

## 49 - Truth that Frees

John 8:31-36

Forgiveness is a wonderful gift. Who among us is not grateful that God mercifully forgives our sins? Forgiveness means He will not punish us when we sin, though our sin may have set in motion forces that will bring much misery. It means He does not withdraw His presence from us, though from our side of the relationship our hearts may grow harder, and God may seem more distant. It means Jesus will not hold that sin against us when we stand before Him on that day when He evaluates our lives. It means in spite of the sins we have committed we will be resurrected when Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth.

That's good news, but it's not the best news. The best news is that Jesus has made it possible for us to stop sinning. His death and resurrection have not only released forgiveness, they have released the power which can set us free from doing things that need to be forgiven; it can break the terrible grip sin has had on us. And that is the best news because obedience to God is the key to success and happiness.

The Bible says sin produces death (Ro 6:23). It always does, in one form or another. Every time I sin I damage something or someone. I release "death" into that situation, and the damage it causes usually can't be undone by forgiveness. I've released a destructive force that must play itself out, though thankfully, because of forgiveness God is still with me to help me deal with it as constructively as possible. So forgiveness is a wonderful gift, but the freedom to stop sinning is an even better gift. And that's the gift Jesus promised to a group of brand new disciples. He said to them, "You will know the truth and the truth will free you" (v32). Now let's discover what those words mean, because every one of us desperately needs freedom from sin.

True discipleship (vs31-36)

• DBS (Sun-Sat)

The very first thing Jesus told this group of new believers is that their years of frustration over their inability to obey God were over. If they would commit themselves to Him, He would set them free from being slaves to sin. At last they could stop constantly cleaning up the messes they had created by their disobedience and discover God's plan for their lives. And He said the key to that new lifestyle was a particular truth.

The truth

Jesus didn't say that all truth tends to free people in one way or another. He didn't make a general philosophical statement about the power of truth. What He said was that His disciples, by remaining in "His word," would learn a specific truth which would free them from sin. He said they would know the truth, and the truth would set them free. What is that truth? It is the truth, the amazing truth, about the power of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The apostle Paul knew this truth and said it is the foundation of our new life in Christ. In Romans, chapter 6, he explained this truth in detail. He said Jesus did not simply die for us, but in a very real way, if we place our faith in Him, when He died we died with Him. You might say we were spiritually present in Him as He hung on the cross, so much so that in the spiritual world His death becomes our death. That's why the Law of God no longer has the power to curse us. In Jesus we have already endured the fury of the curse. That's why the devil has no right to demand justice for our sins; we have already been executed for our sins, in Jesus. And the sin which resides in our bodies has no right to dominate us because those bodies have already died with Jesus. Paul saw our being joined to Jesus not as something that will happen in the future but something that is already finished, and its power is available to us now.

The process

Jesus said freedom from sin would come to those who "remain in My word" (v31). As a disciple continues to struggle to learn how to obey His commands, he or she undergoes a change of thinking. We cease to think of ourselves as helpless victims. Our spirit learns to take charge over our flesh. We recognize a demonic temptation when it arrives, and we feel the futility of this dying world. Our mind is being transformed. We are learning to think like Jesus. As the years pass we become increasingly free, not because we've discovered new truths but because we have grown more and more confident in the truth about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each of us learns to lay hold of that truth in practical ways that work for us, so that in time what may have started as a doctrine becomes a familiar part of our daily life. In situation after situation, we lay hold of the fact of our death and resurrection and of the power that has come to live within us, and gradually in area after area, sin loses its power over us. Meanwhile the grace that is ours, because of His death and resurrection, provides constant forgiveness when we fail. It buys us time to learn how to lay hold of the truth.



# LIFE LESSONS WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible  
practically & understandably  
and seeing lives changed by  
the truth of the Gospel

## The danger (vs34-35)

All sin produces “death,” but Jesus says it also produces bondage. The more I commit a sin the harder it is to stop, and at some point if I continue long enough I will find I can't stop. I can become enslaved to that sin. It can rule me and make me do things I don't want to do. Though Jesus' death and resurrection never lose their power to forgive me, if I continue to sin I will find my heart growing hard. I may grow angry at God, blaming Him for my failure to stop because I prayed and He didn't take it away. I may enjoy that sin and resent God's demand that I stop. I may develop a heavy burden of shame that causes me to avoid God and withdraw from His people. And if that isolation and condemnation are not relieved, it is possible for my confidence in the truth to evaporate. My walk with God can decline until it becomes only a memory. Jesus likens that decline to the flame of a lamp slowly extinguishing (Mt 25:1-13). God's power to forgive us is infinite, but our capacity to repent is not. The Bible warns that a line can be crossed from which we are not able to return. No one has the right or ability to declare when this happens in someone else's life, or for that matter in their own. But the danger is there, and if we are wise we will recognize the symptoms early and repent quickly.

In this passage Jesus gives both a promise and a warning. The promise is that He has set us free from sin; the warning is that we need to lay hold of that freedom because sin has a dangerous power: It can enslave those who practice it. It tempts us and then won't let go, and if we don't lay hold of the truth to stop that process it can carry us away from God. So grace does not mean we have been freed to continue sinning; it means we have been given the time to learn how to stop.

## The best news

Here's the best news of all. You and I don't have to keep damaging relationships, losing jobs, enduring shame, wasting time, missing opportunities, watching our lives go by without fruit and without meaning. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sin is no longer our master, Jesus is, and when we submit to Him He teaches us how to escape addictions, temptations and lies. He teaches us how to make good choices time after time, in situation after situation, until every area of our life is moving upward, healing, growing stronger, getting better, becoming full of joy. He has set us free from sin, and in that climate of freedom we discover the life God planned for us when He formed us in our mother's womb. We hear His call to serve Him. We recognize the gifts He has given us to enable us to carry His love to other people. The old chains that once held us back have been broken. Now when temptations come we know how to respond. When the enemy attacks we know how to use the weapons of our warfare. We daily learn to put to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit. This is what Jesus meant when He said He would set us free; we would be free to obey, free to fulfill God's plan for us, free to lay up treasure in heaven, free to bring delight to our heavenly Father's heart. The best news of all isn't that we can keep on sinning and be forgiven. It's that we can stop sinning and start living.

## Questions

- 1) What would you say to someone who says, “I know what I'm doing is wrong, but it's too powerful. I can't stop.”?
- 2) Have you been set free from some form of slavery to sin? What did you learn from that experience? Was there a verse of Scripture that helped you? Did someone walk with you through the process?