



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 8:31-38 Commentary New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study Commentary*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [*International Bible Study Forum*](#).

(John 8:31) Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;

From the “Parable of the Four Soils,” also called the “Parable of the Sower,” in Mark 4:1-9, we know Jesus knew that not every believer would continue in His word. True discipleship involves learning and doing what we have learned, believing and obeying the truths we have learned from Jesus, and learning more truths and obeying more truths as we study the Bible, grow in grace, seek the will of God, and obey God. True belief in Jesus includes

trusting Jesus enough to do what He commands and seeking to do the will of His Father and Him in every situation as the loving Holy Spirit guides and empowers us to serve God and others.

(John 8:32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

To know the truth about God and true reality a person must know Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (see John 14:6). A true disciple of Jesus will live according to Jesus' way which can only come from continuing in His true word, the Bible. By living according to the truth and way of life that Jesus taught and showed, we will learn the truth and more truths every day. The Truth that is Jesus and the truths He taught in the Bible can be lived out in our daily lives when He uses the truth and frees us from slavery to sin and fills us with the Holy Spirit, who interprets the truths of Jesus to us, gives us understanding of His truths, and helps us apply them practically in everyday situations. Freedom from slavery to some sins may be instantaneous. Freedom from slavery to other sins may be gradual. Jesus uses the new truths we learn each day to slowly release us from the bonds that bind us to sinful habits, both known to us now and revealed to us as we obey Him. In the ways Jesus frees us from slavery to sin we learn to totally depend on Jesus for everything. God is glorified through our daily dependence on Jesus as our Lord and Savior from sin.

(John 8:33) They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

The Jews did not understand that Jesus spoke of the moral and spiritual slavery to sin that enslaved them, or else they did not want to face the truth about themselves that Jesus proclaimed—that they lived in bondage to sin. Even as descendants of Abraham, the Jews were enslaved by the Egyptians for 400 years, by the Babylonians for 70 years, and by the Romans even as they denied ever being enslaved. They only enjoyed “freedom,” only when they cooperated with and obeyed the Romans. They were slaves morally and spiritually to the devil who tempted them directly and indirectly through this world’s systems and their own fleshly desires. Though they might have thought they were free as special children of God, as Abraham’s children, they were not truly morally, physically, or spiritually free.

(John 8:34) Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

Jesus answered their question immediately, and He applied His answer directly to them. He made certain they understood His meaning, or at least would not have a good excuse for misunderstanding Him. Those who practice sin are slaves of sin. Slaves of sin practice sin. Unless freed by

Jesus, no slave of sin can escape the practice of sin. Slaves of sin do not have the power to overcome all the temptations that come to them, though they may be able to overcome some temptations and bad habits. As their Lord and Savior, the true disciples of Jesus are His friends and servants, and His adopted brothers and sisters in the household of God. Though true disciples still sin sometimes, practicing sin is not the direction of their lives. The direction of their lives is following Jesus. They still sin and stray away from Jesus sometimes, but being found by Jesus, He returns them to the fold, as the “Parable of the Lost Sheep” in Luke 15:1-7 illustrates.

(John 8:35) The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has a permanent place in the household of God. Jesus will be in the household of God forever. One who says they believe in Jesus but does not continue in His word as a true disciple remains a slave of sin and does not have a permanent place in the household of God. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, did not continue in Jesus’ word but remained a slave of sin; therefore, he did not have a permanent place in the household of God with Jesus and His true disciples.

(John 8:36) So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Jesus made and still makes His true disciples free from slavery to sin. Jesus freed Peter from slavery to sin. Peter continued in the word of Jesus as a true disciple of Jesus. Yet, Peter tempted Jesus not to go to the cross, and on Jesus' way to the cross, Peter denied Jesus three times. Still, committing sin was not the direction of Peter's life; following Jesus was Peter's direction and destiny. Peter's sins were exceptions to the way Peter wanted to live as a true disciple of Jesus by continuing in His word. On the other hand, as a slave of sin, Judas always practiced stealing and looked for new ways to steal. When Judas wanted to sell the expensive perfume that Mary used to anoint Jesus' feet, Judas really wanted to steal the money. In John 12:5, when Judas asked, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" In John 12:6, John explained, "He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it."

Judas was a slave of sin, a slave to the sin of stealing and other sins; therefore, when Judas betrayed Jesus for silver, his betrayal for money was consistent with the direction of his greedy sinful life. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus taught, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." In spite of all Judas learned from Jesus, Judas did not continue in the words of Jesus and remained a slave of sin.

(John 8:37) I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word.

The Jews were physical descendants of Abraham, but not all of them were spiritual descendants of Abraham. From the beginning, Jesus' true disciples were all descendants of Abraham and they became spiritual descendants of Abraham through faith in Him. Later, Gentiles became spiritual descendants of Abraham through faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and He freed them from slavery to sin. Those who wanted to kill Jesus were so full of evil and such slaves to sin that there was no room in them to consider the truth of Jesus' words or continue in Jesus' words.

(John 8:38) I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

Once again, Jesus declared that He taught them what He had learned from His Father in heaven. He had been in the Father's presence from eternity past, He remained in the Father's presence throughout His ministry on earth, and He would return to His Father's presence after His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven—always and forever in the presence of His Father in the household of God.

The New Testament Greek text of this verse can be read and interpreted in two ways. Of the four translations we are studying in the *International Bible Study Commentary*, only the *New Revised Standard Version* of this text reads, “you should do what you have heard from the Father,” which of course everyone should do, but only those who continue in the word of Jesus as His true disciples can do. They had heard from the Father in their Scriptures and from Jesus, but they refused to follow what they heard from the Father or Jesus. In Mark 7:9, Jesus said, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!”

The other three translations read essentially the same. The *King James Version* reads, “ye do that which ye have seen with your father.”

The *New American Standard Bible* reads, “therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.”

The *New International Version* reads, “you are doing what you have heard from your father.”

These three readings are consistent with Jesus’ words in John 8:44, “You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies,” a verse we will study in our next Bible study lesson on John 8:39-47.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What is a disciple? How did Jesus describe a true disciple of His?
2. If you are a true disciple of Jesus, what will be the result?
3. How is Jesus teaching in these verses often misunderstood?
4. What kind of slavery was Jesus talking about? How does a person become that type of slave?
5. Who can free us from the slavery Jesus talked about and how did Jesus describe that freedom?

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