

## DELIVER US FROM BONDAGE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on November 17, 1968 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

From time to time I profoundly wish that it were possible for us to recreate in our own minds the full reality of some of the events and scenes portrayed in the Bible. For example, I wish there were some way by which we could visualize the events connected with the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. As told in the book of Exodus the Israelites had been in bondage to the Egyptians for a number of generations when their pleas for deliverance caused God to raise up a deliverer. He carefully guided the training of Moses and then sent him, together with Aaron his spokesman, to break the yoke of slavery that bound the Hebrews.

There were a number of dramatic confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh. In Exodus 5:1 we read, "And afterward Moses and Aaron came, and said unto Pharaoh, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness." Pharaoh was little impressed by this rather grandiloquent request from a man who was "slow of speech and of a slow tongue," representing a people who had no weapons of war by which to implement a revolt. There followed in the succeeding pages of the book of Exodus six other occasions, interspersed with the various plagues and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, in which Moses used the same key expression, "Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." (Ex. 7:16; 8:1, 20: 9:1; 10:3). Although these people were in abject slavery their complete bondage to their Egyptian masters was broken by God's power. It is thrilling to read how they ultimately walked out of Egypt free men, carrying the spoils of Egypt with them as they went.

But why should I remind you of this already familiar story on this occasion? Simply because I believe there is a very meaningful parallel between the bondage of God's people then and a different kind of bondage of God's people today. We of the 20th century are not subject to a dictatorial ruler (though the threat of such may not be as far away as many of us would like to think), but we are subject to an even more devastating kind of slavery, planned and perpetrated by the arch-enemy of mankind and the arch-rival of God, Satan. He seeks to bring God's children into bondage on a far more widespread and more destructive scale than Pharaoh could ever have done. We remember the words of the apostle Peter, "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (I Peter 5:8).

### Individuals Are Often In Bondage

Ours is a day in which Satan has reached out with his octopus-like tentacles to many of our young people throughout the land, and has planted doubts and questions in their minds. Ours is a day in which atheism and agnosticism are making inroads among the intellectuals in the colleges and universities. By destroying faith, by raising questions, by upsetting the old ethical and moral standards, and by creating a state of uncertainty and confusion the devil is bringing millions of people into a far more serious kind of bondage than the Israelites in Egypt ever knew. From this loss of faith there comes the realization that life without God has little purpose. If there is no God and if there is no life hereafter then what difference does it all make? How different it was with the apostle Paul who could say, "I know him whom I have believed, and, I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day." (II Tim. 1:12).

### Sensualism

Another of the major efforts to bring man into bondage is in the realm of sensualism. Millions of people are addicted to sex. The books they read, the magazines they buy, the movies they see, the central topic of their conversations, and the general pattern of their lives is dominated by sex. They are slaves to sex, missing through their misuse of this one faculty, many of the fine, wholesome things in life. There are many others who are slaves to alcohol. We are told that between five and six million Americans are hopeless alcoholics, with another five to six million serious problem drinkers. Their lives and the lives of their loved ones are cursed by their bondage to alcoholic beverages. Although the number is not nearly so large, there is an increasing number who are addicted to drugs. Two years ago one respected source mentioned that more than 30,000 in the city of New York alone were drug addicts.

Then, though not nearly on as serious a level as the things just mentioned, there is the very widespread addiction to cigarettes. It is here that I become a bit indignant concerning those who manufacture and sell this hurtful product. It is no longer "possibly true," but "definitely proved" that long-term cigarette smoking means emphysema, problems in the circulatory system, and the likelihood of lung cancer, throat cancer, and lip cancer. Our sympathy and concern go to those who have become addicted, and we yearn for their freedom from the bondage which greedy men for their own selfish gain have placed upon them.

Yet again, some of the finest women we know have been addicted to the current craze for immodest and indecent dress. Without intending to be dressed in a suggestive manner, they are swept along with the crowd away from the modest dress of which the apostle Paul spoke in I Tim. 2. Yet again, this is an age in which all of us seem to be addicted to constant entertainment. Unless there is some kind of entertainment every day, we feel cheated. Radio, television, the sports world, and other avenues of entertainment have created

such a taste for entertainment that more find it difficult, almost impossible, to find time to do the Lord's work. Clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and bringing the gospel to the lost are crowded out by the many hours that we spend entertaining ourselves. This, too, is another way in which Satan has led us into a kind of bondage.

