

Free Indeed Part 2

Free To Be Free

We talked last Sunday about what it means to be free indeed. We said then that freedom is not the absence of rules, that is chaos. Freedom is not the absence of God, that is hell. Freedom is not the power do as you please, that is selfishness. Freedom is the power to choose to do what is right. For the follower of Christ, freedom is the power to choose to be what you were created by God to be and to do what you were created by God to do. Freedom is choosing to live as God called you to live, free from bondage to sin and self. And how do we experience that freedom? By repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. When we place our faith in Christ and his saving grace, we are forgiven and set free from sin. But that's not all. We are not only freed from the wages of sin, the condemnation of our sin, but we are made alive in Christ, freed to live a new life by the power of His Holy Spirit. Jesus is at work in us, enabling us to make right choices, empowering us to live a life that is obedient and pleasing to God. Through Christ we are free to live an abundant and holy life, in rhythm and in step with the life of God.

Through Christ we have been set free. Jesus said "whom the Son sets free is free indeed." We are free to serve Jesus Christ. As Bob Dylan sang, "you got to serve somebody." We've been set free so we can serve Jesus and live in him, but the pull toward slavery and bondage in our own personal lives is relentless and strong. Our old fleshly nature and our culture constantly pull us away from a life surrendered to Christ and back to a life surrendered to self and pleasure and sin. The influence is always there, the constant pressure to compromise, to surrender to sin, to become enslaved again in bondage. That's why the bible warns us and urges us to remain free. **"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." Galatians 5:1**

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians. These gentile Christians were essentially being pressured by some to convert to Judaism in order to become Christians. They were told they would have to be circumcised and needed to eat kosher and keep all of the law of Moses in addition to accepting the grace of Christ for their salvation. Paul tells them to stand firm in the salvation they had experienced in Christ and in that freedom Jesus provided for them and "do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

We aren't being pressured to convert to Judaism, but we are pressured to return to what Paul called "a yoke of slavery". The pressure is there to become enslaved again. I want to mention a few things that can enslave us and the underlying belief that is communicated by our bondage to these things. You'll see what I mean. Consider this. We can be bound by...

Materialism. The underlying belief is "**I am what I have.**" Materialism means we are bound or enslaved by what we own. Materialism offers a shortcut. Everyone wants to be worth something, to be unique, to have value. Materialism suggests it is "easier to buy than to become." Who needs character if we have money and possession? Materialism enslaves us to what we own and to the constant feeling we don't yet have enough. In that sense, materialism also binds you to what you do not have. Never satisfied we are constantly seeking and working for more. Having or not having, either way, when things occupy more time and space and attention and devotion in your heart than Jesus does then it suggests you are bound by materialism. You've become bound to this idea, "I am what I have."

The ultimate danger in materialism is that we judge ourselves and others by what we have. **Materialism emphasizes what we have rather than who we are in Christ!** The emphasis is on things rather than relationships, on possessions rather than people.

Remember the man we call the rich young ruler? You can find his story in Luke 18. He asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments and the young man said he had done that since he was a boy but there was still something in his life that kept him from being free. Jesus told him there was one thing he lacked. "Sell everything you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Luke 18:22 The bible said the man went away very sad because he had great wealth. The rich young ruler was controlled by what he had. He didn't control it, it was controlling him. He was bound by and bound to his possessions.

"If I am what I have, what will I be if I give it all away?" Your identity mustn't be in what possessions you have but in who you are in Christ! You are a child of God and a heir with Christ. Jesus never said you couldn't have money, he just said you couldn't serve God and money. Serve God and use money to bless God and bless others. Be careful that you don't become enslaved to that idea "I am what I have." Consider bondage to....

Appearance. Often in our culture we are bound by appearance. The underlying belief is

“I am what I look like.” We value appearance above all else. What we wear, designer clothes and accessories, the latest hairstyle, glasses, body image, weight and size. Fifty years ago no one had heard of anorexia or bulimia, that neurotic need to look a certain way. We are a nation preoccupied with appearance. We don't care about a person's character, we care about their appearance. We cheer for the people on the red carpet because of how they look. “What was she wearing?” We don't care how messed up or wicked or shallow – how they look is what matters.

