

Hebrews 2:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Analysis

And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. This verse unveils one of Christ's primary accomplishments through His death and resurrection: liberating humanity from the tyranny of death-fear. The Greek word *apallaxē* (ἀπαλλάξῃ, "deliver") means to completely release or set free from bondage. The definite article with "fear" (*phobou*, φόβου) indicates not occasional anxiety but the pervasive, persistent dread that enslaves humanity.

The phrase "all their lifetime" (*dia pantos tou zēn*, διὰ παντὸς τοῦ ζῆν) emphasizes the comprehensive scope of this bondage—from birth to death, fear of mortality shadows human existence. The word *douleias* (δουλείας, "bondage") describes the condition of slavery, suggesting that death-fear doesn't merely trouble people but actually masters and controls them, dictating decisions, priorities, and behaviors.

Christ's deliverance comes through His own death (v. 14), where He destroyed (*katargeō*, render powerless) him who holds death's power—the devil. By experiencing death fully and conquering it through resurrection, Jesus transforms death from a terrifying enemy into a defeated foe and gateway to glory. This liberation enables believers to live courageously, sacrificially, and eternally focused, no longer enslaved to self-preservation or existential dread.

Historical Context

The author of Hebrews wrote to first-century Jewish Christians (likely AD 60s) facing severe persecution, possibly in Rome or Jerusalem. Death was not an abstract theological concept but an immediate threat—believers faced execution, mob violence, and social ostracism that could lead to economic ruin and starvation.

In the Greco-Roman world, death-fear pervaded both philosophy and religion. Ancient writers like Lucretius argued that fear of death and divine judgment poisoned all human happiness. Mystery religions promised initiates deliverance from death's terrors through secret rites. Epicurean philosophy taught that death meant annihilation—no afterlife, no judgment—attempting to relieve fear through materialistic determinism. Stoicism counseled resigned acceptance of fate.

For Jews, death represented separation from God and exclusion from covenant blessings. While later Judaism developed clearer resurrection hope, many first-century Jews remained uncertain about afterlife. Christ's resurrection provided unprecedented assurance, transforming death from humanity's ultimate enemy into the believer's entrance to eternal life. The first Christians' willingness to face martyrdom rather than deny Christ demonstrated this revolutionary liberation from death-fear, shocking both Jewish and Gentile observers.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does fear of death subtly enslave people today, affecting decisions about career, relationships, and faith?
2. In what specific ways did Christ's death and resurrection destroy the devil's power over death?

3. How should deliverance from death-fear transform how believers approach suffering, risk, and sacrifice for the gospel?
4. What does it mean practically to live free from death's bondage while still experiencing grief and the pain of mortality?
5. How can the church today demonstrate to a death-fearing world the freedom and hope found in Christ's victory over death?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἀπαλλάξῃ	τούτους	ὅσοι	φόβῳ	θανάτου	διὰ
And	deliver	them	who	fear	of death	through
G2532	G525	G5128	G3745	G5401	G2288	G1223
παντὸς	τοῦ	ζῆν	ἐνοχοὶ	ὑσταν	δουλείας	
all	G3588	their lifetime	subject	were	to bondage	
G3956		G2198	G1777	G2258	G1397	

Additional Cross-References

Romans 8:15 (Parallel theme): For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

2 Timothy 1:7 (Parallel theme): For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Psalms 55:4 (Parallel theme): My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.

Romans 8:21 (Parallel theme): Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

2 Corinthians 1:10 (Parallel theme): Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Psalms 89:48 (Parallel theme): What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.

Psalms 56:13 (Parallel theme): For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

Psalms 33:19 (Parallel theme): To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

Job 18:11 (Parallel theme): Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet.

Job 24:17 (Parallel theme): For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.

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