

The Gospel of John (55) The Son who sets Sinners Free (2)

Introduction:

Last Lord's Day we were unable to address all that is set forth in the few verses before us in John 8:30 through 41. We were able to consider several matters, however, including (1) the importance of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ (v. 31), (2) our Lord's promise that God's truth would make free His true disciples (v. 32), and (3) we spoke of the power of sin to enslave those who indulge in sin (vs. 33-35). But we only began to address the matter as it is set forth in verse 36. Here the Lord Jesus declared His ability and willingness to set His people free from sin. We desire to address this more fully today.

Let us read our passage once again. Here is **John 8:30-41**:

³⁰As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

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

³³They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"

³⁴Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. ³⁶Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

³⁷"I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. ³⁸I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."

³⁹They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. ⁴⁰But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. ⁴¹You do the deeds of your father."

Last week we described the setting in the temple in which our Lord spoke these words. He was probably speaking to a rather large gathering. And although they all listened to Him with interest, they did not all listen to Him with the same attitude or degree of receptivity to what He was teaching them. The people had mixed feelings regarding Him. Some were very opposed to Him. But we read that "many" among them had "believed in Him" (v. 30).

As we said last week, we should not read more into the description of the faith of these people than what is suggested here. Although "many believed", we should not think that they had necessarily come to saving faith in Jesus as their Messiah. Yes, they "believed", but whether or not they were true disciples of Jesus, those who did possess salvation, could only be determined by their continuance in His words. By abiding in His word, they would show themselves to be His true disciples (v. 31). Very importantly, we affirmed from the Scriptures that only true disciples of Jesus Christ are promised salvation from their sins receiving God's gift of everlasting life.

What is the definition of a true disciple of Christ?

A disciple of Jesus Christ is a professing Christian, one who has purposed to devote himself/herself to obey the teachings of Christ. A disciple of Christ is one who has purposed to learn and obey all that Christ has commanded of His followers and he continues to live unto the Lord in faith and obedience throughout his life.

We want to be very clear about this matter. A true disciple of Jesus Christ is one who shows forth his faith in the manner that he lives. He seeks to learn to do all that the Lord Jesus has commanded him in the Holy

Scriptures (Matt. 28:20). And it is through the things that he does that proves that he is a man or woman of true faith, one who is a true disciple of Jesus Christ. A true Christian may be known not by what he claims to believe, but by what his life demonstrates that he believes.

In order to encourage His disciples as well as to refute and repudiate the others, our Lord reasserted His promise in **verse 36**, “*Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*” But what does this mean? **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote these words:

First, the truth which Christ teaches tends to make men free (Isa. 61:1). Justification makes us free from the guilt of sin, by which we were *bound over* to the judgment of God, and *bound under* amazing fears; sanctification makes us free from the bondage of corruption, by which we were *restrained* from that service which is perfect freedom, and *constrained* to that which is perfect slavery. Gospel truth frees us from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and the more grievous burdens of the traditions of the elders. It makes us *free from* our spiritual enemies, free *in* the service of God, free *to* the privileges of sons, and free *for* the Jerusalem which is from above, which is free.

Secondly, the knowing, entertaining, and believing, of this truth does actually *make us free*, free from prejudices, mistakes, and false notions, than which nothing more *enslaves* and *entangles* the soul, free from the dominion of lust and passion; and restores the soul to the government of itself, by reducing it into obedience to its Creator. The mind, by admitting the truth of Christ in the light and power, is vastly enlarged, and has scope and compass given it, is greatly elevated and raised above things of sense, and never acts with so true a liberty as when it acts under a divine command.¹

And **John Gill** (1697-1771) wrote of the freedom that Christ grants His true disciples:

This suggests, that true freedom is by Jesus Christ, the Son of God (see Galatians 5:1). He it is that makes the saints free from sin; not from the being of it in this life, but from the bondage and servitude of it, from its power and dominion, and from its guilt and liability to punishment for it, by procuring the pardon of their sins through His blood, and justifying their persons by His righteousness: He also makes them free, or delivers them from the captivity of Satan, by ransoming them out of his hands, taking the prey from the mighty, binding the strong man armed, and delivering them from him, and from the power of darkness, and putting them into His own kingdom; He does not indeed free them altogether from his temptations, but He preserves them by His power from being hurt and destroyed by him: He likewise makes His people free from the law, not only the ceremonial law, which is abolished by Him, but from the moral law; not from obedience to it, as it is in His hands, and a rule of walk and conversation to them, but as in the hands of Moses, and as a covenant of works, and from the rigorous exaction of it, and from seeking justification and life by it, and from its curse and condemnation: and He gives them freedom of access to God, as their Father, through His blood and by His Spirit; and admits them to all the privileges and immunities of the church below; and gives them a right to, faith in, and an expectation of the glorious liberty of the children of God hereafter; and such are truly Christ's freemen.

