

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

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Contents

Introduction and Preface	1
The Initial Freedom of Man and the Creation	2
The Bondage of Man	3
The Promise of Liberation	14
The Acts of Liberation	15
The Liberation of Man—The Crisis	18
The True Freedom of Man—The Process	21
Man's Ultimate Freedom	29
Conclusion	31
Appendix	32

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

INTRODUCTION AND PREFACE

The term 'Christian freedom' would seem to imply there is freedom other than Christian freedom, in fact a host of freedoms. It would also seem to imply that Christian freedom is a freedom connected with religion, or theology, and even faith, and that it is thus in this secluded area, and that it is not necessarily native to the true and universal order of things, especially as they relate to the purposes of God for His entire universe. In fact Christian freedom is the only true freedom. It is the freedom which is the universal order of things, especially as this is of the purpose of God for creation and history. It is true freedom. It is of the true order of things.

In dealing with this freedom we will have to consider the original order of things, as proceeding from the act of creation, and then the loss of freedom through the fall of man; also a renewal in freedom through the redemptive act of God, and the ultimate freedom of man and the universe in what we can call the eternal or glorified state.

THE INITIAL FREEDOM OF MAN AND THE CREATION

The Biblical doctrine of creation assumes that the order of God's universe is harmoniously functional. Hence God's view of His own creation, 'it is very good', pronounces it as a universe of freedom. By that we mean that the laws of its operation are harmonious and functional, and whilst operating within those laws the universe knows nothing of bondage. The principle, 'everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected' (1 Tim. 4:4), accords with 'he has made everything beautiful in its time' (Eccl. 3:11). Nothing is of itself wrong or evil.

This view is supported by the fact that the Father initiates the creation (1 Pet. 4:19), the Son mediates its coming into being (Heb. 1:2-3; Col. 1:15-17; John 1:1-3) and the true order of the creation relates to the Father and the Son (1 Cor. 8:6), whilst the Spirit is the Agent of creation (Gen. 1:2-3; Ps. 104:29-30), and is known as the Spirit of the Father and the Son (Gal. 4:6; Matt. 10:20).

The creation of man in the image of God supports the view that man was created after the innate freedom of the Godhead Himself. Man's freedom must have consisted in:

- (a) his affinity with God,
- (b) his obedience to God, that is, his conformity to the will and purpose of God, and
- (c) he being truly man, and accepting his creaturely nature, as against the Creator nature of God. This would mean he would accept his filial nature in the context of God as Father, and his servant

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

nature in the context of God as King. Consequently he would relate to God, himself, his fellow beings, and the whole creation in its innate harmonious and functional operations and nature.

We are told, in a poetic passage, that at creation ‘the morning stars sang together, and all the sons [angels] of God shouted for joy’ (Job 38:7), and this passage conveys the idea that creation was unmarred by evil. However, man’s primal temptation by the serpent (cf. Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:10ff.) was to refuse to accept his creaturehood, as such, and discover his (imagined) innate godhead. The inference is clearly, ‘Live within the bounds God has given you, and you will not know perfect freedom. Go beyond those bounds, and be unbounded, and you will know true freedom. What you have got only appears to be freedom.’

Having eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam very quickly discovered his loss of priceless innocence and his fearful change of relationship with God (cf. Gen. 3:7ff.). He discovered his relationship with God was altered, if not totally changed. Also he now related in a different manner to his wife, himself, and his universe. Whether he knew it or not, he had lost his freedom and was now in the form of bondage.

THE BONDAGE OF MAN

Bondage Develops from Disobedience

Man had been told that his disobedience would bring death. Romans 5:12ff. is a graphic account of this. To speak of Adam’s bondage as being sin and

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

death is correct. To speak of this death as being ‘spiritual’—as against actual, biological, and so on—is to confuse the issues. *His death was primarily one of relationship/s.* This can be seen by reference to 2 Corinthians 5:14–15. Having died to God he became alive to himself and was consequently not truly free. To be free as a man is to (*voluntarily*) conform to the will of God.

Paul, in Romans 5:12ff., develops the thought that man’s disobedience brings him under the tyranny of sin and death. He is no longer a free agent. He lives in terror of death (judgement: cf. Heb. 2:14–15), and is ruled by sin which has power by nature of death. In another passage Paul outlines the bondage of man. The passage is Romans 1:18–32. Some assume that this rejection of God is the Adamic rejection of God (as seen in Gen. 3:1–6; cf. Rom. 5:12ff.). Others see it as the rebellion of the Gentiles against God. Psalm 2:1f. also points to a concerted opposition to God. It does not greatly matter, for the rebellion is consonant with man’s rebellion against God in Adam; and in any case history witnesses to such rebellion from time to time, critically as well as habitually. We mean that, from time to time, the moral deterioration as shown in Romans 1:18–32 can be evidenced. It would be true to say that in western culture there is currently such an expression of rejection of God.

In Romans 5:12ff. the principle is that ‘sin reigned in death’ (v. 21), ‘death reigned from Adam’ (v. 14), and ‘death reigned through that one man’ (v. 17). This is no mere abstraction: it is man’s experience daily of the tyranny of death and sin.

The *forms* of tyranny are seen in Romans 1:19–32. They constitute:

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

- (a) idolatry (v. 23),
- (b) being given up to immorality (v. 24),
- (c) being given up to sexual perversion (v. 26), and
- (d) being given up to ‘a base mind and improper conduct’ (v. 28). This latter includes every kind of evil use of man’s natural being, and his consequent loss of moral understanding. In this he abandons true relationships and is in conflict with the natural order of creation.

