

Liberty Or Independence?

Christian Liberty

Martin G. Collins

Given 08-Apr-01; Sermon #496A

Christ made liberation possible with His sacrifice and our justification on Passover. Today—the first day of Unleavened Bread—represents the beginning of our liberty from sin and our sanctification. In the world, the desire and pursuit of liberty has taken many forms; and it is expressed frequently in the annals of American history. The Pledge of Allegiance for the citizens of the United States is this: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." (The "one nation, under God" was added later, in the 1930s or so. It has not always been that.)

Just before his condemnation to death by the British, the patriot Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death!" Thus, *liberty* has long been a desired condition. What is so important about liberty that men have so desperately sought it—even under the threat of death, or even unto death?

When the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States were written and endorsed, the Bible was assumed to be, by most people in this land, *the standard* for moral law. The Bill of Rights and the Constitution were written as the guiding civil law, designed to work in conjunction with the Word of God. In 1778, just a few years later, James Madison, the fourth President of the United States, said:

We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future. . . upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to sustain ourselves, according to the Ten Commandments of God.

And in 1832, Noah Webster, the author of the first *American Dictionary of the English Language*, said: "The principles of all genuine liberty and of wise laws and administrations are to be drawn from the Bible and sustained by its authority."

So that we can be clear on the terms "liberty" and "freedom" *Webster's Dictionary* defines *liberty* as the quality or state of being free; the power to do as one pleases; freedom from physical restraint; freedom from arbitrary or despotic control; the positive enjoyment of various social, political, or economic rights and privileges; the power of choice. Now notice how similar the definition for freedom is. *Freedom* is the quality or state of being free; the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action; liberation from slavery or restraint or from the power of another— independence; the state or quality of being exempt, usually from something burdensome.

Let us compare *liberty* and *freedom* a little more, while adding the term *license*. All we are doing here is defining these terms. Freedom, liberty, and license mean the power or condition of acting without compulsion. *Freedom* has a broad range of application—from total absence of restraint, to merely a sense of not being unduly hampered or frustrated. *Liberty*, on the other hand, is very similar; but it suggests release from former restraint or compulsion. That is a critical key word there—release. Liberty suggests release from former restraint or compulsion. And *license* (the final word to define) implies freedom specially granted or conceded, and it may connote an abuse of freedom.

When the Bible speaks of liberty, a prior bondage or incarceration is always implied. Liberty means the happy state of having been released from servitude for a life of enjoyment and satisfaction that was not possible before. The paradigm of liberty in the Bible is the deliverance of the Israelites from their servitude in Egypt. They had been slaves under Pharaoh, and the beginning of their nationhood was marked by an act of divine liberation.

At the exodus, God set Israel *free from bondage* in Egypt in order that, from that time on, the nation could serve Him as His covenant people. He brought

them into the land flowing with milk and honey; settled them there; and undertook to maintain them in political independence and economic prosperity—as long as they avoided idolatry and kept His laws. This meant that Israel's freedom would not depend upon her own efforts in either the military or the political realm, but on the quality of her obedience to God. Her freedom was a supernatural blessing.

God's gift of liberty to Israel was unmerited. His terms were clear. Disobedience—whether in the form of religious impiety or social injustice—would result in their loss of freedom. God judges His people by (1) national disaster and (2) enslavement. As the God of their fathers had liberated them, so the liberty into which He had brought them was to be reflected in their constitution and laws.

Psalm 119:41-45 Let your mercies come also to me, O LORD—Your salvation according to Your word. So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your word. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in your ordinances. So shall I keep your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts.

So there is a qualification there for our walking in liberty. We have to be seeking the precepts of God. *Liberty* in the Old Testament means, on the one hand, deliverance from created forces that would keep men from serving and enjoying their Creator and, on the other hand, the positive happiness of living in fellowship with God under His covenant in the place where He chooses and blesses. Liberty is the opposite of slavery to those things that oppose God. It is not man's own achievement, but a free unmerited gift. It is something that is imparted from God's action—something that we do not possess at all, but are given.

