

Truth and Perseverance

In Defense of Truth

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Bible Verse: John 8:31-32
Preached on: Sunday, June 12, 2022

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I rather suppose that many of you grew up in a spiritual environment, like I did, where the expectation and the general approach and teaching, you know, there would be an altar call at the end of the service, and I often get questions from well-meaning and lovely people who say, "Why don't you have an altar call at the end of your service in order to invite people to Christ?? That's the tradition that I grew up in as a young boy. I never walked an aisle in that environment but it's what I came to know and came to expect, and there's a lot of reasons why that's not a good idea, and there's a lot of reasons why we don't practice it. I have a five part series prepared that I may preach sometime after the first of the year to lay out these things and to reinforce a true understanding of salvation, but one of the dangers of the altar call system is that it creates an impression, even if it's unspoken, that if you walk the aisle and you come and you make this kind of one-time public profession of Christ, that that guarantees that you are a Christian and that that represent actual, real conversion in the heart, that a spiritual change has taken place because a physical relocation was taken as someone moved geographically from one position to another in the room, and that has done untold damage that can be traced to the lethal influence of Charles Finney in the 19th century. It's not a biblical practice at all, and the reason that I'm mentioning it now is just to set the stage for what I want to talk about here today. There is a genuine danger in a false profession of faith. There is a genuine risk that people have a false understanding of what it means to be a Christian, are deceived into thinking that they are genuinely saved when they are not, and any superficial reading of Scripture would dispel the idea that that's not a real risk.

Beloved, it is common for people to outwardly identify with Christ or to outwardly identify with a church, and yet not have the inner reality of the new birth in their heart, to still be dead in trespasses and sins, and I'm very very sensitive to this in ministry because, you know, I don't want anybody to end up in judgment thinking that they're going to heaven having been under my ministry, and then only to find that they're facing judgment at the hands of a holy God. That bothers me to think about that, but also it was my own experience for many years, walking, thinking that I was a Christian when, in fact, I was not. I spent years in that position. I spent years telling people that I was a Christian, telling people that I had received Christ while I was living a very sinful life and I was an angry, carnal man, and I just look back on that and it just grieves me to this day to remember what I was like and the false picture I gave of what it meant to be a Christian

to those who knew me, especially in my college days. And so I'm sensitive to these things and I want you to be sensitive to them as well, and to not simply just assume by the fact that you're in a building that you are a Christian; and for some of you, perhaps, the fact that you walked an aisle years ago and made a public display of saying that you wanted to be a Christian without having a real change in your life, those are real dangers.

By way of introduction, I just want to take you to a few passages of Scripture to sensitize you this morning to the problem and then to see what Jesus has to say about it in love and in truth. Look at Philippians 3 with me, for example. Philippians 3. You know, and the danger can be, you know, people think that they're Christians because their politics are conservative or they like parachurch ministries, they like to watch Veggie Tales or something like that, there's just so many false substitutes that people use for the reality of spiritual life and the Apostle Paul spoke about this in Philippians 3:17. He says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." Paul says that there are many like this. A pastor would be a fool not to warn his congregation on an ongoing basis of the danger of this and just trusting the Spirit of God to awaken somebody to the reality while there is still time, before it is too late. And Paul says, "I'm weeping as I tell you this, they are enemies of the cross of Christ." Judas Iscariot was never born again. He walked closely with the Lord himself for three years and the apostles assumed him to be one of their own number, not just outwardly but in spirit, but Judas Iscariot proved to be a son of perdition and gladly betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver and sold his soul, that was the price that he put on the blood of Christ and it was the price that he put on his own soul, and now he is under torment eternally as a result of that. Beloved, it's not even enough to believe the right things. Jesus said through his Scripture writer James in James 2:19 that demons believe and tremble, false professors of Christ associate with the people of God for a while and then they leave and they go to pursue another lifestyle.

