

Becoming Free in Christ

John 8:31-36

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Introduction: Do **You**...know what it means to believe in Jesus? Does it mean to believe certain facts about Him? Does it mean to believe what the Bible says about Him or what your church says about Him? How about this one...to believe what Jesus says about Himself? Certainly that would constitute true belief or saving belief...right? But the Bible throws down a barrage of warnings about belief that is not genuine. Unless you know what faith really is then you can be deceived by bogus faith...faith that does not save. Let's look at some of Scripture's warnings.

John 12:42-43 ⁴² Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God. **It is not what you think about who Jesus is.**

Luke 8:13 ¹³ "Those on the rocky *soil are* those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no *firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. **It does not fail during trials.**

James 2:14 ¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? **It is not just mental assent.**

James 2:19-20 ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. **It is not believing God exists.**

There are over 2 billion men and women who profess belief in Christ. In John 8 Jesus spoke directly to people who "believed in Him." It was not long before they were angry and revealed several startling things about themselves. Let's read these verses....

John 8:31-36 ³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free '?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵ "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶ "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

As He speaks, Jesus is shifting human thinking about faith away from what we do or the facts that we believe. His words are counter intuitive. They describe God's thoughts and God's ways. There is a human tendency to hear what we think makes sense. To impose our own meaning onto words that clearly say something else.

Let me try to illustrate. Look up from your Bible now and tell me if this is the way a person comes to faith. First you come to know the truth. Then you become a disciple [or

follower] of Christ which in turn leads you to obey God's Word? Does that sound right to you? **You** come to know the truth, **you** decide to follow Jesus and **you** obey God's Word. Now....let's look at what Jesus said about this very thing.

John 8:31-32 ³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Jesus describes the order of Salvation and Discipleship in the reverse order of default human reasoning. It makes sense for us to put ourselves in the driver's seat. **We** learn the truth...**We** decide to follow Christ and then **We** obey the Bible.

BUT....Not so fast! Jesus says that Salvation is entirely His work. This is what we call "Christ Centeredness." Salvation and Discipleship are about what Christ does for us and not what we do for Him. We will learn today that we do not give faith to God in exchange for salvation. Instead.... Jesus gives salvation to us. Paul explains faith to the Corinthians this way. He says that the test of Faith is "Jesus Christ in you." If you are not sure of that you may not be in the faith.

2 Corinthians 13:5 ⁵ Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?

Jesus' hearers have "believed" that He is the promised Messiah. They reason..."What more could God ask than this?" We have believed His credentials. We have believed as the Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses both say that "He is the son of God." We have believed as the Moslems assert that "He is a true prophet of God." We believe as the liberal denominations say that "He is a great moral teachers and humanitarian." But Jesus is not content with their "belief." He is not content with any of the belief I have just mentioned. It is not belief as God defines it. It is human belief. It is what men give to the one who needs nothing from us.

Jesus therefore challenges our understanding of "belief." This is vital. Millions die in unbelief while believing that they believe. Let's see how these "believers" react to Christ's explanation of belief....or Faith;

In the past few weeks Jesus has offered the bread of life to men who did not think they were hungry. The water of life to those who do not think they are thirsty. The Light of the world to those who do not think they are in darkness and now freedom to those who do not think they are enslaved. The real problem with the Gospel is that no one thinks they need it. The real problem with the preaching of the church is that it is aimed at perceived needs. If men don't think they need something then the church in our day has decided not to offer it to them.

The vast majority of the 2 billion Christians in the world have not come because they are aware of these hidden spiritual needs of humanity. Only God can reveal them and only He can then meet them. Jesus now begins to describe what true saving and sanctifying

faith is. It is not what the crowd thinks. It does not start and end with them. It starts and ends with Jesus. He is the Center of Salvation, Faith, and Sanctification.

John 8:31-32 ³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

If you continue in My word: At first glance Jesus appears to say...."If you always keep my word perfectly then you are my disciples.... But...."Continue" means to abide or remain. Literally..."If you are continually abiding in my word or living in my word." It speaks of intimate attachment. Like where you live. It is where you always return. It is what you think of first. It is where your needs are certain to be met. Jesus used this same word to speak of our life giving connection to Him.

