

Jubilee Woman

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Jubilee Woman

The following is a slightly adapted speech that was given to the sisters gathered at the 50th annual Ontario Women's League Day hosted by the Spring Creek congregation on October 19, 2011. To fully benefit from what follows, please read in advance Leviticus 25:1-13 and Luke 4:14-21. This is part 1 of 3.

Lady Frantic

I'd like to begin by introducing you to a lady some of you may know. When you meet her, you can see the lines of strain creasing across her forehead and the look of anxiety in her eyes. She is a woman heavily burdened. Her burden is not physical – her health is good over-all. Her burden is not financial – she and her husband have all they need. Her worry is not being childless – God has given them several children. She can, in fact, count quite a few blessings in her life and yet she is a woman under oppression.

She is a lady on the run, torn between this obligation and that, hustling to meet this expectation and that one. She is physically on the run, back and forth to pick up the kids from the soccer field, the hockey rink, piano lessons, *taekwondo* or school events; she's off to this parents' meeting, that committee meeting, this study evening, that choir performance, this evangelism event. She flies over to an aging parent to

visit, drops in at a sibling, phones a friend who has issues, drops off a meal at the home of sick church member, all the while answering constant text messages from her 15 and 17 year-olds from wherever they are! She has many balls in the air and she is struggling with the juggling.

This is a lady under constant pressure – got to make sure there's enough food in the house for the family and that it's mostly healthy stuff; make sure the kids have proper clothing - clothing that's stylish and preferably brand name (yet not too expensive!). Keep on top of the home-work and Catechism. Be there for those talks, address their needs, have constant communication – oh, and be there to support your husband as well! Listen to his concerns, give him the time and attention he needs. And when this lady attends the Ed-Com meeting or Ladies' Aid or goes to Bible Study, then she not only has to come prepared but she has to look good.

She has countless obligations and she must meet them all and she must meet them well or she will be a failure. Fear of failure makes her life frantic – she's a woman who knows no rest and has no peace and is at times border-line depressed. And she doesn't know what to do about it. Have you met this woman before?

Cultural Egypt

I think she may be rather familiar in our midst and I'd like to suggest to you, sisters, that this woman is under a modern-day form of slavery and oppression. Much like the Israelites were trapped in Egypt and forced to serve under Pharaoh's whip, many women – unbelievers and believers alike – are in a cultural Egypt, forced to serve the demands and expectations placed upon them by others or even by themselves.

There are differences, of course. Today's oppression is not *physically* brutal but mentally and emotionally it often takes as big a toll. It may even be, in that respect, somewhat worse because at least the Israelites knew who the enemy was – the Egyptians! They yearned to be free from the enemy's grip, but for the woman living in today's Egypt, who is the enemy? It is not always so clear and this adds to the frustration and panic because even if you realize things are not right, that they have to change, what do you go after and why? Who or what is oppressing the women of Canada in 2011? And how can they be set free?

Jubilee Gospel

I'd like to answer that second question first by speaking about the gospel of Jubilee. Today as sisters you celebrate 50 years of meeting together and that number 50 is a special one in the Bible. We read about it in Leviticus 25 – it was a time of celebration and great rejoicing because in that year as in no other since their release from Egypt, the people of God experienced freedom! They experienced renewed liberty from some of the worst forms of oppression in their day.

Sabbath Rest

To get the full picture of the year of Jubilee, it's important to realize that it was the climax of a whole system of important celebrations. Leviticus 25 starts off speaking about the Sabbath year, which was to take place every seventh year, but the Sabbath Year is based upon and built upon the weekly Sabbath Day. From the beginning of Israel's release from Egypt, the LORD was insistent that His people were to rest every Sabbath Day. Look carefully to one of the key reasons why as given in the Fourth Commandment:

Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant *may rest, as you do*. Remember that you *were slaves in Egypt* and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm. (Deut 5:13-15 NIV)

The Sabbath Day was assigned as a day to remember their release from Egypt's oppression! In Egypt they were forced to work seven days a week under a ruthless dictator. Work was back-breaking, work was relentless and the people had no rest. But the LORD set them free from that misery, broke the power of their slave masters and gave to His people the precious gift of rest!

