

## 8:31–38 THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

<sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” <sup>33</sup> They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave<sup>a</sup> to sin. <sup>35</sup> The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. <sup>38</sup> I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

**OVERVIEW:** Christ knows that his listeners are weak in faith, and so he declares himself to be a deliverer of all who believe in him. The truth of God makes people free, reconciling sinners to the Father and conquering the power of death. The Jews, however, do not recognize their slavery to sin, and so they assert that they have always been free. They do not realize that apart from faith in Christ, they have no rights of inheritance. True freedom is found in the knowledge of Christ and the ability to call on God with a clear conscience. While the Jews may be descendants of Abraham, they would not have sought to kill Christ, except for being slaves of sin. Christ is the Son of the Father of truth.

### 8:31–32 *Disciples Who Abide in Christ’s Word Will Know the Truth*

<sup>a</sup> Greek *bondservant*; also verse 35

**WHAT IS MEANT BY “THE JEWS.”** JUAN DE MALDONADO: The word *therefore* joins this statement to the preceding words.<sup>1</sup> As if to say, “because many had believed in him, he spoke to those who had believed.” He says “the Jews,” to distinguish them from the Galileans and other foreigners, who were more quick to believe. Or, he uses the term to distinguish them from the priests, scribes, Pharisees and Jewish rulers, lest the Evangelist seem to contradict himself. For he had often indicated before that they had not believed but had resisted Christ in every way and had wanted to kill him, and now he says that many of them had believed. Therefore, he adds that they were Jews, that is, common folk. For as we have said elsewhere, the term “the Jews” is sometimes used for the Jewish rulers alone, in contrast to the people. And sometimes the term is used for the people alone, in contrast to the rulers. COMMENTARY ON [JOHN 8:31](#).<sup>2</sup>

**FLESHLY IDEAS THREATEN WEAK FAITH.** CASPAR CRUCIGER: Christ gives a new sermon for those who had begun to believe, urging them to persevere in faith and to seek to know truth lest they fall back, deterred by fleshly judgments or stumbling blocks. For he sees that these hearers are not strong enough, as is clear enough from what happens a little later when they take offense at the words of Christ. Therefore, he gravely warns them that if they are truly to be disciples of his teaching, if they are to remain in his word, that is, if faith is to persevere by simply assenting to his word, it must not allow itself to be subverted by fleshly judgments and ideas like the ones the Pharisees and the multitude had about the Messiah, namely, that he would be a future worldly king possessing glory, power and

<sup>1</sup>The word *therefore* appears in the Vulgate text.

<sup>2</sup>Maldonado, *Commentariorum in Evangelistas*, 2:809.

wealth, and that he would deliver the people from foreign rule and that he would preserve and propagate the Mosaic state and cult. He wants these ideas to be thrown aside, and he wants judgments about himself to be based on his word, namely, that he is sent by the Father not to establish or restore an earthly kingdom for this people but to deliver believers from sin and eternal death, as he said above: “Unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.”

COMMENTARY ON [JOHN 8:31](#).<sup>3</sup>

**PERSEVERANCE.** JOHN MAJOR: There is nothing that the Lord our God does not see. Perceiving a conversion of some of his listeners to his words, he urges them, as novices, to persevere. Seedbeds of faith have been established, but without perseverance they will amount to nothing. “If you remain firmly in my words without dissimulation, you are my disciples. Simply lending your ears to believable things does not amount to discipleship. Steady progress in the light of the gospel requires much more, for perseverance and reaching the goal are what crown the work. What good is it for a builder to have poured the foundation for a fortress if the rest of the building never gets built?” COMMENTARY ON [JOHN 8:31](#).<sup>4</sup>

**SLAVERY IS A LIE.** PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: From this text we must seek to know where Christian freedom is found and what it is. He says that whoever commits a sin is a slave of sin and is under sin. To be under sin is to be condemned and killed by sin, as we read, “The sting of death is sin.” Accordingly, slavery is this: to sin and to die. Second, he defines slavery when he says, “The truth will set you free.” Slavery,

<sup>3</sup>Cruciger, *In Evangelium Iohannis*, 386–87; citing [Jn 8:24](#).

<sup>4</sup>Major, *In quatuor Euangelia*, 289r.

then, is a kind of lie. It is a lie because it is a nature ignorant of God. It neither believes in God nor does it fear God, but it turns aside to creatures, trusting in works and trusting in its own glory, its own wisdom, its own righteousness, a trust which is certainly a lie because it trusts in that which ought not to be trusted and condemns that which is truly life. And so it happens that no one has been delivered from death by this; the curse remains, and so we are condemned to slavery. COMMENTARY ON [JOHN 8:32](#).<sup>5</sup>

**DIFFERENT LEVELS OF FAITH.** HEINRICH BULLINGER: But how did they believe if they did not yet know the truth? Certainly, faith rests on truth and seizes truth. Therefore, those who believe are not ignorant of truth. However, the knowledge of Christians has different levels, and the recognition of truth grows as time progresses, as is clear from many other places in Scripture. Therefore, at this place the Lord is promising those who persevere a growth of knowledge.

