

Christian Liberty, Part 7

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Now may I encourage you to turn with me in your Bibles to that portion of the Word of God that was the focus of our study last Lord's Day, Luke chapter 1. And rather than read the more lengthy portion that I read last Lord's Day, we'll pick up the reading at the beginning of the prophecy of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, on the occasion when Zacharias has taken his eight-day-old son, John, given by God's intervention, by miraculously resuscitating the reproductive faculties of Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth. And now Zacharias there in the temple, on the occasion of the circumcision of his son John, prophesies, and these are the words of his prophecy (Luke 1 and verse 67):

"And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and wrought redemption for His people. and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us, to show mercy toward our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore unto Abraham our father, to grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemy should serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. Yes, and you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you shall go before the face of the Lord to make ready His ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto His people in the remission of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us, to shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

I want you to imagine with me that for just a few minutes I were endowed with a very unusual and strange power. The power that the moment I were to wave my hand from one extreme of the congregation to the other, everyone sitting in this auditorium would have materialized before his or her eyes, and the eyes of all others, his or her true spiritual condition. Now you follow what strange power I'm given for a short period of time. Once I raise my hand over there, all the way across, where you are sitting, your internal true spiritual condition for one minute, for 60 seconds, would be materialized, that is, brought out to where it could be seen by you and felt and heard by everyone else.

If that power were given to me, and I started over here, I brought my hand across, what would materialize in your case? Would you suddenly find yourself unable to see because your internal spiritual blindness registered in your optic nerves for one

minute? If the blindness were removed, would you look down and see your hands manacled and chains that bound you round and round down to your feet? What would the materializing of your true spiritual state look like? For the Scripture tells us that by nature every one of us is born spiritually blind. The Apostle wrote that God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should dawn or shine upon them. And the Scriptures make plain that by nature we come into this world chained and bound by our sins.

And it is because of this reality of our native spiritual bondage that no little part of the glory of the gospel of Christ is both the proclamation of and the impartation of true spiritual liberty. And so for several weeks now we have been studying together out of the scriptures what I have entitled for this series, A Fresh Look at the Doctrine of Christian Liberty. And I have asserted that we are in no position to consider a subset of the doctrine of Christian liberty, that is, what should I or should I not do as a Christian when contemplating certain activities that are neither commanded nor forbidden by the Scriptures, that we're in no position to wrestle with those issues of the subset of the doctrine of Christian liberty until we have come to grips with two massive blocks of biblical revelation.

The first is our real slavery and bondage in Adam. And we looked at that five-fold bondage that is the reality of the experience of every son and daughter of Adam, regardless of one's religious privileges, regardless of any of the factors that set us apart one from another, racially, economically, intellectually. It makes no difference. The Bible makes plain. that every single one of us is in bondage, in this five-fold bondage that we considered from the Word of God.

But then, secondly, we considered together our real freedom and liberty in Christ. Our Lord said, "Whom the Son sets free is free indeed." And we looked at the nine facets of the spiritual liberty that comes to every man, every boy, every woman, every girl who embraces the Lord Jesus Christ as He is offered to us in the gospel. And it is only when we have experienced that liberty that is ours in Christ that we are in any position to talk about these details of the subset of Christian liberty.

Then last Lord's Day, we began to wrestle with a very practical question. If it is indeed true whom the Son sets free is free indeed, and that when Christ is embraced as Savior and Lord by that mighty operation of the Spirit of God taking out our heart of stone, giving us a heart of flesh, enabling us to respond to the gospel in repentance and faith, we find our chains broken and lying at our feet, we find the prison door thrown open, and we ask,

"Lord Jesus, to what end have you set me free? What is the goal of this liberty, this real liberty from bondage to the condemning power of the law, the sin-provoking influence of the law, this real liberty from slavery to sin, the devil, the world, the fear of death, the rules and regulations of men, the nine-fold liberty when all the chains

are broken? And I stand with the broken chains at my feet and the prison door open. What am I to do with this liberated life? What's the goal of this liberty?"

And I've suggested that there is no better condensed, succinct, yet comprehensive statement of the goal of our liberty in Christ than is found embedded in this prophecy of Zechariah. As God is breaking into space-time history in the sending of His only begotten Son into the world in the fullness of the times, in conjunction with the sending of His forerunner, John, who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, Zechariah says the end for which this salvation is being revealed is this (verse 74): "to grant us that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."

