

VERILY, VERILY (5)—*J. van Dijk*

We have now come to John 8. This chapter is a continuation of the seventh, where we read in verse 2 that "the tabernacles, the feast of the Jews, was near." This feast speaks of the coming Millennium, when Satan will be bound (Rev. 20:2) and righteousness will reign, the time to which Romans 8:21 alludes. Bondage will no longer exist. But until that time arrives, everyone should realize that they are in bondage, unless they have been set free. And the only One who can set them free is Jehovah, I AM THAT I AM. This is the theme of this set of occurrences of the words, "Verily, verily..."

The previous set dealt with our need of coming to the Lord as the source of life — it was a matter of life and death. It related to the remark in Ephesians 2:1: "And you being dead in trespasses and sins... This time we have a different aspect, relating to Romans 5-8, where we find man alive in sin. Being alive, he is in bondage. We need to recognize this basic spiritual fact before we can have the desire to be set free from this awful bondage.

The Lord addressed this problem while speaking to those Jews who believed Him (8:31). From the conversation we notice how shallow their belief was: they had no understanding of their own need. The Lord said to them that if they were genuine believers, they would abide in His Word, and the truth would set them free. Intellectually, they felt compelled to acknowledge that He must be the Christ. But this is not a question for the intellect, but for the heart, and so the Lord drew out what was in theirs. His mention of setting free, caused them to display what they were: "We are Abraham's seed, and have never been under bondage to anyone."

How to take such a remark? They certainly were not free politically. Were they simply too proud to admit that? Or did they take the Lord's words in a spiritual sense, and feel that they were spiritually secure by their being the offspring of Abraham?

There are many "Christians" today who feel secure by the fact that their parents had them baptized, that they go to church, or that they do good to their neighbour. "My well-ordered life will certainly be taken into account by a righteous God, won't it? Bondage? Bondage to whom? To sin? Sure, I have my failures, my human weaknesses, but *sin*? What do you think I am, anyway? A heathen?" So they say.

Then there are others who deal with this differently. They say, "I've come to be free. Remember those old Victorian days? I've cast aside these restricting bonds which Christianity had brought over mankind. Now I'm free and let my "love and affections" take its course." They do what they want, not caring that everything they do is sin and will only bring judgment over them. They are bound to sin and can only commit sin. They don't know their own bondage.

This the Lord established when He said, "Verily, verily, I say to you, Every one that practices sin is the bondman of sin." The conversation that follows shows the degree to which this goes. The Lord's confronting these "Jews who believed in Him" with their true nature brought out their unbelief. The Lord had said, "If ye abide in My Word, ye are truly My disciples," and here they demonstrated their unwillingness to do that: they rejected the Lord's appraisal of their character. Willingness to accept what the Lord says about us distinguishes true disciples from those who follow but are not genuine. Today it is still the same: apply God's Word to the activities of a person and there will soon be a demonstration of the flesh unless the person has a true, living relationship with the Lord.

It may be of help to us to take note of what the Lord said in verses 43 and 44. "Why do ye not know My speech?" Would that be a matter of understanding, of human intellect? The Lord continued, "Because ye cannot hear My Word. Ye are of the devil..." There is just no way of coming to the Lord "through the back door." The first thing one must do is acknowledge one's own sinfulness and inability (i.e., repent); lacking this there cannot be any relationship with the Lord. It is the first and essential requirement. The Lord adds to this in verse 47, "He that is of God hears the words of God: therefore ye hear [them] not, because ye are not of God." Man is entirely incapable in himself to hear God's Word. He must begin by hearing God's verdict as to his condition and acknowledge this to be true. Without having done this, man remains in the realm of Satan.