Now although our Lord's promise of John 8:12 is a very blessed one in which a true disciple may receive great encouragement, not all Christians are necessarily encouraged by it. There are true Christians, when thinking of their great struggles and what seems to them their continual defeat in committing sin, who question their relationship with the Lord, because of what they perceive to be perpetual, relentless enslavement to sin. They ask,

“Lord, why don't I experience and enjoy the freedom from sin that You have promised me as Your disciple? Perhaps I am not a true disciple at all, for it would appear that I am anything but free, as You have promised your people!”

¹ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 993.

And so, it would serve us well to understand what our Lord was promising and what He was not promising His disciples that knowing the truth would bring them.

I mentioned last week of a sermon on John 8:36 that was once proclaimed by **John Flavel** (1627-1691), a puritan of the 17th century. It was entitled, “*The Liberty of Believers Opened and Stated.*”² He wrote of this liberty true disciples possess and enjoy:

The devil persuades you, that the ways of obedience and strict godliness are a perfect bondage. But ever if God regenerate you, you will find His ways, “ways of pleasantness, and all His paths peace.” You will “rejoice in the way of His commandments as much as in all ‘riches.’” You will find the worst work Christ puts you about, even suffering work, sweeter than all the pleasures that ever you found in sin. O therefore open your hearts at the call of the gospel: Come unto Christ, *then you will be free indeed.*”³

Flavel wrote of the liberty into which Christ delivers His people based on verse 36, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”:

In which words have two parts; viz, 1. A supposition. 2. A concession.

First, a supposition: The womb of nature has cast you forth into the world in a state of bondage! In that state you have lived all your days; servants to sin; slaves to your lusts; yet freedom is to be obtained: and this freedom is the prerogative belonging to the Son of God to bestow: “If the Son shall make you free.”

Second, a concession: Christ’s concession upon this supposition, “Then shall ye be free indeed,” i.e. you shall have a real freedom, and excellent and everlasting freedom: No conceit only, as that which ye now boast of is: If ever therefore you will be free men indeed, believe in Me. Hence note:

Doctrine: That interest in Christ sets the soul at liberty from all the bondage whereunto it was subjected in its natural state.

Now as we attempt to understand more clearly and precisely what our Lord meant by these words, it is important that we address the following: (1) What true disciples are not freed from by Jesus Christ in this world; (2) what that bondage from which every true disciple is freed by Christ; and (3) what kind of freedom that is which begins upon our first believing and commencing to follow Him. And then (4) we will briefly explain the great blessing we enjoy in our present spiritual liberty.

1. What true disciples are *not* freed from by Jesus Christ in this world

We should not think that the liberty we have in Christ frees us absolutely, from everything in this world and with respect to our duty to our God.

(1) **The Lord Jesus does *not* free believers from their obligation to obey His moral law.** Paul the Christian could say, “So with my mind I serve the law of God” (Rom. 7:25). Christians are to serve God by ordering their lives according to the law of God as their moral code. As Flavel wrote,

“It is true we are no more under it (the law) as a *covenant* for our *justification*; but we are, and must still be under it, as a rule for our *direction*”... This is a sure truth, that they (disciples) are freed from its *penalties* are still under its *precepts*. Though believers are no longer under its *curse*, yet they are still under its *conduct*: The law sends us to Christ to be *justified*, and Christ sends us to the law to be *regulated*... It is excellent when Christians begin to obey the law *from* life, which others obey *for* life; because they *are* justified, not that they *may be* justified.”⁴

² John Flavel, **Works of John Flavel, The**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pp. 269-278. What we say about this matter I gleaned from him.

³ Ibid, p. 278.

⁴ Flavel, p. 271.

God has freed His people from the condemnation of His law, but not from the obligation to live according to His law. The moral law of God continues to be the law code of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in which we live. Paul as a Christian wrote, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (Rom. 7:22).

