

## **“Freedom and Bondage”**

May 17, 2026

John 8:31-47

### **I. Introduction**

Throughout history people have tried to find the truth about reality; about what is right or wrong; about the meaning and the purpose of life. Because of this continuing, unending search, many philosophies, worldviews, and religious systems have come and gone. Each one coming up with its own “absolute” truths that cancelled out the “absolute” truths that came before them.

In the early 1900’s there was the assumption that through intellectual achievements and the growth of scientific knowledge that world utopia would be reached. Two World Wars and many smaller struggles soon destroyed that idealism. In the late 1900’s people thought that by denying the existence of absolute truth and by throwing off the shackles of biblical morality, they would finally be free. To make this philosophy acceptable, it was given a name: “Situational Ethics.” Sinners wanted to do evil and feel no guilt, so the lack of absolutes allowed their wicked human hearts to do as they wished. (This really wasn’t a new concept, [Judges 17:6](#) says, “**In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.**”) Instead, as in the Book of Judges, those following situational ethics found themselves only emptier and more enslaved to destructive passions and the need to legislate morality—just read or watch today’s news reports.

This attitude has evolved into postmodernism—a worldview that is alive and well today. Postmodernism is a philosophy that says absolute truth does not exist. Supporters of postmodernism deny long-held beliefs and conventions and maintain that all viewpoints are equally valid. This has led to relativism, the idea that all truth is relative. That means what is right for one group is not necessarily right or true for everyone. The only thing they are certain of is that nothing is absolutely certain—go figure. Postmodernists want to sin freely, so they need to view all truth as culturally determined and they argue that no morality or law is supreme. The noblest virtue therefore is tolerance of other views; other actions. This is especially true in the area of morals where forcing one’s values on someone else is seen as a horrendous offence. In their eyes, this makes biblical Christianity the most intolerable belief in the Western culture.

In a study from 2016, the Barna Research group found that “*A majority of American adults (57%) believe that “knowing what is right or wrong is a matter of personal experience.” More specifically, “three-quarters of Millennials (74%) agree strongly or somewhat with the statement, ‘Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know.’”* The study also records that “*two-thirds of American adults either believe moral truth is relative to circumstances or have not given it much thought.*”

This attitude has been making its way into the contemporary church; today’s church—as far back as 2005 *Newsweek* reported that 85% of Americans who call themselves “Christians” believe there are other ways to heaven. And that thought hasn’t gotten better. This is **NOT** what the Bible teaches. **Acts 4:12** says, “**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**” The truth—the absolute truth—that brings spiritual freedom is the theme of today’s Scripture.

Jesus claimed over and over to be the Son of God and the Messiah. He had performed many miracles to verify that claim, but still the leaders and many of the people rejected Him. But not everyone was hostile to Jesus; John wrote that there were “**Jews who had believed Him.**” But their belief was not saving faith; it was merely the first step toward it. Jesus’ goal was to bring them to full saving faith in Him.

## **II. The Pathway to Freedom**

John wrote that Jesus addressed those who “**believed Him**”—but there are differing levels of “*believing.*” Let me illustrate this with a story that I have used before—*it’s about a tightrope walker named Blondin back in the 1860’s who crossed Niagara Falls numerous times on a tightrope 1,000-feet long, 160 feet above the raging waters. Obviously, large crowds would gather to watch each of his performances.*

*One day, after testing the taut rope that reached across to the opposite shore, he took his long pole, and, balancing himself expertly, he started across. The crowd followed every movement tensely. The people on the shore reacted nervously to every sharp motion of the balancing pole as he moved forward step-by-step. However, the fears and apprehensions were unnecessary. The great Blondin not only went across safely but returned as well—to the great relief and admiration of the spectators.*

*Turning to the crowd, he then made a sensational offer. He would cross the falls again, this time with someone on his back. Who was willing to go? No one rushed forward to accept the offer. Picking out a man at random, Blondin asked, “Do you believe that I am able to carry you across?”*

*“Yes, sir,” came the unhesitating reply.*

*“Well, then, let’s go,” Blondin urged.*

*“Not on your life!”—and the man withdrew into the crowd.*

**A. Step 1: Believe in Jesus** This describes the hearts of the “**believers**” Jesus addressed. They had taken the first step—they believed Jesus, i.e., they knew and accepted the facts about Jesus being the Messiah and the Son of God; they knew that they needed salvation. Like the man from the crowd at Niagara Falls, they believed, but they needed to do more than that—they needed to act. They needed to believe **in** Him. This is the first step to freedom: Believe in Jesus.

**B. Step 2: Hold to Jesus’ teaching.** But they needed to take the next step. Jesus said, “**If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.**” This is the second step to spiritual freedom—hold to Jesus’ teaching, i.e., obey God’s Word. Being a true disciple of Jesus Christ consists of continued obedience to His Word. **Turn to 1 John 2:4-6.** A true believer’s attitude should be that of the psalmist who wrote in **Psalm 119:69**, “**I keep your precepts with all my heart**” and later in **verse 72**, “**The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.**” To “hold to Jesus’ teaching” means to “**walk as Jesus did**” and obey God’s Word.

