

6.

LET MY PEOPLE GO!

After reading the previous chapters of this book, some people may wonder if I am advocating the absence of any and all institutional authority among God's people. They may be thinking that I am urging the total cessation of submission to positional authority and human dominion in the church. They may have gotten the idea that I am suggesting the complete end of believers' submitting themselves to any pastor, bishop, discipler or Pope, merely because they have some title or religious position. If you are thinking this, then you have clearly understood the message. This is absolutely correct. Here I am teaching complete liberty for the children of God.

But some will no doubt say: "Won't this result in chaos?" "Won't believers then begin to do any old thing they please?" "Without specially trained leaders from seminaries, etc, wouldn't such liberty produce all kinds of heresies, sects, sin and any number of other evils?" "Without official leadership wouldn't the church just fall apart?"

There are many things which need to be said in response to these questions. These are valid concerns. However, it is often not easy to change human concepts. The fixed idea that many have in their minds concerning how the church must work may not change overnight. Therefore, our discussion will take time. We will try to

cover the many facets of these questions one at a time. It may be that your particular concern will not be addressed immediately. But please be patient as we examine these things together.

One thing must be admitted by any honest person looking at the situation of the church as a whole in the world today. It is not healthy. It is not well. Sin is rampant within her. For example, in the United States, sexual immorality – adultery and fornication – is as common within the evangelical church as it is in the world. Divorce rates are actually higher within the church than outside. Many church members are having secret abortions. Every day more and more leaders are discovered with hidden sin. New divisions constantly appear. Fresh heresies and sects arise with increasing frequency.

There are many church members whose lives are a mess. Many of them have been that way for years and never seem to change. The transformation of the lives of not a few seems very slow or non-existent. A great number of church attenders are rebellious, self-seeking, unloving and unholy. Many are dishonest, untrustworthy, covenant breakers (divorcers), gossipers, backbiters, criticizers and disobedient. Unfortunately, in many church groups, this is true of the majority, not the minority. Something is seriously wrong!

Certainly there are some bright spots. All is not lost. Everything is not dark. There are some who are being genuinely converted. It is possible to find some who are truly seeking the Lord. Certainly, in terms of numbers, the church is growing rapidly. I do not wish to be overly critical, but merely totally and completely honest about the true situation among God's people today.

While we are being completely honest, there are some clear facts which we must admit. The many problems which we see, including sin, division and heresy, have not been stopped or cured by our religious organizations. Our reliance on trained leadership has not prevented these things. Our dependence on men has not solved the problem. For example, how many leaders of deviant religious

sects today began as leaders in some church or other or even attended seminary? How many of them are today teaching false doctrines or even heresy?

Our officialized church government has not halted the spread of error, the tendency toward sin or the problem of division within the church. With all the talk and teaching today about submitting to some leader or other, the overall situation is only getting worse. In short, human leadership, positional authority and organizational control have clearly not worked to change the sinful tendencies of the human heart. This is something which we must be honest enough to admit.

As natural men we tend to look to institutions such as the police, the court system, the government etc. to subdue the evil tendencies of mankind. We look to schools to educate and impart values to our children. Perhaps we also imagine that this same sort of institutional structure will aid us in our efforts for God. Maybe we hope that similar types of organizations might help control the sinful tendencies of believers too.

However, even in the world, such things do nothing to change the hearts of men. For example, it may be that the threat of prison helps to subdue the flesh, but it does nothing to truly alter it. In the same way, positional authority in the church does nothing to transform the soul of man. It may serve to suppress the evil tendencies of some, but it can never achieve the objectives of God.

Perhaps then, the time has come to look in another direction. Possibly, it is high time to stop our dependence on human leaders and institutions and look somewhere else. If we can honestly admit that what is being done is not working, we should then seek another answer.

