

## **The Relation of the Free Church to the Slave Church: An Address Delivered in Paisley, Scotland, on March 20, 1846**

**By Frederick Douglass**

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- Mr. Douglas[s] then rose and said—Ladies and Gentlemen, I have come here this evening in the spirit of candour and truth to discuss the relation in which the Free Church of this country stands to the slave church of America. With regard to the motives which actuate us in exposing the Free Church, we are not influenced by any sectarian principles—we have no objections to the organization of that church—we are not here to determine whether they did right or wrong in seceding from the Establishment.
- We are here solely for the purpose of speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves—we are here to speak for the down-trodden, the crushed, and outraged slave, whose cause we believe has been severely injured in consequence of the relation of the Free Church to the slave church, and as its advocates we feel bound to discuss this question. We are as fond of the good will of all people as other men, if we can procure that agreeably to truth, justice, and mercy.
- I believe the Free Church holds a position inimical to the antislavery cause in America. One word in regard to the system. "It is the vilest sin that ever saw the sun"—it is the compendium of every crime—there is not a doctrine in the Bible but slavery violates. I could prove, when you have deprived man of the liberty of acting freely, you disqualify him for obeying the law of God. Slavery does this, and in order to do this, she uses the most brutal and cruel means—the gag, the thumbscrew, the whip, and the branding-iron. The slaveholders darken the soul of the slave, for they know well if he ever have the law of love that he will look upon them as oppressors, and consider their system "the vilest that ever saw the sun." If a mother, smiling upon her child, and thinking upon its immortal destiny, dare to instruct that child in the letters that spell the name of our Creator, she is liable to be hanged. They send him groping his way in the dark from time to eternity. This is upheld by the Church.
- He then read a number of advertisements of runaway slaves. Some had scars on their backs, caused by severe flogging, others a bit of their ears cut off, others with their master's initials branded on their cheeks, their foreheads, and their legs, by which they might be identified. The master's names were signed at the bottom of the advertisements. Just mark this, my friends. The wretches are not content with putting the branding iron on the quivering flesh on the cheek, but they must brand the forehead also, and then dare to publish the bloody deed over their own signature. The best evidence of a man being a slave is the scars on his back. This is but a faint picture. I could read such advertisements till to-morrow, but I think you are all satisfied that slavery is, call it what you may, a horrid and unnatural system. There is not a man or woman in this assembly but would shriek at the thought of being a slave—there is not even a member of the Free Church but would shudder at the thought. Now, then, for our charges. The other day, when in Dundee, I tabled the charges; I mean to read them every place I go. I have as many charges against that church as there are commandments in the Mosaic law.
- I, for one, when I heard of the formation of a free church in Scotland, my soul lit up with joy. I had known none but slave churches—no church organization but had linked within its folds the bloody system. But God be praised! a *Free* church has sprung up, and, not content with spreading its doctrines in Scotland, it has appointed a delegation to go to America. I clapped my

hands for joy—I proclaimed the fact that the cause of freedom was onward in Scotland—a free church is born, and they are going to visit us. Shake your chains, and cheer up your broken spirits!—freedom is onward! But oh! what a sudden reversal! How dark and gloomy became my soul, when I heard they had another object in view than the cause of freedom.

- They came, but not for me or my brethren in bondage; they had not time to come to me, and for the best of all reasons, I had no money, my master had stolen it from me. I had nothing to purchase the advocacy of the *Free* church. Instead of looking into the quarters, they are on their way up to the big house; they want to see *master*, the man that has the money. They pity us in their heart, but they can do nothing for us. They are less free than some others who do not assume that arrogant egotistical name.

- No matter, they got the money; it was stolen, they knew it was stolen. I shall prove it was stolen. What is stealing? Taking that which rightfully belongs to another, is it not?—Yes. Am I not my own?— Yes—my body belongs to myself. How do I know? God has given me it. God has also given me the powers of thought: he would not have given me any such powers if he did not intend me to use them. He has also given me hands, he has given me wants; and I am to use those hands to supply my own wants, or he would not have given me them. Therefore, my hands are my own, my feet my own, my mind my own, my whole body my own—no other man has any right to me—I have the sole right to myself. Therefore, if another man steals me, and makes me his property, liable to be bought and sold, he takes that which rightfully belongs to another. Is not that stealing? And if, after stealing me, he gives the produce of my blood, my bones, my sinews to aid civil and religious liberty, is he not giving that which rightfully belongs to me?

- There is a law above all other enactments—it is the law written by the finger of God upon the heart, that man shall not hold property in man. They admit they hold fellowship with slaveholders, or men-stealers (that is a better word; I like to call everything by its proper name). Would it be wrong to hold fellowship with a man who was known to be in the practice of sheep-stealing? It would not be right. If it would be wrong to hold fellowship with a sheep-stealer, it is also wrong to hold fellowship with a man-stealer. If it be wrong to steal the soul for which Christ died, will the Free Church hold fellowship with these men as Christians? Slavery exists because it is popular. We have to make it unpopular. What would be thought of the man who said he was diametrically opposed to slavery, while he went and took the money which was wrung from the blood, bones, and sinews of the slave, to build his church and pay his stipend? We would say he aided and abetted slavery. If you hold fellowship with slaveholders, you virtually say to the world that a man can be a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, although he be, at the same time, the vilest sinner. But whether it be assumed by others or not, I know it to be true, as truth can have no concord with lies, so a free church cannot hold fellowship with a slave one. No quarter is given to slavery by true freedom.

