



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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FREE OR IMPRISONED: A REALITY CHECK

By Brian R. Kenyon

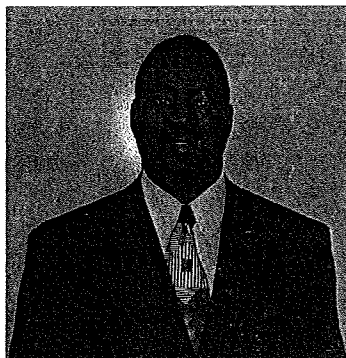
What came to your mind when you heard, or read, the following words:¹ “Jessica Lynch, we’re United States soldiers and we’re here to protect you and take you home”? Indeed, the very thought of it still sends chills up and down the spine of this writer. Imagine being in her condition: captured by hostile forces, enduring pain from injury, perhaps having witnessed the deaths of comrades, perhaps smelling death and decaying flesh while lying in the hospital, the loneliness, the darkness, the inability to adequately communicate, and even the possibility of losing hope, slowly dying in a foreign place with no hint of ever being found. But thanks be to God that through the heroic efforts of some of America’s finest, she will once again enjoy the freedoms for which she so valiantly participated to defend.

Freedom, Not Total Liberty

As great a rescue as that was, it pales in comparison to the rescue of sinners by the Savior (which term can be defined as

“Rescuer”) and the freedoms now enjoyed by those obedient to His orders! Indeed, the rescue and resulting freedom that God wrought through Jesus Christ is the greatest demonstration of love known (Jn. 3:16). Before its establishment, the Messianic kingdom was said to be one where “blind eyes” would be opened and where “prisoners” would be delivered from the “prison

house” of darkness (Isa. 42:7). The mission of the Messiah upon this earth was to proclaim this freedom (Isa. 61:1-3 cf. Lk. 4:18-19). This rescue is a reality only for those who have obeyed the orders of the Savior (Jn. 8:32; Rom. 6:16-18). This aspect of rescue and resulting freedom is emphasized in Paul’s statement, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me



Kenneth Fluellen, Sr.

May Graduate

Brother **Kenneth Fluellen, Sr.** will be graduating May 11, 2003, having completed two years of study. He appreciates his wife, **Elnora**, and son, **Kenneth, Jr.**, who have supported him at home through these two intense years. He has been working with the North Jackson Avenue church of Christ in Bartow, Florida, who also helped support him financially. Prior to studying with us, he served fifteen years in the US Army (1986-2001). He is originally from Warner Robins, Georgia. As of the time of this printing, he is still looking for a full-time work with a local congregation.

free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

However, because Christians are free in Christ does not mean that they are at total liberty to do whatever they desire. Paul warned the Galatians, “...use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). There were some in the churches of Galatia who were thinking that because they had freedom in Christ, they had freedom to practice the law of Moses. This idea came not from a proper understanding of Scripture (Gal. 4:21-5:1), but from “false brethren” (Gal. 2:4). The law of Moses was fulfilled by Christ and nailed to the cross (Mt. 5:17-20; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:24-25; Col. 2:14), yet they were tempted to practice some of its precepts as matters of salvation (cf. Acts 15:1-5). The practice of the law of Moses at that point in time would be equivalent to the practice of man-made religion. Though the Galatians were free, they were not free to practice that Law. In fact, the practice of such would result in a dreadful state: “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

“Freedom” and Error

Today, there are those in the church of Christ who fall into two errors concerning their liberty in Christ, which actually result in their being imprisoned. First, there are those who think that because they are free in Christ, they are free to practice man-made religion, and thus do so openly. These will engage in such practices as, for example, handclapping in worship, stating that they have liberty in Christ to worship God in such a way. Often, appeal is made to Romans 14, as if handclapping in worship were a matter of indifference to God. However, one must realize that worship is not a matter of indifference. It does

matter to God how we worship Him (Jn. 4:19-24 cf. Mt. 15:8-9; Acts 17:22-23; Col. 2:20-23)!

These, being convinced in their own minds that there is nothing wrong with such a practice, openly do so. Peter’s words, however, are relevant here. While encouraging brethren to obey civil government, the apostle said, “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1 Pet. 2:15-16). The KJV’s “a cloke of maliciousness” is translated elsewhere as “a cloak for vice” (NKJ) and “a covering for evil” (NAS). The possibility existed in Peter’s day, as well as ours, for Christians to use their liberty as an excuse to fulfill fleshly lusts. As with the Galatians, people today who practice such things as handclapping in worship do not do so based upon a proper understanding of the Scriptures, but through the teaching of denominationalism and/or “false brethren” (Gal. 2:4).

The result of such unauthorized practices as handclapping in worship is in reality imprisonment to sin. Paul asked in the midst of his discussion with the Galatians about liberty versus sin, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Gal. 5:7). Freedom in Christ entails obedience to the truth! The answer to the “who” is the “false brethren” who sought to bring them into “bondage” (Gal. 2:4). When people freely practice sin, no matter how they came to believe that they are free to do so, they are enslaved by it (Rom. 6:16), and in such a condition, they are imprisoned, no matter how much they may deny it (cf. Jn. 8:33).

Second, there are those who think that because they are free in Christ, they are free to approve the practice of man-made religion. These are those who think that such practices as handclapping in worship are acceptable—after all, “The Bible doesn’t say you can’t”—but for what ever reason they will not practice such. Again, the appeal will sometimes be made to Romans 14, as if the erroneous practice were a mere matter of indifference. The faithful brethren whom they know will not agree with their self-proclaimed “liberty” may sometimes be regarded as the “weak” of First Corinthians 8:9, “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.” However, it must again be realized that worship is not a matter of indifference to God, as is eating or not eating meat (1 Cor. 8:8).

