

Breaking Free, Part One

Demolishing Spiritual Strongholds

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Introduction

A Parable of the Church

They say that if you put a frog into a pot of boiling water, it will leap out right away to escape the danger. **But**, if you put a frog in a kettle that is filled with water that is cool and pleasant, and then you *gradually* heat the kettle until it starts boiling, the frog will not become aware of the threat until it is too late. The frog's survival instincts are geared towards detecting sudden changes.

We are living in a day and age that is reaping the results of gradual changes in our society. As Christians, we are appalled by the outrageous immorality displayed in the media. We are shocked by the tolerance of a silent majority who seem content to observe without comment. We are disturbed by the presence of a church that like the proverbial frog, is bathing comfortably in a hot tub while the world around us raises the temperature aimed at our extinction.

Unmasking Spiritual Strongholds

Do you ever feel weighted down by a sense of spiritual oppression? Who put those chains on you, Christian? Consider, for example, the characterization of the Christian life through the eyes of the apostle Paul:

- More than conquerors through Christ, Rom. 8:37
- Victory is ours through Christ, 1 Cor. 15:57
- Able to do all things through Christ, Phil. 4:13

No one acclaimed more of the Christian life than Paul. No one suffered more as a Christian than Paul. No one was a more glorious example of victorious Christian living than Paul.

How can we explain being similarly blessed as Paul, yet lacking in the sufferings of Paul we fail to achieve the level of His victorious life in Christ?

- Is it possible that Satan and his demonic horde assail our lives with more rapidity and intensity than the apostle Paul?
- Is it possible that the nature of our times, so distant from the less encumbered ancient days explains our anxiety in terms of a more hostile environment?
- Is it possible that the apostolic nature of Paul's gifts permitted him the advantage of spiritual that we simply do not possess and may not obtain?

Yet, have we properly identified the nature of the stronghold that Paul has slated for destruction? Is the apostle's reference to something internal and that plagues the conscious mind of the Christian?

No. Paul is referring to advance of the gospel and the obstruction of false teaching the perverts the truth and erodes the confidence of deceived believers.

However, Satan, the great liar, is intent upon engaging the believer at the point of faith in order to disrupt any forward motion on the path of obedience. Are there principles in this passage that can enable us to remove satanic impedances and marching forward, to remain wholly obedient to Christ?

"Breaking free" is not merely a platitude for those weighed down by life, it is a statement of purpose for those seeking to acknowledge and achieve their mission from God for their lives.

Outline

I. The Substance of our Fight, v. 3

- A. It is Elusive in Observation, “for though we walk in the flesh”
 - 1. The Common Lot of the Uncommon Christian (1 Jn. 4:4)
 - 2. The Entanglements of the Frustrated Christian (2 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 12:1)
 - High Anxiety
 - Low Self-Esteem
 - Crippling Depression
 - Excessive Stress
 - Overwhelming Guilt
 - Painful Loneliness
 - Acute Bitterness
 - Burning Rage
 - Illicit Sex
 - Substance Abuse
 - Uncontrolled Lust
 - Unbridled Ambition
 - Material Preoccupation
 - Spiritual Deprivation
- B. It is Ongoing in Duration, “we do not **war** (campaign)”
 - The Christian Soldier on Active Duty (Matt. 26:41)

- C. It is Spiritual in Essence, “according to the flesh”
 - Right Fight, but on the Wrong Level (**Lk. 22:31-32**)

II. The Superiority of our Weapons, v. 4

- A. The Inferiority of Natural Means Against a Supernatural Combatant, “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh”

1. The Nature of the Enemy

Spiritual (Eph. 6:12)	Formidable (Jas. 4:7)	Mobile (1 Pet. 5:8)
Hostile (Jn. 10:10)	Deceitful (Jn. 8:44)	

2. The Tactics of the Enemy (Gen. 3:1-8)

- Isolate an Individual: Eve alone is singled, “*and he said to the woman*”, v. 1
- Recruit to a “Favorable” Side: A verbal assault on the character of God and the truthfulness of His Word, “*Has God indeed said...?*” v. 1
- Destroy Confidence in God: Eve’s response to Satan was to add to God’s prohibition given to Adam (2:17), indicating that her view of God had been compromised by error, “*nor shall you touch it*”, v. 2
- Lure with Autonomy from God: Both Adam and Eve sinned, though Adam is charged with the fall. As receiving the command from God (Ro. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), “*...she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate*”, v. 6
- Humiliate before God: Adam and Eve “*hid themselves from the presence of the Lord*”, v. 8.

3. The Goal of the Enemy

- **shipwreck** their faith, making themselves unprofitable in the ministry (**1 Tim. 1:19-20**)
- **fall** into grievous sin and become a poor testimony to the faith (**Gal. 6:1**)
- **suffer** loss of fellowship with God due to un-confessed sin (**1 Jn. 1:7-2:2**)

B. The Deployment of Supernatural Means to Complete our Mission, “But mighty in God [in God’s service] for pulling down strongholds”

1. We are not engaged in a campaign to flirt with notions and practices that hinder and resist the influence of the Gospel.
2. Our task is to demolish the fortresses of prejudicial ideas that infect the church, by attaching themselves to host believers (**Gal. 3:1-5**).

Knowing (Phil. 4:13)	Going (e.g., false teachers, 1 Tim. 6:11-16)	Showing (Acts 4:13)
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3. The reason why many believers fail to demolish strongholds is either because it is easier to merely coexist with them, or in the extreme to move into them.
- **Billy Graham on the Filling of the Holy Spirit:** “Unfortunately, many Christians, having prayed for power, have no intention of using it, or else neglect to follow through in active obedience. I think it is a waste of time for us to look for power we never intend to use: for might in prayer, unless we pray; for strength to testify, without witnessing; for power unto holiness, without attempting to live a holy life; for grace to suffer, unless we take up the cross; for power in service, unless we serve.”

