

FREE PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

I recently made friends with a pastor and in speaking to him to get some insight about how he approaches ministry in his church, he made a statement that stood out to me: "free people, free people". In other words, in order to bring people to freedom in Christ, we need to be free in Christ ourselves.

This statement was so profound and as I pondered it, I realised that we as a people and as a church also need to be free. I see it as part of my responsibility as a pastor to make sure that we as a people are living in the freedom of Christ. Not only this, but it must become a core value of Christian Heritage church of we are going to reach the people God has in this city.

Paul said this: **Galatians 5:1**(NIV) 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.

Jesus put it this way: **John 8:32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

God did not call us to live as slaves, but to be free!

We were set free when we accepted and believed in Jesus' work on the cross. What we need to do is make sure that we stay free and don't allow ourselves to get tied back up with the same chains that we were delivered from.

Today we will have a brief look at Christian freedom:

- What it means to us.
- We will identify some areas where I believe that we as a church and as individuals have moved away from the wonderful freedom back into bondage again.
- We will see how Christian freedom will make us more effective in sharing Jesus and in having victory over sin.

MESSAGE

What is freedom?

Freedom means many things to many people:

- We can view freedom in political terms, having the right to vote for particular ideas, people, or parties which best represent our views.
- We can view freedom in terms of freedom of speech, where one has the liberty to voice their personal opinion or perspective.
- We can view freedom in the light of our finances, where people seek to free themselves of financial debt.

- In South Africa, the non-white population was oppressed – when Apartheid finally fell, the people achieved freedom from oppression.
- Then there's freedom of religion, where we have choice in terms of what religion we will follow.

But biblical freedom is something different. Biblical freedom is true freedom. It brings joy, it brings peace and grants us true inner and outer victory for our lives.

What does true biblical freedom look like?

The Bible says quite a bit about freedom. Many see the bible merely **a book of restrictive rules**. But in reality, it is our manual on how to achieve true freedom in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 5:1-8 (NLT) So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. 2 Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 I'll say it again. If you are trying to find favour with God by being circumcised, you must obey every regulation in the whole law of Moses. 5 But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us. 6 For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love. 7 You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? 8 It certainly isn't God, for He is the one who called you to freedom.

1. When the people accepted Jesus Christ by faith, they were **freed from** slavery to a number of **laws which they could not keep anyway**.
2. They were **freed from** the yoke of **sin**.
3. They were **free to serve God** boldly and without guilt and condemnation.
4. They were **free to serve one another in love**.

The problem that that Galatians faced

Through false teaching by the Judaisers, the people were starting to believe they could not please God unless they followed the rules and instructions given in the Law!

Paul had to bring correction and point out that they were not saved by their own works but by grace through believing in Jesus Christ. He said this:

- **Galatians 5:4** For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace.
- The Galatians had brought themselves back into slavery!

Have you ever seen wildlife programs on TV where the animal was released from a cage. Sometimes they were so used to the cage that they wouldn't leave it and would need to be prompted to go out of it. Jesus has freed us

from that cage – bondage to the Law – trying to earn God’s favour through works. We need to be sure to leave that cage and never come back!

The Colossian church faced similar challenges due to false teachings:

Colossians 2:16-23 (NLT) So don’t let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. 17 For these rules are **only shadows of the reality** yet to come. And **Christ himself is that reality**. 18 Don’t let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, 19 and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. 20 You have died with Christ, and **He has set you free from** the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, 21 “**Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!**”? 22 Such rules are **mere human teachings** about things that deteriorate as we use them. 23 These rules **may seem wise** because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But **they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires**.

Sadly, we as a church face similar challenges the Galatians and Colossians did! We may not be bringing ourselves under the Law but we have set up a set of rules and expectations which are just as bonding and limiting as the Law. Some examples:

- We judge people based on what they wear or what they look like.
- We judge people based on their perceived wealth or their race group.
- We categorise “sins”. We call smokers and drinkers sinners because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit yet we don’t judge ourselves for our own addictions to caffeine, pain medication, and food. We simply have different addictions...

As a result, we **become slaves to our own interpretation** of what pleases God and makes us righteous. We are **saved by faith and NOT by our own works**.

Then when we try to share our faith with people, we come with a long list of do’s and don’ts, or they perceive that we have a list of do’s and don’ts.

- This results in outsiders calling church people “hypocrites”.
- Our self-righteous ideas bind those “God has in the city”, because we make them feel uncomfortable to be with us and hence their freedom to meet and accept Jesus Christ is severely impacted, leaving them at risk of eternal judgement.

Galatians 5:6 For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised (bound by our self-righteous rules). **What is important is faith expressing itself in love**.

So what do we learn about our Christian freedom here?

- We need to ask the Lord to set us free from these “self-righteous”, “man-imposed” laws, and instead of focusing on these “rules and regulations”.
- **Instead we must express our faith in love.** This will help us to draw those who God has in the city to serve Him freely too.

THE OTHER SIDE OF FREEDOM

Galatians 5:13-15 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. 14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

- **This Christian freedom we have is not a license to sin!**

I found this description of Christian freedom: A train is free only so long as it stays on its tracks; a train that jumps the tracks is "free" of the rails but no longer free in the most important sense of the word. It's a freed wreck that can't go anywhere. "Free," but no longer truly free.

Augustine, who was one of the founding fathers of the early church, taught that **true freedom is not a lack of constraint, but being what you are meant to be.** We were created in the image of God. The closer we conform to the true image of God, Jesus Christ, the freer we become. The farther we drift from it, the more our freedom shrinks.

- We therefore have to watch that in our Christian freedom, we don't fall and become bound in sin – **Jesus came to free us from sin!**
- Instead our freedom must be focused on loving service.

Galatians 5:17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

- There is a constant battle between our sinful nature and our spirit.
- If we let our sinful nature take control, it will rob us of our freedom to do what is right.

This is a real problem because Paul goes on say this: **Galatians 5:19-21** (NLT) When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me

tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

- anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God!

Let me ask this question – have any of us here been struggling with any of the items listed above? Are we at risk of not inheriting the Kingdom of God?

There is only ONE way of overcoming the desires of the flesh: **Galatians 5:16**
So I say, **let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.** Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

- We have to submit to the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit if we want to be free from the control of our sinful nature!

Galatians 5:22-23 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

As we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us and walk in obedience to His leading, we will find that we start to experience true freedom from the desires of our sinful nature.

CONCLUSION

The gospel does not exist to make people buttoned-down and morbid, grimly discharging duty to God, but it explodes in our hearts, freeing us to live joyfully in Christ. Shame and guilt and moralism are alike defeated in Christ.

In the same way, we have been freed from legalism and man-made rules – we must fight to keep this freedom and never think we can please God by our works or perceived righteousness.

Our Christian freedom does however prepare the way for us to willingly give up our rights so that others can benefit. Paul found real freedom in giving up his rights:

1 Corinthians 9:19 (NLT) Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people **to bring many to Christ.**

We need to be motivated by this same self-sacrificial love where every believer seeks the good of others with no hint of asserting our own rights. Our goal should be to bring many to Christ.

At the same time, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we must continue to live free from sin. As we follow these principles, true freedom will abound in our lives.