

FREEDOM!

By

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The more freedom man creates for himself, the more deeply he despairs and the more desperate his struggles. For the chains that bind him can only be loosed by Christ.

When his disciples brought to him a man sick of the Palsy, Jesus was not blind to the man's pitiful physical condition. Yet he saw a greater disease, and a more crippling ailment, and said, "Son, thy sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). The purpose of Christ's coming was to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Isaiah said that "Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all", and that "he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:6, 12).

The apostles were commissioned to preach "repentance and remission of sins", and the forgiveness of sin was the major concern of the church through the centuries until modern times.

In the past sixty years, however attention has been centered on scientism with the theory of evolution gaining in popularity until it is now generally accepted-without evidence over the entire spectrum of education. If man is the product of evolution then there are no rules. He makes them up as he progresses up the evolutionary ladder, and is accountable: to no one higher than other men, who also must make up their own rules. The result of evolution is chaos, and it is plainly seen all around us as men are rejecting moral laws and clamoring for obscenity, abortions, abolishment of punishment for crime and the general destruction of law and order. Since the public school is the champion of evolution, this makes the school a public enemy for it is responsible for the destruction of social order.

But even worse than the destruction of the social order, is the destruction of man himself. No matter how he may progress in technology with the invention of gadgets to complicate his life, and no matter how far he may roam in space, he still must live with himself, and in the end must answer to God Who created Him, a God Who has not changed, Who is eternal and will never change. And if God is eternal and changes not then man by constant change of God's law is at enmity with God.

Who can deny that man lives in an atmosphere of fearful expectancy? The rise of drug addiction, crime, mental failure, and radical political groups shows that fear dominates the world. Young people are vainly seeking "meaning" and old people in nursing homes are said to face "meaningless" existence. But at the root of all such despair, call it what you will, is man's alienation from God because of sin. It isn't environment, or the government, or the economic squeeze that drives man up the wall. None of these can reach inside the person to cause him despair. But sin can, and does, unless it is forgiven.

Man is created to be in God's image, which means that he must be good, truly good, as God is good. But who can measure up? No one has to have a degree in theology to know that he sins and falls short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Even the best among us knows very well that he is not as righteous as God is. In fact the closer one draws to God to know His glory and righteousness; the greater his sin looms before him. In the illumination of God's glory one sees his own flaws standing out in sharp contrast to him in whose image we are created, so that he bows down and cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It is the rank sinner, so far from God that he is out of ear-shot, who takes his sin lightly and looks upon judgment as a joke. He is unconcerned with sin; because he is such a sinner that holiness never occurred to him. At least the harlots knew they were sinners, but the Pharisees are so far from God that do not recognize sin, hence Jesus said to them, "The publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31).

In this state of sin there is no hope of having life in the image and fellowship of God. Adam was cast out of the garden "lest he put forth his hands and takes of the tree of life and eats and lives forever" (Gen. 3:22). God wants no eternal sinners. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Sin is under the curse of God (Gen. 3:17-19, 2:17, John 3:36). While a man may not consciously think of living under a curse, he suffers all the symptoms, whether or not he recognizes the reason. He is insecure, fearful, worried, nervous, unable to curb his passions, discontented, unsatisfied and afraid of death.

THE REMEDY The issue is sin, and all solutions and benefits derive from resolving this one problem. The remedy is a simple one, plainly described all through Scripture. It is that Christ died for our sins. Unless we grasp this in its true and complete meaning, we never escape fully the fears sin has spawned. The penalty for sin is death, and this must be paid in full before we begin to shake off sin's effects. Christ met the penalty. He "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). This changes everything. Instead of facing death, we now face life, for with the death-penalty already met by Jesus, we are free from it, and therefore have the promise of a resurrection to immortality. This is demonstrated in the fact that Christ, having no sin of His own, was resurrected to immortality becoming "the first-fruits of them that are asleep" and the "first-born from the dead..." (1 Cor. 15:20, Rev. 1:5). There is now meaning to life, because it is not merely a struggle in this world, but life that is to be perfected in eternity, because sin is removed.

Not only are we free from the death-penalty at judgment, but we are now seen as righteous in God's sight. "He who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Get that? The righteousness OF GOD! This means that we are no longer alienated from God, but have the privilege of sweet communion, daily fellowship with him. We now are called His "sons" and we call Him "Father." "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26).

But a question remains: How does forgiveness make us free from the world's woes? The answer is two-fold.

First, when we are freed from death and judgment, we are freed from the mortal limitations of earth, assured that we are bound for a new earth "wherein dwells righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). Thus we are automatically severed from any permanent connection with the world. That is why Jesus could say "My kingdom is not **OF** this world" (John 18:36). Indeed, His kingdom is **IN** the world, and He said that we should not be surprised if the world hated us, but the affairs of the world do not - can not - change our purpose and ultimate success. Citizens of Christ's Kingdom are in the world but not attached to it. That's why John could write, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abides for ever" (1 John 2:17). Nothing in the world can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:39) and nothing can prevent us from being conformed to the image of God, as long as we continue in Christ.

In the second place, being made free from sin and restored to fellowship with God, the Christian looks upon things as they really are; that is, from God's viewpoint, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:11, 18). The Christian operates in a realm of life that is NOT dependent upon this world, and therefore the things happening in it do not scare him or shake him or cause him to despair. He is under no obligation to gain the world's goods, nor its esteem, nor its approval. His responsibility is to God, and even his obedience to civil government is done because of God's command. His ambition is to please God, to glorify Him, to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, to show forth the Excellencies of Christ (not of himself) and to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

In doing this he makes the very best citizen, because he takes seriously the commands of Christ. But at the same time he remains aloof from the world, making no alliances, and expecting nothing from it. Thus when Christ frees us from sin and binds us to eternity, we are free from the web of woes clinging to a dying world.

Evil and death are directly connected. Being free from Evil – through Christ's death – we are free from death. And once made free, it now works the other way around; being free from death, we are free from the bondage of evil. We do not have to submit to the world's evil because we are not bound to the world. Therefore we are free from the things of the world that produce the dreadful expectations, the fear of it all coming to a crunching end and life proving to be meaningless, ending in a terrible death at judgment, or as the atheists believe, simply ending.

We can walk in harmony with God, Christ "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

This is Christ's gracious invitation: "Come unto me". "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:28). "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Rom. 4:3-9). His is the offer of complete and perfect freedom, which no legislature, no rebels nor tyrants can take away.

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36)

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