In its continuance, liberty is a covenant blessing—something that God has promised to maintain as long as His people are faithful. It does not mean "independence" from God. It is precisely in God's service that we find *perfect liberty*. We can enjoy release from bondage to the created only through bondage to our Creator. So, the way God sets us *free* from our captors and enemies is to make us His own *slaves*. He frees us by bringing us to Himself.

Human nature, however, wants us to believe that liberty is independence. More specifically, Satan would like us to believe that independence is liberty or freedom from responsibility, and from obeying anyone else. It has come to be known in this society as *individualism*. Individualism is a major deterrent to liberty! What individualism has come to mean is the abolition of community. That is, that each person stands alone—even within the natural human family. On a physical level, we see this degeneration of liberty in our own society.

Individualism requires liberty. But the paradox of individualism is that liberty unchained (without restraint) leads ultimately to servitude—to the end of all individual freedom. This is where the descendants of Israel are rapidly heading now. Unchained liberty does not lead there directly, as though the prompt results of a nation's free political election were tyranny. The pursuit of freedom leads first to political liberty; and then, if there is no self-discipline of the free, to a hedonistic liberty, which we could call "licentiousness" or "lasciviousness," where whatever pleases a person is allowed. Licentiousness is undisciplined and unrestrained behavior. Especially a flagrant disregard of sexual restraint, it is a deficiency of a morally unrestrained mind.

Mark 7:21-23 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile a man."

The Greek word translated *lasciviousness* here in the King James version, and in the New King James as *licentiousness*, means "outrageous conduct," showing that licentious behavior goes beyond sin to include a disregard for what is right, and a disregard for the good of others. License to do whatever one pleases leads to chaos when pleasure is not regulated by self-discipline. Chaos ultimately yields to tyranny, and the tolerance to do so precedes the chaos. Someone once said: "Tolerance is the devise used to change a form of government from a tolerant one to an intolerant one." That is a profound

quote, actually. No one anticipates this as the outcome of the pursuit of liberty; and as long as liberty is tempered by "the law written in our hearts" it is not a danger.

Romans 2:14-15 For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.

So God tells us here, in verse 15, that humanity knows of His laws. Everyone knows of His laws. It is just that we do not understand them deeply enough—until we are converted and receive God's Holy Spirit.

Romans 2:16 In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

When the heart no longer knows such a law, then the decline of liberty through licentiousness becomes inevitable.

The United States of America was born in the 18th century—the century of the triumph of Enlightenment, or as some would call it, Illumination. The Enlightenment is often portrayed, by its very nature, as "the enemy of religion." One "Illuminist," Immanuel Kant, defined Enlightenment as "liberation from self-imposing immaturity"—by which, of course, he meant religion, and more specifically "mainstream Christianity" and the worship of God. The Age of Enlightenment is not defined primarily by enmity to religion but, more specifically, by *enmity toward God*. And this Enlightenment has had a huge impact on our thinking in this society.

Romans 8:1-7 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement

of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

James 4:4 says "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself the enemy of God." So the Enlightenment (as it is called)—which brought this world to individualism—is anti-God and anti-Christ, having enmity toward Jesus Christ and God the Father. Its source, therefore, is Satan.

In looking back at the Middle Ages, the time of feudalism was a time when interpersonal covenants were dominant. For example: emperor to elector; king to vassals; landlord to tenant (or serf); and, of course, the people to God. Individuals were strongly tied to their community, or communities. And people took care of each other in a more personal way in society—especially within their communities. However, general freedom of movement was very restricted, which made it hard for a worldwide work of God to flourish. So, of course, God had to change what the world was like in the Middle Ages to eventually bring it to a point where freedom reigns—so that God's Word could go worldwide.

