

Freedom in Christ Jesus

While Jacinta was still sitting, she had tuned out her co-workers a while ago.

"It's just too many restrictions, being a Christian," said Alyssa.

"Well, I'm religious, and I still do what I want! God understands," Brittany interjected. "What's the big deal?"

The women were discussing going to one of the casinos in the area and later a male revue club for a night of fun. Sometimes several women from work would meet outside the office for a time of bonding. Many outings had been just a lunch date, and Jacinta had attended some of those.

"We understand that you can't join in on the fun," said Alyssa, "but I think everyone else will be excited."

"It's not that I can't go," offered Jacinta. "I don't want to. I do fun and exciting things that honor God. Besides, I am not interested in a male revue or gambling."

"Gambling? Who's gambling?" asked Takira, who just entered the break room.

"We are planning an outing to a casino and a male revue," grinned Brittany.

"I like the sound of it," Takira exclaimed, "except I need to stay away from the slots and the game tables. I'm dodging bill collectors now! But what's one more?"

It sounds like craziness, Jacinta thought to herself as she cleared up her lunch trash. She had peace of mind and freedom in Christ, and nothing could equal or surpass that!

- 1. What are some things people can be slaves to?**
- 2. What can be of help if someone desires to be set free from these?**
- 3. What must one do if they want to benefit from this help?**

We Are Slaves to No One!

John 8:31-33, KJV

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

John 8:31-33, NIV

³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Many found Jesus' claim that God was His Father dubious and His message of redemption questionable. But as John noted, "many believed in him" (vs. 30). However, Jesus told these believers that they would truly be His disciples only if they held to His teachings. If they did, it would result in them knowing what is true and that this would free them from the sins that enslaved them. Few seemed to understand this, however, and thought that Jesus was referring to being freed from physical enslavement.

Many Jews in those days thought that, because of their special relationship with God through Abraham, they were slaves to no one except to God and never had been. But centuries earlier they had been slaves in Egypt. In the days of their kings, they were subject to those who ruled over them. Then, following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., they were held in captivity in Babylon; now they were subjects of the Romans. Although they denied ever being slaves, they had often experienced political as well as physical enslavement.

Their understanding of Jesus' promise to be set free was also skewed by their desire for political freedom. Many

believed that God's promised messiah would set them free from foreign rulers. Some thought that Jesus' was going to lead an uprising that would restore Israel to its former glory. Peter brought a sword to the garden where Jesus was arrested thinking that this was the moment when Jesus was going to start the "revolution." And so, when they asked, "How can you say that we shall be set free," they were perhaps asking what Jesus was going to do to free them from their Roman oppressors.

4. *What did Jesus say would identify those who were truly one of His disciples?*

5. *What would this result in?*

6. *What did the Jews' response reveal about their understanding of Jesus' promise to set them free?*

You Are Slaves to Sin!

John 8:34-36, KJV

34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

John 8:34-36, NIV

³⁴Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Jesus responded to their misunderstanding by pointing out the nature of their spiritual enslavement. They were slaves to sin, they could not help but sin.

Jesus illustrated this predicament by comparing it to the difference between a son and a slave. Slaves had no permanent standing with their masters. A slave's relationship with their owner could be severed at any time. Even a slave who had done everything their master demanded was not assured of a permanent place in the household.

The same could not be said regarding a son. A son's connection to his household was based on blood, not conduct. A son was always a son even if he acted improperly or dishonorably. And, as noted in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), even an errant son will be accepted back by a father who really loves him.

Jesus was promising a relationship with God that was not tied to performance or lineage but instead was based on sonship. If they held to Him and His teachings, they would become one of God's children, free from the sins that enslaved them and that separated from God.

Those who held to Jesus' teachings would also no longer be slaves to the worst parts of themselves. Paul reinforced this when he wrote, "For we know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin" (Rom. 6:6-7).