One of the keys to man’s bondage is his rejection of the knowledge of God. To really know God is eternal life (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20; cf. Jer. 9:23–24). In fact it can be called ‘creational life’—that is, to know God. Life, then, would be called ‘a matter of relationships’ and man would be free when he related fully—in the created order of things—to God, himself, his fellow being, and his universe. Not to do so is bondage.

Disobedience Is Against the Authority Structures

‘Every authority is ordained of God’ is the thrust of Romans 13:1ff.¹ Authorities relate to the moral order of the universe which, in fact, is the creational and (so) functional order. In this way refusal of God must be refusal of the innate nature of the creation. This includes the innate nature of man, for all creation, including man, is contingent upon God for its essential being. To refuse the natural order is to refuse God; to refuse God is to refuse the natural order. Hence, when

¹ See Living Faith Study no. 5, *The Nature of Authority and Obedience* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1981).

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

one is out of alignment with the creational order one must suffer deeply from a sense of dissociation, awryness, dislocation, and existential guilt.

Some theologians (e.g. Paul Tillich) suggest that man is in anxiety because of his sense of finiteness. Death is a threat because it shows him, and keeps him in, his finiteness. Finiteness, per se, is no real threat to man, because in fact his creaturehood is his true joy. There is no true life for man which is not at once creaturely, filial, and for service. The term 'finiteness' is philosophical, for man's true being is one of contingency, and the question of being finite or infinite does not really arise. Only when a man sins does the question of finiteness arise, for now he is in competition with God. Being out of contingency is what really makes him anxious.

This anxiety—amongst many other things—is part of his bondage. That is why death is so much a threat, because it is the ever constant reminder to him that he is finite, and cannot control God, the universe or his fate. Were he not disobedient and seeking autonomous living he would not fear God, the authorities or the universe. There would be no fate—only destiny.

If Romans 5:12ff. is read it will be seen that death and sin are the tyrants which rule him. In Romans 1:19–32 the idols rule him, and then his own lusts. Out of a state of contingency upon God, he is left to make his own decisions, for he must have his guidance from himself, and so he is the slave of his own desires and decisions. Yet, even here, he must obey his idols.

In Galatians 5:19–21 man is seen as doing the works of the flesh. Those also control him more than he does them. They too are tyrants. Since they spring from the flesh, he is the slave of the flesh. The flesh is

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

really man's created humanity as it has been affected by sin and sin's concomitants, and these we shall shortly see. However we still have to reckon with the fact that man must obey the functional principles of the universe, and these are related directly to the ruling powers. Hence, if for example he is a glutton, then he has disobeyed the positive principle to eat for edification of his being, and in disobeying a physiological principle of human living, he has rebelled against the laws of creation.² Hence his modes of bondage are many, and take many forms.

What further confuses the issues is that many of the authorities themselves do not use their authority in an authentic manner. Hence they exercise an unlawful tyranny, which further complicates the whole issue of obedience.

The Tyrants Who Keep Man in Bondage

As we have seen, man is in bondage because of his own rebellion. Being made in the image of God he has been given total choice. As a moral being he can exercise choice of will. Since God's freedom of choice is total, so is man's freedom, as human freedom. Hence his wrong or evil choices are those for which he is entirely responsible. That is, his guilt for every sin is total. Nor can God be expected to ameliorate his guilt or its punishment. Add to this that every choice which is against God's choice is against the normal natural order of the created universe, and it can be seen that man is bound within the perimeter of his own

² See 1 Timothy 4:4, where Paul says everything created by God is good and to be enjoyed if it is received with thanksgiving, i.e. understood as God's gifts and consequently used correctly and beneficially.

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

being. Were there no personal demons, no personal powers of evil, man would be 'demonised' enough by the distortions of his whole personality, and the conflicting forces within him, as a person. Being created for obedience, disobedience sets him not only at odds with creation which does not correspond to his lifestyle and mindset, but also sets him at tortuous variation with his own essential being—which being he has hopelessly denied.

There are, however, personal forces of darkness: Satan and his evil powers. These powers are constituted of fallen angelic authorities and demonic forms: malevolent, personalised evil. We will examine them in detail, but must recognise that they have a power over rebellious man. They also constitute a system which the Scriptures call 'the world', and it has its own ethos, its own mores which are not those of the true essential creation of God. What is evil in this system has its counterpart in the 'flesh' of mankind. Sin and death are also allied to this evil system, and in their presence the very moral law of God becomes, for man, 'the law of sin and death'. Likewise to him the very judgements of the law, the wrath of God and his own judicial conscience become his hated enemies, tyrants who rule him without pity. This is the bondage of man. In order to understand this bondage we will look at each tyrant particularly:

Satan

Known variously as Satan, the Devil, the Destroyer, the Accuser, the god of this world, the prince of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the one who has the power (Gk. *kratos*) of death, the contender with God and with Michael, the one who goes about as

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

a roaring lion, who can appear as an angel of light, who was called the light-bearer, ‘that ancient serpent’, and many other terms. It can be seen by these descriptions that he is wily, boastful, powerful, deceptive, destructive and so on.³ We are referred to closer study on this one who was originally given great power. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28—amongst others—give us a lead as to his nature and modes of operation. He is in competition with God and seeks to usurp Him as the God of the universe. However it is where he holds man in bondage that we are concerned.

