

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Truth Will Set You Free

John 8:31-38

September 11, 2005

Verse 31

- Jesus was saying “to those Jews who had believed Him [from Verse 30], ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine...’”
 - Jesus was speaking “to those Jews who had believed Him...”
 - The context will reveal that these are those who have made outward professions of faith [for multiple reasons]; yet these were not genuine believers [at least not all of them].
 - This is the mark of all [true] disciples of Jesus Christ
 - “If you **continue** in My word”
 - Possibly, a more accurate translation would be, if you **remain** in My word...
 - This word, remain [Greek, *meno*, μενω], describes their constant spiritual state of being
 - “to remain” in Christ and in His Word in a strong theme in the Gospel of John. Read John 15
 - John has already made the distinction between *true* disciples and *false (temporary)* disciples: Read John 2:23-25
 - There will be **many** who **claim** to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; however, the *true* disciples will **remain** in His word. In other words, their lives will be marked with a **consistent** desire to seek God, read His word, and know Him better. They will have a hunger and passion for the Word of God.

- Unfortunately, the church today has a term for individuals it assumes are born-again simply because they made a one-time profession of faith, and underwent baptism. The church often calls these individuals “backsliders.” Yet, such a term is foreign to the pages of Scripture – for **true** [real] disciples will **remain** in God’s word. The church must not assure individuals, who show no interest in the Word of God, that they are saved simply because they made a profession of faith.
 - Yet, this is the power of the Word – it sanctifies, sustains and strengthens existing believers; it exposes *false* believers [as they have no interest in **remaining** in the Word]; yet, it also is the instrument, the imperishable seed of salvation, for leading non-believers to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
 - This is why the church is called to be faithful in one thing: proclaiming the Word of God [to believer and non-believer alike – this could be called discipleship and evangelism].
- Notice here, as well as other places in the Gospels [such as Luke 9:57-62 and 14:25-33], that Jesus’ form of evangelism is **never** to gain the most converts.
 - D.A. Carson comments on Verse 31, stating, “[Jesus] is never interested in multiplying numbers of converts if they are not genuine believers, and therefore he insists on forcing would-be disciples to ‘count the cost.’”
 - **Jesus Christ evangelized in such a way that only true believers fully embraced His message. In other words, in the presences of Jesus, superficial faith was quickly exposed because His sayings were too “difficult” (i.e. scandalous). Read, once again, John 6:60**
 - **Even the “difficult” words of Jesus Christ are comforting to true believers; yet, they are disturbing and scandalous to false converts.**

Verse 32

- Then Jesus states, “and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”
- Judaism taught that the study of the law set a man free (e.g. *Pirke Aboth* 3:5). However, it was the very Law that they believe freed them that actually revealed their state of bondage and slavery [to sin].
- Jesus Christ is the truth to which the Law points. Only in Him is their true freedom. This nature of this freedom will become apparent in the next few Verses.

Verse 33

- It is no surprise that these words of Jesus deeply offended the Jews.

- To imply that “the truth will set you free” to the Jews is to imply that they are **slaves**.
- Yet, the Jews assert, “We are Abraham’s descendants [literally, “Abraham’s *seed*”]”
 - The Jews took great pride in their heritage as descendants of Abraham.
 - The Jews viewed themselves [as the Talmud states] as the sons of kings, royal children, i.e. descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (B. *Shabbath* 128a)
 - The Mishnah [the body of Jewish oral and rabbinical traditions] states, “Even the poorest in Israel are looked upon as freemen who have lost their possessions, for they are sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (*Exod. Rab.* 15.11)
 - Yet, even in the Old Testament, physical descent from Abraham was not enough in the sight of God (Genesis 21:9-10; 25:21-34; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25-26; Ezekiel 36:26-27; in the New Testament: Romans 9:6-13; Galatians 4:21-23)
- Then, they assert, “...and have never yet been enslaved to anyone...”
 - The irony here is self-evident: even as they speak, they were under Roman occupation. For thousands of years, they had been enslaved by foreign nations: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria, and now Rome.
 - Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones comments on this passage, specifically, the response of the Jews to Jesus’ words, “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”:

They stepped back aghast and stood upon their dignity and said, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’” (John 8:30-33) ‘We don’t want your proffered freedom,’ they said, in effect. ‘We will never be slaves.’ They did not realize that as they were speaking they were slaves of sin and slaves of the devil and slaves of self and slaves of the world.”
 - J.C. Ryle once commented on this Verse, “The power of self-deception in unconverted man is infinite. These Jews were not more unreasonable than many now-a-days, who say, ‘We are not dead in sin; we have grace, we have faith, we are regenerate, we have the Spirit,’ while their lives show plainly that they are totally mistaken.”
 - Leon Morris writes, “A proud assertion of self-sufficiency is itself evidence of the bondage of which he speaks.”

Verse 34

- ❑ Jesus, then, responded to the Jews, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”
- ❑ **One of the most tragic consequences of the slavery of sin in the unregenerate man is the complete ignorance of the sin which enslaves.**
- ❑ The Jews, here, as well as all non-believers, are ignorant because they are blind spiritually. They are blind spiritually because they have not been born again, and, therefore, are unable to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).
- ❑ There is a sense that the practice of sin reveals that one is a slave to it; however, the practice of sin also actively imprisons and enslaves the sinner in it.
- ❑ The sin, here, that Jesus is speaking of is not individual, discrete acts of sin; but, rather, **remaining** in a state of sin.
- ❑ Augustine speaks of the slavery to sin, stating, “at times a man’s slave, worn out by the commands of an unfeeling master, finds rest in flight. Where can the servant of sin flee? Himself he carries with him wherever he flees. An evil conscience flees not from itself; it has no place to go to; it follows itself. Yes, he cannot withdraw from himself, for the sin he commits is within.”
- ❑ John Calvin stated, “the greater the mass of vices anyone is buried under, the more fiercely and bombastically does he extol free will.”

Verses 35 – 36

- ❑ In ancient Jewish culture, a “household” was made up of sons and slaves. However, every seventh year, slaves were to be set free. Sons, however, remained in the household forever.
- ❑ 1 Chronicles 17:12-14 reveals the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. He is not merely a son; but, rather, **the** Son.
- ❑ Therefore, because of His identity as the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ has the authority to grant **true freedom** to all of those that the Father gives to Him [John 6:37].
- ❑ “...it is sin, not to believe in Christ: And this sin is seated, not in the skin, nor in the hairs of the head, but in the very reason and will. Moreover, as Christ makes the whole world guilty from this sin, and as it is known by experience that the world is ignorant of this sin, as much so as it is ignorant of Christ, seeing that, it must be *revealed* by the *reproof* of the Spirit; it is manifest, that freewill, together with its will and reason, is accounted a captive of this sin, and condemned before God. Wherefore, as long as it is ignorant of Christ and believes not in Him, it can will or attempt nothing good, but necessarily serves that sin of which it is ignorant.”
Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*

- **“True freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please, but the liberty to do what we ought; and it is genuine liberty because doing what we ought now pleases us.”**
D.A Carson
- The ones Jesus sets free are truly [*ontos*], in their very being, free **in Him**.

Verses 37-38

- Jesus acknowledges that the Jews are physical descendants of Abraham; however, this is not enough.
- For, even though they are Abraham’s seed, they seek to kill Jesus, because His word has no place in them.
 - This is similar to Jesus’ comments in John 7:19
- Jesus concludes this section by stating, “I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore, you also do the things which you heard from your father.”
 - In other words, one’s actions are a direct result of his father [Jesus will later reveal that the Jews’ father is the Devil].