

WHO IS MY BROTHER?

A CASE STUDY ON CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

(A discourse to be given in Greensboro, NC 6/14/97 and Salem, OR 6/28/97)

By Bro. Perry Robinson.

Open with hymn 362, close with hymn 23

I would like to begin with an apology. I apologize to anyone who may have been offended in the past because I failed to extend to them the proper Christian liberty, to think, reason and believe what they understood the Scriptures to teach. For example, I apologize for the tone of voice I used two years ago from this platform, which had the effect to deny Christian liberty to those of differing views. In words I extended Christian liberty to each, however I believe my tone of voice said "You should agree with me."

Our objective this hour will be to answer the question "Who is my brother or sister in Christ?" Now you may ask, why would you devote much time or thought to such a simple question? Well perhaps you have never had an uneasy feeling around brethren who have differing views on the Pastor's writings, but I have; and I'll bet some, if not all of you have too. And you may be stunned to find out the Pastor's views on this very thing.

But before we begin let me tell you about a thought provoking, heart warming incident that happened to me a few years ago: [and before that, does everyone know the child's game kooties? where one child gets pointed at while all the children yell 'kooties' and then all the children run and hide from the one and will not play with them, because they have kooties?]

We got a call from a dear sister who desired a dinner meeting with us at which she said; "Brother Perry I want to apologise to you. I want you to know that if you thought I was treating you like you had kooties, it is because I DID TREAT YOU THAT WAY."

Formerly, we had agreed on nearly every doctrine as presented by the Pastor, but on one non-fundamental item we disagreed and therefore she felt we and nearly all brethren everywhere were a great danger to be around, and should be avoided like a deadly plague. This behavior, e.g. the boycotting of Bible Student conventions and the avoiding of the brethren, had formerly been believed as being "proper" because it was supposedly "done out of Agape Love for the brethren" and was supposedly "not coming down off the mountain, but rather beckoning with the hand." Today she realizes it is wrong to cut off your brethren.

You might wonder why I mentioned this story: It is because I too have had these kinds of feelings of uneasiness around brethren who have differing ideas and opinions on what Pastor Russell taught, and I wanted to share this feeling, what causes the feeling, and how it directly relates to the subject of Christian Liberty, and the answer to the question: Who is My Brother in Christ? or Who is my Sister in Christ? in the fullest sense of these terms.

This hour we will talk about:

- A surprising quote by the Pastor on Christian Liberty
- The writing of the Epistle of Christ in our hearts
- Contentiousness vs. Contending for "the faith once delivered to the saints"
- Class splits - deplorable
- Are contentions necessary?
- Just one ground for contention
- Christian Liberty with regard to electing elders - surprising recommendations by the Pastor
- Grudges and dog fights
- Defending the Lord's peoples' liberties
- The waiving of personal liberties in class arrangements as proper and necessary
- Not binding others' consciences and
- Not permitting them to bind yours
- The object of our meetings - not knowledge, but character building
- Spiritual pride - the root of contentiousness & the cause of hindering of others' C. Liberty
- How to correct the tendency to hinder others' Christian Liberty, viz.
- "Be of one mind"; "do all things without disputings" and
- "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time";
- And time permitting, we will discuss an example or a Case Study on Christian Liberty.

Well, whatever we learn from the Pastor, we want to be sure to put into practice; and from R23 we quote: "One personal struggle and conquest over self will be of more benefit than listening to a hundred sermons or singing a hundred hymns. It is not so much what we learn as what we practice that benefits us."

The quotation which got me thinking about this subject of Christian Liberty, and to me was a surprising quote was in R5348, which we will read and then talk about it:

R5348 The general facts are much more valuable and important than merely the day or the year respecting these facts. 'Let brotherly love continue!' Suffer not any dispute over a day or a year to break the most precious bond of love which binds us to the Lord and to all who are truly his. Be specially careful on this point when the subject of discussion is one respecting which we have no positive knowledge. The rupture of fellowship may sometimes be necessary, when we "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints" --faith in the divine plan, in the Redeemer, in the efficacy of his death, etc. These matters are positively stated in the Bible--not left to deduction, as in the case of chronology and all matters based upon chronology.

