

Why and how to be free from sin

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 September 2013

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] Please then turn to John chapter 8. We're going through John chapter 8. John 7 and 8 being, it seems to me, chapters of conflict, chapters of controversy for the Lord Jesus.

! Slightly different in pace and tone in chapter 8 than in chapter 7. But nevertheless, conflict, it seems to me.

And we're going to look in John 8 from verse 30 through to verse 47 or around there. And while you're finding the place, let me give you this expression, nominal Christianity.

I don't know whether you've heard that expression, nominal Christianity or a nominal Christian. It's a phrase which means, in name, but not in reality.

In name only. A Christian in name only. A nominal Christian. I didn't look up the exact statistics, but in Brighton and Hove, I think it's something like 45% of people in Brighton and Hove give themselves the name Christians.

[1 : 23] So if they're filling in a form and it comes to religion, they presumably tick C of E. And yet, is Brighton and Hove nearly half full of Christian people in reality?

Would you say that yet there are many people who are enslaved?

So it would appear by things like greed and addictions of various sorts and disordered loves.

And would you say that there are many people who might have, in some sense, the name Christian, but can't speak for God because they don't listen to God?

They don't or can't listen to God. And would you say that of this apparently large number of people, yet many don't seem any different for apparently being a Christian?

[2 : 47] They still have ugly thoughts in their hearts, perhaps hatred. They still have ugliness in their speech.

Perhaps they speak wrongly. Sometimes cruelly. And don't seem any different to people who aren't Christians.

This nominal Christianity. Christianity that is in name only. Well, if that is a question that vexes you at all, Jesus had the same problem.

In verse 30, as he spoke, many put their faith in him. Oh, that's great. We've got many believers. And yet Jesus turns to them and says, To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus says, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

[3 : 49] It's interesting, isn't it? He makes the distinction between people who, in some sense, say they are his disciples, and those who are really his disciples.

And that's the key from which we're going to start this morning. It's a little bit of an uncomfortable theme, isn't it? Because it's addressing people who say they're Christians and disagreeing with them.

And saying, well, is that really true? Jesus entered conflict. Let's follow the way that he did so. Now, may I tell you that there are some words and themes in the text.

This always interests me. It won't necessarily interest you. But it is there as a little key to the way that the writer is portraying Jesus. And as such, I think it deserves our attention.

I said the other week that these two chapters were chapters of hide and seek. Jesus he'd himself. And they sought, well, they sought various things. Well, the seeking is still going on.

[4 : 55] In verse 37, Jesus says to the people he's speaking to, You, verse 37, you are ready to kill me. Do you see that?

Literally, you seek to kill me. That's what you're seeking. And in verse 40, you, as it is, says Jesus, you are determined to kill me.

You seek to kill me. And the seeking is also going on in verse 50, where you can see verse 50, Jesus says, I am not seeking glory for myself.

There is one who seeks it. So that's the seeking. Jesus is seeking for the glory of God, not for himself. And the Father seeks the glory of Jesus. So there's seeking going on. There's another lot of repetitions to do with true and truth and truly. So let me point these out to you. In verse 31, if you hold to my teaching, you are, what it actually says is, truly my disciples.

[6:01] And then Jesus says, and then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. It's all about truth. If you look in verse 34, where Jesus says in the NIV, I tell you the truth.

Actually, he doesn't use the expression in the original. He says, amen, amen, I say to you. He means that what he's saying is important. He doesn't actually use the word truth. But in verse 40, he uses the word truth.

A man, you're trying to, you're seeking to kill me. A man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. And in verse 44, the devil does not hold to the truth.

There is no truth in him. And verse 45, I tell you the truth. So there's a lot going on about truth. And there's a lot going on about slavery and freedom, which we'll see as we go through.

For example, in verse 33, we've never been slaves. How can you say we shall be set free? And there's even more going on about father and son.

[7:09] So there's quite a lot of things happening in the text. So we'll try and pick that out and make that into some sort of sense. The first, so the first thing I'd like to draw our attention to is what Jesus says in this rather conflicting way about disciples versus true disciples.