**C. Step 3: Knowing the Truth** The inevitable result of believing in Jesus and holding to His Word leads to the 3<sup>rd</sup> step—knowing the truth. Jesus said, “**Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**” **John 1:17** says, “**For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**” In **John 14:6** Jesus said, “**I the way, the truth, and the life.**” Contrary to Satan and the question he asked Eve in **Gen. 3:1**, “**Did God really say?**” there is absolute truth and it is found in the Bible. The modern skeptics, the postmodernists are left with nothing but their own ignorance and despair as they search for truth apart from God. The result of their ignorance and despair is a plethora of anti-depression drugs that are available.

The Bible is the revelation of divine truth—absolute truth. In [John 17:17](#), Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” [Turn to 2 Timothy 3:16-17](#). To know the truth of God and to know Jesus Christ, who is the truth, one must study the Word of God, not someone else’s words.

Believing in Jesus, obeying His word, and knowing the truth will bring spiritual freedom; Jesus said, “The truth will set you free.” This is why Jesus came into the world—[Luke 19:10](#) says, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” In [Luke 4:18](#) Jesus applied the following words from Isaiah to His own ministry, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.” Because of His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has the authority to release those who put their faith in Him from their bondage, their slavery to sin and make them sons and daughters of God. As [Romans 8:15](#) says, “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

### III. Spiritual Bondage

But many of the Jews rejected Jesus’ offer of freedom as they insisted that they “have never been slaves of anyone.” They felt that as Abraham’s physical children, they were also his spiritual children and were therefore free spiritually. But spiritual freedom isn’t based on blood lineage or religious identity. [Turn to Romans 2:28-29](#). Despite their proud, self-righteous pretense of freedom, the Jews were in reality slaves to sin, as [1 Peter 2:19](#) says, “for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” With that in mind, Jesus then challenged them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the things Abraham did.”

In contrast to Abraham, who [Galatians 3:6](#) says, “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” the Jews were self-righteously trying to earn favor with God by their own good works. They did not follow Abraham’s example. If they were truly Abraham’s spiritual children, they would have done the same kind of deeds that Abraham did, and worship God, instead Jesus said, “you are determined to kill

me, a man who had told you the truth that I heard from God.” Abraham loved and obeyed the truth, while they vehemently rejected it. Abraham loved God ([Genesis 18:1](#)), but the Jews rejected Him ([Acts 2:23](#)).

Infuriated by Jesus’ continual insistence that they were not Abraham’s children, the Jews lashed out at Him with a vicious insult, “**We are not illegitimate children.**” They were implying that Jesus’ birth, unlike theirs, was illegitimate. They went on to insist, “**The only Father we have is God himself.**” It was true, in a national sense, that God was the Father of all Israel. But ancestry, traditions, or family history doesn’t lead to spiritual freedom and being a child of God. God is the Father only of those who have truly come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. [John 3:36](#) says, “**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.**”

By choosing to reject Jesus, the Jewish leaders completely undermined their claim that God was their Father. As Jesus said to them earlier in [John 5:23](#), “**He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.**” Now Jesus said, “**If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God, and now am here.**” Then in [John 8:44](#), Jesus stated a truth that He had implied earlier, “**You belong to your father, the devil.**” Physically, they were children of Abraham, but spiritually and morally they were children of Satan. They, like all unbelievers, were and are in bondage to sin and Satan.

Jesus asked a rhetorical question, “**Why is my language not clear to you?**” That they were unable to hear and understand proved that they were not God’s children. Instead, their lack of discernment demonstrated that “**you belong to your father the devil.**” Just like physical children take after their earthly fathers, the Pharisees and scribes bore a spiritual resemblance to Satan himself. As the old saying goes, “*Like father, like son.*”

Satan is a liar and a murderer. He lied to Adam and Eve and engineered their deaths. John wrote in [1 John 3:12](#) “**Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one.**” Cain was a child of the devil for he was both a liar and a murderer. He killed his brother Abel and then lied about it. As children of the devil, these religious leaders lied about Jesus, hired false witnesses, and later they would have Him killed. One might say that “*The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.*”

The worst spiritual bondage is the kind that the prisoner himself does not recognize. He thinks he is free, yet he is really a slave. The Pharisees and other religious leaders thought that they were free, but, like the postmodernists of today, they were actually enslaved in terrible spiritual bondage to sin and to Satan. They would not face or tolerate the truth and yet it was the truth alone that could set them free.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

People continue to look for freedom and security in a variety of places. Some look to wealth and possessions to provide freedom and eliminate anxiety. Others look to power or social standing or personal appearance to quiet their hearts. The Book of Ecclesiastes records that Solomon tried everything under the sun, but, as he wrote several times, “**everything was meaningless.**” In the end, he wrote that security and freedom come only from being right with God; **Ecclesiastes.12:13** says, “**Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.**” Or as **Acts 16:31** says, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.**” **Gal. 5:1** adds, “**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**”

After a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and makes Him his Lord and Savior, Jesus said he should “**hold to or continue in His Word.**” **2 Timothy 3:15** says, “**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.**” Is Jesus your Lord and Savior? Do you continue in God’s Word? Do you make a habit of studying God’s Word regularly? Are you growing in your understanding of God’s truth?

Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone. It will produce something. **James 2:26** says, “**As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.**” In **Matthew 7:20** Jesus said, “**Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**” **Turn to Ephesians 2:8-10.** **1 Corinthians 10:31** adds, “**So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**” After we are freed from the bondage of sin, after we have received freedom and God’s gift of eternal life, we are to do the good works God has prepared for us to do. Do your words and actions bring praise to God? What do your deeds tell others about your family membership? Do the things you do proclaim that you are child of God or a child of the devil?