If we take Pastor Russell's advice in the aforementioned quote, we would "Suffer not any dispute [that is over matters arrived at by deductive reasoning] to break the most precious bond of love which binds us to the Lord and to all who are truly his." And he cautions us to "Be specially careful on this point."

What struck me about Pastor Russell's statement is that this is so vast an area of study, because all of volumes 2, 3 and 4 are based mostly on his deductive reasonings on Bible prophecy; and he here states this would not be a reason to break the bonds of Christian fellowship. You could have knocked me over with a feather.

In R5967 Pastor Russell helps us stay focused on our goals, by reminding us of the "epistle of Christ, mentioned in 2nd Corinthians 3:3, which is to be written in our hearts, by asking:

"...what is the epistle, that is written in our hearts by the holy Spirit through various agencies? Is it the knowledge of chronology? Is it the unraveling of types and shadows? Is it the cracking of hard theological nuts in respect to differently understood passages of Scripture? Is it the knowledge of the history of the Jews, the history of the world, the history of the church? Is it the understanding and appreciation of the different covenants, past, present, and to come? No, it is none of these.

"All of these subjects have more or less of value, and are more or less used of the Lord in connection with this writing that is to be done in the hearts of his people. But writing the epistle of Christ is different...

"We might have all knowledge respecting chronology and history, might be able to quote every text in the Bible, and cite it, too; and yet not have the epistle of Christ written in our hearts."

The epistle of Christ that is to be written in our hearts should not, and does not include contentiousness, and yet I have been contentious at times over the years, have you? Contentiousness would tend to, or attempt to, restrain the Christial Liberty of others. In R 5056 the Pastor says:

R5056 THE CONTENTION which the Scriptures reprobate is that of selfishness--contending for place, for power, for our friends against some one else's friends, for our ideas against those of others. And the implication is given that those who are thus contentious will never enter into the Kingdom; for this contentious spirit indicates a wrong attitude or condition.

Amongst the Lord's people, even in the Apostles' day, there was a tendency at times to fight each other rather than to fight the Devil and the spirit of the world and the weaknesses within themselves. The organs of destructiveness and combativeness, which would serve a Christian soldier in good stead if directed against his own weaknesses and blemishes, are sadly out of place when, ignoring his own weaknesses, he merely becomes contentious with the brethren--often over nothing or over questions whose importance he exaggerates, because of his contentious spirit. Such should remember the Scriptural statement that "he that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." --Prov. 16:32

The Apostle Paul reprehends that misdirection of Christian energy which "bites and devours" one another and warns against it as tending to the destruction of all that is spiritual amongst the Lord's people. Not that the Apostle favored slackness as respects the important principles of Divine Revelation, for he showed always his determination to contend for righteousness...

R5057 It is possible for one to be contentious in religious matters, and to "earnestly contend," and yet such a course be not contending "for the faith once delivered to the saints." One might be contentious for some pet theory of his own rather than for those principles of righteousness which the Bible inculcates.

Sometimes it might seem like contention for the faith once delivered to the saints for one person to argue with another on Scriptural subjects, and yet his real motive in so doing might be pride. Pride is a part of selfishness; therefore in contending for his own ideas one might be cultivating pride.

We would like to compare this spirit of contentiousness with contending for "the faith once delivered to the saints." What was the faith once delivered unto the saints? Was it volumes 2, 3 and 4? Was it the Jubilees? the Parallels? the Days of Waiting? the Time of the End? or anything relating to chronology, or matters of deductive reasoning?