God did not make us to be workaholics. God did not design us to be enslaved and oppressed. As humans our highest purpose is to know and enjoy our Creator and while work is a gift of God and has its proper place, it is not to *consume* the people of God! And so God renewed the creation Sabbath as a day of physical rest so the Israelites might enjoy their freedom always, be reminded of their high calling in life, have time to worship God and remember the rest He freely gave them!

Reverse the Curse

God's salvation, however, goes further than release from Egypt's oppression and to show that God gave also a Sabbath year. Not just one day every week to stop and rest but one year every seven! They were promised an abundant harvest in the sixth year to get them through the following two years until the crop of the eighth year would come in. In the meantime, they were to let the land rest, refraining from active farming in the seventh year. They could pick what grew freely of itself for their own food, but they were to make no production out of harvesting. God's people were to rest and God's land was to rest so that the people and land might experience some relief in the midst of a sin-cursed world!

For that is ultimately what lies behind all the various Sabbath laws – the LORD is undoing the curse! When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the harmony of creation was shattered. The peaceful and blessed cycle of work and rest, of planting and harvesting, of earth cooperating with man and man exercising stewardship over the earth for God's glory – all of that came to a grinding halt. Man's sin brought punishment, a curse on the ground which now would only produce under pressure from man's painful and sweat-soaked toil. There would be difficulty and pain in the whole child-birthing process. Nothing worked smoothly anymore. The animal kingdom fell into inner-hostility even as it became outwardly hostile toward man; the plant world no longer gave of itself freely for man's benefit, and human beings among themselves became antagonistic toward each other and toward God. Nothing worked right.

There was no peace and there was no rest – until the LORD intervened! Until He gave the promise of a Saviour and gave a sign of His redeeming work in the Sabbaths! The weekly Sabbath was and remains a message of hope: *God has come to reverse the curse!*

Jubilee's Jubilation!

A Sabbath day every week, a Sabbath year every seventh year – can you imagine a whole year off the back-breaking work of farming? The curse of sin would *not* triumph! It would not have the last say and those who put their trust in the LORD could enjoy some relief and rest every week, every seventh year and then in a most special and jubilant way every 50th year, the year of Jubilee!

Leviticus 25:8 relates the two as follows: “Count off seven Sabbaths of years – seven times seven years – so that the seven Sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years.” Now, this number seven, as you likely know, is a key number throughout the Bible, signifying perfection, wholeness. Some have called it the number of God. So when God commands that every seventh Sabbath year is to mark off another special year, immediately we know that this is a very special occasion, the

climax of all those Sabbath years. On the heels of the seventh Sabbath year is to follow the year of Jubilee. Year 49 would be a Sabbath year and then year 50 would be another one, a special Jubilee!

That would make two years in a row where the people did not have to work the land – a double time of grace! – but there is much more! The LORD specifies the purpose of this 50th year in Lev 25:10, “Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim *liberty* throughout the land to all its inhabitants.” Put this all together and you see that the character of God’s Jubilee, the character of the crown of *all* the Sabbaths can be summed up in one word: “Liberty!”

Freedom for God’s People

More than physical rest for the land and people, Sabbath and Jubilee are all about freedom for God’s people! It’s all about restoration of what was lost and freedom from slavery to live again as an independent person before the LORD. We read in v.10, “Each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan...everyone is to return to his own property.” Such a law prevented continual poverty and slavery among the Israelites. In our sinful, broken world, business ventures can go wrong. Bad decisions are made, disaster strikes and a person’s living is lost. People in those days couldn’t live on credit as long as we can today. Government social programs simply didn’t exist. The lender would demand payment quickly and if you couldn’t pay, you had to forfeit your property. And if your property wasn’t enough to cover your debt, you may even have to become a slave of the lender, literally working off your debt. So life could become miserable and demeaning, with little hope for improvement and no thought of enjoying life in God’s promised land. It sometimes happened that God’s people entered into a new form of oppression – financial slavery, landlessness, poverty.

But the Year of Jubilee was meant to change that situation! The Jubilee was there to give hope, to give a new start, to give restoration. All the Israelite slaves were to be set free in the Jubilee and everyone was to be given their property back. It was as if every 50 years God wiped the slate clean for His people and gave them a chance to begin again! God had purchased His people out of Egypt by the blood of the Lamb. He was their God, their owner, their Lord and He would not see them go back into another form of slavery. For freedom the LORD had set His people free and they were not to return to Egypt – to any form of oppression! The LORD was their Master and they were to live under Him and enjoy His freedom!

