

FREE AS A SLAVE

Today we hear the world crying out for more rights. More freedom. Two hundred years ago, the great statesman, Edmund Burke, penned this warning: “Men qualify for freedom in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains on their own appetites. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power is put somewhere on will and appetite, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.”

Contemporary history is filled with movements for the rights of men. But no man can change the world until he himself has been changed. No man can free others until he himself is truly free.

Nearly two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote to a little group of people living in the capital of the world’s greatest civilization. Some were rulers, some were servants. Yet all had been freed from one form of slavery and had gladly surrendered to a new kind. New power had gripped their lives. A transforming faith had altered their destinies. In the midst of a world filled with slavery, they met a brave new message that broke off the shackles of their past, and gave them peace and power in the midst of a chained society.

Paul had some astonishing, perhaps even disturbing things to say about the kind of life that results in true freedom. Part of his message was this:

“You are the SLAVES of the power you have chosen to obey. All men have a choice of two masters; sin, leading to death, or obedience to God, bringing a life of right. Thank God that you, who were once enslaved to sin, have followed from the heart the challenge given to you. Having been delivered from the mastery of sin, you have now willingly become the slaves of Christ and His righteousness...now, being free from sin and being enslaved to God, your lives have begun to show holiness and you are on the path of life that never ends.”
(Romans 6:16-22, Youth Paraphrase)

It’s hard to imagine that anything good could be learned from slavery. But perhaps Paul, and the early Christian church, knew something about the nature of “slavery” that’s totally lost on us today. While slavery to earthly masters can be cruel and harsh, slavery to Christ will set us free. If we really want to change our world, even our world of personal relationships, we need to ask ourselves whether we have “rights,” or whether we are “love-slaves” of Christ.

Who Has the Right To Rule?

At the foundation of the struggle for rights, each must settle this question: Who has the right to rule my life? Even as Christians we often struggle with what we consider “our rights.” The answer is not only simple; it is logical.

The one who has a right to rule the affairs of men is the one best qualified. And who is better qualified than God? He made us. He has the wisdom, the understanding and the love. He has the power to direct and control, the justice to be perfectly fair and the mercy to be kind. God has the ultimate right to our lives. He has the first right to be loved, the right to be worshiped, the right to be obeyed. He has the right to be King. Men have marched for their own rights, but who is marching for the rights of God?

Long ago a party of powerful religious leaders came to speak to a quiet carpenter. These leaders had a real problem with the man who said He had the right and authority to forgive sins. And so they came, with one of their many difficult questions. "Master," they said, "we know you teach and say what is right, and don't play favorites. So we have a question for you. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?"

Jesus lifted up his eyes. "Show me a penny," He said. They gave Him one, wondering. "Whose image and name are stamped on this?" He asked. "Caesar's", they replied. "Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's!"

Like the coins stamped with the image of Caesar, you are made in God's image. Have you given Him the things that belong to Him? Have you given Him what is rightfully His?

Love-Slavery To Christ

The early Christians called themselves "servants of Christ." In Greek, there is a special word for this type of servant; doulos, which means slave. To understand what it means to be a love-slave of Christ, we must discover what this servant hood meant to the first disciples.

Disciples Are Love-Slaves Of Christ

First, they had a clear understanding that a Christian is a person who has been delivered from the service of sin and become a love-slave of Jesus. If Jesus is not truly our Master, then we are not truly Christians. (Romans 10:9) No man is a true Christian who has not made Jesus LORD of all known areas of his life. Deliberate withholding of obedience to God and refusal to surrender known rights, or sins, are signs of a phony Christianity. We cannot be a mixture of bad and good. You are either a love-slave of Christ, or a bond-slave of sin! (Romans 6:12-22; Philippians 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 Corinthians 7:21-24)

Slavery to sin is marked by fear of punishment and hope of reward, as well as guilt and emptiness. Slavery to Jesus Christ is marked by LOVE; unselfish choices for the highest good of God and His creation. This is the sign of the true Christian. He loves Christ, he loves others, and he does what his Master asks him to do.

Slaves Have No Rights Of Their Own

When a man becomes a slave he ceases to have any say in his own life. He has been bought with

a price, and belongs absolutely to his master. All that a slave has and is, lies under the control of his new owner. He is not free from the control of his lord, until death. He is called to serve and to go on serving regardless of praise or blame, weariness or sickness, thanks or disgrace.