Our confession of faith sets forth the role of the law of God for the Christian life quite well:

Chapter 19: Of the Law of God

1. God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it. (Gen. 1:27; Ecc. 7:29; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 12)

2. The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man. (Rom. 2:14f; Deut. 10:4)

3. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end abrogated and taken away. (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:14, 16f; 1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:14-16)

4. To them also He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only being of moral use.

5. The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (Rom. 13:8-10; James 2:8-12; Matt, 5:17-19; Rom. 3:31)

6. Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their natures, hearts, and lives, so as examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against, sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of His obedience; it is likewise of use to the regenerate (i.e. the Christian) to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin; and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse and unallayed rigour thereof. The promises of it likewise shew them God's approbation (approval) of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, though not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works; so as man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace. (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:20; 6:12-14; 7:7; 8:1; 10:4; 1 Pet. 3:8-13)

7. Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done. (Gal. 3:21; Ezek. 36:27)⁵

⁵ **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, Article 19.

But even as we set forth these truths of Holy Scripture, we acknowledge that there is great error that is commonly asserted by well-intentioned people, even by true Christians. They deny any role of God's law to direct the Christian in how he is to live. They believe that all that God requires of them is faith, and that faith is to be understood as faith wholly upon who Christ is and what He did. Now in one sense, there is a great deal of truth to that statement. Certainly we are justified by God through faith in Christ alone. However, the faith that trusts Jesus Christ to forgive one's sins also trusts the Lord Jesus Christ to govern one's life. He is the Lord. And the Lord Jesus governs His people through the law of God that He has given by which all people are to order their lives. The true Christian, the true disciple of Jesus Christ, because of his faith in the Lord Jesus, carries on this effort to conform himself to the life of righteousness set forth in God's moral law. We are to follow the Lord Jesus in the same way that He ordered His life. We are to follow Him in faith and obedience in the narrow way that He has prescribed for us. Jesus taught these words to those who heard Him:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴Because *narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life*, and there are few who find it.” (Matt. 7:13f)

This narrow way is a way of life prescribed by God's law. It is the same path that our Lord Jesus Himself traveled when He passed through this world. We are to follow Him who has led the way that we are to live. Nevertheless, there those Christians who have been taught that this is not what the Holy Scriptures teach. They say that faith *alone* is all that is required of them and that they are free to order their lives according to the course they choose for themselves, even in ways that are contrary to the will of God as set forth in the written Word of God. As long as they believe, they think, it matters not how they live.

The Lord Jesus Himself declared that they are in error in this matter do not please Him. He declared in His Sermon on the Mount these words:

¹⁷“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees⁶, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17-20)

And so we conclude that when the Lord Jesus declared in John 8:36, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”, He was *not* promising to free believers from their obligation to obey His moral law.

(2) The Lord Jesus has *not* freed His disciples from the temptations and assaults of satan.

Again, **John Flavel** wrote about this matter:

“Even those that are freed from his (^{satan's}) *dominion*, are not free from his *molestation*. It is said indeed, Romans 16:20, “God shall shortly bruise satan under your feet.” But meantime he has power to bruise and buffet us by injections (2 Cor. 12:7). He now bruises Christ's heel (Gen. 3:15), i.e. bruises Him in His tempted and afflicted members. Though he cannot kill them, yet he can and doth afflict and fright them, by shooting fiery darts of temptation among them (Eph. 6:16). It is true, when the saints are got safe into heaven they are out of gunshot; there is perfect freedom from all temptation. A believer may then say, “O thou enemy, temptations are come to a perpetual end. I am now arrived there, where none of thy fiery darts can reach me.” But this freedom is not yet.⁷

⁶ The “righteousness” of the Pharisees was only external, to be seen of men, but the righteousness of the true disciple is a matter of the heart, that which is internal, not merely what one does outside, external to themselves.

⁷ Ibid.

Some Christians wrongly assume that coming to Christ is going to bring an end to all the trouble in their soul, that the Christian life will be characterized as all pleasantness and peacefulness, that they will be not be accosted by the enemy of their souls. But becoming a Christian may actually compound the trials and troubles that are experienced from the devil. There will be problems with other people and problems dealing with things and the things that happen to us. There will be temptations that entice and trouble the Christian, the same kinds of temptations he encountered before becoming a Christian, but then they were not terribly troubling to him. Now, however, the Christian is tormented by the temptations that the devil lays before him day after day.