John 15:4 ⁴ "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.

The branch cannot pick itself up and attach itself to the vine and so become alive. Its very existence as a branch depends entirely on the vine. Jesus describes a condition that is completely initiated by Him. He is not giving a formula for but a description of Saving, Life giving faith.

In My word: speaks of the source of our life. God speaks and everything comes into existence. His Word created life in the universe and does exactly the same thing for you.

Psalms 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

2 Corinthians 4:6 ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

The starting point for Salvation is God and not man. The description of a believer is one who is abiding in the life giving word of God. Such vital attachment to Christ means....

You are truly disciples of Mine: Jesus starts with Himself and not with you. Disciples are said to be those who are in life giving union with Christ. Christ is The Living Word of God, the creator and life giver. He defines "belief" by saying, "if you are drawing your life from me you are my disciples" He does not say, "if you become my disciples you will draw your life from me." Humans always do it the second way. But God is first to act. He acted to create life. Life did not ask for or do anything to merit being created. Jesus constantly makes this point. It is not what you do for God...it is what God does, has done and will do for you. The Father and the Son are the beginning cause of salvation and the ongoing cause of discipleship.

You will know the truth: In the human mind this is first but in Christ's order it is last. It is....remember....a description of a person to whom Jesus has given life and love for God. That person will come to a knowledge of God. It is inevitable! Jesus is speaking

of an experiential knowledge and not just facts. These “believers” already had facts and they knew those facts. This is the difference between saying I know algebra and I know my spouse or child. Jesus himself is that Truth.

John 14:6 ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The truth will make you free: “I will make you free!” You are not free until Christ makes you free. These believers did not like the implications of this at all. Many, many church people still do not like this. We feel free! We do what we want and we say what we want and we think what we want....but Jesus said that humankind is not free until He frees them. Jesus is the initiator and the cause of eternal life and not man. You are the recipient of it...just like you were the recipient of your physical life. You did not bargain with your parents for it. You did not deserve it. You had done and did nothing to obtain it. Your parents did not plead with you to let yourself be born. It was a gift of life and you lived in it. You abided in it. You became a learner in it and eventually intimately knew your parents and your family.

John 8:36 ³⁶ "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Review: First Christ gives us life. This is spiritual, eternal life. He does not trade it to us for belief. Belief is not the cause of Eternal Life. Eternal Life is the cause of belief.

Ephesians 2:4-5 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We are drawing life from Christ like a branch from a vine. Our union to Him...which is His doing imparts His Eternal Life to us and also produces the fruit we bear. The one who gave us life gives us also faith, love for Him and even works of righteousness.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free '?" [33]: Thus proving Jesus' point!!! They are entirely enslaved. They cannot remember their past....

Exodus 2:23 During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.

They had also been enslaved to Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Syria.

They are oblivious to their present condition.... They were living as a vassal kingdom at the whim and mercy of Rome. The slightest pretense would bring it all down on them at any moment.

John 11:48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Their fears actually happened within 40 years of Christ's death in 70 AD.

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. [34]: The people are talking about the physical and Jesus uses that to speak to them about the spiritual. But sadly, many men are not even aware of their physical realities. The ones they can see and know through their physical senses. How, Jesus asks, are they ever going to be able to understand anything at all about the spiritual realities of creation?

John 3:12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

Are men like this today? Certainly....If you owed \$30,000 on credit cards and I told you that the solution to your debt was to charge \$50,000 more would you do that? But men do and our government does do that. If a person says they want to kill you and then tries to kill you because of your religion and race would you refuse to listen to them or believe them? Of course not....but men do and complain bitterly when anyone does not go along with their delusion.