III. The Success of our Victory, v. 5

A. The Presentation of our Polemic, “casting down arguments” (1 Pet. 3:15).

The Silent Carousel Rider	The Rude Bull Horn Announcer	The Blind Tour Guide
The Tolerant Peace Maker	The Ambivalent Fence Walker	

B. The Identification of our Enemy, “and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God”

1. The **Rise** of Secular Humanism: A main tenet of modernism is that human reason, armed with the scientific method, is the only reliable means of attaining the knowledge necessary for humans to live well and die happily.
2. The **Death** of God: Fredrich Nietzsche, “god is dead...the belief in the Christian God has become unworthy of belief.” Man must fend for himself, exercise the power of his will, create his own values and fashion the course of his life (superman). He died of insanity! [anti-theism]
3. The **Birth** of Post-Modernism: (values clarification) In its essence it rejects reason, rationality, and confidence in epistemology (theories of knowledge) and science as cultural biases but does not deny authority in the individual (trades the “foundations” of scientific method for the “web” of relativism).
4. The **Growth** of Relativism: In the name of tolerance, every ideology is accepted on an equal plane of authority. Truth is no longer absolute, but is personalized and pragmatic. No time could be more confusing than today. Is there any wonder that as a society we are groping for meaning and purpose and drugged beyond comprehension.

- c. The Subjugation of our Captives, “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (analogy)
 - The Christian Response...
- **Colson:** “Why are cultural trends shifting? Because modernity has played out its destructive logical consequences. All the ideologies, all the utopian promises that have marked this century have proven utterly bankrupt. Americans have achieved what modernism presented as life’s great shining purpose: individual autonomy, the right to do what one chooses. Yet this has not produced the promised freedom; instead, it has led to the loss of community and civility, to kids shooting kids in schoolyards, to citizens huddling in gated communities for protection. We have discovered that we cannot live with chaos that inevitably results from choice divorced from morality...We must show the world that Christianity is more than a private belief, more than personal salvation. We must show that it is a comprehensive life system that answers all of humanity’s age-old questions: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Does life have meaning and purpose?”
- **Kuyper** (1837-1920): “the dominating principle of Christian truth is not soteriological (i.e., justification by faith) but rather cosmological (i.e. the sovereign and triune God over the world cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible). The entire cosmos can be understood only in relation to God.”

Conclusion

Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*: “Openness, and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and various ways of life and kinds of human beings, is the great insight of our times. **The true believer is in real danger.** The study of history and culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, and racism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.”

Fredrich Froebel, (1782-1852). Froebel was a German scholar who devoted himself exclusively to the study of preschoolers who founded the “kindergarten.” Sounds harmless enough? Yet, many rejected his kindergarten movement as atheistic and socialistic. Why? Froebel’s vision for his “children’s garden” was a radical utopian educational theory. While classical educational theory had focused on the transference of one’s past cultural heritage, Froebel taught children to reject the past, freeing them to create something new. This “new man” would eventually become a utopian society where old standards of truth are cast off and new ideas and ways of living are born through personal experience.

Breaking Free, Part Two

The Lies that Bind

1 John 5:1-5

Introduction

When the apostle John wrote this letter there was a need to **clarify the claims of Christianity** among those who assembled as believers. A noticeable division existed with a group that seemed to represent **two opposing and irreconcilable extremes**.

Profess Christ in Some Mystical Sense	Possess Christ as Personal Savior	
Jesus merely appeared to be human and only seemed to die; there was no real incarnation, no divine Savior, no death for sinners.	Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came in the flesh, died for the sins of the world as the righteous sacrifice of God; and, who is risen and has anointed true believers with the Spirit of God, resulting in a sensitivity to sin and an outpouring of love for God and fellow believers.	
Walk in darkness	1:6-2:2	Walk in the light
Deny the stain of original sin		Confess their sins to God
Deny sinful acts		Rely on the advocacy of the righteous Lord Jesus Christ
Claim to have a relationship with God, but fail to keep His commandments	2:3-6 (3:10-23)	Motivated by a love for God that results in obedience to His commandments.
Hates other Christians and abides in darkness	2:7-11(3:16-23; 4:7-5:1)	Loves other Christians and abides in light
Loves the world system	2:15-17	Loves the Father
Denies that Jesus is the Messiah and is against Christ	2:18-27	Possess an anointing from Christ and is united with Christ
Child of the devil	2:28-3:23	Child of God

Practices lawlessness		Practices righteousness
Abides in death		Has eternal life
Loves in word		Loves in deed
Spirit of Error	3:24-4:6	Spirit of truth
Of the world	5:2-13	Overcomes the world
Does not possess the Son of God and does not possess life		Possesses the Son of God and possesses life
Under the sway of the wicked one and practices sin	5:18-21	Under the sway of the Spirit (4:2) and does not practice sin (3:9)

Two groups emerged among the early adherents to Christianity by the end of the first century. John is writing to encourage the faithful who had experienced the departure of those who were adhering to the wrong “Christ” (2:18-19). Many claim a relationship with Jesus today, but which Jesus? Adhering to the wrong Jesus earns us the brand of liar in the eyes of God and we are bound to our sins (2:22-23).

I. The Great Divide, v. 1

A. The Faith we Embrace

1. Character, “**all of the ones believing-practicing faith**”
 - a. A Monumental Beginning (Jn. 1:12; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-10, 13)
 - b. A Fundamental Enduring (Rom. 1:16-17 [Hab. 2:4] Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)
2. Content, “**that Jesus is the Christ [the Chosen-Anointed One of God to provide deliverance from sin],”** 1 Jn. 4:14.