God decided to break down this stranglehold that feudalism and the Roman Catholic Church had on a great part of the world. The rise of towns, where a self-sufficient bourgeoisie could grow; the discovery and conquest of the American continents; the rise of capitalism; and the Protestant Reformation broke down traditional forms and understanding, and made room for individuals to become autonomous—a law unto themselves. Private interpretation of Scripture exploded at this time! (It has always been a problem, but especially when this "freedom" and "liberty" were given in a physical sense.)

II Peter 1:19-21 We we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this

first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The Protestant principle of permitting individualistic "private interpretation" was set loose in the context of the freedom, democracy, and equality of North America. From this came the present attitude in mainstream Christianity that "Every man's opinion is as good as everyone else's." This principle does not work in physics; it does not work in medicine; it does not hold true in law; and it certainly does not hold true in theology!

Judges 17:5-6 And the man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel; but everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We see there an example of what happens when men do what is right in their own eyes. They move to Sabbath breaking, to idolatry, to breaking all of the commandments, and to a very degenerate society which God eventually has to send into slavery and send through tribulation-type of suffering. God sees this attitude as stemming from pride. In Proverbs 21:2-4 it is recorded: "Every way of man is right in his own eyes; but the LORD weighs the heart. To do justice and righteousness is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin."

Mainstream Christianity is a product of individualism. It puts people in contact with what they think is "God," and seemingly would rule out autonomy. But it degenerates into a religion of "just me and Jesus" and loses the perspective of community and fellowship. *Autonomy* comes from another angle. It sounds similar to this: "If Jesus is my 'personal Savior,' then no minister and no congregation can tell me anything." The hidden implication is that unless Jesus is actually talking to me personally (which He seldom is, of course—at least, in the literal sense), then "I can do as I please." That is the attitude of Protestantism.

The United States is a country of an astronomical number of churches. All religions prosper here. Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, New Age, the Occult—the list goes on and on and on. The

United States is so full of religion and religious enthusiasm. It is also the place where no such thing as "sin" exists. Any attempt to speak out for traditional moral values, or to criticize newly fashionable lifestyles that once were called perverse, is met with fierce antagonism.

The more this society degenerates, the more we see the separation between God's church and the world. The world is always in our face in a perverse way. That should move us closer to God. The degeneration of this nation has reached the point of "anything goes"—from abortion, to physician assisted suicide, and all manners of things in between. As a people "every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually."

If the universal rule were "I want it my way," it would lead first to license, then to chaos, and then to the loss of liberty. This is exactly what we are seeing happen in this nation today, and also throughout the world. A prime example of the wrong pursuit of liberty is that the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789 led to the "Terror of France" four years later. Liberty and fraternity disappeared; and the only reliable equality was that of the guillotine, which devoured even its most devoted servant—Robespierre.

In more recent times, American has given individualism to the world. To some extent, we can still afford it—for we have the land, the money, and the leisure (for most people). We can still have it when we say, "I want it my way." As a nation, we are still living off of the national blessings God promised to the descendants of Abraham. But the rest of the world cannot, and we will not be able to do so much longer.

The free market, which flourishes in an individualistic society, does not create values. It consumes them. And unless it is constantly immunized against rot, it will collapse. The only immunization is God's Word, which has been totally rejected. Therefore, the world—and especially this nation—is totally susceptible to the disease of individualism and "Enlightenment" (as the world looks at it).

The roots of religious liberty go back to the settlement of the colonies by the British in the 17th century. Not only England, but Europe as a whole, was still in a state of religious ferment caused by the Reformation and the

Counter-Reformation. Many of the early settlers were religious dissidents who came seeking a home where they would be free to practice their religion, and to worship as they desired here in the colonies of the United States. Several of the colonies were established as havens for specific sects and denominations.