We are told that ‘the whole world is in the power of the evil one’ (1 John 5:19). Ephesians 2:1–3 shows us that sinful man is forced to live according to the dictates of Satan. The way in which the Devil dominates man is through human guilt. Man’s rebellion against God places him in the whole kingdom of rebellion of which Satan is the leader. However it is deeper even than this. Satan is the Accuser, and whilst humanity is in actual guilt he accuses, contending that such belong to his power, and will meet death. Hence Hebrews 2:14–15 (compare 1 John 4:18) shows that he keeps men and women in bondage through fear of death. Man fears to die primarily because he must face the judgement of death.

Were there no fear of death, there would be no power to Satan. It has been said, ‘Satan only tempts where there is innocence. Where there is guilt he has already gained control.’ Jude 9 shows Michael contending with Satan for the body of Moses. That is, Satan is saying Moses cannot rise in the resurrection because

³ For further reading see *The Dominion of Darkness and the Victory of God* by Geoffrey Bingham (NCPI, Blackwood, 1977).

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

of his guilt of sin. Compare this with Jesus' statement, 'the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me', meaning that because Jesus had not sinned, Satan has no power.

The World Powers

Revelation 12 has a graphic account of Satan's rebellion within heaven, against God. The outcome was that he drew to himself a third of the stars of heaven, that is, a third of the angels. These relate to him in his evil kingdom and operations. They are called 'principalities and powers' and have areas of dominion in the creation. Daniel 10 and 11, amongst other Scriptures, suggest that angels control the national operations of the various peoples of the universe.

Such powers certainly have control over man, but primarily where there is guilt. Galatians 1:4 shows that where man's sins are destroyed these authorities have no control. Ephesians 6:10ff., Romans 8:37ff., and other passages show that these powers are out to destroy man. It is clear that demonic powers seek to infest the human personality and make it unclean and obscene. The Gospels show us persons who are inflicted with maladies and insanity, having been demonised from evil powers.

We should note, especially from Galatians 1:4, that these powers only have a hold over men by reason of man's guilt.

The World

We have already indicated that Satan is known as the god or prince of 'this world'. This world is not the creation, as such, but a system within that creation which is opposed to God. Satan and his powers draw

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

men, by their disobedience, into their kingdom, and then Satan ruthlessly dominates man. He also blinds man to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4) lest he be redeemed. This world system has its kind of 'wisdom', that is, an ego seeking, ego extending wisdom which is foreign to the wisdom of submitting to God. It is fateful to think of this kingdom merely in superstitious awe, or think it relates only to the supernatural. This kingdom seeks to capture the creation for itself, and moves out into every detail of human existence.

Were man not guilty and alienated from God it could have no power. Satan, his angelic cohorts and demonic forces are all debased forms of the original creation, and hence constitute creatures who have no power unless God Himself allowed it, and this in accordance with His own inscrutable purposes.

The Law

It does not seem fitting to think of man under the bondage of the law. However, because of his guilt, the very law of God has become 'the law of sin and death' (Rom. 8:2). Were there no law, man would not be guilty, for where there is no law there can be no transgression and to break the law is to come under the curse of its judgements (see Rom. 7:8–11; Gal. 3:10). Had man no guilt he would fear no judgement: evil powers could not threaten him, and he would face God fearlessly. In fact, where there is no guilt there is no real death, that is, death with power and dread (cf. 1 Cor. 15:55–56).

The Wrath of God

Redeemed man is spoken of as being delivered 'from the wrath to come' (cf. 1 Thess. 1:10; Rom. 5:9f).

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

Wrath then is a terrible tyrant, but it would have no terror if man had no guilt. In fact Paul shows in Romans 1:18–32 that God’s wrath is giving man up to his sin, to let his sinful, guilty, distorted state be the mode of God’s anger upon him; anger that is felt in the conscience every day. In addition to this there is a day of reckoning, the day of God’s righteous wrath (cf. Rom. 2:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:8f.; etc.).

If man had no guilt, he would have no fear of wrath, and would not be under its bondage.

The Conscience

Hamlet’s statement, ‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all’, recognises the universal principle of conscience—man is under its tyranny where he has actual guilt. The conscience is ruthless in that it will not clear its victim from accusation for, as P. T. Forsyth once said, ‘It takes as much to satisfy the conscience of man as it does to satisfy the conscience of God’. Conscience serves to further etch the guilt of man upon him, and man is driven by guilt to further actions of disobedience and sin.

Death

Death is the outcome of sin. In Romans 5:12ff. Paul makes it clear that death is a monster which has power by reason of sin, and sin is a monster which has power by reason of death. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law (guilt). Hence Satan has power to keep man in bondage since he has the might of death. In fact this means that man fears death, all his life, and hence Satan can manipulate him.

Had man no guilt, he would have no fear of death. Death is the outcome of sin.

Sin

‘Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin’, Jesus said (John 8:31–36). He pictured true freedom being like a son ranging the home of his father, but the slave having no essential part in this home. Man is a slave to sin. Sin constitutes the ‘sting of death’ and it has power by reason of the law. It is present, almost, as a personalised power. It even manipulates the law to deceive man and to bring him into deeper sin.

