

Freedom

by George MacDonald

True freedom comes from recognizing the Father and living as God lives, and it is only possible through the truth of Jesus.

Scripture: John 8:31-32, John 8:34, John 8:36, John 8:44, John 8:58, John 14:6, John 14:23, John 17:21, Galatians 4:7

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Sonship In Christ"

Description

George MacDonald delves into the concept of freedom in relation to sin and servitude, emphasizing the distinction between being a slave to sin and a slave to God. He explores the idea that true freedom comes from becoming sons and daughters of God, aligning our will with His and seeking to fulfill His desires. MacDonald highlights the journey from slavery to sonship, where individuals must choose to give up their self-serving ways and embrace obedience to God, ultimately finding freedom in becoming like Jesus, who lived in perfect obedience and devotion to the Father.

Transcript

The Truth shall make you free. . . . Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.--John viii. 32, 34-36.

As this passage stands, I have not been able to make sense of it. No man could be in the house of the Father in virtue of being the servant of sin; yet this man is in the house as a servant, and the house in which he serves is not the house of sin, but the house of the Father. The utterance is confused at best, and the reasoning faulty. He must be in the house of the Father on some other ground than sin. This, had no help come, would have been sufficient cause for leaving the passage alone, as one where, perhaps, the words of the Lord were misrepresented--where, at least, perceiving more than one fundamental truth involved in the passage, I failed to follow the argument. I do not see that I could ever have suggested where the corruption, if any, lay. Most difficulties of similar nature have originated, like this, I can hardly doubt, with some scribe who, desiring to explain what he did not understand, wrote his worthless gloss on the margin: the next copier took the words for an omission that ought to be replaced in the body of the text, and inserting them, falsified the utterance, and greatly obscured its intention. What do we not owe to the critics who have searched the scriptures, and found what really was written! In the present case, Dr. Westcott's notation gives us to understand that there is another with 'a reasonable probability of being the true reading.' The difference is indeed small to the eye, but is great enough to give us fine gold instead of

questionable ore. In an alternative of the kind, I must hope in what seems logical against what seems illogical; in what seems radiant against what seems trite.

What I take for the true reading then, I English thus: 'Every one committing sin is a slave. But the slave does not remain in the house for ever; the son remaineth for ever. If then the son shall make you free, you shall in reality be free.' The authorized version gives, 'Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin;' the revised version gives, 'Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin;' both accepting the reading that has the words, 'of sin.' The statement is certainly in itself true, but appears to me useless for the argument that follows. And I think it may have been what I take to be the true reading, that suggested to the apostle Paul what he says in the beginning of the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians--words of spirit and life from which has been mistakenly drawn the doctrine of adoption, merest poison to the child-heart. The words of the Lord here are not that he who sins is the slave of sin, true utterly as that is; but that he is a slave, and the argument shows that he means a slave to God. The two are perfectly consistent. No amount of slavery to sin can keep a man from being as much the slave of God as God chooses in his mercy to make him. It is his sin makes him a slave instead of a child. His slavery to sin is his ruin; his slavery to God is his only hope. God indeed does not love slavery; he hates it; he will have children, not slaves; but he may keep a slave in his house a long time in the hope of waking up the poor slavish nature to aspire to the sonship which belongs to him, which is his birthright. But the slave is not to be in the house for ever. The father is not bound to keep his son a slave because the foolish child prefers it.

Whoever will not do what God desires of him, is a slave whom God can compel to do it, however he may bear with him. He who, knowing this, or fearing punishment, obeys God, is still a slave, but a slave who comes within hearing of the voice of his master. There are, however, far higher than he, who yet are but slaves. Those to whom God is not all in all, are slaves. They may not commit great sins; they may be trying to do right; but so long as they serve God, as they call it, from duty, and do not know him as their father, the joy of their being, they are slaves--good slaves, but slaves.

If they did not try to do their duty, they would be bad slaves. They are by no means so slavish as those that serve from fear, but they are slaves; and because they are but slaves, they can fulfil no righteousness, can do no duty perfectly, but must ever be trying after it wearily and in pain, knowing well that if they stop trying, they are lost. They are slaves indeed, for they would be glad to be adopted by one who is their own father! Where then are the sons? I know none, I answer, who are yet utterly and entirely sons or daughters.

There may be such--God knows; I have not known them; or, knowing them, have not been myself such as to be able to recognize them. But I do know some who are enough sons and daughters to be at war with the slave in them, who are not content to be slaves to their father. Nothing I have seen or known of sonship, comes near the glory of the thing; but there are thousands of sons and daughters, though their number be yet only a remnant, who are siding with the father of their spirits against themselves, against all that divides them from him from whom they have come, but out of whom they have never come, seeing that in him they live and move and have their being.

