



Truth: The Key to Freedom

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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Introduction:

"Why do I feel the way I do?" the troubled person cries. "Why am I always so afraid, anxious, depressed, angry, etc.?" "Why do I always mess up? Why am I such a failure? What's wrong with me?" Most people look for some external fault. "It's this woman you gave me. She's so irritating." "It's my husband. He's such a jerk." "It's my friends. They don't care about me." "It's the weather." "It's my kids. They are horrendous." "It's my job. If my boss would quit mistreating me..." "It's my church. The preacher is mean. The elders don't care. Nobody wants to be my friend." On and on the list goes as we search for someone or something outside to blame for all the problems we are having inside. We may even spend some time spinning our wheels trying to fix other people, thinking if we can get them to change, we'll be good. Or, we sit helplessly waiting for one of those externals to change so our struggle can be resolved. But it never quite happens. We end up thinking it is hopeless. It doesn't have to be this way for us. We don't have to be tossed about by the fickle fits of everyone around us. We don't have to be at the mercy of all these external forces. We can take up arms against all of this and end it, finding happiness, joy, peace. After all, doesn't God promise that the fruit of the Spirit includes joy and peace (**Galatians 5:22-23**). We can have that. Would you like to know how?

Discussion:

I. It's true; look at Paul.

- A. Before I explain the biblical secret, I want to prove to you it is possible. Consider the example of the apostle Paul. If anyone should be held captive by anxiety, fear, depression, anger, guilt, and shame, it's Paul.
- B. Remember his background. According to **Acts 26:9-11**, Paul had been a persecutor. According to **I Timothy 1:12-15**, he saw himself as the foremost of sinners. According to **Romans 7:9-11**, Paul had struggled with covetousness despite all his best efforts to overcome it on his own. Then he became a Christian. You would think life would have become easy for him. However, in **Acts 16:22-24**, Paul was stripped, beaten with rods, and then put in stocks. According to **II Corinthians 11:24-28**, Paul had been beaten with rods three times, beaten by the Jews five times, stoned once, shipwrecked three times, adrift at sea for a night and day once, in constant danger, constantly laboring, spent many sleepless nights, often going without food and drink. In **II Timothy 4:16**, despite all Paul had done for folks, he was deserted by everyone when he was on trial. None of his friends defended him. In **Philippians 1:7**, he was imprisoned. In **Philippians 1:17-18**, his enemies added to his burden by preaching from fraudulent motives. According to **Philippians 1:19-23; 2:17**, he faced potential death. According to **Philippians 3:12**, after so many years as a Christian, he still couldn't claim perfection, which means he had failed again and again.
- C. I consider this and I am ashamed of how I've reacted to many of my minor issues. If this had been me, I would have been in tears. I would have been walking around in depression. I would have wondered why God was punishing me. I would have cried out in despair. I probably would have been a nervous wreck, exploding at the drop of a hat with everyone around me. And yet, that isn't Paul.
- D. In **Acts 16:25**, as Paul's blood mingled with the dirt and grime of the prison floor, as he listened to the moaning of other prisoners, as the rats skittered around, Paul sang hymns and prayed. In **Philippians**, Paul mentions joy and rejoicing 14 times. Our emotions and reactions are not simply a determined byproduct of what happens to us. So, what is the key? How can we have this same kind of joy and happiness when it seems like everything is falling apart around us. How did Paul do it?

II. The truth will set you free.

- A. The answer is found in **John 8:32**. Jesus said, "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (ESV). Think about this for just a moment. If freedom is found in truth, then all captivity comes from falsehood. According to **John 8:44**, falsehood comes from the devil. He is the father of lies. That means all lies have their origin in him. Therefore, all captivity comes from him. If you are held captive by sin, depression, anxiety, fear, anger, guilt, shame, etc. this isn't natural. It's earthly and demonic, because all that is false to the truth is earthly and demonic (cf. **James 3:14-15**).
- B. Please do not misunderstand. I'm not saying every sad, scared, anxious, angry, guilty, shameful feeling comes from the devil. Just read a few psalms sometime to discover real emotions. But if you are held cap-