There are many Scriptures which refer to the binding elements of sin. Sin has the elements of *pollution*, *power* and *penalty*. They really form an unholy trinity, and dominate man cruelly. Man is thus in a state of being both deprived and depraved. Hence statements such as, ‘The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt’, or, ‘Every imagination of [man’s] heart [is] only evil continually’, or Jesus’ observation that the human heart was a cesspool of uncleanness which defiled man give a picture of man’s shocking depravity. Created to be pure and in the image of God, his deep inner dissociation must be a source of unbelievable bondage.

Our conclusion on this section is that man is in terrible bondage to the enemies of Satan, the world powers, the world, the law, conscience, wrath, death and sin. None of these enemies has any power except by reason of guilt. We mean by this that man has sinned, offended the law, and merited wrath and death. Were he able to be cleared of his guilt, he would be cleared of his enemies. Satan, the world and the world powers would still seek to enslave him, but they would lack the necessary power. The law and conscience would no longer trouble him. In fact they would be on his

side. They would help him in his true freedom. Death, even if it were to exist, would no longer threaten him. At most it would be a transition point into fuller life. It would have no sting whatsoever.

THE PROMISE OF LIBERATION

When we speak of guilt we do not primarily mean man's *feelings* of guilt. We mean his *actual* guilt. That is, man is guilty before God for not being what he has been created to be. He is guilty for not doing what he has been created to do. He is guilty because of actual things he has done against the Person of God, that is, by transgressing His law. These he sometimes feels and sometimes does not. His subjective feeling or non-feeling of guilt may or may not be commensurate with his actual guilt, but this is not the point. Whether he feels it or not, he is guilty.

Man is in a dilemma because he cannot effect the erasing of his guilt. God, for His part, is under no obligation to forgive man. In fact He is under obligation by nature of His holiness and His law to judge and punish man. Even His mercy must not be in conflict with His righteousness. His love cannot overleap His justice. Nor may some curious gimmick be worked by which man is 'let off the hook'. This is impossible.

However, man is promised freedom. Jesus' great promise 'If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed' is total. So 1 John 3:8 says, 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil'. At the birth of John the Baptist, the Spirit-filled Zechariah prophesies that God 'has raised up a horn of salvation'. He says that this deliverance of

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

God's people has been promised by God's prophets which have been since the world began. He says that Abraham was told that God would 'grant us that we, being *delivered from the hand of our enemies*, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life' (Luke 1:68–75). The angel said to Joseph, of Jesus, 'Call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21). John the Baptist cried, 'Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' Jesus, having been baptised, announced that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, 'because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable [jubilee, liberation] year of the Lord' (Luke 4:18–19).

Jesus himself promised freedom from 'the strong man' (Luke 11:21f.) and said that Satan had been seen as cast down from heaven (Luke 10:18) and before going to the cross uttered the words, 'Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out' (John 12:31).

THE ACTS OF LIBERATION

In Genesis 3:15 God had told the serpent that his head would be crushed by the seed of the woman, whilst the serpent, in return, would bruise the heel of that seed. In conformity with this, Jesus, after being baptised and anointed as Messiah and affirmed by the Father as His Son, is immediately led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by Satan. He emerges from the

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

ordeal, having defeated Satan's attempts to divert him from the course he is on, or to change his modes of action within that course. Satan retires 'for a season'.

Jesus then commences his ministry of teaching, and compassion. He heals, he forgives, he calms the storm, he takes away stresses of evil which are upon men and women. He sees Satanic activity within many sicknesses and states of being. In all of these he directly attacks the kingdom of Satan and, at each point, defeats it.

However he has yet to make a *principal* defeat of Satan. As he is leaving the garden of Gethsemane he is met by the soldiers, and says to them, or their leaders, 'when I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But *this is your hour, and the power of darkness*' (Luke 22:53).

He had already said to his disciples, 'The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father' (John 14:30–31). He meant that there was an hour in history when evil would have authority to do what it was entitled to do—at the cross (cf. Luke 22:53). He was to become sin for man (2 Cor. 5:21) and to bear the sins of the world (1 Pet. 2:24). In fact all accusation for all sin, for all time would fall upon him, and every power of evil would be there to lend its bitter accusation and vituperation.

Likewise the bearing of sins meant the bearing of guilt. He would now come under the power of Satan, the world powers, the world, wrath, sin, death, the flesh; in fact, of all evil. He would be the victim of the law, the object of God's holy wrath. The cross was to be the judgement of all evil.

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

And so it was. We are told, variously, that in that cross he was crucified to the world, and the world to him (Gal. 6:14); that in that cross the flesh was crucified (Gal. 5:24; 1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 8:11); that our Adamic humanity was crucified (Rom. 6:6); that each person was personally crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20); and that he was lifted up as a serpent—all evil (John 3:14). We are told that the guilt of the law was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14–15), and many other things beside.

What it amounted to was that every element of human guilt was borne in his body on the tree. The total demands of the law were fulfilled in his penal suffering, the complete outpouring of the wrath of God in his suffering (1 John 2:2; 4:9–10; Rom. 3:24ff.; cf. Gal. 2:16–21). At the same time he fought the bitter battle against the accusing forces of evil, as death had dominion over him. The sting of death was thrust into him, the guilt of man burdening him. Yet he defeated death on the cross, by taking the death of all men into himself, and yet not dying (2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 6:10). When he died he laid down his life, saying, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit’. Hence he triumphed over the principalities and powers (Col. 2:14–15). Thus the writer of Hebrews can say, ‘through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil’ (2:14).

