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FREEDOM OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”

— *Romans 8:18-21*

Through Christ Jesus, we have been made free – free from despair, free from the apparent futility of life, free from the enslavement to corruption, sin and death. Whereas some wonder **if** there is life after death, we who look to the Christ have a **certitude** of personality survival on into eternity.

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.” — *1 Thessalonians 4:13*

That assurance is verified through our spirit as the spirit of truth bears witness that we are sons of God and heirs of Christ (*Romans 8:16*) – heirs to the heavenly kingdom. We must be careful to safeguard this freedom and not let it be trampled upon by doubt, smothered by anxiety, or destroyed by looking to the weak and beggarly elementary things. Yes, we **live in** the flesh, but we are not **led by** the flesh. We are led by spirit. “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.” — *Romans 8:14*.

The early Christians, being mostly Jews, had an especially difficult time keeping their minds on their spiritual inheritance. Their long history of law-keeping, seasonal observances, sacrifice and offerings seemed to always lurk in the background threatening to swallow their new found freedom. Paul was thus obliged to repeatedly counsel those brothers and sisters not to look back to the Law Covenant or the things under the law. For if they did, then as to them individually, the Christ died for nothing. (*Galatians 2:21*)

Strangely, Christians today, the vast majority of whom are **not** fleshly Jews and were **never** under law, are falling victim to the same folly of turning to the Law Covenant of the Jews as a guide and measure of their faith. We refer to that as “rebuilding Jerusalem” and it is to be strictly avoided because such a course will nullify our spiritual inheritance and cause us to be condemned as those under law.

“Therefore, there is now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” — *Romans 8:1-4*

Let us examine what it means to “rebuild Jerusalem” and how that can affect our freedom – the freedom Christ lived and died for – as well as our eternal future.

The Jews of Jesus' Time

By the times of Jesus, the nation of Israel had arrived at a settled concept of their religion. They had built up a rigid wall of separation between themselves and the gentile world; and they looked upon all gentile ways with utter contempt. They worshiped the letter of the law and indulged a form of self-righteousness based upon the false pride of racial descent. They had formed preconceived notions regarding the promised Messiah, and most of these expectations envisioned a Messiah who would come as a part of their national and racial history. To the Jews of those days, Jewish theology was irrevocably settled, forever fixed.

When Jesus arrived, his teachings and practices regarding tolerance and kindness ran counter to the long-standing attitude of the Jews toward other peoples whom they considered heathen. For generations the Jews had nourished an attitude toward the outside world which made it impossible for them to accept the Master's teachings about the spiritual brotherhood of man. They were unwilling to share Jehovah on equal terms with the gentiles and were likewise unwilling to accept Jesus as the Son of God.

The scribes, the Pharisees, and the priesthood held the Jews in a terrible bondage of ritualism and legalism, a bondage far more real than that of the Roman political rule. The Jews of Jesus' time were not only held in slavery to the law, but were equally bound by the slavish demands of the traditions, which involved and invaded every domain of personal and social life.

These minute regulations of conduct pursued and dominated every loyal Jew, and it is not strange that they promptly rejected one of their number who presumed to ignore their sacred traditions, and who dared to flout their long-honored regulations of social conduct. They could hardly regard with favor the teachings of one who did not hesitate to clash with dogmas which they regarded as having been ordained by Father Abraham himself. Moses had given them their law and they would not compromise.

By the time of the first century, the spoken interpretation of the law by the recognized religious teachers, the scribes, had become an authority higher than the written law itself. And all this made it easier for certain religious leaders of the Jews to array the people against the acceptance of a new gospel.

These circumstances rendered it impossible for the Jews to fulfill their divine destiny as messengers of the new gospel of religious freedom and spiritual liberty. They could not break the fetters of tradition. Jeremiah had told to ‘write it on their hearts’ (*Jeremiah 31:33*); Ezekiel had spoken of a ‘new spirit’ to live within man (*Ezekiel 11:19*); and the Psalmist had prayed that God would ‘create a pure heart and a new spirit.’ (*Psalms 51:10*)

But when the Jewish religion of good works and slavery to law fell victim to the stagnation of tradition and ritual, the hand of the Father passed the mantle of religious enlightenment by means of the Kingdom of Heaven to a new nation producing its fruits. (*Matthew 21:43*) Into this world, Jesus came.

The New Message of Sonship

When the Son of Man began his ministry early in the first century, he preached a message of hope directed initially to the Jews:

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”” – **Luke 4:16-21**

Throughout his entire ministry, Jesus demonstrated his great affection for his people and his desire to lift them from their oppressed condition:

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” – **Matthew 9:35-36**

“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” – **Matthew 14:14**

He recognized the heavy load laid upon them by their religious leaders, and he assured the people that the message he brought is not burdensome:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
– **Matthew 11:28-30**

Jesus recognized their frailty. He had good news to share, but he did not want to crush their spirits while doing so. Specifically, he did not want to destroy their heritage or condemn their faithfulness. So when he preached his message, he told the people:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”
– **Matthew 5:17-18**

Yes, Jesus fulfilled the Law. By fulfilling it, he finished it. He released the Jews from the Law and he brought it to an end.