Let us use this opportunity to look at what God's Word says about bondage. Romans 6:23 says: "The *wages* of sin [is] death; but the act of favour of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Lord takes up this situation in His words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If any one shall keep My Word, he shall never see death" (Jn. 8:51). Death is the outcome of

bondage to sin; eternal life is the outcome of being set free by the Son. "Death" in these verses is not physical death, but spiritual death, eternal separation from God. Every Christian may know that he has been crucified with Christ and has been justified from sin (Rom. 6:6-7). He has been freed from its bondage. Now the believer can reckon himself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Sin will no longer have dominion over the believer for he is not under law (Rom. 6:14). Yet Romans does not present our new condition as one of freedom, but as one of being a bondman to righteousness. Our former state had death as its fruit; now we have holiness as its fruit. This holiness, however, is not produced by following the law, for we are dead to the law (Rom. 7:4) and consequently clear from the law (7:6). As long as we do not understand this, we may suffer under the oppressing experience of Romans 7:14-24. The law brings a curse (Gal. 3:10) — this holds true for Christians and non-Christians alike. If we are under the law (positionally the Christian isn't, but many nevertheless put themselves under law), we are under its curse. God knows our incapability to keep the law, and so has given us a far better guide for living. The law was a written requirement; the Christian's Guide is a Person: the indwelling Spirit. All the Christian must do to produce fruit toward God is to live in close communion with his God and Father. One who lives this way continually says, "Oh God, I can't! Hold my hand. Direct my path. Show me the way." He knows the truth of the Lord's words: "Without Me ye can do nothing." It is an acknowledgement of a personal lack of strength and a need for total reliance upon God's faithfulness to cause us to live pleasing to Himself through the Spirit. "The just shall live on the principle of faith" (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 4:11). "Walk in [the] Spirit, and ye shall no way fulfil flesh's lust" (Gal. 5:16).

This is the truth which forms the background for the Lord's words. By nature we are bondmen of sin, but thanks to God's grace, those who accept the Word of God may walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). God has given them a new life, they are born again, and they will not see death. And note well that the Lord did not say, that they *may* not see death, He said that they "*shall never see death*"! It is an absolute certainty, depending upon God's faithfulness towards them who have trusted in the efficacy of the work of the Lord Jesus.

But how can the Word of the Lord Jesus have such power that those who keep it will never die? It is because of who He is: the One greater than Abraham — greater than all! The Lord made this clear by saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

That sounds strange. Shouldn't that read, "Before Abraham was, I was"? That might be more correct grammatically, but there is something more than grammar involved here. The Lord here used His name. "I AM," the same as the Old Testament's Jehovah," the "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). "I AM" Himself had come among His people. Once again the Lord brought His own Person into the discussion. The Lord had left unsaid some precious facts in His discourse with the ones who seemed to believe in Him. When they were confronted with the truth of God, however, they showed their true character in their unwillingness to accept it. Worse yet, when they were confronted with whom the Lord is, they actually took up stones to kill Him. Man in the flesh shows his enmity with God in His presence. By doing this, they vividly demonstrated the truth of all that the Lord had said concerning them in the verses that went before: "Ye are of the devil, as [your] father."

This is instructive for us: it teaches us what to expect from persons who have only the outward show of religion and not true life from God, and the necessity of discernment, for not all who say, "Lord, Lord," are truly the Lord's. As the Lord, we too should not pursue discussions with such persons; once we have shown them their condition before God, we should commit them to Him. No amount of discussion will help; only the Spirit of God is able to convict them of their sinfulness and their need of a Saviour. But when we see that they recognize their sinfulness, we know that God has been working in their heart, and perhaps we may be used of Him to present more of the precious Good News to them, so that they too may come to know Him who is before Abraham was.

Some of our readers may fall into the same class as those with whom the Lord had this discussion. Are you one of those who get angry when your condition is pointed out to you? If so, you should examine yourself in the Lord's presence, for I fear that you may be one of those who "believe," but whose belief does not go any deeper than that of those who were so severely admonished by our Lord. Your anger gives you away, my friend. True, you have always led a God-fearing life (at least what you considered to be God-fearing), but so had these Jews, who were certainly not indifferent to spiritual things. They did not, however, know their own condition. Acknowledge, then, that there is no good in you. If you do so truthfully, you will no longer become angry when there is a need to consider your walk, talk, and actions in the light of God's Word. The change God will bring to your heart will bring about an acknowledgement that *indeed* no good dwells in your flesh. I hope that these passages may prove helpful to you. What a joy it will be when pretense gives place to reality and you know what it is to be free indeed. May God grant this to you.