tive by these things, you are listening to his lies. Truth sets us free; falsehood holds us captive. According to **Luke 4:18**, Jesus came to set the captives free. If you are held captive by sin, by depression, by anxiety, by lack of self-control, by anger, by anything, Jesus came to set you free from that. How did He do that? Obviously, as we've heard again and again, He offered the sacrifice that cleanses us. However, there is a part of Jesus that we often overlook as we consider how to live in that sacrifice. Consider **John 14:6**. Jesus is the embodiment of truth. He is the path to freedom. Further, He sent the Holy Spirit to guide the way into all truth (**John 16:13**). The Spirit revealed God's Word which is also truth (**John 17:17**). Jesus has armed us with truth so we might destroy every stronghold that might try to hold us captive (cf. **II Corinthians 10:5**).

- C. But how does this work practically. We have to learn to accept the very shocking truth. The reason we feel the way we do is not because of what is happening to us. We feel the way we do because of what we think about what is happening to us. The KJV, NKJV, and NASB all translate **Proverbs 23:7** similarly: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (NKJV). While that passage presents this point in the specific context of a miser who is sharing his goods with you, the point is this is the way people are. It's not the behavior that defines a person, it is his thinking. Sometimes we try to willpower and white-knuckle our behavior into alignment, but that never works for long. This miser may force his way to share, but as he thinks in his heart is what he really is, and eventually his resentment at sharing will be against you.
- D. Here is the problem. As **Jeremiah 17:9** says, "The heart is deceitful above all things..." That is, the heart that has abandoned the Lord through sin has become deceitful. Understand that in ancient Jewish culture the heart did not represent the seat of the emotions. For the ancient Hebrews, the seat of emotion was the gut or the bowels (see **Genesis 43:30** in the KJV). The heart was the seat of the thinking and the will (see **Matthew 9:4**). It is what we call the mind. What is the problem? Our thinking is deceitful. **Romans 1:21-23** gives an illustration. Having become futile in their thinking, their hearts/minds were darkened, and they behaved as fools. Jesus came to set us free from our deceitful thinking with His truth. Through Jesus, who is the truth, our thinking will become useful, our heart/minds will be enlightened (cf. **Ephesians 1:17-18**), and our behavior will align with Jesus. No wonder Paul, in **Philippians 4:8**, tells us to get our thinking under control. Think about true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, praise-worthy things. As we allow Jesus to control our thinking, we will be set free from all that holds us captive.

III. The three-step plan for pursuing liberation.

- A. Considering the above, there is basically a three-step plan for those of us who are in Jesus Christ to find freedom from sin, emotional bondage, spiritual traps, and psychological captivity. This plan is adapted from William Backus and Marie Chapman in their book Telling Yourself the Truth.¹
- B. *Identify the falsehoods you believe.* Backus and Chapman call these "misbeliefs." As we've already noted, if truth brings freedom, captivity comes from falsehood. The first step in breaking free is identifying the falsehood. The hard part about this is that many times there is some truth in the false belief Satan presents.
 - 1. Consider the lie Satan told Eve in **Genesis 3:4-5**. There was some truth in that statement. She wouldn't die, at least not physically. That was true. She would become more like God. She would have new understanding that God already had. The lie was that she would like that state more. The lie was that God was holding back something beneficial. The lie was that she wouldn't die at all. She would, in fact, die spiritually. The lie was that it would be just awful if she didn't know good and evil more accurately. It is hard sometimes to wade through the truths that we distort to accept the lies that ensnare us. But that is exactly what we have to do.
 - 2. As another example, consider Job and his three friends. For a great deal of the book, Job was ensnared in despair and anger with his friends. And for most of the book, the friends were ensnared in arrogance and anger against Job. What was the problem? They all believed the same lie—all negative and painful experiences are God's judgment on sin. Job also believed the lie that God should give account to man for his actions. He also seemed to believe the lie that he needed the approval of his friends. After all, if he had just rested in God's knowledge that Job was right in His eyes, and not been so bent on convincing his friends, we wouldn't have a 42 chapter book. Part of Job's desire for God to give an account to him was so he could be vindicated before his friends.
 - 3. Another example is Martha in **Luke 10:38-42**. Jesus said her problem was being anxious and bothered by so many things. She was being held captive by these anxieties rather than set free by the one necessary thing. What kind of lies did she believe? Obviously, the specific is not revealed to us. But I can consider some possibilities. She believed it would be simply awful if folks said something negative about

