

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

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"It is for freedom that Jesus Christ has set us free."

Slavery enters human history with civilization. Hunter-gatherers and primitive farmers had no use for a slave. They collected or grew just enough food for themselves. One more pair of hands was also one more mouth. There was no economic advantage in owning another human being.

The history of slavery spans nearly every culture, nationality, and religion, from ancient times to the present day. Every ancient civilization used slaves.

There are at least six ways in which slaves have been acquired. Prisoners of war often became slave labor for their conquerors. Pirates, or other abductors, offered their captives for sale. Criminals might be sentenced to slavery. An unpayable debt could bring the end of liberty. The impoverished sometimes sell their own children. And the children of slaves are themselves slaves.

Although slavery is no longer legal anywhere in the world, human trafficking remains an international problem and an estimated 29.8 million people are living in illegal slavery today.

However, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Billions more suffer another kind of slavery—slavery of the soul. Governments do not recognize it as a crime (in fact, many of them depend upon it for control), and religions often foster it, but the Church of Jesus Christ has been uniquely established and authorized to deal with this blight.

"Now we have been released from the law, for we died with Christ, and we are no longer captive to its power. Now we can really serve God, not in the old way by obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way, by the Spirit." (Romans 7:6)

In all the world, there are laws of science (such as gravity and thermodynamics) which have been shown to affect all of creation generally and impersonally, and there are laws of God (the Ten Commandments) which, according to the Bible, affect all people generally and personally (that is, in relationship to their Creator), and there are laws of men which may be religious or political (secular). It is this third kind, and particularly religious laws, to which the sixth verse of Romans 7 refers.

The "power of the law" to which people are captive by religions is fueled by our guilt and shame, for we are taught, or otherwise made to feel, that we are inadequate and inferior if we

do not comply with the rules. Inadequate to enjoy God's kindness. Inferior to others who do comply.

Perfection (or completeness) is equated with compliance, as defined and measured by those in leadership. Thus, all who are out of compliance are taught and made to feel "less than" acceptable (ashamed), in debt to the system (guilty), and unwelcomed by God (helpless). It is *not* true! God has an answer to this crippling abuse!

Galatians 4:4-12

⁴ *But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.* ⁵ *God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children.* ⁶ *And because we are His children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."* ⁷ *Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are His child, God has made you His heir.*

⁴ *But **when the right time came**, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.*

God's timing is perfect. He's never early, and He's never late. He always acts at "the right time."

We think we know what time it is by looking to the sun and moon, but God commands the sun and moon. It is recorded in the Bible that He once turned the sun backward to add several hours to the day, to show that He could also add years to Hezekiah's life (Isaiah 38:7-8). Another time, God stopped the sun in its track for a whole day—it just stood still—so that Israel could thoroughly defeat their enemy in battle (Joshua 10:13).

Your time is in God's hand. He knows the number of your days, and you may rest secure in the knowledge that no one can pluck you out of His hand before your time.

⁴ *But when the right time came, **God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.***

Jesus did not come on His own; He came at the Father's direction. Our salvation did not begin with Jesus; it began with the Father, who sent Him. The Father has loved you with "an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). Jesus is the proof of that.

God did not send an angel (though they serve Him well); He sent His only begotten Son. Jesus, the Son of God, was His best representative, and Jesus, the Son of Man, was our best representative. As our representative, Jesus could bear the sins of humankind. As God's representative, Jesus could forgive the sins of humanity.

⁴ *But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, **subject to the law.***

It was necessary that Jesus be born “under the law” (that is, the Law which God gave to Moses), so that He could redeem those who also lived under that Law. Jesus did not come to abolish that Law, but to fully satisfy its demands, and thus to fulfill all that God required of human beings.

He was the perfect man, who lived just as God required. Having fulfilled all that the Law demanded, Jesus brought that Law to an end—He closed that book and concluded an era.

Then, He rose from the dead to initiate a new era—the Age of Salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵ ***God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children.***

Jesus bought our freedom by His own death. He became our substitute. He bore our judgment. The only way to save us was to pay our debt, for our debt toward God was real—we violated and ignored His commands. Our sins were judged in Jesus’ death, and forgiven in His resurrection.

And having forgiven us, God also adopted us. He has forgiven us so completely that He wants us to be with Him forever. He wants us to be His family. God has made us His own children.