To be cont'd

12. Lamed — Verses 89-96

- a. Learner — Isa. 8:16, 50:4
- b. To Learn — Isa. 1:17, Dt. 4:10
- c. To teach — Ps. 143:10
- d. To cause to Learn — Ezra. 7:10
- e. The number 30 — Num. 4:3, 23

The number 30 represents the age at which a priest could commence priestly service (cf. Lk. 3:23, Num. 4:3).

In the first section, we were not told where the way was leading; even in the fourth (Daleth — "door"), the door was not yet revealed as the door to Heaven. In this section, however, we have a turning point. Here in verse 89, He who speaks from the heavens is becoming more openly revealed. The saint who pays attention can expect to receive Heaven-taught assurance (vv. 92, 93, 94, 95) and can be found standing on the faithfulness of Him who speaks from Heaven: "I am Thine" (v. 94).

13. Mem — Verses 97-104

- a. Water — Ps. 18:16, 23:2; Isa. 8:6, 55:11; Jer. 2:13; Ezek. 47:1-9
- b. Spot, blemish — Lev. 21:21
- c. Water that proves to be bitter — Gen. 1:2; Ex. 15:23; Isa. 43:2

In every verse in this section we can see "The washing of water by the Word." In Isaiah 8:6-7 we read about two kinds of water: the waters of Shiloah that go softly and the waters of the river, strong and many ("the spirit of bondage again for fear"). The latter waters we find in various forms: the teaching of the enemies (vv. 98, 99), the seductive idolatries of the ancients (v. 100), the ways of the evil one (v. 101), and the false way (v. 104).

In this section we see how the saint who has learned to drink the Living Water (v. 103) is kept by the Word and the power of God from all the wiles of the enemy; though there is conflict and temptation, the Holy Spirit will keep his feet through the Word (v. 101).

14. Nun — Verses 105-112

- a. Increase, flourish — Ps. 72:16
- b. Offspring — Isa. 14:22 ("son")
- c. Fish (Aramaic in Talmud)

Why was Joshua a true son of Nun? Because "He departed not from within the tent" (Ex. 33:11). Joshua walked in the path lit only by the Word of God (v. 105). Taking the Word (the promises) as his inheritance (v. 111), he continually allowed the Holy Spirit to have His way (v. 106) and to produce His fruit (v. 108) though the wicked one laid many snares (vv. 109, 110). Yet, Joshua continually followed the Captain of Jehovah's army who had the drawn sword in His hand (vv. 105, 107 - "Thy Word"). Notice how the Holy Spirit is producing fruit (increase) in the heart of the saint (vv. 111, 112) who is willing to trust to the end without knowing what a day will bring forth.

15. Samech — Verses 113-120

- a. Support — Ps. 119:116 ("uphold"), 1 Chr. 26:7 (Semachiah), Song 2:5 ("sustain," or "stay").

The Word of God beautifully explains this word in 1 Chronicles 26:7. Samachiah is a strong man because, as his name suggests, he is supported by the Lord. Verse 116 says: "*Samech* me according to Thy Word." This section clearly shows us that we are kept (v. 114) by the power of God (vv. 118, 119) through faith (v. 113), and that faith and safety together come from loving (v. 113) and hearing (v. 117) the Word of God.

16. Ain — Verses 121-128

- a. Eye — Ps. 32:8, 33:18
- b. Fountain — Gen. 24:13

The saint is learning (v. 123) not to look anywhere in this world but to Jesus and His Word. Like Abraham's servant (v. 125), we are standing beside a well — a well of living water (v. 128) containing the True Riches (v. 127). Like the Lord at Jacob's well (John 4), we too may be wearied from our journey (vv. 121, 122) surrounded by opposition (v. 126). We look for the

Lord to work (v. 126) in our hearts and in those of others. It is remarkable that nothing is said here about the eye of the Lord; everything here relates only to those who love the Word and know His promises in their hearts.