Therefore, it might just be the hour to begin to trust in Jesus. Maybe it is time to turn back to the risen Savior as our one and only authority. It is possible that He could run things well. By some chance, He might be able to deal with the sin, divisions and errors which are so rampant around us. Truthfully, we need another Head. We desperately need another Authority in our church experience. We must have

Someone powerful enough to change the human heart. It is only by true submission to Him that we will find the solution to the many problems in the church today.

We, the church, have tried the human authority way for almost 2,000 years. It hasn't worked. So now it is time to try God's way. Let us therefore, cast down all the idols. Let us remove any and all practices from our midst which hinder, limit or interfere with the authority of the true Head. We must abandon totally our dependence upon man or men and turn our hearts again to the Lord.

Anything and everything which substitutes for Him in the life of every believer must be cast aside. How we need a great repentance! How much God's people need to rend their hearts before Him and cry out for His leadership and authority in their midst. Our individual lives desperately need to be submitted to His lordship and our church gatherings are crying out for His direction.

RESTORING THE TRUE HEAD

This is the great need of today. We must restore the Head to His rightful position among us. We must enthrone Jesus as Lord of our lives and our church experience. He is the cure for our ills. He is the answer to every problem in the church. His leadership and His authority will resolve all questions of sin, heresy and division. It is He and He alone that we need. No new program of house meetings or discipleship will do the job. No returning to Judaism or "learning to submit to authority" will meet the need. No great manifestations of gifts or miracles can possibly effect the change that is needed. No insistence upon certain doctrinal truths will cure the problem.

What I am advocating here is indeed something very radical. What we need is a new kind of reformation or even revolution within the church. Martin Luther was considered a radical in his day. Indeed he did go a long way to help the church escape from the bondage of Catholicism.

But he did not go far enough. More change is needed. We must pick up where he left off and continue with this

reform until nothing human and earthly is left. We desperately need to press on with the cleansing of God's temple until no substitute altars and objects of worship remain. Moving in the fear of the Lord, we need to return to Him with all our hearts. If we leave any "Canaanites" in the land, eventually their influence will work to bring us back into idolatry and bondage.

Moses cried to Pharaoh in the name of the Lord saying: "Let my people go that they may serve Me" (Ex 7:16). Far too many of God's people today are also in bondage to various taskmasters. They are burdened down with following the dictates of human leadership. They are enslaved to an organized system of religious practice. Many and various leaders are reigning over them, urging them to use their time and effort to build up the leaders' own "great works for God."

Such submissive members are often used in the construction of worldly monuments which declare their leaders' success and pride. Almost invariably, the more successful a "church" or "ministry" becomes, the more lavish and grandiose their buildings seem to be. This requires the labor and money of the people of God. I believe that in these last days Jesus is desiring to set His people free from such bondage.

Honestly, we have nothing to lose by going this new scriptural, if unfamiliar, way. It is painfully obvious that the church of our day is not without "spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph 5:27). She is very far from what she needs to be in order to be ready to meet her King. If we are afraid to "risk" trusting completely in God, then we are left only with what we already have. This, my dear brothers and sisters, has not gotten the job done and never will.

What we need here to proceed is a great dose of faith. We need to believe that if we stop our doing, leading and organizing in the house of God that He might be capable of doing it. We must believe that Jesus is capable of being our Head. We must trust in an invisible Lord. We have to have faith that since He is upholding the entire universe, along with every atom in it, He could possibly lead every mem-

ber of His body. If we do not believe in His ability to do this, then we will go nowhere.

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb 11:6). It is imperative that the body of Christ return to a walk of faith with the risen Jesus. By faith, we can sense His leadership and follow Him. No visible, tangible, human substitute can ever help us arrive where we need to be.

IS THERE NO KING IN ISRAEL?

Some may object to this new way of following an invisible leader by quoting the verse in Judges 21:25 where we read: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Using the examples we find in the book of Judges of how far off people can get without leadership, they will insist that the idea of going without human leadership cannot work and will only produce confusion. Let us take some time here to examine this idea.

It is true that when there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes. The situation in those times was a real mess. Many wild and weird things happened. The people were completely without government or control.

