

TRUE FREEDOM

John 8:31-36

Throughout the three years of His public ministry leading up to His death on the cross there were many claimed to “believe” in Jesus. In John chapter two, John tells us that early in the ministry of Jesus there were “*many*” who “*believed*” in Jesus — and then tells us how Jesus responded to them.

*John 2:23–25 (CSB) ²³While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many **believed** in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. ²⁴Jesus, however, would not **entrust** himself to them, since he knew them all ²⁵and because he did not need anyone to testify about man; for he himself knew what was in man.*

There in **verse 24** the Holy Spirit uses the response of Jesus to explain what it means for a man or woman to truly “*believe*” in Jesus

The verb **entrust** in **verse 24** is the same verb translated **believe** in **verse 23**. WOW! Jesus didn’t believe in their belief! He wouldn’t commit himself to their faith.

A handbook on the Gospel of John — *To believe in Jesus is not merely to agree with certain facts about him; it is rather a commitment or trust of one’s life to him and to his way of life.*¹

Fast forward to **John 8**. Once again John tells us that there were people who in some way made it clear that they *believed* in Jesus. So, Jesus is going to lay down exactly what real faith looks like — what genuine faith does — **AND** what **that** faith leads to.

John 8:31 (CSB) ³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you **continue in my word, you really are my disciples.**

¹ Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A. (1993). A handbook on the Gospel of John (p. 72). New York: United Bible Societies.

FIRST — True faith perseveres. It holds tight to Jesus by holding fast to His Word

HUGE QUESTION: What does it mean to *continue* in the words of Jesus?

The Greek word here is *μένω meno*. I don't pretend to be a student of New Testament Greek. But I am so thankful for Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich. These men dedicated their lives to the study of the Greek language and compiled a work that is famously known by the first letters of each of their last — BDAG. It's a Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Here's what they have to say about this Greek word, meno

= **Remain, Stay, Luke 19:5** *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."*

= **Dwell** — In **John 1:38** we are told that John and Andrew asked Jesus *"where are you staying — (meno) — abiding or living?"*

Listen to how the Greek Scholar A.T. Robertson reads the language of Jesus in His comment to those who believed.

QUOTE: A.T. Robertson — *Your future loyalty to my teaching will prove the reality of your present profession. Continuance in the word (teaching) proves the sincerity or insincerity of the profession. It is the acid test of life.*²

The man or woman who truly *"believes"* in Jesus REMAINS and STAYS in the Word, like one would STAY in the house. If I truly believe in Jesus I will LIVE in the Words of Jesus as if they are my home! If I truly believe in Jesus, I will remain in the place of listening to the Word of Jesus. Real faith means that you have a continuing — on-going relationship with Jesus — in which you come under His instruction — sit in it and steep in it!

SECOND — True faith is inextricably bound up in the term DISCIPLE.

² Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Jn 8:31). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

DISCIPLE (*mathētēs*) is literally — **the learner**. A disciple does not merely believe — a disciple is someone who is constantly learning from Jesus. As we read the New Testament we find that a disciple was more than a mere pupil or learner. A disciple was an **adherent** who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct.

QUOTE: William Barclay — *The disciple is the learner who learns in order to do. The truth which Jesus brought is designed for action.*³

QUOTE: D.A. Carson — *A genuine believer remains in Jesus' 'word' (logos), his teaching: i.e. such a person **obeys it**, seeks to understand it better, and finds it more precious, **more controlling**, precisely when other forces flatly oppose it.*⁴

So, Jesus says that “believing” is much more than a cognitive or intellectual response to Him — to “believe” in Jesus is to make His teaching the basis of your conduct. By the way — we see this same relationship between faith and obedience all the way back in the Old Testament in the life of Abraham — who the New Testament calls “The father of all who believe.

Genesis 18:19 (ESV) ¹⁹*For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to **keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.***”

The progression of true faith continues — True Faith perseveres. It seeks to remain in — live in — the words of Jesus, and THAT is the essence of what it means to be a **True Learner** — **True Disciple** of Jesus.