Now Christ himself is truth. Therefore, if we stand firm in Christ's Word, Christ will shine more brightly to us. Truth is also set against the shadows of the Law. Thus, the Lord will open the mysteries of the gospel more brightly to those who persevere in gospel teaching. According to the Hebrew idiom, truth is the most perfect essence of a thing, the most absolute perfection of a thing. And thus we say in German, "You will hear and understand the whole truth and the right reason." The Lord discloses, then, in time all the mysteries of godliness and the kingdom of God to those who persevere, releasing them from a complete knowledge which seems to pertain to true godliness.

Next, he says, "The truth will make you free." Truth (I say) is the Son of God himself, Jesus Christ, the deliverer of

<sup>5</sup> [MO 14:1121–22](#); citing [1 Cor 15:56](#).

the world. Or faith itself which rests on eternal truth makes those who persevere free. But he is speaking about a freedom of souls, “which does not change one’s status in life, releasing the body from a master’s control, but it delivers the soul from sins, from perverse and worldly lusts, from the devil’s tyranny, from fear of death, from the slavery of human regulations, from the yoke of the Law.”<sup>6</sup>

And because the deliverer concedes to those who are freed a willing spirit and a spirit of liberty, they serve God willingly in complete holiness and righteousness. As Zechariah testifies, “That we should be freed from the hand of all that hate us to serve him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life.” Therefore, Christian freedom is not wanton passion or license, as some pigs from the Epicurean crew think, but it is a manumission and deliverance from the devil and from sin, and it is a complete dedication and surrender to our chief, Christ, to whom we completely bind ourselves, as is more fully set forth in the epistles of the apostles.

Additionally, the plan or order of salvation is indicated here. For before all things truth is made known. Having been made known, it is received by faith. Having been received, it is preserved. Having been preserved, it grows and increases. These are the very things that make people free. COMMENTARY ON [JOHN 8:32](#).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Bullinger usually acknowledges his quotations from one of his favorite sources, Erasmus’s *Paraphrase on John*. Here he does not. I have added the quote marks to indicate the words that belong to Erasmus. Bullinger makes one small change in the quoted material: Erasmus’s “from the slavery of the Pharisees’ regulations” becomes “from the slavery of human regulations.”

<sup>7</sup> Bullinger, *In Ioannem*, 102v–103r; citing [Lk 1:71, 75](#).

**SATAN ENSLAVES BY A LIE, CHRIST DELIVERS BY THE TRUTH.**  
WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: We must also consider here the fact that he does not say, “And I will make you free” (and yet below he says, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”), but “The truth will make you free.” Christ, the Son of God, makes us free, but he does so through this truth about which he is speaking at present, the truth by which he was sent into this world that he might reconcile by his death the human race to God the Father and that he might save those who believe in him, and regenerate them by a spirit of liberty and adopt them as children of God. Therefore, the truth of God brings deliverance on the cross, while it erases the handwriting of slavery and of death; it redeems the captives, reconciling them to the Father, it condemns sin in its own flesh, it kills death, it conquers the power of darkness and it makes peace between heaven and earth.

The truth of God makes people free when the knowledge of it is given by the Holy Spirit, not only by keeping the minds of believers free of error by its illuminating power but also by its power to regenerate from sin, bringing deliverance and renewal. Eve was seduced, taken in by the lie of the serpent, and through this seduction was led to transgression and then to condemnation and slavery to sin and death, so that it could have been rightly said to the human race, “If you remain in the serpent’s word, you will truly be his disciples, and you will learn a lie and you will become slaves of a liar.” Thus by the truth of Christ, received by faith and actively embraced, the human race is led back from a lie, transgression, condemnation and slavery to sin and death into the true freedom of the children of God.

Therefore, Christ is the way, the truth and the life, just as Satan, that old serpent, is the seduction, the lie and the death. And just as Satan destroys believers with his lie, tak-

ing them captive, so Christ with his truth delivers those who believe in him. This is why the power of darkness with its entire army assaults the truth of Christ in a perpetual state of fury, attacking with deceit, treachery, sword, fire and every kind of siege engine, trying to destroy the truth of Christ with which the rule of Satan is destroyed and the captives are liberated. Thus, this power of darkness makes it seem in the eyes of the world that this truth makes initiates and disciples more wretched rather than free, more ruined than delivered. COMMENTARY ON [JOHN 8:32](#).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Musculus, *Commentarii in Ioannem*, 2:67–68.