“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”

– *Romans 7:6*

“Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” – *Romans 10:4*

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.” – *Colossians 2:13-14*

“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” – *Galatians 3:23-25*

No more did they have to be “observing special days and months and seasons and years.’ (*Galatians 4:10*) No more sacrificial offerings. No more types and shadows. (*Hebrews 8:5*) They were given the freedom to become sons of God.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” – *Galatians 5:1*

Jesus had preached his message of ‘for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ (*Luke 4:18-19*) Thousands of the common people were responding to Christ’s message and getting baptized into this new freedom that put the old burdensome covenant to an end. Yet in spite of this glorious good news, the religious leaders resisted the teaching. They regarded Jesus’ testimony of sonship as blasphemy. (*Matthew 26:63-65*) And they would expel from the synagogues all who listened to him. (*John 9:22; 12:42*)

Finally, after repeatedly trying to reach the hearts of the Jewish religious leader without success, Jesus proclaimed:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.”

– *Matthew 23:37-38*

Yes, their house – their religious system – was abandoned! The Father’s spirit moved away from the nation as a whole and took up lodging in the remnant of faithful Jews who listened to Jesus and subsequently formed the new Christian congregation.

In the beginning, the new converts were allowed to preach and teach right within the synagogues. (*Acts 9:20*) But eventually, the brothers had to separate themselves. (*Acts 11:19-26*) The Christian message was no longer welcome in company with the Law. Over the

next few centuries, the Hebrew writings came to be known as the Old Testament and the Christian writings were known as the New Testament. As we can see, that is a fitting distinction!

Out with the Old and in With the New

Once the Jewish Christians separated from the synagogues, it became necessary to clarify the distinction between the old way under the Law and the new way under Christ. Paul explained that through faith in Jesus, the Jews were sons of God and no longer slaves to the Law. And they were to worship alongside others, even gentiles, who joined the faith:

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

– *Galatians 3:26-29*

To those who believed that they could combine the old Law with the new, Paul wrote:

“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” – *Galatians 3:23-25*

These two codes are not to be practiced simultaneously. They were to view them as applying consecutively – one after the other. First, they had the Law, then they had the Christ. Consequently, all those who chose the Law – the old tutor – were automatically rejecting the new teacher, Jesus Christ. And conversely, all who chose the Christ, were automatically rejecting the law, as Jesus said:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” – *Matthew 6:24*

For those sticking with the Christ, the old system of things was dead to them.

“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.” – *Galatians 2:19*

Yet, in spite of Paul’s repeated efforts to help them realize their newfound freedom, many of the Jewish Christians began to turn back to the Law. In fact, the majority of the Christian Scriptures are devoted to moving the Jewish Christians forward in their faith, and leaving behind the written Law of works and rituals in favor of the law of the spirit. Paul wrote:

“But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!” – *Galatians 4:9-10*

He attempted to put matters into prospective. The Jewish system of things consisted of weak and beggarly things compared to the inestimable glory of sonship in the Kingdom. Yet many were looking back longingly, electing the mundane earthly works under the Jewish system rather than the unknown realities of the Kingdom of the Heavens. Based on the constant reminders that they were no longer under Law, it appears that this issue continued to be a struggle for the Jewish Christians.

Not Rebuilding Jerusalem

What about us today? Many of us, **who were never under Law**, are likewise reaching back to those “weak and beggarly elementary things” and choosing to slave for them. So we ask, are we today seeking to rebuild the Jewish system by reviving its mundane earthly promises? If we are, we are blinding ourselves:

“But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. **It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.** But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and **where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.**” – 2 Corinthians 3:14-17

For example, in establishing the hope for mankind, some choose the Jewish idea of an earthly paradise over the heavenly hope. They look to the prophesies of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and the Psalms, completely ignoring the Christian writings from Matthew to Jude, and then latching onto the prophetic signs of Revelation.

They completely ignore Jesus’ repeated statements that he came to reveal God as a Father (**Matthew 11:27**), that we are God’s sons (**Matthew 6:9-15**), that we are to follow Christ into the heavens, and that Christ is preparing a place for us in the Heavenly Kingdom. (**John 14:1-6**). They further ignore Paul’s statements that we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom (**Philippians 3:20**), aliens and temporary residents on earth (**1 Peter 2:11**), and have an incorruptible inheritance in the heavens (**1 Peter 1:4**).

Clearly, all the Jewish promises for an earthly paradise are elementary and not the type of life sons of the kingdom are to strive for. For when we choose this course, we remonstrate that “Christ died for nothing.” (**Galatians 2:21**)

Few, if any, among us would accept the idea that Christ died for nothing. Yet, if we find ourselves mirroring the Jewish system, we are, in fact, declaring through our actions that we choose the weak things under law over the superlative things under spirit. When we do, we are for all intents and purposes, rebuilding Jerusalem, thus, finding ourselves in direct conflict with the Father who clearly abandoned it.