In R5284 we read:

"These latter are not necessarily essential to our membership in the Body of Christ; otherwise our forefathers who did not have them would not have been members of Christ, and there would have been no Christ Body for centuries. The fundamental theory of the Atonement is as follows:

- (1) All men--all of Adam's children--are sinners.
- (2) None can be reconciled to God without a Redeemer's sacrifice.
- (3) Jesus came into the world to be that Sacrifice-- and later to apply that Ransom-price for the sins of the world.
- (4) On the basis of faith in the Redeemer's work, the believer may consecrate himself to the Divine service, in acceptance of the Divine invitation, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice."
- (5) So doing, the believer may--up to the time of the completion of the Elect number--exercise full assurance of faith that his sacrifice will be accepted of the Father; and that he will receive a share of the anointing of the Holy Spirit--the begetting.
- (6) Such as meet these conditions are to be accepted as brethren in the highest sense of the term. This much would seem to have been always necessary, and more than this we believe is not necessary today.

So here we have the answer to the question: Who is my brother? in the highest sense of the term. Notice too that the first three relate to faith in the blood, and the second two relate to full consecration: What do these two conditions or criteria remind you of? every 14th of Nisan? Yes, these are the only two criteria for proper participation in our Memorial celebration every year. What we have here is consistency by the Pastor.

If we are not convinced however, let's look at volume 6, page 240:

Unity of faith is desirable; it is to be striven for.....Unity is to be along the lines of "the faith once delivered unto the saints" in its purity and simplicity, and with full liberty to each member to take different views of minor points...The Scriptural idea of unity is upon the foundation principles of the Gospel. (1) Our redemption through the precious blood, and our justification by demonstrated faith therein. (2) Our sanctification, setting apart to the Lord, the Truth and their service--including the service of the brethren. (3) Aside from these essentials, upon which unity must be demanded [i.e. Ransom and consecration] there can be no Scriptural fellowship; [but] upon every other point fullest liberty is to be accorded, with, however, a desire to see, and to help others to see, the divine plan in its every feature and detail.

Again we have the Pastor's teaching that unity is based upon only two criteria, the same criteria as in the memorial celebration, viz. faith in the blood--the Ransom, and full consecration, or as he puts it here "our sanctification."

Returning again to the quote from R5287:

Our advice to the Lord's dear people everywhere is that they put no yoke upon each other, beyond the fundamentals specified above--that otherwise they stand free, and leave each other free, and fellowship and agree as much as they can, with each other.

If there be a disposition to crowd each other on more than this basic faith, and if it be considered necessary to separate in order to the progress of either of the parties, then doubtless rather than a continual contention a separation would be the wise course.

So you might say, Okay, fine; every time we don't agree with each other, we have the Pastor's word here that a class split is a "wise course," so we should just split every time a disagreement comes up, right? Wrong! Pastor Russell continues on to say, in this same article, that class splits are deplorable. This is the part that those who wish to split are less likely to quote:

R5285 If after fully considering these matters, a class finds that it cannot agree, and would make better progress as two classes, we would concur in that conclusion as a wise one, as much as we would deplore the necessity of a division.

So what the Pastor is saying about classes splitting is that it may be wise, if the brethren are so contentious, that the class must split, but it is also deplorable that the character of the brethren has become so poor and degraded that it would be necessary that it be a wise course.

Our class in St. Louis split years ago; and we have heard of other classes splitting. I am ashamed to say that I have even urged classes to split years ago, when I should have: 1) studied to be quiet and minded my own business, and 2) studied the matter out, as here presented, rather than internalizing the then-prevalent view and repeating the same, without careful and prayerful consideration. I was young in the Truth and foolish then.

F241 The Apostle declares that it is the Lord's pleasure that there be no schism in the body--no splits, no divisions.

You may be thinking "Yes I see that Pastor Russell said all these things but this just sounds like too much liberty, why, if we had this kind of liberty it would be a constant test of self-control." Let's read from volume 6 page 196:

it may surprise many to discover how much liberty the Lord has left to each individual member of the New Creation... it is clear that the Lord's plan of granting great liberty is the best plan--the one which most surely tests the heart-loyalty, most fully develops character, and proves the willingness of each to follow with the other the Law of Love, doing to the other as he would the other should do to him.

In the past I have tried to "fix" the brethren who I thought needed "fixing." In so doing I was, without realizing it, trying to manage God's work. Let's read:

R4502 Let us leave to God the management of his work. Let us humbly realize that if he would commit it all to our care we would be unable to manage it and would be obliged to take it back to him and to solicit his supervision of his own work.