Look at the book of 1 John 2:19, and again you see the danger of outward association without the inward reality, outward association without the inward reality. And the Apostle John says in 1 John 2:18, he says, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour." And then he goes on to say this, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." There in the first century, there were people that identified with the Apostle John and with his ministry and with the early church, they were there for a while and then they walked out, they left, and they abandoned the truth, they abandoned the people of God, and they went out and that leaves the people that were behind there in the first century, it left them trying to understand what had just happened. And the Apostle John gives them the answer, he says, "Yes, they were outwardly associated with us for a time but then they left and they showed that they were not really of us."

You see, beloved, and I'm not talking about people leaving local churches today, I'm talking about the reality of abandoning Christ and so I just want to be clear in what I'm saying here right now, but people having identified outwardly superficially with the people of God, outwardly superficially identifying with Christ and then leaving and abandoning that profession behind, and that's always difficult for people to come to grips with; maybe it's a child that showed in their early years it seemed like they were a Christian, seemed like they were following their parents' teaching but then they go off into adult life, they just completely reject that they had previously identified with. Well, understand that Scripture's interpretation of that is not that they were a Christian, genuinely born again and then changed and left or somehow lost their salvation, that's not the way to understand and interpret that. The biblical interpretation of that is that it is very possible for people to outwardly identify, for people to make a profession of Christ and even to maintain that for a long period of time but when they leave, when they reject it, they are showing that it was never real to begin with and we can only know those in many instances by what happens over the course of time. Time and truth go hand-in-hand and someone who abandons Christ, no matter how long they seemed to have walked with him, someone who rejects the truth is shown that they were never a believer to begin with.

Look at the book of Matthew 7 with me. Matthew 7. And someone might say at this point, say, "Well, you know, if what you're saying is true, then that means that it's likely that there are far fewer real Christians that it would outwardly appear to be." And that's exactly the case and that is exactly what we are saying, beloved, because that is exactly what Scripture teaches. Not every outward profession is the sign of an inward possession of Christ, and so we just look at Scripture and the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:13 and 14, he says, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Then, of course, he goes on and says in verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," outwardly identifying with Christ by what they say with their lips, Jesus says, "They had no part in Me because it is the one who enters the kingdom of heaven is he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." Miraculous signs are no indication that someone is in the kingdom. The fact that a faith-healer healed someone of a bad headache or lower back pain is no indication that that person has been touched by the Spirit of God at all, and we just need to really understand this because the consequences there in verse 23 Christ says, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

So this is unsettling. Scripture is unsettling to us. Scripture does not come to sinful people and simply affirm them and promise them the love of God without repentance. It doesn't promise them salvation without a life-change because true salvation is a supernatural act by which the Holy Spirit comes and changes a person, takes out their sinful heart, takes out their heart of stone and gives them a new heart that is tender to the things of God, that has an increasing hostility toward sin and increasing love toward the word of God. It's not that someone is made perfect in salvation, that doesn't occur until we're glorified in heaven but the whole direction, the whole affections of the human heart are completely

reoriented and permanently reoriented by this supernatural change that the Lord produces when he saves someone. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, the old things have passed away, behold, new things have come." Beloved, if someone makes a profession of faith that is followed by an unaltered lifestyle, think about it chronologically, you have the old man living up to a point of supposed conversion, and then that old man lifestyle just continues afterwards, beloved, that is not genuine salvation, that is a falsehood, that is deception and it is important for us all to recognize that not only for our own sake, so that we can help those that are around us to rightly discern their spiritual condition.

It is vital, therefore, to know the distinguishing marks of a true disciple and with that introduction, I now want you to turn to our text for today which is found in the book of John 8. The gospel of John 8. As you're turning there to John 8, we are in the middle of a very important series in our church on the nature of truth. We have rejected the idea that truth is relative, that truth is subjective, that truth is simply a matter of your opinion versus mine and that there is no final answer on truth, we've rejected that. We have looked at the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who is true incarnate from John 1:14. He is fully God, fully man, full of grace, Scripture says, and truth. Reality is found in Christ and in Christ alone. Last week, we looked at a text from John 4 and saw the central role of truth in worship, that true worship must be biblical worship; we're not free to make-up our own approach to God. Now we come to what we could call today truth and the idea of perseverance, perseverance which I will define in a few moments, but truth and perseverance of the saints, that's our concern for today and I'm going to read verses 30 through 34 and that will expand our understanding of the Scriptures that we looked at during the introduction. So we see in John 8:30,

