

**The Gospel of John (56)**  
**The Son who sets Sinners Free (3)**

**Introduction:**

Let us turn our attention once again to John 8:36. If the Lord is willing, today we will move beyond this verse that we have been addressing for the past two Lord's Days. We will do so after we complete explaining the meaning and implication of our Lord's words, in order that we might better understand the Christian liberty that our Lord has established for us.

**I. Our Lord Jesus speaking of the freedom that He grants His true disciples (John 8:36).**

John 8:36 records these words of promise of our Lord, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." Last Lord's Day we were attempting to explain what these words mean as well as what they do not mean. This is important for there is sometimes confusion and a troubled heart on the part of the true Christian because he or she believes our Lord's words mean something different than what He intended them to mean. And so, last week we sought to explain our Lord's words by first, stating **what true disciples are not freed from by Jesus Christ in this world**. We emphasized two points in some detail. These were that...

- (1) **The Lord Jesus does *not* free believers from their obligation to obey His moral law.**
- (2) **The Lord Jesus has *not* freed His disciples from the temptations and assaults of satan.**

We next desire to state the fact, that...

- (3) **Christ has *not* yet freed believers in this world from the motions of indwelling sin.**

Christians can become troubled when they read the promise of our Lord, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." Because they are troubled by sin, they either believe that they are not doing something right, or they may have doubts about their very salvation. They think to themselves, "How can I be a Christian when I am plagued with sin in my life. I must not be experiencing the freedom that the Lord has promised to His people. But the Lord Jesus was not promising His people freedom from sinning in this life. Sin is a problem that plagues us all.

**John Flavel** (1627-1691) wrote of these struggles with sin:

"These are continually acting, and infesting the holiest of men (Rom. 7:21, 23, 24). Corruptions, like Canaanites, are still left in the land to be thorns in your eyes, and goads in your sides. Those that boast most of freedom from the motions of sin, have most cause to suspect themselves still under the dominion of sin (i.e. unsaved)."<sup>1</sup>

In Romans 7 the apostle Paul wrote of the "*sin that dwells in me*" (Rom. 7:17). As a Christian he wrote, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) *nothing good dwells* (7:18); for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." He related his own struggle against sin, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but *sin that dwells in me*" (vs. 19f).

The writer to the Hebrew Christians addressed "the sin that easily besets us."

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<sup>1</sup> John Flavel, **Works of John Flavel, The**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), p. 272.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, *and the sin which so easily ensnares us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1f, NKJV)

The English Standard Version (ESV) translates it this way: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely...*” The true Christian may have sin, even a particular sin, “cling closely” to him even while he is trying to run and win this race toward glory. It is a sin that “easily ensnares” him.

The apostle John wrote of the prevalency of sin that plagues the true believer, the true disciple of Jesus Christ. He wrote, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8), and, “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:10). Christians are troubled by their sin. Sin does not reign over them, for Jesus Christ is their Lord. But sin is always present and is always troubling their souls. Only when we pass from this world into the presence of our Lord will we be fully delivered from the presence of sin. Christ has *not* yet freed believers in this world from the motions of indwelling sin.

**(4) Jesus Christ does *not* free believers, in this world, from inward troubles and exercises of soul, on account of sin.**

John Flavel wrote of these inward trials and troubles.

“God may let loose satan, and conscience too, in the way of terrible accusations, which may greatly distress the soul of a believer, and woefully eclipse the light of God’s countenance, and break the peace of their souls.”