We appreciated this thought of the Pastor because we sometimes thought, if we didn't enforce a correction upon the brethren, we were shirking our Christian responsibility to defend the Truth, or Stand up for the Truth.

Now we will ask a question from R4008 - ARE CONTENTIONS NECESSARY?

R4008 We reply that they are sometimes, but not nearly so often as they occur. There is just one ground of contention authorized, and we find it in the words, "Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." (Jude 3).

Recall that we just gave the Pastor's definition of "the faith once delivered unto the saints" in the five points, or put more simply--faith in the blood--the ransom and full consecration.

R4009 Some...have a vain-glorious spirit, the spirit of pride and ambition, which gets themselves and others into difficulty. But are we to reject those who are naturally combative, naturally ambitious? Are we to say that they therefore are not of the Body, and cut them off? By no means...

Years ago I had internalized the then-prevalent view that we should, out of Agape love, cut off the brethren who didn't agree with us. Here the Pastor says "by no means" should we do this.

...rather we should seek to so exemplify the proper course in our own conduct as to impress a lesson upon them and upon all with whom we have contact. Wherever we see a wrong spirit in another our first thought should be, Have I any of that disposition myself? and our first correction should be in our own hearts and conduct. Thus casting the mote or beam out of our own eyes we would be the better prepared to approach our brother with gentleness and kindness, and unobtrusively to render him assistance in getting the better of his difficulties.

Now we come to a statement of the Pastor which made me cringe a little, because I have done this very thing, i.e. in times past, I have argued until late at night. The section in R4009 is entitled BEREANS WHO FIGHT TO A FINISH:

Some of the Lord's dear brethren of excellent heart and noble intention seem to get the improper thought in connection with the Berean studies. They seem to say to themselves, There can be but one right thought on this subject, and that one the truth; and everyone else here should want the truth, and we should contend and dispute on this question if necessary all night and fight the matter until some one gives up and sees that he is wrong.

[This next part is what got me]:

This is an evil thought entirely, and is productive of great discomfort and disadvantage, and a hindrance to spirituality in various classes. ...the Lord has had great patience with us all in our slowness to learn, and surely we should be patient with each other.

Each therefore should be content if he have a reasonable opportunity for presenting his view on any question, and should not attempt to enforce and crowd it in upon another. If the Editor has stated his view, and one or more do not see the matter exactly so, and the question is not fundamental, then it would be the proper course to let the matter rest there, and to allow the Lord eventually as the great Teacher, through his providences to gradually bring us to where we could the more completely see eye to eye. In this we have

the opportunity for learning the lesson of patience and forbearance, brotherly kindness, meekness, gentleness--Love.

So you might say, okay fine, I should fellowship on a more broad scale than I was accustomed to before, but fellowship and eldership are two different things: I should never vote for one as elder who didn't agree with me on every particular, RIGHT? The Pastor may surprise you:

R4009 Some very devoted brethren seem to get the impression that they should have no part in electing as an Elder anyone they could not endorse in every particular.

...suppose that a minority of the congregation have a liking for the presentations or manners or what not of another brother, and suppose that another minority have a preference for still another brother...

What shall each party do?--fight it out on political lines and say, We have power, and therefore authority to elect our man, and you must either join in this or quit the company? By no means! This might be "good politics" amongst the worldly, but it would be quite out of harmony with the spirit of love which must govern in the Church. In gaining such a victory we might wound one or more of the Lord's brethren, might offend our Lord, and do ourselves incalculable injury in our race for the great prize. Such a "victory" would be a defeat of our real aims and aspirations --a victory for our great Adversary. Are we not to consider one another, and seek not every man merely his own preferences, but seek to build one another up in the most holy faith? The spirit of love would therefore seem to dictate that more than one Elder should be elected in such a case--two or three or more, as the supply of material and the desires of the company could be reasonably interpreted, without violating the general directions of the Lord's Word.