These, being convinced in their own mind that some are free to practice such with God’s approval, are imprisoned to their own beliefs. What would you think about an eldership who said privately, “We don’t see any thing wrong with handclapping in worship, but we will not allow it to take place here because too many people would be upset about it”? Is this not saying that if there were enough people

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TRAINING PREACHERS SINCE
1969

who were not "upset" with it that they would allow it? Why not make it known publically? Are they not imprisoned?! What would you think about a preacher who believed that the guilty of fornication spouse was free to remarry with God's approval, but refused to teach or even acknowledge it publically? What is keeping him from publically proclaiming it? Is he not imprisoned?! What would you think about a parent who tells his or her child, "Don't tell the preacher's kid you're going to the prom"? Why not? Is not such a parent imprisoned?!

At least for this second category there seems to be more hope for their rescue, for their conscience has not been seared to the point that they are openly practicing their approval of error. The fact that they do not want faithful brethren to know indicates that they are not completely comfortable with their error. However, they do not realize that because faithful brethren may not know their erroneous beliefs, does not mean that God does not know (cf. Jer. 23:24; Heb. 4:13). Tragically, they seem more fearful of what faithful brethren *might* know than what God *in fact* knows!

A Reality Check

Are we free or imprisoned? Are we able to truly evaluate our status? This writer could not help but to reflect upon recent events concerning Iraq as they relate to brethren who either do not realize their imprisonment to error or who refuse to admit their imprisonment to error as discussed above. Those following the events remember time and again the Iraqi minister of information (or, more accurately, misinformation) refuse to acknowledge reality. The local newspaper reported, "As televised evidence mounted that American

armored units had reached the western outskirts of Bagdad, Iraq's minister of information, Mohamed Saeed al-Sahhaf scoffed at the reports. "They are not any place. They are on the move everywhere. They are a snake moving in the desert. They hold no place in Iraq. This is an illusion."² Reality, however, proved otherwise, and, at the time of this printing, he has not been heard from again, except through a mocking doll that a toy manufacturer introduced.

Sadly, there are those in the church who should know the truth and be able to defend it (i.e. elders, preachers, members on the boards of directors of "Christian" camps, orphan homes, etc.), but are imprisoned by error. Like the minister of misinformation cited above, they are either oblivious to error in their midst or they are pretending to be unaware of such, and, like the minister of misinformation, to all those who know the truth, they are making fools of themselves and commanding less and less respect.

To evaluate whether we are free or imprisoned, let us answer for ourselves some questions. Have we obeyed the Gospel (Mk. 16:15-16), or are we still in sin (Lk. 13:3, 5)? If we have obeyed the Gospel, are we continuing to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4)? Preachers and elders, and for that matter all Christians, are there doctrines to which we hold that we cannot openly discuss with others? If so, why not? Are we afraid to let others know what we truly believe and practice? If so, why? Can we be like Paul and make "fully known [our] doctrine" (2 Tim. 3:10)? If not, why? Are we imprisoned by error or are we free? Reality reveals: How do we answer these questions?

ENDNOTES

¹Quotation taken from the report of Alan Sipress, "Officials Reveal Details of

Raid to Bring Jessica Lynch Home," *The [Lakeland] Ledger* 6 April 2003: A13.

²Patrick E. Tyler, "Big Guns Rattle Bagdad's Door," *The [Lakeland] Ledger* 4 April 2003: A13.

Director Of Public Relations Report

Gene Burgett

April has been a month full of blessings for me in my role as the Director of Public Relations. I spoke with the Alachua church of Christ on April 5th at a banquet honoring their Bible class teachers. The following day I had the opportunity to hear Garrett Russell preach his first sermon at the evening worship assembly of the Alachua church. Garrett will begin classes in Lakeland this August. I am currently contacting congregations that might be able to provide him support while he is in school. Any churches interested in helping are encouraged to contact me through the School office.

I was privileged to preach in Milton, Florida, during the morning worship assembly of the Margaret Street church of Christ April 13th. I also visited with the church at Gulf Breeze for their Sunday evening worship. Brother Jack Locklin, an elder at the Margaret Street church, and his wife, Sheree, were very kind and allowed me stay in their home while I was in Milton.

As I approach churches about financially supporting the Florida School of Preaching, I have noted that some fear such support will take away from money that might be used in

mission efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, training men to preach is supporting mission work on the most fundamental level. Missionary work usually begins with a preacher. As Paul put it: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15).

It is common that a church only considers it is doing mission work when it supports sending a preacher to a mission area. But, before raising the issue of sending a preacher, Paul raised the question, "And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

There can be no sending without a preacher to be sent. Training preachers is a fundamental part of mission work.

**Gene Burgett's
Speaking Schedule**

May 2-4
Weeki Wachi Christian Camp

May 4-7
Gospel Meeting,
Northside church of Christ,
Brooksville, FL (Brian Kenyon
speaks Sunday, May 4th)

May 23-25
Christian Evidences Workshop,
Florida Bible Camp

June 29
Hazel Green, AL

July 9
Central, Clearwater, FL

July 13-27
Visit various churches
in area of Walker County, AL

September 1
Wesconnett church of Christ
Jacksonville, FL

September 14-17
Gospel Meeting,
Liberty church of Christ, Jasper, AL

October 1
Wesconnett Lectureship
(manuscript required)

October 10-15
Home School Roundhouse

October 26-29
Gospel Meeting, Alachua, FL

November 9-13
Speak at Denton Lectures
Denton, TX
(manuscript required)



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