Then Jesus adds —

³ Barclay, W. (2001). [*The Gospel of John*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 24). Louisville, KY: Edinburgh.

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991). [*The Gospel according to John*](#) (p. 347). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

“If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. ³²You will know the truth

To learn from Jesus is to learn the truth.

A few thoughts on **the truth** —

1. Many *philosophies / ideologies* claim to be based on truth — but the truth Jesus is speaking of here is not intellectual assent to some philosophical proposition. It is trust **in Jesus Himself** who said — *“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”*

2. The Word of God does not claim to *just contain* truth, but **is truth**. In **John 17:17** Jesus doesn't say — *Your word is true*. He says — *Your word IS truth*.

Once again we find that Christianity really is ALL ABOUT JESUS! It is only in the truth of Jesus we see God for Who He truly is. It is only in the truth of Jesus we see this world for what it really is. It is only in the truth of Jesus we see ourselves for who we really are. It is only in the truth of Jesus we see what things are of real value, eternal value. It is only in the truth of Jesus we see what is right and what is wrong; what is truly good or truly bad. It is only in the truth of Jesus we see what things are really important and what things are not.

APPLICATION — Most every professed believer has at one time or another, slipped into a certain pattern in their spiritual life. It looks something like this; Jesus will blow our mind with some truth or some passage of Scripture. We're so stoked about it — it makes so much sense of our life — it brings such clarity to a situation or relationship. We have an almost euphoric rush because of that truth. **But then we tend to *not* continue in it — abide in it.** Not long after — we tend to cycle back down to where we began before that incredible learning moment!

Life for a lot of Christians ends up being a series of emotional highs and lows — peaks and valleys. Their Christian life is a continual cycle of God speaking to them and teaching them something — and then failing to **live in it** — and then running back in that cycle over and over and over.

Jesus says that the key to **TRUE FAITH** and **TRUE DISCIPLESHIP** is **to continue**.

QUOTE: Eugene Peterson — “Discipleship is a long obedience in the same direction.”

Jesus said that True Discipleship RESULTS in knowledge of the truth — and then He said

³²...and the truth will set you free.”

As a result of knowing the truth, freedom will be yours as a gift — you experience **TRUE FREEDOM**.

One of this world’s highest virtues, noblest values and greatest desires, is freedom. The amazing thing is that the world has NO IDEA what freedom really is. Apart from the truth of Scripture we have no concept of what freedom is. We tend to think of freedom as being free from rules or standards that might prevent us from doing whatever feels good. Jesus — the Truth-Teller in a world of lies — is going to tell us that TRUE FREEDOM involves two things — It involves God freeing us from one thing so that you can be free to the right thing.

³³“We are descendants of Abraham,” they answered him, “and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will become free?’”

Warren Wiersbe — whom I greatly respect as a commentator, said — *It is not likely that the pronoun “they” refers to these new believers, for they would probably not argue with their Savior.*

Well.... Anyone here ever argued with the Lord? Besides myself — I know that Peter argued with the Lord at least 4 times that I can think of! At Caesarea Philippi (after Jesus foretold His betrayal and sacrificial death); twice at the last supper (feet washing and denial); and in [Acts 10](#). There Peter was on the roof top of the Simon the Tanner’s house. The Lord told Peter to eat non-kosher food. Peter said — ***NOT SO LORD — I’ve never eaten anything unclean!***

Jesus said that True Freedom comes from True Faith that lives in and from His Word — and in the blink of an eye their professed faith in Jesus was seen for what it really was! They didn't believe His Word at all.

Wait a minute — Why are you talking to US about freedom? We're descendants of Abraham, we're Jews. We don't need any deliverance. When were we ever slaves? We were never in bondage to any man — unless you count that 400 years in Egypt — or Assyria, or Babylon, or Persia! Other than that we've never been in bondage to any man. By the way — don't mind those Roman soldiers you see everywhere.

BY THE WAY — This theme of TRUE FREEDOM would have really struck a chord with John's audience — the Greek culture of the 1st Century AD. Their great philosophers were always talking about the subject of freedom. The Stoics said — *"Only the wise man is free; the foolish man is a slave."* Socrates had demanded — *"How can you call a man free when his pleasures rule over him?"*

So His audience asks — *Why are you talking to US about freedom?*

So here comes His Word! Here comes the Light of His Word to expose them as something they could not imagine themselves to be — SLAVES!