But today our situation is completely different. Today, there is a King in Israel! We do have a Leader! We are supposed to be in touch with and submitting ourselves to a King. We have a very real, alive and present Teacher, Guide, Master, Pastor and whatever else is needed. There should be no lack of authority and leadership for any believer. The government of God, or the kingdom of God, is at hand. This means that it is present and available here and now. The only question is how much each of us are willing to submit ourselves to Him.

If we are genuinely submissive and submitting to Jesus, He will guide us in every aspect of our living. He will direct us in our relationships with one another. He will even lead us when we are meeting together in His name.

Jesus is willing and able to do all this and more. Simply by subjecting ourselves to Him, we will find new vistas of His truth and glory opening up every day in our lives.

But if we are not truly willing to subject ourselves to His control, if we are somewhat resistant to His rule, if we are rebellious in our hearts, then this invisible government will not work. We will not listen to Him, seek Him or obey Him. He will not really be the Lord of our lives.

However, if this is the case, then substituting Jesus' leadership with some human variety will not work either. If believers are refusing to submit to God, they will not be helped by submitting to man. The solution for rebellious believers is to learn to repent and genuinely obey Jesus. If they are unwilling to do this, there is nothing whatsoever that other believers can do to help them.

THE EXAMPLE OF ETHIOPIA

Perhaps many imagine that if the weight of human authority were suddenly lifted from the church, chaos would result. Others might think that most believers, without the support of Christian institutions, would simply fall away. Maybe meetings would cease to happen, evangelism would grind to a halt and ministry would vanish. Yet we have several examples in recent history which seem to speak something else. Please allow me to repeat a story which I have heard along this line.

Some years ago in the country of Ethiopia, the Communists took power. As part of their strategy to create an atheist state, they closed down all the church buildings and imprisoned all the pastors. They thought that they could put an end to all this religious nonsense.

So what happened? What was the result of this complete removal of all such positional authority and religious props? Did the church fall apart and disintegrate? Was disorder and confusion a result? No! Instead exactly the opposite occurred. Revival broke out. Without human institutions and earthly authority, everyone had to begin seeking the Lord for themselves. They had to pray. They needed to

seek out fellowship with one another. They had to learn to get in touch with God for themselves, hear from Him and obey Him. With no one to carry them along, with no religious institutions to supply them with programs, activities and entertainments, they were left with only God upon whom to depend.

According to the report which I heard, when the Communists took over, there were about 5,000 believers in the country. Within a short period of time, perhaps several years, this number exploded to about 50,000. The removal of the religious apparatus, the absence of all the props of human leadership and authority, turned out to be a great blessing. God was actually able to lead His people. Amazingly, He was capable of being the Head over all things to them. And His headship turned out to be much more powerful and effective than the human variety.

These folks could not plan any meetings. If they did, there was a good chance that the authorities would find out and arrest everyone. So they had to follow the Holy Spirit. They had to sense when and where to go to meet with other believers. Surprisingly, when they arrived at the the house of some brother or other, many others were already there meeting together.

Instead of depending on a man to organize and run their church experience, they had to seek God. Every day, they had to hear from Him, where to go, to whom to minister, with whom to pray, with whom to share the gospel. Theirs was a life of total dependence on Jesus.

And it worked! There was no confusion here. There was no chaos. Instead, all the members of the body worked together in harmony, simply following the leadership of the one Head.

This is exactly how the church worked in the book of Acts. We know that the believers were meeting daily from house to house (Acts 2:46). The apostles were teaching daily in the temple and also in homes. No doubt, many gifted brothers and sisters were circulating among the others, teaching, encouraging, praying, healing, prophesying, working miracles, etc.

But who was organizing all this? Was it Peter who was scheduling the visits of pastors to various homes? Was it James or John who was planning the different home meetings and getting a little teaching ready for each home group leader to give? Who was in control? Who was running the church? It was Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit who was leading and orchestrating all the activities of the church.