Sin committed by the true Christian is a troubling matter. And sometimes the Christian that is walking in close fellowship with the Lord is actually troubled greatly by sin, for his holy nature has become more aware of its presence and more sensitive and troubled by its extent in his life. Whereas before he was a Christian, he may have become desensitized to his sin through the hardening of his conscience and his lack of concern and desire for holiness in his life. But the Christian is quite a different being. He may become quite sensitive to the presence and the evil of sin. The believer may come to see his sin as exceedingly sinful, and he is thereby plagued greatly in his conscience. **J. C. Philpott** (1802-1869) once wrote of this sensitivity of sin that may be experienced by a maturing Christian. He first spoke of the difficulty that the Christian encounters from non-Christians, but then he speaks of the much worse affliction, the sin that still resides in his soul:

However various sects differ among themselves, they all unite in condemning him. All other religion is right, and his alone wrong; everyone else’s faith is genuine, and his only is spurious. Of him alone the charitable augur uncharitably; universal salvationists cut off him alone from salvation; those that pity the heathen have no pity for him; and those who compass sea and land to make one proselyte, pronounce his case alone as past recovery. And what is his trespass and what is his sin, that they so hotly pursue after him? (Gen. 31:36). Does he live in sin? No. Is he buried in the world, head over ears in politics, heaping together dishonest gains, or eaten up with covetousness? None dare say so. Does he neglect prayer, reading the Word, hearing the truth, contributing to the necessities of saints, and living peaceably with all men? No. Why then this universal baying at him from every dog of the pack? For the same reason that Joseph’s brethren hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him—the Father loves him, and has clothed him in a garment of many colors, and given him revelations which He has denied to them. But he has sorrow, too, and opposition within, far more trying to his spirit than the evil names which malicious ignorance heaps upon him, or the unjust suspicions which Pharisaic pride harbours against him. Paul, after being caught up into the third heaven, had given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure (2 Cor. 12:7). Go where he would, this thorn still accompanied him, rankling continually in his flesh, hampering every movement, inflicting unceasing pain, and piercing him deeper and deeper the more that he struggled against it. Ten thousand thorns in the hedge do not pain like

one in the flesh. And thus ten thousand unjust suspicions of the sons of Belial, though they be “all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear” (2 Sam. 23:6, 7)—ten thousand suspicions, I say, from vulture-eyed professors are but as thorns in the hedge, which only wound us when we go near them, and which a wise man will keep a due distance from. But a thorn in the flesh, driven and fastened in by the hand of God, we can neither ease nor extract.

*And thus any one constant harassing temptation, which strikes into the soul of a child of God, will grieve and wound him a thousand times more deeply than a thick hedge of furze-bush professors standing by the roadside.* But by these painful exercises he is kept from settling down on the lees of a dead assurance, or resting at his ease on the ground of a past experience. This rankling thorn preserves him from that vain, wretched, delusive establishment, falsely so-called, which, as a spreading gangrene, has infected well nigh whole churches with the dry rot—an establishment built upon length of profession, upon belief of the doctrines of grace, upon membership in a Particular Baptist Church, upon consistency of conduct, upon a general currency as a believer, upon freedom from doubts and fears, and upon an experience twenty years ago. His thorn in the flesh will not let him stand at ease, or ground his arms, as though the battle were won, the enemy vanquished, and the articles of peace signed. He cannot rest on doctrines, of which the power is not now felt; nor in a past experience, which is not continually renewed; nor in a Saviour in the Bible whose presence is not from time to time manifested; nor in promises, of which the sweetness is not occasionally enjoyed. He cannot thus cast anchor in the Dead Sea. He cannot lie stretched at his ease on this downy bed, for his thorn will not let him rest, but makes him “full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day” (Job 7:4).<sup>2</sup>

Jesus Christ does *not* free believers, in this world, from inward troubles and exercises of soul, on account of sin. Troubles within his soul may, and probably will plague him throughout this life.

For affliction does not come from the dust,  
Nor does trouble spring from the ground;  
Yet man is born to trouble,  
As the sparks fly upward. (Job 5:6)

And it is the self-inflicted wounds that seem to hurt worse. We bring them on ourselves when we fail or refuse to order our thinking and actions in accordance with His Word. We are as Jeremiah who called out to the Lord, “Look, O LORD, for I am in distress; my stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious” (Lam. 1:20).

