

Rest Your Soul in "the Simplicity and Purity of Devotion to Christ"

In the early morning dim of March 29, 1849, a sympathetic storekeeper in Richmond, Virginia nailed the lid on a crate containing a slave. A two-hundred pound man had folded himself into a wooden box just three feet, one inch long, two feet wide, and two-and-a-half feet deep. Cramped in a suffocating darkness, the slave endured—often upside down—a grueling three hundred and fifty mile shipment via railroad freight car, steamboat, and wagon. Twenty-seven hours later in a Philadelphia abolitionist's office, Henry "Box" Brown emerged from his coffinlike confinement to begin life as a free man. The news of his stunning appearance encouraged the hopes of freedom in countless slaves.

Everyone is born a slave of sin. Jesus Christ said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). We cannot free ourselves from this oppressive master, for no one can live without sinning against God. But the sinless Jesus—not for His own sake, but for others—came from Heaven to deliver His people. Jesus allowed godless men to nail Him to a Roman cross, and three days later rose from the dead so that "we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:6). And all those who trust in His work (and not their own) as the way to freedom will find emancipation from sin. "Therefore," declared Jesus, "if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

I wonder if Henry Brown ever suffered nightmares of being back in his box? I do know that Christians—though freed from the penalty of all sin and declared righteous in God's sight—sometimes feel a spiritual claustrophobia. It's almost as though they've returned to the bondage that enslaved them before they knew Jesus. Sinful choices and activities can cause God's forgiven people to feel this way. But there are other reasons why believers may not be breathing the sweet air of spiritual freedom.

If you feel boxed-in spiritually, perhaps it's because you've experienced what the Apostle Paul feared for the souls of some: "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3, NASB). Paul's readers had been distracted by the message of "another Jesus" (verse 4). In other words, men had come preaching about Jesus, but spoke of Him differently than the Apostle Paul. Many think that false teachers had told them about Christ in a way that caused them to look less to Jesus and more to their own good deeds and spirituality. As they did so, they were "led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

Whenever this happens to a Christian, his spiritual life soon becomes burdensome. He feels "back in the box" of slavery to duties that bring no joy. Instead of refreshing and ravishing his soul with the love of Christ, his spirituality seems complicated, unfulfilling, and feels like just "one more thing to do" in an overbusy life. And so, if you recognize yourself in this bondage, rest your soul afresh in "the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." Look to Him to be the satisfaction of what God requires from you. Rediscover

your spiritual practices as means of experiencing and enjoying Christ, and not a mere checklist of requirements to keep.

But other readers who feel boxed-in spiritually, so far as they know their own hearts, *have* kept their eyes on Christ alone, not only to *make* them right with God, but also to *keep* them right with God. And yet the responsibilities of life have become so overwhelming that even the habits of their spirituality only seem to add to the burden and complexity of their weary existence. Spiritually they're as dry and rootless as a tumbleweed. If this is you, it's my prayer that as you turn these pages, your devotion to Christ will become more simple and pure. And as it does, may you feel the refreshing return of the gentleness and love of Christ in your soul.

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