

Free Indeed

Aren't you thankful for the freedom we enjoy as Americans? For more than 200 years we have enjoyed the blessings of freedom and democracy. We understand such freedom carries a price with it and we acknowledge and honor all those who have paid that price to keep us free. But freedom also carries a distinct moral and spiritual risk and responsibility with it as well. The freedom to express ourselves means those with views and opinions we disagree with and even despise have the same freedom. Just because we have the freedom to do some things doesn't mean we should do some things. It seems in our culture most people think freedom is the right to do absolutely as we please with no restraint and no unpleasant consequence. We think we have the right to do as we please. "The pursuit of happiness – it's my right, remember?"

We all want our freedom! Teenagers can't wait to move out of the house so they can have their freedom. Husbands and wives divorce because they want their freedom. Christians walk away from the church because they want their freedom. Ever felt that way? "I want my freedom!" Well let me ask you: "**Freedom from what?**" Freedom from parents and their rules? Freedom from authority? Freedom from the church? The church's rules? Freedom from God and God's rules? Freedom from your spouse? Your spouse's rules? What is it you are setting yourself free from?

Understand, rules aren't bad. Most of the time they are there for our good and our protection. The truth is, **The absence of rules is not freedom, it is chaos.** "I'm tired of all the rules, tired of the church and the bible and people telling me what to do." Are you really tired of ALL the rules? Like "One Way. Do Not Enter". That's a rule isn't it? It's there to save your life. "Do not insert metal objects into electrical outlets". That's a rule isn't it? Tired of that one? "Don't put your hand in the lion's cage." "Don't text and drive. Don't drink and drive." "Stop at red lights." Not all rules are bad. Some of those rules are there to protect you.

God gave us rules for life. "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not kill." Breaking those rules produces pain. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Breaking that rule is painful for everyone concerned. Those rules aren't denying us our freedom, they are ensuring that life functions in a way so we can enjoy freedom and live life as God intended. (If you haven't read *Not Just Idle Words*, purchase a copy at the information booth. It will help you understand why God gave us the commandments and the value and freedom that comes with God's rules for living.)

The absence of rules is not freedom. When every man is left to his own ways and governed only by his own conscience, we have anarchy and chaos and no one enjoys real freedom. Nazi concentration camps, Rwandan genocide, the horrors of American slavery, all show you what humanity can do when there are no rules to govern behavior.

“Okay, so I don’t mean freedom from all rules. I just mean stupid rules like the ones the church laid down. I just want to be free from God and all his rules.” Really? Do you really want to be free from a God that loved you so much he sent his only Son to die in your place so you could be truly free? Have you thought this through? A God that loves you that much just might have placed rules and boundaries in your life to protect you from pain and heartache and death. Are you sure you want freedom from God and his rules for living? Can you really ever be free of God?

I suppose there is one way you can be free from God and his rules for living. There is one place that is free from his rules but that happens to be hell, for above everything else, beyond the fire and brimstone and all the torment the bible speaks of, ultimately the best description and definition of hell is “the complete absence of God’s presence.” If you want to be free from God and his rules, consider the ramifications. Think about this: **The absence of God is not freedom, it is hell.** Running from God, hoping to be free from him and his rules, wanting to live as you please with no restraint. It is possible, but it isn’t freedom, it’s hell.

When we mistakenly view freedom as the right and power to do anything we please, we are in trouble. Somewhere along the way we confused freedom with indulgence and excess. The truth is, **Freedom, without discipline and appropriate restraint, leads to bondage.** Living life without restraint, without rules, without God and his commandments, without discipline, will only lead to bondage and not freedom. We indulge ourselves to the point we are no longer free to enjoy things, we are addicted. We have to have them! The joy and the freedom are gone. We are addicted to food, drugs, alcohol, sex, entertainment, pleasure, you name it. We aren’t free, we’re enslaved! The land of the free has become the land of the addict.