And that's what he says in verse 31. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus says, if you hold to my teaching, you are truly my disciples.

So he says, here's somebody with faith, apparently, faith of a sort. And yet that does not make the person truly a disciple.

What he says makes them truly a disciple if, what does it say? If you what? If you hold to? Does it say anything?

My word. If you hold to my teaching. Quite literally, if you abide in my word. So here's somebody who says they have faith.

[8:24] And Jesus says, okay, now real faith means that you abide in my word. That you hold to my teaching. And he says a similar thing in verse 37, where he says, now do I mean 37 or 47?

37. You seek to kill me because you have no room for my word. So let's start off by making that distinction then.

He says, faith of a sort. But that's not truly being a disciple. Faith that means my word abides in you. Or if you put it in the NIV, you hold to my teaching. You have room in your life for my word. That, says Jesus, is really being a disciple.

I put two tick boxes. I haven't got my pens out, but I was going to put a cross in that one. And a tick in that one. Because that's not being really a Christian. This one's being really a Christian.

[9:43] And it shows how important words are, doesn't it? Shows how important words are. Jesus says, yeah, but do you abide in my word? Does my word have room in your life?

It's a very good question. It's a very good question. I got a little illustration about words mattering. Here's somebody going to do the shopping. So they've got a shopping list and a shopping basket.

And on the shopping list, it says, butter, eggs, milk. Words. They go to do the shopping.

I was going to put Tesco, but I thought that would be politically incorrect. So I put Hisby, which is the ethical supermarket which is opening down opposite St. Peter's, run by Ruth and Amy Anslow.

And so this person's been to Tesco, been to Hisby, and has brought back very healthy orange aid and bananas and potatoes.

[10:45] They've left the shopping list and just ignored that and brought back orange aid, bananas and potatoes. And I ask, when they get home, will they be congratulated for their shopping?

No. Because they just haven't paid attention to the words they were given. They were asked to get butter and eggs and milk.

Well, they're just words. No, they're not. That's what you... You can't do the shopping for those things unless you pay attention to the words. It's a rather trivial illustration.

But Jesus says, you can't be my disciple unless you actually take notice of what I say. It's not... In a strange sort of way, it makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

I think you would be very annoyed if people said they were your friend, but they never took the slightest notice of what you said.

[11:47] So aggravating. And Jesus says, you call yourself my disciple, but you never bother with what I say. You are my disciple if my word abides in you, if you hold to my teaching.

So I've given a little picture of the disciple, the real disciple, in relationship to the word of Jesus. The word of Jesus is found in a particular place.

It's found in this book. That's the word. The words of Jesus are there. And Jesus is saying, you can't be a disciple unless you have this relationship with this book.

That's the way it is. Do you read it? Do you hear what it says? Do you know what it says?

Do you love what it says? And do you live what it says? That's the question.

[12:48] And we could say this is in terms of person, personally. Do you personally, not via somebody else.

I know somebody who's a good Christian and I'm sort of hanging on their coattails. But do you, yourself, listen in any consistent way to the words of Jesus?

Do you pay any attention to the words of Jesus? It's perfectly possible to come to Jesus praying.

You've got all the things that you want to tell him. But you never stop and listen to what he says to you.

He might be saying, well, I understand your concern about such and such a matter. But I'll tell you what, I've got something I'm concerned about. And you need to listen to me. Personally, corporately, one of the rather subtle things the Bible says is that we don't only hear the word of God on our own in what Christians sometimes call the quiet time.

I don't know why they call it that. I suppose because it's quiet. But corporately, when we're together as a group, what is God saying to us together?

[13:56] And we hear that because somebody will have picked up something that you hadn't picked up. And when they say that, you think, yeah, that was for me as well. And there's a corporateness about hearing God's word.

And I put consistently, because I don't think Jesus is talking about a one-off or something that happens twice a year. He's saying, do you hold to my teaching?

Do you abide in my word? Does my word have a place in your life? So that's the first thing that Jesus says here in this conflict about being a disciple.

And I lay that question to you for you to answer before the Lord. So let's move on to some other things that he says. So he says quite a lot about slavery versus sonship and freedom.