3. Crisis, “**has been born of God**”

- a. The **Word** of God, 1 Pet. 1:23
- b. The **Spirit** of God, Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5
- c. The **Nature** of God:

- His Grace to Freely Provide Deliverance, Eph. 2:8
- His Mercy to Compassionately Withhold Judgment, Eph. 2:4
- His Love to Willingly Sacrifice Everything, Rom. 5:8 (1 Jn. 4:10)

d. The **Ambassador** of God, 2 Cor. 5:20

- Our Mission is Extensive, Mk. 16:15
- Our Message is Exclusive (sinners), Rom. 3:23
- Our Manner is Engaging (Relevance of Jesus for one's ultimate need), Lk. 19:10

B. The Love we Practice, “**everyone who loves the one who gives birth [also] loves the ones who have been born**”

1. The Major Premise: Every child of God loves its Father...
2. The Minor Premise: Children from a common Father love one another...
3. The Conclusion: Every child of God (as evidenced by a Christ-dependent life, v. 1a) loves both the Father and His children

II. The Supreme Test, vv. 2-3

- A. Stated Generally, v. 2 **“this is how we know that we love God’s children, [we know this] whenever we love God and do whatever He commands”**
 - 1. A Knowledge Defined by Experience: This act of “knowing” is a matter of definite experience, not one of intellectual assent to the fact that “Christians *should* love.”
 - 2. An Experience Confirmed by Action-Nature: This is the “uncommon Christian” living amidst the “common” struggles of men.
 - a. We actively love God through surrender (negative) and praise (positive).
 - b. We listen for and adhere to God’s leading-directions because His way is best (Ecc. 12:13)
- B. Explained Specifically: The Un-oppressed Life, v. 3 **“For this is [the nature of] God’s love, in order that we should keep His commandments; and His commandments [by their nature] are not an oppressive burden”**

- a. Keeping the commandments of God never promoted the Pharisees to a position of favor with God, **Matt. 15:8**.
- b. An in-born capacity to love God is the foundation for an acceptable life of obedience, Rom. 5:5 (1 Jn. 4:7).
- c. Obedience as Intended for Devotion: We are governed by a desire to please God in all that we do, Col. 1:10.
- d. Devotion as Intended for Satisfaction-Fulfillment (Matt. 11:28-29; Jn. 14:21)

III. The Final Victory, vv. 4-5

- A. The Advantage of Every Child of God, v. 4 **“because all that has been born of God is conquering the world [the system that represents all that is antithetical to God]; and this is the [nature of our] victory, the one that [began when it] overcame the world, [it is] our faith.**
 - 1. The Battles we Face have been Already Won (1 Jn. 2:13)
 - 2. The Faith we Practice (v. 1) is the Peace we Enjoy...**“our faith”**
 - a. Our faith in Christ that resulted in our forgiveness of sins and entrance into the family of God, Jn. 1:12.
 - b. Our faith as an ongoing life of trust that depends upon God in the midst of trials and opposition to our witness by the world, Heb. 11:6.

- B. The Question for Every "World-ling" Observer, v. 5 **"And who is the one who is overcoming the world, if not the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"** (1 Pet. 3:15)

Conclusion

When he was 32 years of age and was employed as a teacher of rhetoric in Milan, he had reached a desperate state of distress, and then, to use his own words:

"I flung myself down, how I know not, under a certain fig tree, giving free course to my tears. . . I sent up these sorrowful cries, How long, how long? Tomorrow, or the next day? Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?' I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighboring house and oft repeating, 'Take up and read, take up and read.' Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words, nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears' I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon. . . . I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell,

"Not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

No further would I read, nor did I need, for instantly, as the sentence ended by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart all gloom of doubt vanished away."

Later Augustine would write: "as a new song fits not well an old man's lips, he should sing a new song who is a new creature and is living a new life."

One of the most quotable references of Augustine is found in his treatise, *Confessions*,

"Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

Augustine is attempting to convey the restless heart of the Christian who so longs for God that he will not truly rest until finally achieving the highest level of devotion in the very presence of God.

Breaking Free, Part Three

The Mission of the Radical Revolutionary

Luke 4:18-19

Introduction

The American Revolution ended two centuries of British rule for most of the North American colonies and created the modern United States of America. The Revolutionary era was both exhilarating and disturbing---a time of progress for some, dislocation for others. In the wake of the Revolution came events as varied as the drafting and ratification of the Constitution of the United States of America and the rebellions of slaves who saw the contrast between slavery and proclamations of liberty.

Early in 1776, as many Americans moved toward an emotionally wrenching separation from Great Britain, two young South Carolinians studying abroad discussed their country's uncertain future. John Laurens, son of the wealthy merchant and planter, Henry Laurens, ardently embraced republicanism and independence. In defending revolution and republicanism, Laurens recognized the disparity between American ideals and practices. It was hypocritical, he wrote, for white Americans to demand their liberty while they held blacks in bondage.

In an August 1776 letter to his son John, Henry Laurens privately acknowledged that slavery violated the Golden Rule. The elder Laurens, whose devout Christian faith set him apart from most other American political leaders, hoped one day to free his own slaves and convince his contemporaries to follow suit. Despite this pledge, he never made a public attack on slavery. Of the nearly 260 slaves Henry owned, he freed only George, his personal servant during the Revolution.

Unlike his father, John Laurens translated private sentiments into public action. He eventually conceived a bold plan to enlist slaves in the Continental Army and grant them freedom in return for their service. His proposal not only pledged reinforcements to the dwindling American regular forces but also threatened to subvert the institution of slavery in the lower South (*Slavery and Liberty in the American Revolution: John Laurens's Black Regiment Proposal*, by Gregory D. Massey).

Laurens ultimately failed in his efforts. However, the freedom proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ is available to every slave of sin who is willing to be liberated. As radical as Lauren's idea for emancipating slaves in the 18th century was, Jesus Christ came to this world with a mission as a radical Revolutionary aimed at succeeding where man could only fail.