So the Pastor here shows there may be times when we would properly vote for ones as elder who we did "not agree with," "in every particular." How about attending conventions? Would it be using the spirit of Christ to avoid, or even hinder others, by boycotting conventions that we thought had a mixed platform? "WHERE the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." R3751

Now we will consider what the Pastor had to say about grudges and dog fights.

R3752 "Grudge not one against another, brethren; the Judge standeth at the door," (James 5:9) "Be patient, brethren, the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." (James 5:8)

The lesson here is in full accord with the text we are discussing. We need patience; we need to remember that it is not in order for us to nurse grudges or hard feelings of any kind, especially against those who like ourselves are striving to walk in the narrow way and to attain joint-heirship with our Lord in the Kingdom. Rather we should be willing to sacrifice something of our own rights and liberties and privileges in the interest of others. This does not signify that we should sit quietly and hear the truth misrepresented when we have the right and the opportunity to defend it. We should contend earnestly for the truth against the error, but we should not contend against the brethren. If there be any who deny...the ransom, the Lord through the apostles has left us no room to doubt how firmly we should take a stand in respect to any kind of fellowship with them....But there are a thousand and one occasions of friction amongst the brethren where no principle of truth is at stake; and these we are to be willing and glad to waive in the interest of harmony and peace and fellowship. This, however, need not mean that we should not present our understanding of the truth on proper occasions, but we need not insist upon them nor force them upon others if they cannot see them as we do. In our text the Apostle seems to imply that such a condition might arise even amongst the Lord's people that some would not only be wounded to the extent of being "bitten" by the harshness and slander of others, but that the tendency to retaliate more or less in kind would

arise, and that it would mean a general conflict unworthy of God's children and more nearly resembling a fight among dogs. "Take heed that ye be not consumed one of another," (Gal 5:15)

I have retaliated in kind, in the past;have you?

What if we would consume some brother for whom Christ died?

In R4803 we learned what it is we should fight for, i.e. our Lord's peoples' liberties.

R4803 ...we all should be gallant soldiers in this battle for Right and Truth, lovingly defending our Captain's honor and his people's liberties....

But such a good use of combativeness is not pleasing to the Prince of this world, who will seek to pervert what he cannot directly use. Consequently, he attempts with some to make combativeness a chief virtue. He encourages them to fight everything and everybody; the brethren, more than the powers of darkness; nominal churchmen, more than the errors and ignorance which blind them and make them such. Indeed, his desire is to get us to "fight against God."

Let us be on our guard on this point. Let us, first of all, judge ourselves, lest we cast a stumbling-block before others; let us fight down in our own hearts the wrong spirit which seeks to make mountains out of trifles and disposes us to be captious and contentious over non-essentials. Greater is "He that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." (Prov. 16:32) Let us guard ourselves that our defense of the Truth be, not from motives of self-glorification....Let us be "gentle toward all."

Pastor Russell points out that sometimes in the exercise of our Christian liberty we will properly waive our personal liberties in the class arrangements. The principle is laid down in:

R5501 This means a great deal of liberty in the Church within the lines of the word and spirit of Jesus' teaching, directly and through His Apostles.

Brethren meeting as a class should understand that in so doing they properly waive, or make void, some of their personal liberties and privileges. Individual preferences are to be more or less subjected to class preferences. Even the majority of the class should be considerate of the wishes of the minority, and if possible, should moderate the arrangements, so that all can be accommodated and pleased in respect to speakers [there's your eldership again], and in respect to place and character of meetings. No one should selfishly consider merely his own preferences and welfare.

Pastor Russell explains that the waiving of our personal liberties may properly involve voting for elders or speakers, for the benefit of the minority, that we otherwise would not have voted for if we were not in a particular class arrangement.

R5501 Conscience is always to be respected--never to be throttled or violated. Nor is any one who stands faithful to his conscience to be disesteemed therefor by his brethren, even if their consciences view the matter differently.

R5502 On these principles liberty may be maintained in the Body of Christ; and we shall find blessing in proportion as those of one mind can fellowship with each other.

But where the brethren find it advantageous to meet in different classes [in other words in a class that split], it will usually be found, we believe, that originally too great restraint of personal liberty was exercised, and that the majority were too careless of the sentiments of the brethren constituting the minority.