Let's read on then. Verse 32. You will know the truth if you hold to my teaching. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. And they answered him, we are Abraham's descendants.

[15:03] We are genetically descended from Abraham. We are legitimate racial ethnic Jews. We are Abraham's descendants. And we have never been slaves of anyone.

How can you say that we shall be set free? They don't seem to be particularly keen on this idea. Jesus says there is such a thing as being a son who is free.

And there is such a thing as being a slave who is in chains. And he says that the words of Jesus, this is one way of putting it at least, the words of Jesus, the truth, sets you free.

What a grand thing to be set free. Is there a song that says, hallelujah, free at last?

You get the sense of that promise of freedom? Well, the Jews don't like this. The Jews are listening to him. And they become rather indignant.

[16:10] Which is an interesting thing. When people who say they're Christians but aren't get challenged, they can become quite indignant. And it sounds to me as though the Jews are becoming quite indignant with Jesus.

What are you going on about? We are Jews. We're not slaves. We've never been slaves of anyone, they said. Rather like Britons on the last night of the proms.

Britons never, never, never shall be slaves, apparently. But the Jews were saying, we've never been slaves. We're not slaves. Rather insulting for you to say that we're slaves.

Now, history would say, not quite sure the word is true to say you've never been slaves.

The nation of Israel, half of it, half of the nation was carted off to Assyria in slavery and never seen again. Later on, they were carted off in exile to Babylon and returned.

[17:17] But they were in slavery for a while, weren't they? And even at the time of writing, they were sort of under Roman occupation.

And perhaps that's why it was such a sensitive issue. But the Jews say, no, we're not slaves. Never have been. Well, Jesus doesn't answer the political or historical question, but he puts it more

fundamentally.

Don't you realize that if you're a sinner, you're a slave to sin? I tell you the truth, says Jesus. Amen, amen. Everyone who does sin is a slave to sin.

He puts it on a moral and spiritual level. And says that's the sort of bondage that you are in. It's a very powerful statement. You were born in the realm of sin.

You were born as a slave. And you need to be set free. And the person who can set you free is Jesus. And the way that he sets you free is by his word.

[18 : 22] You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. And they're not particularly keen on that. And then Jesus develops this idea of a son versus a slave.

Now he says, the son is free and abides to eternity in the house, in the household.

And the slave does not. So what does he say? A slave has no permanent place in the family, but the son belongs to it forever.

Two quite different ways of relating. The temporariness, the fact that you're not permanently at home, the fact that you're a slave, compared with being a son, being at liberty, belonging there forever.

And Jesus says, you are in the slavery condition. And then he talks about a way out of that condition.

[19 : 36] The son could take the slave, break off their chains, and bring them into the house. If the son sets you free, you will be free.

Really free. You will be free. And maybe you'd like to contemplate that remarkable promise. From slavery, from not having a home, to being set free by the son, and brought into the house, and being free forever.

And that's what Jesus is talking about in terms of slavery versus sonship. And the Christian is set free.

Let's move on to the next thing that he talks about. He moves this on to the question of belonging to the family.

And he talks about the father and the son, whose child is which. So let's follow him as he goes on.

[20 : 55] He says, I know you are Abraham's descendants, yet you seek to kill me because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the father's presence.

You do what you have heard from your father. Abraham is our father, they answered. If you were Abraham's children, said Jesus, then you would do the things Abraham did.

As it is, you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does.

We are not illegitimate children, they protested. The only father we have is God himself. Jesus said, if God were your father, you would love me. For I came from God, and now I am here.

I have not come on my own, but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil.

[21 : 57] You desire to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding the truth, for there is no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks his native language, because he is a liar and the father of lies. He goes on to say, he who belongs to God hears what God says.

The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. So again, it's quite challenging words, really. The basic idea is that there is a pattern between the father and the son.

That the father has acts and words and choices and things that he wills and desires. And that the son acts in a similar way, learns the words that the father says, and perhaps speaks them out as well, and chooses and desires the same sort of things that the father chooses and desires.

That's the idea that Jesus is working on. So from this, we can start to ask the question, whose family likeness is which?