**(5) Christ has *not* freed His disciples, in this world, from the rods of affliction.** Hebrews 12:8 reads, “But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.”<sup>3</sup>

“All the children of God are made free, yet what son is there whom the father chasteneth not? Exemption from affliction is so far from being the mark of a free man, that the apostle there makes it the mark of a slave.” “To be free from affliction would be no benefit to believers, who receive so many benefits from it.”<sup>3</sup>

Some Christians feel themselves as forsaken by God because of the nature and degree of the troubles that they face in life. It seems that they are assaulted with every form of pain and difficulty. One after another it seems that the arrows of the enemy come at him, and he feels to himself, “This cannot be freedom by anyone’s definition. How can I be set free when the Lord declares that He will set His people free?” But you may be assured, that though your afflictions are many and frequent, the Lord will indeed set you free even of these one day. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19).

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<sup>2</sup> J. C. Philpott, “**Winter Afore Harvest; or the Soul’s Growth in Grace**”, a sermon preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, England, on Lord’s Day Morning, 20th August, 1837.

<sup>3</sup> John Flavel, **Works of John Flavel, The**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pp. 269-278.

Christians encounter the same afflictions as non-Christians, sometimes more so than non-Christians. We are to guard our hearts and reaffix our minds on the Lord and be confident of His good purposes for us in Jesus Christ. We are not to envy those who may not be suffering to the same degree. And we certainly are not to envy the unrighteous, when it appears, “Life is going much easier and better for them than for me.” The Psalmist struggled spiritually with this envy of the well-being of the unrighteous.

Truly God is good to Israel,  
To such as are pure in heart.  
<sup>2</sup>But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;  
My steps had nearly slipped.  
<sup>3</sup>For I was envious of the boastful,  
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
<sup>4</sup>For there are no <sup>[a]</sup>pangs in their death,  
But their strength is firm.  
<sup>5</sup>They are not in trouble as other men,  
Nor are they plagued like other men. (Psa. 73:2-5)

(6) “No believer is freed by Christ from the *stroke* of death, though they are all freed from the *sting* of death (Rom. 8:10). The bodies of believers are under the same law of mortality with other men.”<sup>4</sup> “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

But having stated what Christ has not set His people free from in this life in this fallen world, let us consider...

## 2. The bondage from which every true disciple *is freed* by Christ.

Jesus promised His true disciples, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

### (1) All true disciples are freed from the *rigour* and the *curse* of the law.

John Flavel wrote regarding this matter:

“The rigorous yoke of the law is broken off from their necks, and the sweet and easy yoke of Jesus Christ is put on (Matt. 9:28). The law required perfect working, under pain of a curse (Gal. 3:10), accepted of no short endeavors; admitted no repentance; gave no strength. It is not so now; proportional strength is given (Phil. 4:13).”<sup>5</sup>

There was no provision under the law of God as a covenant of works to empower or enable people to live according to the precepts of God’s law. The law of God imposed the responsibility to obey God and the penalty for failure to do so, but the law of God gave no power to obey it. But under the new covenant instituted by Christ, the true disciple of Christ (i.e. the true Christian) has available the blessed Holy Spirit to give strength to enable him to do the things that that Lord has commanded in His law.

Now it is important for us to understand, that the Lord has given every true believer the desire to live in accordance to God’s moral commands, i.e. His law, but the believer only gains the power to live according to God’s command as he is enabled by the Holy Spirit on each occasion he is called upon to obey the will of God. We emphasize this frequently, for it is a most common area of failure on the part of Christians. Paul had written to Christians, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom. 8:13).

Now by way of explaining very simply and plainly how this spiritual dynamic works, when a Christian learns or recalls what the will of God in the Holy Scriptures would have him do, he is to recognize and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

acknowledge immediately in prayer before the Lord his inability to comply with His will. And at that moment he is to pray and trust the Lord Jesus to empower him by grace to enable him to desire and to conform to that precept. And then, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit who resides in him, he then is enabled supernaturally to obey the word of God.

