

# God's Liberty Bell

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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I realized late last spring that we had gotten through the Easter and Passover season and I had not seen the movie 'The Ten Commandments' anywhere. It must've been playing somewhere, in fact someone said they saw it, but it didn't crop up for me. I remember seeing the movie in the theater, it would've been around 1956 or 1957. Hard to realize that was 50 years ago.

## **The Great Pronouncement**

One of the things I remember though from that movie was, the centurion's voice pronouncing, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, under the inhabitants thereof." I recall thinking how awkward the King James English was at that point in the film. I think it was Charlton Heston who made the great pronouncement.

What I did not know at the time was, that those words are engraved on the Liberty Bell and they were engraved there when it was cast in 1753. But I think those writing the script of the movie knew it well enough and the connection was deliberate.

I asked some friends, "What in your mind is the dominant theme of the movie 'The Ten Commandments?'" Somebody look at me and said, "Are you crazy, 'The Ten Commandments.'" Actually no it wasn't. The dominant theme of the movie was 'freedom and liberty.' The Israelites had been a people who had been enslaved in slavery all their lives, not only they had been slaves, their fathers had been slaves, their grandfathers had been slaves, their great-grandfathers had been enslaved. They knew nothing of freedom and liberty. They had now been freed and while one might not pick up on it at first, it's plain enough, you can't just free the slaves and guarantee liberty for them. Doesn't everyone know this? I gather not. You see, the connection with 'The Ten Commandments' was, it was the Ten Commandments that form the foundation and pillar stones of liberty for those newly freed.

## **The Perfect Law Of Liberty**

That's why James in his letter, that he wrote in the New Testament, said this in verse 25 of the first chapter, "Whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in all that he does."

So what is he talking about? He is talking about the Ten Commandments, if we look at it in context. It's called 'the perfect law of liberty.' It is utterly asinine to suggest as some people have, that the Ten Commandments are some sort of 'yoke of bondage' upon people. They were and are the guarantor of freedom for mankind, not just for Israel. The King James Bible calls it 'liberty.' The New International Version calls it 'freedom.' Whatever you call it, there are very few things more fundamental to the purpose of God for man. And it's no coincidence that Christians and Jews have found so much freedom here in this country and have contributed so much to freedom because what we have believed and what we practice is really founded on, guess what, the Ten Commandments.

I invite my audience to show me any comparable example of freedom in Islam. Islam means submission, it doesn't mean freedom, it doesn't mean liberty, now I'm not saying that the idea of freedom is not there, I'm just inviting anyone to point it out, because I have read fairly widely about this, and at this point I haven't found it.

Now how important is this to the Christian faith, this idea of freedom, of liberty?

### **Jesus' First Sermon in the Synagogue**

Well, if you consider Jesus' first sermon in the synagogue, you find this in the fourth chapter of Luke starting in verse 16, "Jesus came to Nazareth where He had been brought up, and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. {17} They delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book, He found the place where it was written and Jesus began to read aloud, {18}"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, {19} To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

That's an incredible statement. Think about this! Deliverance to the captives, setting at liberty people who were bruised and oppressed.

Verse 20, "He closed the book, handed it back to the servant and sat down, and the eyes of all of them in the synagogue were fastened on him and He began to say to them, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

I can't imagine how that went over in the synagogue on that day. What did they make of it? But there's something we need to understand about this thing, that Jesus called 'the acceptable year of the Lord that He was anointed to preach."

### **Background Information**

Now to explain this some background is necessary. When Israel came into the Promised Land it was divided to them by lot, the land had to be surveyed out, there were 12 tribes, 13

if you count Levi, and Levi was handled differently, and then within those lots everybody got their own plot of land, a very large plot of land, in the land of Palestine, given to them by God, by the casting of lots. After that, this plot of land, because it was broken down even below that in the tribes themselves, there were more of them that were given land and defined land, after that, that land as defined by lot, from the very beginning of the time they took over the land, it was secure to the lineage of the original owner.