[23 : 14] And who is showing what? And who's in a relationship to which? And the three possible fathers are God and Abraham and the devil.

And it's who are the sons of these? So there's the question of the son of God, which Jesus talks about him and his father.

There's the question of being the seed of Abraham, or the descendants of Abraham, or the children of Abraham. And then there's the devil, and being children of the devil.

You are of your father the devil. Now I must say, I really hesitate to use that third category. I would find it quite difficult to say to somebody, you are descended from the devil.

You are a child of the devil. But Jesus is a much more compassionate and feeling and caring person than I am. But in this case, Jesus doesn't hesitate to say, your family likeness is not God, it's the devil.

[24 : 25] That's what he says. Let's just see what he says then, and how he says it. So can we pick up the references to this father-son relationship?

So let's look in verse 38. Jesus says, I am telling you what I have seen in the father's presence. So Jesus says, well I have a father-son relationship, and I have seen things from my father.

So Jesus is clear about that. And he, in the same sentence says, and you do what you have heard from your father.

So you have heard things from your father, and you are now doing them. So notice there's a combination of seeing and hearing and doing and telling.

Jesus has seen, and now he tells. They have heard, and now they do. And then they complain, verse 39, Abraham is our father.

[25 : 35] If you're Abraham's children, says Jesus, you would do the things that Abraham did. So the things that Abraham did, you would be doing. And then in verse 42, Jesus says, if God were your father, you would love me.

If that was the relationship, you would love me. And I'll come back to that in a moment. I came from God, and now I'm here. I have not come on my own, but he sent me.

So we learn a little more about Jesus, father-son relationship. The father sent Jesus. Verse 43.

My speech, my language is not clear to you. You are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil.

Bold statement. You want, or you choose, or you desire to carry out what your father chooses, or wants, or desires.

[26 : 43] There's a similarity in your basic motivation to the devil. And that particular motivation is to murder Jesus.

He was a murderer from the beginning. Not holding to the truth. There's no truth in him. That's something else we learn about the devil. There's no truth in him. He's the father of lies.

But these particular Jerusalem Jews, whom he was speaking to, were the ones who would not only seek to murder Jesus, but in the end actually do so.

And Jesus is not afraid to pin this on them and say, that's what you're trying to do. And that's where that desire comes from. You are of your father, the devil.

Now I would hesitate to expand on that and to go from that particular group of Jews to any particular ethnic group. Or indeed to you who are sitting here listening.

[27 : 58] And yet... And yet there is a connection.

Because even though we did not... We were not there planning his death. We did not physically drive the nails into his hands.

Yet the same attitude to him is within everyone who is not born again. It is an attitude of rejection.

Given the opportunity, it would be murder. We don't have the opportunity. But I invite you to reflect on what the rejection of Jesus is actually all about.

And where it comes from. And how serious it is. When those people rejected Jesus, they did it in the shape and form of murder.

[29 : 04] Now in our day and generation, people reject Jesus in a far more respectable way.

They do it by ridiculing Jesus. Making fun of him. Or respectfully ignoring him.

Or just paying no attention to him. But it seems to me... These are all forms of the same thing.

To reject Jesus... Is to do the thing that the devil does. You are of your father a devil.

Which is very shocking, isn't it? Because the common idea is... Well, we are all children of God. But Jesus is bold to say... I'm afraid not. Until you're born again into the family...

[30 : 11] You're not part of that family. Well, let's move on to see what he does say about the true child of God.

What can we say about somebody who... Is in the relationship that God has...

That God is his father. Now Jesus says that he himself is definitely in that relationship. He keeps speaking about his father. He keeps telling us about the things he's seen. And the things he's heard.

He says that the truth that he tells... He's got from his father. There's a wonderfully close... An unending relationship between Jesus and his father.

But what about if we were slaves... And the son had set us free... And brought us into the family. What would that look like? Well, I think we can gather that from what Jesus says.

[31 : 10] I think we can say... That this is somebody who is really a disciple. Verse 31. And this is somebody who holds to the teaching of Jesus.

