

Free from Bondage

*“The creature itself
also shall be
delivered from the
bondage of
corruption into the
glorious liberty of
the children of
God.”*

—Romans 8:21

IN HIS LETTER TO THE

brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul confirms that the faithful followers of our Lord Jesus have been delivered from bondage and are now set free as the children of God. This continues to be a special blessing to those who

are now living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. As the apostle pointed out, “We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”—vs. 22

CONDITIONS APPLY

From the Scriptures, we learn about liberty and those who enjoy its freedom. God’s Word also speaks about its contrasting principle of bondage, and those who are held in its grasp. However, liberty is not always desirable, nor is it always pleasing to the Lord. Personal liberty cannot be expected without certain conditions or considerations being

applied. Neither can it be affected when it is not in accord with the Scriptures.

We know that earth's first parents—Adam and Eve—were permitted to exercise their liberty, but because they failed to obey God's righteous laws that had promised them life, they were condemned and sentenced to death. Later, while God's typical people Israel were held as slaves in Egypt, they longed for liberty and to be set free from bondage. In God's due time, we know that he did set them free. However, their freedom did not imply that they had a right to do whatever they pleased, and they were soon brought under the restraints and conditions of the Law Covenant. This proved to be a burden to them because of their inherited sin, which God's law condemned.

A JUST LAW

The apostle explains that the Law which was established upon righteousness proved to be a yoke upon the necks of the Jews. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin."—Rom. 7:12-14

God's law was spiritual because it came from him. Had the Israelites been able to measure up to its standards, they would have enjoyed the promised rights and liberty in their obedience to it. There was a short period in Israel's history during which time they were without any leader, whether

judge or king. We learn from the scriptural record, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."—Judg. 17:6

SERVANTS OF CORRUPTION

The Apostle Peter speaks of some who attempt to distort the doctrine of liberty. "When they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."—II Pet. 2:18,19

Peter is here pointing out that there is a liberty that is displeasing to God. It is a liberty that appeals to the lusts and desires of the flesh. Those who preach in this manner appeal along the lines of the fallen flesh, and suggest in subtle ways that it is not necessary to be bound by the restraining will of God. The apostle warns about such corruptible teachings.

ALL HAVE GONE ASTRAY

It was necessary for Jesus to die in order that man might be redeemed from death, and that the human family might enjoy full liberty under the perfect laws of God. The Prophet Isaiah addressed this, when he wrote, "He [Jesus] was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."—Isa. 53:5,6

The prophet speaks of the principle of full liberty and the will to do as one pleases, as iniquity. However, in this connection we note that Jesus proved worthy to be man's Redeemer because he was at all times totally obedient to his Father's will. During the closing and terribly agonizing days of his earthly ministry, we read, "He came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. . . . And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:39,41,42) He knew that he must submit himself to the doing of his Father's will instead of his own. This confirms the Divine purpose for his coming to earth. "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."—John 6:38

FREE IN CHRIST

The liberty of which the Scriptures speak is freedom from the enslaving cords of sin and death. The children of Israel were given opportunity to be free from this condemnation by keeping the terms of the old Law Covenant. They were unable to do this because of sin and inherited weaknesses of the flesh, which resulted in their being brought under the additional bondage of the Law. Within the Early Church, some taught that believers must still remain under the Law. However, through faith in Christ they had been set free from the condemnation of the Law. Paul made this matter clear in his letter to the brethren at Galatia. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us

free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”—Gal. 5:1

This scripture has been improperly used to substantiate the arguments of those who offer the brethren freedom and encourage them to go their own way. They suggest that the ideal state of the Christian is one in which all are free to think and to act as they please. The best defense against this suggestion is when the followers of Jesus are in tune with the Divine will and are glad to give up their own preferences to do the will of God. Those who are thus devoted to God enjoy true liberty and are set free from bondage.