They did not need human beings to do this. They did not need to depend on man. There was no confusion. It was not a great mess. No one needed to manage everything and tell the others what to do. There was no necessity for a lot of organization and planning. Yet somehow everything worked. Evangelism happened. Needs were met. The believers were edified and strengthened in the faith.

The many ministries and meetings probably seemed to happen in some kind of co-ordinated fashion. This is because they were all being directed by the same Person. The risen Lord Himself was among them, leading every aspect of the church. He, the Head, was directing every movement of His own body.

How we need a dose of this kind of Christianity today! How much we, God's people, need to return to Him as our leader, teacher and guide. If we would only, by faith, look to Him for the guidance in our everyday lives and our corporate experience, there is no limit to what He might do in our midst. The truth is that, instead of helping God with all our authority figures and structures, we are actually hindering His work among us.

RESTORING THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

We, God's people, need to return to a walk of faith. We need to repent of what we have done to supplant His government and restore Him to His rightful place among us. It is high time, no, it is past time for us to cast aside all substitutes, anything which takes His place among His people. Only in this way will we begin to experience New

Testament Christianity. Only by returning to Him as our head and leader will we know His power and glory in our midst. True revival will only result if and when we restore all power and authority in the church to Jesus Christ. He is able and ready to lead His people.

You see, when we try to establish authority figures, we create a kind of bottleneck in the church. This is what I call the “funnel problem.” Men are finite. Their time, attention and energy is limited. Their capacity, imagination and even revelation about the work of God is restricted. So when we lift them up as our head, the activities of Christ’s body become very truncated. With man at the helm, the members are not free to follow Jesus. Everything must be checked out with and “funneled through” the leadership.

Suppose, for example, sister Ruth feels that the Lord wants her to start a Bible study for women at her house. Before she does this, she must ask the pastor for his approval. She doesn’t want to be seen as being rebellious. She does not want others to think she is challenging the authority of the leaders, so she must go and ask first.

But the pastor is busy. Perhaps he has just had a fight with his wife or a family crisis. He is reluctant for Ruth to start a Bible study without his supervision. What might she teach? What might happen? If anything goes wrong, he will be responsible and have to put out the fire. So, he says to her, “Look, I don’t have time right now to handle this. Perhaps another time. We will look into this,” or some other such response. Thus Ruth is not really free to follow Jesus. Human leadership becomes a bottleneck for the flow of God’s directions.

This is just one of thousands of examples. This kind of problem is endemic with any kind of human authority. All of the members of the body of Christ have gifts. Therefore, they are all to become ministers, exercising their gifts for the benefit of the others.

But no one man or even a group of men is capable of supervising all this. Only someone infinite could co-ordinate and direct it. So, when man is in charge, a huge part of this ministry disappears. The funnel at the top of the

authority pyramid restricts it. No one is simply free to follow the Lord and do what He says. In this way, human authority, instead of helping the work of God, greatly hinders it.

How many men and women of God are backslidden and/or pursuing the things of the world because there was no room for their gifts and ministry in the church? They did not fit into the program. The activities of the group simply did not permit time or space for them. Their gifts and callings were not recognized. Maybe the organizational structure only left room for a few gifted members, while the rest could only sit passively in the pews and listen. Perhaps the leader felt threatened by their anointing or gift, so he slowly squeezed them out. These and many other such evils are a result of human authority and earthly structure in the church.

But what a difference it is when Jesus is in the lead! Then all the members are free to function as He leads them. Their gifts and talents are needed. It is precisely their joint of supply (Eph 4:16) which some other member is lacking to overcome some sin, to be healed of some disease or liberated from some demonic force.

With Jesus directing all the movements of His body, every need is met. The power of the Holy Spirit is more in evidence, since each one is responding to and obeying Him. The body is built up much more quickly and efficiently, because each one is doing their job without restrictions. Everything is co-ordinated because one Head is in charge.

Perhaps brother Philip the evangelist could be a good example here. He felt that the Holy Spirit was telling him to go out into the middle of the desert and stand there (Acts 8:26). This seems like a strange kind of leading.

