

# No Longer our Own

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When we consider the parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke, we gain an understanding of Christ's redemptive work in our lives. Luke 15:11-23. This parable tells the story of a young man who asked his father for his share of the family estate. He then left home and travelled to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance with loose living. If we assume the son was the second of two brothers, his inheritance would have amounted to one third of the capital value of the family enterprise. It would have been a difficult scenario for the father to divide up his property in this way and yet he still managed to give the young fellow his share.

When he had spent everything, and had become impoverished because famine gripped the land, the prodigal came to his senses and returned home saying, 'I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men'. Luke 15:19. But the father had compassion on his son and welcomed him back into the family, restoring all that he had lost. The father reinvested in his son and gave back to him. When Christ redeems us with His blood, He also gives back to us by restoring our inheritance. The




first portion of our inheritance is our 'sonship' and it includes the natural abilities that He has ordained for us.

We must never undersell or under-rate our redemption; nor should we presume upon it. When we were redeemed, it cost a portion of His precious blood to buy us back from our state of squandered destruction. We may have grown up in the church all our lives, but it still doesn't change the fact that we were dead in our trespasses and sin. Every person from the age of sixteen through to about twenty years must negotiate this crisis of salvation or redemption. We are not our own and, therefore, our abilities are no longer our own. They were purchased by Christ when He paid the price to ransom and redeem us. The free gift of God is eternal life but salvation isn't free at all; it has a capital value. It cost the Father, Son and Holy Spirit everything to buy us back. Of course, we are all delighted to be redeemed. But it means that we no longer have the freedom to do what we like with our lives or our abilities, although we must manage them as 'good stewards of the manifold grace of God'. 1 Pet 4:10.

In order to become good stewards of God's grace, we must firstly be trained. In the four years after becoming a Christian, my whole life was turned around. I went from someone who did no work at school, and was not scholastic in any way, to someone who spent most of his

spare time studying the Scriptures. Of course, I was blessed by certain people who took an interest in my training, but in the end I had to do the hard work myself. Whether we are young or old, we are obligated to be trained. Christ wants to give us our eternal reward which is a double portion of His blessing and the second portion of our inheritance. We received the first portion when He redeemed us and gave back to us what we had squandered.

In his first letter, Peter wrote, 'Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one who is in authority ... For such is the will of God that by doing right you might silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.' 1 Pet 2:13,15,16. It is interesting to note, that Peter defined 'free men' as 'bondslaves of God'. Paul also wrote about freedom. He said in his letter to the Galatians, 'Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh'. Gal 5:13. It is obvious that our freedom is not like the freedom of the world. The world's freedom is in fact bondage because people are clinging to a squandered possession. But that is not our scenario. We have been bought with a price and, therefore, we are accountable for our freedom. We are bondslaves.




In his second letter, Peter speaks about false ministers of the gospel who speak 'arrogant words of vanity' and 'entice by fleshy desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error'. 2 Pet 2:18,19. We would all agree that this was the mindset of the prodigal son. He was certainly drawn away by fleshy desires and sensuality and he ended up in a pigpen. But the mercy of the father restored him back to his place in the family. The father paid the redemption price by giving back to his son all that had been lost. Peter went on to say that false ministers lived in error, promising freedom while they themselves were slaves of corruption. He explained that a man is enslaved by the things which overcome him.

In Galatians, Paul also talked about 'false brethren'. Gal 2:4. There are many gospels with false promises, intoxications, enticements, and inducements. We have to know the nature of our freedom because 'it was for freedom that Christ set us free'. Gal 5:1. He paid a price for our freedom and we are no longer our own. Therefore, we have to be accountable for the freedom that we have. We may in fact be using our ability, the gift of Christ, as an opportunity or occasion for the flesh. We may be using the portion that Christ has committed to us to build up our fleshy life. Instead, we should be building ourselves up on our most holy faith. Jude 1:20.

After a number of years, Paul went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas to give an account of his ministry to the other apostles. Many were not happy with what he said and became his opponents. But James, Peter and John embraced him and gave Paul the right-hand of fellowship and said, 'Yes, you're on the right course'. Paul wrote to the Galatians, 'Not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But it was because of the false brethren ... who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.' Gal 2:3-5

The irony of Paul's teaching is that we have been set free only to become bondslaves. He called his fellow brethren 'fellow doulos' which means 'fellow slave' or 'fellow servant'. When Paul referred to the false brethren who were trying to spy out his liberty, I think they were seeking to understand how grace worked in Paul's life. The more they persecuted Paul and tried to close him down, the more effective his ministry became. He received 'a greater grace' or 'more grace'. James 4:6. Many people are not yet walking in the freedom of Christ in a sustainable and continuous way, but are finding themselves reverting to old ways and using their liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. Christ has restored to us our abilities and the



freedom to use them as we choose, as long as we remain a bonds slave.


