

# LIBERTY ONLY IN TRUTH

by John Hall

---

*Hall's discourse on spiritual liberty derived from seeking God's precepts and statutes, arguing that true freedom comes not from worldly license but from obedience to God's Word, offering freedom from worldly bondage, corrupting influences, and sinful associations.*

1 Chapters

# Table of Contents

1. Liberty Only in Truth

## Liberty Only in Truth

---

Liberty Only in Truth And I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts.--Psalms 119:45.

God is the Governor of this world. Some one may say, that is a very elementary truth. Even so; there have been long ages in the history of our race when that truth was not accepted and when the most intelligent of our race believed something directly opposed. There have been multitudes of men, for example, who believed, like Aristotle, that matter is eternal. There are multitudes still who believe that in some way or other nature governs itself. There is a large class of thinkers who, without taking the name to themselves, are practically pantheists, and, like Spinoza and Fichte and Hegel, persuade themselves that all is God, as they express it, and that God is all. You do not need to be told that the earlier portion of the Old Testament Scriptures God has given to us that we might have these illusions banished, and that we might be made to know that God is the Creator and the Ruler of all things, that He is not nature, and nature is not God; that He is not to be confounded with the works of His hands; that He is a distinct, personal and holy Being, who has created all, and who has a right, on the ground of creation, even if there were no other, to be the Ruler of all. It took long to make men understand this truth, simple and elementary as it seems to you and to me. When we say that God governs the globe, we do not mean the mere earthly, solid structure on which we dwell. We mean that He governs the inhabitants of it, the communities and the individuals. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." "The Lord reigneth, let the nations tremble." "He raiseth up kings and he putteth them down." He calls into being Pharaohs that He may show His power and His glory in relation to them. His providence is most holy and wise and powerful, and it is not general merely, it is particular, extending to all the creatures and to all their actions. These things we have to keep in mind in relation to Jehovah.

Now it would seem, surely, that if a man believed this his common sense would dictate to him that, living in a world that God had made and God rules in every detail, if he wishes to be happy in it, he must have respect to the law of Him who has made and who rules. Common sense indicates that if we live in a house it is desirable to be on good terms with the head of the house if we wish to be comfortable. Common sense dictates that if a man is in the employment of others, it is wise for him to have a right understanding, to stand well with the head of the department in which he is engaged. Common sense teaches us that if we are subjects in a kingdom and wish to be safe and happy, we must respect the laws by which the kingdom is ruled. And we have only to extend this principle, and we get to the point that was before the Psalmist's mind when he says: "I will walk at liberty, for I seek (or, as it is in the revision, without changing the meaning, 'I have sought') thy statutes." I am living in Thy world, I am dependent upon Thee, I have taken pains to know what Thy will is, that I may do it; and so I walk at liberty. That is the idea that is brought to us in the text, and it is easy for you to see how good and practical that idea is. But the question may arise, can we know the precepts and the statutes that God has given to us? You do not need to be told that that is within our reach. God has spoken to us in this revelation, as He did speak less articulately in the works of His hands, and in the instincts and convictions that He produced in our spirit. We have His revelation in our hands. We can seek the knowledge of it. In many instances

well-meaning and right-minded boys, under great difficulties, have sought education that they may get on in this world. In many other cases boys have had education at their very doors, and have never sought it, and consequently have been of little account in the world. Now the difference is not great, in this aspect of it, between ordinary secular education and the spiritual education of which the text gives us an illustration. Here are God's statutes and precepts put within our reach. We can search them, seek them, know them and do them, by the grace that God is willing to give, or we can push them aside, ignore and disregard them, and take our own way, and the result will be absolute and everlasting failure in our lives. We can not have this too solemnly fixt in our thoughts. God has spoken to us. What shall we do with His word? Shall we neglect it and pass it by, or shall we take it, study it, seek it, as the verse expresses it, and make it the rule of our lives? Jesus Christ has come down from heaven to live among us, and has said to our race, "Come unto me and learn of me"; and there are millions to whom this message has come and they disregard and ignore it; they do not come to Him, they do not learn of Him. Can we wonder if the Judge should say to them when they appear at His seat, "I never knew you"? If you read the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, you will see pictures of an angry God, as an avenging fire, in the apostle's description. On whom does the fire fall? On whom does the Judge show his indignation? Is it upon the misers and the miscreants and the murderers of the race merely? Oh, no. It is upon them that "know not God and obey not the gospel of his Son." Is it any wonder that the sacred writer should say, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth"; not merely remember that there is a God—remember thy Creator, who made thee and in whose hand thy fortunes are. Remember in the days of thy youth, the formative days, the days when character is being shaped. What is well begun is half ended. The life that is well begun in this way has a guaranty of usefulness and success. The life that is not begun in this way has a dark and gloomy prospect before it. Remember thy Creator. We all know well what is meant when some one says to us, on going away from our homes, "Don't forget your home, don't forget your mother." We know what that means. And God's messenger speaks to us in the same tone when he makes this appeal: Remember thy Creator; remember His power, remember His will, remember His statutes, seek His precepts, and by doing this thou wilt be able to walk at liberty.