- He then read a few paragraphs of Dr. Chalmers, which had appeared in print to the following effect:—"That although the system of slavery is bad, it would display a narrowness of mind to exclude the slaveholders from fellowship; that a line of distinction ought to be drawn between slaveholders and slavery." A distinction ought to be made between slavery and slaveholders! As well might he tell us that a distinction ought to be made between the sin and the sinner, between the dice and the sharper. He will denounce adultery most powerfully, and then come forward and tell us that distinction ought to be made between the adulterer and adultery. Every sinner, every criminal, may here find a place of escape. A distinction ought to be made between the slaveholder and slavery! *O! the artful dodger*. The learned, eloquent, and religious Scotch divine has, by much logical research and deep study, at last ascertained that a distinction ought to be

made. "By their fruits ye shall know them." No, no, says Dr. Chalmers, with all his brilliant clear sightedness. In order to reform the world, we are to individualize the sinner with the sin. The Doctor says, "we must take into consideration the men whom circumstances have connected therewith, and although they were willing to liberate their slaves, their constitution compels them to hold them."

- I deny that any circumstances compel the slaveholder to hold his slaves. There is not a single slaveholder but could, if he would, get rid of his slaves. God looks down through the net-work of the system, and sees the sin individually. It will [not] be judged as a system,—every man will be judged by himself. Singly I come into this world, singly I live, and singly I die. The slaveholder may charge it on the system, but it will be of no avail.

- I know what degree of joy the slaveholders felt when they were acknowledged by the Free Church. The delegation forgot the commission they received from heaven, but remembered the commission they received from the church. I have often supposed an interview with my old master and Mr. Lewis. Mr. Lewis calls upon my old master, Mr. Auld. "A fine day, Mr. Auld."—"Fine day, sir." "I have been appointed to come here, and try to get a little support in aid of civil and religious liberty. Your friend, Deacon has already headed the subscription with a handsome sum." "I am a great friend to civil and religious liberty, but I am scarce of money at present; however, the deacon and I always like to go hand in hand. I have a very likely young negro, I will take him to the market to-morrow, and I have no doubt I will realize a considerable sum, and will be able to give you a handsome donation in aid of the cause. You will come and breakfast with me tomorrow morning." "With pleasure, sir." "We will go down to the sale in our gig. You would never see one of our sales, I suppose." "No." "Well, you will be over in time for breakfast." "Yes, sir." "Good by, Mr. Auld." "Good by, Mr. Lewis."

- Next morning arrives, Mr. Lewis calls, I usher him into the room, the Bible is handed down to him, to conduct family worship. He opens it, reads a portion, one as far removed from slavery as possible, and then prays, while I am anxiously listening at the door to hear if he will say, "O God! soften the hearts of the slaveholders, burst the chains and fetters of the oppressed, and let the bond go free, enlighten the minds of the down-trodden and injured slaves," &c., &c. But no such prayers did I hear. Breakfast over, I am called upon, ordered to cross my hands, a rope is tied round them, the rope is attached behind the gig, and I am obliged to run behind twelve or 15 miles, while they are sitting in the gig. (I have been in the same position, only tied behind a horse instead of a gig.) We arrive at the auction place, I am put up for sale, the buyers are bid to come forward and judge for themselves; they feel my arms, my legs, and look into my mouth as if I was a horse. Women are used in the same manner, their limbs are brutally exposed to the gaze and feel of the fiends. At last I am knocked down, perhaps at six hundred dollars, when the auctioneer says, "Gentlemen, you lost a decided bargain; he is not sold for any fault of his own; merely because his master is out of cash at present, and wishes to make a donation in aid of *civil and religious liberty in Scotland*." The Free Church pockets the money. They may say they did not attend any sales. What is the difference? The money which they got was made by the traffic in human flesh, and in return for that money they have covered the slaveholder with the garb of Christianity.

- I call upon you as Christians to cry into the ear of that church— **SEND BACK THE MONEY**. I may be allowed to speak on that system, and I have a right to speak when the blood of four sisters, a brother, and an old grandmother is sticking in the hem of her garment. If you **SEND BACK THAT MONEY**, I will speak as much in your praise as I have done against you. I have not the power to utter the feelings that agitate my bosom. I have not words strong enough to give

vent to my sufferings. If there is a Free Churchman within the sound of my voice, I would say—**SEND BACK THE MONEY.** Help to unrivet the fetters of the poor bondsmen, and hasten the glad jubilee when three millions of poor down-trodden men shall be delivered from the bloody chains of tyranny and oppression, and God will bless you—the slaves will bless you.