And I suggested that in this text we have two basic units of thought. We have the goal of Christian liberty identified in these simple words we are delivered to serve Him, to render to Him worshipful service. The chains are broken, the prison door is open, not to send us out to serve the world whose chain has been broken, sin whose chain has been broken, the devil whose chain has been broken, idolatrous self whose chain has been broken, but we are set free to serve Him, that the entirety of life would be one sacrificial offering unto the God who has delivered us, so that in every facet of life the great passion of the heart of the liberated prisoner is, "I want to serve the God who has set me free."

Well, having considered the goal of our Christian liberty identified, now we come this morning to the second major division in the text, and it's what I'm calling the goal of our liberty in Christ qualified. It's identified in the words "to serve Him". But then in the following words, it is qualified.

Now the word "qualified" can mean that you make statements in order to hedge up and modify and restrict something. You make a statement and say, "But wait a minute, I want to qualify that. And by the time you're done qualifying, you take back what you gave." But the word can mean--and this is the sense in which I'm using it, and it's found as the first listing in my dictionary--to describe by giving the qualities or characteristics of something. And that's what the Spirit of God has given us here in this text.

If the essence of the end or goal to which we are set free in Christ is to serve Him, that the whole of life will be rendered as worshipful service unto our God, then Zacharias in his prophecy gives us four qualities of that service that is rendered to our Redeemer and liberating Savior. And I want us to examine those four qualities.

We have, first of all, the emotional quality. We are to serve Him without fear. And then we are given the moral or the ethical quality in holiness and righteousness. And then we are given the personal quality before Him or in His presence. And then I'd hoped to get another word that ended with AL, and had used "temporal", but I found nowhere does temporal mean having to do with time. It means limitation of time, so I've had to slip in another word, "the enduring quality all of our days". Very simple.

And in those four simple qualifications, we have one of the most comprehensive statements of the quality of the life that is lived unto Him as the fruit of the liberty that He has granted. And until those qualities of that life have become a passion for us and we are committed to those qualities of life, we are in no position to talk about Christian liberty in the subset of "what movies shall I watch, what music shall I listen to, what beverages?" No, no, no, no. You're in no position until it can be said of you and of me: "I am living unto Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before His face all of my days." I'm in no position to settle the particulars of the subsets of Christian liberty as we often think of it. So let's seek to unpack these together.

Number one, this life of worshipful service is to be rendered without fear. That is its emotional quality. Look at the text: "to grant us that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear." In fact, it's very emphatic in the original. The "without fear" comes very early in the whole statement. "To grant us that without fear we, having been delivered out of the hand of our enemy, should serve Him. But "without fear" is a dominant concept placed way at the front in the structure of the original.

Now, here's a place where we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Does the phrase "without fear" mean that when our chains are broken and when the prison door is open and we are free in Christ, that fear in no way, shape, or form is to mark the life that I live as a life of worshipful service unto God. The answer is no. Let me just give a couple of specials. And this is only special. This is where you must let Scripture interpret Scripture. And as we shall see, let context bring the greatest bear upon our understanding of any one of the parts.

Psalms 130 and verse 4 says, "There is forgiveness with You in order that You may be feared." The end of God's forgiveness is to bring us into a life of a certain quality of the fear of God. "If You, Lord, should mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You that You may be feared." There is a fear of God not only consistent with the joyful awareness of forgiveness, but an essential fruit of that joyful awareness.

Furthermore, in Jeremiah 32:40, God says, in terms of the new covenant, "I will put My fear into their hearts so that they may not depart from Me." There is a fear placed in the heart of the sinner in the work of God in new covenant salvation that secures his perseverance, without which he will not persevere. God says, "I will put My fear into their hearts so that they may not depart from Me."

Or 1 Peter 1:17-19: "If you call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judges each man according to his work, pass the sojourning of your time in fear, knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." Here we are commanded to pass the time of our sojourning in fear in the light of the day of judgment, and in the light of the consciousness of free pardon of all of our sins in the blood of Christ.

So, when you have people say, "Well, once you appreciate what it is to be a son or daughter of God, once you appreciate what it is to have your chains broken and the prison door open, fear has absolutely no place in the Christian life." That's heresy. It's nonsense. It's destructive of a healthy Christian experience. I've only given you a sampling. I haven't quoted Jesus' words: "I tell you My friends fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." He says that to His friends. Many other passages.

