

You Have Been Born Free

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Some of you may remember the wonderful 1960s film, *Born Free*. Our family has it on DVD, and it is one of our favorite family videos. It is based on the true story of George and Joy Adamson. George is a gamekeeper in Africa. The couple adopts a lioness cub after George had to kill her mother in self defense. They name the cub Elsa, and bring her up as a pet. As Elsa grows, George and Joy realize they must get rid of her. The obvious solution is to send her to a zoo, but Joy suggests that they set her free. They make several attempts to rehabilitate Elsa to the wild, all unsuccessful. Tired and discouraged, George again suggests to Joy that they send Elsa to a zoo. "Is freedom so important?" he asks. Joy's response hits a sympathetic chord within me: "She was born free, and she has the right to live free!"*

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, if you have been born again, you have been born free, and you have a right to live free. This is a benefit at the very heart of the Gospel. In John 8:36, Jesus says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Proclaim Liberty

One of the symbols of liberty in the United States is the Liberty Bell. It is inscribed with the words, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." This is taken from Leviticus 25:10.

In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus reads in the synagogue from a similar Scripture, Isaiah 61:1-2. Luke 4:18-19 says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Here is my own expanded translation of these verses: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the good news to the poor; He has sent Me on a mission to heal the broken-hearted, to herald liberty to the prisoners of war, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send out in liberty those who have been crushed, to herald the acceptable year of the Lord." This is based upon

* By the way, they try one more time and are successful in giving Elsa her liberty.

fuller definitions of the Greek words. Notice that "deliverance" and "liberty" in the King James Version are really the same Greek word (*aphesis*), so I translated it "liberty" both times. After Jesus read this, He said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (verse 21). In reading these verses, Jesus was announcing the ultimate Jubilee year. This ushered in eternal release from the captivity of our enemy Satan, healing from the oppressive rule of the devil (see Acts 10:38), and the gift of spiritual eyes to see the kingdom of God (see John 3:3). He was proclaiming liberty throughout all the land—ringing the liberty bell, so to speak.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul writes, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." The words "liberty" and "free" are here both translated from the Greek word *eleutheria*. Because of this, as well as the grammar, the *American Standard Version* does a better job of translating this verse as, "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage." Christ freed us for the very purpose of giving us freedom, but many have returned to a yoke of bondage.

Countless Christians live as though they are still in bondage. They have not realized their freedom or they have allowed themselves to be brought back under bondage.

Throwing Off the Yoke

For many years, ever since the Lord started showing me the liberty I have in Him, I have been proclaiming the liberty Christ bought for us. At first, having once been a member of the Worldwide Church of God, I concentrated on cults: the splinter groups of the Worldwide Church of God, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, etc. I started this ministry to help members of these cults or to advise people who had loved ones in cults. But then God woke me up to the fact that spiritual myopia concerning our Christian liberty is not confined to organizations labeled cults. It is rampant throughout Christianity.

It seems that no sooner does someone confess his faith in Christ than someone else comes along and tries to shackle him with observing a day, paying a tithe, keeping the Ten Commandments of God's Old Covenant with Israel, or laying guilt on him if he is "not faithful" to be "in the house of the Lord" every Sunday. His pastor (like many others) may even openly tell him that he is obligated to follow the pastor's

rule. (If you learn New Testament Greek, you will soon learn that there is no Scripture that says you are to do this.) I recently had an acquaintance with a pastor who taught, "You are responsible to be in unity with my position. If it is otherwise then God does not approve of it." This is not the New Testament teaching of Christ or the apostles.

What has amazed me is how frequently Christians do not understand and live in the freedom God gives them in this Gospel age. I can truly echo Paul's words to the Galatians when he wrote, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (Galatians 1:6).

Yet, many allow themselves to be bound. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face" (2 Corinthians 11:20). When you allow this, you are denying what Jesus Christ has done for you. In effect, you are saying with your actions that Christ is not enough. You are saying you must add your law-keeping in order to achieve salvation. I think we cannot be reminded of Galatians 5:1 too often: "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage." Writing of those who would bring you back under the shadows of the Old Covenant, Paul wrote, "Therefore suffer no one to sit in judgement on you as to eating or drinking or with regard to a festival, a new moon or a sabbath. These were a shadow of things that were soon to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17—*Weymouth New Testament*).

Free From What?

What are we free from? We are free from the law: "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6). To those who think that we need the law to keep us from sin, this verse should be self explanatory. Being free from the law, we now serve God freely in the new, spiritual life we live. The law only incited sin and led to death (Romans 7:8-9). But now, being free from the law, we are free from sin: "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). We are free from condemnation and eternal death: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Being free from the law and its condemnation, we are free from our accuser, the devil (Acts 10:38;

Revelation 12:10). Being sons of God, we are free from required payments to God (Matthew 17:26).

In the Middle Ages, most people did not know about the freedom Jesus Christ had purchased for them. The Roman Catholic Church enslaved the people in ignorance. Today, most who are reading this have every advantage that those people did not. Most of us live in countries where we are free to believe according to our conscience. We can readily purchase Bibles in our own language. Not only that, but we now have easy access to computer software Bible tools that scholars could not even have dreamt of only a few decades ago. Some of these, such as e-Sword (<http://www.e-sword.net>) are free! We can even learn the original Bible languages by buying books or taking courses available on the Internet (and some of these are also free). We have absolutely no excuse for ignorance. But today, many Christians are again living in a spiritual dark age, letting the "clergy" do their thinking for them, and equating membership in an institution with salvation.

Stop listening to people who are trying to equate Christianity to morality or liturgy; who confuse "faithful attendance" with spiritual maturity; who confound commandment-keeping with sanctification and day-keeping with our true Rest; who prescribe tithing as a way to stay in God's favor; who believe agreement with a man is the same as submission to God; who teach that the words of men in creeds and confessions or even in sermons is the Word of God; and who try to tell you that your performance can in any way add to what Jesus Christ has already done in making God well pleased in Him (and, therefore, in you who are in Christ) and who "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne" on your shoulders (Matthew 23:4). Break out your Bible, read and study it (not to please God, but to educate yourself), use the many tools available to you to dig into the Scriptures, start learning Greek (yes, you CAN DO it and you can start here: <http://www.inthebeginning.org/ntgreek/>), and learn the truth:

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31b-32).