

natural eye the reverse appears to be true. What could be more rocklike than an established church or denomination with large membership, well-trained full-time leadership and long pages of history behind it? What could seem less secure than to follow by faith what the eye cannot see? When our eyes are opened to see as God sees, we perceive that it is the kingdom of God - the spiritual realm - that is permanent, lasting and secure; the realm of the flesh is like the grass which is here today and tomorrow is cast into the oven.

There was a blind man in John chapter 9 whose eyes Jesus opened. He soon came into conflict with the Pharisees (who never like people to have open eyes!) and was eventually thrown out of the synagogue. In verses 28 and 29 the Pharisees said to him 'You are his (Jesus') disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where he is from.' It takes no great insight to recognise the godly men of the past. They leave behind them lasting fruit which is plain for all to see. The Pharisees recognised Moses and all the other prophets of ancient time and yet they crucified Jesus. They were, as they imagined, faithful followers of Moses and of the Scriptures, but they lived in the carnal realm, and so were blind and deaf to the Spirit of God and to his Son. It is not enough to follow those who followed Jesus; nor even to follow those who follow Jesus. If we want to know the truth and be set free we must ourselves be disciples of Jesus.

Do you have a Moses whose teachings you seek to follow? Or have you set your heart to follow Jesus, whose yoke is easy and whose burden light, who leads you progressively forward into blessed communion with the Father and the glorious liberty of the sons of God? May God grant that we may be as that blessed company who are redeemed from among men and follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14:4).

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**The Truth  
will  
make you  
Free**

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To summarise this we may say that the new believer will be dependent on spiritual teachers till his 'senses are trained to discern good and evil' (see Heb 5:13,14). Then he will depend directly on Jesus. The faithful teacher or pastor will have the attitude of John the Baptist: 'He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.' John 3:30. He will point those sheep, whom the Lord has entrusted to him, increasingly away from himself and to the Lord Jesus until he himself becomes no longer necessary.

Paul writes on this theme in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. In verse 1 he says, 'I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babies in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still carnal (or fleshly). For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking as humans? For when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are you not humans?' Paul told the Corinthians that they were still spiritual babies because they walked according to the flesh, and were followers of man and hence were full of splits and divisions. Jesus said that those who abided in **his** word were truly **his** disciples and it was they who would know the truth and in doing so be set free.

## Disciples of Jesus

It is a very, very easy thing to be a follower of man. It is a more difficult thing to be a follower of Jesus. There are many different ways of following man. We can follow an individual man, perhaps because of his gifts or personality. We can follow a group of men in whose teachings we feel secure. We can become faithful members of some man-made denomination and comfort our consciences in that way. Or we can espouse some set of man-made doctrines and seek with great fervour to propagate them. All these things appeal to the natural man because they give him a sense of security. He has a clearly defined pathway which his natural eyes can see. He does not have to walk by faith; he can do it all by sight. He can measure his achievements and progress and receive comforting approval from man for what he does.

To follow Jesus is a very different thing. We can only do it by faith. We can only do it if we are led by the Holy Spirit. We will need to cultivate the attitude of listening to his voice and prizing it more than the voice of man. We will have to be willing to come to him 'outside the camp, bearing his reproach' (Heb 13:13). We will be like that great company of witnesses described in Hebrews chapter 11 who built their lives on the words that God spoke to them. Unmoved by the countless pressures that govern people's lives, we will be led by the Spirit of God.

Those who follow Jesus are building on the rock. Those who follow man are building on the sand. Man can and will be removed. Jesus remains for ever. To the

leave his disciples? No one will question that he was the best teacher, pastor and leader this world has ever seen. Had he then brought them to a state of perfection where they no longer needed him? One of them had grasped so little of the message that he actually betrayed him and the other eleven forsook him and fled. They had just been boasting of their courage and, not too long before, arguing as to who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Yet Jesus said **'It is profitable for you that I go away'** and shortly afterwards he prayed **'Father... I have accomplished the work which you have given me to do.'**

Jesus knew that the truth could never really be internal in the hearts of his disciples while their eyes were on him as a human leader in their midst. As long as we are followers of men - and so often men who cannot be compared with our blessed Saviour - we will never know the fullness of the Holy Spirit, nor know the truth in its reality, nor enter the freedom of the sons of God.

Jesus spent three and a half years teaching his disciples on this earth as a human being and then declared that his work was finished. Subsequent events proved his words true. He had trained men who were then able to turn the world upside down. We may deduce two things. Firstly there is a time and place for teaching new believers; and secondly there should come a time when they have no need of a teacher.

The Bible compares the new believer to a baby. The very terminology of the new birth implies this. Peter speaks of the new birth (1 Pet 1:23) and a few verses later says **'Like new-born babies, long for the pure milk of the word, that you may grow by it in respect to salvation.'** A human baby has two problems with regard to food. Firstly it is totally unable to feed itself; and secondly it is totally indiscriminating about what goes into its mouth. The spiritual baby has the same troubles. He is largely dependent on others for his spiritual food and due to his trusting nature will happily receive it from the hand of anyone who seems willing to give. He is not yet aware that many wolves appear in sheep's clothing and that the devil himself is transformed into an angel of light to deceive the unwary. God has therefore appointed teachers and pastors to bring spiritual children to maturity.

Paul told the Galatians **'As long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.'** Gal 4:1,2. But this is not to be a permanent state. A mother loves to feed her baby, but knows that it must grow to independence - to childhood and then to adulthood when she will no longer be necessary. So also John writes to the mature believers **'The anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in him.'** (1 John 2:27).

## Introduction

**'If you abide in my word you are truly disciples of mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'** John 8:32.