Well then what does it mean? It says He has delivered us from the hand of our enemies that we should render worshipful service without fear. Well, look at the context (verse 71). The salvation that God is now bringing in sending the forerunner, John, and in the One Who is now in Mary's womb and would soon be born will be salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us.

Now drop down to verse 74,: "to grant us that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear." Think of yourself as part of that oppressed nation, dragged off into Babylon, brought back to your own land amidst enemies hindering you all along the way from the reestablishment of your place of worship and your national life. Think then of the conquest of Rome and being an oppressed, conquered people. Everywhere you turned, a Roman soldier here, a Roman soldier there. Enemies all about you. And now God says, the Redeemer is coming. And in His redemption we will serve without fear, having been delivered from the hand of all our enemies. Now the problem with the vast majority of the Jews is they saw this only in terms of political deliverance.

But the true remnant, such as this dear man Zacharias, they saw that the great enemy was their sins. That is why they spoke of salvation from our enemies. And then down in verse 77: "to give the knowledge of salvation unto His people in the remission of their sins because of the tender mercies of our God." They saw there was a far greater enemy than Roman oppression and Roman rule and Roman intimidation. They saw the great oppression of their sins, the bondage that they were in because of their sins.

And when Zechariah says in his prophecy, "We should serve Him without fear", it is obvious that the first dimension of that without fear is this: without the fear of our defeated enemy. No longer do we need to fear those enemies whom Jesus Christ, by His redemptive work, has brought to naught. Having broken our chains, we need not fear that those chains will ever again bind us. He has broken them, and having broken them, they are broken indeed, "for whom the Son sets free is free indeed." So in the context, the "without fear" means that we render worshipful service unto God, confident that in Jesus Christ, those enemies whom He has defeated in order to set me free will never again be able to bring me into subjection.

This is why Luther could throw an inkwell at the devil. He knew he was a conquered foe. "Did we in our own strength confide our striving will be losing. Were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. Thus ask who that may be. Christ

Jesus it is He. Lord of armies is His name." You read that whole marvelous hymn and there is the element of triumph and confidence, delivered from the fear of the enemies ever again, bringing us into bondage.

And then the second dimension of this fear that is broken is the fear of an offended God. When you and I take seriously that we are God's creatures made to obey Him; we are God's creatures accountable to Him; we are God's creatures who have broken His law, fallen in Adam, violated His precepts, exposed to His judgment, that can only produce fear as it did with Adam. The moment Adam was conscious of his sin, he ran to hide among the trees. And when God comes in grace and in judgment: "Where are you, Adam?" He said, "I heard your voice, and I was [what?] afraid." The voice that once was like the voice of a lover beckoning the beloved into intimate embraces, this voice now scares Him witless and He runs to hide.

And if you've ever been delivered from your chains, you know what that fear is. Because before God ever delivered you from your chains, He made you aware of your chains. And He made you aware of the fact that you were chained because of your sin that left you exposed and liable to the just and holy wrath of God. But when in Christ, you see Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. Christ did what I could not do, what the law in itself could not do. Sin was condemned in His flesh, so there is therefore now no condemnation to me, because I am in Christ Jesus.

You see, that's the kind of fear that John speaks about in 1 John 4, verse 18, when he says, "Fear has torment. Perfect love casts out fear. He that is fearful [he that is afraid] is not made perfect in love", he has not yet grasped the message of the love of God in Jesus Christ. And when I have grasped that message, then I can say with the Apostle Paul in Romans 8.31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" God is now for us, committed in saving love and mercy and power to our salvation. And therefore, we now no longer have this fear of an offended God. We fear of offending God. But we have no fear of an offended God. Christ has born His wrath. And now we can serve with the freedom and the joy and the liberty of one who no longer fears that my defeated enemies will ever come and repossess me. I can serve without fear that God's going to get me, God's going to do me in. No, this God so loved me and sent His only begotten Son for me. And Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. If God is for me, who can be against me?

You see, few emotions are more crippling than fear. Someone will say, I was paralyzed with fear. Fear is paralyzing. And God wants us to serve in the way that Paul describes in Romans 14:18: "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking." It's interesting. That's right in the passage dealing with Christian liberty. He said, "Look, you're all upset about matters of what you should eat and what you should drink and what you shouldn't eat and what you shouldn't drink. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and [what?] Joy in the Holy Spirit. He that herein serves God." See how it all comes together? "He that herein

serves God." Our service rendered to God, worshipful service in response to His mercy, service that in its emotional quality is without fear.