Fulfillment in Christ

This is what the Lord Jesus is talking about when He quotes from the prophecies of Isaiah as we read it in Luke 4:18-19, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” The year of the Lord's favour was another way of speaking about the great year of Jubilee. After all, what was that year but a year of God's undeserved favour, of His mercy and grace? In Jubilee, people with debt up to their eye-balls were forgiven it all. Indentured servants could go home. People without a property could go back to the family farm and start over. None of it deserved, none of it earned. It was a year of grace for Israel like no other since the day they left Egypt and now Jesus says, “I've come to usher in the greatest Jubilee ever!”

In fulfillment of all of Yahweh's promises of old, the Lord Jesus was sent to proclaim freedom – freedom for the spiritual prisoners, freedom for the blind, freedom for the oppressed! As wonderful as the original Jubilee was for God's people, so much greater is the liberty which Christ brought, for He gets to the root of the problem. In Israel's day, God addressed the effects of the curse and provided relief from certain symptoms – the tyranny of toilsome labour, financial ruin, slavery. But in the Messiah, God goes much further and addresses the curse of sin itself!

The Horns of Freedom

That was already foreshadowed in the Jubilee instructions of the LORD, for did you notice on what day the Jubilee was to begin? We read in Leviticus 25:9, “Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land.” The Day of Atonement was that uniquely special day where the High Priest would enter the most holy place in the tabernacle, where He would take some of the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the mercy seat over the ark of the covenant! That act would ensure God's forgiveness of the people for all their sins. It was the annual ceremony of national guilt-cleansing and right after that the Jubilee could begin! First the payment for sins, then freedom for the people! *Sound the trumpets, O priests!* First the blood of the lamb, then the enjoyment of life, true life for God's people! *Aaron, blow the horns of freedom!*

Jubilee People

And Jesus came to make that payment once and for all, to do what the animal sacrifices could only foreshadow and symbolize but never accomplish in themselves. Jesus puts Himself in the place of sinners and endures the righteous punishment of God against sin so that the curse can be forever broken! Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood painted the beams of the cross so that all who find refuge on Golgotha, all who live in the shadow of the cross, are passed-over by the curse and instead receive blessing! Christ releases His people from the Egypt of sin and the Pharaoh called Satan so that His people – Christians – do not have to toil under the curse anymore! As far as the curse of sin extends in this world, so far does the payment of Christ extend, so far does His salvation reach! His slogan is the same as it always was but now with fullness: *reverse the curse!* His proclamation of liberty reaches to every form of oppression caused by sin or its consequences! He makes His people a Jubilee people - Jubilee men and Jubilee women!

Jubilee Woman (2)

What follows is the second of three instalments of a speech given to the sisters gathered at the 50th annual Ontario Women's League Day hosted by the Spring Creek congregation on October 19, 2011.

Forms of Oppression

So dear sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, you are, by definition, Jubilee women! If you belong to Christ by faith then you have been brought into His kingdom and you are free from the tyranny of the curse. Only you may not always feel like it. Perhaps you feel closer to the woman I described earlier. Perhaps you see her in the mirror and wonder what – if anything – can be done to help.

The thing about belonging to Jesus Christ is that there is always something that can be done. Not every form of oppression can be *solved* now because sin remains in this life but every problem can be *addressed* because Jesus has broken the curse! The completion of our liberation will arrive on the day Christ returns but in the meantime already now freedom has been proclaimed, liberty has been announced and liberty is

breaking into the life of every Christian, also the Christian women in Canada, 2011! D-Day has taken place and the end of the war is within sight.

Paul speaks this language in Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” We have been handed freedom from sin’s curse and it’s our responsibility to stay free – notice that we are *commanded* to stand firm in freedom! Like the Israelites in the desert, we must not go back to Egypt and put ourselves back into slavery. To do that we need to identify the things which oppress us – in particular, the things which oppress women and what the Jubilee freedom looks like.

Pressure From Outside

One form of oppression is the *pressure to conform*, the pressure to be like others around you. There are at least two sources of this pressure, one of which is from the world, from society around us. In our Canadian culture, Christian women can feel like a square peg in a round hole. The expectations of our society are more and more that a Canadian woman will be a career woman. The feminist movement has pushed our culture into ranking motherhood several notches down the list of life occupations for a woman with marriage even lower. First establish your career, then have a couple of kids (if you want them) - husbands are optional. Husbands and wives are described as “partners” and the relationship is seen as two independent people living under the same roof and sharing life together where each has his or her own sphere of authority and decision-making. You are to think of your husband as your friend and partner but never as your head. Gone is the family unit under the leadership of the husband.

