



Writings of W. Burney Overton

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The Awesome Freedom of a Child of God

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W. Burney Overton

FREEDOM!!!

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Insofar as I can tell, everyone wants to see self as having freedom. I know I do. And then I'm not so sure that I do. It occurs to me that there may be some real confusion about both meaning and application of a concept of freedom – and some real fear about being all that free.

Wouldn't you know that the first definition for "freedom" in the dictionary is, "Quality or state of being free"? Of course, there are a variety of others. They include, "Liberation from slavery, imprisonment, or restraint." Additional ones are "political independence, autonomy, self-determination, lack of restraints, exemption from control (somebody else's control, I suppose – but maybe self-control as well), improper familiarity, and spiritual self-fulfillment." And this is a confusing, but not an exhaustive listing.

Synonyms for "freedom" include liberty, independence, license, ease of movement, lack of restraint, and similar words and phrases. Nowhere in the definitions do I find anything that calls my attention to the issue of responsibility as it relates to freedom. Isn't that interesting? Perhaps I could interpret "spiritual self-fulfillment" as pointing in that direction, but I can get there only by reading a meaning into the phrase.

Having written all this about the meaning of the word "freedom", I now propose to write a paper on "The Awesome Freedom of a Child of God".

I am a child of God. If you will, the seed of God is in me. The raw material that is me has potential to be somebody and to do something – far more than I seem able to understand. I both know my limits and do not know them. Considering this, I find it necessary to entertain the thought that, in the creating power and will of God, I just may be totally free because God has drawn no limits around me.

Totally free because God has drawn no limits about me! What a thought!

It is a frightening thought. If it is supportable as a thought, I can only describe such freedom as awesome indeed.

Freedom without limits! As a matter of fact, freedom with limits is, at best, only partial freedom.

I am accustomed to freedom within limits. The rights of other people put limits on me. So does the economic level at which I live. The laws of the land define parameters. The places where I live and work prescribe boundaries. Just about everything in my life puts limits on me. I am limited by my physical capacities, the kinds of transportation available to me, the job I do, the level of my intelligence, the responsibilities that I have, the relationships I maintain. Sometimes I feel so burdened and so constrained by all the limitations of my life that I have very little sense of having any freedom at all.

And I would entertain the thought that, as a creation of God and in the will of God, I am totally free?

If I am totally free, I can make any decision I want to make. I can do anything I want to do. I can refuse to do anything I do not want to do. I can totally disregard anything that happens as the result of my decisions and actions. Even the parameters to which I have referred come about because I decide. What I can't do is to refuse to decide. I do not have that option.

Why would God give me such freedom? I'm not sure I want to face this question.

Maybe it isn't true that I have limitless freedom. Maybe I don't have to face the awesomeness of such a concept.

As I have indicated, limitations are a reality of life. They provide me with a sense of the familiar, and, with that, a sense of security.

As a matter of fact, in addition to the boundaries to which I have already referred, I recognize that I am born with limits. I am a genetic product, and my genes prescribe the parameters of my being, as well as my potential. They determine my eventual size, my abilities, my sex, my particular physical and personality characteristics. This is who I am created to be.

Society also determines limits for me. They are, for all practical purposes, imposed on me. The country, geographic environment, community, and family into which I am born contribute significantly to defining me. In fact, in the main, I use these factors to describe who I am.

However, I am free to challenge my perception of my limits, especially those set by my environment. I'm also free not to. I am aware, however, that people who have chosen to challenge have, in many instances, brought about profound changes in our world.

For instance, for many years it was assumed in the athletic world that a runner would not ever be able to run a mile in four minutes. The four-minute-mile was a goal, never to be attained. Then a strong runner ran a mile in a few seconds less than four minutes. He broke the barrier. He reached the goal that was supposed to be unattainable. After that, a few other athletes ran the mile in less than four minutes. In time, it became fairly routine for this to happen. The four-minute-mile was no longer a goal impossible to attain.

Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr., Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi and many others are examples of people who have chosen to challenge the limits, and who, having done so, have made a profound difference in our world.

While it is evident that there are all kinds of limits in life, I don't see them cancelling the concept that I am – we are – “created totally free”, for this freedom has to do with making decisions and acting on them. Nothing takes that freedom from me. Nothing can.

I want to be very clear here. Freedom to decide does not mean that I am free not to decide. It means that I am always free to choose among the options available to me. I must decide, and there are always options. Granted, I don't always like the options. However, I must decide and I am free to choose any one of the options.

When I write the words, “created totally free”, I am aware that I feel very insecure. I don't want to feel insecure. I want to feel secure. When I think about being totally free, I don't feel very secure.

Why not?

Because being totally free to make decisions and act on them makes me totally responsible for me, for my decisions, and for my responses to my decisions. That kind of freedom puts the responsibility for me and what I do with my life squarely on my shoulders. I don't have any excuses. I can't blame anyone or anything. I can't escape into being a victim.

Frequently, people say to me, “I don't have a choice.” It appears to me that those people seem to prefer to see themselves as victims. They may want freedom, but they do not want the responsibility that goes with it.

I can't not decide. My freedom is to choose. I can't not be responsible. My free is to be responsible for my decisions and my actions.

If I'm honest with myself, I recognize that God is very wise to have created me to make my own decisions, to act on them, and to bear the responsibility.

To have total freedom to confront my life, make my decisions, act on them, and be responsible for my participation in the events that transpire is the only way for me to experience and enjoy the fullness and completeness of the life God has given me.

Therefore I, a child of God, am created with this awesome freedom. How can I possibly be sufficiently responsible to use this freedom wisely?

One thing is for sure. I can't wait until I experience the consequences of my decisions to find out if I have exercised my freedom wisely. I am free to choose any option in a given situation. However, once I decide and act, the consequences follow. If I want to influence the consequences, I do that prior to making a decision.

To illustrate, let us suppose that I have just acquired a shiny and powerful new car. I am eager to take it out on the highway and see what it will do, so I decide to do just that.

The car is all that I imagined it might be. The ride is smooth as silk. The handling is superb. The feel of the power under the hood is exhilarating. It is almost as if I am flying. I glance at the speedometer and see that I am traveling well over one hundred miles an hour.

Just then, I hear the whine of a siren behind me. I groan and, as quickly as I safely can, pull over to the side of the highway and stop.

I'll spare you the details. You know the outcome without my telling you. At that time, there was no way that I could alter the consequences.

The surest way to keep from being arrested for speeding was to decide to stay within the speed limit. I couldn't make that decision after I had already been caught. Of course, at the outset, I knew the possible consequences.

I might not have gotten the speeding ticket. I might have lost control of the car and wrecked it. I might have seriously injured or killed myself. I might have simply enjoyed my test run and had no adverse consequences at all. The reality is that I made the decision and acted on it. Getting a speeding ticket was a result. I did not control the result.

Whether I like it or not, I am a child of God – and God has drawn no limits around me – not when it comes to making decisions and acting upon them. However, I am responsible for my decisions and actions, and, realistically, for the outcome. I can't divest myself of the responsibility any more than I can divest myself of the freedom to decide and act.

I am free. I am responsible. I can choose any option. I can act on that choice in any way I wish. The point at which I exercise my freedom – and my responsibility – is when I give consideration to possible outcomes and, with them in mind, make my decision and act on it.

I need to keep reminding myself that there are two options I do not have. I do not have the option not to decide, and I cannot control the outcome when I enact my decision.

I am free. I am responsible. Thus God has created me. Like it or not, that is how it is. I choose to like it and to thank God.