Forgive me if I seem too simplistic in illustrating how this is done, but this is important. Many professing Christians fail to experience the liberty that Jesus Christ gives them because they fail to put into practice this principle. For example, suppose the Lord brought to your mind His command that you forgive someone his offense toward you. You do not want to do so, for he has so deeply hurt you. You do not think that you are even “able” to do so. At that moment, you are to pray to the Lord, being honest with Him (He can handle it):

“Lord, I know in your Word you command me to forgive that one who so deeply harmed me. I know also that if I fail or refuse to forgive him his trespass, You tell me that You will not forgive me of my trespasses (Matt. 6:14, 15). So, Lord, please give me both the desire and ability to forgive him from my heart by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in me, so that I might do your will, for that is my heart’s true desire.”

If you pray believing God’s promise, He will then enable you by the Holy Spirit to obey Him in this matter.

Here is another example. Suppose that you have in the past foolishly and sinfully given yourself over to practicing a particular sin, but recently you repented of that sin before the Lord. But now the temptation presents itself to you to commit that sin once again. The temptation is of such a nature and to such a degree that you are unable not to yield and fall into committing that sin. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are to pray:

“Lord, this temptation is too great for me to resist. Unless You act on my behalf, I am going to fail You. So, Lord, please give me both the desire and ability by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in me not to yield to this temptation, so that I might do Your will, for that is my true heart’s desire. Please take away this desire from my heart to sin against You.”

Here is one more example. Suppose the Lord has burdened you about the spiritual well-being of someone you know. You would like to witness to him, but you do not know what to say and you do not have the courage to do so. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are to pray:

“Lord, I pray and trust you to give me both the opportunity and courage to speak on Your behalf to this one for whom I am concerned. Give me wisdom to know what to say and give me the words to speak to him on Your behalf. I know that You will do this for You have promised, ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses (Acts 1:8).

He will give you power to enable you to rise to the opportunity to represent Him and His Word to that soul.

It is in this way of trusting the Lord to enable you to do all and everything that He has commanded you, that you experience His life flowing through you. Paul expressed it this way regarding himself.

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Gal. 2:19)

And so, all true disciples are freed from the rigour and the curse of the law, in that the Lord enables His people by the Holy Spirit to conform their beliefs and actions to His will, to His law. This is a blessing that we enjoy under the new covenant in Jesus Christ that the Old Testament saints had by way of God’s promises in the coming reign of the Messiah.

## **(2) Similarly, all true disciples are freed from the guilt of sin.**

All true Christians are freed from the actual guilt of sin before God. Now here we are not speaking of our own guilty feelings about sin. Although there is a way to address that problem, we do not do so here. Here we

are addressing the matter of our actual guilt before God. From this actual, legal guilt before God due to our sins, we have been fully set free by our lord Jesus Christ.

“It (sin) may trouble, but it cannot condemn them (Rom. 8:1)”, wrote John Flavel.<sup>6</sup> The Lord Jesus in His death rendered the law unable to condemn the true believer (disciple) of Jesus. He bore in His own body the penalty of death that was upon all of His people. He thereby satisfied God’s justice in fulfilling the law’s punishment for His people due to their sin. The law of God, therefore, no longer has the ability to condemn the true believer in Jesus. Paul wrote: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-- for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13). Before we were Christians, we were under the law of God as a rule of life, but that law could only condemn us. But Christians continue to live according to the law of God as a rule of life, but that law is now administered by Jesus Christ. He is our Lord who not only directs us, but empowers us by the Holy Spirit to live in righteousness, a life characterized by law-keeping. But when we fall short, which we all too often do, the law does not and cannot condemn us, for Christ intercedes for us, and His life and death have satisfied the demands of the law that once had brought upon us the sentence of death and damnation. The law is no longer in the hands of the Judge to condemn us, but it is now administered by Him who has saved us and empowers us. Paul could write of every true Christian: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

### (3) Jesus Christ frees all true disciples from the dominion (reign) of sin (Rom. 6:14).

“We are delivered “not from the *residence*, but from the *reign* of sin” (Flavel). Before we came to Christ, we lived unto sin. That was our desire and our delight. It mattered not if God’s law forbid it. If a commandment ran counter to our sinful desire, we set aside the commandment in order to live in our sin. That came to an end with our conversion. Now we live to serve Christ rather than sin. Sin troubles us because it would hinder us from doing that which we truly desire to do, to live before Him according to His righteousness.