When you receive a survey form to fill-in with a list occupations that could possibly apply to you, then most often you have to go to the “other” option and write in “home-maker.” It’s not given status let alone equality among acceptable occupations. Society makes you feel embarrassed and backward for marrying in your early 20s, for having children soon after and being a stay-at-home Mom. And don’t mention that you have more than three kids because the looks you’ll get will make you feel like an idiot, like you have to apologize for multiplying and being fruitful!

It’s even the case that sometimes these looks and these view-points make their way into the doors of the church. You may have seen the disapproving or disbelieving looks or heard the disparaging comments in the church corridors or on the parking lot.

Pressure From Inside

For that's another source of pressure to conform, the opinion of our very own brothers and especially sisters in the Lord! If I observe things correctly, then it's often the sisters who place on other sisters the pressure to be like others – at least, that pressure is perceived and felt by ladies from other church ladies. These things are subtle but unmistakable – how many sisters can walk into the door of the auditorium on Sunday morning and not feel like everyone is staring at her? Or her children? I have met many sisters who have great difficulty sitting near the front of the church or even walking up to the Lord's Supper table because of all the eyes they feel trained on them.

There is a fear there – a fear of what others are thinking, what other *church women* are thinking about my looks, my dress, my hair style or (in the case of mothers) my children – their looks and behaviour. In one instant of time we feel ourselves scanned and judged by two hundred pairs of eyes and it makes us nervous or – if we are having a good hair day or/and the kids are well-in-line – it makes us proud. The idol of vanity is never far from our hearts.

High Expectations

There is other pressure too from within the church. If a woman gets a part-time or full-time job then she might be afraid of being thought a poor wife and mother, even though she is intent on keeping her family as her number one focus. Some sisters can feel quite nervous going to women's society because of the expectation they feel to have a high-level of knowledge and preparation. And if you say something that is not in conformity with prevailing opinion, you risk a cool response and a cold shoulder.

More generally, a church woman often feels the pressure to be all things to everyone: to be a supportive and loving wife, a God-fearing and caring mother, a faithful daughter to aging parents, a dedicated sister in the Lord who can be counted on to bring meals and sit on committees. It can feel like the weight of the world on a sister's shoulders to raise the perfect family, be a good example to others, give care to Dad & Mom, be the car-pool coordinator, the baby-sit organizer, the fund-raising committee co-chair - and you need to look *chic* and stylish while you're at it! Otherwise, you've failed and failure is not acceptable! In fact, failure is not even an option!

Keeping Up

There is also in our time a growing pressure of “keeping up with the Jones’” among us, a materialistic burden of sorts. If our peers give their kids access to sports, music and entertainment, the pressure is on to do the same for our kids and to the same degree. If others give their kids access to Satellite TV, iPods, cell phones and Wii, and going out to movies and restaurants, then we and also our kids feel “left out” if we don’t keep up. We could even feel excluded just by virtue of the fact that the conversations of our friends and their children involve so many of these forms of entertainment that if we don’t share in them, we soon won’t have anything to talk about with them.

If half of our friends take a Florida vacation or go for a weekend to New York city, we start looking for ways to go there too when based on our income we would never have considered it. As our community grows in wealth, there is something almost like a force of gravity that pushes us into mimicking the world with its forms of entertainment and then mimicking each other so that we can keep up, fit in and belong. The idol of community approval is never far away!

Pressure from the Lord

But is this what the Lord Jesus wants from us? Is this the Christian life He calls His daughters to? Of course, any one of these activities or task in themselves can have their value and their place but it’s *the burden you feel to do them a certain way and to a certain standard that is the trouble*. Sisters, I submit to you that the pressure you feel to do these things according to the opinions of people in society or people in the church is a form of slavery from which Christ has set you free!

The yoke of Christ is easy and His burden is light. That means, following Christ frees us from all forms of oppression and sets our hearts free from serving other masters to serve the one true God. And His commandments are not burdensome! Your master is not the collective opinion of Canadian culture nor is it the collective opinion of the sisters in the church – perceived or real! Your master is the will of God as He has written it down in the Bible!