## **Economic Liberty**

Now here's what you need to know about this. This is one of the laws beyond the Ten Commandments which secured economic liberty for the people.

The 25th chapter of Leviticus lays out the principles for it. We can't apply these laws quite the same way in our generation because we are not in the land, our land was not granted directly by lot, we have to go out and buy it. But the principle is here and Jesus himself is calling upon it on this day.

In Leviticus 25 and verse 1, it says this, "The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, {2} "Speak to the Israelites and say to them, "When you enter the land I'm going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord, {3} for six years sow your field, for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops, {4} but in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath of the LORD. Don't sow your fields, don't prune your vineyards.""

Now He goes on to say, whatever the land produces, without you having pruned your vineyards or sowing or anything, whatever comes up, you can eat it. You can eat it, your servants can eat it, the stranger passing through your land can eat it, but what you do is you go out to the field or the vineyard and you get what you need for today, and you then leave it alone. You can't harvest it and sell it. It is for you to eat. The whole idea was, you not only give the land a year off, it gives man a year off, that's really something for a farmer.

Okay, after this God says in Leviticus 25 and verse 8, "Count off seven sabbaths of years, seven times seven of years, so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years."

This is very King James-y isn't it? It has to tell it to you in three different ways, so you get it.

Verse 9, "Then have the trumpets sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month, on the Day of Atonement, sound the trumpet throughout your land. {10} You consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." That's the citation, and this is the NIV version of the one that Charlton Heston proclaimed in the movie, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land, it shall be a Jubilee, everyone is to go back to his family property, each to his own clan. {11} The fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee for you,

do not sow, do not reap what grows of itself, {12} It's a Jubilee, to be holy, eat only what is taken directly from the fields."

Now here comes one of the great principles of economic liberty.

Continuing in verse 13, "In this year of Jubilee, everyone is to return to his own property, {14} If you sell land to one of your countrymen or if you buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. {15} You are to buy from your countrymen on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee."

Now you see what is developing here is what in real estate, they would call 'leasehold.' If we've got 30 years left before the next Jubilee, I can calculate the value of the crops I can grow on the land in that 30 year period of time and we calculate the price I pay you for that. I can't buy the land freehold. I can't buy it and hold it in my family forever, because at the Jubilee it has to go back to the original owner. It's leasehold only in a purchase.

God said, verse 16, "When the years are many, you can increase the price, when the years are few, you decrease the price, because what you are really selling is the number of crops. {17} Don't take advantage of each other, but fear the LORD your God, I am the LORD your God."

Now this is what Jesus was driving at on that day in the synagogue when He said, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

### **Jesus' Mission Statement**

Jesus was to preach the Jubilee. In a way, what Jesus has just said here, is his mission statement, this is what I am here for and what He is here for, is liberty and freedom.

Honestly, I don't think we appreciate the importance of the central idea of what Jesus is saying here. The central idea of his mission is liberty and freedom. It is the will of God for mankind and the answer to most of the troubling questions that we face. It is why man was put here in the first place. God didn't put us here to guarantee comfort. He didn't guarantee that we would be well fed. What he wanted us to have was freedom. It's the reason Adam and Eve were granted the freedom they were given in the Garden of Eden. God said. "Eat everything that is here but don't eat of that one tree over there." And having told them that, He went away and left them free to decide whether they would eat it or not. And we all know the story and we are all suffering the results of the decision that they made. But they made it in freedom.

## **Purpose of the Law**

The purpose of law is to guarantee freedom. It only seems otherwise when men take in hand to be the enforcers of law. Now it's interesting when you go back to the beginnings of a whole idea of the Passover, as a part of the movie 'The Ten Commandments' and the freeing of the slaves out of Egypt. The whole idea of this story is, a people who had been in slavery were freed. Now you see this to some extent in the movie, 'The Ten Commandments.'