When we are slaves to sin, the only way out is death; that is the sting of sin that burns in its final wages. The Lord Jesus offers a new kind of service and an alternate way of death to escape from the slavery of sin. Christ challenges us to die to our old way of life, allow Him to bury our selfish past, and live as His love-slave. As long as we are under His control we will be paid His wages, and not the wages of sin. But if He is to be Boss, He must be absolute Boss. This involves the total surrender of all our rights to Him. Until this happens, He is not our real Master and Lord. (Matt. 10:24-39; Phil 2:5-8; 3:7-8)

True Freedom Is Love-Slavery To Christ

There is certainly NO freedom in sin! Sin is a hard taskmaster that pays its slaves in the coin of a cemetery. We are made to be directed by some power or control. And at the same time, we are given the freedom to choose the power we will obey; either selfishness or the Savior.

Christian freedom is a new kind of control where we are free to do anything we like, because we choose the things that are best for everyone and the things that do not enslave us to selfishness. It is impossible to let both powers control our life at the same time. (Matt: 6:24, 7:16-23; Jas. 3:11-13) Our hearts are either fixed on pleasing Christ or ourselves. If we do not really belong to Him, His laws will seem tiresome. His demands will seem extreme and we will resent and rebel against His commands. But once we have given Him our love and become His slaves, we enter the path to true freedom and God opens the door to sonship in His family. God is a loving Master! He is not harsh, or unfair, or overbearing. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. (Matt. 11:29, 19:29; Luke 9:23-25, 17:10, 22:24-27; I Cor. 7:23b)

Disciples Are Learners

There is another name given to the one who would be a love-slave of Christ, and that is DISCIPLE. All disciples are learners. It's possible that you didn't understand what becoming a Christian really was when you first gave your life to God. You acted on all the light you had, and God met you graciously in His love. Since then, no doubt, you have wondered why it can seem so difficult to be a servant of Christ and why it often seems impossible to serve others as He commands you to do. Perhaps you have thought, "If it were not for the irritating things other people do, I could be a better disciple." How often do we react in anger, because we feel that someone has hurt us and violated our rights?

There is one basic lesson you must learn to be a true disciple; the lesson of meekness. You must know now, that the Lord Jesus wants all of you, and that He is not going to stop dealing with you until He has it! He is easy to please, but hard to satisfy. If you are still troubled by fits of temper or worry, you have not learned what it means to be a love-slave. This can be learned by taking on His yoke of meekness.

Meekness Isn't Weakness

After God got through with him, Moses was meek. But he wasn't weak! (Numbers 12:3) The Lord Jesus was meek, but if there was ever an example of virile humanity, Christ was that example. Watch Him as He empties the Temple with His eyes blazing with fire! He who knotted the cords of rope was meek, but never weak. Christ was strong; a Man among men. But He knew meekness. (Matt. 21:5; John 2:13-17)

Meekness, very simply, means: having a will that is yielded to God. It is the key response of man to the claims of Christ. When we truly surrender to God, our lives should show the fruit of the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-23) Our human response to God's shared love, joy and peace will be marked by faith, meekness, and self-control. God never used a man until his life showed these three human responses. They are the foundations of human spiritual development in Christ, and meekness is the key. Meekness determines the extent of our faith and self-control. Meekness is vital! Without it we cannot inherit what God has for us. (Matt. 5:5; 1Pet.3:4) It is a key to getting guidance and instruction from God. (Ps 25:9) Lack of meekness results in worry (lack of faith) and failure to get along with others (lack of self-control). (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 3:2) The more our wills are yielded, the greater faith and self-control we will possess.

When Rage Rushes Up

One of the most destructive results of an unyielded will is anger. Selfish anger is among the most damaging of sins. God lists it with murder. (Matt. 5:21-22; Col. 3:5-8; Jas. 1:19-20) There is a holy anger in Scripture, and we must distinguish this. God gets angry, and God does not sin. Holy anger is a righteous wrath for the rights of God. It is a right reaction to wrong done against others, especially God. It is always marked by some constructive action taken to end the wrong that created the anger. It includes feeling sorry for the one who caused it, and choosing a way to help him if possible, so he doesn't do the same thing again. Holy anger will be as stern as the depth of love we have for God. The Lord Jesus had it, and a Christian who does not have it is not really following in His steps. It is a Bible command that we "be angry, and sin not." (Eph. 4:26; Mk. 3:5; Lk. 17:1-2)

But selfish anger is sin, resulting from personal resentment and damaged pride. It ruins personality and character by fanning the flames of bitterness, envy and jealousy. (Eph. 4:30-32; Prov. 16:32, 19:11) It damages the body physically, by filling the system with tension, causing heart-attacks, ulcers, and other physical ailments. It ruins our fellowship with others socially, blasting friendships, family relations and testimony. (Prov. 21:19, 25:24) The Bible warns against selfish anger in no uncertain terms. Christians are instructed not befriend or even be seen with an angry man. (Prov. 22:24) The person who is selfishly angry at his brother is in danger of judgment. God considers anger a terrible sin.

