

The readiness, too, with which the Jewish people, after being set free by the Gospel, returned to bondage is a cause of wonder. They seemed to dearly love the beggarly elements, and that in spite of the fact that they cost them time and effort and money. The human heart seems resolutely set in opposition to salvation by grace. Men despise and reject the freedom which is obtained without money and without price, and will undergo any degree of drudgery and degradation to establish a righteousness of their own. In this vain attempt they will enslave themselves by innumerable vexatious rules of human invention, tithing mint and anise and cummin, while omitting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith. They will practise unauthorized and even unnatural austerities, superfluous fasts, seclusion from legitimate social enjoyments, and a hundred inane formalities which can neither be justified by reason nor by the letter or spirit of the Gospel. They will cling to such after they have been shown a thousand times to be utterly worthless, contrary to common sense and the plain teaching of Jesus Christ. Thus it was when the light of the world first appeared. "The darkness apprehended it not." And thus it is still. And the evil is not confined to any one sect, religious denomination, place or nationality—it is universal.

Just as idolatry is natural to all, indigenous to the human heart, so is this tendency to multiply formalities and appearances because the substance is not. And, sad to say, history shows, beyond doubt, that the church has been corrupted by drawing enormously in this respect from pagan sources. This has been self-imposed slavery; and deliverance from all such and a return to Scriptural purity and simplicity, form essential factors in spiritual freedom. Once more, spiritual freedom consists in—

(4) *Exemption from servile submission to the doctrines and commandments of men.*

The imperative word of Him who sets us free is: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. Hence, He enjoins us to "call no man master," and certainly no combination of men. In things spiritual, things pertaining to God and the conscience, we recognize only one Lord. We strongly maintain personal freedom and responsibility before Him. To his own Divine Master each one must stand or fall. Every one of us must give an account of himself to God. "God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith

and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also."

It follows, necessarily, from this position—a position maintained by the branch of the church to which we belong, for over two centuries and a half—that in determining and defending our liberty the Word of God is supreme; and this being so, it becomes the privilege and bounden duty of all to search its contents and ascertain its meaning. In doing so many questions, some of which we may mention, will necessarily demand attention. For example:

(1) Is the Word so dark and ill-adapted to general use that I cannot with ordinary intelligence and education understand it? Is this the general character which a God of infinite wisdom and goodness has stamped upon the volume of revelation to man? Must it be exclusively read and interpreted by a limited and profoundly learned class of specialists, or is it open to all, a heavenly boon to all our race?

Certainly the latter. God intends that His Word of truth should run, and have free course and be glorified. The dangerous obscurity which is attributed to it is a grievous slander against revelation. The path of duty and of glory is so clearly indicated thereby that "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." The deep things of His kingdom and of eternal life God hath revealed unto babes. And to tell us that the Word is not for general use, that we are not to search the Scriptures, on the cunning pretext that it is unintelligible, is to rob us in part, of the freedom which is our God-given heritage.

(2) Is God the Father, who so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son for its redemption, so reluctant and unwilling to hear the cry of His highest earthly creature, man, that we must invoke the aid of many special intercessors on earth and in heaven, in order to command His attention and rouse His sympathy in our behalf? No! *A thousand times, No!* This is a vile misrepresentation of our Father in Heaven. Even the inarticulate voice of dumb creatures reaches His compassionate ear. The ravens and young lions cry to Him, the eyes of all wait upon Him, and He giveth them their meat in due season. And to man He says, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"; "Call upon me, and I will answer you"; "And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

Why, then, should we for a moment regard the doctrines and commandments of men that in any degree deprive us of the liberty of access to our Father, through our only intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ?

(3) Does the Word represent Jesus so in different towards those for whom He died that