## **Passover and the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread**

But the whole thing about Passover is about freedom and connected with the Passover are the seven days of unleavened bread. Now what in the world is that all about?

Back in the 12th chapter of Exodus along about verse 34, it tells us that the Egyptians had been urgent upon them to get the Israelites out of Egypt. They said: "We are going to be dead mean if we don't get these Israelites out of the country."

"So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their needing troughs were bound up in their clothes on their shoulders and they got busy and they got out of the country. {37} They journeyed out from Ramses to Succoth, about 600,000 men on foot plus women and children and out they went. {39} With the dough they brought from Egypt, they baked unleavened cakes of bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves."

Now what was that about? Well they were free! Here is a question: Unleavened Bread is a small price to pay for being free, isn't it? And when you are given freedom, you don't wait around for bread to rise. They ate the Passover in haste. They ate it standing up with their staff in their hand. They left Egypt in a hurry. They had no choice, but good grief, if you're being freed from slavery, why don't you get out here! And maybe that is the lesson we should take with us from this.

Jesus said plainly, that what He is here for, "Is to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

So we all should get this. It's freedom that Christ has come to give to us.

## **Crisis in the Early Church**

The early church had a crisis early on, and they had a decision to make. Paul and Barnabas had gone all through Asia minor and in the course of their going they would go the synagogue and the Jews rejected the gospel, so they preached to the Gentiles and they went all the way around and it was amazing. The Jews were turning it down for the most part, not entirely, but usually, and the Gentiles, the God-fearers, who had been attending synagogue but were uncircumcised were accepting the gospel in droves. I gather, that Paul and

Barnabas were baptizing them, so they came back to Antioch, got the church together, and rehearsed everything God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a while.

Now Acts 15 presents the crisis. "Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren saying, "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Well, Paul and Barnabas says, "Hold on here a minute, because we have been seeing people being saved all over the place without being circumcised. So finally after all the dispute, they sent Paul and Barnabas and some others to the apostles and elders about the question.

Acts 15 verse 4, "When they got to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared everything God had done with them, {5} But there rose certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, "It was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

Now right here I learned something, not that long ago, that I had not really known before. To observant Jews, to these Pharisees who believed, the law of Moses and the Torah included both the written and the oral law of the Jews. I discussed this at considerable length in my book, "The Law and the Covenant," so I won't go into it here. (Note: You can buy my book on Amazon.com). But the fact of the matter is, the Jews had built up a great edifice of oral law around the written law which Jesus rejected their traditions entirely! Strange to say, but He did!

When they talked this over very thoroughly, Peter rose up and said, {7} "Men and brethren, you know that a long time ago, God made a choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. {8} And God who knows the hearts bore them witness giving them the Holy Spirit just like he did to us. {9} He put no difference between us, purifying their hearts by faith. {10} Now, why in the world are you trying to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear, {11} But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved just like they are!"

Well they fought this thing all the way down, issued some decrees, so the Church would understand it. It was not long after this, that Paul having delivered the decree from the conference saying, "No, no you people are saved. You can have the Holy Spirit, you can be baptized, you don't have to be circumcised and you certainly don't need to keep the oral law of the Jews. The Ten Commandments, that's another matter."

Well, Paul, sometime after this, had learned that the believing Pharisees who had caused the trouble in Jerusalem had followed him to Galatia and provoked a controversy all over again. It is understanding this that opens up the book of Galatians for understanding.

In the second chapter, Paul outlines how he had to go up to Jerusalem, how he took Titus and Titus even though he was a Gentile was not compelled to be circumcised by the Jerusalem Church.

Paul says in Galatians 2 and verse 4, this matter arose "because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Jesus Christ and to make us slaves."

Slaves to what? Well about the only thing Paul could mean here is: Jewish Tradition, because he certainly would not be talking about being made slaves to the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were the order, the foundation of the freedom that the Israelites were given coming out of Egypt. It gave order to their society and allowed them to live as free men. Paul is not talking about that.