Psalms 22 and 69 vividly portray his sufferings as he fought the powers of darkness and endured the intolerable loneliness of separation from God, as he suffered—man for men.

The liberation, however, was total. Jesus had said, ‘If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:36). Well, now all men could be free. He said,

‘Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out’ (John 12:31), and so it was. The world was crucified, Satan’s grip on man had been loosened. In fact humanity was free, and it was free in this way: Christ had borne all its guilt. Hence Satan had no power to accuse, no basis for storing up the fear of penal judgement. He had no power to work upon guilty man and increase his fear, and hatred of God. Guilt triggers sin, but the guilt chain had been broken. No enemy or tyrant could now tyrannise man!

THE LIBERATION OF MAN—THE CRISIS

The liberation of sinful man must be seen as the total act of God. That is, it must be seen that God takes the initiative in redeeming man. However, such redemption must be seen in the widest frame of reference, and it is this; that God had determined to redeem His elect from eternity. This is seen by such references as Romans 8:28–30, 1 Corinthians 2:6–9, Ephesians 1:3–14 and 2 Timothy 1:9–10, amongst others. It must also be seen that God created with the sonship of His elect in mind (Eph. 1:4–8). The Mediator both of creation and redemption is the Son, and what has been created through him, he will redeem; that is to say, that which has been given to him (cf. John 6:39; 17:1–3). Likewise the Spirit is the Spirit of life, and he must participate in the work of redemption, as also in the work of sonship, or adoption.

We say ‘the widest frame of reference’ because often man’s liberation is viewed only as the erasure of his guilt. A shallow view of guilt erasure will only

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

see man set free to begin a new round of human endeavours or to seek to be better than before or morally good. These are inadequate views.

We must see that the cross accomplished the following:

- (a) It breaks the power of sin by justifying man (Rom. 6:7–14). This means that man is legally and actually freed from condemnation. He is justified once for all.
- (b) The transaction of forgiveness takes place. God says, ‘Son, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven you.’
- (c) The fear or power of death is broken. ‘O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?’
- (d) Satan, his powers, and the world have had their power broken and, lacking the guilt of the person, cannot effectively draw him into bondage. Whilst they may attempt to deceive there is no authentic basis upon which they can demand the bondage of man.

This complete freedom which Jesus had promised is effected by the cross and the resurrection. If Christ had not risen then it would have been evident, practically, that death was stronger than him, and so none could be forgiven or justified. However, he did rise, and so Paul says, ‘In that he died, he died unto sin, once. In that he lives, he lives unto God’ (Rom. 6:10). He then goes on to say, in effect, ‘You see yourself in a similar way—dead to sin, and alive to God, this act (for you) having happened *once for all*’.

Receiving Liberation

Liberation is God's act, by nature of the case, for no man can free himself. At the same time repentance and faith are required of him. Even then, whilst man must go through these actions, repentance and faith are gifts of God (Acts 5:30–31; 11:18; Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 1:29). Repentance must relate to the totality of sin—man's condition, as well as his acts of sin. There must be the confession of the soul as to this state, and so the need to be covered by the work of the cross and the resurrection. It is well to see that the Holy Spirit is at work not only in giving repentance, but also bringing man to exercise this gift, for he convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement. If man views his experience of confession and the acts of repentance and faith to be something of his own, then this will be the basis for later bondage when he will wonder whether he acted correctly or not.

Also it must be seen that the Holy Spirit *effects* the gift of liberation. Romans 8:1–3, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and Titus 3:3–7 indicate that the Holy Spirit applies the work of the cross and resurrection to the heart of man so that he is not only forgiven, but also cleansed, given a new heart (regenerated) and thus becomes a new creature (creation).

Liberation Not Only Justification

Liberation is not only *from* the powers of evil, but also *into* a new relationship with God. Two terms are used: *adoption* and *regeneration*. The first means that God makes one into a son, where one was not before. It also carries the idea of mature sonship. The second

carries the idea of one's nature being changed—that is, being *renewed*—so that the Scripture talks of man being born of God (John 1:12–13; 3:3ff.; 1 John 3:9–10; etc.). Paul, who mainly uses the term *adoption*, has a reference to *regeneration* and *adoption* within the few verses of Romans 8:14–17. These two are virtually, although not totally, the one.

True liberation is the restoration to man of his true humanity, and also the fulfilment of God's plan to make man a son, not through Adam,⁴ but through Christ (Eph. 1:4–7). This also puts him into the context of the family of God, and many other functional elements which we will discuss later. It is God who effects the crisis of liberation, having made revelation of His grace, and man having responded to this grace.

THE TRUE FREEDOM OF MAN— THE PROCESS

Liberation is the act which frees man from his bondage. Freedom is the life for which we have been freed: the life we are to live. In Galatians 5:1, Paul says, in effect, 'Stand fast in the freedom for which Christ has made us free and do not come again under the yoke of bondage'. He means that whilst liberation is an act in the past, it is intended to lead to and be followed by a life of freedom. To stand fast in that liberty means to be aware of the totality of liberation,

⁴ Man may well be said to be originated as a son (cf. Luke 3:38; Acts 17:24–31) by creation, but God's intention was for him to be truly a son through redemption, i.e. through Christ.

and to refuse to come again under bondage. Let us repeat: the liberation is total, but it is seen as such by faith, and not by sight. The danger of being brought under some element of bondage will not be passed until the end-time, when there will be no need to be on the alert.

