

The Truth That Frees

Jesus told his followers, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*" (John 8:32). What is that liberating truth? Is it the Bible? Is it the New Testament writings? Is it just the gospel? Is it simply the "plan of salvation"? Is it Christ's law?

It is none of the above! Although the Bible is true, Jesus was not pointing them to a book to be written and compiled at some time in the future. Jesus was not talking about a set of facts, a code of law, or a system of doctrine; he had only one truth in mind.

And from what would the truth free them?

In order to find the answer to these questions, one need not belabor himself with commentaries, lexicons, and the deliberations of the scholars. A reading of the context of this much-quoted passage, which includes the second quadrant of the gospel of John, can give us the simple answer. Let us scan it briefly to see.

Jesus was going about teaching and performing miracles in order to create faith that he was the Son of God, yet he was being cautious not to arouse a peak of opposition before his hour should come. As Jesus was gaining public attention and popularity among the people, the chief priests and Pharisees were stirring up opposition. In the setting of John 7-8, we see the controversy intensify. Jesus testified of his relation to the Father who sent him. He was to identify himself as the Savior: "*I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he*" (John 8:24). They would be in bondage to their sins as long as they did not believe "I am he"-- that is, that he was the Christ sent from God.

Although Jesus had done many convincing works among them, he had not given the ultimate demonstration of his Sonship. So he also declared, "*When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he*" (8:28).

What is the truth that they would know? It was the answer to the great controversy -- whether he was the Christ sent from the Father. The uplifted Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4). In a short time, both believers and those who opposed would be able to know that liberating truth.

When those disciples heard him speak of their being set free, they protested that they had never been in bondage. Then Jesus made it clear that it was their bondage to sin that would be relieved. The whole world still awaited an atonement.

It should be noted that Jesus stated positively and without condition that "*you will know*" and "*the truth will make you free.*" The disciples were Jewish law-keepers who already believed in Jesus. This promise applied to them uniquely and was fulfilled in that they became witnesses of the resurrection which enabled them to know that he was the Son of God and they were freed from sin without further condition because "*when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law...*" (Gal.4:4).

Avoiding any hint that he was speaking of a body of teachings instead of himself as a person, Jesus assured the disciples, "*So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed*" (8:36). He is the Truth who frees. A code of law, factual truths, defined doctrines, and rules of conduct have no power to break the bondage of sin, and no complicated system of either of these must be mastered in order for one to gain his forgiveness.

We, too, are enabled to know the Truth and to be freed by him, for later, in his prayer, Jesus said, "*And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*" (17:3).

While we are brought to the liberating Jesus by the gospel and we are directed in the exercise of freedom in him by the apostolic teachings, it is to the Son of God rather than to a system of true teachings that we owe our freedom from both sin and law.

If we must know and understand all facts recorded in the Bible, we are hopeless. I have quoted, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,*" countless times thinking that I had a system of truth fairly well defined. I was trying to convert others to a body of truth or system of doctrine more than to Christ. Often addressing those who already believed in Jesus, I sought to convince them of a code of law which I thought they had failed to recognize and understand. But I was the one who needed more insight. Jesus rebuked me along with others like me in his day: "*You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life*" (5:39).

In a related but secondary sense, they were unconditionally freed from the slavery to law. Law and sin are closely related, for it is law that brings sin. While law brings sin, it has no remedy to free those under its dominion.

To impose a system of teaching as a code of law is to enslave rather than to free. Law is "*a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear*" (Acts 15:10). Jesus brought freedom from both law and its consequential sin, "*For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace*" (Rom. 6:14). "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*" (Gal. 5:1).

I have often declared that truth frees us and that error cannot do what truth does. In some sense, that is true, but I was setting error as the opposite of truth, while Satan is the opposite of Truth -- one personage opposing another. When I am in Christ, I am in the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and Satan cannot snatch me out of his hand.

The truth that frees us from sin is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

This is Chapter 7 of my fourth book, *Free To Change*. []

(Cecil Hook; March 2005)

Talkin' Texas: Rainbow Bridge on Texas 87 near Port Arthur is the highest bridge in Texas with a clearance of 177 feet above the water.