Now....if you tell a person....who "believes" in Jesus....who has joined a church....who has been baptized or taken communion.....who has prayed a prayer.....walked and aisle.....signed a doctrinal statement.....That none of that counts toward salvation you will learn something about their faith. This is why Jesus spoke this way. To confront our human inclination for everything to be **about us and what we do**.

A slave, by definition is not free to chose. He is owned, controlled and bound to obey his master and Jesus says his master is sin. Do you know that most Christians do not see themselves as sinners. This is why we have such a reputation with the world as hypocrites. If you are what you say and pretend not to be....that is by definition a hypocrite.

But...I thought Jesus freed us from sin. Yes, yes, yes. Until Christ came we were sinners who were **not free not to sin**. We were slaves to sin. After Christ set us free we were sinners who were **free not to sin**. But...and this is important....we are still sinners. We spend more energy trying to hide this reality from one another than we do following and learning from Christ and coming to know Him intimately. So...How will any man or woman ever be set free from their slavery to their own sinful nature? Jesus will do set you free. Even the Pharisees realized this...and they hated Christ for it.

Luke 15:2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Paul affirmed it to be so. He could have said I was the foremost sinner before Christ, but chose instead to say this....

1 Timothy 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

John 8:35 "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.

The slave is not free to do what he wants and he is not the heir to the house and his time there is temporary. The Son, on the other hand is everything that the slave is not. He has a permanent home. He has a secure home. We could say in this context he has an eternal home....but why? Is he a better person than the slave. Is he more moral, more religious, more worthy? No....he is the son. He has been given what he never asked for. He did not trade for it. He did not earn it. He just received it from His father.

John 8:36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Free means the opposite of slave. Satan turns the table on this concept whenever he can. He asserts that God enslaves and sin liberates. He told Eve that God was withholding freedom from her. God did not want her to experience everything and she could only be free when she disobeyed God. This is still believed and taught today. As a result men are enslaved to their own passions, anger, lust, greed, malice and hatred. Murder, child abuse, abortion, war and crime abound.

CONCLUSION: Jesus frees men who trust their eternal and earthly lives to him. He gives you new birth in the same way your parents gave you physical birth. They just did it. You had nothing to give, nothing to offer, nothing you had to do. They just did it.

1 Peter 1:3 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused** us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Let's return to Christ's opening statement here for a moment.

John 8:31-32 ³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue [abide] in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

If you continue [abide] in My word: Life comes first and life comes from God. This does not mean that men have no responsibility or culpability for their sin....it means that men must seek Christ. Preachers must preach Christ....The church must exalt Christ as the life giver. It means that God does not give life on the basis of merit or knowledge or religion or nationality or morality or education or ritual. It means that men can come to Christ in humility of heart and trust Him alone to give them life, love for God, intimacy with Himself and Freedom from slavery to sin.

Like a little baby gets their life from their parents we receive ours from Christ. DO not try to buy it, merit it, earn it, do ritual for it, join something for it or even believe the right doctrines for it. Come to Jesus. This is saving faith...

You are truly disciples of Mine: Where is your life going now that you have been born of God? Are you a disciple....a learner? Are you insatiable to know and learn about your life giver. Or...have you gotten everything you wanted already.....That get out of hell free card.....the pass into heaven.....What about Christ and knowing Him intimately and profoundly?

If you are confident that you have come to Christ this way then let me speak to you as a Christian believer.....not one who just believes facts but who has received eternal spiritual life from Christ.....what about us and I hope that means you today....

Does Christ's description sound like you? Are you abiding in His Word? Is your first thought about life's trials and uncertainties...."what does Christ think and say about this?" Are you a disciple of Christ. This does not mean a church attendee. It means a learner. It does not mean a learner of the Bible. We abide in the Bible but we learn who God and Christ are. We are disciples of Christ. When was the last time you learned something new about Jesus or even thought you should? And why should you pursue the knowledge of Christ? So that you may know Him as profoundly as possible. Knowledge of Christ leads to Love for Christ. You will not love Him more until you know Him more. How hard are you going after the knowledge of Jesus Christ? I pray....

Ephesians 3:16-21 ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.