I. The Impact of His Enabling, v. 18a

A. The **Nature** of the Enabling, “the Spirit of the LORD”

1. The Enabling Spirit of Whom **Isaiah** Prophesied (**Is. 61:1-2**)
 - a. He is the Servant of the LORD, **Is. 52:13**
 - b. He is the One who will be anointed with the Spirit, **Is. 11:1-2; 42:1**
 - c. He will be prophetic in His calling, declaring a message of restoration and renewal from God, **61:1-11**
 - d. He will satisfy the wrath of God with His sacrifice for sins, **Is. 53:4-12**
 - e. He will usher in an unprecedented time of God’s Favor, an everlasting covenant for both Jew and Gentile, **Is. 54:1-56:8 (61:2)**
 - f. He will be mercilessly rejected by His own people, **Is. 53:1-3 (Jn. 1:11)**
2. The Enabling Spirit of Whom **Jesus** Experienced (**Lk. 4:1, 14**)
 - a. The Spirit is Active in Guiding (**Matt. 4:1**)
 - b. The Spirit is Active in Resisting (**Matt. 4:10**)
 - c. The Spirit is Active in Proclaiming (**Matt. 4:17**)
 - d. The Spirit is Active in Calling (**Matt. 4:18-19**)
 - e. The Spirit is Active in Signifying (**Matt. 4:23-25; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:4**)

B. The **Reception** of the Enabling, “is upon Me,” (**Lk. 3:21-22**)

1. Taken as a whole, the phrase, “the Spirit of the LORD is upon Me” is a paraphrase of the term Messiah-Anointed [**hym, Cristol**]. “Jesus, in reading these words, could not but apply them to His recent baptism” (Godet, 150).
2. What follows (the preaching of the gospel) demonstrates the need for such a reception, as though establishing the church via the preaching of the gospel is powerless apart from the attending ministry of the Holy Spirit (**Rom. 1:16**)

3. Our anointing is from the Lord Jesus who pours out the Spirit of God indiscriminately upon His disciples (universality implied: **Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27**)

C. The **Proof** of the Enabling, “**because He has anointed Me**”

1. Gives the Spirit Fully to His Witnesses, **Jn. 3:34**
2. Guided-Influenced by the Spirit, **Acts 1:2**
3. Reign is Opposed by the World, **Acts 4:25-31**
4. Superior Power is Demonstrated Victoriously, **Acts 10:34-43**

D. The **Intention** for the Enabling, “**to preach the gospel-evangelize to the poor**” (**Matt. 5:3**)

1. The Post-Enabling Witness the Baptist (**Lk. 1:16-17, 76-79; Matt. 3:2**)
2. The Post-Enabling Witness of Jesus (**Matt. 4:17**)
3. The Post-Enabling Witness of the Apostles (**Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:14; 4:8, 20; 5:20, 32**)
4. The Post-Enabling Witness of the Early Church (**Acts 2:1-12; 2 Cor. 1:21; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27**)

II. **The Performance of His Ministry, v. 18b**

A. **Metaphor One:** Bring Healing to those who are in a Crushed Condition (here of the soul's condition; see **Lk. 5:17** e.g., of physical-sign healing; or Lk. 9:39 e.g., of literal crushing-bruising)

- His Compassionate Manner does not Break the Crushed or Extinguish the Faint-Hearted, **Is. 42:3** (**Matt. 12:20**); Ps. 34:18

B. **Metaphor Two:** Proclaiming Release to Prisoners of War

1. His “heralding” of forgiveness (“release”) to those who have been captured by sin with no ability to break free.

2. Original sin has rendered the human race in a depraved condition; not that we all are as bad as we can be, but that we are all as bad off as we can be (**Rom. 3:10-12, 19, 23; 5:12; 6:23; 10:13**)
- C. **Metaphor Three: Opening Eyes that are Closed to the Truth** (here of the soul's condition; see **Lk. 7:22** e.g., of physical-sign healing)
- The lost are characterized as sitting in darkness and in need of having their "eyes of understanding" opened, **Is. 42:6-7 (9:1-2; Matt. 3:15-16)**; see also, Lk. 24:31; 2 Tim. 2:7
- D. **Metaphor Four: Liberating the Downtrodden-Shattered in Pieces** (combining aspects of "A" and "B")
- Perhaps this stresses the necessity of true repentance in preparing the heart for receiving deliverance of sin by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (**Is. 40:1-5; Lk. 1:16-17; 3:7-10; Acts 2:37; 20:21; Is. 58:6**)

III. The Character of His Age, v. 19

A. The **Underlying Figure**: The Year of Jubilee, **Lev. 25:8-17**

The **Year of Jubilee** was proclaimed every 50th year on the Day of Atonement by trumpet blasts throughout the land of Israel. Like the Sabbatical year (every 7th year), it was a year for resting the soil (two consecutive years of fallow land occurred whenever the Sabbatical and Jubilee years followed). During the Year of Jubilee, slaves were released from bondage and the land that had been lost due to debt was recovered by the original owner. The Year of Jubilee serves as a type of **the Messianic Age** to come, one that we presently enjoy, one that is characterized by true and lasting liberty.

B. The **Application** to Mission of the Lord Jesus Christ

1. Came to **Seek and to Save** the Lost, **Lk. 2:14**
2. Came to **Embody Grace and Truth** as the Incarnate Son of God, **Lk. 2:11** (Jn. 1:14)

3. Came to **Provide True Freedom, Jn. 8:36** (not to lost again and regained during the 7th or 50th years)

Conclusion

On Jan. 1, 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln declared free all slaves residing in territory in rebellion against the federal government. This Emancipation Proclamation actually freed few people. It did not apply to slaves in border states fighting on the Union side; nor did it affect slaves in southern areas already under Union control. Naturally, the states in rebellion did not act on Lincoln's order. But the proclamation did show Americans--and the world--that the civil war was now being fought to end slavery.