And what about our relations with our brothers and neighbors? Have we built a wall of separation between our religion and the religion of others? Do we look at other religions as heathen or pagan? Have we developed a sort of national pride in our religion? Do we choose to imitate the fiery prophets of Israel, pronouncing judgment on those who we believe are disapproved, rather than the mild and loving message of reconciliation? (**2 Corinthians 5:18**) Have we added burdensome rules of conduct that dominate our personal and social life beyond what is written? Have we allowed the interpretations of “Rabbis” to overstep the Bible’s message? Have we allowed our beliefs to crystalized and fossilize to the point where we cannot receive the gospel of religious freedom and spiritual liberty as sons of God?

If so, we need to readjust ourselves in accord with the spirit – “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (*Galatians 5:22-23*) Since the Father abandoned the Jewish system of things, we have an obligation to likewise let go. We see the Jewish system as partial, a shadow, a prototype, a typical representation, but not our exemplar, and not the fulfillment. Christ is the fulfillment.

The Faithful Men and Women of Old

That does not mean that we cannot benefit from considering the history of the Jews. For example, on this website, in our foundation series “**The Royal Priesthood and the Holy Nation,**” we examined the typical representations of the Law Covenant, and we used that as a means of establishing a common ground with our brothers who look to the Jewish system of things as a model, in order to lead them to the New Covenant.

Paul also utilized this technique of using the traditions of others to establish common ground when he was speaking to the men in Athens:

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said:
“People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.
For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of
worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an
unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you
worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.””

– *Acts 17:22-23*

The Law is indeed a “guardian until Christ came,” but once we are led to the Christ, we can leave the tutor behind. (*Galatians 3:24-25*)

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when
completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”

– *1 Corinthians 13:9-10*

Nevertheless, while we do not imitate their religious system, we should be careful not to look with disdain upon the children of Abraham because they have fallen on days of traditional barrenness. The forefathers offered themselves up to the persistent and passionate search for God, and they found him as no other whole race of men have ever known him since the times of Adam.

Our Father has not failed to mark the long and untiring struggle of Israel, ever since the days of Moses, to find God and to know God. For weary generations, the Jews have not ceased to toil, sweat, groan, travail, and endure the sufferings and experience the sorrows of a misunderstood and despised people, all in order that they might come a little nearer the discovery of the truth about God. And, notwithstanding all the falterings of Israel, they progressively, from Moses to the times of Amos and Hosea, did reveal increasingly to the whole world an ever clearer and more truthful picture of the eternal God. And so was the way prepared for the still greater revelation of the Father through Jesus in which we have all, **including the Jews**, been called to share.

The Faith of the Sons of God

In the letter to the Hebrews, Paul describes faith:

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” – Hebrews 11:1

In short, it is the ability to believe without seeing. Continuing on, Paul enumerates the experiences of several of the men and women of old as examples of faith. (**Hebrews 11:2-38**) And he concludes:

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” – Hebrews 11:39-40

Our hope is a better hope because it leads to freedom, sonship and everlasting life in the heavens with the Father. Nevertheless, we can look at their examples as an assurance that exercising faith has its rewards. Moreover, rather than passively marveling at the faith of the men and women of old, we should be discovering those qualities in ourselves and becoming new expressions of bold and faithful living for our generation and future generations to look upon. To future generations, we will be the ‘men and women of old.’

And who knows, the “trials of many kinds” may have enormous value to the Father, beyond the value to ourselves. (**James 1:2**) We do not believe that our achieving perfection is for the sole purpose of glorifying ourselves. There must be a purpose to all the effort the Father and the Son put into creating man, raising him to perfection, even sending the Christ who suffered on our behalf. Surely there will be work for us to do.

“Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.””

– John 5:14-17

As such, we wonder, as we keep our minds fixed on the things above (**Colossians 2:2**), if there are certain assignments in the heavens for those of us who have exercised extraordinary faith under difficult circumstances. We can imagine there may be tasks that require the services of Sons who can work faithfully in isolation from their brothers; perhaps assignments in other confused worlds like ours; perhaps assignments on newly developing worlds. Take, for example, the high priest Melchizedek:

“This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.” – Hebrews 7:1-3

We wonder if Melchizedek was such a perfected soul on assignment to our planet! After all, it is written in Revelation that some of us will serve as “a kingdom and priests.” (**Revelation 5:10**) Is not that was Melchizedek was?

Whatever the case, we can be confident that our hard work at perfecting our faith will be for a grander purpose. So while we are here, let us do our utmost to grow in faith, cherishing our divine freedom, and working as ambassadors of the Christ, and in service of one another.

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” – Romans 13:8

We welcome your comments.

“Elaia Luchnia”