Free From Worldly Views

That means the pressure you *should* feel and pay close attention to is the pressure from the Lord Jesus Christ – and when you study it carefully, you’ll discover it’s quite pleasant! That it’s not really pressure at all but simply direction for healthy,

satisfying and peaceful living! The Lord provides His grace and Spirit to His daughters – daughters like you – so you can give your hearts and lives to Him and function as you were created to function. He sets you free from the sinful impulses of selfishness so that you may act as the godly and needed helper to your husbands like Eve was created to do in the beginning. He frees you from the pressure to be your own authority and instead provides the grace to submit to your husband's authority. He liberates you from ungodly opinions about marriage and children so that you can be a free mother in your home, happily raising however many children He may give you, joyfully managing the affairs of your family so that your husband has full confidence in you.

Precious Brides

You don't need to be reduced to a "partner" or merely a "friend" for your husband for you are something greater: *his one and only Christian bride!* According to God's Word, you are your husband's lover and unique helper, complementing him where he lacks and being one unit with him as His covenant wife for God's glory! You don't need to be a career woman for you are a woman with a critical calling to honour your God-given head and raise up citizens in Christ's kingdom. You have the glorious privilege to reflect – together with your husband – the marriage bond between Christ and His precious bride, the church! Society's so-called emancipation of the female is just another form of slavery ironically called, "Women's Liberation." All the world does is exchange one set of chains for another, another set of "shoes" all women's feet must pinch into, but under Christ the Jubilee woman is free and joyful serving her husband as she was created to do, as we see her, for example, in Proverbs 31.

Precious Daughters

This freedom applies equally to the Christian woman who is single or who has been abandoned in divorce. Singleness is a gift of Christ and frees a sister to serve her Lord in different capacities. She may be in the work-force but as a Jubilee woman need not be consumed with climbing the ladder of success. She is free under Christ to serve an earthly employer while also giving of her time and talents in her extended family and church. She gives her best at work but she does not give her life to work. Nor does she not need to be defined by the wishes of others – even well-meaning parents who only want her to be married and 'give them' grand-children. A single sister in Christ can rest in her identity as a precious daughter of her heavenly Father.

The same goes for a Christian woman who has suffered marital abandonment or otherwise been left in a broken situation by a husband: she too is set free by Christ! Her identity does not come from her marital relationship or from the car crash it has become – it comes from who she is in the Lord Jesus Christ! She is sister of the Lord Jesus, daughter of the Father who is renewed and being renewed (as we all are) in Christ. Thus, she can take her place in the church and in the world honourably. She does not have to hide or deny reality. She has brought the mess – including her own sin in it - to her Saviour and He receives her in grace. She lives in this grace. No daughter in Christ's kingdom is to be despised. She may find her rest and peace in belonging to that King and build a new life on that basis.

Jubilee Woman (3)

What follows is the final of three instalments of a speech given to the sisters gathered at the 50th annual Ontario Women's League Day hosted by the Spring Creek congregation on October 19, 2011.

Free From Opinions

And that freedom should not be curtailed by the opinion of fellow sisters in the church either. I stress the word “opinion” because there's a difference between the biblical norms and commands of God on the one hand, which are upheld by the church and rightfully expected of everyone, also the sisters. We do need to watch over each other and gently be our sister's keeper, holding each other accountable to God's Word. But on the other hand, over time and with the development of customs and practices and ways of doing things, strong expectations can take shape that are not based on Christ's commands but on *human opinion*. And when people are not allowed to deviate from those human expectations, then that's a form of oppression we must take our stand against as well.

Compassion, Not Competition

You'll know it's a form of oppression because inside you feel afraid of it. You'll have a great desire to conform so that you will find acceptance and favour and maybe even commendation from your fellow sisters in Christ. But sisters, Christ has come to cast out fear of punishment, to fill our hearts with peace and contentment. He did not shed His blood so that I could be yoked under a new form of fear, so that I

have to imagine what those 200 sets of eyes see when they look at me and what their opinion is of my looks, my kids, my husband, my family. He did not put us together in the church so that we would compete with each other for perfect-wife-of-the-year award, best-mom-of-the-congregation badge or most-together, helpful and good-looking sister-in-the church prize! He put us together so that we could serve one another as each of us strives to serve Christ. So that we could love each other out of a tireless love for our Saviour. He put us here not to ramp up pressure on each other but to be part of community of contentment, a society of solace, a people of peace.

