

COLLECTIVE

Life In The Spirit Series (Lesson 1) - Christian Freedom

Our connect group lessons this year will focus primarily on Galatians 5.

Read: Galatians 5:1-15

The Apostle Paul in his address to the Galatians tells them that “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), and “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5:13-15)

What sort of freedom is Christian freedom?

1) Christian freedom is not freedom to indulge the flesh (v13).

“You were called to freedom, brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh”. The “flesh” is not referring to the outer material or substance that covers our skeleton, but our fallen human nature, which we inherited from the fall of man.

It is filled with self-centeredness and therefore prone to sin. We are not to use our Christian freedom to indulge this “flesh” or “as an opportunity for the flesh”.

Christian freedom is **freedom from sin**, not **freedom to sin**. It is an **unrestricted liberty to approach God as his children**, and not an **unrestricted liberty to self-indulge in sin**.

We were called to be free men, but we cannot turn our freedom into licence for our lower nature. Such liberty – an unbridled license, is not true liberty/freedom at all. In fact, it is another and more dreadful form of bondage, a slavery to the desires of our fallen nature.

That is why Jesus said to the Jews “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). And Paul describes us before we became children of God as “slaves to various passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3).

There are many such slaves in our world today. They speak of freedom such as free sex and a free life, but in reality, they are slaves to their own appetites to which they give free rein, simply because they cannot control them.

Christian freedom is very different. Instead of having liberty to indulge the flesh, Christians are said to have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (v24).

COLLECTIVE

This means we have rejected the rule of our sinful nature over us. That is why Paul says we have “crucified it” – nailed it to the cross. Now we seek to walk in the Spirit. And if we do, we shall not gratify the desires of the flesh” (v16). Instead, the Holy Spirit will cause His fruit to ripen in our lives, culminating in self-control (v23).

2) Christian freedom is not freedom to exploit my neighbor (vs 13b, 15).

Verse 13 ends with “serve one another humbly in love”.

Just as Christian freedom is not a freedom to do as I please in the indulgence of my flesh, it is also not a freedom to do as I please irrespective of my neighbor.

Christian freedom is a freedom to approach God without fear, not freedom to exploit my neighbor without love. We are commanded to love our neighbours, and through love, to serve them, not ignore, neglect, or abuse our fellow man, as if they were things to serve us. **Christian liberty is service, not selfishness.**

This is a remarkable paradox. From one point of view Christian freedom is a form of slavery, but it is not a slavery to the flesh, but to our neighbor. We are free in relation to God, but slaves in relation to serving one another. This is the meaning of love. If we love one another, we shall serve one another (vs15).

And if we serve one another, we shall not bite, devour, or attack each other with malicious words or action which is destructive. Love on the other hand is constructive, it serves. And Paul describes some of the marks of love in Galatians 5:22 as “patience”, “kindness”, “goodness” and “faithfulness”.

Love is patient towards those who aggravate and provoke us. Love thinks kind thoughts and performs good deeds. Love is faithful, dependable, reliable, trustworthy. Furthermore, if we love one another, we shall “bear one another’s burdens” (vs 6:2). For love is never greedy, always expansive, never possessive. True love is not to possess but to serve.

3) Christian freedom is not freedom to disregard the law (vs 14).

“For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Notice that Paul does not say that if we love one another, we can safely break the law in the interest of love, but that if we love one another, we shall fulfil the law, because the whole law is summed up in this one command - “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”.

What is the Christian’s relation to the law?

COLLECTIVE

It is quite true that Paul says to us that if we are Christians, we have been set free from the law, that we are no longer under the law and that we must not submit again to the “yoke of slavery” which is the law (vs 1). But we must understand clearly what he means by this.

Our Christian freedom from the law, which Paul emphasizes, concerns our relationship to God. It means that our acceptance depends not on our obedience to the law’s demand, but on faith in Jesus Christ who bore the curse of the law when He died. It certainly does not mean that we are free to disregard or disobey the law.

On the contrary, although we cannot gain acceptance by keeping the law, yet once we have been accepted, we shall keep the law willingly out of love for Him who has accepted us and has given us His Spirit to enable us to keep it.

Our justification no longer depends on the law but on Christ crucified, yet our sanctification consists in the fulfilment of the law (Romans 8:3-4).

Conclusion

Christian freedom is not a freedom to indulge in the flesh, but to control the flesh; not a freedom to exploit our neighbor, but to serve our neighbor; freedom not to disregard the law, but to fulfil the law.

Everyone who has been truly set free by Jesus Christ expresses his freedom and liberty in these three ways – first in self-control, secondly in loving service of his neighbor, and thirdly in obedience to the law of his God.

This is the freedom with which “Christ has set us free” (vs 1) and to which we “were called” (vs 13). We must stand firm in it, not falling back into slavery on the one hand or falling into licence on the other.

Reflection/discussion:

- 1) Do you have true freedom in Christ?**
- 2) Is that freedom or liberty expressed in your life through:**
 - a) Self-control?**
 - b) Loving service to one another?**
 - c) Obedience to the law of God?**