Several were, in fact, experiments in establishing a new form of governance based on religious ideals. The problem was that the religious ideals were based on private interpretation—because of the individualistic attitude that so many had. The Plymouth Colony, for example, was founded by British Separatists. Massachusetts and New Haven, which is now Connecticut, were established by Puritans favoring a reform of the Church of England along Congregationalist lines. Pennsylvania was founded as a Quaker experiment by William Penn. Maryland was founded as a sanctuary for Catholics from Protestant England.

Christians, who were persecuted within the newly founded colonial communities, started new settlements where they could worship freely. In the 1630s, Roger Williams established the colony of Rhode Island—based in the principle of freedom of conscience, and complete separation of church and state. Many seventh day Sabbath keepers established themselves there, because they were free to worship on the seventh day. Even though the rest of the colonies declared "religious liberty" and "religious freedom," it was not truly there—because of the bias of those specific groups.

Not only did a wide variety of English dissidents migrate to the new colonies; but, as the reputation of the American colonies for religious freedom spread, Huguenots fleeing France, Mennonites from Holland and Germany, and others made their way to the colonies. In the 1600s, religious dissidents from Europe made up the majority of the population of the American colonies—even in those colonies that were nominally Anglican, such as Virginia. So you can see that the nation that we are in today was founded by people with diverse religious beliefs. Although under the banner of "Christianity," they still interpreted Scripture as *they* thought right.

Controversies over biblical issues and religious practice spawned new denominations—such as the Baptists, who spread throughout America. We see the same individualism continuing to spread through the United States

today. Diversity of race, ethnic background, and religious background helped fuel the flame of individualism. This cancer has been going through the greater church of God for years now.

Freedom is possible only within limits. Spiritually, the instrument through which this liberty was imparted is the truth. You find that in John 8:32. We are earnestly warned not to presume upon, or abuse, our *liberty in Christ*.

Galatians 5:13 For, brethren, you have been called to liberty; only use not liberty for an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

We are given that gift of liberty through Jesus Christ; and we are warned not to abuse it, because it is a great gift and one that can be abused to the harm of others.

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

It always comes back to that, does it not? We are given *liberty and freedom*; but, in order to properly use it, we have to have love for one another.

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another.

So if we abuse our liberty and our freedom in God's church; and we use private interpretations; and we do not show love for one another in the proper way—by keeping the commandments and the laws of God—then we can actually cause each other to lose salvation. We, as individuals, are responsible for how we impact others. We, as individuals, are responsible in God's church for helping each other to the Kingdom. Of course, that is with the help of the Holy Spirit, and by the guidance of Jesus Christ and God the Father through the Word of God.

In I Peter 2:15-16, Peter says "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God." Physically, freedom

is possible only within limits; but humanity cannot agree on those limits. The reason they cannot agree on those limits is because they have rejected the Source of righteous standards—God.

The people who emigrated from Europe to come to the American continent were people unwilling to be satisfied with a gradually evolving *status quo*. They left an older stifling civilization behind and established new commonwealths in the wilderness. When conditions in the seaboard colonies seemed oppressive, colonists rebelled against the English crown and made themselves independent.

Then, when conditions in the States did not provide the freedom and opportunity they sought, large numbers abandoned the Puritan establishment of the North and the plantation culture of the South to move farther West. When the forests were cut clear and the trees were gone, when the land was exhausted—then they could move on.

When the inner cities became run down, they could move to the nearby suburbs. When those "streetcar suburbs" deteriorated and the tracks were torn up, they could build larger homes on larger lots and commute by larger cars on a network of new and larger highways. When that began to displease them, they could begin to "gentrify" to the central city. There was no need to conserve—no need to preserve—for there was always a new opportunity across the road, across the river, or across the prairie.

Individualism began with a quest for freedom, but freedom is possible only within limits. Without limits, freedom leads to chaos; and after chaos, one is privileged if the new limits are gentle. But under man, the new limits are not gentle—when freedom is taken to its extreme, without restraint. It ends up bringing us back to slavery—to corrupt leaders, to corrupt bosses, to cruel criminals, and on and on and on. In this society, *freedom* and *limits* are incompatible at the extreme; but there is a healthy middle—where freedom is real, and the limits are balanced and acceptable. This liberty only God can provide by freeing us first from sin.

