

People are not into absolute (*i.e. has a fixed meaning and can't be understood in a relative way*) truth these days. When it comes to matters of morality the prevailing philosophy with competing thoughts and perspectives is a multiple-choice view, A, B, C, or D, on what is right and wrong; true and false. These perspectives are often contradictory, and this has been further complicated by the addition of E -“All of the above.” to the multiple-choice mix.

While many are comfortable with this kind of ambiguity (*i.e. what can be understood in more than one way because the intended meaning isn't clear*) for their personal choices, very few would want their material world to be this arbitrary (*i.e. based on one's wishes, feelings, or perceptions*). Everyone acknowledges that there are some basic, absolute physical laws that govern our experience and shape our behavior. There's no getting around it. The reality of heat and fire is a good example of this. Heat is an indicator that fire is hot and that it burns. It doesn't take too much testing to confirm this.

The physical laws governing heat and fire are not arbitrary. Understanding the absolute nature of gravity, mathematics, blood pressure, and other physical realities is essential for living life safely and successfully.

It's interesting that even though we all believe it's important to respect and submit to physical laws, many believe that moral laws are up for grabs! Unfortunately, believing and living by this philosophy inevitably leads to disastrous consequences.

If we were to live in a world with multiple-choice morality where nothing is always right and nothing is always wrong, there would be no sin and no need of a Savior. The Bible and what it says would be irrelevant. But God has made it clear that some things are always right and some things are always wrong. Sin is a reality of life, and we need a Savior from its disastrous consequences. To ignore the reality of moral absolutes is to play with fire. You'll get burned and be scarred for eternity.

In fact, it isn't just eternal consequences that should concern us. Look around at our world. It's in tough shape. It's a dangerous environment to live in and this testifies to the destructive impact of ignoring God's spiritual laws that govern the universe.

Thankfully, God is not a multiple-choice God. Jesus is the Truth who came full of grace and truth to bring us the absolute truth of God. We can know the truth and experience the freedom it brings from the inevitable and disastrous consequences that come from living in a multiple-choice world. Believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and the certainty of eternal life now and in heaven one day is not one among many other options. It's the only option. It's an absolute – fixed truth (Jn 8:24; 14:6).

Why is it that people are willing to accept the absolute nature of physical laws, yet openly deny the absolute nature of God's moral laws?

How have you seen multiple-choice thinking in action around you? What have the consequences been?

Has multiple-choice thinking, even in small ways, crept into your own life? What specific steps can you take to get back on track?

In Jn 8:28-30 “Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the One I claim to be (When I am crucified *cf.* 3:14; 12:32, *then* you will know for sure who I am.), and that I do nothing on My own but

“speak just what the Father has taught Me. The One who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what pleases Him.’ Even as He spoke, many put their faith in Him.”

Jesus, God the Son, spoke the very words of God the Father – like Father, like Son. Jesus’ practice, the way He lived His life, matched His profession. What Jesus said, He did. He said what His Father taught Him and He did what His Father said by always doing what pleased Him (Jn 8:28-30). What a perfect example of how God wants us to live our lives as His children. His own Son showed us how. And He is the One who makes it possible for us to live like this because He is always with us and He never leaves us by ourselves to do it alone.

Oswald Chambers said, “Discipleship means personal, passionate devotion to a Person— our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a vast difference between devotion to a person and devotion to principles or to a cause. Our Lord never proclaimed a cause— He proclaimed personal devotion to Himself. To be a disciple is to be a devoted bondservant motivated by love for the Lord Jesus.” Discipleship is relational and experiential.

Many of us have placed so much emphasis on getting people to make a decision to receive Jesus Christ as Savior that we have marginalized what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Getting people into the kingdom has been the goal rather than encouraging them to bring every area of their lives under the ruling influence of Jesus as King and as Lord.

Jesus made it clear that He was asking His followers to do more than make a decision to believe that He was the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God. He said, “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” (Luke 6:40). How trained are you in the truths of God’s Word? How well do you know what the Bible teaches?

Jesus said, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.” (Lk 14:27).

Following Jesus involves more than enjoying the wonder of His forgiveness. It challenges us to put Christ, His body – the people of God, and His mission above our own natural commitments to home, work, and happiness.

Illustration (Leadership, Vol 4, No. 4): On a wall near the entrance to the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, is a portrait with the following inscription: “James Butler Bonham – no picture of him exists. This portrait is of his nephew, James Bonham, deceased, who greatly resembled his uncle. It is placed here by the family that people may know the appearance of the man who died for freedom.” No literal portrait of Jesus exists either. But the likeness of the Son who makes us free can be seen in the lives of His true followers. Is this true of you; of me? Do you resemble Jesus in what you say and in what you do? Can others see Jesus in you? How like Jesus are you in how you live your life?

The call to discipleship is the goal of Christlikeness as we make it our highest desire to join Jesus in His prayer: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Lk 22:42).

This is the kind of faith that enables us to follow Jesus into our own time and world. As important as it is to grow into the likeness of Jesus, the Scriptures also tell us about the importance of first making a decision to trust Him as Lord and Savior. You have to know Him and what He’s like by personal experience in order to be like Him. You can’t be like someone you don’t really know.