But then secondly, the Prophet Zacharias moves us to its moral or ethical quality. And I want to state it this way: as surely as this life of worshipful service is to be rendered without fear, this life of worshipful service is to be characterized by holiness and righteousness. Without fear: its emotional quality. In righteous holiness and righteousness: it's ethical or moral quality.

Now, it's very interesting that this combination of words (and we're going to get into what the words are) is used in reverse order in Ephesians 4 and verse 24. I could quote the verse, but I want you to look at it with me. As so often the Apostle Paul is urging believers to whom he has opened up the riches of God's salvation saying in essence, "Now, live out what God has put in. Don't walk anymore as the Gentiles (verse 17 of Ephesians 4), in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding..." He said,

"You did not so learn Christ. [verse 20] If so be that you heard Him and were taught in Him, even as the truth is in Jesus. If you have truly been brought under the tutelage of Christ in a saving relationship, having embraced Him not only as your priest to die, and to intercede for you, but as your prophet to teach you. If you've embraced Christ and you've begun to learn of Christ, you did not learn from Christ to walk as those whose minds are darkened, whose affections are... No, no, you did not learn that lifestyle from Christ. What you learned from Christ was this: that you put away [verse 22] as concerning your former manner of life, the old man that waxes corrupt after the lust of deceit, and be renewed in the spirit of mind, and put on the new man."

Now notice, that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth, he says if you've really been brought into the tutelage of Christ, you have learned that in that relationship to Christ that you put off the old man that is all that you were in Adam with its chains, with its bondage, with its ignorance, with its lusts. You put that aside and have put on the new man that has as its pattern and its prototype God Himself in His moral purity; that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness that are born of and productive of the truth.

You say you've embraced the truth of God's salvation. You say you've embraced the truth that whom the Son sets free is free indeed. Then this is what you've learned from Him who is the Truth. You've learned from Jesus: put off the old, put on the new, and in that putting on of the new, the prototype and pattern for the totality of your life is nothing short of the moral excellence of God Himself. And that moral excellence is distilled into two words, righteousness and holiness. Now, the prophet Zacharias reverses them. He says that we should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness.

Now let's look at the words that are used. You say, "Why are they reversed?" I don't have a clue. Maybe no significance, but they're both found in conjunction. The word "holiness", used by Zechariah and used by Paul, is not the standard word, the most

frequently used word for holiness. The most frequently used word in the New Testament for holiness is the family of words, the verb is *hagyadzo*, *hagynos*, *hagynosmos*, nouns, adjectives, the whole family of words, the *hagynos* family of words. And the basic idea in the *hagynos* family of words is being separated unto God.

When it is said, "Be ye holy, for I am Holy" (*Hagios*, family of words), God says, "I'm utterly separate from, apart from, all that is sinful and all that is vile and all that is even human. I am wholly separate from all of that." *Hagios* has, as its fundamental concept, separateness, apartness. Apartness in essence, apartness in moral quality, apart from sin, apart from evil. But that's not the word that's used here. The word used here is *hosiotis*, the noun, and then you have *hosios*, the adjective, used in two other verses that may help us to grasp what it means.

In Hebrews 7 and verse 26, describing our Lord Jesus as our great High Priest, this is what we read: "For such a High Priest became us [that's Jesus], holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, made higher than the heavens. Such a high priest became us holy." Here it is: *hosios*, not *hogios* (utterly set apart from), but *hosios* (holy). He was holy, He was guileless, He was undefiled. You see, the family of words is pointing not so much to the concept of apartness, but utterly free in His being from every form of pollution and defilement. It's the word used in 1 Timothy 2 and verse 8: "I will that the men pray in every place, lifting up [here we are] holy hands, without wrath and without disputing." Hands that have not been engaged in that which is defiling and polluting, the hand being the symbol of the whole of one's active life, particularly one's physical actions, holy hands, undefiled, unpolluted.