Freedom is not the power to do as you please – that’s selfishness. Freedom is the power to choose to do what is right. 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 he called you to live. If you have made Christ the Savior and Lord of your life, you have been

freed from bondage to sin and the Holy Spirit is present to help you obey God. Real life, real freedom is found in serving Jesus and living the way he intended us to live! Life apart from obedience to God ultimately cannot and will not satisfy you. It is less than what God intended for you.

One year I had a goldfish up here and asked, “what if this goldfish decided he was sick of the water, tired of this bowl and the little rocks and the underwater diver. He decides ‘I’m getting out of here. I want to be free. I want to live on land.’ That’s not freedom, that’s death for the goldfish. Life for the goldfish is living as God created him to live – within the parameters of his existence, i.e. the water.”

“Oh, but that’s not enough. There is a world beyond the goldfish bowl.” Not really, no. Not for goldfish there isn’t. Beyond the bowl is death. “Well, that’s fine for goldfish, but there is a life beyond the church and obeying God.” Not really, no. Not for humans there isn’t. Beyond obedience to God and his word is bondage and death. The problem is, too often we and the goldfish haven’t explored what life can be when lived as God intended. He has enough grace and mercy and power to enable you to live in fullness, in abundance, in freedom.

You may feel like none of this applies to you. You are living as free as you can be, doing what you want to do, when you want to do it. “No rules from the bible are gonna tell me what to do. I’m not gonna live like a prisoner to God and the church and his rules.”

You want to be totally free. But do you want to hear the truth about yourself? Here’s what the bible says. **“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin...”** **Galatians 3:22.** We aren’t as free as we thought. We’ve been making some of those rotten choices because we don’t have the power to make better choices. We think about making better choices, but it turns out we are prisoners of sin. The bible says the good we wanted to do we find ourselves not doing because without Christ as our Savior we are bound to sin. We are enslaved. What you’ve been calling freedom to do as you please, turns out was really slavery to selfishness. Doing what you wanted and calling it freedom was really just using people and being used, getting rather than giving, winning at any cost. We buy into the world’s system thinking “at last, I’m free!” But disobedience to God and his plans and his purposes – that’s not freedom, it’s bondage. You aren’t free, you’re just selfish and deceived.

The whole world is a prisoner to sin. Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, everyone who**

sins is a slave to sin.” John 8:34. That freedom you’re looking for, that freedom to live any way you feel like living, doing as you please – disobeying God’s word, his rules – the bible calls that sin. **Sin is not a sign of freedom. Sin is a sign of slavery.** You aren’t in control. You’re just doing what your emotions and passions tell you to do. Without control, without restraint, without discipline we become less human and more like animals. Sin degrades us and at the same time gives us a false sense of civility and sophistication. (Someone said, ‘Civilization doesn’t keep you from killing each other, it just keeps you from eating one another after we’re dead.’)

We think we have freed ourselves from the silly rules of God and the bible. Do you see freedom? In the highest levels of our culture, do you see freedom? The highest divorce rates, devastation and dysfunction everywhere, broken homes and broken lives. Six and seven figure incomes coupled with heart break, chemical dependence, inability to commit to anyone or anything, mass murders, suicide, hopelessness, despair. Does this sound like freedom? It’s slavery. It’s prison. “The whole world is a prisoner to sin.”

Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” John 8:34** That’s all of us, isn’t it? All of us have sinned. All of us at some point in time said, “I’ll never do that again” and we didn’t, at least not until the next time we sinned and had to make that promise again. It felt like we were slaves to sin and we were. But that isn’t all Jesus had to say on the subject. He said, **“Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:35-36.**

You want to be free? All of us were slaves to sin - prisoners unable to break free from our prison. But Jesus came and bore the penalty for our sins in his own body as he took our place on the cross. The penalty for our sin was death. Jesus died in our place so we could live. He died and then rose again and now he alone has the power to set us free from sin and from death. That’s why Jesus said, “If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed.”

Real freedom is found in serving Jesus. Nothing else comes close. How about it? You’ve tried the other stuff and found it to be bondage. How about coming to the one who can truly make you free? “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!” He says you will no longer be a slave, you’ll be a son. You will live in his freedom! If you want to truly be free, come to Jesus!

The bible says, **“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** Come to Jesus

and be free indeed!