Lincoln had been reluctant to come to this position...He initially viewed the war only in terms of preserving the Union. As pressure for abolition mounted in Congress and the country, however, Lincoln became more sympathetic to the idea. On Sept. 22, 1862, he issued a preliminary proclamation announcing that emancipation would become effective on Jan. 1, 1863, in those states still in rebellion. Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery in America--this was achieved by the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution on Dec. 18, 1865--it did make that accomplishment a basic war goal and a virtual certainty (Douglas T. Miller).

Breaking Free, Part 4
Demolishing Earthbound Thinking
1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Introduction

Mid-way through his letter to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul addressed the issue of sin and the nullification of its power over the Christian. In Romans chapter six, Paul describes the practical outworking of the new creation in the life of the believer. Since the believer is united to Christ, it is as if he also experiences daily what the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ has accomplished. The fact that Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and has risen victoriously over sin and its judgment, death, insures every believer that his/her deliverance from the penalty of sin is an accomplished fact and that death will one day be transformed into resurrection (see **Rom. 6:1-14**).

The baptism described by Paul in these verses, “baptized into Christ Jesus...buried with Him through baptism into death” (v. 4) is a public personal affirmation and ratification of one’s adherence to Christ and desire to life according to “the newness of life,” or the “resurrected life,” the principle of the new man who life is lived “to God” (v. 10). Water baptism is a public demonstration of a private experience. It is from this point that we are accountable to a local congregation to live according to “the newness of life” we claimed to possess in baptism. Every child of God should use this means of public testimony and become numbered among the children of God (**Acts 2:41**).

This is not a message on baptism, but it is a message on “the resurrection life.” At our water baptism, we openly testified by our action: “Look at me, I’m a Christian, I belong to Jesus Christ and He has given me a new life. Watch my life from here on out and you’ll see the new life that you can possess as well.”

The problem is that “the resurrection life” is housed in mortal body that is prone to weakness and subjected to all the adverse elements of this world. God does not save us to shield us, nor does He place us in a vacuum. With all due respect to former president Ronald Reagan, America is not “the shining city on the hill” that Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount...we are! (see **Matt. 5:14-16**)

In **1 Corinthians 15:50-58**, the apostle Paul is describing the ongoing present victory that God is doling out to us daily through our union with the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 57). Paul describes our present victory in terms of the future resurrection of our bodies.

I. **The Abiding Principle, v. 50**

- A. The Current State of the Bodies of Living Believers is Ill-Equipped for the Kingdom of God, **“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”**
- B. The Corrupting State of the Remains of Dead Believers is Ill-Equipped for the Kingdom of God, **“nor does corruption inherit incorruption”**
 - 1. The Essence of Human Existence
 - a. The **Division** of our Being (Ecc. 12:7; 1 Thess. 5:23)
 - Material: Body (Rom. 7:24)
 - Immaterial: Soul-Spirit (Heb. 4:12)
 - b. The **Pollution** of our Being, Is. 53:6; 59:2, 10; 64:6 (Rom. 3:10-12)
 - c. The **Redemption** of our Being:
 - Present: The Penalty and Power of Sin, Eph. 1:7
 - Future: The Presence of Sin, Eph. 1:14; 4:30
 - 2. The Nature of the Kingdom of God
 - a. The Kingdom of God is **Earthly**, Matt. 25:31-46
 - b. The Kingdom of God is **Spiritual**, Jn. 18:36; Lk. 17:20-21; Rom. 14:17
 - c. The Kingdom of God is **Present**, Matt. 4:17
 - d. The Kingdom of God is **Future**, Matt. 6:10

Jesus was not mistaken when He announced that His kingdom was present, because He (the King) was present. However, the fullness of the plan of God involved not only the arrival of the King, but also the King laying down His life for His subjects and being exalted at the right hand of God to reign over a spiritual kingdom (**Jn. 18:36**). But there is more. The presently reigning King will return to earth one day in the future as He said and extend His reign over the kingdom of this world (**Rev. 11:15**).

II. The Impending Miracle, vv. 51-53

- A. The **Significance** of the Miracle, “**Behold**” (v. 51)
- B. The **Disclosure** of the Miracle, “**I tell you a mystery**” (v. 51)
- C. The **Experience** of the Miracle (1 Thess. 4:15-18)
 1. What Some of the Righteous will Avoid, “**we shall not all sleep**” (v. 52)
 - a. The Wicked will abide in torment (Lk. 16:23)
 - The present abode of the wicked: Hades: This term is rooted in the OT (*sheol*, the grave or the abode of the dead) and defined in the NT as an intermediate abode of conscious torment for the unrighteous dead (Matt. 11:23; 16:18). Luke 16:19-31, whether parabolic or not, is the most descriptive of Hades.
 - The future abode of the wicked: Gehenna: (Lit., The Valley of Hinnom) Most of the NT references are from the lips of our Lord as warnings against its a fiery doom that burns but does not consume (Mk. 9:43-47). This is the place of final consignment for the wicked dead who are delivered up from Hades, Rev. 20:11-15.
 - b. The Just will sleep in comfort (see Lk. 16:19-31)
 - Perhaps the account in Luke offers imagery from which we can derive principles...
 - There is conscious existence after death
 - Fixed separation between the righteous and the unrighteous after death
 - For the righteous, being absent from the body they are present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8)
 - No opportunity for the wicked to amend their after death
 - Determination of one’s eternal destiny is rooted in this life