Now come back to our text. Why has He broken our chains? Why has He opened the prison door that we should step out and do what? Flirt near the edges of what is defiling? Flirt near the edges of what is polluting and call it Christian liberty? No! That's picking up the chain of bondage to sin, as though flirtation with the marginal is necessary to make my life full and complete and meaningful. No. The moral context and ethical quality of the worshipful service is to be characterized by an uncompromising commitment to a life of holiness; that is, a life in which, by the grace of God, I stay as far away from anything that would pollute me and defile me as it is possible by prayer and pains and watchfulness and carefulness over everything that enters my eye, enters my ear, enters my relationships. I am committed to serve Him, how? Without carnal, crippling fear in the liberty of a son and a daughter, but in the realm of ethical purity and undefiled.

And then the other word, "righteousness", what does that mean? The fundamental idea of *dikaio*, *dikaio*shune, a whole family of words, is that which conforms to God's requirement. What conforms to what God requires is righteous.

Notice how it is used back in Luke chapter 1 and in verse 6. In this very chapter, Luke had already used the word in describing Zacharias and Elizabeth. Luke chapter 1 and verse 6: "And they [Elizabeth and Zacharias] were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." Does that

mean they were sinless? Absolutely not. But it means that insofar as a true Israelite walking in the power of God's grace could conform his life outwardly and inwardly to God's requirement, such a one was called a righteous man, a righteous woman.

Now their righteousness in the court of heaven was exactly the same righteousness with which we stand in Christ in the court of heaven. The righteousness of Christ's perfect obedience and His substitutionary death was credited to all Old Testament saints before Christ came, just as it's credited to us subsequent to His coming. But this is describing the quality of their life here on earth. And they are described as righteous, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.

You couldn't point the finger at Zacharias when he was going in to fulfill his role as a priest in the temple and nudge one another and say, "Heh heh, look old Zachy. Heh, I saw him on Wednesday. He was standing there at the newspaper rack ogling at the girly magazines like all the other guys on their way to work. Heh, look at old Zachy, horny old Zachy." No one could point the finger at old Zachy. He was blameless. He was a husband. Not sinless! And if he were irritated, you would have heard him saying, "Oh, dear Elizabeth, I sinned by that irritated word. Will you forgive me?" Blameless. Not sinless. Blameless. That is what it means.

Now listen. If you are in Christ, and the chains are all there, broken at your feet, and the prison door is open, He has set you free to render worshipful service unto Him, not only emotionally, without fear, but ethically and morally, in holiness, non-pollutedness, non-defilement, and righteousness, a life in which you are passionately committed to do what is right according to the law and will of God in every single area of your life. You are not content to simply have an ethical standard that will pass muster with others, that your profession of faith may, in the judgment of charity, be real. No. You see, your great question concerning the so-called issues of Christian liberty is not what's wrong with it. You're committed to do what's right. And your question is, what is right with it? What is there in it that conforms to the great paradigm of a righteous and holy life which, after God, has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth?

And this was the truth that we saw a few weeks ago in Romans 6. Come back to it now. Perhaps it will make a little more sense. In verses 17-19 where Paul is describing the conversion of the Roman Christians under the imagery of a change of masters and the implications of that change: "But thanks be to God that whereas you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered" (verse 17). That is, the gospel came as a form of teaching, and by the Spirit, you were cast into its mold, one of the most beautiful descriptions of what it is to be converted. You get thrown into the mold of the gospel. There's a gospel mold with free forgiveness and power to deliver from the enslavement of sin and the love of the world and all the rest. And you say you got thrown into that mold. And when you came out, you were molded by the gospel. Isn't that beautiful? Well, if it didn't get you excited, it gets me excited. All right, "unto which you were delivered."

And what happened when you came out of that mold? Verse 18: "being made free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: as you presented your members [eyes, hands, feet, ears, everything] slaves to uncleanness and to iniquity, even so now present your members as bond slaves to righteousness unto sanctification." I'm a slave of what's right. I want to know what's right. I'm not always pushing the margins. This is wrong. For I have a standard for what's right that overwhelms me and buries me by its magnitude: "Ye shall be holy as I am holy...Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." That's it, folks. That's it.

And I want to tell you, you young people especially, you take this seriously and begin to lean this way, and you'll be marked and even ostracized by fellow Christians in our circles. You'll be marked in the Christian school. You'll be marked in the singles conferences. You'll be marked wherever you go, because you've got no time to be pushing the limits to the line between righteousness and unrighteousness: that which is clean and undefiling, and that which is polluting and defiling. You want to stay as far away from the margins as the grace of God can make you.