30 As [Jesus] spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

And so we see here in this passage that Jesus had been teaching the Jews and some of them had believed. Look at verse 30, "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him." Now we're so used to the word "believe" that we equate seeing that word as necessarily being an indication of true conversion but as you read on, for some, at least, their supposed conversions were superficial and Jesus presses them in order to bring out the reality of what a true disciple is and to distinguish a true convert from those which are not genuinely born again. So we see as we come to our first point this morning, we see that what Jesus is going to show us is that true disciples continue in the word of God. True disciples continue in the word of God, and as we consider this passage in John 8, it's important for us to realize that John's gospel had already been dealing with the problem of false conversion.

Go back to John 2 at the end of the chapter as we set some context for the text from the gospel in which it appears. In John 2:23 we read this, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man." These Jews at this time of the Passover outwardly identified, outwardly said that they were believing in Christ but Jesus knew the reality, that's why Scripture says he wasn't entrusting himself to them. He knew that there was a deeper spiritual reality that had not yet connected in their minds and in their heart, and as you go on you read in chapter 3, verse 1, you read this, notice there's no chapter breaks in the original text, in verse 25 Jesus himself knew what was in man. I'm sorry, I'm confusing you here. John 2:25, Jesus knew what was in man, then in chapter 3, verse 1, "Now there was a man," and Jesus is going on and what the gospel is doing here is it's going on to explain the significance of what was just said, that Jesus knew what was in man, and it's going to show that the outward confession of belief was not necessarily a guarantee of the inner reality.

So "there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews," and Nicodemus becomes an illustration of the problem that is identified at the end of chapter 2, and "this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'" That sounds like, on a simple first reading, that sounds like a powerful statement of faith, doesn't it? You say Nicodemus recognizes who Christ is but Jesus is having none of it. Jesus confronts him immediately, speaking to a leader of the Jews and says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." He says, "Nicodemus, you come with these flattering words about Me but I want to confront you with the reality that you have not been born again and you need to be born again even though you are a leader and a teacher of the Jews."

"Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?'" Jesus had confronted him with the most basic spiritual reality of the need for the new birth and this leader and teacher of the Jews had no idea what he was talking about. That's how profound this problem of self-deception can be.

Jesus said in verse 5, "Truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Look at verse 7, "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'" Salvation is supernatural and it's a supernatural reality that occurs in the heart and Nicodemus is so lost at this point that he says to Jesus in verse 9, "'How can these things be?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?'" You're the teacher of Israel and you don't understand these things? There's a sad reality to it, and so we see Jesus at the end of chapter 2 recognizing that not all men are saved, and you see an illustration of that principle in the person of Nicodemus in chapter 3.

Go on to John 6 with these things in mind. Jesus said in verse 58, John 6:58, "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." He's referring to himself, "Whoever personally appropriates Me will live forever." Verse 59, "These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum." Now in verse 60, "Therefore many of His disciples," many of his disciples, those that had been following him, those that had been hearing his teaching and learning from him, when they heard Jesus say that, they responded, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, 'Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.'" He's speaking to a group of outward disciples, thousands of them actually because they had just been fed, miraculously fed by him, and Jesus says, "There are some of you who do not believe. You follow Me but the reality is not there. You're not a genuine convert of Mine."

So he's warning them and verse 64, it goes on to say, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.'" Jesus Christ, God the Father must grant the ability to believe. He must grant the power for someone to come to Christ or they cannot come at all. We do not have the capacity in our unsaved, unconverted condition to believe in Christ of our own power. There must be a work from God from above. There must be a work from God by the Holy Spirit through his word in order for anyone to be saved. And so Jesus is laying out for them the reality, "Don't take this for granted. Recognize your lost sinful condition, your helpless, desperate condition, and cry out to God for mercy and not presume simply because you're a Jew that you're part of God's family." And today the idea would be, "Don't simply assume by the fact that you've grown up in a church or you've walked an aisle or something like that, don't simply presume by outward associations that you are actually inwardly in the kingdom of God."