True disciples are fully justified before God through their faith alone, so now they are without condemnation before God. They are now enjoying a state of peace between God and themselves. Romans 5:1 reads, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

Christ rules over His kingdom in a reign in which His grace is sovereign. Paul wrote of the contrast between life under the law of God and life under the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:20f)

The Christian is now under the reign of God’s grace rather than under the reign of God’s law. **Abraham Booth** (1734-1806) was a well known reformed Baptist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote several very good and widely circulated books. One of these was entitled, *The Reign of Grace*.<sup>7</sup> He spoke of this reign of grace in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 273.

<sup>7</sup> The full title of this book by *Abraham Booth* is **The Reign of Grace; the Stumblingblock of the Self-Righteous**. It is available on line at <https://www.monergism.com/blog/reign-grace-ebook>. The chapter titles are as follows:

1. Concerning the Signification of the term Grace
2. Of Grace, as it reigns in Salvation in general
3. Of Grace, as it reigns in our Election
4. Of Grace, as it reigns in our effectual Calling
5. Of Grace, as it reigns in a full, free, and everlasting Pardon
6. Of Grace, as it reigns in our Justification
7. Of Grace, as it reigns in our Adoption
8. Of Grace, as it reigns in our Sanctification
9. Concerning the Necessity and Usefulness of Holiness, and of Good Works
10. Of Grace, as it reigns in the Perseverance of the Saints to eternal Glory
11. Concerning the Person of Christ, by whom Grace reigns

GRACE, in our text, is compared to a sovereign. Now a sovereign, considered as such, is invested with regal power, and the highest authority. Grace, therefore, in her beneficent government, must exert and manifest sovereign power--must supersede the reign, and counteract the mighty and destructive operations of sin; or she cannot bring the sinner to eternal life. For the Holy Spirit has compared sin to a sovereign, whose reign terminates in death.

As *sin* appears, clothed in horrid deformity, and armed with destructive power, inflicting temporal death, and menacing eternal flames; so Grace appears on the throne, arrayed in the beauties of holiness, and smiling with divine benevolence; touched with feelings of the tenderest compassion, and armed with all the magnificence of invincible power. Fully determined to exert her authority and gratify her compassion, under the conduct of infinite wisdom; to the everlasting honor of inflexible justice, inviolable veracity, and every divine perfection—by rescuing the condemned offender from the jaws of destruction; by speaking peace to the alarmed consciences of damnable delinquents; by restoring to apostate creatures and vile miscreants a supreme love to God and delight in the ways of holiness; and, finally, by bringing them safe to everlasting honor and joy. In a word, the heart of this mighty sovereign is compassion itself: her looks are love; her language is balm to the bleeding soul, and her aria<sup>8</sup> salvation. Such a sovereign is GRACE. Those who are delivered by her must enjoy a complete salvation. Those who live under her most benign government must be happy indeed.<sup>9</sup>

**(4) Jesus Christ sets free all of His true disciples from the power of satan, in whose right they were by nature.** “Satan had possession of them, as a man his own goods; but Christ dispossesseth that strong man armed, alters their property, and recovers them out of his hand (Luke 11:21f).”<sup>10</sup> “He (God the Father) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13f). The devil is now enraged against us, but his power over us is broken. We have been set free from our enslavement to him. He cannot lead us about as he once could do and did, when we were, his willing, subservient slaves, who were in some ways quite happy being indentured to him. We now resist every effort that he makes in leading us about. Now the Lord Jesus leads the devil about, controlling him on a “chain”, as I were. The Lord in effect saying to him, as one would His slave: “This far and no more.” And he may snarl at us and throw at us whatever he may, but his designs and movements are held in check by our lord who has delivered us from his kingdom into His own.