Remember the story back in the days when men had to get around, not in Toyotas and Hondas and Fords and whatever else you drive. They drove carriages, and the man needed to hire a new carriage driver. And the place where he lived, you had access to it by a very dangerous road that was cut into the side of a mountain. And when he was putting out the news that he wanted to hire a new carriage driver, he would ask each carriage driver, "How close can you come to the edge of the precipice and still keep the carriage on the road?" One said, "I can go this far. I can get within a foot. I can get within six inches." And one man said, "I keep as close to the inside wall as possible." He said, "You're my driver. You're my driver." See the point?

If I'm committed to render worshipful service unto my gracious Liberator, I will do so not only without fear of my former enemies and without fear of this God who has so graciously redeemed me in Christ. I am committed to do so in an ethical context of holiness and of righteousness. I want to keep as close to the wall as possible. I'm not always going to be flirting with the edge of the precipice and say, "That's my liberty." No, that's your folly. Flirt with the precipice is your folly, not your liberty. "Wherefore, let him who thinks he stand, take heed [lest he drop off the precipice] lest he fall. That's in the context of Christian liberty (1 Corinthians 10:12). To what are we set free in Christ? To render worshipful service to Him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness, because this is what Jesus died to get.

Do you know Jesus had some very committed heart passions when He went to the cross? Not just to offer up an acceptable sacrifice to God, but this is our final text under this head. I want you to turn to Titus chapter 2. Paul has been giving very detailed instructions about a life of holiness and righteousness to old men, to old women, assuming that some would admit they were in both those categories, to young men, young women, etc., slaves. Now then he comes and he says, "Why am I

giving all of this detailed instruction about a life of holiness and righteousness?" Here's why. Titus 2, verse 11: "For the grace of God has appeared..." That's a beautiful summary statement about all the things that were happening in Luke 1 and 2. God is breaking into space-time history, sending His Son, sending the forerunner. The grace of God has appeared in the person and work of the Lord Jesus in all the redemptive activities surrounding it, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to this intent. How does the grace of God in Christ teach us? What does it teach us? Here it is:

"Instructing us to the intent that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly [that is, in touch with reality], righteously and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God in our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, purify to Himself a people for His own possession [zealous of pressing their liberties to the limit]."

No! Jesus didn't die to do that. That's the devil's doctrine of Christian liberty. It's not the doctrine of the Word of God. He died to have a people burning up with passion to do good, not to get as close to the "What's wrong with it?" Jesus didn't die for that. And as long as He didn't die for it, I'm not going to preach it. And I hope you don't believe it, and I hope you don't live by it. It's a wretched, tragic, devilish distortion of the doctrine of Christian liberty. There are tons of worldliness floating through our churches because we don't have people passionate for good works.

I've got to hurry on. Quickly, this life of worshipful service is to be lived consciously before the face of God. This is its personal quality. We've looked at its emotional quality: without fear, its ethical and moral quality: holiness and righteousness. Now what's its personal quality? This life of worshipful service is to be lived consciously before the face of God. Look at the text again. Here's the end for which we're set free, blessed be God: "to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him." Now, if we drop out the intervening phrases, we could read it like this: "to grant that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies should serve Him before Him."

You say, "Well, that really doesn't add anything new, does it?" Oh, yes, it does. We should serve Him before Him. Now, this Greek word *anopion* (before) is sometimes translated "in the presence of", or "in front of". Look at Luke 1:19. Luke had already used it in this chapter. "And the angel answering said unto him, [that is, to Zacharias], I am Gabriel that stand [*anopion*] God." "I am Gabriel" is translated in my American Standard "in the presence of God". That's our word. "I am Gabriel. My posture is that of being constantly before the face of my God. And when a directive comes from His mouth, I'm quick to fulfill it. But that's my posture. I am Gabriel that stand [*anopion*] God in the presence of God."

It's used again in Luke 1 in verse 6: "And they were both righteous [here it is: *anopion*] God. They were righteous, not just in the eyes of men. They weren't

hypocrites. Jesus could say of the Pharisees, You appear beautiful unto men, but God knows what you are. You see, Zechariah and Elizabeth were before men what God knew they were before Him. They were righteous before God. The angel Gabriel comes from the presence of God.