There is nothing wrong with looking nice. I'm not suggesting that in order to be free of bondage to appearance we should abandon all matters of personal hygiene. I appreciate you wearing clean clothes and combing your hair, even putting on a little deodorant. You put on your makeup today. Looking nice, there is nothing wrong with that, but the world around us says if you don't look a certain way then you don't really matter, you have no value. If you don't dress a certain way, then you aren't as good as someone else. “You are what you look like.”

You've heard that old saying, “You can't tell a book by its cover.” Believe it. You are more than what you look like. It isn't about outward appearance, it is about what is on the inside, that's what matters. Jesus on the inside and His Holy Spirit at work in your life makes you irresistible, regardless of the outside. You are more than your outward appearance, more than your clothes or fashion. Don't let yourself become enslaved to outward appearance, (yours or someone else) but focus on spiritual formation on the inside, becoming more like Jesus!

Jesus said, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?why do you worry about clothes?...Do not worry saying, ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”** Matthew 6:25-33. Jesus tells us life is more than clothing, more than physical appearance, more than looking good.

The Apostle Peter wrote especially to ladies, **“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.”** 1 Peter 3:3-5.

Don't be a slave to outward appearance. It does not deserve the priority it gets. Your physical appearance doesn't determine your value or your worth as an individual. You are not what you wear or what you look like. Stop believing what Madison Avenue tells you, that ladies, unless you are a size 1 or 3 you have no worth or value. Stop believing that unless you look and dress like a Kardashian you can't be popular or accepted. Beauty is found in your relationship with Christ. It is that unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight. Don't be deceived into believing you are what you look like. Let the light of Christ and his holiness be seen in the way you dress and the way you conduct your life. You aren't what you look like, you are what Christ has set you free to be! Consider bondage to...

The past. Many of us are bound to the past, to the bad choices or sinful mistakes of our past. You may have come to Christ in faith and you've been trying to live this new life we are talking about, but the past keeps drawing you back. The underlying belief that enslaves you is: **"I am what I used to be."**

It is easy to fall back into old patterns, old habits. Something happens and you look for comfort and the old programs in your brain tell you to go back to the default position, back to the old crowd, the old means of comfort, the choices of the past. You take that step back and you hear a voice tell you, "See, this is who you really are. Just what you used to be. You can't really change." And you tell yourself, "this is what I am. This is who I was and this is who I will always be." What did Paul say in our text? **"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."** Stand firm! Persevere. Be stationary. Don't budge. Don't even turn your feet towards the bondage you walked away from and don't start believing the lie that you are what you used to be.

The bible says, **"If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17.** I am what I used to be but that's not all I am. I am what Jesus has made me to be! My past may have shaped me, but it doesn't control my choices today and it doesn't determine my destiny for tomorrow. God's grace is greater than my sins and my past. **I am what I used to be? No, I am what Christ says I am by his grace!** Stop telling yourself you can't change, you can't be different. You are a new creation! Jesus said "You must be born again." Born again. It's a new beginning! You used to be lost but now you are found. You used to be controlled by your passions but now you are controlled by the Spirit of Christ. You used to

be dead in your sins but now you are alive in Christ. You used to gratify your flesh but now you live by the Spirit. You used to live to serve yourself, now you live to serve God and to serve others. You are a new person! You are not who you used to be.

When the enemy, when the old friends, when the old voices start playing in your head, do what the scripture said to do, “Stand firm.” Stop and say it. “I am not what I used to be. That’s not how I live. That’s not how I think. That’s not how I behave. I am a new creation in Christ. I live by faith and I serve the Lord. I am who Christ says I am. I am what God’s word says I am.” You have been set free from the past, from its control, from its bondage, from its domination of your life and your choices. Stop submitting yourself to its influence and stand firm in the freedom that Jesus has provided for you. You are free in Christ!! Don’t go back to bondage and slavery. What about bondage to your...

Peers. Some of the strongest pressure, especially on younger people, is peer pressure. The underlying belief is, “**I am what my peers say I should be.**” Peer pressure is succumbing to the fear of standing alone or of being isolated from your peers, exposed. Bowing to the pressure we surrender our right to make our own decisions and allow others to make the decisions for us. We bow to the pressure of the world and a sinful culture rather than choosing to obey Christ and his word. “If that’s what everyone else is doing, then that’s what I’ll do. Whatever you all think, that’s what I’ll be, that’s what I’ll do. I just want to belong. I want to fit in.”