So what did he do? Did he go and ask permission from Peter? Did he get advice from John? Did James counsel him something like this? "Look brother, this seems a little strange. What could God possibly want you in the middle of the desert for? Probably this was just your imagination or an evil spirit. We need your gifts here where the believ-

ers are, not in the wilderness. No, I don't think you should go."

Instead, Philip obeyed God. Consequently, He led a servant of the queen of Ethiopia to Christ and quite possibly this whole nation was impacted with the gospel at that time. The result of his obedience was spiritual fruit. This is precisely how it could work today if we gave God the chance to lead us Himself.

WHAT! TURN EVERYBODY LOOSE?

So if we simply let everyone loose, teaching them to submit to and follow Jesus, what would happen? On the positive side, I believe revival could break out. Many gifts and ministries would be released. Many believers would be challenged as to whether or not they really had a commitment to the Lord. The body of Christ would be edified much more quickly and efficiently. The power of God would be seen in His church. Even more than this, He would come and make His home among us.

On the negative side, there would be mistakes made. Some would sin. Others would be misled. Still others would backslide. No doubt, there would be some error and/or heresy. Certainly, in the New Testament times, such things also occurred too.

But such sin and error is no different from what we have today. The negative things which might happen are already happening in great fullness in the church of our time. So there is really no risk. The only risk is not doing what God is leading us to do. The only peril is in disobedience. Two thousand years of human control in the church has not brought us to the goal. Let us then take our hands off the controls and let Jesus Christ reign supreme over us.

If suddenly all believers were free from human authority, then they would either have to sink or swim. They would be faced with the necessity to seek God for themselves. They would have to learn how to hear from Him and follow Him. They would be pressed to know His word and be able to sense His presence.

Many might suppose that most would sink. However, I believe we would be surprised by how many would learn to swim. It is not as if there is no help for the weak ones. God would never let anyone whose heart was open to Him perish. Further, there exists in the body of Christ many gifted members who would minister to those who were in trouble.

Yet this ministry must not be to bring anyone back into bondage to human leadership, but a helping of the weaker ones to get to know Jesus for themselves. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and His ministry through His body, I believe that anyone who really has a heart to follow Jesus would certainly learn how to swim.

THE DANGER OF ORGANIZATION

In the New Testament almost nothing was organized. There we have very few examples of "central planning." In fact, it is impressive how little organization they had. Yet this author is not insisting that it is unbiblical to organize anything, ever. Truthfully, it is impossible to live without any form of pre-planning. For example, if I call up a friend and invite him over to dinner, we have then organized something. If I agree to meet someone at a particular time and place, our meeting has then become organized to some extent. As we live, we will always need to have some form of organization.

The danger of organization is this: once it is set in motion, it can very easily stay in motion. It can take on a life of its own. Once the essential elements of any work or effort are set in place, it is easy for things just to keep going on and on. The Ford motor company is a good example of this. Henry Ford is dead. He has been dead for a long time. Yet the company which he organized is still going on to this day.

Many works for the Lord are also in this category. We may concede, for the sake of argument, that some work or other was initiated by Jesus. Perhaps He led some child of His to labor for Him in some specific way. But how about

today? Is this still His will? Is He still in charge of everything? Or has the Holy Spirit moved on and someone is still trying to make something work which is really now an empty form.

Part of this danger is that people tend to like things to be well organized. They like things to be predictable. They feel comfortable with something well structured and well run. They have little need to seek the Lord for themselves. Their flesh can relax and trust that everything will be taken care of. Familiarity feels safe and secure and many people really like that feeling.

When things are organized, believers do not have to be in living, constant touch with Jesus. They do not have to be exercised to seek Him moment by moment. They do not have to be ready to obey. They do not have to be willing to say something or do something for Him. With an organization, they do not have to be ready to change their activities, their employment or even the place where they live. They can simply sit back and let the organization run their meetings and their lives.