Personal salvation is foundational to finding our spiritual life and bearings. Only through forgiveness, can we know our identity “in Christ,” and find the sense of security and peace that our hearts long for. But, our birth into the family of God is just the beginning. Our calling as disciples of Jesus is being disciples and followers of Him each and every day.

Paul wrote not only about salvation by faith but also about the need for behavior that will make “the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” (Ti 2:10). Why would anyone see any value in believing what you say about the importance of believing in Jesus, if it hasn’t made any difference in the way you live your life?

I’d like to read the two verses we’re going to give our attention to briefly this morning from John, ch.8:31, 32:

V31 “To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.’”

V32 “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (*Repeat the verse emphasizing “hold” and “then.”*).

We tend to focus on the first part of v31 and all of v32 and we struggle with what draws them together.

First of all, what’s the connection between v30 and v31? Scholars are divided as to the spiritual identity of those referred to in v30 who “put their faith in Him.” Some believe these were true believers in Jesus based on the words (*episteusan eis auton*), “faith in Him” and that they are just like those in Jn 1:12 “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—” They are believed to be a different group from those addressed in v31 who simply made an outward profession that they believed Him, i.e. His message but didn’t actually exercise faith in Him as the Messianic as the following verses unmistakably bear out.

Others maintain that they are the same people and align those in vv 30 and 31 with those in Jn 2:23 and 6:30. In light of the verses that follow in both of these instances as well as the verses that follow here in Jn 8 after v32, Jesus was speaking of those who merely professed to believe in Him and His message but there was no depth to their faith and they were not really genuine believers in Jesus

Permit me to put these two verses in my own words to bring out their intended force: “To the Jews who said they believed His words, Jesus said, If you do what I say, you are really my disciples, it is then that you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” The Translator’s NT renders this verse, “If you continue in My word you are truly My disciples” Many claim to believe what Jesus says in the Bible, but in reality are only paying lip service because their practice doesn’t match their profession. What they say and what they do don’t line up.

Let’s look more closely at these verses, v31 “To the Jews who *had believed* Him ...” – they professed to believe what Jesus said, but notice their response to Him in v33 **Read** “... We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free.” I’m going to paraphrase their words, “What are you saying, Jesus. We are descendants of Abraham who believed the LORD and He credited it to him as righteousness (Ge 15:16). How can you say that we are going to be set free when we’ve never been slaves of anyone.” Their immediate response was a defensive declaration of their physical relationship to Abraham and that they were not slaves who needed to be set free.

The responses of people today to Jesus’ words as we have them recorded for us in the Bible are not all that different. Those who merely pay lip service to Jesus but have had no inner working of the Spirit of God to change their hearts are typically denying, defensive, and justifying:

1. First of all that there is anything wrong with them;
2. Secondly, that they don’t need anyone telling them what to believe; and
3. Thirdly, that they are not accountable to anyone for how they live their lives. They are free to live as they please.

Jesus goes right to the heart of their problem thinking and condition in v34 where He says, you are slaves because you are sinners and you do not belong to God's family – only true sons do (v35), and I am the One who makes this relationship possible because I've personally taken care of their sin problem and its deadly consequences (v36).

Jesus reinforced their actual relationship to Him in vv 45-47 "You don't believe Me, and you don't belong to God."

Jesus was well aware of their human origins and pointed to their natural human condition which was to deny the truths of God's words which confirmed the emptiness of their earlier profession, their disdain for authority, and their evil intent (v37).

When you come to terms with the reality of your sin and accept the fact that there is nothing you can do to change your sinful condition and come to a point of believing that Jesus has dealt with your sin through His death on the cross and you accept the forgiveness He provides by receiving Him as your Lord and Savior, you become a child of God as Jn 1:12, 13 so clearly describe. But that's just the beginning. Children don't stay children, they grow into adults. Children of God are disciples or learners who grow into spiritual adulthood.

The remainder of v31 is definitive, "If you hold to My teaching you are really my disciples." What was Jesus saying here? Jesus was talking about what true discipleship is. True discipleship involves not only a beginning but is a continuing day by day life journey. The key words "hold to My teaching" get to the heart of this. Said another way – if you continually do what I say! The "If" used here is a third class condition in the Gr. NT which indicates the probable reality of one who really believes. The idea conveyed here is that they aren't doing it right now but it is probable that they will do it in the future if they really are disciples. New born believers are quite dependant initially. They need to be cared for and nurtured and spiritually fed. They need to learn to crawl, then pull themselves up, then walk, then talk, and then to feed themselves. It's a process that takes time and maturity to the point that they are continuing to learn and grow and develop on their own.

Now for the remainder of the verse, "when this happens – when you do what I say as a manner of course in your day to day living – this will be the evidence that you are really my disciples." When you are continually practicing your profession, you will be confirming your real relationship to God as a follower, a disciple, or a learner of Jesus Christ. What you actually behave is the acid test for what you say you believe. Jesus is not saying that doing what He says makes you a disciple but that what you are doing is evidence of who you truly are. Only a personal relationship through faith in Jesus Christ can make you a disciple. Without this relationship there is nothing of eternal value that you can be doing.

