

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **Set Free By The Truth John 8:31, 32**

The opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ has been rising like a crescendo. It is soon about to burst upon Him and His disciples. John's Gospel portrays Jesus as the Son of God. The reason for this is because John desires to provoke (in one sense) his readers to deep faith and belief in Jesus as very God of very God. John's Gospel rotates around the 7 "I am" sayings of our Lord (John 6:35, 48; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1 – 5. Compare these with 4:25, 26; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8). In these references, Jesus says that He is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the True Vine. He is also the same as the "I AM" of the Old Testament Scriptures.

John also includes 7 signs that point specifically to the divine character of our Lord. These are changing the water into wine (2:1 – 10), healing the nobleman's son (4:46 – 54), healing the paralyzed man (5:1 – 9), feeding the 5,000 (6:1 – 14), walking on the water (6:15 – 21), healing the blind man (9: 1 – 41), and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1 – 44). In each of these miracles, our Lord points to the fact that He is indeed God.

John also tells us why he wrote his Gospel in John 20:30, 31, "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" The key word here is "believe." Believe what? Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The result of believing is life in His name. John's record is designed and is sufficient to provide us with enough information in order for us to believe. We are not to believe anything, but only the specific truth about Christ. In fact, to believe anything other than the truth is to believe a lie. So John lays great stress on believing and on what we are to believe.

The disciple of Christ is one who abides in the words of Jesus and as a result of this abiding or remaining, the disciple knows the truth and finds that this truth sets him free. The true disciple does not merely say that he or she believes, but there is a transforming power associated with believing – *the truth shall set you free*. Mere belief spoken may not be true belief believed, therefore, it is possible to say that one believes the truth, but not be prepared to yield to the One who is Truth. If this is the case, of what value then is belief – it is of no value. So ultimately, the question will be over the question or state of belief. We would probably find in any survey of any section of our country that the majority of people would claim to believe, and therefore would further claim the title "Christian," yet we know that the reality is that their saying they believe does not make them believers. It is the truth alone found in Christ alone that makes true believers.

The idea of being set free speaks of slavery or bondage. Jesus' words to his hearers who were Jews (and the Scripture says that they had believed in him) was that *if* they remained in him they were His true disciples, and the implication behind His words is that their believing may not go far enough to embrace Him as their Lord and Savior. This position is in reality a position of slavery. If one is not free then one is in bondage. True freedom is liberation from bondage to sin. True freedom is the liberty that comes from Christ.

Superficial attraction is mere superficiality and is vain and empty. There is no substance to it. Real faith contains substance. It is not mere words as the Jews were guilty of. Jesus shows what real attachment to Him means. They say they are attached to Him, so Jesus proceeds to unfold what that actually means. The real test is *“abiding.”* Abiding speaks of continuance. True and real disciples continue believing. They are not like Judas who gave up believing, thereby proving that he really did not believe in the first place. True believers are not like Cain, Esau and Balaam (see Heb. 12:16, 17; 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11).

It is as if Jesus had said to them, *“you who say you have believed, you also can become my true disciples if you abide in me.”* Jesus says they should abide in His word, that is, all of His teaching (John 5:24, 14:23). To abide in His word is to be a true disciple. We find in John 8 that these same Jews who said they believed in Him begin immediately to question the statement of the Lord about being free (see vs. 33). In verse 37, Jesus even states that they were seeking to kill because His word found no place in them. So what kind of faith do they really have – it is a spurious faith, not a real faith at all. They are merely interested in Jesus for what they can supposedly get from Him. They were slaves and not true sons (vs. 34, 35) at all. They were in bondage to sin even though they claimed to have the same faith as Abraham (vs. 33).

True discipleship consists of remaining in Christ. If a person is a true disciple then there are consequences. He will know the truth (mentioned 7 times in the passage – see vv. 40, 44, 45, 46). The truth is intimately related to the Person of Jesus. John 1:17 speaks of *“grace and truth”* coming by our Lord. Jesus affirms that He alone is the truth (John 14:6).

Association with Christ is association with the truth and is related to being a disciple. Since Jesus communicates Himself to His disciples they therefore know the truth, and we are told the truth liberates. This is not a deliverance from ignorance that is in view here, but rather that the truth is bound up in the Person of Christ. Appropriating the truth is appropriating Christ. This truth is saving truth – truth that saves us from our sins. It is truth that saves us from our sins, not truth that saves us from error. The Jews of Jesus’ day did not realize that they were in bondage to sin. They relied on their privileged position. They relied on their status and their nationality. As far as they were concerned they were not slaves. Thus they did not recognize their need of deliverance. This is why they respond in verse 33, that they were descendants of Abraham, and were therefore not enslaved to anyone. They *“truly”* do not understand what Jesus is talking about. They are not conscious of their bondage and their sins.

This line of questioning that begins in verse 33 comes to its conclusion in verses 58 and 59. In verse 58, Jesus acknowledges that before Abraham existed, He always had existed. This was a claim on one level to equality with God, and on another level, it was the same as saying, *“I am God.”* In response to this, the Jews pick up stones to stone Him because they believe He has committed blasphemy. The conclusion of chapter 8 leaves the reader with no doubt that these Jews were still in their sins, were still in darkness, and were still slaves to their sins and therefore outside of Christ. They refused the Truth when He spoke the truth to them. They were blind and dead in their sins. Augustine speaks of this bondage from personal experience. He states that a man’s slave may flee his master and find some rest in his flight, but who can flee his sin? Where can the servant of sin flee? Wherever he goes, his sin goes with him. He is never free. When the pleasure of sin passes away, the sin remains. He calls this an *“evil bondage”* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol.VII, XLI. 4; p. 231). The believer, on the other hand is truly free because true freedom is deliverance from the bondage of sin, and only Christ does this for us. We can not set ourselves free. Since Jesus is the Truth, the truth sets us free. The truth about Christ, about God, about ourselves - all truth, therefore finding its total and complete expression in the Son of God – this sets us free. Who wants to believe a lie? – we believe the Truth who sets us free.