Such freedom is not completely obtainable this side of the veil, for the mind of the flesh strives against the mind of the Spirit. This causes the Spirit to be hampered in carrying out the entire will of God. This restraint is referred to in our featured scripture as the ‘bondage of corruption.’ From this bondage every true Christian longs to be delivered in order to be entirely free to serve the Lord, the glorious liberty of the children of God. It will be enjoyed beyond the veil by those who have humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God, and who have learned to love his will. In their resurrection bodies, they will then have the ability to do the will of the Heavenly Father perfectly, with no cords of imperfection to restrain them.

TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

In the scriptural record, we read, “He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. . . . Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on

him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:29,31,32) In the family home, its members must to some extent be subject one to another. Each one is free to do as he pleases as long as it will contribute to the best interests of all the others. However, absolute freedom without applying certain conditions would prove to be unworkable, and this would be true in any field of human experience or endeavor.

The Truth that Jesus was talking about included freedom to do the will of the Heavenly Father. He was always concerned about the spiritual welfare of those who followed him and, on behalf of his disciples, he prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) During Jesus’ earthly ministry, the word of truth was contained in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament. This was the volume of the book that Jesus agreed to obey at the time of his baptism and consecration at Jordan.

PROPHETIC WORDS OF DAVID

Jesus recognized certain prophecies and other writings as applying to himself and the purpose of his earthly ministry. In prophetic words, the Psalmist David wrote, “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” (Ps. 40:6-8) The Apostle Paul quoted from David’s words in his letter to the Hebrew brethren.—Heb. 10:5-7

SANCTIFYING INFLUENCES

The followers of our Lord have been blessed with the New Testament Scriptures that enlarge and elucidate that which had been written many centuries earlier. Thus is the Truth made plain for those who are being called during this Gospel Age. The Truth not only makes us free, but it is sanctifying. God's Word acting in our lives serves as the ultimate accomplishment of his will. The Truth separates us from the blinding influence of error and then sets us apart to do the will of God. It liberates us from the bondage of sin, and makes us the bondservants of Jesus Christ. "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men."—Eph. 6:6,7

The freedom which Jesus offered his followers through the Truth was not a personal liberty to chart their own course in life, but he wanted them to be free from the traditions of men. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30) His yoke would be easy and light to bear because they would learn to love it.

LEARNING OBEDIENCE

When in harmony with the Divine will, the follower of Jesus is controlled by the Father's laws and will. Our obedience is voluntary, and he is dealing with us with the view of our learning to love his will and to delight in doing it. We have freedom

only within the circumscribed limits of the will of God and Jesus. Our Lord Jesus understood his relationship, and did not attempt to exercise personal liberty in his service to his Father and of the Truth. Paul wrote, “[God] hath put all things under his [Christ’s] feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”—Eph. 1:22,23

At times, the preferences of our fallen flesh may run counter to the will of God. The criterion by which the will of God can be properly determined is in his Word. If we find ourselves attempting to circumvent the Divine requirements, we have not fully learned to appreciate our privilege of being bondservants of the Lord. We would then be guided by the reasoning of the flesh while believing that we were merely exercising our liberty in Christ Jesus.

At times, there may be experiences associated with the will of God that we find grievous until we learn to recognize and love them. In the arrangements of the various ecclesias, there are elected servants, and the apostle thus admonishes, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” (Heb. 13:17) The apostle also exhorts, “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.”—chap. 10:24

PAUL’S WARNING

The proper exercise of love for the brethren in our association with them may present difficulties at times. Through our association with the Lord’s

people, close friendships may develop which are proper unless we permit them to influence our judgment or our course of action with respect to the doing of God's will. Paul cautioned the brethren at Ephesus, "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—Acts 20:29,30

Unfortunately, Paul's warning has been true throughout the present Gospel Age. In the church at Ephesus, some who began to speak perverse things may have become the special friends of others in the ecclesia. This serves as a lesson for all of the Lord's people throughout the Gospel Age. We want to keep in touch with our friends because we love them and we don't want to give them up. However, it is possible to injure them by a course of action that is contrary to the will of God.