The bottom line of the goal of our liberty is to serve Him, to render worshipful service, but it is not an impersonal rendering of service. This little prepositional phrase brings it into the realm of the most personal, intimate context. This worshipful service is to be rendered by us in the climate of a present personal awareness that we are living before the face of God, serving Him as those that always have their eye upon Him and who are glad that He always has His eye upon us. We're never out of eyeshot before Him.

This takes away any sense of this is some kind of a legalistic, tight, I'm afraid of doing the wrong thing? I'm living before the face of God. This glorious, infinitely pure, holy, loving, majestic, wise being Who is called God. And I live as before His face, therefore, I can't be a hypocrite. I mourn the sins that only He sees as much as the ones that my wife and my kids see. The vile thought to which none was witness but God drives me to cry, "O God, how long, how long, before I have a mind free of filth." The inadvertent or perhaps even the willful glance for a moment or two or a minute at the television, it's something your conscience said, "Turn your eyes away from beholding vanity." No one was there. Wife and kids weren't there. But you looked, and the chambers of your mind were stained with what you saw. And you don't go look out the window: "Did anybody see me?" You say, "I live before the face of God. Oh, God, You saw me. You saw me, Lord. When will I learn? Oh, God, forgive me. Forgive me. Have mercy upon me." Before the face of God.

And then it works the other way around. You set yourself to do something that you know is according to the Word of God. And you do it out of your sacrificial, loving service to God as before His face. And you're misunderstood. You're slandered. You're maligned. What keeps you going on? You say, "Oh Lord, Thou knowest. Other eyes misjudged what I did. But Lord, You know I did this before Your face, as unto You." And it puts a blessed cocoon around you.

If you have any kind of profile, I mean, it's one of the most grievous things to have your motives misjudged. You know what it's like in husband and wife. Man, that cuts the gizzard out of you, doesn't it? Best you know before God, there's something God put in you that you're doing. Behold, out of this kind of heart, by nature so full of rottenness, God's put some goodness in there, and you're doing this thing out of a motive of goodness, and your own wife misunderstands it. I mean, that hurts. But what a wonderful thing to be able to say, "Sweetheart, God knows. God knows. This was my motive." And the more intimate you are, the more sensitive you are to the slightest fracture of that intimacy. Right.

But you see, it's liberating. Get hold of this principle. He set me free from these chains and opened the prison door that I might go out into a life lived without fear, in

holiness and righteousness before the face of my God, which is the essence of what I'm going to have forever and ever, for Revelation 22, verse 4 says they shall see His face: "His servants shall serve Him and they shall see His face." The glory of the life of heaven is that this element of the personal relationship will be brought to its heightened and most pure expression, and it will grow and grow forever and forever.

What was a terror to us in our unconverted days (Psalm 139): "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. You know my down-sitting. You know my uprising. You understand my thought from afar. Not a word in my tongue but, O Lord, You know it all together. You have beset me behind and before and laid Your hand upon me." Those verses used to strike terror to me. If I had to write the next ones, it would be, not how wonderful are these thoughts to me, how great is the sum of them. I would have had to write how frightening and terrifying is that reality. God is the one heavenly eye. He sees me. He hears me. He is recording all of my filthy thoughts and my dirty words and my dirty jokes. But when you come to know that God, you can read Psalm 139 the way David wrote it. He said, "This is such a wonderful truth." He said, "If I jump down into my grave earlier, You're there. If somehow I could be shot up into the stratosphere, Lord, You're there. How wonderful are Your thoughts to me?" It's a wonderful thing to live before the face of God. And that's why He sets you free. He sets you free to live before His face.

Now, when you start applying that to Christian liberty, are you going to watch that certain movie? Can you walk into there and say, "O gracious God who redeemed me in Christ, that I might serve you without fear in holiness and righteousness? I welcome your eye upon me right there above the TV. I welcome your eye as I expose the chambers of my soul to the plot of this movie, as I expose the walls of my mind to the permanent etchings of the vision and the scenes of this movie." For every time you watch a movie, there is permanent etching upon the walls of the mind. You do that before the eye of this holy God, then you watch your movie. You listen to the plot. But if you can't, I don't care who else does. You say, "No, I live before the eye of my God."

And when all the kids get together, and that's the buzzword, "Oh, did you..." And you say, sorry, folks, I don't know from nothing. "Oh, what about the..." And you say, "I'm sorry, I don't listen to those kind of CDs. I do not make my icons these half-converted little bimbos who traffic in the gullibility of an undiscerning generation of professing Christians. They won't get my bucks." And you're willing, young people, to say, "No, as for me, I'm going to live before the face of God. What goes in my ears, what goes in my eyes, I live before the face of God."