The true spiritual enemies, from whom God through Jesus Christ liberates His people, are revealed to be (1) sin, (2) Satan, and (3) death. Christian liberty is from sin and from law simultaneously. Sin is presented as a

"master" whose slaves are unable to escape its control except by dying or becoming the property of another. But *the elect* (that is, us) pass from the control of sin through their death with Christ. Paul says those who have died to sin can no longer live in sin.

Romans 6:1-6 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

So that is liberation—a liberation that we see begins on this day, the first day of Unleavened Bread.

Romans 6:7-11 For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:14-15 For sin shall not have dominion over you [We have been given liberation.], for you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

Paul emphasizes that again. He also emphasized it in verse 2.

Romans 6:16-17 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you

obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which were delivered.

That is, the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles.

Now, Herbert Armstrong is credited many times for delivering us "the faith once delivered." But I would like to clarify that, because I do not think that is quite accurate. If we look at our lives in the church throughout the last several decades, some of us came into the church in the 1960s under Mr. Armstrong. Some of us came in the 1970s, some in the 1980s, and some in the 1990s—into the Worldwide Church of God, under Joseph Tkach. Each of us received, in a sense, similar but different doctrines (comparing the '60s and '70s with the '80s and the '90s). The same doctrines that had been changed in the '90s had been changed, or *attempted* to be changed, in the '70s. So it was just a repetition of what Satan had already tried.

But if I was to say that Mr. Armstrong delivered me "the faith once delivered" in the '60s and someone else said that Mr. Armstrong delivered "the faith" to them let us say in the '70s (during the very liberal times that the Systematic Theology Project was being done—the STP), then there were different religious doctrines between those two. Yet Mr. Armstrong was over the church at that time—not realizing that these changes were being made. But he was over the church. So we cannot say that we got our faith from Mr. Armstrong as our "faith once delivered." We have to go back beyond that.

"The faith once delivered" that we got from Mr. Armstrong was the faith that was delivered to the apostles by Jesus Christ and to Moses in the Old Testament. That is *the faith once delivered!* Mr. Armstrong re-instated and reaffirmed that. He brought it back to our attention. But we have to be careful how we word that. Mr. Armstrong is credited for re-establishing that—under God's direction, with God's power and authority. But it was already there. It just was not noticeable, completely, to the church of God. So remember that our "faith once delivered," and that faith that we first received, was what Jesus Christ gave to the apostles. We have to go back to the source of these things.

Romans 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. . . .

Romans 6:22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

Having died with Jesus Christ, we now "walk in newness of life," as verse 4 says—living from that time on in the service of God and enjoying sanctification and its end, eternal life. The Days of Unleavened Bread explain and memorialize the second major step in salvation—*sanctification*. The first major step is the *justification* which Passover pictures. Verse 22 gives us a three-step process to eternal liberty and everlasting life. It is actually a summary.

First, Jesus Christ liberates us from sin. Second, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we serve God in obedience to the law of liberty. And third, in liberty from sin, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we produce righteous fruit—including love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control. It is crucial that we continue to obey God—remembering what God requires, and never ever forgetting.

James 1:23-25 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself, goes his way, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, he is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Sin has dominion over mankind as long as they are under the penalty of the law. "Freedom from law" was a central element in Paul's explanation of the process of salvation in Romans 6. It is inseparably bound up with freedom from sin, although the law is not equated with sin. In Romans 7:1-4, the law is depicted as a husband to whom his wife (that is, the Christian) is bound as long as they both live. The husband's death frees her from that bond and

enables her to marry another—spiritually speaking that is, of course, Jesus Christ. The law is also represented as our schoolmaster, prior to our justification by faith.

