The Greatest Liberty

by Bill Crews

According to Isaiah 61:1 the Messiah was to proclaim liberty to the captives. In a synagogue in His home town of Nazareth Jesus read the Isaiah passage and announced, *"Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears"* (Lk. 4:16-21).

The captivity referred to is not **political** (being held prisoner in a government prison) or **social** (being owned as the slave of another), but ***spiritual*** (being in bondage to sin). The word of Christ, in fact, calls upon every soul to be subject to civil authorities (Rom. 13:1-7) and upon slaves to be obedient to their masters (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25), but no one is called upon to be content in sin or obedient to Satan. Sin is, after all, the most oppressive and the most destructive form of slavery. Don't wait until life is over to discover this!

To certain Jews that had believed on Him (nominally, according to the context), Jesus said, *"If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (Jn. 8:31-32). They mistakenly said, *"We have never yet been in bondage to any man"* (**vs. 33**; had they forgotten the long bondage in Egypt? the Assyrian captivity? the 70 years of Babylonian captivity?, and other times of national oppression? And if they referred only to themselves, did they think they were now free from the Romans? But Jesus had in mind none of these things. However, they were also enslaved by sin and in bondage to the human traditions of their fathers.)

When Jesus said, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin"* (vs. 34), He made clear His meaning. Christ, the great Deliverer, came to set at liberty those who are enslaved by sin. Solomon said, *"Surely there is not a righteous man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not"* (Ecclesiastes 7:20). And Paul wrote, *"For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23). However, full release is offered by and through Christ, and to the extent that mankind is made free from sin, other forms of oppressive bondage will in time disappear.

The saints at Rome, like all other saints who were saved through Christ, were once the bondservants of sin, but they became obedient from the heart unto that form of teaching unto which they were delivered, and were then made free from sin and became bondservants of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). They traded a bondage that was oppressive and destructive for a bondage that was beneficial and salutary (see Matt. 11:28-30 on *"yoke"*).

Because of the liberating power of the truth, the gospel of Christ, it is called *"the law of liberty"* (James 1:25; 2:12). Paul refers to it as *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"* and declares that it made him *"free from the law of sin and death"* (Rom. 8:2). To the saints in Galatia Paul wrote: *"For freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage"* (Gal. 5:1).

And how are Christians to use, rather than abuse, this freedom? *"For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another"* (Gal. 5:13). *"As free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God"* (1 Pet. 2:16 — notice the context, vv. 13-17). We should think of our freedom in Christ more as freedom from things that are oppressive and burdensome rather than as freedom to do as we please or as freedom from restraint and responsibility.

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