³⁴Jesus responded, "Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin."

In Southern California — on the 91 Freeway going towards Riverside there is a dam on the opposite side of the freeway with a big Liberty Bell painted on it along with the words:

1776-1976
200 years of freedom.

But here's the problem — We can live in a "free country" and yet still not have **True Freedom**. The people of **John 8** were the apple of God's eye — and yet they weren't free.

True Freedom is not a matter of political and social liberty (which we should never take for granted). True freedom is not a matter of religious heritage. You can live in the “land of the free and the home of the brave” — you can be a descendant of Abraham, or a descendant of Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterians, or Evangelicals — but NONE of that makes you **Truly Free!**

³⁴Jesus responded, “Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.

ESV — “Truly, truly, I say to you

Here is Jesus — the Truth-Teller in a world of lies — giving them HIS Word. He has said if they would remain in and live in these Words they would be **true disciples** — and **they would know the truth** — and **the truth would make them free!**

everyone who commits sin is a slave δουλος of sin.

A.T. Robertson points out that the grammar does not refer to a single act of sin — but rather a continuous habit or practice. “*Whoever keeps on practicing sin [literal translation] is the servant δουλος of sin.*”⁵

THIS is the bottom line issue. Jesus gets right to the point. The issue is the **practice** of sin. The fact that we sin continuously and habitually proves that we are enslaved to **sin**. If you want to prove that you are not in bondage to sin — stop sinning. By NOT sinning you can prove that sin is not your master. The excuse — “Well nobody is perfect” only confirms the fact that we are slaves to sin. Nobody is perfect because everybody is a slave to sin. To be a **slave to sin** means that sin owns you — it governs you — it seeks nothing but to abuse you.

Here is the interesting thing — When we talk about sin we tend to talk in terms of specific sins — murder, drunkenness, anger, stealing, sexual sin. Those are sins — but those are a by-product of something much deeper. Jesus is addressing the heart of the issue here — He is addressing the condition of sin. Sin is a condition.

⁵ Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Jn 8:34). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

It is a state of being. It is a state of being in rebellion against God. It is a state of being obstinate towards God. It is a state of being hard of heart towards God. It's a state of rejecting God's truth. It is the state of being in which we live as if we were God.

As D.A Carson puts it — *the root problem is our rebellion against God..... our grotesque de-godding of God.*

QUOTE: Alistair Begg (Brave by Faith) — *“We take what God has given and then announce that we don't like God or his ways, so we will not believe in him. We'd rather have a God who agrees with us and with how we want to behave: a God who is accessible and malleable; a God who we can keep or change as we wish; a God who answers to us rather than us answering to him.”*

**It is out of that state of being that sinful activities, specific sins flow.
As descendants of Adam we are born into that state of being!**

We sin **by nature** and **by choice**. That's why Paul could write in Romans

***Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Jesus said that we are **all** slaves to sin — slaves to its presence and its power. Those listening to Jesus protested. You may protest. We all protest. We tend to see ourselves as basically good people who occasionally do bad things. We have this estimation of ourselves because we compare ourselves to others. Before I became a Christian people told me I needed to be saved and I would ask them — *Why? I'm a pretty good person. I'm not perfect but I'm not a serial killer either. I'm no Mother Teresa but I'm no Adolf Hitler either.*

Jesus says — *No, you're bad people who once in a while do something nice.* And when we do happen to do something good we tell ourselves how good we are and we ruin it with our pride — basically turning that good moment into sin! So we're back to the reality that we are **slaves to sin**.

Again — We are so much like those listening to Jesus! We are great at minimizing our enslavement. “It’s not so bad. I just have to make a few adjustments.” In fact in our culture “sin” is virtually banned from our vocabulary.