And then also it is often the case that when one becomes a Christian only then does he begin to experience some kinds of problems that are quite strange to his experience or his expectations. The devil may assault more directly the Christian, the one who is escaping his realm rather than trouble the one who is firmly entrenched in his kingdom.

It is the Christian that the Word of God warns,

⁸Be sober, be vigilant; because *your adversary* the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. ¹⁰But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. ¹¹To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:8-11)

Who is it that the devil is “seeking whom he may devour”, his own people? No, his assault is on those who have repudiated his rule over them and who have enlisted in following King Jesus. If you are a follower of Jesus the devil is “*your adversary*.” Christians may find themselves more assaulted by the one like a “roaring lion” than they had ever experienced before they had become Christians.

The Christian life is described in the Scriptures as one characterized by conflict and difficulty. The Lord Jesus declared these words:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; ³⁶and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ ³⁷He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matt. 10:34-39)

Paul wrote of his own struggles in serving and walking with our Lord.

⁸We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:8-12)

Paul’s exhortation to the Christians in the church at Ephesus betrays the fact that the devil assaults Christians with hostility and severity. Paul wrote,

¹⁰Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, *that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* ¹²*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, *that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶above all, taking the shield of faith *with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.* ¹⁷And take the helmet of

salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints... (Eph. 6:10-18)

If Christians fail to equip themselves with the spiritual “armour”, they will not be successful “to stand” against the wiles of the devil. If they fail to equip themselves rightly and engage the evil one successfully, they will not be able “*to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*” Yes, the Lord has made provision for His people that they can stand against this spiritual enemy, but the Lord Jesus has *not* freed His disciples from having to engage the temptations and assaults of satan. The battle is hottest and greatest against the enemy of the Lord for those who stand with the Lord Jesus against him.

He assaults us with trouble and temptation because we have our backs to him and are walking from him into the arms of our Lord Jesus. And he resents it. He is as Apollyon (the devil) toward Christian in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*:

So he went on, and Apollyon met him. Now the monster was hideous to behold: he was clothed with scales, like a fish, and they are his pride; he had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion. When he was come up to Christian, he beheld him with a disdainful countenance, and thus began to question with him.

APOLLYON. Whence come you, and whither are you bound?

CHRISTIAN. I am come from the city of Destruction, which is the place of all evil, and am going to the city of Zion.

APOLLYON. By this I perceive thou art one of my subjects; for all that country is mine, and I am the prince and God of it. How is it, then, that thou hast run away from thy king? Were it not that I hope thou mayest do me more service, I would strike thee now, at one blow, to the ground.

CHRISTIAN. I was born indeed, in your dominions, but your service was hard, and your wages such as a man could not live on; for the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), therefore, when I was come to years, I did, as other considerate persons do, look out, if, perhaps, I might mend myself.

APOLLYON. There is no prince that will thus lightly lose his subjects, neither will I as yet lose thee; but since thou complainest of thy service and wages, be content to go back: what our country will afford, I do here promise to give thee.

CHRISTIAN. But I have let myself to another, even to the King of princes; and how can I, with fairness, go back with thee?

APOLLYON. Thou hast done in this, according to the proverb, ‘changed a bad for a worse;’ but it is ordinary for those that have professed themselves His servants, after a while to give Him the slip, and return again to me. Do thou so too, and all shall be well.

CHRISTIAN. I have given Him my faith, and sworn my allegiance to Him; how, then, can I go back from this, and not be hanged as a traitor?

APOLLYON. Thou didst the same to me, and yet I am willing to pass by all, if now thou wilt yet turn again and go back.

CHRISTIAN. What I promised thee was in my nonage; and, besides, I count the Prince under whose banner now I stand is able to absolve me, yea, and to pardon also what I did as to my compliance with thee; and besides, O thou destroying Apollyon, to speak truth, I like His service, His wages, His servants, His

government, His company, and country, better than thine; and, therefore, leave off to persuade me further; I am His servant, and I will follow Him.

APOLLYON. Consider, again, when thou art in cool blood, what thou art like to meet with in the way that thou goest. Thou knowest that, for the most part, His servants come to an ill end, because they are transgressors against me and my ways. How many of them have been put to shameful deaths! And, besides, thou countest His service better than mine, whereas He never yet came from the place where He is to deliver any that served Him out of their hands; but as for me, how many times, as all the world very well knows, have I delivered, either by power, or fraud, those that have faithfully served me, from Him and His, though taken by them; and so I will deliver thee.