To be cont'd

OUTLINES FOR BIBLE TEACHINGS (5)

9. ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION; DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH — Genesis 18:16-19:30

Outline

1. God announces Sodom's Judgment Gen. 18:16-21
2. Abraham's intercession Gen. 18:22-33
3. The depraved condition at Sodom Gen. 19:1-11
4. Lot's deliverance Gen. 19:12-23
5. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah Gen. 19:24-29

Explanation

1. God shared with Abraham His plans regarding Sodom and Gomorrah (Jn. 15:14, 15; Jas. 2:23).
2. Abraham used this honour to intercede (1 Tim. 2:1-4).
3. Lot had become so enmeshed in the immoral conditions of his surroundings that he was willing to sacrifice his daughters for the protection of God's messengers, not realizing that they possessed divine power.
4. Lot was delivered through Abraham's intercession (19:29; 2 Pet. 3:9).
5. Sodom and Gomorrah were totally destroyed by fire and brimstone from Heaven.

Lesson

God could speak with Abraham as He did because of his position:

(a) *Before* God, he was righteous; This is the essential character of all true believers. Lot had this in common with Abraham (2 Pe. 2:7).

(b) *With* God, he was faithful and separated. This was Abraham's position (not Lot's) — an essential for communion with God.

(c) *For* God, he served in testimony and intercession.

All true, meaningful service flows from communion.

Lot sat in the gate, which was the place where governmental authority was exercised. For the sake of outward advantage, he walked among the world and led a weak life of faith, far from God (2 Pet. 2:8; 1 Jn. 2:15), Meanwhile he "tormented his righteous soul" with the filthy manner of life of the wicked men in Sodom and Gomorrah. He had a position of authority — sitting in the gate of Sodom — but had lost his testimony, and was spiritually fruitless.

The overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of the judgment to come upon the world of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:6, 3:10). Although Lot's wife escaped the destruction, she met death through worldliness and disobedience (Lk. 17:32, 33). She is a picture of those who call themselves "Christians" without possessing life from God.

10. BIRTH OF ISAAC; HAGAR SENT AWAY; ABRAHAM'S OFFERING OF ISAAC — Genesis 21:1-21 and 22:1-24

Outline

1. Birth of Isaac Gen. 21:1-8
2. Ishmael cast out Gen. 21:9-21
3. The offering of Isaac Gen. 22:1-19
4. The birth of Rebecca Gen. 22:20-24

Explanation

1. Isaac's birth was possible only through God's intervention. Both Abraham and Sarah were too old to expect children (Heb. 11:11-12).
2. Ishmael was cast out, apparently at God's command (Gal. 4:30). God cared for Ishmael and promised to make him into a nation for Abraham's sake.
3. The Lord demanded unconditional obedience from Abraham, even the sacrifice of the one dearest to him.
4. Consequent upon Isaac's "death and resurrection" (Heb. 11:19 - which speaks of the death and resurrection of the promised seed, Christ), the birth of his future bride, Rebecca (which speaks of the Assembly, the Bride - 2 Cor. 11:2) is recorded.

Lesson

Ishmael, a mocker, persecuted Isaac, and was therefore cast out (Gal. 4:29). As we have seen in Lesson 8, Ishmael was the fruit of an act of the flesh; Galatians 4 uses this event as a type for us. The flesh is always opposed to the Spirit (Gal. 5:17, 18). Christians should live by faith, guided by the Spirit, who has been given for that express purpose (Gal. 3:11; 5:16), rather than by the law.

Abraham's heart was thoroughly searched and tested (Prov. 23:26). Abraham did not counsel with flesh and blood; he believed and obeyed (Heb. 11:17-19). His deed was a type of God's deed of love (Rom. 8:32). An animal substitute was provided by God until that time when He should give up His own Son. Through this deed of faith, Abraham was recognized as a justified man (Jas. 2:21).