But our Lord is “new every morning” (Lam 3:23). While He was on the earth, He was constantly doing something different. His life was far from routine. Every day, the disciples could be surprised by what He would do, where He might go or what He might say. Therefore, we can be sure that His leading in the church and in our individual lives will be this way also. We must have the flexibility to move and change with Him at any moment.

The experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness is an excellent example of this. They were following the living God who was manifested in the column of fire and in the cloud. When He moved, they were supposed to be ready to move also. This cloud or pillar of fire would move at any moment, day or night. They had to be always ready (Ex 13:21,22; 40:36,37).

Perhaps they would stay in one place an hour, a week, months or even a year. But at any moment, God might move and they had to move with Him. They had to be ready and willing to pack up everything in an instant and

go. Even the tabernacle which God instructed Moses to build was made with this in mind. It was portable. It was easily dismantled and ready to move. This readiness to abandon our established practices and behaviors, meeting times and places, any and all ingrained religious habits must be our attitude also.

Therefore, the key to any organization of meetings, ministries or works for God which we do is that we must be led by the Holy Spirit. It is His direction which must initiate anything. It is He who must be leading us in the doing of whatever is done. Further, we must be acutely sensitive to Him to dismantle anything which we have previously organized. We must be constantly attuned to Him to stop anything which has been put in motion.

It is essential that we preserve His rulership over everything, especially over anything which tends to become organized and therefore routine and predictable. Otherwise we will soon be left with an empty shell. We will only have something which God once used and blessed at some time in the past but today is a mere form or formula.

One of the very few examples of anything being organized we find in the New Testament was the appointment of deacons in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7)). There, a problem arose. Some widows were being neglected when food was distributed. Evidently, this was something which was being done in a sporadic, haphazard way, and some non-Jewish members were being neglected. So they selected some men to take care of this work.

But please note what kind of men they chose. Almost anyone can distribute food. Even an unbeliever could take charge of this kind of work and even run it fairly. However, they were careful to select men with a certain virtue. They were especially "full of the Holy Spirit" (vs 3). The apostles and others were concerned that this work be something which was directed by God. It was not enough to simply meet the need. They wanted to be sure that what was done was initiated, conducted and if necessary terminated by the Lord. So they selected men who knew how to follow

Him. In this way this practical necessity could remain under the control of the Head.

GLORIOUS LIBERTY FOR GOD'S CHILDREN

We have been called into "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). We have been freed from sin. We have been released from the law. As we understand the ways of God more perfectly, we will even become free from the bondage of being "under" religious authorities too. The children of God are not supposed to be subject to any variety of earthly servitude. Paul goes so far as to say that due to this tremendous liberty "all things are lawful" (I Cor 6:12; 10:23) for a believer. A Christian is completely free to do whatever he or she chooses.

In the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve free will. They could do anything they wished. Only one thing was prohibited. But even this was freely available to them. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was right in front of their eyes. Their Lord even gave them the liberty to make the wrong choice. He never interfered, but let them make their own decision.

In exactly the same way today, every Christian must have total freedom to choose their own way unhindered by any religious authority. Should we give less liberty to one another than God gives to us? Are we in a position to restrict the complete freedom of others in a way which the Lord never does? Clearly the answer is "no." Just as our forefathers were allowed in the garden to freely choose, so today every believer must be permitted complete free will.

However, this great liberty becomes a test for us. Our choices will expose us. What exactly is in our hearts? Where do our affections lie? Are we really seeking Jesus and His kingdom with all our hearts or are there some other things lurking in our souls? Do we truly desire to please Him in all things, or are we playing around with His forgiveness and grace? How are we using our liberty?

Complete freedom will expose just where your heart really is in relationship to Jesus Christ. What you do, say or

think when there is no human authority figure watching over you reveals what is really inside.

If, when you realize your true position of freedom, you stop praying very much, this says something. If you no longer meditate in the word of God daily, seeking His will and revelation, this too speaks. If you abandon your habit of daily seeking out other brothers and sisters for fellowship and prayer, this also is revealing.