- God has revealed the truth of these sobering matters in His Word in order for us to escape
2. What all of the Righteous will Experience, **“but, we shall all be changed”** (v. 52)
 - a. This change will occur suddenly, **“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last [in the sense of finality, not in a series of trumpet blasts] trumpet”** (v. 52)
 - b. This change will occur programmatically, **“for the trumpet [used in ancient times for gathering people] will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”** (v. 52; Job. 7:21)
 - The **Resurrection** of the Dead (Dan. 12: 2; Jn. 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Matt. 25:46; 1 Cor. 15:20-28)
 - The Resurrection of the Just
 - The Resurrection of the Unjust (Ps. 1:5-6)
 - The **Rapture** of the Church (1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Thess. 2:1; Jn. 14:3; Rev. 4:1)
- D. The **Reason** for the Miracle, **“for this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality”** (v. 53)
1. The Problem: God must equip our bodies for life [with Him] in heaven (1 Jn. 3:1-3), **“we shall be changed,”** v. 52]. From 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 49 we see that our resurrected-glorified bodies:
 - a. “imperishable,” do not wear out, grow old, or subject to disease, v. 42
 - b. “glory,” beautiful and radiant, v. 43
 - c. “power,” constant supply of strength to accomplish all that is demanded of us by God, v. 43
 - d. “spiritual,” not in the sense of non-physical, but in the sense of operating according to the influence of the Holy Spirit

2. The Pattern: Both Enoch and Elijah did not experience physical death but were taken directly into the presence of God (Gen. 5:24; 2 Ki. 2:1-12; Heb. 11:5)

III. The Fleeting Obstacle, vv. 54-55

- A. Fulfillment of an Ancient Promise, **Is. 25:8** (v. 54)
 1. **“Death is swallowed up in victory”** gives the image of death being absorbed in imperishable life [F. L. Godet, *1 Corinthians*].
 2. Peter addresses imperishability of the life we enjoy as a result of our salvation in terms of an *“inheritance”* (here is a reference to our salvation), one that is *“incorruptible”* (untouched by death), *“undefiled”* (unstained by evil), and *“non-fading”* (unimpaired by time), see **1 Peter 1:4**. This salvation *“has been reserved”* (a once-and-for-all-event that cannot be changed) not on earth as though something might disrupt it, but *“in heaven for you”*.
- B. Exclamation of an Ardent Prophet, **Hos. 13:14** (v. 55)
 1. Follow the NASB or NIV text for the rendering of “Death” where “Hades” appears in the NKJV and “Grave” in the KJV. Textual support is for “Death,” though the Hebrew is “Sheol” and the LXX is “Hades.”
 2. The **venom of a poisonous bite** (“sting”) is attributed to the lethal and irreversible power of death. Hence, another, Jesus Christ, came and took the “sting” of death for us in order put death to death (**Rom. 6:10**).
- C. Climax of an Assuring Preacher: Paul cites past references to future experiences, acknowledging that the basis of our present hope is the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross (**Jn. 19:30**).

IV. The Inspiring Testimonial, vv. 56-58

- A. The **Chains** that Formerly Bound us, v. 56 (see Rom. 3:9, 19, 23; 5:12; compare Rom. 5:8, 19; 6:23)
- B. The **Truth** that Presently Liberates us, v. 57 (see **Rom. 8:1-4**)
 1. The Expression of our Experience: The lifting of the burden of sin and the release from all guilt associated with the law results in a sense of release, **“Let thanks be ascribed to God.”**

2. The Duration of our Experience: The present tense of the participle should be acknowledged here, **“the [One who is] giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**
 - Our victory results in a quality of resurrection-living that daily proves the inferior power of sin and failed efforts of sin and the law to dominate us (see **Rom. 6:14**).
- c. The **Work** that Constantly Enjoins Us, v. 58
 1. Our **Capacity** for Abounding in our God-Assigned Labors though Limited Bodily is Attributed to an Inner Principle (Spirit-powered living for Spirit-powered ends; **Acts 1:8**).
 2. Our **Sphere** for Laboring is not Tied to Earthly Conditions, but is Accomplished in Concert with an Eternal Design (**Is. 55:11**)

Conclusion

Among the most quoted verses of the Bible is Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

The first word, “but,” suggests that the sentiments of the verse are in contrast to another possible alternative way of living. The context reveals that many people worry about things that will clothe their bodies or what will feed their bodies (vv. 25-32).

The Christian is not to be governed by the transient events of life , but is to live according to the “newness of life” has both feet planted in this present world while gazing at all that one day will be...forever.

The Chains God Uses on His Children

Philippians 1:12-18

Introduction

The so-called “Maniac of Gadera” was seized upon by a demonic spirit such that multiple attempts to bind him resulted in his breaking the chains in pieces (Mk. 5:1-5). Here is a man whose binding was on the inside, though able to break free from all shackles placed upon him. Against this image is the Christian who at times experiences the restraint of God’s chains, though fully free on the inside.

I. The Pain Identified with Your Chains, v. 12

- A. Is a **Comfort** to Other Believers, “But I want you to know, brethren”
 - 1. The Providence of **Extreme Circumstances** (The God of the Mountain is Also the God of the Valley, 1 Ki. 20:28)
 - a. **Abraham** on a Mountain in the Land of Moriah, Gen. 22:12
 - b. **Jacob** at the Ford of Jabbok, Gen. 32:24
 - c. **Joseph** in the House of Potiphar and in the King’s Prison, Gen. 39:3, 21
 - d. **Moses** on the Backside of the Desert, Ex. 3:1-3
 - e. **Gideon** at the Winepress in Ophrah, Jud. 6:12
 - f. **David** before Goliath in the Valley of Elah, 1 Sam. 17:45-47
 - g. **Elijah** before the Priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, 1 Ki. 18:36-38
 - h. **Elisha** and His Servant in the City of Dothan, 2 Ki. 6:16-18
 - i. **Hezekiah** and the Sundial of Ahaz, Is. 38:4-8
 - j. **Jeremiah** in the Court of the Prison, Jer. 33:1-3
 - k. **Daniel** and the Den of Lions, Dan. 6:22
 - l. **Jonah** in the Belly of the Great Fish, Jon. 2:10
 - m. **Peter** in a Jerusalem Prison, Acts 12:11
 - n. **Paul** and **Silas** in a jail at Philippi, Acts 16:25-26
 - o. **Paul** on the Stormy Seas Heading for Rome, Acts 27:21-26
 - p. **John** the Apostle Exiled on Patmos, Rev. 1:9-11
 - 2. The Powerful Influence of **Exemplary Living** (see Jn. 17:19; Gal. 2:20)
- B. Is a **Challenge** to Personal Growth, “that the things which happened to me”