The Modes of Freedom— Process Following Crisis

To truly understand freedom we must understand that man liberated is the man who has gone through the crisis of regeneration. Whilst there is no doubt that the crisis is total, and that in God's sight and action 'those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified', and that men of faith have been washed, sanctified and justified (Rom. 8:28–30; 1 Cor. 6:11), yet the believer lives in the realm of both faith and hope. Faith is in the work of God which redeems him, and equally in the God who redeems him, whilst hope is 'faith with a future look', that is, it looks to the end when faith and hope, at least in this sense, will no longer be required.

We mean to say that the present freedom of the children of God is not exactly the same as 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' of which Paul speaks in Romans 8:18–25. He says that we groan for that day, albeit we have the marvellous first fruits of the Spirit. In Romans 7 he speaks about indwelling sin, from whose presence even the believer is not at present fully relieved. He looks to the day when redeemed man shall be delivered from his 'body of death'.

Having gone through the crisis of initial regeneration man looks to the totality of ultimate regeneration,

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

for in that day the entire freedom will be experienced, which issues from the totality of the redemptive work of the Triune God. Then man will be fully what God had foreordained he should be. Yet, knowing what man was in creation, we must assume that in regeneration man is renewed in the image of God as given to him at creation. We repeat that this image cannot be operative without opposition from the enemies of Satan, the world, the world powers, the flesh, sin and death; yet because man is relieved of guilt they cannot, with any right or authority, dominate him.

This means we will have to trace the modes of freedom which the new man knows, in Christ, as he lives in the power of the Spirit.

Various Aspects of Freedom

Man is free from the guilt of sin, hence he is free from condemnation, and so from his enemies

This can be seen from the following references:

Satan: Hebrews 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8; John 12:31; 16:11; cf. Revelation 12:10–11. Compare Jude 9 with John 14:30–31; and John 10:10 with Luke 11:21f.

World Powers: Galatians 1:4; Colossians 2:14–15; cf. Romans 8:37–39.

The World: Galatians 1:4; 6:14.

The Law: Romans 3:19–25; 6:7, 14; 7:6; 8:1–3; Galatians 2:16–21.

The Wrath of God: 1 John 4:17–18; 2:2; link with Matthew 26:31 (Zech. 13:7); and see Romans 1:18ff.; 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

The Conscience: Hebrews 9:14; compare Titus 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:5; compare Heb. 1:3; 10:22.

The Flesh: Romans 8:11; Galatians 5:24.

Death: Romans 6:10; 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Corinthians 15:55–56; 1 John 4:17–18.

Sin: John 8:31–36; Matthew 1:21; Romans 6:7, 12–17; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.

Man, becoming a son of God, in full sense is freed from bondage

Romans 8:14–17 makes it clear that man is a son of God and freely walks in the will of God by being led by the Spirit. He does not have the spirit of slavery, but the Spirit of freedom. His true humanity is fitted for sonship and so he is, as a person, now truly free, being what he is both created and redeemed to be. To be doing the will of God is the functional freedom which man can know.

Doing the will of God he does not feel guilty. He is free from anxiety, which always comes from the uneasiness bred by lack of union with God in His purposes. On the positive side he feels free doing the will of God, for God's essential 'freedom' is in fulfilling his own will.

Man, freed from the trammels of guilt, is now relationally free

By this we mean that man's life consists in relationships—with God, himself, others, and his universe. We saw above that his bondage is in being against the functional, harmonious order of things as they really are. In aligning himself with God, his fellow man,

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

himself, and the true order of the created universe, he is in harmony, both relationally and functionally. Hence he lives in freedom, however much that may be contested by the forces of evil and disharmony.

The positive side of relationships is the flow of love. He relates to God as Father, to the Son as both Lord and Brother. He relates to the brethren in the warm encouragement of the true family of God. The conditions for freedom are well set.

Obedience is the way of freedom

In this section we are repeating ourselves with every aspect of freedom which we are naming. To obey God is to be free. To obey His law is to be free. The essence of all God's law is love (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–26), because it is 'the law of liberty' (James 1:22–25; 2:8–12).

We must understand that obedience is motivated and triggered off by love (cf. John 14:15; Luke 7:47; 1 John 4:10, 19). However true law obedience *is* love (1 John 5:3; cf. 2:3–6). Obedience is constrained by love (2 Cor. 5:14–15) and obedience is love. To love is to be truly free.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Ezekiel 36:24–28 show that where there is cleansing and forgiveness there will be the law written in the heart. Hence Psalm 119:32 (Jerusalem Bible) says, 'I run the way of your commandments, since you have set me free', whilst verse 45 says, 'So, having sought your precepts, I shall walk in all freedom'. In verse 47 he says, 'Your commandments fill me with delight: I love them deeply'. We can then understand what James means when he says, 'the perfect law, the law of liberty'.

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

It means, then, that when we conform to God's law, and do this out of a heart motivated by freedom from guilt with consequent love and gratitude, we are really living freely. We must never think that obedience is the cost of freedom, but see it as the *functional way* or *mode* of freedom.