Galatians 3:23-25 ? But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

This shows that the law has a temporary custodial function in God's plan of salvation—until the "coming of faith." This *coming of faith* can be understood as an event both in salvation history and in the lives of individual Christians. In salvation history, it coincides with the appearance of Christ, in whom the parenthetic reign of law ended—so that the age of faith, that is, the age of the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, could begin. In the lives of Christians individually, the coming of faith coincides with our abandonment of the attempt to establish our own righteous standing and our acceptance from God of the righteousness received through faith in Christ.

The law is compared to the slave who accompanied the master's son wherever he went, and exercised a disciplinary responsibility over him—until he came of age. Through faith, we "come of age" spiritually and have no further need of a custodian. Therefore, we are set free from law. That liberation from law involves redemption from the curse that the law pronounces on those who fail to keep it. Deuteronomy 27:15-26 begins each verse with the phrase "Cursed be. . ." Then Moses lists, phrases, abominations that Israel is warned not to partake of.

For emphasis and clarity, God inspired Moses to record details about what would bring about a curse. It can be summarized as disobedience to God's law, of course. Some of the most terrifying scriptures in the Bible are found in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, where God emphatically sets down the curses that will come upon us for disobedience! Twenty-seven types of curses are found in these contexts, representing virtually all the miseries that could be imagined occurring in ancient Israel—or in modern Israel today (meaning

the Israelitish nations, the descendants of Abraham). All of these can be summarized by six words beginning with the letter "D"—defeat, disease, desolation, deprivation, deportation, and death.

This list of curses is a warning of what God will cause to happen to those who break the law of God. Jeremiah speaks of the curse that attends the law, in Jeremiah 11:3—as Paul does in Galatians 3:13—with the ultimate curse being that of death. Anyone who disobeys God's law is a sinner and falls under the curse of the whole law for breaking even one portion of the law. That includes all of us! Romans 3:23-24 says "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." To state the obvious—to be under the curse of the law is a horrible thing.

Liberation from law involves redemption from the curse that the law pronounces on those who fail to keep it. This redemption is the result of Christ bearing the curse in our place. It almost seems like a contradiction that Christ is referred to as "most blessed forever" in Psalms 21:6 and Psalm 45:2, and as "a curse for us" in Galatians 3:13. How has Jesus Christ become "a curse" for us? Christ's bearing the curse results in our receiving by faith the gift of the Spirit—liberating us from the penalty of the sin.

Galatians 3:10-14 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

In verse 10, the Hebrew word for curse is "*katara*." That means a thorough curse uttered out of maliciousness or malevolence upon those (primarily Jews) who sought justification by obedience through the *works* of the law only, and not also by *faith*. Those living under the penalty of law are under

the law's curse. The law pronounces a curse upon all who fail to keep the law in its entirety, as Deuteronomy 27:26 declares and as is recorded in Galatians 3:10.

The law is not a collection of stray and miscellaneous parts, some of which may be conveniently disregarded. It is a whole and must be kept in all its parts, if it is to be kept at all. The point is that a curse is attached to any failure to keep the law, no matter how small. Since all fail, all are under the curse. Paul states this here with the fact that "*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

In verse 11, it says "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." No one is justified (or, declared righteous) by the law. Those declared righteous *live by faith*, and the faithful are justified by God.

In verse 13, the word curse is again used. Here it is the same Hebrew word, "*katara*," as was seen in verse 10. The *curse of the law* is *the death penalty*. Paul's phrase is always "the curse of the law," rather than "the curse of God." Still, the law is God's law—an extension of His character and will, and it is a failure to keep the law that brings man under God's wrath. The curse involves the true anathema of God, and refers to both Jew and Gentile since both receive deliverance through Christ—Christ "having become a curse for us." That is, Christ having become what we were—that is, a curse through sin—in our behalf, that we may cease to be a curse.

