

## FREE INDEED

**<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” <sup>33</sup> They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” <sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

In the fall of 29 AD, that we sometimes call the Year of Opposition, Jesus Christ our Lord was concerned about theologians who opposed his teaching that he is the only way to heaven and eternal life.

In the fall of 1517, Martin Luther was concerned about theologians who opposed the Scripture’s teaching that Jesus is the only way to heaven and eternal life.

Today, you and I should be concerned about certain theologians who, once again, oppose our Lord Jesus Christ’s teaching, laid out clearly in the Scriptures, that he is the only way to heaven and eternal life.

The life and ministry of our Lord Jesus is documented for us in the Gospels. And the Holy Spirit has done something to those documents, and to all of the books that make up the Holy Scriptures-- 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. You see, the Holy Spirit wrote those books through the pens of human authors by means of Divine Inspiration, something that has never happened since. And this means in part that the gospel presented by these Holy Scriptures creates faith. However it is presented, it is able to the work of evangelism all by itself. An opponent can quote Scripture, can read Scripture, can typeset Scripture, and the Word of God can work faith in his heart even though he set out to do damage to those same Scriptures.

So the devil had learned over the years to fear Scripture. So he avoids when he can, and instead has adopted the trick to tempted men and women to find another path to heaven besides faith in Christ alone, as taught by the Holy Scriptures.

In John 8, Jesus is facing “the Jews who had believed in him. How shall we take the word “had”? well, in our text, Jesus is preaching to a large crowd of Jews during or shortly after the Feast of the Tabernacles. Some of them were Pharisees who challenged his teaching. Others were ordinary working-class Jews, and while Jesus was preaching to them, some of them came to have

faith in him as the Savior. In fact, he was preaching near the place where the people put their offerings--a place which would have been guarded by special temple guards--but the priests did not have Jesus arrested. Now, I want to be careful about this word "had" in our text. It means those who once had faith and who continued to have faith, and so it seems from the word to mean believers, and yet a few verses later it seems to mean those who turned on him and betrayed him--and perhaps both are possible.

The Lord gets right to the matter: "If you hold to my teaching, you will know the truth." This isn't a truth of philosophy, or of science, or of ethics. It is the absolute truth of how we are taken to heaven. And that leads us to what he means by "free." When he told them that they would be set free by this truth, they didn't understand. "We've never been slaves of anyone," they said in verse 33.

Humanly speaking, they had been slaves to the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and even, at this very moment, the Romans. But what Jesus was talking about goes deeper than that kind of slavery. Jesus is talking about the slavery of sin.

Sin, beginning with the original sin we inherit from our first parents Adam and Eve, has stages that lead into actual sins. Sometimes these might be sins we commit, or they might be sins of omission. But the stages are these:

First: Inclination. This is the infection of sin we're born with; conceived in. It includes our original and inherited depravity that makes our nature want to resist God and his will.

Second, Suggestions. These suggestions and urgings come from the devil and the world around us. There might be sins here we had never even dreamed of, but the thought is placed there in our minds by the people around us.

Third: Pleasure. Once a person experiences a sin, they might get some pleasure out of it, some thrill or delight and then the desire to experience that all over again. This includes the added little thrill of getting away with it without getting caught or punished right away.

Fourth: Consent. Consent is when the sinner makes a decision away from Christ. This is the only kind of decision theology that actually exists. No one can decide to believe in Christ; our faith is given to us as a gift. But every single sinning human being has the ability to make a decision not to trust in Jesus and accept his gift of forgiveness. This is becomes the consent to willingly commit a sin.

Finally: The work of sin itself. This is sin accomplished by the sinner for his own sinful means.

This slippery slope down into sin gets wider and easier and harder to resist the deeper you get. And all of these stages condemn us before God. This is truly slavery to sin, a bondage that has no human way out. We are chained to our sin, imprisoned by it, sentenced to a payment we can never make.

In ancient times up until the not so distant past, there was a kind of prison called “debtor’s prison.” You could be jailed if you defaulted on a debt, but you couldn’t get out until you had paid what you owed. But if you’re in jail, you can’t work, and you can’t earn money, and so for many people there was no way out. That’s what our debt and slavery to sin is truly like, because we cannot pay the price for our sins ourselves.

Today, there is a growing danger in Christianity, as whole denominations are leading their people to believe that there are ways to eternal life in heaven apart from Jesus, contrary to the words of Jesus himself in the Holy Scriptures. Holy Lord God, preserve us and our church from such a folly, and from wandering so far away from the truth.

In Luther’s time, there was a get-rich-quick scheme that involved selling people the forgiveness of sins as a fund-raiser in the Catholic Church. The sheets of paper that were sold were called “indulgences,” and the Pope claimed that buying one could free a person from suffering and spring into heaven. And you could even buy one for a loved one or a dead relative. But the Apostle Peter himself says: “It was not with gold or silver that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

In Jesus’ time, people thought that they could earn salvation by observing the Law of Moses, but Jesus said: “Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law” (Jn 7:19). We are not saved by what we do, or by what we might try to pay. Only the blood of Jesus could pay for our sins, and it did.

“Free indeed” – we are free from the debt of sin, and from the stain of our sinful ancestry.  
“Free indeed” – we are from the inevitable and relentless temptation to sin, because through faith we trust in Jesus, and he enables us to say no to sin. And if we fall, as fall we do, we have the certainty that our sins are covered over by Jesus’ blood, so that we are free from the guilt of our sins as well – Free Indeed.

Now, free Christians, truth-knowing Christians: Live out your life in love, so that the people around you will see the love of Christ in the things that you do. Reflect the glory of his forgiveness in the way you treat people around you, and pray for God’s help day by day, every day, as you live as a Child of God who is free indeed.