It’s not just teenagers that give in to peer pressure. Everyone does it, from the youngest to the eldest among us. We adapt to the business culture around us, we try to fit in with co-workers in terms of language, after-hours behavior. “I can’t refuse to go to the clubs if that’s what everyone else is doing. Everyone goes for drinks after work and you have to go along to get along isn’t that what they say?” “Everyone at work or at school talks like this. They all use this language. They all talk about their spouse that way. They all cheat on their girlfriend or boyfriend, their husband or wife. They all watch pornography. Everyone acts this way.”

In the first place, we know that isn’t the truth. Not everyone talks that way. Not everyone cheats, lies, is unfaithful. No, that isn’t the way to get ahead in business. I’m sure you could ask some of the business men in this church and they can tell you the cost and the blessing that comes with making the right choice. They can tell you the long term benefit that comes with

saying, "I am going to be what Jesus says I should be and not what my peers or co-workers say I should be."

Bill Bartlett and his wife Rita attend our church. He was the president of John Zink company when it was bought by another company in a hostile takeover. He was on a business trip in Europe when his new boss said to him, "I notice you don't drink." "No, I don't drink." I notice you don't swear." "No, I don't swear." "I haven't heard you talk about chasing women." "No, I don't chase women." The boss said, "I'm going to change all of that." Bill said, "No, you won't." Within a year, Bill was fired. He said, "I didn't get fired for poor performance. I got fired because of the God I served. My boss and I served different Gods." Ultimately, it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to him as God blessed him. Stand firm, Paul said and don't be enslaved again to a yoke of sin and bondage.

Peer pressure says, "Don't be a fanatic. Don't be a radical for Jesus, just be like the rest of us." It's amazing isn't it how some person wearing pajama bottoms with their underwear showing and their hair dyed fifteen shades of purple with a couple dozen piercings in their face can somehow make you feel odd or humiliated because you love Jesus and carry a bible and won't get high with them or get drunk or sleep around. Peer pressure says, "don't say too much about Jesus. Keep your faith to yourself." Jesus did say, "**If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.**" **Mark 8:38.** We have no reason to be ashamed of loving the One who died on the cross for us and living for him. Stand firm and don't go back to bondage.

Peer pressure is bondage to the error of the many. **I am not what peers say I should be, I am what I know Christ has redeemed me to be!** Finally there is bondage to...

Self. The underlying belief is "**I am whatever I want to be.**" My generation said, "do your own thing" and "if it feels good, do it." We shifted the focus to self. "It's all about me. I'm the center of the universe and what I want is more important than anyone or anything else. I must be fulfilled. I must be satisfied. My needs must be met. I must be happy. I must have it all." "Well, you know there is no "I" in team." "Yeah but there is no "us" in team either. It isn't about us, it's about me." It's about getting all you can for yourself while you can. And friends, that is bondage to self. Culture says "It's all about me" and "look out for number 1" but Jesus

said, **“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

Matthew 10:39. You can't find life and freedom by serving yourself. You find it by serving God and serving others. Jesus said, **“...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** **Mark 10:43-45**

Freedom for the follower of Christ is not found in saying “I can be whatever I choose to be and live however I choose to live.” Freedom for the follower of Christ is found in saying yes to being what Jesus calls us to be. The bible tells us, **“You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”** **1 Corinthians 6:19-20.**

Freedom comes when we surrender ourselves, body, mind, spirit, soul, every area and aspect of our life to Christ. Surrender to Jesus is freedom. The world says, “You are what you have, what you look like, what your past says, what your peers say you should be, what you want to be,” but the bible tells us our identity is found in Christ. I am a new creation in Christ. I am what Christ set me free to be. I am not my own, I have been ransomed and redeemed by the life and blood of Christ. My worth is based not on what I have or on what I look like but my worth is based on Christ himself and his sacrifice. He says I have worth because he died for me and now I belong to him!

You want to be free indeed? Surrender your life to Jesus Christ. I know it sounds crazy. I'm telling you to surrender your whole life to Christ and become a servant of his in order to be free! And that is exactly what I'm saying and it is the truth. You will never be more free than to surrender your life to Jesus and accept by faith the freedom Christ offers you today. Want to be free? Give it all to Jesus!