And what happened as a result of that instruction from Jesus? In verse 66 we read this, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." They went out from us but they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us. And here in the first century ministry of Jesus, you see that reality taking place, outward association, the lack of the inward reality is shown by the fact that they walked away from the Lord himself. They walked away. They had Jesus in their midst, they heard him live, they saw his miracles live, and they walked away. It's almost incomprehensible except when you remember this is what unsaved dark hearts do.

So from the story of Nicodemus from John 6, here's the point of all of that: we are prepared for Jesus now in chapter 8 to challenge mere outward professions of faith in order to test the reality of them. And that's what's going on as we come back to John 8 now under our first point that true disciples continue in the word and the word of God has a way of exposing the true from the false and that's the point that Jesus is making here in

verse 31. Jesus was saying, look at it there, John 8:31, "Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" He says, "If you continue in My word, that will be the mark that you are a true disciple." It becomes very simple in that sense, and what happens here is that remember that this is coming right on the heels of verse 30, "many came to believe in Him." All right, now in verse 31, Jesus says to those people, "If you continue in My word," and it's not as clear in English as it is in the original language. In the original Greek, the construction expresses a measure of doubt about the reality of their conversion. "If you continue in My word," and it's an open question about whether you will or not as he's speaking to those Jews at that point, "then if you continue, you are truly disciples of Mine." The point here is that Jesus doesn't accept their outward profession of belief at simple face value. He presses them and says, "Genuine conversion will have this result in your life."

He says there is an inevitable result of true saving faith and when you think about it, and with what I'm about to say, it could be no other way. The one whom Jesus Christ saves is one who will naturally continue in the word of God, will continue in the teaching of Christ. Listen, we come to Christ and we bow before him in salvation, we receive him as Savior, we receive him as Lord, we bow before him and in whatever imperfection of understanding we have and however weak our faith may be at the moment, true conversion receives Christ by faith and receives him as Lord, receives him as Savior, receives him as teacher. If that is real, it is irreversible. You do not go back on that because the power of that conversion comes from heaven itself. It is a supernatural change that is worked in your heart, not simply one that you make by simply trying to try harder.

So God, we said last week that God seeks people to be true worshipers. God saves someone in order to make them a true worshiper of his, seeks someone that will follow after him, and that God saves us in order to accomplish that result. So when the Spirit saves someone, he changes their heart and – watch this – he inclines them permanently to the word of God. He inclines, the Spirit of God inclines their heart in this new birth, he gives them a heart that inclines them to the word that the Spirit himself has inspired. He leads someone to Christ to be a permanent disciple of Christ. He leads someone to the true God to be a true worshiper of God. And the means by which God has established for that reality to be manifested is shown in the ongoing response to the word of God.

You see, beloved, here's the thing, for someone who is genuinely converted to Christ, the Spirit of God has changed them inside. The word of God is not a temporary interest that passes, as if someone takes up woodworking, finds out that they really don't like the sawdust and the noise of the saws and so they abandon it, they've tried it for a while and then they left and said, "That's not for me." Well, that has no spiritual implications but we're so used to that kind of thing that someone coming to the word of God might show an immediate interest in it, might show themselves and they might seem to be really profoundly affected by it, but the question is not that initial emotional response, the question is does it last? Is it an ongoing product? Does it take root? Does it produce lasting fruit?

Jesus warned against passing interest in the things of God in the parable of the sower. Go back to Matthew 13. We'll start in verse 18. We're not going to go through the whole parable here, time does not permit that. Jesus says in Matthew 13:18, "Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away." You see, it is possible, Scripture tells us that people can respond immediately to the word of God and show joy and enthusiasm for it but it doesn't last. Jesus says, "If you continue in My word, then you are true disciples of Mine." Beloved, when God saves a man, when God truly saves a man, he puts his Holy Spirit within him and that guarantees that the work that is begun will be finished. Philippians 1:6, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." If God begins the work, it will be finished. If someone falls away, it shows that the work was never begun to begin with.