In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote, 'It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm, and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.' Gal 5:1. This is a very categorical statement. 'It was for freedom that Christ set us free.' He laid hold of us by paying our ransom price. It was like the contract of the battlefield. He won us and we became His prisoners. In fact, we are only free when we are His prisoner. In the book of Hebrews, it says, 'Remember the prisoners as though you yourself were imprisoned'. Heb 13:3. Of course, we know that he was talking about those who were literally in prison. But he was also suggesting that those who had been bought with the purchase price of redemption are equally in prison because they are not their own.

This was the amazing thing about Paul's liberty. He was locked away in a prison, and yet produced a legacy that we would not have if he hadn't been severely incarcerated. That is the mystery of grace. If he hadn't written those letters in prison, we would not have a large part of the New Testament or an understanding of redemption. The apostle John was on that Alcatraz type island called Patmos. In his most extreme

imprisonment, John wrote the book of Revelation. You and I need to experience the same thing. We are going to be most effective when we are imprisoned by Christ. Like Paul, we are His prisoner. Paul wrote, 'I the prisoner of the Lord'. Eph 4:1. He also referred to men like Titus and Timothy as fellow prisoners even though they had never been behind bars.

In the book of James, we read that He gives 'more grace' or 'greater grace'. James 4:6. This is the evidence of His investment in us. When Christ paid our redemption price, He gave our abilities back to us as the first portion of our inheritance. But because we are now His prisoners, we invest those abilities in Christ who then gives us 'more grace'. In the parable of the talents, we read of a master who entrusted talents, which were a measure of wealth, to his servants. 'For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.' Matt 25:14,15. The parable of the talents teaches us that He gives grace or 'talents' according to our ability.

The only people who receive grace in this way are those who steward their abilities as prisoners of Christ under the contract of the battlefield. Then the Lord begins to



give 'more grace'. If we are not getting 'more grace', we need to consider how well we are stewarding our abilities. Perhaps we have become distracted and need to make an adjustment. After beginning well, what has hindered us? Gal 5:7. We may not be going off to perdition or destruction, but what about our eternal reward? I want the maximum eternal reward that has been deemed for me, because I want to be part of that glorious bride of Christ which will multiply forever.


Christ is constantly laying hold of us to make us a prisoner. We are in difficulty if we find ourselves kicking against this process, because this is the gospel and it is the only freedom that Christ has promised. I am absolutely certain that the prodigal, having been freely restored, was able to be retrained. I have no doubt that he was repatriated and gave much consideration to what made him rebel in the first place. In the same way, we need to consider the nature of our abilities and determine if we have committed them to Christ as a slave or prisoner.

Perhaps we have committed them in the past but have begun to deviate? Are we using our freedom as an opportunity or occasion for the flesh? I haven't seen anyone in the world receive grace according to ability. However, I've seen many Christians who have received

grace but taken it out and multiplied their ability in the world. What kind of judgement awaits the one who uses their ability for their own freedom? Of course, this would include all of mankind. And what kind of judgement awaits the person who, having become a prisoner and slave of Christ, received 'more grace' but used it to build himself up?

When I was seventeen, I took the kingdom by force. I studied my Bible for an hour every day for seven years and I began to teach and preach. I didn't determine to go into the ministry, but I did determine to study the Scriptures. But now I know that I must preach the gospel because He has invested in me in the same way He has invested in you. As Paul said to the Corinthians, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel'. 1 Cor 9:16. The Lord gives grace according to our ability. He then asks us to 'go and trade'. For me that means more study, more meditation and more prayer. If we don't study our Bible, we will find ourselves diminishing whilst others increase in grace.

When He gives 'more grace', we need to be dynamic and adapt. We may need to do things differently to how we did them before. However, it doesn't mean that we throw everything out and start again. And as He adds to us, His grace will eventually far exceed our ability. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told a parable about minas. A certain



nobleman gave ten minas to ten servants and told them to do business while he travelled to a far country. When he returned home he wanted to 'know how much every man had gained by trading'. If the servant had made five minas, he was given authority over five cities, and if he made ten minas he was given authority over ten cities. The one who refused to trade had his mina taken from him and given to the one who had ten. Luke 19:12-25. Minas are a measure of authority. We learn from this parable that we cannot step forward to assume authority if we have not been stewarding our ability. That would be presumption.

There are multiple steps before we are given authority. Firstly, we recover our ability through redemption and we faithfully steward that ability. Of course, we will need courage if we are going to trade because there will be rises and falls in the market place with good times and bad. We then receive a quota of grace and we add it to our regime of skill. He asks us to be faithful in that which is least, and in something which belongs to another. We need to be a 'flunky', to get our hands dirty, to work hard, to labour, and to feel like a prisoner. Paul said that an heir who is still a child, is no better than a slave. Gal 4:1. He is no better than a slave until the day grace comes to him. To me, grace is like a highly potent chemical which changes the

composition of everything, because it is a little quota of Christ Himself. We must, therefore, change our historic thinking about who we are and what we do. We need to let Him bring grace to our lives.