These words from the lips of any other than him who spoke them would be either blasphemy or insanity, but from the mouth of Jesus, the Son of God, they constitute a glorious promise of freedom to us who follow him. Most of his hearers knew neither him, nor their own condition, and so continued in their slavery. They remained blind to the fact that sin with all its entanglements ruled their lives.

In this article I want to consider three topics that arise from these words that Jesus spoke: firstly, what it means to be free; secondly, our attitude to truth; and thirdly, what it means to be truly his disciples.

## Freedom of Jesus

What then does it mean to be free? In verse 36 Jesus added, **'If therefore the Son sets you free, you will be free in reality.'** What is real freedom? The answer is simply Jesus. He is the model and example of what it is to be free. Above all else, Jesus was free from sin. His whole life was a perfect expression of God's righteousness in every way. This fact is too well-known for me to need to expand on it. He was free also from Satan and the powers of darkness. He could say of Satan, **'He has nothing in me'** (John 14:30).

He was free from fear. He could denounce sin in religious leaders. He was not afraid of mobs that wanted to kill him. He could set his face to go to Jerusalem to meet his death. He was free from all disease and illness. There is no record of him having anything but perfect health. He was free from religious tradition. He had no respect for anything in religion that did not proceed from God. This freedom is difficult to grasp or understand, but if you can imagine yourself back in his day, with only the Old Testament plus a mass of Pharisaic additions to the law, and then listen with fresh ears to the words he uttered, you will perhaps see afresh how totally revolutionary his teaching was.

He was free from all these things and many others. But he was not only free **from**. He was also free **to**. He was free to do the will of his Father all day and every day. He was free to be a perfect expression of his heavenly Father in everything he was and said and did. He was free to lay down his life for us.

The freedom that Jesus enjoyed is the freedom he offers to those who believe in him. God did not intend that the life of Jesus should be lived only once. It was not something wonderful, but never-to-be-repeated. God planned that Jesus should be the **'firstborn among many brethren'** (Rom 8:29). He planned that younger brothers and sisters should grow up in the likeness of their elder brother. In Romans 8:19-22

Paul wrote: 'The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.' Creation itself is longing to see reproductions of Jesus, and God, I believe, is preparing them at this present time for display.

We can too easily give Jesus a wrong uniqueness. His suffering and death on the tree of Cavalry to atone for sin cannot and - praise God - never needs to be repeated. But the life he lived was poured out in the blood he shed that whoever truly receives him may re-live the very same life that he lived.

How then are we to enter and experience this freedom of which Jesus speaks? Jesus answers this question in the verse I have already quoted: 'If you abide in my word you are truly disciples of mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' We must learn to be disciples not of man but of Jesus. It is the truth coming from God and entering into our hearts that will bring us into true freedom. Let me emphasise, it is not doctrine coming from man and entering into our heads; it is truth coming from God and entering into our hearts that will set us free.

## New Truth

Some of what I write in this and other articles may well be new to you. If that is the case, beware how you read! Some people blindly reject everything new, because it is contrary to their tradition, or cuts across their own ideas, or is in some other way unpalatable. This was the attitude of the Pharisees to Jesus and ended in them having him crucified. It has been the attitude of many in every generation since. In Stephen's speech before his death he said to the crowd: 'You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become.' (Acts 7: 51, 52). Many of the people to whom he spoke were seeking to follow every letter of the law of Moses. They followed the written word, as they read it, but they were deaf to the voice of God the Holy Spirit.

Some people, on the other hand, with equal blindness accept everything they read or hear, provided it comes from an acceptable source and is to their liking. This attitude is little better and in fact little different from the first. Both attitudes spring from following man and being deaf to God. 'We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine...' (Eph 4: 14).

Those who are very young in their faith can be excused for accepting all they are taught; and in fact that is what they must do. They are as spiritual babies who

cannot feed themselves and must depend on others. But the time must come when we are no longer children in our understanding, and we cease to be followers of man. If we want to follow man all our lives, as blind followers of the blind we will inevitably end up in the ditch. This is because only those who are themselves blind will happily accept blind allegiance.

The true spiritual leader will have the attitude of John the Baptist, who said, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' Furthermore, however perfect the man that we follow, that pathway will not lead us into true sonship, because the sons of God are those that are led by the Spirit of God (Rom 8:14) and not those who follow man.

Probably in every generation some have clung to their traditions and rejected the voice of God, while others have followed false prophets and false teaching. Praise God, there have also been others who have heard his voice and responded. How may we tell the voice of God and distinguish truth from error? Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to 'Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good' (1 Thes 5: 21). We read in Acts 17:11 that the Jews of Berea were more noble-minded than those of Thessalonica in that 'they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.' It is as we wait on God and seek his face and search the Scriptures - if necessary with fasting that we will discern between truth and error, and that the truth will be made alive in our hearts.

For the young in the faith what I write may be difficult to understand. Don't let it disturb you. Take what is for you now, and put the rest into cold storage! When Mary could not understand things she treasured them up in her heart. Many years later it all became plain.

I have taken truth as the theme of this article. Jesus said 'I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). He also said 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life' (John 8:12). When we are faced with any doubt or dilemma, there is no surer way of finding an answer than by looking to him. Jesus is the great Yardstick of all truth. Often when I have been perplexed over some course of action, or some teaching, the thought has come to my mind like a ray of light, "Consider Jesus". He is the light and the truth, and as we turn to him our doubts and perplexities disappear. Jesus has the answer, and more than that, he is the answer to everything in life.

Jesus himself is the Truth and he spoke of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth. He said, 'When he, the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth' (John 16: 13). A few verses before he had said 'It is profitable for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. But if I go away, I will send him to you' (John 16:7). Hidden in these words there is a great mystery. Could it possibly be profitable, or expedient (AV) or advantageous (NASB) that Jesus should