Finding Freedom

We must be deliberate and conscious about this in order to over-come it, because it is so subtle. Ask yourself before you go to church Sunday morning: what does my Lord and Saviour ask of me on this day? What does He want from me as a woman? As a wife and mother? What does He want from my children? Why am I putting on this dress and why do I want my kids looking like this – is it to impress my church friends or is it to honour my Lord?

Ever notice how much tension is in the air in our homes when we are rushing the kids and ourselves to get dressed up? We have to herd them along like cattle and not one hair can be out of place...and by the time we get to the van the parents are frazzled and the kids are grumpy.

That is not freedom. And the Jubilee woman may say: *I will not bow down to the idol of vanity*. Also on Sunday mornings, I will take up my cross and stand under the yoke of Jesus Christ. I am free to prepare my family for a joyful day of worshipping our Saviour. I'll do my best to prepare their hearts and their bodies so that they come ready to sing God's praises and listen to His Word. I'll concentrate on reducing the tensions at home and increasing the wondrous expectation of meeting with our covenant God. I'll give more time to have breakfast, play some CD's of David's psalms or church hymns, and speak about what's coming in church that day. I'll be sure to have them looking respectable for the Lord's sake but most of all I will model and teach them to anticipate the Lord's Day and church worship with eagerness! That is the freedom for which Christ has set us free!

Balancing Commitments

Before you volunteer or sign-on to every church or school or community committee, consider what priorities the Lord Jesus places upon you. Are you able to look after the needs of your husband, children and family in general? Are you able to make time to meditate on God's Word and pray? Christ gives us rest, remember – spiritual rest, to be sure, but that includes also sufficient physical rest in life. He calls no one to a frenetic life. Of course, we should be living members in the church and active citizens in our communities but it must be in balance with being faithful wives and mothers at home while finding time to commune with our Saviour as His daughter.

And as for keeping up with the Jones' in order to fit in and belong, let's remember that we *already* belong – to Christ and to His church! Our identity does not hinge on whether we are up to date with the latest sit-coms, movies, books, iPods, iPhones or Wii games; or whether we frequent acceptable restaurants and go south for vacations – we already have pre-paid access to paradise through the precious blood of the Lamb of God!

Again, none of these things in themselves is ungodly but it's what's driving us to get these things that's often the problem. We need to slow down and consider *why* we're buying *what* we're buying and *why* going where we're going and do not let ourselves be bullied by what others are doing. *Their choices* are not your Master – *Christ is!* Sharing in their cultural habits does not give you acceptance – the cross of Jesus alone does! Being thought well of by your peers – even your church peers – does not make you belong or define your identity in the only place that it counts – in God's kingdom. Christ has established your identity there and even given you a new name: Jubilee woman! So *be* what you *are!* Become her more and more!

Guilty or Not?

There's another burden I see among church ladies that may not be obvious at first and that's the burden of false guilt. It is its own kind of pressure but with a moral side to it. We often mistake false guilt for true guilt which is why it is a sneaky and difficult form of oppression. But the two can be told apart. True guilt occurs when we have violated one of God's commands – when we have sinned against the Lord. By contrast, false guilt occurs when we have violated some merely human precept or expectation. The difficulty is that they can *feel* the same. It doesn't take much to berate ourselves for doing something wrong before God when in fact all we have done is let down another human's expectation. And living with false guilt is oppressive.

Let me give an example. As a mother you wish to provide well for your children, to train them and equip them to live as God's children in the midst of an ungodly world. You want them to be successful in life, to be well-rounded, solid Christian men and women when they grow up. So you send them to the Christian school and you sign them up for piano lessons. And then you hear about *taekwondo* being offered and your son is interested but he'd also like to play hockey. And your daughter wouldn't mind to take figure skating this winter and an art class every second Saturday.

And as your family expands, these interests and expectations expand with them but you remain only one mother with only so much time and so much money and you begin to feel guilty that you can't do for your kids all that you should be doing. You see your friend has her kids enrolled in more of these things and that makes you feel more uptight about it. Maybe your own kids start to rub it in by mentioning that their friends do this and they have this at their house (while they go without) – the implication being you're not being a good mom. And so you stew over it and worry and wonder whether you're just a selfish person who is holding back on her children.