If meeting together with other believers to worship our Lord and share with one another does not draw your heart, this exposes where your heart really is. If walking hand in hand with Jesus and being "all pleasing" (Col 1:10 KJV) to Him in every aspect and detail of your life is not your focus and delight, then this certainly speaks loudly. If there is anyone who is not really committed to the Lord, if by some chance there are a few whose participation in the Christian community is not based upon submission to and love for Jesus, true liberty will show it for what it is.

You see, these faults cannot be cured by submission to man. They cannot be fixed by insisting on obedience to positional authority. In fact, it is often only when such authority is removed that the real attitudes of the heart are exposed. Many times, submission to human authority only serves to cover up these and many other problems. We easily begin to do "eye service" and become "men pleasers," instead of "doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:6).

The goals of Christians can easily become trying to satisfy the demands of our human leader and/or some particular religious group while actually neglecting those of our Lord. If our authority figure is satisfied with our conduct, we naturally assume that Jesus is also. When the standards of our particular religious group are met, then it is easy to suppose that we are right with God. In this way, such submission works to hide sin instead of expose it.

But God sees deep into the recesses of our heart. He knows what is there, even if it is lying dormant. No discipler or pastor can do such a thing. Yet "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13). God knows it all. You may hide it

from others. You may even try to hide from yourself. But Jesus “searches the minds and hearts” (Rev 2:23).

EXPOSING SIN

A large part of the work of God in our lives is to expose such sin. His purpose is for us to see what we are really like, repent for our sin and be transformed by the work of His Spirit. The job of the Comforter whom Jesus sent was just this, to convict the world of sin (Jn 16:8). Perhaps this is one reason we are given such great liberty. It exposes just who and what we really are.

How you use your liberty shows what is in your heart. It reveals whether or not you are really right with God and walking in intimacy with Him. Therefore, total liberty is an absolutely essential experience for every believer. If you have never enjoyed it, then it is something you should seek to know. As you walk in it, you will begin to see yourself in the light of God. Your choices and actions will reveal just who and what you really are.

If your heart is really seeking after the righteousness of God and His kingdom, this will be shown. If there are other priorities within you, this too will be exposed. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who has given you this liberty. It is His will that you experience it. Only in this way can you see yourself in His light and be transformed into all that He is. Without such liberty, the work of God cannot really be completed in your life.

Yes, anywhere there is liberty, there is a danger. There is the danger of people misusing it. Liberty gives us the option to simply please ourselves. It is all too possible for a Christian to abuse God’s goodness and use it as a means to satisfy the flesh and to sin. Paul exhorts us to be careful not use our liberty “as an opportunity for the flesh,” to fulfill its sinful desires (Gal 5:13).

He teaches that we should instead use our freedom to become servants of the other brothers and sisters. We should freely give ourselves in His love to help them grow up into God’s fullness. Further, He warns us that because

of our liberty, there is a danger of becoming entangled again in the yoke of bondage of sin or the law (Gal 5:1).

Paul's instruction is that we were freed from the law, but not simply to be without any government whatsoever. He says that we were liberated from the law so "that [we] may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead" (Rm 7:4). So we see that the goal is not to be without restraint or authority, but to willingly submit ourselves completely to Jesus. The object of our liberty is not to become some kind of "free spirits" wandering around doing whatever we desire, but to choose to willingly subject our body, soul and spirit to Him.

By giving us complete liberty, God is testing us. Our total freedom then becomes a sort of litmus paper to see what is really in our hearts. In this age of grace, our Lord is not imposing His authority on anyone. He never pushes beyond our willingness to submit. Any tiny amount of resistance on our part stops His work in our lives.

With liberty comes responsibility. We become answerable to God for our choices. When someone else is running our life, then it is easy for us to imagine that they are responsible for the results. But when we are at liberty to choose, then it is we who will bear the burden of the consequences. Someday when Jesus returns He will judge us for what we did with the liberty which He freely gave to us. Each and every one of us should be living with this coming judgment day in mind.