⁵ ***God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children.***

If you have put your trust in Jesus and what He has done for you, then you need never worry about your relationship with God again. He is for you. He loves you. No one and nothing can take that away from you, as Paul wrote:

Romans 8:38-39

³⁸ *And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.* ³⁹ *No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

That’s why John said, “*If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness*” (1 John 1:9).

Not only did God buy our forgiveness, but He bought our freedom, too! And not only did He buy our freedom, but He also adopted us as His own children! And not only did God adopt us as His own, but He also gave to us the Spirit of His Son!

⁶ *And because we are His children, **God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”***

We are His children, and we share His heart!

You used to be alone, without God in this world, but we will never be alone again, because Emmanuel has come—God with us. The Spirit of Jesus (the Holy Spirit) has come to live in our hearts. He hasn't come for a visit. He hasn't come for a cup of tea or coffee. He has come to stay! He is at home in your heart, if you are a follower of Jesus.

⁶ *And because we are His children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, **prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”***

The Spirit's arrival means change. He changes us. Some things that we once loved—those things God calls evil—we have begun to hate. And some things that we once hated—those things that God calls good—we have begun to love. Our hearts are becoming like His!

We have been called His children, and now we are actually becoming His children (like father, like child).

This prompts a response in us. It does not force a response, but it encourages one. If we choose to cooperate, we will call out to Him, like young children do to their fathers. We want to see Him. We want to be with Him. We're not afraid of Him. He is dear to us. *“We love Him, because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19).

So, when we call Him, whatever words we may use, our heart says, “Abba!” It's an ancient word that means “papa.” God is Papa. It's okay to call Him that. Give your heart permission to call Him that. Papa! Papa! Papa God!

⁷ *Now you are **no longer a slave but God's own child**. And since you are His child, God has made you His heir.*

True freedom is not easy to enjoy. We all tend to live as slaves—first, as slaves to sin. But real freedom is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. We usually return to some level of bondage.

We turn ourselves over to the Law of Creation (Romans 1), observing times and seasons, seeking physical eco-order, and elevating the creation to the status of the Creator. But there is no freedom there.

Or, we enslave ourselves to the Law of Conscience (Romans 2), tirelessly working to observe our own estimation of “best behaviors,” and trying to promote and impose them on all those around us. But there is no freedom there.

Or, we may become slavishly religious (a common subset of the Law of Conscience, which I will call the Law of Religion). Religion mimics true freedom’s ideals and behaviors, but from a wholly different motivation. Religion is always our effort to deserve God’s approval, to earn His love. But they cannot be earned or deserved. They are the gifts of God’s grace, without any reference at all to what we may or may not deserve.

God has set His love on us, not because of our behavior (or promises to behave), but solely because of what Jesus accomplished on our behalf. Not because of what we do or try to do for God, but because of what Jesus has already done for us.

Jesus is the reason God loves humanity. Jesus is the reason God has forgiven our sins. Jesus is the reason God has adopted us as His own children. Jesus is the reason God has set us free. And Jesus is the reason God has given us an inheritance. We owe it all to our Elder Brother, Jesus!

*⁷ Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And **since you are His child, God has made you His heir.***

God’s heir!!!

This is not an inheritance to be gained and enjoyed after God dies, for God cannot die—ever! This is the inheritance that God shares with all His children, as we live together in His Kingdom. We gain, and have the right to enjoy, all of God’s goodness, all of His riches, all of His fruitfulness. Some of it in this life, and *all* of it in the next life.

All that He has He shares with us, because of Jesus. No wonder Paul exclaimed, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13). In the midst of Paul’s imprisonment, he was a free man! Chains and restrictions, or persecution and deprivation, could not confine his heart or mind. The Spirit of Jesus was in Him. He was alive and free!

These things are true of us, if we have entrusted our hearts and lives to the care of Jesus Christ.

He has bought them for us by His death in our place upon the cross. And He has guaranteed them for us by His resurrection from the dead three days later.

When the right time came, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

But has He been born in your heart? You must be born again. And if not before today, then this is the right time for you. *“For God says, ‘At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.’ Indeed, the ‘right time’ is now. Today is the day of salvation”* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Has He been born in your heart? If so, do you live like it?

Do you live in forgiveness, or in shame? Genuinely?

Do you live in freedom, or in fear? Honestly?

Do you share with others what Christ has given to you? Or do you pretend that you can have it without giving it away?

Make these Scriptures your own. Put your trust in Jesus Christ. Tell Him you believe in Him. Tell Him you intend to follow Him daily. Tell Him you want Him to have His way with the rest of your life.

Do it for the first time today! Do it for the thousandth time today!