Obedience is related to the nature and plan of God

True freedom is in doing the will of God. Much bondage comes from thinking that doing the will of God is mere *moral conformism*. That is, that the form of morality is an end in itself. The nature of God's universe is dynamic. It cannot simply be analysed and categorised, not even its so-called innate dynamism. The universe is always in the *process of God's purposive action*. It is moving from its initial point of creation towards its true goal of consummation. Hence obedience to moral law does not simply keep a constant and static status quo, but obedience is love in its positive form, which is at the same time the ongoing will of God, relating to its ultimate intention. Hence all that we have said above about being triggered by the release from bondage, doing the will of God from love, and being free through the functional way of obedience must be understood in the wider frame of reference which is the on-moving will of God.

In practice this will be summed up in two great cries from the heart in the New Testament. The first is, 'Abba!' ('Father!') and the second, 'Jesus! Lord!' (see Gal. 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:3). Both of these cries are authentic only when they come through the revelation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as they are said to do. When they are cried then man who cries them is in direct relational and functional modes of life. He is

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

operative in obedience: he is free in that operation. We should see that this attitudinal approach corresponds with the true nature of ‘things as they really are’, that is, the true authorities (and, authority) of the universe, as seen in 1 Corinthians 8:6—‘For us there is one God, the *Father*, *from* whom are all things and *for* whom we exist, and one *Lord*, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things, and *through* whom we exist’. In history the Father and the Son (with the Spirit) work to accomplish their plan. Only he who is geared to this plan, and sharing in it, is truly free.

The full freedom of love—love that is self-confining in its acts

We do not need to repeat that God’s love for us is that which liberates us. Nor do we need to state again that when we are freed by love, we are now free to obey. That obedience, as we have seen, is both motivated by love and in its actions, constitutes love itself. We have seen that the plan of God requires us to love Him, ourself, others and His creation, and to relate to them in love. Even so we have not exhausted the extent of love. God’s plan itself is the love plan and we do not love unless we are fully sharing in it. All of this constitutes the freedom of love: the freedom we know through love.

There is another aspect, and it is seen clearly in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8. These two passages teach us the following principle—‘You are not really free until you are free not to do that which you are free to do’. This has to do with a strong conscience and a strong faith. Paul, in 1 Timothy 1:5, speaks of ‘love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith’, meaning that the operation of love

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

in its fullest form depends upon the cleansed heart and good conscience and sincere faith. In Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8, Paul speaks of people who still have problems with their conscience (cf. Heb. 10:22 where there is no problem.). He suggests that the freedom which a person exercises and which is authentic freedom, may be 'too much' for a believer whose faith—and so conscience—is weak. He observes, 'If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love' (lit. trans.). He exhorts, 'Let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding'. Love, as we know, does that—it builds up. For this reason love will not insist on its freedom rights in this particular case.

To be this way is to be really free. It can also be seen that love goes on building, and this kind of building relates to God's plan for His universe. Hence we can talk of 'freedom upon freedom!'

The Application of Freedom

When we understand that created man, having fallen, is restored through the gospel, then we understand that the true freedom of man is simply in being man. He does not burden himself with trying to be more than man. The new man, the reborn man, the redeemed regenerated man, knows where his liberty lies. It lies in truly being himself, that is, it lies in being a son of God, a creature of the Creator and a servant of the King. It lies in recognising that God is good, that he need not fear anything from God. His old guilt of hating God is cleansed away and now he loves in every sphere of his life. He is indwelt by the Son, led by the Spirit and loved and aided by the

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

Father. At the same time he is in the context of the family of God.

Having stated this we can see how he can apply freedom. Part of the obligation of freedom is to free others. That is, he is to share the gospel of freedom. This he may do in many ways and according to those gifts which are particularly his. However, his many relationships become his ministry. He must: (i) live with people as true love demands; and (ii) aid, where it is necessary, those who are in need of freedom.

For a man this action of freedom may be in being truly a son to his father, a husband to his wife, a father to his children, and a friend to his neighbour. He, by forgiveness, has to free others from their guilt in regard to him, as he is to receive their forgiveness where needed. Where he sees a man in bondage, as that one hates God, so he must seek to relate to him in such a way as to bring that person to peace with God, as well as with others.

All of this we can rightly call the application of freedom. The power lies in the cross and resurrection and such power is released for action by the work of the Holy Spirit. Our whole point is that freedom is not for a man to hug to himself and not share with others. He who is free shares his freedom and in this way his freedom remains a living thing.

MAN'S ULTIMATE FREEDOM

Jesus, on the day of his resurrection, was seen to have a true human body. He said, 'flesh and bones'. He ate with his body, which also had powers which human bodies do not normally appear to possess. Doubtless

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

in ascending to the Father his body was glorified. However it is not possible to say that prior to the ascension it was not glorified. Paul says, in any case, that we wait for our Saviour to appear from heaven who will change this present body of our humiliation so that it will be like his body of glory (Phil. 3:21).

What we do know is that we shall be like him (1 John 3:1–3; Rom. 8:29; cf. Col. 3:10). Likeness to him is not merely something we visualise, or symbolise by forms of radiance and light—although these may be so—but conformity is of nature, character and person. We will be like him in the way he is, and in what he does, and in the manner of living which is his.

Both 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Colossians 3:10 suggest that we are at present experiencing a *process* of change or transformation and 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 suggests that this transformation is related to suffering. Romans 8:18–30 also agrees with this. The ultimate glorification of man relates both to the redemptive suffering of Christ and the suffering which the believer knows when sharing with Christ. Whilst this is for the most part a mystery, Paul is clear that true suffering leads to real glory.