To be cont'd

STUDY CORNER (5)

Here is another opportunity to test your knowledge of Scripture and your ability to find familiar passages. I hope that as a result of these questions many of our readers will have learned to use a concordance. How many of you are trying the group approach to answering these questions? Try it. You'll find that one knows this, and another knows that, so that you can all profit from one another's knowledge. ~~There are many of you who have not sent us answers. Why not start today? The address is on the inside of the front cover; try to have your answers on my desk by May 31.~~

41. Before Pentecost, there were two scriptural divisions of mankind; since Pentecost there are three. What are they?
42. Out of whom is God taking "a people for His Name" today?
43. As the gospel went out from Jerusalem, many were saved and added to the Assembly in many places. What was the basis for these widely separated groups of believers to gather together?
44. Every believer is a member of Christ's Body, the Assembly. What does the Bible say about believers who fail to identify themselves with the scripturally-gathered local assembly, whether at Rome, Corinth, or elsewhere?

45. How can the Lord Jesus, a Man in Heaven, be present in the midst of two or three believers on earth gathered together unto His Name?
46. In one of His letters in chapters two and three of the book of Revelations, the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as "He that is holy, He that is true," and said to them, "thou... hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name." To which assembly was this letter addressed?
47. What is meant by "Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name..."?
48. When members of Christ's Body on earth are persecuted, does Christ, the Head in Heaven, feel that persecution?
49. Should we be indifferent as to how other Christians fare? Should they be indifferent as to how we fare? Quote a verse in the Bible which answers these questions.
50. What did Paul write to the Corinthians which reminds us of the saying, "The Christian is the only Bible that many people ever read"?
51. When did the Lord Jesus express His desire that all His own might be one, so that the world might believe that the Father had sent Him?
52. The Lord once said, "I have other sheep which are not of this fold." Who were these other sheep, and what was this fold? (The Lord then added that there would be one flock, one Shepherd.)
53. Another verse expressing the oneness of all believers starts like this: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female..." (KJV). Can you quote the rest of the verse?
54. Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus should die for the Jewish nation. The narrative then continues: "and not for that nation only, but that He also should..." (KJV). Quote the rest of the verse.
55. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, we read "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts..." (KJV). Again, quote the rest of the verse.

That is the exercise for this month. I hope the study will profit you. While I transcribe these questions, I try to answer them. It is good to be put on the spot and forced to search the Scriptures for the answers. I hope you will think so too.

—John van Dijk

ANSWERS TO A LETTER

1. How can I know for sure that I am born again and that my sins are forgiven?

Let me ask you some questions. Have you repented of your sins? (Acts 17:30-31). Have you acknowledged before God that you are a guilty sinner? (Lk. 18:13-14). Do you believe that God is willing to forgive sinners? (Eph. 1:7). Do you believe that the death of the Lord Jesus is the only available and sufficient sacrifice by which sins can be atoned? (He. 10:11-14). If you answer all these questions with a whole-hearted: "Yes," I have no doubt that you are born again. How can I say this although I do not even know you? I know it because of what God has said in His Word, and God does not lie, it is as simple as this. If you believe these things, you will also believe that God does not lie. So why don't you read what God has said about those who believe in the Lord Jesus and then simply trust His word. The Lord Jesus has said: "He who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." So if you have confessed your sins, you are forgiven and you have new life, for all who believe in Him have life eternal (Jn. 1:36; 3:16).

It is a bit more difficult if you believe only some of these things. If that is so, you would do well to read God's Word to learn what God says on these points and simply believe what God has said. If you do this, I can say again, God has promised to receive each one who comes this way to Him. If after reading what God's Word says on these points you still do not believe what God says about them, I like to ask you, "Are you really so concerned about being saved?" Those who truly are, will have no difficulty to believe what God has said regarding these points, they quickly realize that all they can do is cry out: "Oh, God, be merciful to me a sinner." And those who utter that cry, are justified; the Lord Jesus said so.

