

"Freedom and Reverence"

Hiroshi Suzuki

31. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31, 32, NKJV)

"Freedom and Reverence" is one of the key phrases at ICU. Have you seen it somewhere? It appears in ICU's mission statement which upholds three principal commitments:

ICU holds as its mission the establishment of an academic tradition of freedom and reverence based on Christian ideals, and the education of individuals of conscience, internationally cultured and with a strong sense of citizenship in a democratic society. As demonstrated in its name, International Christian University, ICU has followed three principal commitments as its mission: academic, Christian and international commitments.

What do you think of these two words "Freedom" and "Reverence" in ICU's mission? This is the topic I have chosen for us to meditate upon during this special week. You may have some ideas about the word "Freedom" but how do you define "Reverence"?

A dictionary gives us this definition: "A profound emotion inspired by a deity."

Today's Scripture talks about "Freedom and Reverence". "If we abide in the word of Jesus, we are His disciples." So one definition of "Reverence" is to "abide in the word of Jesus," and that is an evidence of being a disciple of Jesus. Moreover, if we abide in Jesus' word, we will know the truth and the truth will make us free." The passages which follow our verses tell us that

"Freedom" is liberation from the bondage of sin.

At ICU, liberal education is expressed as developing adventurous minds capable of critical thinking and sensitivity to questions of meaning and value— liberation from a closed and exclusive mind-set. The Scriptures tell us because we are self-centered, we cannot abide in Jesus' word, and so remain in the bondage of sin. Liberation can come only from Jesus.

Recently I have had opportunities to talk about Liberal Education from this view point. For those who are interested, I have posted one of the scripts on my home page. In our few moments together, I would like for us to discuss "Reverence" and what it means "to abide in Jesus' word" today.

I was born in a Christian home, and attended Sunday school when I was small. I did not attend church when I was a junior high school student. A while later, I learned Christianity at, or was trained by, Hi-B.A. (the High School Born-Againers Club) and the Navigators (an international Christian organization). How should we live as a disciple of Christ? Attend church and meetings regularly, have devotions to pray and read the word of God every morning, hold Bible studies to read the Scriptures carefully, memorize Scripture verses, and share our faith with others. These helped me a lot. I also learned methods to study the Bible, and how to lead a discussion type Bible study. Through scripture memorization, I could better meditate on the meaning of Bible verses.

In such a group, some claimed that doing these things faithfully is "THE" evidence of being a disciple of Jesus. "Reverence" is viewed as being inseparable from certain Christian commitments. I felt uneasiness with these people and kept my distance at times. However, I believe that these practices helped me to abide in Jesus' words.

I'm thankful that it is partly because I kept these daily practices that I could receive guidance, peace and strength from the word of Jesus during various situations in my life.

I still read the Bible every day. Recently I read the book of Judges in the Old Testament. There are many cruel stories. At the end it says, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25) It is really tragic that people were doing what is right in their own eyes. How is it now? At several libraries of Japanese universities, a sign is inscribed, saying, "The truth shall make you free." It is today's Bible verse 32 without verse 31. The truth shall set us free only by abiding in Jesus' word. This is the Bible's message to us. Apart from Jesus, "Freedom" is just doing what is right in one's own eyes. To keep the Bible's words is neither to put a box with scripture passages on one's body nor simply repeat memorized Scripture verses. But unless we humbly try to listen to and learn from Bible passages and Jesus' message, our "Freedom" may be "Foul" and/or "Folly".

What can we say about the liberal education at our university? Is it truly based on Jesus' word? Let us eagerly seek to live as a disciple of Jesus. And what is the sign of being a disciple of Jesus? "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35, NKJV) Abiding in Jesus' word is not to philosophize about words but to live our life as Jesus commands us.

Let's come back to our theme "Freedom and Reverence" once again. I am attracted by this phrase because it represents perfectly the character of Jesus described in the gospels of the New Testament. At the same time, no matter how I try my best to fill up my heart with God's word, or pray that God

will fill me with the Holy Spirit, I cannot attain the "Freedom" Jesus demonstrated. Is it because I am still in the bondage of sin?

Please allow me to conclude by offering the key I have found in the Scriptures to truly attaining "Freedom and Reverence".

"Reverence" is to be amazed at Jesus' "Freedom" and recognize my existence as being very far from His "Freedom". "Reverence" is to stand in awe of God's sacredness, and at the same time to confess the greatness of God's love that saved a wretch like me. And finally, "Reverence" is to humbly have faith that He alone can help me overcome my bondage to sin and thereby attain a freedom like His Perfect Freedom.