Many passages in the Old Testament (e.g. Isa. 11:6–9; 65:25; Hab. 2:14) suggest that ultimately this creation will be restored, or renewed. In the New Testament, other passages agree with this, such as Revelation 21–22 and 2 Peter 3, amongst others. There will be a new heaven and a new earth: ‘we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’. It is the passage of Romans 8:18–30 which tells us that the whole creation has been subjected to futility, and cannot fulfil its full function in its present state. In this state it knows ‘the bondage of corruption’

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

(v. 21, AV). However, it will be free from decay and obtain ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’.

The liberty of the children of God will constitute total union with their God—He will be their God and they will be His people and His dwelling will be with them (Rev. 21:3; cf. 22:3–4; Ezek. 37:27; Eph. 2:21–22). At the same time the creation, being free, will also constitute part of the freedom of the children of God. The freedom of God’s sons, or God’s family, will be that there will no longer be conflict between good and evil. There will be no experience of evil temptation. There will be no indwelling sin or guilt. What was of faith will have been fulfilled in hope, and what was of hope will have been fulfilled in the promise. Hence man will be in total union with God, with himself, others and the wonderful creation which will then be the new creation.

CONCLUSION ON CHRISTIAN FREEDOM: CRISIS, PROCESS, AND CLIMAX

We have seen then, that man having been creationally free, fell into bondage by choice of his own will, in acceding to the temptation to be ‘as God’. We have seen that God’s redemptive purpose, from eternity, was to liberate the elect children of His family and give them freedom. This He did through the cross and resurrection and made such actual liberation effective by the Holy Spirit.

For freedom man was made free, but his freedom is constantly contested in a world where evil’s power has been broken, but which still operates where faith is not present. Where faith is present there is still a battle—

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

the battle of faith. However, the child of God is free to obey, having been loosed from guilt. He delights in obedience, knowing that it is the true mode of freedom. Nevertheless, the struggle of faith and hope makes him desire the consummation of God's plan in the coming of the new world, in which he will be totally free.

His struggle is not simply to maintain the faith of freedom (or the freedom of faith), but to share it also with others who themselves are in bondage, or who need to be taught the way of liberty. Hence the goal of God's plan is devoutly waited for and the hope of it is a powerful dynamic to persist in freedom and not give way to the old patterns of 'self-help', trying to be free in autonomy of self rather than union with God.

We conclude then, that freedom is available to all who will come to repentance and faith, receiving the gifts of forgiveness and the Spirit. It is available as a continuing experience to those who will go on in faith. Such are not only redeemed persons, but also children of God relating to their Father and His family. Ultimately the entire family will be before the Father and this climax will be the crisis leading through to an eternal and unchangeable freedom.

APPENDIX

A Practical Note on Freedom and License

Considerable confusion has come in Christian practice in failing to distinguish between 'law' and 'grace'. Without doubt, freedom from law is implied in much

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

of Paul's writings (e.g. Rom. 6:7, 14; 7:3–6; Gal. 2:16–21). Hence people, in saying they are free from the law, consider that there is no law they have to obey. This confusion arises because they do not understand that their freedom is not from *law*, but from the *condemnation* of law. Reference to Romans 13:9–10, Galatians 5:1 and similar passages will show that the believer is under obligation to obey all God's law.

When he is under the guilt of the law's condemnation, he is powerless to obey out of the heart (cf. Rom. 6:15–19). However, the forgiveness of sins releases him from guilt and as we have said he obeys from the *heart*. This is the thrust of Ezekiel 36:24–28 and Jeremiah 31:31–34. Forgiveness brings love (Luke 7:47) and love brings obedience (John 14:15; cf. 1 John 4:19; 2 Cor. 5:14).

Also the Epistle to the Galatians shows that to begin in the Spirit is to be justified and forgiven, through the cross (3:1–6; cf. 1:4; 2:19–21; 5:24; 6:14). Paul here shows that true obedience is the operation of 'faith way' as over and against 'law way'. Law way is seeking to be justified by working, or by observance of law. 'Faith way' is not seeking to be justified at all, but being obedient out of justification received.

In practice many persons become exhilarated by being free from the notion of law. They see much of their past activity as springing from 'law way' and not 'faith way', so they react against the *actions* of the former 'law way', such as prayer, Scripture study, tithing, and righteous actions. They scorn to do anything of this kind. This may prove to be temporary, and the reflex of love and gratitude will draw them afresh to such exercises, although with a different thrust or motive. They should come to understand that

Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process

the Holy Spirit 'internalises' the true law, the law of love, the law of Christ, as it is enshrined in the moral law. In the New Testament there are even more commands than in the Old. Hence the fact of law cannot be said to be dissolved. Law is so much the very expression of the nature of God that we dare not go against it. Nevertheless, should we transgress or fail, then forgiveness is already there for the needy believer.

In 2 Peter 2:1–22 the writer has a strong passage on those who profess the faith but do not evidence obedience to authorities or the law. Verse 19 says that 'They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption: for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved'. The term for 'law way' is nomianism (law observance) whilst the term for lawless operations is antinomianism. Both are wrong. The true way is simply obedience which springs from the heart which has responded to the love of God.

Incidentally one must live continually in the 'good' of justification and forgiveness. This not only frees one from the entanglement of fresh guilt, but also vivifies the love that is within us, thus giving us a positive thrust for continuing obedience.