CHRISTIAN. His forbearing at present to deliver them is on purpose to try their love, whether they will cleave to Him to the end; and as for the ill end thou sayest they come to, that is most glorious in their account; for, for present deliverance, they do not much expect it, for they stay for their glory, and then they shall have it when their Prince comes in His and the glory of the angels.

APOLLYON. Thou hast already been unfaithful in thy service to Him; and how dost thou think to receive wages of Him?

CHRISTIAN. Wherein, O Apollyon, have I been unfaithful to Him?

APOLLYON. Thou didst faint at first setting out, when thou wast almost choked in the Gulf of Despond; thou didst attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden, whereas thou shouldst have stayed till thy Prince had taken it off; thou didst sinfully sleep and lose thy choice thing; thou wast, also, almost persuaded to go back at the sight of the lions; and when thou talkest of thy journey, and of what thou hast heard and seen, thou art inwardly desirous of vain-glory in all that thou sayest or doest.

CHRISTIAN. All this is true, and much more which thou hast left out; but the Prince whom I serve and honour is merciful, and ready to forgive; but, besides, these infirmities possessed me in thy country, for there I sucked them in; and I have groaned under them, been sorry for them, and have obtained pardon of my Prince.

Then Apollyon broke out into a grievous rage, saying, *‘I am an enemy to this Prince; I hate his person, his laws, and people: I am come out on purpose to withstand thee.’*

And so we see that the Lord Jesus has *not* freed His disciples from the temptations and assaults of satan.

(3) Christ has *not* yet freed believers in this world from the motions of indwelling sin.

John Flavel wrote of these struggles with sin:

“These are continually acting, and infesting the holiest of men (Rom. 7:21, 23, 24). Corruptions, like Canaanites, are still left in the land to be thorns in your eyes, and goads in your sides. Those that boast most of freedom from the motions of sin, have most cause to suspect themselves still under the dominion of sin (i.e. unsaved).”⁸

In Romans 7 the apostle Paul wrote of the “*sin that dwells in me*” (Rom. 7:17). He could write, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) *nothing good dwells* (7:18); for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” He wrote of his own struggle against sin, “For the good that I will to do, I

⁸ Ibid, p. 272.

do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but *sin that dwells in me*" (vs. 19f).

The writer to the Hebrew Christians addressed "the sin that easily besets us" (

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, *and the sin which so easily ensnares us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1f)

The ESV translates it this way: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely...*" The true Christian may have sin, even a particular sin, "cling closely" to him even while he is trying to run and win this race toward glory. It is a sin that "easily ensnares" him.

The apostle John wrote of the prevalency of sin that plagues the true believer, the true disciple of Jesus Christ. He wrote, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8), and, "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:10). Christians are troubled by their sin. Sin does not reign over them, for Jesus Christ is Lord. But sin is always present and is always troubling the soul. Only when we pass from this life in this world will we be fully delivered from the presence of sin.

(4) Jesus Christ does *not* free believers, in this world, from inward troubles and exercises of soul, upon account of sin.

Flavel wrote of these inward trials and troubles.

"God may let loose satan, and conscience too, in the way of terrible accusations, which may greatly distress the soul of a believer, and woefully eclipse the light of God's countenance, and break the peace of their souls."

Sin committed by the true Christian is a troubling matter. Whereas before he was a Christian, he may have become desensitized to his sin through the hardening of his conscience and his lack of concern and desire for holiness in his life. But the Christian is quite a different being. He may become quite sensitive to the presence and the evil of sin. The believer may come to see his sin as exceedingly sinful, and he is thereby plagued greatly in his conscience. **J. C. Philpott** (1802-1869) once wrote of this sensitivity of sin that may be experienced by a maturing Christian. He first spoke of the difficulty that he encounters from non-Christians, but then he speaks of the much worse affliction, the sin that still resides in his soul:

However various sects differ among themselves, they all unite in condemning him. All other religion is right, and his alone wrong; everyone else's faith is genuine, and his only is spurious. Of him alone the charitable augur uncharitably; universal salvationists cut off him alone from salvation; those that pity the heathen have no pity for him; and those who compass sea and land to make one proselyte, pronounce his case alone as past recovery. And what is his trespass and what is his sin, that they so hotly pursue after him? (Gen. 31:36). Does he live in sin? No. Is he buried in the world, head over ears in politics, heaping together dishonest gains, or eaten up with covetousness? None dare say so. Does he neglect prayer, reading the Word, hearing the truth, contributing to the necessities of saints, and living peaceably with all men? No. Why then this universal baying at him from every dog of the pack? For the same reason that Joseph's brethren hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him—the Father loves him, and has clothed him in a garment of many colors, and given him revelations which He has denied to them. But he has sorrow, too, and opposition within, far more trying to his spirit than the evil names which malicious ignorance heaps upon him, or the unjust suspicions which Pharisaic pride harbours against him. Paul, after being caught up into the third heaven, had given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure (2 Cor. 12:7). Go where he would, this thorn still accompanied him, rankling continually in his flesh, hampering every movement, inflicting unceasing pain, and piercing him

deeper and deeper the more that he struggled against it. Ten thousand thorns in the hedge do not pain like one in the flesh. And thus ten thousand unjust suspicions of the sons of Belial, though they be “all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear” (2 Sam. 23:6, 7)—ten thousand suspicions, I say, from vulture-eyed professors are but as thorns in the hedge, which only wound us when we go near them, and which a wise man will keep a due distance from. But a thorn in the flesh, driven and fastened in by the hand of God, we can neither ease nor extract.

And thus any one constant harassing temptation, which strikes into the soul of a child of God, will grieve and wound him a thousand times more deeply than a thick hedge of furze-bush professors standing by the roadside. But by these painful exercises he is kept from settling down on the lees of a dead assurance, or resting at his ease on the ground of a past experience. This rankling thorn preserves him from that vain, wretched, delusive establishment, falsely so-called, which, as a spreading gangrene, has infected well nigh whole churches with the dry rot—an establishment built upon length of profession, upon belief of the doctrines of grace, upon membership in a Particular Baptist Church, upon consistency of conduct, upon a general currency as a believer, upon freedom from doubts and fears, and upon an experience twenty years ago. His thorn in the flesh will not let him stand at ease, or ground his arms, as though the battle were won, the enemy vanquished, and the articles of peace signed. He cannot rest on doctrines, of which the power is not now felt; nor in a past experience, which is not continually renewed; nor in a Saviour in the Bible whose presence is not from time to time manifested; nor in promises, of which the sweetness is not occasionally enjoyed. He cannot thus cast anchor in the Dead Sea. He cannot lie stretched at his ease on this downy bed, for his thorn will not let him rest, but makes him “full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day” (Job 7:4).⁹

Jesus Christ does *not* free believers, in this world, from inward troubles and exercises of soul, upon account of sin. Troubles within his soul may plague him in this life.

(5) Christ has *not* freed His disciples, in this world, from the rods of affliction. Hebrews 12:8 reads, “But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.”

“All the children of God are made free, yet what son is there whom the father chasteneth not? Exemption from affliction is so far from being the mark of a free man, that the apostle there makes it the mark of a slave.” “To be free from affliction would be no benefit to believers, who receive so many benefits from it.”¹⁰

(6) “No believer is freed by Christ from the *stroke* of death, though they are all freed from the *sting* of death (Rom. 8:10). The bodies of believers are under the same law of mortality with other men (Heb. 9:27).”¹¹

2. What that bondage from which every true disciple is freed by Christ;

(1) All true disciples are freed from the *rigour* and the *curse* of the law.

Flavel wrote regarding this matter:

“The rigorous yoke of the law is broken off from their necks, and the sweet and easy yoke of Jesus Christ is put on (Matt. 9:28). The law required perfect working, under pain of a curse (Gal. 3:10), accepted of no

⁹ J. C. Philpott, “**Winter Afore Harvest; or the Soul’s Growth in Grace**”, a sermon preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, England, on Lord’s Day Morning, 20th August, 1837.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

short endeavors; admitted no repentance; gave no strength. It is not so now; proportional strength is given (Phil. 4:13).”¹²

There was no provision under the law of God as a covenant of works to enable people to live according to its precepts. But under the new covenant instituted by Christ, He has available the blessed Holy Spirit to give us strength to enable us to do the things that He commands us in His law.