So let me put it in that way. What about you? Now perhaps you would like to call yourself a Christian. And perhaps you do call yourself a Christian.

But let me be bold from what Jesus says to ask... Are you really a Christian? Or are you a Christian only in name?

So I could ask that question by saying... Do you hold to the teaching of Jesus? Is it a matter of interest to you? What does Jesus say?

Or is it boring? Is it important to you when you make decisions... And when you decide how to live your life...

[32 : 10] And how to look at life... That you say, first of all... What does Jesus say about this? How should I look at my life in the light of the word of Jesus?

So I ask that question. It's rather telling, isn't it? If you hold my teaching, you are truly my disciple. And perhaps we could go a little bit further. We could say that such a person loves Jesus. Verse 42. Jesus said to them, If God were your father, you would love me.

That's a very strong statement again, isn't it? If you were really in the family of God... Then your relation to Jesus would be you love him. Now I don't want to fill the word love...

With fluffy, oozy, wispy feelings of... Ooh, I love Jesus. I don't think Jesus uses the word in that way. He uses it in a strong way...

[33 : 21] And in a deep way... And in a powerful, life-changing way. In another place, he says, If you love me, you obey my commandments. But he does say here...

If you were really in the family of God... There would be no doubt... But you would love me. So I can ask that question.

What about you and Jesus? Particularly if you say you're a Christian. Do you love Jesus?

And what else could we say? Well, we could say that... The real believer... The real Christian... Believes Jesus. Look in verse 45.

If he says... I tell you the truth... But you don't believe me. If I'm telling the truth... Why don't you believe me? And that brings us back to faith.

[34 : 23] And I can ask that question. You say you're a Christian... But do you trust Jesus? Do you trust what he says? And that's not a trivial question.

And as we shall see as a church on Wednesday... It's a question with considerable ramifications. When I face the problems of life...

Or the challenges of life... And I can't see the answer myself... Am I prepared to live by faith... In the Son of God... Who loved me and gave himself for me?

That's what Paul says... That's how I live. I live by faith... In the Son of God. So Jesus says... If I'm telling you the truth... Why don't you believe me?

Why don't you believe my promises? Why do you get so anxious about things... When I made you promises concerning them? Why are you so worried... About the future... When I've told you that the future's in my hands? Why are you so...

[35 : 22] Agitated... When you could simply be resting in faith in me? It's a real question. Do you love me?

Says Jesus. Do you believe me? Do you trust me? And do you hear me?

Look at what Jesus says to these Jewish people... Who are debating with him. He says... You don't hear what I'm saying.

If God were your father you would love me. Verse 42... For I have come from God and am now here. I have not come on my own but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you?

Because you are unable to hear what I say. You are unable to hear what I say. Do you hear God? Do you hear God in the Bible?

[36 : 17] That's where he speaks. Not saying do you get voices in your head. Saying when you read scripture do you sense that God is speaking? And I might even say not necessarily every time.

You might be going through a bad patch and it's not particularly strongly aware of what anybody's saying perhaps. But do you hear God in the Bible?

If God were your father you'd hear me. Says Jesus. My sheep hear my voice. They follow me. So there's some rather searching questions.

Am I truly a child of God? Am I really a Christian? Do I believe Jesus? Does his word rule my life? Does his word have a place in my life?

Do I hold to his word in the sense that I obey his word? They're all very simple. But they're important questions. And let me close by saying that to be a child of God is not impossible.

[37 : 20] It's not that everybody is bound to go away saying oh I've completely failed to be a child of God. We might fail the Lord in many ways.

But he does succeed in making people his children. And the privileges that we have. We are set free by the son.

The son sets you free and you'll be free indeed. We can call God our heavenly father. What an amazing privilege to be able to do that.

To say I have a permanent place in the family home. I'm not on a temporary contract for God.

But I'm a permanent resident with God. And I speak to him and he speaks to me. These are the privileges of being a child of God.

[38 : 21] Are you a child of God? Are you really a Christian? If so, what privileges you have. If not, then become a Christian.

Ask the son to set you free and to take you from slavery into the home so that God is your father. Let's sing.