1. Paul is writing to the church in Philippi presumably from Rome where for two years he was confined under house arrest (Acts 28:30-31).
 2. His relative liberty while awaiting trial before Caesar, being able to write correspondence, see occasional visitors, preach the Gospel and engage in a teaching ministry from his own rented quarters, “no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:31), may give us the impression of ease.
 3. However, Paul is concerned that the believers in Philippi may reason from his circumstances that his ministry has been thwarted and the advance of the Gospel halted. Why would the Philippians reason this way if Roman house arrest was so unrestraining?
 4. The answer perhaps lies in non-biblical text of history. Josephus, the Jewish historian contemporaneous with New Testament times, wrote concerning the treatment of Agrippa the First, who was imprisoned during his early life in Rome. Upon arrest, Agrippa was confined to the Praetorian camp (Imperial Guard) and chained to one of the guard. The condition of life for the prisoner depended fully on the disposition of the guard to whom he was shackled. In Agrippa’s case, the guard treated him with great severity until a friend intervened who appointed a guard with a more pleasant disposition. Eventually, after six months, Agrippa was removed from the praetorium to his own house where he was subject to less restraint (see agreement with w. 7, 13-14).
 5. We can only wonder if Paul was subject to hostility that he may have reasoned at first to be contrary to the advance of the Gospel (much like his Spirit-hindered attempts to advance the Gospel in Asia Minor, Acts 16:6-10; when, providentially, God was guiding him to a place of greater impact, though fraught with pain and suffering (16:19-22). Only after patient endurance did Paul perhaps discover the merits of his circumstances.
- C. Is a **Cornerstone** to Strategic Initiative, “have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel”
1. There is no lament here of mere survival.
 2. To the contrary, the very circumstances that appear to be the best case scenario for the enemy of the Gospel paradoxically prove to be the very means intended by God to advance the Gospel into pioneer territory.
 3. The word translated “furtherance” (NKJV), “greater progress” (NASB) or “advance” (NIV) refers to the work of “cutting away” an otherwise impenetrably forested area in order build new roads to convey an army against an enemy.
 4. We are inextricably “chained” at times by circumstances imposed upon us by God that initially seem to inconsistent with our perceived plan for our lives; the pain causes us to languish hopelessly, but endurance exonerates the intent of God to clear the path ahead of us with every step of faith (Pr. 3:5-6).

II. The Purpose Intended for Your Chains, v. 13

- A. To **Expose** the Sincerity of the Messenger, “so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest”
1. **The Occasion:** The reason why the apostle Paul was in chains would become “fully understood” to members of the Praetorian Guard and “all the rest” who may include “members of Caesar’s household,” meaning the servants in his palace (4:22).
 2. **The Method:** While in his rented quarters, Paul was permitted to write (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), to preach, and to teach (Acts 28:30-31). If we accept the witness of Josephus, it may have been prior to his writing of the letter, perhaps among the Praetorian Guard at the praetorium that Paul’s witness was received.
 3. **The Reason:** Nevertheless, it seems that his genuine love for Christ and devotion to the advance of the Gospel energized the apostle in every circumstance and among any people. That is an amazing epitaph, especially when compared to many of us who excuse our lack of witness on the basis of circumstances. Paul would say that it is on the basis of his present circumstances that he engages in witness (Acts 20:19).
- B. To **Advance** the Knowledge of the Message, “that my chains are in Christ”
1. What became “known” and “fully understood” by the Praetorian Guard and the “members of Caesar’s household” was that Paul was confined solely on account of his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, one that resulted in a lifestyle of witness that actively engaged in the preaching of the Gospel.
 2. The phrase “in Christ” is deeply theological and refers to the believer’s union with the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). This union is not an abstraction, but results in the ability of the believer to openly display the character and conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ, even when “in chains” (Phil. 1:21; 4:13)

III. The Pattern Inspired by Your Chains, v. 14

- A. Become **Burdened** to Follow, “and most of the brethren”
1. Apathy among God’s people does not ignite the flames of revival, nor does an unopposed Christianity mobilize the Church to action.
 2. The Early Church reasoned that Paul’s example was not that of a lone radical deeply dedicated individual, but was in fact the template for every child of God.
 3. Sixty years before William Carey set out for India and 150 years before Hudson Taylor first landed in China, two Moravian missionaries arrived on the isle of St. Thomas to preach the Gospel (1732). From the mountains of Saxony, the Moravian (United) Brethren sent out 2,158 missionaries in their first 150 years of existence.

- B. Possess **Boldness** to Speak, “having become confident [in the Lord] by my chains, are much more bold to [fearlessly break their silence], speaking the Word of God”
1. A mobilized church is here characterized by an “increase in zeal” whereby the Word of God finds expression not professionally (from the pulpit) but passionately (from the heart).
 2. The identity of “the brethren” here would be those in Rome who had first hand witnessed the apostle’s condition. The city of Rome was not favorable to Christianity. Just a few short years after Paul’s release, Emperor Nero would set fire to the city and blame the destruction on the Christian population.
 3. We in the USA are living in an increasing polarized society, one that demonizes traditional Christian moral values as “intolerance.” As a result, the church seems to be shrinking from the public debate as every vestige of our nation’s Christian heritage is removed from courthouses and schools. The sacred institution of marriage is being redefined by some and morphed into a “civil union” by others.
 - At worst the church can retreat inside the four walls of her facilities.
 - At best she can advance beyond her walls with a positive message of hope that will eclipse any rival form being offered as a political platform by either party.