So in these things and in this verse in John 8:31, you can turn back there, we see the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The perseverance of the saints and one writer defines perseverance this way, "All those who are truly born of the Spirit and united to Christ by faith are kept secure in Him by God's power, and thus will persevere in faith until they go to be with Christ in death." Those who are truly born of the Spirit are united to Christ by faith. That is a permanent indivisible union. It cannot be broken. And God keeps those that he saves by his own power so that they stay in the faith until they go to be with Christ in death. Now when you understand that, beloved, and we're kind of belaboring the point here but only because it is so very important to understand, when you understand that salvation is by the power of God, not by the power of man, you see why that can be and must be true. God saves a man, God does not reverse his purpose, God has an intention that he established in eternity past that he accomplished at the cross that he is now working out by the Spirit in the life of the man, there's an eternal purpose at work in those that are truly redeemed. If someone just has a passing interest in it, whatever motivates that, it's a passing interest and then they turn away and they don't come back to it, beloved, that's an indication of someone who was never truly converted.

"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." You see, when you are born again, God effects a change in your heart in which the truth of Scripture is lastingly, lovingly received, believed and obeyed. I'll say that again. When you're truly born again, God effects a change in you in which the truth of Scripture is lastingly received, believed and obeyed. For these Jews in John 8, beloved, their subsequent interaction with Christ showed the reality of their outward profession. They turned into hostile opponents of Christ.

Look at verse 33. Jesus said, "you'll know the truth and the truth will make you free," and they challenged him. These were supposedly his disciples, supposedly those that were

following him, and they challenged his teaching. They rejected what he had to say when they came to understand it better. They said to him in verse 33, "We are Abraham's descendants, we have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus was telling them, "You're a slave," and their pride rejected against that, reacted against that. They said, "We're not slaves. We are free," their proud heart coming to the surface as Jesus challenges their faith.

In verse 45 Jesus says to them, actually let's go up earlier, go to verse 39, "They answered and said to [Jesus], 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.'" He didn't try to kill the Son of God. He says, "You are doing the deeds of your father." And they challenge Christ, they insult him, "We were not born of fornication," like you were, you know, where was your mother's father? "We have one Father: God." And Jesus challenges them and said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God." Verse 43, "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." And then Jesus clenches his point with those Jews who supposedly had believed in him, Jesus says to them in verse 45, "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me." Verse 48, "The Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" Verse 52, "The Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, "If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death." Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?'"

Beloved, do you see how the subsequent interaction shows that their belief was only superficial, it was temporary, it was not real, they had not actually come under the word of Christ at all so that at the slightest challenge and provocation they react against Christ, they insult him, they reject him, they call him a demon? Beloved, here's the point, I've been talking for nearly 35 minutes to make this point: their hostility to Christ's word shows that their faith was not genuine. Time and truth go hand-in-hand, beloved. The nature of genuine conversion is that true Christians profess the faith and then they continue in the faith. That's what Jesus said.

Go back to verse 31, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." Now understand this is not linking works with salvation in the sense that you have faith and then you have to work to keep it up in order to truly be saved. That's not what Jesus is saying. We're justified by faith alone apart from the works of the law. This is not a matter of continuing in the word in order to earn favor and merit with God so he'll let us into heaven. That's not it. What Jesus is saying, the reality of which we are talking about is the reality of regeneration. The reality of the new birth produces someone who is permanently changed and one mark of that change is an ongoing love for the word of

God so that someone who falls into a long-term pattern of indifference or rejection of the word of God was never a Christian to begin with.

Now just a pastoral word here, a word of encouragement, a word of pleading maybe with some. This is undoubtedly the hardest point, I think, in my opinion, this is the hardest point for Christian parents of adult children to embrace and accept. I can't tell you how many parents I've spoken with over three decades of ministry who will say things that contradict what I know they know to be true, "Well, I remember when Johnny was little and he prayed at my knee and received Christ at my knee. And yeah, he's working on his fourth marriage now, yeah, he's a drunk but I know, but I just know that the truth is in him, I just know that he's actually a Christian even though nothing about his life," now I'm interpreting what they say, "even though nothing about his life for 30 years has given the slightest indication of any interest in truth, any interest in obedience to Christ. He's never darkened the door of a church in all of that time." This is a composite picture, and yet parents, because they don't want to think and don't want to face the reality that maybe their child is one of those described so often in Scripture, they'll deny what Scripture says about true conversion in order to maintain the illusion in their mind that their son is still going to heaven. That's deadly. A son like that, a daughter like that, cannot be affirmed in the faith, beloved, they have to be challenged to examine what that prior profession was and to be told and warned, "It doesn't matter if you prayed at my knee. It doesn't matter if you stood at an altar. It doesn't matter if you were baptized at Truth Community Church if your subsequent life has been one of rejection and hostility to the word of God and in opposition to truth."