**(5) “Christ frees His disciples from the poisonous sting and hurt of death: Kill us it can, but hurt us it cannot” (1 Cor. 15:55f).**<sup>11</sup>

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb. 2:14f)

### **3. What kind of freedom that is which begins upon our first believing and commencing to follow Him.**

Liberty may be regarded as available in two forms: there is *civil* liberty, and there is *sacred* liberty. “As to civil liberty, it belongs not to our present business.” But there is a consummate liberty, that which will be granted us one day in glory. “The liberty believers have at present is but a beginning liberty; they are freed in part from their spiritual enemies; but it is a growing liberty every day, and will be consummate and complete at last.”<sup>12</sup>

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12. Concerning the Work of Christ, through which Grace reigns

13. Concerning the Consummation of the Glorious Reign of Grace

<sup>8</sup> “Aria” is melody, tune, which is sung by a single voice. The “aria” of grace is salvation.

<sup>9</sup> Booth, **Reign of Grace**, pp. 48f.

<sup>10</sup> John Flavel, **Works of John Flavel, The**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), p. 272.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 274.

We have a wonderful liberty in this present life, for which we could never value enough and express enough our gratefulness to God for that which He has given us in Christ.

How could it be imagined that ever those who owed unto God more than ever they could pay by their own eternal sufferings; those that were under the dreadful curse and condemnation of the law, in the power and presence of satan, the strong man armed; those that were bound with so many chains in their spiritual prison; their understanding bound with ignorance, their wills with obstinacy, their hearts with impenetrable hardness, their affections with a thousand bewitching vanities, that sight their slavery so much, as industriously to oppose all instruments and means of deliverance; for such persons are set at liberty, notwithstanding all this, is the wonder of wonders, and will deservedly be marvelous in the eyes of believers forever.<sup>13</sup>

Again, everything that we have rehearsed regarding the blessing of God for the Christian to live before Him in righteousness, conforming his thinking and living to the law of God under King Jesus, is all due to the grace that God has lavished upon us in Christ in setting us free. Here again, are the words of **Abraham Booth** regarding our sole dependence upon the grace of God to enable us to live before God:

Or, if awake in your conscience, do you think it possible to effect your own deliverance? Alas! You are entirely without strength to perform any such thing; and grace was never intended as an auxiliary to help the weak, but well-disposed, to save themselves. The mercy of God and the gospel of Christ, were never designed to assist and reward the righteous, but to relieve the miserable and save the desperate--to deliver those who have no other assistance, nor any other hope. Were you acquainted with your abject vassalage, were you convinced by the Spirit of truth, that there is no possible way of escape, but by reigning grace; then would you cry for help, and then the relief that grace affords would be all your salvation, and all your desire. If, on the other hand, you are burdened with sin and harassed by clamorous fears of being cast into hell; if, sensible of your native depravity, the multiplied iniquities of your life, the many shameful defects attending your best services, and your present absolute unworthiness, you are ready to sink in despondency; O remember, that grace has erected her throne! This forbids despair. For her wonderful throne is erected, not on the ruins of justice, not on the dishonor of the law; but, on the BLOOD OF THE LAMB. The inconceivably perfect obedience, and the infinitely meritorious death of the Son of God, form its mighty basis. Here grace is highly exalted: here grace appears in state, dispensing her favors and showing her glory. To such a benevolent and condescending Sovereign, the basest may have free access. By such a powerful sovereign the most various, multiplied, and pressing wants (needs) may be relieved with the utmost ease and greatest alacrity (cheerful readiness). Remember, disconsolate soul, that the name, the nature, the office of GRACE ENTHRONED, loudly attest, that the greatest unworthiness and the most profligate (degenerate) crimes are no bar to the sinner in coming to Christ for salvation; in looking to sovereign favor for all that he wants. Nay, they demonstrate, that the unworthy and sinful are the only persons with whom grace is at all concerned: This is amazing! This is delightful!<sup>14</sup>

Let us now turn to another entirely different matter that is set forth in the passage under consideration—John 8:30-47.