7. *What is the difference between a son and a slave?*

8. *Why did Jesus point this out?*

Let's Kill Him!

John 8:37-38, KJV

37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

John 8:37-38, NIV

³⁷"I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father."

Jesus then addressed the Jews' argument that their relationship with God was secure and somehow "protected" because of their special relationship with God through Abraham. Jesus acknowledged that they were indeed

descendants of Abraham. What He was promising should therefore have been good news to them. But instead of responding with appreciation, they wanted to kill Him. Although John called them believers, there was in reality no room in their hearts for Jesus.

In this respect, Jesus' father was not the same as theirs. The voice or voices they were listening to were not the same. Soon after this, Jesus said to them, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires" (v. 44). Because they believed their identification with Abraham and their obedience to the law was sufficient to gain them right-standing with God, they failed to recognize it would take something more to guarantee their place in God's family. They failed to recognize that Jesus came to set them free from the sins that enslaved them and that kept them from being a part of God's kingdom.

Jesus came to set them free from being a slave to sin;

but instead of accepting and embracing Jesus and this wonderful truth, they were looking for ways to get rid of Him.

Hopefully we won't be like them. Hopefully we will hold fast to Jesus and His teachings so that we will know the truth and be set free.

9. How did these "believers" respond to what Jesus was promising?

10. What did this reveal about their hearts?



An ancient Roman slave collar saying anyone who finds this slave if he escaped would receive a gold coin.

The Chains Are Broken!

Pilgrim's Progress, a book written in 1677 by John Bunyan, is an allegorical story about the journey of a man named Christian from his hometown, the "City of Destruction," to the "Celestial City." Along the way, he carries a bag that weighs him down and makes it hard to reach his destination. This weight—his doubts, fears, guilt, and temptations—nearly causes him to drown in the "Slough of Despond." After being rescued by Help, he is told by Mr. Worldly Wiseman that his burden can be lifted only through the Law with the help of Mr. Legality from the village of Morality. This fraud is eventually exposed by Evangelist. But it is only when the straps of his bag are broken at the "place of deliverance" that Christian is freed from the load he is carrying. Although the rest of his journey is not without difficulty, the guilt and shame that weighed him down so heavily has been removed.

Sometimes I feel that I am like Christian in this story. Sometimes the weight of shame, guilt, and regret I carry keeps me from appreciating my actual standing with Jesus and enjoying life now to its fullest. Sometimes my struggles with sin result in a sense of hopelessness and a belief that I will forever be a slave to the worst parts of myself.

What helps in those times when I feel I'm not good enough or that my past cannot be put behind is remembering what Jesus did to free me from being a slave to my sin, my guilt, my shame, and my past failures. Being freed from the yoke of these allows me to appreciate my relationship with Jesus and to enjoy life now unencumbered by their chains.

11. *What are some things you feel you are a slave to?*

12. *As you think about these, what promises or truths do you need to hold fast to?*

13. *What else can you do so that you are enjoying the fruits of being set free by Jesus?*

I Am Free! Now What?

Jesus promised to free us from enslavement to our sin. He promised as well to free us from the burdens of shame and guilt we feel for our past failures, but we may continue to believe that we're doomed to be a slave to our sin and chained to our past. Holding fast to Jesus and His teachings is the only choice that will result in an unencumbered, eternal relationship with Him.

► *What truth do you need to hold fast to so you can be set free from what enslaves you?*

KEY VERSE

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

—John 8:36, KJV

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

—John 8:36, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 25 through May 1

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 130—Out of the Depths I Cry.

Tue. John 7:53–8:11—Go and Sin No More.

Wed. Romans 3:19–31—Righteousness Disclosed in Christ.

Thu. Romans 5:1–11—The Justified Have Peace with God.

Fri. Romans 5:12–21—God's Free Gift Brings Life.

Sat. Isaiah 55:6–13—Seek the Lord and Find Joy.

Sun. Romans 6:1–14—Baptized into Christ's Death.