We have to be more loyal to the word of God and what it says about true conversion than we are even to our flesh and blood. And beloved, parents like that, and I'm not accusing anyone in the room here, I'm genuinely not, just stating broad principles here, parents, you're not doing your kid any favors by talking about them like that. Far better to drop the facade, to drop the brave face, far better to abandon the inconsistency with what you know to be true from God's word, far better to say, "My heart is broken over you! My heart is breaking by the fact that you have not continued in the word of God! I can't affirm you as a Christian even though I want to. How can you claim to know Christ when everything about your life is worldly? Even if it's not immoral, there's just no love of God in your soul, there's no desire for Christ in you. Oh, my dear flesh and blood, I plead with you to examine yourself and not continue on this cold indifference, this outward hostility, this life of rebellion against God. I plead with you to examine yourself and see whether you're in the faith." And parent, if you're like my life was, and to embrace the fact that maybe you've been a false convert all this time, far better to recognize that, to humble yourself, to admit it, to go to Christ afresh and plead with him for the new birth, to plead with him to save your soul, far better to do that than to maintain the charade, better to sacrifice your pride now and have your soul saved than to continue the charade and have Jesus point you, "See the flashing neon light that says 'Hell' above that gate? That's where you're to go."

You see, beloved, what we believe about these things has immense consequences. This is the most practical thing that we could talk about is the nature of true conversion, and the

way that we deal with our families, but even more importantly the way that you deal with your own soul to take an honest measure of your soul. I know that none of us love the word of God perfectly, I certainly don't. I know that we run hot and cold. I know that. I do. You do. We can be honest about all of those things without denying that there is an underlying reality that when my mind is clear and, you know, when I'm in the presence of God, I want his word, I want Christ, I reject, I denounce that part of me that is unfaithful, I reject and denounce that and with the fullness of my heart I embrace a love of this word as that which is my life. Where am I to go? You have the words of eternal life, I can't go anywhere else.

Beloved, is something like that in your heart or not, or are you just satisfied with the trinkets and the trifles of life on this earth? If I weren't so Scottish, the tears in my heart would come out and show tears on my face to plead with you to that end. These things matter and your soul is eternal and your soul is of infinite value. God has given you a soul with the responsibility to pursue its well-being. Forget about what it might look like before men to acknowledge, "Do you know what? I've been a fake Christian for 40 years." Forget about that. Better to be a real Christian for a year and then go to heaven than to maintain your pride, like the Jews did, and being unwilling to confess any spiritual problem in your life, and to maintain appearances before man and to live eternity with the devil. What do you gain in that exchange? Look, I'm just a pastor pleading with you for your soul. That's all. Not angry at anyone. I'm just a pastor pleading with your soul.

Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, you are a true disciple of Mine." Well, there's a second mark of true discipleship. Go back to John 8. True disciples continue in the word. True disciples, point 2, know the truth. True disciples know the truth. For those who continue in the truth, one mark, one way that you can know that you're continuing in the truth not simply by, you know, your fidelity to a daily quiet time, it's deeper, it's broader, it's more significant than just that, for those who continue in the truth, their knowledge and their understanding grows.

