

Freedom

Freedom is a theme that runs through the Bible, from Noah's family escaping the Flood in Genesis and the Israelites escaping the tyranny of Egypt in Exodus to the future hope spoken of in Revelation. Chains being broken, prisoners being released and people being set free are all familiar themes in the bible.

Freedom is a word used much in the media today. We enjoy freedom today in this country because of the sacrifice of those who fought in World Wars 1 and 2. I am not so much talking about freedom in that way – rather the freedom that only God can bring to us as believers. To be able to say “I am free” is a great blessing. It does not mean you are a free agent to do what you like, when you like, regardless of others.

Today we will see that God's freedom has boundaries, accountability and responsibility. It is not “Nike” – just do it. Rather it is do what pleases God. I have heard testimony from prisoners who found Christ while in prison. They said there experienced more freedom in prison than on the outside. How? God set them free!

Charles Wesley hymn about being set free – one of the verses:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light:
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee*

What does freedom mean to you?

- Retirement
- A desert island with palm trees
- Not having to go to work
- Having your own business
- Travelling the world

Whatever pictures come to mind, today we will take a look at what freedom means for a Christian. You may be in for a surprise!

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul corrected erroneous teaching that salvation was in part through observance of the Law, and he asserts that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. In **Galatians 5:1** he says *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened by a yoke of slavery.* The slavery here refers to following religious laws or legalism. The truth is that we have been set free to experience and enjoy a vibrant relationship with the Lord through the Holy Spirit.

In **Luke 4:18** Jesus said in describing his ministry that He was sent to *proclaim freedom for the prisoners* (NIV) *...to set oppressed people free* (NLT). Jesus wants us to be free. The truth is of course that Jesus came to free us from sin. As **Isaiah 53:12** tells us *...He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.*

To be set free from sin is absolutely wonderful and the most freeing gift of all. But what does freedom look like on the other side of this wonderful gift, after we have experienced this forgiveness from sin? Isn't it interesting that God, who is truly the most free agent of all, chose to restrict His freedom and become a human being, the creator becoming the created, to bring freedom to mankind? This tells us something about the true nature of this freedom. It tells us that there are decisions we make as free men that impose boundaries and limitations on us, and that this is a part of being free. If I choose to be an honest person and not lie, I impose a restriction, but it's for my good and for the good of those in my world.

Having structure in your life brings freedom

Romans 6:7 states clearly that we have been *freed from sin*. Then in v18 *You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of righteousness*. So we have been freed from sin but have become slaves of something else – righteousness!

We are set free to serve a new Master. This is huge, because it shows us that our freedom has boundaries. There is accountability. We are servants of righteousness. **Romans 6** goes on to say that our slavery to sin led to impurity, ever increasing wickedness and death. In contrast, slavery to righteousness leads to holiness and eternal life. Doesn't that sound better?

The word "slave" has a negative feel to it. But being a slave to God is very different. It is a place where our desire is to follow after God, where our responses to the issues of life are to do the right thing. To do what pleases God. This brings great freedom. Think of how freeing forgiveness is! You don't have to carry around the pain of hurts that drags you down each day – rather, you let go and ask God to take it. That is freedom. Yes it takes effort, but most good things in life require effort on our part.

The world's view of freedom is very different. Do as you please, anything goes, anti establishment, if it feels good – do it. Nike advert – just do it.

The Prodigal son is a good example. He asked his father for his inheritance, which was substantial ... **Luke 15:13-16** *Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

So the Prodigal son left family and friends to live it up in Tahiti or somewhere romantic like that. He left that which was familiar to "be free" to "just do it". And where did this lead him? To a pigsty! So much for the world's freedom.

Matthew 7:13-14 *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

The truth is that, left to our own devices, without guidance from the One who made us; we will end up in a heap somewhere. **Proverbs 5:11-14** reminds us of where we end up by doing our own thing in life: *At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin..."*

You have only to look at some celebrities who have a significant amount of so-called freedom. They are free agents, financially free, answerable to no one, surrounded by people who keep telling them how wonderful they are. Many end up in re-hab for drugs or alcohol. Their freedom has ensnared them. The enticing path of so-called freedom became a road to bondage. Of course we reach out to those captivated by drugs and alcohol – it is such a huge issue in our society.