As I said before, the freedom that is granted from all these things is no problem at all and the law is no problem, until men decide they are going to enforce it.

Later in Galatians 5 verse one, Paul says this remarkable statement: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free, stand firm and don't let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

That's an astonishing statement, because it says that Christ's objective was our freedom and it isn't the law that enslaves, its man.

### **Love Your Neighbor As Yourself**

Later Paul would say in Galatians 5 verse 13, "You my brothers, were called to be free, but don't use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature. Serve one another in love. {14} The entire law is summed up in a single command, love your neighbor as yourself, {15} If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out, you will be destroyed by each other."

This is the burden of freedom. We have to struggle for it. We have to watch out for it, for the human drive to control, is a constant threat to our freedom.

It's amazing how simple some ideas are and how hard it is to get our minds around them. God commands us that we love our neighbor as ourselves. He does not coerce us into doing it.

### **The Purpose of the Law is to Guarantee Freedom**

In second Corinthians 3 and verse 13, Paul wrote, "We are not like Moses who had to put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at him while the radiance was fading away. {14} 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. {15} Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts."

What was Paul talking about? Well he is familiar enough with the synagogue service where the law is read regularly and people will sit there. They will hear the law read in the language that they understand and they just don't get it. Some of them never figure out, that the purpose of the law is to guarantee freedom, not to hand control or give control to a bunch of leaders.

### **Where the Spirit of the Lord is, There is Freedom**

Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 3, The veil is there {16} "But whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away. {17} Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Now let me read that again, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." {18} And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is that spirit."

This is such a tremendous thing to understand, that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom, but there's something in man that whenever we are together in groups and where ever we gather we feel like we have just got to direct the affairs of other people. The early church learned this lesson. They learned it kind of hard. But it wasn't just Paul that talked about it, Peter did too.

In Peter's first epistle, second chapter verse 13, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men whether it is to the king, who is supreme, {14} Or to governors, who are sent by him, to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right."

What he is calling for here is a voluntary submission to governmental authority.

"For it is God's will," verse 15, "that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men." Then he says this, {16} "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil."

You know this is one of the hard lessons again that people have to get through their head. You're free. You're free to go out and sleep with another man's wife. You're free to commit fornication. You are free to steal. You are free to all kinds of evil things, but you cannot use that freedom as a cover-up for doing the wrong things. It is still a sin when you do wrong things.

Verse 17, "Show proper respect to everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God and honor the king."

This is what Peter says we should do living as free men.

In Peter's second letter, second chapter, he talks about certain men who just cannot get this straight. He said in verse 17, "These men are springs without water, their mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. {18} They mouth empty boastful words and by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error, {19} While they promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity, for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."

You know reading the story of the Exodus, the story of the Ten Commandments, even maybe going back and watching the movie again, is interesting, because there were always those who wanted to try to pull people aside, to draw people off and it is a constant of human nature and you can't seem to get away from it. But you can, if you keep in mind who you are and who your Lord really is.

Continuing in verse 20, "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and they again become entangled and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. {21} It would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and turned their backs on the sacred command that was given to them. {22} Of them the proverbs are true. "A dog returns to his vomit," and "A sow that was washed goes back to wallowing in the mud."

When you understand the glory of the freedom in Christ, the freedom of being a man of God, why would anyone ever want to return to the vomit and the mud?

### **What Else Did Isaiah Say?**

You see, when Jesus talked about this in the synagogue on that day and He said that "He was here to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison to them that are bound," He was citing this straight out of the book of Isaiah. He quoted Isaiah 61 and verse one, He quotes it exactly the same all the way down to {2} "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," but Isaiah went on and said "To proclaim .... the day of the vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn, {3} To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, .... {4} And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations."

They will do this as free men and free women not as slaves, as people who from the heart gave themselves to God. Freedom is rarely taken away, more often, people lay it down because the cost of freedom is high.

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