The Pastor here teaches that the restricting of the Christian Liberty and the attempt to bind the consciences' of others, may result in a class splitting, which as we have already seen, he regarded as deplorable. Some years ago there was the boycotting of conventions which were determined to have "mixed platforms." This was very informal but consisted of drawing a line for others, which they dare not step over, lest they be considered as "not straight in the Truth" or "going out of the Truth" or "no longer led of the holy Spirit." This attempt to impute one's conscience onto another and thus bind their conscience, I now see, is exceedingly sinful and no part of the spirit of Christ, the spirit of Liberty, "the Liberty wherewith Christ makes [each one] free [to do their own thinking, their own judging of Scriptural matters, and their own believing]. Do your own believing. We should defend the holy spirit of Liberty, Christian Liberty, or as the apostle called it "the perfect Law [not suggestion] of Liberty." James 1:25

In F255 we read: This absolute liberty of the individual conscience and talents, and the absence of any bondage or authority to restrict, is one of the marked features of the early Church which we do well to copy in spirit and in deed.

R1866 Do not seek to bind others' consciences, and do not permit others to bind yours.

The Bible instructs you whom to fellowship as "brethren;"[now here's our definition of brethren] --only believers who are seeking to walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit [that is the consecrated]. Not believers of any and every thing, but believers of the Gospel record--that mankind is fallen into sin and its penalty, death, and that only in Christ is there salvation, "through faith in his blood" "shed for the remission of sins," as "a ransom [a corresponding price] for all." [There are our two criteria again, consecration and faith in the blood--the ransom].

But, you might say, I thought the purpose of our meetings was to obtain a correct and comprehensive knowledge of the Truth? Is knowledge our ultimate object in meeting? Let's read:

R1866 Thus seen, a knowledge of doctrines is not our ultimate object in meeting, but the building up of characters, which, as attempted copies of the character of God's dear Son, will be "accepted in the Beloved." But God declares that knowledge of the doctrines which he has revealed in his Word will be of great value to us in our endeavors to grow in his grace.

What causes me to seek to bind my brother's conscience? Could it be spiritual pride? I have spiritual pride. Let's see a show of hands of everyone who has spiritual pride. [raise hand]

R5957 one of the serious things connected with this malady of spiritual pride is that those who have it are rarely aware of it.

Another difficulty is that it is almost impossible to correct them and to cause them to know that they have the disease.

Where the class fails to help in this matter, apparently nothing remains except for the Lord to chasten the individual for his good, either with business reverses or losses or with physical disease, or in whatever way may seem best to Him. And we have confidence that the Lord will do this for everyone who is truly His child and who gets into such a condition as to need such correction in righteousness. Is it not written, "The Lord will judge [punish] His people"?--Deuteronomy 32:36.

I have had chastisements of the Lord, and I'm glad; because they have worked out in my character a greater humility and appreciation of who my brethren are, whether they agree with me on the non-fundamentals or not. I no longer have as uneasy of a feeling around brethren of different views: I no longer mentally wish them off into never-never-land, never to be judged because I know it is wrong to judge, but never to be fellowshipped because of the danger of being contaminated with error.

R5957 The chief feature of the difficulty [of spiritual pride] seems to be that the disease has a destroying effect upon the conscience. The mind becomes more or less obtuse to the simple principles of the Golden Rule--not to mention the still higher law of our Lord's New Commandment to the brethren.

He [that is anyone in a class] has the right to express his judgment. But he has no right to hinder others from the expression of their judgment; and every such interference is a violation of the Golden Rule as well as a violation of the Law of Love and a violation of the First Commandment--to honor God; for it is setting aside the Divine arrangement provided for such matters.

Well, let's not dwell too long on the malady, but rather, let's look at some cures for spiritual pride, i.e. "Be of one mind"; and "do all things without disputings"

R5810 "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."--Philippians 2:2-5.

"He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"--1 John 4:20

He [Paul] urged that each should have that lowliness of mind which could see the good qualities and talents of the fellow members of the Body; and that they should appreciate these qualities as, in some respects at least, superior to their own.