You may have mere liberty, and not light and not the liberty of God. You may combine liberty with means, with power, and with a certain degree of prosperity; you may combine it with equality and with fraternity, and yet not have the true enlightenment. True enlightenment comes in the way, indicated in the text, by the seeking of God's precepts, the knowing of God's statutes, and this you and I need to keep in mind. "What is liberty?" once asked Burke. "What is liberty without wisdom and without virtue? Such liberty is the greatest of all possible evils, for it is vice and folly and madness, without tuition and without restraint." Mere liberty without other forces working in the sphere that it opens up, is only another name for license. "Give me liberty or give me death," said Patrick Henry—not because he felt the need of enlightenment. He had been enlightened by the teaching of an intelligent Scottish father, by the preaching of the splendid sermons of Samuel Davies, and especially by the daily study, which he kept up to his dying day, of his Bible. He had been enlightened by these things. What he craved for himself and for his fellow men was open space in which, unhindered, other and mighty influences might tell upon his fellow men and make the country what, in the blessing of God, it has become. Settle this in your minds: Liberty is simply the freedom for other forces to act, and it is for you and me who are free, to see what these forces are, and we never can have any so good as those which the Psalmist speaks of when he says that

he sought God's precepts, he studied God's statutes, that he might do them, and so walk at liberty. We want to walk at liberty. How can we do it? If we do not thus walk at liberty, there is only one alternative—stay in bondage and walk in bondage, moving about indeed, and apparently free, but with moral chains binding our natures and our whole being in bondage to the powers that will rejoice in our misery and ultimate ruin. It is to make men understand this that we have such institutions as we enjoy to-day. For this end church edifices are reared. For this end people are invited to come and be regularly in them and under their influence. For this end God has been pleased to give us the day of holy rest. For this purpose the ministry has been instituted. Our business is to make men seek and know God's precepts and statutes, that they may do them and that they may walk at liberty. We ministers are for you; our business is to seek your moral and spiritual good, your full and complete liberation. Our business is to enlighten you with the truth as God has been pleased to reveal it unto us. You do not come to these churches for our sakes, to hear us. You do not give your money that we may be sustained and upheld. I tell you I would rather sweep the streets, I would rather carry bricks on my shoulder to the builder, than be a mere official person maintained because he can teach so much and get so many people to hear him. Brethren, it is that you may be enlightened and saved with the light of life, that God has brought us into the position in which we are now together. Keep this in your thoughts; and that you may be enlightened and free, look upward and not downward, nor around you. In that statue in our harbor, the light that will shine is light that comes, I suppose, from the heart of the earth; but the light that is to enlighten the world is the light of the sun, the Sun of Righteousness. See that you have that shining into your souls, that you may walk at liberty.

Having looked at the former part of this text, namely, what the Psalmist did with a view to the end, we look at the end at which he was aiming. He studied God's Word, not simply that he might have so much intellectual knowledge. He studied it for practical uses. He studied God's precepts that he might obey them. I do not need to remind you that you and I have advantages greater than he had, in some important respects. He had the revelation in part; we have it in its completeness. He had the preparatory dispensation; we have the dispensation that fulfils the promises of the preparatory. He had the beginning; we have the complement. We know more than he did. He wrote these words, "I have sought thy precepts." He knew of the Paschal Lamb and of its typical significance; we know the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He knew the Hebrew priest and the general character of his functions. We know a High Priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. He knew of the altar and the victim, and the blood that made typical atonement; we know of the great sacrifice on the cross, bringing in a redemption that is complete and eternal. He knew of a Messiah that was to come. You, even children in the Sunday-school to-day, know of that Messiah risen, risen triumphant, risen a conqueror, risen for you, risen because He has finished the work God gave Him to do. If the Psalmist studied God's will that he might walk at liberty, how much greater is the obligation upon us to do the same, and how much greater our facilities and our encouragement. Let us try, then, to travel in the Psalmist's steps, and let us see some, not all, of the forms of liberty that we can have by compliance with the divine precepts.

