

Have you ever started to do something, only to stop doing it a little while later? Maybe you made a New Year's resolution this year, and you had every intention of keeping it. And for a while it was going pretty well. It seemed really easy to do. It seemed like it was the easiest thing in the world to keep, and you almost wonder why you didn't do it earlier. But then you miss a day. You're feeling kind of tired. You had a lot to do. You're just not really feeling it today. You'll get to it tomorrow. Then you'll be able to get back to it. And maybe you do get back to it tomorrow, and you're good for a little while longer. But then you miss another day. One day turns into two, and two days turns into a week. Pretty soon, you've stopped doing it altogether. I'm sure we've all done this at one point in our lives or another, but it shows us an important truth, Christians. It's very easy to start something, but it's very difficult to continue, especially when the excitement that we had at first is gone.

And honestly, being a Christian is often the same way. Because being a Christian means that we have to fight against our sins, and either that's going to mean we need to start doing something that God wants us to do, something we weren't doing before, or it means that we're going to have to stop doing something that God doesn't want us to do, even if we've been doing it for a very long time. Maybe we made a resolution to pray more, for example. And for a while it was going pretty well. Everything was working out really nicely. But then you miss a day, because you just aren't feeling it that day, or maybe you just forgot. And one day turns into two turns into a week, and pretty soon you've stop doing it altogether. You just don't have the same excitement that you had at first.

Or maybe you're trying to stop doing some sin, something you know God says is a sin, something you know you should not be doing. And for a while it works. For a while you're able to quit it. And maybe you even feel like you're over it now, like you've gotten through it. It's the easiest thing in the world not to do it. You don't even feel the desire to do it anymore. But then the old temptation comes back, and you fall into it again. Because Christians, it is easy to turn away at first, but it is hard to continue, especially over time. The reason for that is because it costs something to be a Christian. Are you willing to pay that cost?

This is what Jesus is talking about in our Gospel reading for today, when he says in verse 31: "Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.'" Jesus up to this point in John chapter 8 had been talking to the Jews mostly about himself and about his coming from the Father. And John tells us right before our reading that some of the Jews who heard him on that day actually believed what he said. They thought it was true. And that was a good thing! We should believe that what Jesus is saying is true. But Jesus says that it's not good enough. It's a good start, but it's not enough. Because a disciple abides in his Word. A disciple continues, a disciple persists, a disciple keeps at it, a disciple keeps coming back to the Lord. And while it is good for us to start these things, eventually it will cost us something to be a Christian. And are we willing to pay that cost when it comes? Are we willing to pay that cost when it means losing friends and family? Are we willing to pay that cost when it means that we have to change something about how we're living? Are we willing to pay that cost when it hurts us, even physically hurts us? Are we willing to follow Jesus even then? A disciple is willing to pay that cost, Christians, but how easy it is to not want to pay it at all!

Jesus shows us why when he says in verse 34: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin." That's what causes our difficulties. It is sin that makes us want to stop. It is

sin that makes us not want to continue. Because sin is a cruel master, Christians. Sin enslaves us in a way that nothing else can. Sin even makes us love our slavery. It makes us want to do it. Our hearts and our heads want to go do these things. Our body even rushes to go after these things. Sin makes us love it even as it kills us in both body and soul. That's why it's so difficult for us to break free. Sin makes us feel good. Sin makes us want to keep doing it. And why shouldn't I feel good? Why shouldn't I be happy? Why should I do something difficult if it's not going to make much difference anyway? It almost feels like home to us. It is easier for us to keep these chains on than it is for us to break free of them. So why would I want to stop? Sin can even deceive us into thinking that it's not a big deal, that God doesn't actually hate it all that much, that he is just going to overlook it. He's going to forgive me anyway, so it's no big deal if I keep doing it. A little sin here or there isn't going to hurt anything. This is how sin enslaves us, Christians. This is how it hurts us in both body and soul.

We have to be especially careful of it, because Jesus says in verse 35: "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever." The one who persists in sin, who practices sin is a slave to sin, even if it doesn't feel like slavery. And Jesus says the slave doesn't really belong to the house. A slave can be sold. A slave can belong to someone else. Eventually they won't be part of the house anymore. And it's the same way for us, Christians, when we are slaves to sin. The slave of sin is not truly a part of the house of God. The slave of sin is walking the way of death. And abiding in that sin will finally take us away from God. We will not inherit the house in the end!

But the son will inherit the house, Christians. The son truly belongs to the family in the way that a slave never can. And when we are sons, we will belong to the house forever. We can never be taken away from it. Nothing will ever change that fact. So we must be free of the sins which bind us. We must be set free from the sins which are killing us.

But how? How can we be free? It seems like there is no way out of these things. It seems like we keep coming back to them. After all, how many times have we failed? How many times have we failed when we tried to stop doing something? How many times have we failed when we tried to start doing something that God wants us to do? It seems like we want to keep coming back to it. It's easier to be a slave than it is to be a son. How can we finally be free of the sin which kills us?

Jesus tells us, Christians, that there is freedom in the truth, the truth which is ours through Jesus Christ. And if Jesus sets us free, we will be free indeed. There is no sin that is stronger than Jesus. In Christ alone we have true freedom from sin. In Christ alone we are sons and not slaves. Through the blood of Christ, we have a power, Christians, a power which can dissolve every chain, a power which can break every bond. Even if we have to struggle for a lifetime, we will finally be free through Jesus Christ. Because that sin will be broken. That sin will finally come to an end. In Jesus Christ is perfect freedom! And we will be sons of the house forever through what he has done for us in love.

And knowing all of this, Christians, gives us strength. It gives us the strength to fight against every sin, knowing that that sin will finally be defeated. Our struggle is not hopeless, as if we can never be free, as if it will always hold us. We will be free. Christ has killed the power of sin. So no matter how many times it seems like you have failed, get up and keep fighting. No matter

how big that sin seems to be, keep punching, keep fighting! Because Jesus is bigger than any sin. And you will find victory over it through the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So if you want to be free, Christians, turn to Jesus. There is power in his blood, power to take away the toughest sin, power to break the strongest chain. And no matter what cost you have to pay, no matter what you lose when you lose these things, it's worth it. Because heaven is worth it. Being a son of God is worth it. And the house of God will be yours forever! So abide in the word of Jesus, "and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood has set us free from the power of sin, strengthen us for the fight so that we may put to death every sin that remains in us and walk after you in newness of life; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.