Jesus illustrates this unambiguously in Jn 15:4-5 "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." The word "remain" occurs four times in the span of two verses. It means to "stay in place" and is often used in reference to one's home, so we could say "to be at home in." We need to be at home in Christ.

Earlier in Jn 7:16, 17 we find these words of Jesus, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." What Jesus was teaching was God's truth.

Did you pick up from these verses that doing God's will is how you confirm for yourself that it lines up with all that Jesus says in the Bible. It is in doing the truth that we find and experience the freedom that it brings from all those things that are contrary to it.

Illustration: The well known pastor and Bible teacher of old Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse was quoted as saying – “It is our business to see that we do right; God will see that we come out right.”

If you are doing what I say, If your behavior is consistent with what Jesus says in the Bible, If you are behaving your beliefs – Now, v32 “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ ”

“Know” refers not simply to an intellectual knowledge, but to knowledge gained through experience. However, gaining knowledge through experience doesn’t result in the freedom Jesus is talking about here because knowledge of the truth requires spending time reading and studying the Bible to gain it. You need to know the truth before you can apply it in your life and experience the results of what doing it brings about.

When we take a closer look at what the Jews Jesus was speaking to were saying about themselves and what Jesus was saying about them in the verses that follow, we find some interesting contrasts. Their understanding of freedom was inaccurate. They claimed to be descendants of Abraham – God’s chosen people, and that they had never been slaves of anyone. This just wasn’t true. They were currently subservient to the Romans and in the past they were captives in Assyria and were absorbed into that culture. They were captives in Babylon for 70 years and they were slaves in Egypt for 400 years before that. But, Jesus wasn’t talking about political or economic slavery. He was referring to spiritual slavery which was an inward reality. They were slaves first and foremost to sin (v34).

Being physical descendents of Abraham did not make them members of God’s family. Only a personal relationship with God through Jesus could do that (v35). Jesus was the only One who could set them free from their slavery to sin (v36). Jesus exposed their shallow profession of belief in His message and their real attitude toward Him in v37. They claimed God as their Father in v41 but harbored murder in their hearts and despised the truth (v40).

They didn’t love the Son whom God sent to redeem them (v42). They didn’t believe what He said (v46). They didn’t belong to God (v47). They claimed Jesus was demon-possessed (v48) and they ultimately picked up stones to kill Him (v59). Does this sound like they believed Him?

Obedience to the truth presupposes a knowledge of that which is to be obeyed. How much time do you spend reading and studying your Bible? If what Jesus is saying here means anything, it means that you will not and cannot know the freedom that the truths of God will bring about in your life until knowing the truth and living the truth is part of your everyday life experience.

What do you believe about what Jesus says in the Bible? If you don’t have a personal faith relationship with Jesus, you are not part of God’s family. You’re a slave to sin, and are going to die in your sin, separated from God for all eternity (2 Th 1:8,9).

What’s your heart attitude toward Jesus? Do you live your life based on what Jesus says in the Bible? What are you harboring in your heart toward God? Do you despise the truth and live your life the way you want to regardless of what God says? Be honest with yourself.

Jesus said in Jn 8:24 “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” You’re playing with fire and you’re going to get burned.

Jn 8:36 “... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Jesus is the only one who can set us free from slavery to sin. He is the truth that sets us free.

Paul put it this way in Ro 8:2 “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

I find the order of the verses here in Jn 8:31, 32 to be highly instructive. If you do the truth you'll know it. You won't be free until you do the truth. Jesus' words are the truth. They are to be believed in and lived by.

Jesus in no uncertain terms was stating His relationship with God the Father, His Father, and was exposing their relationship with their father, the god of this world or Satan.

Salvation comes from "faith in the truth (2 Thes 1:13; cf. 1 Ti 2:4; 2 Ti 2:25); for those who believe in and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior from sin's penalty of eternal separation from God (Jn 3:16; 1:12). Believers in Jesus Christ are to: worship God in truth (Jn 4:23,24) be committed to the truth (Pr 23:23), obey the truth (1 Pe 1:22; cf. Ro 2:8; Ga 5:7), walk in the truth (Ps 26:3; 86:11; 2 Jn 4:3; Jn 3-4) and take their stand on the truth (1 Co 15:1; Ga 5:1; Eph 6:14; 1 Pe 5:12). Truth is central to the existence and mission of the church, which is to be the pillar and foundation of the truth (**1 Ti 3:15**). The truth that brings freedom is the theme of this passage.

Saving faith is found in the Person of Jesus Christ who is the Truth and reveals the truth. True freedom is possible only for those who have been freed from the prison of sin. Genuine faith issues in a changed life (1 Jn 2:4-6 "The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys (holds to) His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did."). The Scriptures are all-sufficient (2 Ti 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."). The purpose of God's truth is not only to change lives but to change the way we live them as children of God.

What confirms our profession of faith in Christ is our daily practice. Living what you believe gives visibility to your faith and testifies to its genuineness. If people don't see what you say it makes it harder for them to believe it's true for you and can be true for them.

Benediction: And now "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father – to Him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen." (Re 1:5b-6).