¹ William Backus and Marie Chapman, Telling Yourself the Truth, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, 2000, p 15.

the state of her house or her hospitality. She believed everyone else, or at least Mary, should place the exact same importance on everything she did. She believed it was just awful if Mary didn't help with the serving. She believed she was entitled to some help and Mary was obligated to be that help. None of these things were true. But because she believed them and said them to herself, these misbeliefs impacted her behavior and even led her to receive a rebuke from Jesus about her anxiety and anger.

- C. *Remove the falsehoods:* Having identified the falsehoods, get rid of them. Deny them. Attack them. Argue with them. Hit them head on. If you are telling yourself it is absolutely awful because things aren't going your way, argue with that. You may even need to vocally tell yourself, "No it's not. It is preferable for things to go my way, but I'll make it if they don't." As **II Corinthians 10:5** says, we need to take false thoughts that are raised up against the knowledge of God captive. As a friend of mine says, you can't keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair. The same is true with this kind of stinking thinking. You may not be able to keep stray false thoughts from entering your mind, especially now that you've fed on these falsehoods so long. But you can keep them from lingering there. At this point, it will be good for you to enlist the help of your friends. As **Psalms 141:5** explains, the rebuke of a friend is like oil on the head. We need to enlist friends who will not allow our falsehoods to go unchallenged.
- D. *Replace the falsehoods with truth:* It really is interesting how many times Jesus attacked falsehoods and replaced them with truth. Consider passages like **Matthew 5:17; 6:7; Luke 13:1-5**. Jesus repeatedly challenged false thinking and strived to replace it with true thinking. Nature abhors a vacuum. So does our thinking. We can't actually remove the falsehoods if we don't replace them with truth. Otherwise, when the going gets rough, our thinking will just go back to its old deceitful ways. Consider the truths Paul understood, allowing him to be the example we started with.
 - 1. What truth did Paul grasp in **Acts 16:25**, allowing him to praise God while in stocks after a beating with rods? He understood the truth he wrote in **Romans 8:31-39**. If God was for him, it didn't matter if the entire Roman Empire was against him. Further, he knew the whole Roman Army couldn't separate him from the love of God. There was nothing about this beating that changed God's love for him.
 - 2. In **II Timothy 4:16**, Paul didn't sink in to the captivity of depression over the abandonment of his friends because he focused on the truth of God's presence and protection (**II Timothy 4:17-18**).
 - 3. In **Philippians 1:19-23**, Paul was able to face death without being held captive by fear and anxiety, not because he believed he would be delivered from it. Rather, he understood the truth that death for the Christian is not a bad thing. It was gain. We don't have to grieve like those who have no hope (cf. **I Thessalonians 4:13**). Rather, we can rejoice in the face of death because we know death means going to be with Christ (**Philippians 1:23**).
- E. We could go on and on with examples in the Bible of false beliefs causing problems and truth setting folks free. I trust you see the point. If you are being held captive by something, look for the falsehood holding you captive, remove it, and replace it with the truth. That is the key. That is the only thing that will set you free.

Conclusion:

Why do you feel the way you do? Because of the things you think. Jesus is the truth. The Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The Bible is the Word of truth. Jesus came to set captives free. He does it with truth. Sadly, too many Christians accept forgiveness but resign themselves to bondage. That's like a person who has been raised from the dead deciding to continue to live in a tomb. Don't linger in the bondage. The truth of Jesus will set you free if you will let it.