Getting Irritated

Common everyday irritations often spark selfish anger. An irritant is anything frustrating that you have no control over. Each day will bring us irritation. It may come in the form of thoughtlessness, a crossing of our plans, or an ill-spoken word. We cannot avoid or escape irritation, but we can learn how to respond correctly.

Each trial, cause for complaint, or irritation, is actually a test of consecration. If you react in love, these obstacles can be stepping - stones to power with God. React to them selfishly and they will be barriers. We must learn how to handle irritations in Christ. Don't respond in the wrong way! Don't get mad. (Eccl. 7:9; Prov. 29:8)

If you are right, you don't need to lose your temper; if you are wrong, you certainly can't afford to! This amounts to nothing more than justifying yourself by defending your "rights." (Prov. 19:11, 29:22) God wants to help you die to your rights; so don't blame your anger on the irritation. When you shift the blame to someone else, you will end up with two angry people instead of one irritated one! (Prov. 15:1, 29:22) A kick that knocks a barrel over only reveals what is in the barrel; it does not create it.

Another mistake is to keep your anger bottled up inside you. Silently fuming is not the way to deal with anger. "Don't let the sun go down on your wrath." The one who nurses anger is a fool in Scripture. (Eccl. 7:9) Don't hold on to rage. (Eph. 4:26)

What Do You Do With Anger?

Step one is to examine the irritation that provokes you to anger. God has allowed this to happen to test your meekness. Therefore you can thank Him for this irritation! Yes; go on! This is one of the ways God will try your spirituality. Go ahead, deep breath; do it.

Then you must expose any hidden heart attitude by asking yourself, "What kind of person has this irritation uncovered? Has something been revealed in my heart that the Lord Jesus would not be pleased with?" Irritation is like a flame playing on a sample of gold. Under intense heat, impurities come to light. This is one of the purposes of a trial.

After this, you can empty out bad attitudes by confessing discovered sin to God, repenting and receiving His loving forgiveness. Now, don't stop with the negative! Ask yourself, "What sort of godly attitude should I have instead? How would Jesus have behaved in that situation?" Then ask God to help you respond rightly to the next similar trial, with patience, self control and meekness.

Victory Over Worry

Worry is the other destructive force stemming from unyielded rights. Occasions for worry also are opportunities for you to discover the faithfulness of the Father. As human beings, we have six basic essentials for living. When we find one of these rights threatened, self-love, (self-

preservation), signals danger to the personality. A man who is trying to run his own life will worry. He has no heavenly Father's promise of provision, and must take full responsibility for insuring and meeting all these needs himself. He assumes a responsibility that is not rightfully his, and this produces worry. These six needs are:

1. **ACCEPTANCE** - A sense of belonging, being well thought of, feeling loved and cared for.
2. **ACCOMPLISHMENT** - A longing to do something worthwhile with time, talents, opportunity.
3. **PROVISION** - having food, housing, clothes and money to meet needs, pay bills and taxes.
4. **POSSESSIONS** - Things we can call our own; belongings to use in the business of living.
5. **SAFETY** - To be protected from hurt, danger or disaster, illness, incapacity or disability.
6. **SECURITY** - Assurance of tomorrow, whatever the future holds; a sense of guidance.

The following steps can be used to surrender your rights, and get rid of worry and anger. If you will carefully and prayerfully follow these steps with your cherished right, you will be set free!

- ⇒ **DISCOVER YOUR RIGHT.** What has taken place that made you angry or worried? What actually caused your feelings? Discover the source of your irritation. Which of your rights were violated?
- ⇒ **WRITE DOWN THAT RIGHT** on a slip of paper. Perhaps it was the right to do what you want with your own time, money or things; the right to dress or act the way you want to; the right to be well thought of by someone you like a lot, who has shown no interest in you. The right to be recognized or encouraged. The right to a certain sport, friend, job, hobby, possession, etc.
- ⇒ **BUILD A LITTLE FIRE,** either outside where you can be alone with God or in the secret place of your heart. Use this fire as an "altar" where you can "offer up" to the Lord, in prayer, this right. (Gen. 22:1-18) This will be your secret sacrifice, known only to yourself and God. From this moment on, it will be His right, not yours.
- ⇒ **FINALLY, EXPECT GOD TO TAKE HIS RIGHT!** Let Him test your sincerity. If the right has been truly given to Him, it is now His; as it should have been in the first place. It is no longer yours to worry about or get angry over. Now, you may only ask Him if you can "borrow" it for a time, and if He says "no" you shouldn't mind. You are only His love-slave, and because you are a slave, you will know the freedom of joy that comes from serving the most attentive and loving Master in the world! Your new motto will be: "If the Lord is glorified, the servant is satisfied!"