In the midst of all of this we are reminded of the words of the apostle Paul, "For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, and whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:18-20). Or remember the same apostle's words in the Galatian letter, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life." (Gal. 6:7-8).

### Materialism

Yet another avenue through which Satan brings men into bondage in our day is that of materialism. This is an age in which there are more creature comforts and a higher level of luxurious living than ever before known in the history of the world. As a consequence we who live in this materially blessed society find ourselves dominated by things. We need to heed the warning of the apostle John who wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." (1 John 2:15-17).

We also remember Christ's own words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also ... But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:19-21, 33).

### Wretched Man That I Am!

Perhaps the best passage in all the New Testament to convey this inner struggle within man is that in which the apostle Paul pours out his own battle. We read it in Rom. 7:15-8:2, as follows, "For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practice; but what I hate, that I do ... So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practice. But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me ... For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord ... There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death." Satan is constantly on the attack trying to bring us into bondage along all these lines. We must be discreet and wise and ever on our guard if we would remain free in Christ.

### The Church Is Often In Bondage

Not only does Satan try to bring individuals under his dominion, he also endeavors to bring the church under his control. One of the avenues of bringing the church into bondage is through the introduction of religious error. How widespread this is in the religious realm! So many of the good intentions and the worthy motives of men back through the ages have been washed out because Satan directed their religious activities into channels which God does not approve. Religious division and religious error are among the most tragic of all the subjects that one can contemplate. How often we need to read the warnings of the apostle Paul, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, If any men preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema." (Gal. 1:8-9).

Yet another means by which Satan has endeavored to bring the church into bondage is through an attitude of defeatism, or an attitude of negativism. It is so easy for leaders of the church to see the problems and the complications connected with some activity of the Lord's work that they sometimes decide not to do the work at all. On paper, many activities look impossible, but by God's help they are within the realm of possibility. As a familiar case in point we remember the story of the twelve spies. When they had spent their forty days spying out the land of Canaan they returned with a divided verdict. They had found the land peopled by men who were large and warlike and dwelt in fortified cities. Only Joshua and Caleb had the faith to say, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are able to overcome it." The other ten advised, "He are not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we." (Num. 13:30-31). Satan holds many people in bondage through the attitudes of defeatism and negativism.

Yet another means by which Satan has enslaved the church is that of causing people to be wedded to their traditions. Traditionalism causes people to enshrine the "status quo," and to feel that whatever has been done is what must continue to be done. This, too, has often limited the effectiveness of the Cause of Christ. We gladly submit to the limitations placed upon us in the scriptures, for we

readily agree that Christians must be bound by God's commands. However, we must never allow ourselves to be bound by our own man-made traditions. In our own generation there are those who would place limitations upon Christ's church in the realm of congregational cooperation and the care of homeless children which the Bible does not place. It is just as wrong to "bind where the scriptures do not bind" as it is to "loose where the scriptures do not loose."

Looking back to earlier years we remember times when the idea of having two identical worship services on Sunday morning was opposed because it was "a new idea." Earlier still there were those who insisted upon the "one cup" on the communion service. There were those who opposed the use of literature in the Bible school program. There were even those who opposed the idea of dividing into classes at all for Bible study. These were all battles over the traditions of men. Sometimes the debates were hard-fought and long-continued and the result was that many were disturbed and led away from the spirit of Christ. It is here that we might well read Christ's own quotation from the prophet Isaiah, "Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you saying, This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men." (Matt. 15:7-9).

### Conclusion

When one looks deeply into what Christianity is all about he finds that essentially it is God's effort to free man from the bondage of sin. There is a significant paragraph in the gospel of Luke, "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:16-19). Jesus came to preach liberty to those who were in bondage to sin.

At another time Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free ... If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:32, 36). In Gal. 5:1, we find an excellent summary statement of all that we have been trying to say, "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage." We were in bondage to sin, then Christ came to free us from that bondage. Satan still tries to bring us under bondage in all these and many other ways. Ours is a continuing battle to remain free after the blood of Christ has cleansed us when first we became Christians. May we work constantly and may we diligently pray that God will "deliver us from bondage."