Look at John 8:32. Jesus says, "and, if you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and," this is joined together. There's a spiritual sandwich here, you might say, that's joined together here, "and in addition to continuing in My word, something else will happen, you will know the truth." You see, as you continue in the truth as a real Christian, your knowledge of Scripture, your understanding of God's word grows. And this knowledge of truth concerns the person of Christ, it recognizes him as the promised Messiah, it recognizes him as fully God and fully man in one person, it recognizes who Christ is, it understands that at the cross he accomplished redemption for his people, it understands that that cross was a one-time event contrary to Catholic teaching that he's re-crucified every time the Mass is celebrated. But in addition to those things, this knowledge of the truth also includes a recognition and submission to the authority of his teaching. The authority of his teaching. Listen, if you know and understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, then that has immense consequences for coming to his word and seeing what it says. It means that his word is authority not just in general throughout diffuse through the universe and throughout the

world, "Heaven and earth will pass away but My word will not pass away," Matthew 24:35 but, beloved, his word is authority for you. His word is authoritative over your soul. His word is binding on his disciples for life and for doctrine. We are not free as disciples of Christ to celebrate and participate in Pride Month, for example. That's an impossibility for the true Christian because God's word condemns pride itself in addition to the lifestyle that's being separated. Pride goes before destruction. A Christian understands that and resists it even though it's celebrated ad nauseam. That's just an illustration.

When God's word comes and identifies sin in your life, the sin must be rejected. You see, beloved, to know the truth is more than simple mental acquiescence to it. It's more than just saying, "Oh, I agree with that." That's not a knowledge of the truth in biblical terms. Look, look, look, look, look, look, look, if you know that Christ is Lord and you know that Lord means that he is final authority, and he is Lord over your soul, Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" Beloved, there cannot be that bifurcation in your mind, "I acknowledge Him as Lord but, you know, in the final analysis, I'll live like I want." No, that is not Christian salvation. You see, to know the truth as Jesus speaks about it is to know it includes a moral commitment to the truth that includes a submission to its authority. It's a moral commitment to the truth that includes a submission to its authority. If you really know Christ and understand that he's Lord, and you understand that the 66 books of the Bible are his word, then the authority of Christ as Lord mediated through his word means that it has authority over your own soul. You can't live any other way. You can't live in this regard to Scripture and call yourself a Christian.

You will know the truth and you see, beloved, when you remember the context of the Jews that we looked at earlier, no one really knows the truth if they respond to it with defiance. No one really knows the truth that denies the inerrancy and the authority of the word of God. No one really knows the truth that lives in conscious unrepentant sin. Now to be sure, in this life we only know in part, our knowledge is imperfect, but there's not a defiance against what we know, there's not a settled rebellion and unrepentance against the moral authority of God's word. And so Christ gives his disciples a confident knowledge of truth, they grow in the faith despite setbacks and outward challenges. Beloved, and I understand that we go through times and, you know, adversity, severe adversity hits you and you feel some of the questions that we've seen in the Psalms over the past eight years on Tuesday nights, I get that, that's not inconsistent with what I'm saying but at the bottom there is a love for the truth, there is a desire for the truth, there is a submission to the truth. To know the truth is to respond to it inwardly like that.

Now third and finally as time gets away from us yet again. We've seen that true disciples continue in the word, true disciples know the truth, thirdly, true disciples are set free. True disciples are set free. This is what the truth does. Verse 32 again. We say, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." Number 1, true disciples continue in the word. Secondly, true disciples will know the truth. And then there's another "and," these things joined together, linked together like links in a chain, "you will know the truth, and," thirdly, "the truth will make you free." A third result of genuine

conversion is expressed by freedom, not the political freedom that we celebrate on July 4th, Jesus is talking about a spiritual freedom.

As we saw earlier, the Jews thought that physical lineage from Abraham was enough. Look at verse 33, "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free?'" Jesus is making these profound far-reaching statements about what true conversion produces in the life of a true disciple, inward realities, and these Jews are so spiritually dull, so dead to truth that they want to talk about physical genealogy. You know, "Well, my dad was a pastor and his dad was a pastor and, you know, we were all good Baptists." You know, and people want to talk that way, you know, "And my whole family, I was born into a Christian family." If that's where you go for a spiritual discussion, that's where you go to assert your own spirituality, you're right here in verse 33 with the Jews. That's the wrong way to think.