(2) Similarly, all true disciples are freed from the guilt of sin. “It may trouble, but it cannot condemn them (Rom. 8:1).”¹³

The Lord Jesus in His death rendered the law unable to condemn the true believer (disciple) of Jesus. He bore in His own body the penalty of death that was upon all of His people. He thereby satisfied God’s justice in fulfilling the law’s punishment for His people due to their sin. The law of God, therefore, no longer has any ability to condemn the true believer in Jesus. Paul wrote: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-- for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13). Before we were Christians, we were under the law of God as a rule of life, by which we could not be saved but only condemned. Now as Christians we are under the law of God as a rule of life, but now as administered by Jesus Christ. He is our Lord who not only directs us, but empowers us by the Holy Spirit to live in righteousness, a life characterized by law-keeping. But when we fall short, the law does not condemn us, for Christ intercedes for us, and His life and death have satisfied the demands of the law that once had brought upon us the sentence of death and damnation. The law is no longer in the hands of the Judge to condemn us, but it is now administered by Him who has saved us and empowers us.

(3) Jesus Christ frees all true disciples from the dominion as well as the guilt of sin (Rom. 6:14).

“We are delivered “not from the *residence*, but from the *reign* of sin” (Flavel). Before we came to Christ, we lived unto sin. That was our desire and our delight. It mattered not if God’s law forbid it. If a commandment ran counter to our sinful desire, we set aside the commandment in order to live in our sin. That came to an end with our conversion. Now we live to serve Christ rather than sin. Sin troubles us because it would hinder us from doing that which we truly desire to do, to live before Him according to His righteousness.

True disciples are fully justified before God through their faith alone, so now they are without condemnation before God. They are now enjoying a state of peace between God and themselves. Romans 5:1 reads, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

(4) Jesus Christ sets free all of His true disciples from the power of satan, in whose right they were by nature. “Satan had possession of them, as a man his own goods; but Christ dispossesseth that strong man armed, alters their property, and recovers them out of his hand (Luke 11:21f).”¹⁴ “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13f).

(5) “Christ frees His disciples from the poisonous sting and hurt of death: Kill us it can, but hurt us it cannot” (1 Cor. 15:55f).¹⁵

3. What kind of freedom that is which begins upon our first believing and commencing to follow Him.

Liberty may be regarded as available in two forms: there is *civil* liberty, and there is *sacred* liberty. “As to civil liberty, it belongs not to our present business.” But there is a consummate liberty, that which

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p. 273.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

will be granted us one day in glory. “The liberty believers have at present is but a beginning liberty; they are freed in part from their spiritual enemies; but it is a growing liberty every day, and will be consummate and complete at last.”¹⁶

4. “We will explain the great blessing we enjoy in our present spiritual liberty.”

First, we have a wonderful liberty, for which we could never value enough and express enough our gratefulness to God for the liberty He has given us in Christ.

How could it be imagined that ever those who owed unto God more than ever they could pay by their own eternal sufferings; those that were under the dreadful curse and condemnation of the law, in the power and presence of satan the strong man armed; those that were bound with so many chains in their spiritual prison; their understanding bound with ignorance, their wills with obstinacy, their hearts with impenetrable hardness, their affections with a thousand bewitching vanities, that sight their slavery so much, as industriously to oppose all instruments and means of deliverance; for such persons are set at liberty, notwithstanding all this, is the wonder of wonders, and will deservedly marvelous in the eyes of believers forever.¹⁷

Second, the freedom of believers is a peculiar (special and rare) freedom. We enjoy “a liberty which few obtain; the generality abiding still in bondage to satan... How many nobles and great ones of the world are but loyal slaves of satan, and their own lusts!”¹⁸

Thirdly, the freedom that true disciples of Jesus Christ enjoy is due to the purchase of the blood of Jesus Christ. The Roman soldier said to Paul of his freedom as a Roman citizen, “With a great sum I obtained this freedom.” The cost of his free status was a trifle in comparison to the value of Christ who purchased us with His own sufferings and death.

Fourthly, the liberty disciples possess is a growing and expanding liberty. They increasingly gain power to resist and overcome sin. They grow nearer each day to the time when their liberty will be enjoyed fully.

Fifthly, the liberty that the true disciple enjoys is one that is enjoyed greatly even as it lifts the lowly to a glorious state. Even a Christian who may have been a household slave, could regard himself as the Lord’s freeman. (1 Cor. 7:22).

Sixthly, the liberty enjoyed by true disciples of Jesus Christ is a perpetual and final freedom. They that are once freed by Christ, are forever free. “Sin shall never have dominion over them any more: it may tempt them and trouble them, but shall never more rule and govern them” (cf. Acts 26:18).

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.
The Lord be with you all. (2 Thess. 3:16)

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 274.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 275.

¹⁸ Ibid.