False Guilt at Home

All of that, dear sisters, is false guilt. Jesus Christ does not ask you to give your child every opportunity or even most extra-curricular things, nor does He demand that you spread yourself so thin you have nothing left to give your husband or the church. He brought Israel up out of Egypt to give them *rest* from their enemies in the land of Canaan, remember? Running yourself ragged is like going back to Egypt. And even for the children who, in their immaturity, think it will be good for them, having so much of their time spent in organized learning environments can become an oppression too. Down-time, alone-time, meditation-time are necessary and beneficial for children too.

Instead, the LORD asks you to raise your kids in a God-fearing way, to teach them about their covenant God, His salvation, His promises, His obligations. They don't need so-called every opportunity to expand their potential but what they need from you is every consideration to ground their thinking, their attitude and their world-view in the covenant of God's love. They need to understand the Jubilee for themselves, to see what a God-directed, balanced and restful life looks like and feels like. If you run around like a headless chicken now, you'll only teach them to do the same later.

False Guilt Elsewhere

False guilt can come also from siblings or parents or even adult children who place upon you their own expectations and make you feel bad if you don't live up to them. Quite often they are pre-occupied with their own situations – maybe they've had some misfortune in life and look to you for some relief or comfort. They can be consumed by their own circumstances to the point where they are almost blind to your circumstances and particularly your calling from God as a wife and mother or sister in the congregation.

And so the pressure mounts, for example, from aging parents who would like more visits or from siblings who want you to call more than you do. Or from an adult child with health or life problems who expects you to be around doing things all the time. Loneliness or perhaps a feeling of helplessness might compel them to seek your companionship often and when you don't meet their expectation then little comments are made or the tone of voice or change of facial expression makes it clear that they are hurt and disappointed. And so you go home or hang up the phone racked with guilt and wondering whether you're being selfish but not knowing how to give more because you have a family of your own to maintain or you just don't have more to give. You might even get a little angry and bitter because they don't seem to understand *your* needs and your other responsibilities.

Christ is Judge

This is often a difficult and sensitive matter and yet it is possible to distinguish right from wrong when you remember that your Judge is not your family member but your Saviour in heaven is! You must do right *in His eyes* and to do that you must keep in mind His calling and His commands. Certainly you have an obligation to aging parents and needy siblings but if you are married, your *first* obligation lies with your husband and children. Christ redeemed marriage so that it can function as intended at creation, as a new family unit under God. And if you are single, then you also have the obligation to provide for yourself, commune with your God and serve in the church, all of which takes time and energy.

So you have to ask yourself: am I treating my parent, my sibling my friend (even) in a way that pleases God? Am I doing right in the eyes of the Lord? Your loved one may be disappointed in you but is God disappointed in you? If you are trying to be a faithful daughter of your heavenly Father then chances are you do visit your Mom or Dad or sibling regularly, you do think of them and phone them periodically, you do remember to pray for them. Sometimes in their trying

circumstances they give you the feeling that it is never enough and, without realizing it, they add to your burden. But the truth is, they may be asking more of you than the Lord does and it's that oppression from false guilt from which the Lord sets us free. Be honest before God, manage all your callings according to the priority He assigns and live free from judgments based on human opinion.

Jubilee Woman

By now, dear sisters, you have begun to see the Jubilee woman. She is free – from the inside out. She knows peace in her heart, a freedom from the true guilt of her sins in Christ Jesus. And so she won't be sucked into the mud of false guilt or the vortex of communal pressure brought on by mere human expectations. She knows who she is: a simple child of the Lord, loved by her Father in heaven for the sake of the Son. Not precious in herself but precious in Christ.

She has a calmness about her and knows times of tranquility on a daily basis. Each morning she swings her legs out of bed and realizes that she lives ultimately for an audience of One – her Lord in heaven! It's His opinion that concerns her most and she will always inquire: what does my Lord ask of me? And she will daily pray: Father, preserve me in the freedom for which your Son has bought me!

In her freedom she refuses to become caught up in the rat-race of this world. If she's received the gift of marriage and children then she makes choices – together with her husband – to keep herself and her family in the peace of Christ as much as possible. Happily productive as a housewife, mother and sister in the church, she finds room to breathe and rest, spiritually and physically, knowing that it is for freedom that Christ has set her free!

by Peter H. Holtvluwer

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