2. If one is saved, is he saved eternally or can he lose salvation?

The answer is: "Eternally, through the grace of God." I will quote some-verses to back this up. But first let me remind you that when God speaks of those who are saved as having life from God and as having been born again, He does so because these thoughts convey the character of their relationship to God. These expressions contain the idea of continuance. Could one who is born again (thus having received life from God) be lost again (thus being dead in offences and sins — Eph. 2:1) by sinning? Who of us who have come to know the Lord, does never sin? We all do. It would mean that after we have received new life when we first confessed our sins, we would go through a continuous cycle of having life, being dead, and receiving life once more, again and again. This shows that the terms the Lord uses in connection with our salvation are entirely incompatible with our being lost again. All of this, however, may be considered to be circumstantial evidence as long as we have not considered some verses.

John 3:16 and 36 say that they who believe have eternal life. These verses and many others speak of our possessing eternal life now. But how can the life we receive upon conversion be called "eternal life" if we can lose it through sinning? Neither would the Lord's remark: "He shall never thirst forever," in John 4:14 be true if, after sinning, one would no longer have eternal life, and be in a condition of thirsting for it once more.

John 5 is even more explicit! "He that hears My word, and believes Him that has sent Me, has life eternal, and does not come into judgment, but is passed out of death into life." What can we make of this? Is it not entirely clear that one who believes has eternal life, which is a life that does never end (it is more than that, but this is not our subject now). But then there is also the promise, that such a person will not come into judgment. How can that be? If we understand the work of the Lord Jesus, we realize that He has borne all our sins — past, present, and future — in His body on the tree. He paid the price for all of them. That is very personal and real, so that every Christian can say: "The Lord has been punished for each lie I spoke, each time I stole." And what an encouragement to know that God is righteous; He will not punish the same sin twice. My sins were judged while borne by the Lord Jesus during the three hours of darkness upon the cross; He bore them all.

There are many people, however, who claim to be Christians but who do not truly believe in the Lord Jesus and the effectiveness of His work. Those who do not truly believe know this for themselves and God knows it too. Others, like you and me, may be confused and not know how to distinguish such a person from those who truly believe. Therefore we read in Hebrews some warnings to all who say they believe. In chapter 6:4 we read that once such persons fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. They have experienced many of the Christian blessings but have turned their backs upon them. We find an example of such a person in Simon in Acts 8. He acted as if he were a Christian, but he was a fake and Peter recognized him as such.

Let me again turn to a positive word of the Lord. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them life eternal; and they shall never perish, and no one shall seize them out of My hand. My Father who has given [them] to Me is greater than all, and no one can seize out of the hand of My Father" (Jn. 10:27-29). The firmness in the Lord's words is unmistakable: "They shall never perish"! Once we realize that our salvation does not depend on us but on God, all difficulty vanishes. Not we, but God is capable. When we come to Him, we entrust ourselves to His care in the full acknowledgement that we are only sinful and incapable of doing anything towards our own salvation.

3. In 1 John 1:6-9 we read that we cannot say that we have no sin. Many other verses support this truth. Yet, in the same epistle we read in chapter 3 that those who are born of God cannot sin, because His seed remains in Him.

First of all, we should realize the distinction between sin (in the singular) and sins (in the plural). The former often stands for the principle of sin that lives within fallen man; this is the way it is used in chapter 1. The latter speaks of the fruits produced by the principle of sin within fallen man; chapter 3 uses the word in this way. It says that one who is born of God cannot sin — cannot produce such fruits. How can that be? Because he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), for he has a new nature within him which, since it is born of God, cannot sin. God's Word identifies the believer with that new nature within him rather than with his old, sinful nature. Nevertheless, it is true that as long as we are left in this body, we will have our old nature, which can do nothing else but sin, within us. We should, however, not live by that old nature, but by the new one we received when we believed in the Lord Jesus. So we see that the second verse, which seemed to contradict the first, really supports it. We should reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11). We must realize that our old nature has been done with and refuse to live by it. We should walk in the Spirit, who will cause us to serve God alone by means of our new nature. That new nature will go to God, whereas our old nature has been judged by God and will no longer be found once we leave this body. Although it has found its end upon the cross of

the Lord Jesus, practically it remains with us until our departure from here, but we should keep it in the place where it belongs, in death.

To be cont'd