The most effective way to help those who may have erred is to maintain our position based on scripture, and by our example of faithfulness assist them to return to the right course. The Apostle Paul would not have encouraged the faithful brethren to go along with those who had erred, as if nothing had happened. It would have merely encouraged them in their wrongful actions. Such behavior would have been in defiance of the expressed will of God, and as spoken through Paul his beloved apostle.

"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you,

and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”—II John 9-11

EXERCISING RESTRAINT

The importance of restraining our personal preferences is a matter that existed in the Early Church, an example being that of eating meat that had been offered to idols. The more developed Christians understood that the meat had not been defiled by its being presented in sacrifice to an inanimate god, and they felt at liberty to eat it. No doubt it could be bought at bargain prices, and its use would be an economic advantage to those who were not offended by it. However, this was an excellent opportunity to restrain from exercising this manner of liberty.

On certain occasions, the rule of love must supercede liberty. Paul realized that if he ate meat that had been offered to idols, some brethren who believed it was not proper to do so might be weakened by his exercise of liberty. He explains, “Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”—I Cor. 8:11-13

A MEANINGFUL LESSON

The law of God calls for sacrificing self-interests especially on behalf of our brethren. This serves as a restraining cord that limits the exercise of our

own personal liberty. It will be found to apply in many situations with which we may be confronted from time to time. Even where there is no specific command of scripture to explain the will of God in a particular circumstance, this principle shows us the proper course to take. Our words, actions, and attitude may affect our brethren, particularly the ones who may be only recently walking in the narrow way, and who are not yet well grounded in the Truth. The general welfare of our brethren should include control of what we do, where we go, and what we say.

The false idea that Christian liberty allows us freedom to do anything that we want is something to be guarded against. As members of the body of Christ, we are not free to say or do those things that may injure another member. Our liberty must be restrained to meet the viewpoint of the babes in Christ. Our flesh may at times rebel against such restraint but, as we learn to love God's will, we will rejoice in the privilege of setting aside our own liberties and preferences that others might be blessed.

EVERY THOUGHT

Vigilance is necessary to not misuse our liberty which is in Christ. "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations [reasonings, *Marginal Translation*], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."—II Cor. 10:3-5

This lesson should impress upon our hearts and minds the folly of believing that as followers of Christ Jesus we are no longer subject to certain restraints and restrictions. To be truly free is to become so oriented to the will of God that its every detail is a delight to our hearts. The Apostle Paul has pointed out that, so far as the mind of the flesh is concerned, we have no liberty; for our every thought is to be brought into captivity to the will of God. As bondservants of Christ, we are to have no plans of our own that will in any way run counter to the will of God.

BUILDING ON FAITH

We are given further instructions concerning our development as New Creatures in Christ by the Apostle Peter, who wrote, “Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”—II Pet. 1:5-7

We are free to do good unto all men as we have opportunity, and especially unto the household of faith. We are encouraged to let our light shine forth that others may have an opportunity to be blessed by the Truth. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) We have freedom to send forth the word of life, truth, and the wonderful promises of salvation to all who may have a hearing ear.

LIMITATIONS

We do not have the freedom to walk after the flesh, nor to speak or act in any way that may even remotely be injurious to our brethren and others. We cannot render evil for evil, or reviling for reviling. Neither are we free to do as we please according to the preferences of our fallen flesh.

When we learn to love the will of our loving Heavenly Father, the only limitation or restraint that we may find burdensome would be the hampering of the imperfections of the flesh. These imperfections alone would prevent us from rendering our total and absolute obedience to our Heavenly Father and our dear Lord Jesus for the wonderful blessings that we have received. Because of these fleshly cords of bondage, we often groan while we strive to keep our sacrifice on the altar until it is fully consumed.

In the resurrection, we will be delivered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. At that time, we will be able fully to render the absolute obedience which we are trying to do now. May the anticipation of that future liberty spur us on now to greater faithfulness, love, and zeal as servants of our dear Lord and Master. ■

“In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”

—II Timothy 2:20,21, New International Version