Christ took the curse upon Himself, becoming a curse for us! Conybeare renders this "He became accursed for our sakes." Barnes explains it like this: "Jesus was subjected to what was regarded as an accursed death. He was treated in His death as if He had been a criminal." In having become a curse for us, Christ also became a blessing to us—in that He took the penalty of the law's curse upon Himself in His crucifixion.

Now let us look at the phrase "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 "If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely

bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God."

At the time of Christ and before, the person who suffered for breaking the law was considered as bearing the curse in his body. Therefore, in the same day in which a criminal was executed, it was ordered that his body be buried—that the land might not be polluted, because the one hanged (which was the case with every exceptionally wicked criminal) was considered *accursed of God*. Every one was considered accursed of God.

A curse that has overtaken its victim is a spent force. That is, it no longer carries any power. It can be understood, in part, both through the illustration of the Old Testament sacrifices and in Christ's cry of abandonment while on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27: 46). The idea of the curse of sin being borne away by an innocent substitute is best seen in the illustration concerning the scapegoat found in Leviticus 16: 5, 7-10, and 20-22.

Back in Galatians 3:14, it says there that the blessings of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ so that we might receive the promises of the Spirit through faith. Two purposes are given in this verse for why Christ redeemed us through His death. One is that the blessing of Abraham—justification—might come to Gentiles as well as Jews. And, two, that all might together receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The blessing of Abraham is seen today in the reception of the Holy Spirit, as it is received with faith.

Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:26, "Bless those who curse you." expresses the proper response toward those who do wrong against us. Here we see the principle of *love toward others*. Luke 6:31 says, "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise." Revelation 22 predicts the cessation of "the curse." Curses are the result of sin. They manifest themselves in defeat, disease, desolation, deprivation, deportation, and death. Revelation 22:3 says "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him." Sin will have been

removed—which is the source of curses. Christ's bearing of the curse resulted in our receiving by faith the gift of the Spirit—liberating us from the penalty of sin.

Christ's ministry was one of *liberation*. He is described in Luke as announcing Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1, which announces good news to the meek and release for captives.

Isaiah 61:1-2 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."

Since Jesus started no liberation to free slaves when He was here in His physical life, His famous statement in this vein is spiritually intended when He claims (in Luke 4:18) that God "has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives. . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed." With His explanation of Isaiah 61 and resulting activity, He showed that the liberation that He proclaimed was not the kind that many of His contemporaries were anticipating—that is, liberation from Imperial Rome. Political liberation was proclaimed in particular by the adherents of *the fourth philosophy* (as Josephus called it, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*). That is, the followers of Judas of Galilee—who developed, in due course, into the party of the Zealots. That is the liberation that the Jews of that time thought that Christ was bringing—not the *spiritual liberation from sin* that we know.

In fact, neither in the teaching of Jesus nor in the rest of the New Testament does "political liberty" play a significant part. The incident of the tribute money (in Mark 12) shows that Jesus did not regard the payment of taxes to Caesar as an obstacle to the interest of the Kingdom of God. Ignoring Zealot obsession with a national liberation from Rome, Christ declared that He had come to set Israelites free from the state of slavery to sin and Satan, in which He found them.

John 8:34-36 Jesus answered them, "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is the slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

That is, we shall have our liberation, indeed. As I said, our liberation begins with what this day signifies. He had come, He said, to overthrow "the prince of this world" and to release his prisoners. Exorcisms and healings were part of this work of dispossession. Christ appealed to these as proof of the coming among men of the Representative of the Kingdom of God. Liberty is a concept that describes salvation. This freedom—in all of its aspects—is the gift of Christ, who by death bought us out of bondage.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

So, again, liberty is a concept that describes salvation. This freedom—in all of its aspects—is a gift of Christ who, by death, brought us out of bondage. Freedom from the law, sin, and death is conveyed to us by the Spirit that unites us to Christ through faith. Liberation brings with it adoption. Those set free from guilt become sons of God and receive the Spirit of Christ as the Spirit of adoption—assuring us that we are, in truth, God's sons and heirs. A Christian's response to the divine gift of liberty, and the means of receiving it, is a free acceptance of *bond service*—to God, to Christ, to righteousness, and to all men for the sake of the gospel.