Such are not slaves; they are true though not perfect children; they are fighting along with God against the evil separation; they are breaking at the middle wall of partition. Only the rings of their fetters are left, and they are struggling to take them off. They are children--with more or less of the dying slave in them; they know it is there, and what it is, and hate the slavery in them, and try to slay it. The real slave is he who

does not seek to be a child; who does not desire to end his slavery; who looks upon the claim of the child as presumption; who cleaves to the traditional authorized service of forms and ceremonies, and does not know the will of him who made the seven stars and Orion, much less cares to obey it; who never lifts up his heart to cry 'Father, what wouldst thou have me to do?'

Such are continually betraying their slavery by their complaints. 'Do we not well to be angry?' they cry with Jonah; and, truly, being slaves, I do not know how they are to help it. When they are sons and daughters, they will no longer complain of the hardships, and miseries, and troubles of life; no longer grumble at their aches and pains, at the pinching of their poverty, at the hunger that assails them; no longer be indignant at their rejection by what is called Society. Those who believe in their own perfect father, can ill blame him for anything they do not like. Ah, friend, it may be you and I are slaves, but there are such sons and daughters as I speak of.

The slaves of sin rarely grumble at that slavery; it is their slavery to God they grumble at; of that alone they complain--of the painful messengers he sends to deliver them from their slavery both to sin and to himself. They must be sons or slaves. They cannot rid themselves of their owner. Whether they deny God, or mock him by acknowledging and not heeding him, or treat him as an arbitrary, formal monarch; whether, taking no trouble to find out what pleases him, they do dull things for his service he cares nothing about, or try to propitiate him by assuming with strenuous effort some yoke the Son never wore, and never called on them to wear, they are slaves, and not the less slaves that they are slaves to God; they are so thoroughly slaves, that they do not care to get out of their slavery by becoming sons and daughters, by finding the good of life where alone it can or could lie. Could a creator make a creature whose well-being should not depend on himself? And if he could, would the creature be the greater for that? Which, the creature he made more, or the creature he made less dependent on himself, would be the greater? The slave in heart would immediately, with Milton's Satan, reply, that the farthest from him who made him must be the freest, thus acknowledging his very existence a slavery, and but two kinds in being--a creator, and as many slaves as he pleases to make, whose refusal to obey is their unknown protest against their own essence. Being itself must, for what they call liberty, be repudiated! Creation itself, to go by their lines of life, is an injustice! God had no right to create beings less than himself; and as he could not create equal, he ought not to have created! But they do not complain of having been created; they complain of being required to do justice. They will not obey, but, his own handiwork, ravish from his work every advantage they can! They desire to be free with another kind of freedom than that with which God is free; unknowing, they seek a more complete slavery. There is, in truth, no mid way between absolute harmony with the Father and the condition of slaves--submissive, or rebellious. If the latter, their very rebellion is by the strength of the Father in them. Of divine essence, they thrust their existence in the face of their essence, their own nature.

Yet is their very rebellion in some sense but the rising in them of his spirit against their false notion of him--against the lies they hold concerning him. They do not see that, if his work, namely, they themselves, are the chief joy to themselves, much more might the life that works them be a glory and joy to them the work--inasmuch as it is nearer to them than they to themselves, causing them to be, and extends, without breach of relation, so infinitely above and beyond them.

For nothing can come so close as that which creates; the nearest, strongest, dearest relation possible is between creator and created. Where this is denied, the schism is the widest; where it is acknowledged and fulfilled, the closeness is unspeakable. But ever remains what cannot be said, and I sink defeated. The very protest of the rebel against slavery, comes at once of the truth of God in him, which he cannot all

cast from him, and of a slavery too low to love truth--a meanness that will take all and acknowledge nothing, as if his very being was a disgrace to him.

The liberty of the God that would have his creature free, is in contest with the slavery of the creature who would cut his own stem from his root that he might call it his own and love it; who rejoices in his own consciousness, instead of the life of that consciousness; who poises himself on the tottering wall of his own being, instead of the rock on which that being is built. Such a one regards his own dominion over himself--the rule of the greater by the less, inasmuch as the conscious self is less than the self-as a freedom infinitely greater than the range of the universe of God's being.

If he says, 'At least I have it my own way!' I answer, You do not know what is your way and what is not. You know nothing of whence your impulses, your desires, your tendencies, your likings come. They may spring now from some chance, as of nerves diseased; now from some roar of a wandering bodiless devil; now from some infant hate in your heart; now from the greed or lawlessness of some ancestor you would be ashamed of if you knew him; or it may be now from some far--piercing chord of a heavenly orchestra: the moment it comes up into your consciousness, you call it your own way, and glory in it!