In proportion as we are filled with the Holy Spirit of love, we shall find ourselves interested in the welfare and happiness of others. This was the mind, the disposition, which was in our dear Redeemer...

Paul said in Phil 2:14 "Do all things without murmurings and disputings."

I can't tell you how many times I have disputed about this doctrine or that. But we should do all things without disputings.

But we can take comfort in the fact that..."even our blunders or stumblings, if properly received, will be overruled for our blessing." R5811

Another cure for spiritual pride is humility:

R5843 We must admit that we need the Master, and that without Him we can do nothing. So we take this position: "I am nothing but a sinner; I know that I am imperfect, that I have nothing which I have not received. God provides everything; whatever I have is a gift from Him. Knowing all this, I gratefully accept these things, and humble myself under His mighty hand."

1Pet 5:6 "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

Well as we promised you, time permitting, we would consider a Case Study on Christian Liberty, and so we will describe two processes nearly all Bible Students will agree are a part of the Divine Plan as presented by Pastor Russell, and we will ask:

1. What year did Pastor Russell say the sleeping saints were raised? (1878)
2. What year will the last member of the body of Christ be rewarded with an elevation to the divine nature, or go beyond the veil? (> or = to 1997)
3. When did our returned Lord separate the spirit-begotten from the Ecclesiastical plus Kings (E+K) polity? i.e. when did our Lord return, so to do? (1874)
4. What is the definition of Polity? (Form Of Gov't.)
5. When did the separation of the spirit-begotten saints, from, the (E+K) polity, into purer study groups, end? When did the (E+K) form of government end, or change into another form?(1914)
6. After the sleeping saints were elevated or raised, let's consider the very next saint to die: What plane of existence was this one on, just before death? (plane M, as an embryo new creature)
7. After this one is elevated or resurrected, what plane are they on? (plane L, divine being)
8. Now let's go to process #2: What plane of existence were the spirit-begotten saints on, before our Lord returned and began separating them from the (E+K) polity? (plane M, the plane of embryo new creatures)
9. What plane of existence were they on after they were separated from the (E+K) polity, i.e. out of those organizations who claimed to be Christ's already-ruling Kingdom, or Christendom and into purer study groups? (plane M, the plane of embryo new creatures)
10. In process #1, was there a change of planes of existence, when the spirit-begotten were elevated to the the divine nature, spirit birth? (yes, from plane M to plane L)
11. In process #2, was there a change of planes, when the spirit-begotten were separated from the (E+K) polity, to the Lord's people in the Truth ecclesias? (no, they started on plane M, as embryo new creatures, and they were still on plane m - embryo new creatures after separation.
12. In process #1, will it be possible for new ones to become spirit-begotten after this process is completed? (No)

13. In process #2, has it been possible for new ones to become spirit-begotten after this process was completed? (Yes) Why? because some of those who consecrated would not continue faithful and would need replacing with newly consecrated/spirit-begotten ones.

Notice these two processes are entirely different. Do they start at the same time? (No) Do they end at the same time? (No) Do they describe the same effect? (No) Do they both involve a change of planes? (No) Is it possible for new ones to become spirit-begotten after the completion of both processes? (No) These processes are entirely different in every way; one describes elevation, the other describes separation. Seems pretty clear doesn't it?

And yet these two processes have been the subject of controversy among brethren for the last 80 years. Notice that few, if any, brethren would say that these two processes were not part of the Divine Plan. The reason for this controversy has been the usage of a single word, as yet unspoken here, i.e. a matter of selfish preference of semantics, and the subsequent attempts to restrain the Christian Liberty of others.

Please reflect for a moment on this controversy, no matter which side we may have been on, with regard to what we have just considered.....

We began the hour with my apology to you, my brethren, if any felt as though I had restricted your Christian Liberty in the past. If I do so in the future, please tell me, "brother, I feel like you are restricting my Christian Liberty."

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Gal 5:1

May we all take these lessons to heart, and practice them.

And may the Lord add His blessing.