## **II. Our Lord Jesus speaking of Physical and Spiritual children of Abraham**

Let us remember what was taking place as our Lord Jesus was taught the crowds in the temple arena. In verse 30 we had read that “many” from this large crowd had believed on Him. Not all of these “believers”, however, were actually true converts, who had embraced Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In verse 31 Jesus promised that the ones among these “believers” who continued in His word, would be His true disciples. And then Jesus gave them this promise in verse 32: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” This resulted in the reaction of many of the Jews present, when they understood by His words that He

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 275.

<sup>14</sup> Booth, **Reign of Grace**, p. 51.



was saying that they were in bondage. They protested, which resulted in our lord's response to them. Let us now read verses 33 through 47. In this text I have highlighted several phrases that identify and classify two peoples. Although all of them are physical descendants of their father Abraham, only some of them were the spiritual descendants of Abraham, whose Father was God. All the others, although physical descendants of Abraham, had the devil as their father.

<sup>33</sup>They answered Him, "***We are Abraham's descendants***, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup>And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. <sup>36</sup>Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

<sup>37</sup>"***I know that you are Abraham's descendants***, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. <sup>38</sup>I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with ***your father***."

<sup>39</sup>They answered and said to Him, "***Abraham is our father***."

Jesus said to them, "***If you were Abraham's children***, you would do the works of Abraham. <sup>40</sup>But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. <sup>41</sup>You do the deeds of ***your father***."

Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."

<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. <sup>43</sup>Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. <sup>44</sup>You are of ***your father the devil***, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. <sup>45</sup>But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. <sup>46</sup>Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? <sup>47</sup>He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because ***you are not of God***."

It is quite clear that the Lord Jesus here set forth the distinction between ***physical Israel*** and ***spiritual Israel***. As Paul would later state, so our Lord set forth here: "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). In other words, they are not all members of spiritual Israel who are physically born of physical Israel.

This is a very informative passage. If it were properly and widely taught in the churches, it would correct much errant thinking about the identity of the true people of God. Many evangelicals (i.e. dispensationalists) believe wrongly that the "true" people of God are all the physical descendants of Abraham, that is, ethnic Jews. What distinguishes them as the people of God is their physical birth that is in the lineage of Abraham. Abraham is their father, so they will inherit God's promises to Abraham and to his descendants. But the Lord Jesus made it very clear that physical birth--Jewish ethnicity-- is not what constitutes or distinguishes the true people of God. Only those who have the same faith that Abraham had, may rightly be called his children to whom God has promised His spiritual blessing, distinguishing them as His people. Only the spiritual children of Abraham will inherit everlasting life.

By the way, I believe what our Lord taught in these verses is also quite devastating to the theology that is held by our paedobaptist friends. They maintain that the physical descendants of believing parents are children belonging to the new covenant in Christ, because God has promised, they claim, His blessing of salvation belongs to the physical descendants of believers. That could not be said of these physical descendants of Abraham in John 8, nor can that be said of physical descendants of believers today.<sup>15</sup>

Now it is true that God had promised great blessing to the physical descendants of Abraham. But when reading the Holy Scriptures one must distinguish between God's promises to Abraham's physical seed and

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<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Johnson rightly stated, "Yet both Dispensationalism and Presbyterian covenantalism stumble at the same point. For they identify 'a physical seed' (either the unbelieving Jew or the unbelieving child of the believer) as belonging to the true people of God. What distinguishes Baptist covenant theology from both Dispensationalism and Presbyterian covenant theology is the teaching that *believers alone* are and always have been the only *true people of God*. Jeffrey D. Johnson, **The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant and Biblical Theology** (Free Grace Press, 2014), p. 26.