In our liberation that we receive through Jesus Christ, we have the responsibility, individually, of limiting our liberation to within the confines of what Jesus Christ has revealed to us—what is written within the Word of God. Christian liberty is neither abolishing of responsibility nor a sanctioning of license. We are no longer under the penalty of the law for salvation, but we are not 'without law toward God.' The divine law—as interpreted and exemplified by Christ Himself—remains the standard

expressing Christ's will for *us, the freed bondservants*. We are under the law of Christ.

I Corinthians 9:18-19 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more. . . .

In our liberty, which we have received as a gift, we receive more liberty by putting ourselves under God the Father and Jesus Christ—and Their direction in the Word of God.

I Corinthians 9:20 . . . and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law. . . .

We see that those who have not been converted yet are still under the law in that they know that there is a God and that there is a law. No one can deny this, because creation shows us—beyond a shadow of a doubt—that there is a God. That is, a God with law and organization and who has a very careful plan.

I Corinthians 9:21 . . . to those who are without law, as without law, (not being without law to God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law.

So there are two different laws. There is the law that the world is under the penalty of, and then there is the law of Christ, which is the way of Christ. That is, *the way* of God the Father and Jesus Christ. The example of the life that Jesus Christ set is a law in and of itself. That is what this law is here. It is *a way of life*. It is God's way of life.

The "law of Christ," and the "law of liberty," and the "law of love" are all the same law. The principle is the voluntary and unstinting self-sacrifice for the good of mankind and the glory of God. This *life of love* is the response of gratitude that the liberating gospel both requires and stirs up. Christian

liberty is precisely freedom for love and service to God and mankind. It is abused when it is made an excuse for unloving license or irresponsible lack of consideration.

Paul wrote, in I Corinthians 8:9, "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." We must use our liberty responsibly—with an eye to what is expedient and edifying, and with tender regard for others. The limits that permit and even enhance true liberty are those of covenant between God and man. To serve the Creator God is not servitude, but liberty. It is not servitude if the One that we serve is the very One who, in being served, makes us free. That is, makes us even more "free" and grants us more liberty.

Freedom is a major theme of Exodus, and we know that "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:36) It is in the spiritual adherence to the "word written in the heart" through the Holy Spirit that we can be part of a glorious Kingdom in which chaos does not need to be restrained by chains because chaos will not arise. What a contradiction that is to the way of this world! Chaos constantly arises from the so-called "freedom" and "liberty" that man receives. As soon as he received "freedom," it begins to become *perverse* immediately. Then through *tolerance*, society—in that "freedom"—ends up being in slavery. The tolerance leads to more sin, which then leads eventually to slavery.

Paul wrote, in II Corinthians 3:17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Our liberty is put to the best use by responsible fulfillment of the law of love. Throughout this whole sermon, we have constantly been hitting scriptures that express the importance of the law of love. That is what our liberty is based in. That liberty that we get from God the Father and Jesus Christ can only be our "liberty" if we live by the law of love—the law of Christ, and the law of God.

There was a time in the United States' history—long since passed—and no doubt in the history of many countries (especially Israelitish nations), when liberty was deeply desired and sought after. Indeed, many millions have been willing to die for it. But they totally miss the way of achieving *eternal liberty*. Because they reject God, they remain in permanent bondage to corrupt leaders—and, more importantly, to sin.

We, on the other hand, have an awesome opportunity to be part of the *spiritual liberation* God has given His church. We must deeply desire and seek after this liberty and what it means for us. This day signifies our entering into that eternal liberation so few on earth have ever had access to, or have ever understood. May God grant us *liberty*—eternal liberation in the Kingdom of God!