Tragically — in contemporary church culture there is a frighteningly insufficient view of sin. It has virtually ignored or redefined the depths of the hold of sin upon us. As a result, men and women look at Jesus as a cosmic therapist prescribing a little “chicken soup for the soul” by way of a Bible verse here and a Bible verse there. In modern Christianity, the great point of faith in Jesus is not **True Freedom** — not to be liberated from the presence and power of sin — it is to the end of personal happiness.

³⁵A slave does not remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever.

The concept of **slave** hard for us to grasp — but not for the men and women of **John 8**. They understood this language. They knew that a slave was not a part of the family. They knew that a slave didn’t get the family name — couldn’t touch the family inheritance. They knew that at any point in time a slave could be cast out and mistreated. But a **son** was completely different. A son was loved. A son was given the family name. A son was beloved by the father. The son is in the house and has access to everything. He can go wherever he wants to go. He can stay as long as he wants to stay. But the slave has no rights. If you are a slave to sin, the son’s freedoms are not yours.

Jesus is saying — THAT sonship is what you want. You want a relationship with God as **your** Father — and He adopts you into his family — and you get to enjoy the freedoms that belong to the children of God

Jesus is essentially telling them that the reason they are slaves is because they are not **sons** of God. He essentially says — Since you are a slave to sin, you are not a child of God.

Sin exists. People are slaves to sin — and as a result they do bad things. What in the world do we do with that problem?

THIS IS HUGE — The conversation shifts from *sin* to *Him*

36So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free.

QUOTE: J.C. Ryle — — *Liberty, most Englishmen know, is rightly esteemed one of the highest temporal blessings. Freedom from foreign dominion, a free constitution, free trade, a free press, civil and religious liberty--what a world of meaning lies beneath these phrases! How many would sacrifice life and fortune to maintain the things which they represent! Yet, after all our boasting, there are many so-called freemen who are nothing better than slaves. There are many who are totally ignorant of the highest, purest form of liberty. The noblest liberty is that which is the property of the true Christian. Those only are perfectly free people whom the Son of God "makes free." All else will sooner or later be found slaves.*⁶

ONLY JESUS CAN GIVE TRUE FREEDOM. That freedom is a freedom FROM one thing — and a freedom TO another.

Jesus frees us **from** the *power of sin* and the *penalty of sin*.

Romans 8:2 *"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus frees from the law of sin and death"*

Jesus frees us **to** a life of serving God.

Romans 6:17-22 ¹⁷*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves δουλος of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves δουλος to righteousness leading to sanctification. ²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that*

⁶ J.C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, vol.8

*you have been set free from sin and have become slaves **δουλος** of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*

The Greek thought was that a man found his true worth only in being conscious of himself and in the free development of his potential. Thus he placed great value on the right to be **independent of others** and **to live just as he pleased**. The Greek felt only revulsion and contempt for the position of a slave — the *doulos* — because the slave was **subordinate** and **dependent**. His position was looked upon with contempt. You see the *doulos* belongs by nature not to himself, but to someone else.

To the Greek that was awful. But the early Christians understood that they had BEEN SLAVES of SIN. But Jesus had set them FREE! They saw themselves not as set free to live for themselves. They saw themselves set free to SERVE their Savior. In that light the concept of *Doulos* became something wonderful. The apostles — Paul; Peter; James; Jude — all used the word in reference to themselves. They called themselves the *doulos* — the **bondslaves of Christ!** They saw it as an honored and privileged position. They saw themselves as belonging lock, stock and barrel to the Lord.

QUOTE: J.C. Ryle — *Liberty, like this, is the portion of all true Christians in the day that they flee to Christ by faith, and commit their souls to Him. That day they become free men. Liberty, like this, is their portion forevermore. Death cannot stop it. The grave cannot even hold their bodies for more than a little season. Those whom Christ makes free are free to all eternity.*⁷

Are you a TRUE DISCIPLE?

REMEMBER A.T. Robertson — *Your future loyalty to my teaching will prove the reality of your present profession.*

Are you abiding in the Word, feeding yourself on it?

Are you obeying the Word?

⁷ **J.C. Ryle**, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, vol.8

Have you been freed from sin but you're living for self?

Are you a TRULY FREE?

ONLY JESUS can set you free!