There is liberty, in the first place, from the world. I use the word now in the sense in which it is used so frequently in the Bible—not merely this round globe or the hundreds of millions that are upon it—not merely these millions in that capacity. The world lieth in the wicked one; the mass of

men, that is, do not know God. They constitute the world of the New Testament; we can be in bondage to this world. Natural men are in bondage to it. They are not at liberty in relation to that natural world. It is without God; it does not ask what His will is. It enquires as to its own will, and it tries to enforce it. You sometimes see cliques and coteries and collections of men insisting at any cost upon carrying out their own will. This is only the spirit of the greater world of which they constitute a section. Sometimes men are in bondage to the world in this sense, and the mainspring of their life is to stand well with it, to do what their set, their society, the world round about them, wishes them to do. Sometimes the bondage is aggravated by another feature, viz., the effort to rise higher, to get upon a more elevated plane, to get into another set; and, oh, how aggravated is the bondage under which many thus live and labor! Freedom from that is obtained when we walk according to God's statutes. Believers, the world is not your master. One is your Master, even Christ, and we are brethren in Him, and He is reasonable and kind and just and brotherly, and you can walk with Him. His favor is enough for you, His smile satisfies you. Fellowship with Him is the best society. Let society stigmatize you, let it stamp its enmity upon you, but seek God's precepts. If you only have Christ walking with you, then you walk at liberty. But as to the life-work in which many are busy, or trying to get up a little higher socially, take this precept of the Word, "Godliness with contentment is great gain"; and these things, the godliness with the contentment, will break these clanking chains of insane and stupid ambition and will prepare you to walk at liberty. "I am in the place where God puts me. I am trying to do the work that God gives to me. I am responsible to Him. I belong to Him. He is my Father, Christ is my Brother, heaven is my home. This I believe on the authority of His word. I will walk at liberty." Let me commend that form of true freedom to you.

There is liberty, in the second place, from bad ways. Do I need to describe these bad ways to you? You can not live in the city, you can not read the newspapers, you can not hear the gossip, you can not know what is going on in the circles in which you mingle, without knowing some of these bad ways. There is the lover of this world's possessions, so strongly denounced in Isaiah's prophecies: beginning, perhaps, with necessary saving, but coming slowly but steadily to a sordid love of the thing that is saved, till the whole spirit is mercenary, and gold is the deity that is practically worshiped. There is the drunkard, sipping a little innocently, as he thinks, at the beginning, then going a little farther, and secretly, until shame is lost and the victim is under the power of the drink—degraded, wretched, irresponsible, not ashamed of himself, for shame is gone, but an object for which all are ashamed that are connected with him. There is the gambler, beginning perhaps with what he deemed innocent recreation, and catching the spirit of the thing till it masters him, until he flings away all that he has, and all that he hopes to have, in the chance of recovering something already lost, till life is a burden and fortune is gone, and suicide is perhaps the tragical termination. These are specimens of the bad ways—marked specimens, I grant, but still simple specimens. There is freedom from this when we seek and do God's statutes—real freedom. We learn to walk circumspectly; we learn to keep the heart with all diligence; we learn to hate evil and to do good; we learn to flee from the snares that Satan sets for the feet of men. We walk securely, for we have been taught of the Spirit to walk with God. Make sure, dear hearers, that you have this liberty.

There is liberty from bad memories—bad, putrid memories. When the corrupt imagination contemplates indulgences in sin, it often dwells upon these long before the actual execution of them, and as they linger in the mind they photograph themselves upon its surface, and they stay

there. There may be compunction for the sin, there may be shame over it, there may be vows against it, there may be honest purposes to resist and overcome it, and these purposes to a good degree carried out; but the horrid, poisonous memories remain in the soul. You know what it is to be in a house where animal matter is decaying and poisoning fumes are being scattered up and down. Oh! the misery of the human mind that is haunted with the ghosts of bad deeds that have been done in the past. It is bondage of the keenest and sorest kind. There is liberty from these to those who walk in God's statutes, liberty that can be had nowhere else. "A new heart will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Happy are they to whom this Word was fulfilled in their early youth, and who in consequence were kept from the sins, the very recollection of which is sometimes like the beginning of hell.

There is bondage to bad associates and bad associations. In how many instances, in thoughtlessness, inexperience, under the impulses of mere feeling, do men become entangled in connections that mar their lives and spoil all their happiness—make happiness practically impossible! I speak what I know, when I say that there are too many cases in which boys are practically ruined where they go as pupils to schools away from their parents' supervision, thrown into dependence, in some degree, upon those whom they call friends, and these friends bad, initiating them into ways and habits and modes of thinking and doing, for which they only want the liberty of later years that they may put them into practise, with disgrace, misery and ruin. Relief from this bondage, escape from it, these can be had when we seek God's statutes, when we walk according to His precepts. Wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and her paths are peace. There are no bad habits in them; there are no entangling associations in them; there are no corrupting and degrading influences in them. There is nothing in them that plays upon passion, till passion, once our idol and our sport, becomes our ruler and our cruel tyrant. To escape all these, this is the way: seek God's statutes, that you may know and do them, and you shall walk at liberty.

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
  - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**