Well, very quickly in closing, number four, the life of worshipful service is to mark us all our days. I originally had this as its temporal quality, but I had to throw the word temporal away. So it's its enduring quality. Look at the text. Why did He set us free, deliver us from the hand of all of our enemies? This is why: "To grant that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should render worshipful service to Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before His face all our days." It's

interesting. It doesn't say for the whole of our life. You see, that's a collective noun. The whole of my life, but all of our days. You get the emphasis of it? That means that as I wake up and kick the covers off in a new day, I say,

"This day God has given to me. And this day it is my privilege as a free man, a free woman, a free boy or girl in Christ with my chains broken and the prison door open, I'm free in Christ this day to render worshipful service to my gracious Redeemer God without dread that He is going to zap me with a heart committed to and trusting in Him for grace to live a life of universal holiness and righteousness before His very face even this day."

Now that particular day you get up and your arthritic joints are particularly intense in sending signals to your brain, and you've got a headache. And you know you're going to face some horrible situations in the home, at work, in the church. But it doesn't make any difference. You say, "I'm set free. That this day, God will get from me the worshipful service that His dear Son died that He would have." When it's easy, when it's convenient, no hardship, no reproach, when there's suffering, when there's grief, when there's pain, it doesn't make any difference. He's worthy. He's worthy. He's worthy that throughout this day, by His grace and by the power of the Spirit, I will render that kind of service to Him. Now, that's not just for old people who had their fling. And you young people sit there and say, "Yeah, you're all right." Some of us never had a fling. God saved us in our youth. And for some of us, God laid adult responsibilities on us in our youth.

I don't often give anything of my testimony. One of the most wonderful compliments I've ever had some years ago, a man said, "Pastor Martin, I've listened to about 300 of your tapes, and I know so little about you." I said, "Good, I'm not supposed to preach myself." But at age 17, God made me the de facto pastor of a little group of six or seven kids. A few months later, I had the burden and responsibility of being freshman chaplain to 800 students, a short time after, being a student pastor of a little group of people in the white trash section of Augusta, Georgia. And all of my hormones and all of my athletic energies and capacities still at their height, I'd sit at my desk in my dorm and look out and see the guys out playing basketball, and everything in me wanted to go. But I had to go Sunday and open up the Word. And I sat there with my Greek Testament preparing sermons. Not fair that an 18-year-old kid, a 19-year-old boy can't go play ball. No, it may not be fair. But that's what God marked out for this man.

Now, do I look back with regrets? As I've told you more times in recent years, whatever I am, you know I ain't a sour old man. I'm a happy old man. I got no regrets. Now, does that mean I never went out and played basketball, gotten the exercise? No, no. Don't take that to extremes. What I'm saying is this. The world has no right to tell you what the dimensions and the contours of your life will be if it becomes a life lived in worshipful service unto Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before His face all the days of your life.

Now, if we get that stuff in place, then we're ready to sit down and talk about Christian liberty. And frankly, if that stuff is not in place and has begun to be the framework within which you passionately live, then don't talk to me about Christian liberty. I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear it. Because all you're doing is talking about a way to wiggle out from admitting you're still in your chains. And you've just got to have this that the world says you've got to have to be fulfilled. And you've got to go here, and you've got to see this, and you've got to hear that. Because the world says without it, your life is not complete.

You're free from that. You're ready to let God tell you what you need to have a complete life. And let anybody say what they will, think what they will. It's a wonderful thing to be set free. That's Christian liberty--set free to be Christ's bond slave all of my days, rendering to Him worshipful service without fear in holiness and righteousness before His face all the days of my life.

Now, my friend, if you're sitting here this morning saying to live like that would be a bummer. Well, that's just your chains rattling. Cry to God to show you. That's just your chains rattling. Cry to God to set you free and show you the blessedness of the words of Jesus: "Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed." The Apostle Paul picks them up and says, "For freedom did Christ set you free."

And for you who are the liberated ones, pray in these perspectives. Maybe it would be well to take the next couple of days as part of your devotions to take Luke 1:74 and 75 and pray it in and say, Oh God, let this become the framework within which I live my life by Your grace and by Your power.

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