One writer says about these Jews and I quote, "Their sense of inherited spiritual privilege is so strong they can neither acknowledge their own need nor recognize the divine Word incarnate before them." They had Christ in front of them and yet they couldn't acknowledge their spiritual need. They had Christ in front of them and they want to talk about who their ancestor from 2,000 years earlier was. This is spiritual death, not spiritual life.

Jesus wasn't talking to them about physical realities, he was talking about spiritual freedom. Look at verse 34, "Jesus answered them," they had just talked about physical things, Jesus immediately changes the subject and talks about spiritual things. Verse 34, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." You see, beloved, true conversion, one of the marks of a true disciple, one of the marks of genuine truth and perseverance is that true conversion liberates you from the bondage that you were previously in to your sin and to Satan.

Look over at 1 John 3 with me as we bring this to a close sometime in the next hour and a half. 1 John 3, you can see both of these things in one passage, in one text. Chapter 3, verse 4, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that [Christ] appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins," the idea is continually, habitually, unrepentantly, "no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children," the Apostle John was making the same plea 2,000 years ago that I was just making to you a few moments ago, that's because it's biblical. And he says in verse 7, he says, "Little children," you see the pastoral affection for them? "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious:

anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

Beloved, when Jesus Christ saves a Christian, when he saves a sinner and converts them into a child of God, something miraculous happens, he breaks the power of sin in the heart, the prevailing, dominating sense of sin. And being unable to get yourself out of sin, being unwilling to leave sinful relationships, for example, a true Christian, Christ comes and breaks that power and replaces it with a greater spiritual liberty, a greater spiritual power and inclines the heart and empowers the heart with a love for righteousness and a love for godliness that is greater than the power of sin that previously dwelt therein. He came to take away sin. He came to break the power of sin in his disciples so that one of the marks of a true Christian is that somehow there is a change that takes place, somehow there is something in the subsequent life after the supposed moment of conversion that shows that a new life principle is in operation, that a new life trajectory has taken root and that just grows in its manifestation and maturity over time.

That's why it is so vital for us to keep a short list of our sins, to be confessing and repenting of our sins on an ongoing basis because they are contrary to the very reason that Christ saved us. Christ breaks the power of sin, Christ opens eyes that had previously been blinded by Satan. One of the sweetest testimonies I've heard over the past few years was someone who had grown up in Catholicism and looking back on their Catholicism and making an expression of faith, they looked back after decades in that system of false religion, they said and bless God for this, they said, "I now know that was false." Christ had opened their eyes to an entire system of religion, freed them from the spiritual bondage of it to the point that they could publicly assert, "I know that was false and now I'm walking on a different path."

Beloved, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free, free from satanic false doctrine, free from binding sinful life patterns. You see, to come into union with Christ is a liberating spiritual gift from God himself that cannot fail to show forth the fruit that he appoints to be manifested. We are his workmanship, Ephesians 2 says, united with Christ in order to bring forth good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

So Jesus here in John 8 has spoken of immense spiritual gifts. Being a true disciple, knowing the truth, spiritual liberty from sin and Satan, these gifts are available only in the truth, in Christ and in Scripture. Beloved, this freedom which Christ promises is found only in him. It's offered to you freely as a gift to be received in a repentant faith that rejects the world, that turns from self and sin and humbly comes to Christ and says, "Save me. Have mercy on me, the sinner." And beloved, if you are in Christ, he has given you already freedom to rise above your sins, freedom to be free from pervasive guilt, freedom to live in hope and not to just play the part of a perpetual victim, the perpetual victim is not the mindset of the true Christian. "Yes," you say, "people have wronged me but I am in Christ. I belong to One who can turn all of that to good for me and I trust Him and I rejoice in Him despite what man has done to me." We're not the victim. And this spiritual

change flows from abiding faithfully in the word of God over time. Beloved, do you feed yourself on Scripture and thus prove to be a true disciple of Christ?

Let's pray together.

Father, I earnestly pray that for each one here, each one being a son and daughter of someone else, so, Father, for each son of a mother who's perhaps prayed for them, for each daughter for a father perhaps that has prayed for them, that You would so work by Your Spirit in their hearts that they would be a true disciple, that they would know the truth and that the truth would set them free. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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