IV. The Praise Initiated from Your Chains, vv. 15-18

- A. The **Division** in the Camp is Apparent, v. 15
1. Responding to the Preaching of the **Wrongly Motivated**: “some indeed preach Christ even because of envy and strife”
 - There were professing Christians in the city of Rome who, knowing of Paul’s confinement, sought perhaps to rival his apostleship, or flaunt their unfettered estate in such a way so as to arouse “envy” (a desire to dispossess others of what one is unable to possess) in the heart of Paul and “strife” (intense conflict) perhaps from partisan Pauline supporters (1 Cor. 3:4-8).
 2. Responding to Preaching of the **Rightly Motivated**: “and some also from goodwill”
 - There were also Christians in Rome who were emboldened to ease the confinement of Paul by advancing the cause so close to his heart (1 Cor. 9:16). Nothing is more encouraging to a preacher than to see the impact of his ministry exemplified in the lives of those to whom he has ministered (see 1 Cor. 1:4-5; Phil. 1:3-5).

B. The **Determination** of the Parties:

[Textual Note: Some of the ancient manuscripts reverse the order of verses 16 and 17 as it appears in the KJV (AV) and the NKJV. For example, the NASB, the NIV and the RSV are translated accordingly. It is possible that the chiasmic structure (literary device pairing the 1st and 4th “envy and strife” and “selfish ambition” with the 2nd and 3rd “goodwill” and “love”) present in the above ancient manuscripts is to be maintained.]

1. Gratification of **Selfish Ambition**, v. 16

- This further identifies the “wrongly motivated” above (“not sincerely” means “with mixed motives”). Paul says that they are governed by a notion that the ministry revolves around them and is intended to showcase their personal abilities. The word “selfish” originally referred to a hired employee whose labors were completely self-motivated and compensation seeking. The “compensation” of a wrongly motivated Christian worker is positively the approval, applause, and accolades of those they serve (see **Matt. 6:1-6; 16-18**); but negatively is to gratify oneself by punishing rival Christians, assuming that their actions will occasion “affliction” (pressure, tribulation) in the heart of their targeted victim.
- Yet, if you’re the object of such covert attacks, don’t make matters worse by tugging hard at your chains!

2. Resignation to **Selfless Abandon**, v. 17

- This further identifies the “rightly motivated” who out of “love” become a healing balm-like co-laborer in the Gospel ministry and a joy to the preacher’s heart.

C. The **Design** from the Witness, “What then?” v. 18 (see Acts 20:24)

1. The Options others Choose will not **Affect** Me, “Only that in every way, whether in pretense (ostensibly) or in truth (sincerely)”
2. The Christ others Preach will not **Offend** Me, “Christ is preached” (see Ga. 6:14)
3. The Joy others Lack will not **Hinder** Me, “and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (see also 3:1; 4:14)

Conclusion

In Ernest Gordon’s true account of life in a World War II Japanese prison camp, *Through the Valley of the Kwai*, there is a story that never fails to move me. It is about a man who through giving it all away literally transformed a whole camp of soldiers. The man’s name was Angus McGillivray. Angus was a Scottish prisoner in one of the camps filled with Americans, Australians, and Britons who had helped build the infamous Bridge over the River Kwai. The camp had become an ugly situation. A dog-eat-dog mentality had set in. Allies would literally steal from each other and cheat each other; men would sleep on their packs and yet have them stolen from under their heads. Survival was everything. The law of the jungle prevailed...until the news of Angus McGillivray’s death spread throughout the camp. Rumors spread in the wake of his

death. No one could believe big Angus had succumbed. He was strong, one of those whom they had expected to be the last to die. Actually, it wasn't the fact of his death that shocked the men, but the reason he died. Finally they pieced together the true story.

The Argylls (Scottish soldiers) took their buddy system very seriously. Their buddy was called their "mucker," and these Argylls believed that it was literally up to each of them to make sure their "mucker" survived. Angus's mucker, though, was dying, and everyone had given up on him, everyone, of course, but Angus. He had made up his mind that his friend would not die. Someone had stolen his mucker's blanket. So Angus gave him his own, telling his mucker that he had "just come across an extra one." Likewise, every mealtime, Angus would get his rations and take them to his friend, stand over him and force him to eat them, again stating that he was able to get "extra food." Angus was going to do anything and everything to see that his buddy got what he needed to recover. But as Angus's mucker began to recover, Angus collapsed, slumped over, and died. The doctors discovered that he had died of starvation complicated by exhaustion. He had been giving of his own food and shelter. He had given everything he had—even his very life. The ramifications of his acts of love and unselfishness had a startling impact on the compound. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12).

As word circulated of the reason for Angus McGillivray's death, the feel of the camp began to change. Suddenly, men began to focus on their mates, their friends, and humanity of living beyond survival, of giving oneself away. They began to pool their talents—one was a violin maker, another an orchestra leader, another a cabinet maker, another a professor. Soon the camp had an orchestra full of homemade instruments and a church called the "Church Without Walls" that was so powerful, so compelling, that even the Japanese guards attended. The men began a university, a hospital, and a library system. The place was transformed; an all but smothered love revived, all because one man named Angus gave all he had for his friend. For many of those men this turnaround meant survival. What happened is an awesome illustration of the potential unleashed when one person actually gives it all away.

-- Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 146-147