God's promises to Abraham's spiritual seed, for they are distinct from one another. The differences may be seen as follows:

- (1) God's promise to Abraham's physical descendants (the males who were physically circumcised), was that of a physical, earthly, political and temporal kingdom--Israel, which would occupy a physical land--Canaan, which would be ruled by a physical king--a son of David.
- (2) God's promise to Abraham's spiritual descendants (who are spiritually circumcised), was that of a spiritual eternal kingdom--the church, which will one day dwell in the new heavens and earth-- the new Jerusalem, which would be ruled by a spiritual King--Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of David.

Now, although Israel's entrance and occupation of Canaan was fulfilled by God due to the unconditional promise of God to the Patriarchs, the continuance of Israel in the land, and the continuance of the physical descendants as the earthly people of God was contingent on the Jews ordering their national life in the Promised Land according to God's law. If and when Israel failed and refused to so order its national life, God would eject this people from the land. And this is what happened historically when Israel was exiled from the Promised Land (722, 587 BC).

But thankfully, the Lord promised that He would save unto Himself a remnant of the physical descendants of Abraham. He promised to cause them to return to their land, which He fulfilled. He then sent the Messiah to them to establish the everlasting kingdom that He had promised to David, that one of his descendants would reign forever over the house of Israel. Jesus Christ came and through His life and death and resurrection brought into fulfillment this promised kingdom. Only the spiritual descendants of Abraham, true disciples of Jesus Christ, are granted citizenship in this kingdom.

But not only are the spiritual descendants of Abraham comprised of ethnic Jewish people, but Gentile believers in Jesus Christ are also regarded as the promised children of Abraham, who inherit God's promises to Abraham. We read this in many places in the New Testament:

Paul wrote to the Gentile Christians in the churches of Galatia, declaring them to be the promised children of Abraham who inherit the promises that God gave to Abraham.

<sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. <sup>23</sup>But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, <sup>24</sup>which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— <sup>25</sup>for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— <sup>26</sup>but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. <sup>27</sup>For it is written:

“Rejoice, O barren,  
You who do not bear!  
Break forth and shout,  
You who are not in labor!  
For the desolate has many more children  
Than she who has a husband.”

<sup>28</sup>*Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.* <sup>29</sup>But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. <sup>30</sup>Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” <sup>31</sup>So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

Paul declared to the church at Rome that all believers, even Gentile believers, were the promised children of Abraham. After speaking of the blessing that Abraham experienced of being justified by and before God through faith alone, he wrote of all believers, both Jewish and Gentile, that they were all children of Abraham. Here is Romans 4:9ff:

<sup>9</sup>*Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also?* For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. <sup>10</sup>How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. <sup>11</sup>And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, *that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised*, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, <sup>12</sup>and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

<sup>13</sup>For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, <sup>15</sup>because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup>Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, *who is the father of us all* <sup>17</sup>(as it is written, *“I have made you a father of many nations”*) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; <sup>18</sup>who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so *that he became the father of many nations*, according to what was spoken, *“So shall your descendants be.”*

We can return to Galatians 3:26-29, in which we read the following words written to Gentile Christians:

<sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

It is wrong to believe that God’s promises to the Jewish people as Jewish people go beyond what they enjoyed under the Old Testament economy. Their place and position in the world as a distinct nation in covenant relationship with God was a temporary relationship that only lasted as long as they had continued to keep that Mosaic covenant that God had established with them at Mount Sinai. They broke that covenant long ago, and what replaced that covenant was God’s promise of a new covenant in Jesus Christ. God has established that covenant in Christ through His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ is presently enthroned over all of the spiritual offspring of Abraham, those who believe and worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.  
The Lord be with you all. (2 Thess. 3:16)

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