Two devils amusing themselves with a duet of inspiration, one at each ear, might soon make that lordly me you are so in love with, rejoice in the freedom of willing the opposite each alternate moment; and at length drive you mad at finding that you could not, will as you would, make choice of a way and its opposite simultaneously. The whole question rests and turns on the relation of creative and created, of which relation few seem to have the consciousness yet developed. To live without the eternal creative life is an impossibility; freedom from God can only mean an incapacity for seeing the facts of existence, an incapability of understanding the glory of the creature who makes common cause with his creator in his creation of him, who wills that the lovely will calling him into life and giving him choice, should finish making him, should draw him into the circle of the creative heart, to joy that he lives by no poor power of his own will, but is one with the causing life of his life, in closest breathing and willing, vital and claimant oneness with the life of all life.

Such a creature knows the life of the infinite Father as the very flame of his life, and joys that nothing is done or will be done in the universe in which the Father will not make him all of a sharer that it is possible for perfect generosity to make him. If you say this is irreverent, I doubt if you have seen the God manifest in Jesus. But all will be well, for the little god of your poor content will starve your soul to misery, and the terror of the eternal death creeping upon you, will compel you to seek a perfect father. Oh, ye hide--bound Christians, the Lord is not straitened, but ye are straitened in your narrow unwilling souls! Some of you need to be shamed before yourselves; some of you need the fire.

But one who reads may call out, in the agony and thirst of a child waking from a dream of endless seeking and no finding, 'I am bound like Lazarus in his grave-clothes! what am I to do?' Here is the answer, drawn from this parable of our Lord; for the saying is much like a parable, teaching more than it utters, appealing to the conscience and heart, not to the understanding: You are a slave; the slave has no hold on the house; only the sons and daughters have an abiding rest in the home of their father. God cannot have slaves about him always. You must give up your slavery, and be set free from it. That is what I am here for. If I make you free, you shall be free indeed; for I can make you free only by making you what you were meant to be, sons like myself. That is how alone the Son can work. But it is you who must become sons; you must will it, and I am here to help you.' It is as if he said, 'You shall have the freedom of my father's universe; for, free from yourselves, you will be free of his heart. Yourselves are your slavery. That is the

darkness which you have loved rather than the light. You have given honour to yourselves, and not to the Father; you have sought honour from men, and not from the Father! Therefore, even in the house of your father, you have been but sojourning slaves. We in his family are all one; we have no party-spirit; we have no self-seeking: fall in with us, and you shall be free as we are free.'

If then the poor starved child cry--'How, Lord?' the answer will depend on what he means by that how. If he means, 'What plan wilt thou adopt? What is thy scheme for cutting my bonds and setting me free?' the answer may be a deepening of the darkness, a tightening of the bonds. But if he means, 'Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?' the answer will not tarry. 'Give yourself to me to do what I tell you, to understand what I say, to be my good, obedient little brother, and I will wake in you the heart that my father put in you, the same kind of heart that I have, and it will grow to love the Father, altogether and absolutely, as mine does, till you are ready to be torn to pieces for him. Then you will know that you are at the heart of the universe, at the heart of every secret--at the heart of the Father. Not till then will you be free, then free indeed!'

Christ died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves; not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust. He died that we might live--but live as he lives, by dying as he died who died to himself that he might live unto God. If we do not die to ourselves, we cannot live to God, and he that does not live to God, is dead. 'Ye shall know the truth,' the Lord says, 'and the truth shall make you free. I am the truth, and you shall be free as I am free. To be free, you must be sons like me. To be free you must be that which you have to be, that which you are created. To be free you must give the answer of sons to the Father who calls you. To be free you must fear nothing but evil, care for nothing but the will of the Father, hold to him in absolute confidence and infinite expectation. He alone is to be trusted.' He has shown us the Father not only by doing what the Father does, not only by loving his Father's children even as the Father loves them, but by his perfect satisfaction with him, his joy in him, his utter obedience to him. He has shown us the Father by the absolute devotion of a perfect son. He is the Son of God because the Father and he are one, have one thought, one mind, one heart. Upon this truth--I do not mean the dogma, but the truth itself of Jesus to his father--hangs the universe; and upon the recognition of this truth--that is, upon their becoming thus true--hangs the freedom of the children, the redemption of their whole world. 'I and the Father are one,' is the center-truth of the Universe; and the circumfering truth is, 'that they also may be one in us.'

The only free man, then, is he who is a child of the Father. He is a servant of all, but can be made the slave of none: he is a son of the lord of the universe. He is in himself, in virtue of his truth, free. He is in himself a king. For the Son rests his claim to royalty on this, that he was born and came into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/george-macdonald/freedom/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net