So we begin to see that when Christ sets us free, His freedom is very different from the world. Freedom in Christ brings with it accountability. There are boundaries. **Psalm 119:32** *I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.* We are set free to live a life of obedience. That's freedom as a Christian.

- Run – implies unrestricted movement
- Path – shows us there is a road to follow
- Commands – those instructions that God gives in His word for our good, and the benefit of mankind.
- My freedom is linked to God's commands. I am free to be a slave

Ever seen children who are allowed to do anything by their parents? Not pretty is it. And they are not free, because they have no boundaries. In contrast, a disciplined child has the security of boundaries established by parents and within those, they experience safety and freedom. In the same way, obeying God's commands in His word brings safety and freedom for us.

By way of an illustration, I was thinking about marriage. In contrast with the promiscuity of the world, God's plan for marriage is that sexual intercourse is confined to a husband and wife relationship. A boundary is set. The world would say that was an unnecessary restriction, and that having sex with multiple partners was freedom. Same with having sex before marriage which many find acceptable, even Christians. So the world goes against God's laws and leads people down of path of promiscuity which messes with their minds and ends in trouble.

For those of us who know the joy of sex within marriage, we know true freedom. Fidelity in marriage means that both partners live in a trusting loving relationship. They are not worried that their husband or wife will run after someone else. In that type of relationship, we experience true freedom.

Yes there are boundaries, but these are for our protection and fulfilment. It is wonderful to be married!

Galatians 5:13-14 develops the truth about freedom further emphasizing that we are called to serve others. *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."*

We are free to serve. Let's face it you have to let go in order to serve. Let go of your own agenda and look to the needs of others. Freedom is a love walk.

Philippians 2:1-4 *If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand*

Freedom embraces the truth that life is not all about me, but being part of a community where others are respected and cared for. You help others progress in life. As the saying goes "You will rise by lifting others".

Your character is developed and your life is enlarged as we help others. This is the real purpose of our God-given freedom – to serve others.

- We are free to live by faith – because God is with us
- We are free to love – because God has put His love in our hearts
- We are free to forgive – just as we have been forgiven
- We are free to give – because God meets all of our needs
- We are free to be all that God wants us to be – because He has a plan for our lives

You may recognize that there are areas of your life to day where you are not free. The truth we have seen today is that Jesus came to bring freedom. Gal 5:1 ***It is for freedom that Christ has set us free....***

As believers, **Galatians 5:22** tells us that *...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

These God qualities are in us. So today, we are going to pray and believe God for change:

- Faith replacing fear
- Self control replacing bad habits
- Patience replacing frustration
- Joy and peace replacing anger

Jesus said in **John 8:32** that *...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

We know that Jesus wants us to be free, and that this freedom is unlike the so-called freedom of the world. It is a life of obedience to God, a life lived in relationship with Him. In that there is security, peace and true freedom. **Joel 3:10** *...let the weak SAY "I am strong!"* **Job 22:28** *You shall also decide and decree a thing, and it shall be established for you; and the light [of God's favour] shall shine upon your ways.*

Dear Father,

I come to you today in faith, believing in your love for me.

I acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God,

that He died on the Cross to pay for the sins of all mankind,

that He rose again from the dead,

that He is my saviour.

I come to you in repentance;

I turn away from my sins and the things which have me bound.

I turn to you father God.

I declare on the authority of your word:

- *That I am forgiven*
- *That I am born again*
- *That I do not live in fear*
- *That I have your love in my heart*
- *That I am a faithful person*

- *That I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*
- *That greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world*
- *That I am blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus*
- *That you are my shepherd and I lack nothing*
- *That I am your servant*
- *That I serve others and help them get ahead*
- *I SAY: I AM STRONG*
- *I SAY: I AM FREE*