

Article of the Month
December, 2023

Freedom From What?

In a recent National Geographic video, people on the street from all over the world were asked, “What does freedom mean to you?” Everyone had a different answer, but some sample replies (including a silly one) were:

“Liberating yourself from other people’s expectations.”

“Being yourself; being who you are.”

“To live without any oppression.”

“Absence of fear.”

“Doing what your heart wants.”

“I can run naked through the streets.”

It seems interesting that most of these answers are about self. But that is currently normal since we naturally tend to think mostly about self. But there is something so much larger! What would it be like if everyone were free? Can we imagine a world where no one has personal or societal bondages -- other than restraint from evil? Can we imagine a time when freedom works without friction -- for EVERY person?

Merriam-Webster defines *freedom* in part as: “**1. The condition of being free of restraints... 4. Exemption from unpleasant or onerous conditions... 11. The right of enjoying all of the privileges of membership or citizenship.**” It defines *liberty* in part as: “**1. The condition of not being subject to restriction or control.**”

Even the dictionary seems to focus on INDIVIDUAL freedoms as opposed to WORLD-WIDE, human-race freedoms. In that last definition (no restrictions), it gives a frightening scenario! No control? Ouch!

Today’s society often seems to define freedom as the ability to act in whatever way one pleases, at any time, and with no regard for the rights of others. (Freedoms DO have effects on others; and if the freedom of ANYONE is threatened, NO ONE is free!)

Return to 2023 Index

Increasingly, it seems as if many in this society are angry. They seem to use the "idea" of freedom as an excuse to try to achieve their angry aims with no consideration for others. Their "freedom" becomes a tool for fighting others.

But what does the Bible have to say on this subject? How does God define freedom? After all, He is the Great Definer of *everything*. From what is He freeing us?

Not surprisingly, God looks at the concept of freedom differently from the average person.

Adam's disobedience to God tumbled him and all of his posterity into the condition that has bound the human race in slavery ever since (Romans 5:12). History has been a long, woeful recitation of wars, invasions, cruelties, and exploitation of others. True, there have been outstanding examples of individual selfless behavior and of governments that have truly tried to uplift their citizens; but the general trend of human history reflects the influence that sin has had on us all. In our current day, we only need to listen to the news to hear of corruption in corporations and religious institutions, in personal and group selfishness, and in nations practicing aggression. Worst of all, Adam's act resulted in a death sentence for him and for all who came after him (Genesis 2:17, 3:19). This death sentence has been carried out ever since. NO ONE escapes it. It is the ultimate loss of freedom!

The Lord presented a series of laws or commandments to the nation of Israel which, if followed, would have enabled them to live forever. But Israel was unable to live up to the Law since they inherited imperfection and death (Galatians 3:10), and so they couldn't attain that right to life that comes with perfection and that special relationship to God as sons.

The animal sacrifices which the Law required were pictures or types of the true redemption to come through the sacrifices of the Christ. They were never meant to permanently redeem the Israelites from death (Hebrews 10:1-4). Because of this, their imperfections should have led them to the realization of their need for Christ as their true Redeemer; but instead, the Law became an intolerable burden to them. They were subject to a double condemnation -- condemnation under the Law in addition to condemnation for the Adamic death sentence.

The Gentiles were not bound by the Mosaic Law and, in fact, were not subject to any Divine laws except possibly the awareness of an internal moral law (conscience) with which God created mankind (Romans 2:14-15). Through the centuries, however, the Gentiles have developed religions, customs, and practices which are as ineffective in banishing sin and death for them as the Mosaic Law had been for Israel. All of these things have wrapped the human race in a net of ignorance, superstition, and fear regarding God's character and plans for mankind -- all of those things, in themselves, forms of slavery. We have become so enslaved by it that we accept it as the natural way of the world. And there is NO FREEDOM from it.

Return to 2023 Index

Jesus came into this mire and changed everything (for those who could comprehend now -- and, ultimately, for EVERYONE). He explained his mission in Luke 4:18. Although he was speaking at the synagogue, and although he dealt almost exclusively with the nation of Israel when he was on earth, this prophecy applies to the whole world of humanity (Hebrews. 2:9; Romans 1:16, 3:29). Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 61:1, and it speaks of his “proclaiming release to the captives...to set free those who are downtrodden.” All of mankind are captive to sickness -- mental and physical, -- decline, and ultimately death. This is the terrible bondage that Jesus offered to rescue us from! In John 8:31-34, Jesus tells us, “If you abide in my Word, then you are truly disciples of mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... Jesus answered them and said, Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin...If, therefore, the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”

Jesus was offering a new law of Christian liberty, a way out -- the ONLY way out (for those who hear in this Christian Age) of the sin and death and ignorance with which the race has been enslaved since the beginning. But how can we access this liberty? What do we do with it if we get it?

Christ died to cancel all the effects of sin eventually, and as soon as we realize and believe that, our freedom starts to take hold. As we study and comprehend the Bible and learn more about God’s plan for all mankind (not just for current true believers), we begin to appreciate His incredible love, wisdom, and mercy. We begin to leave behind the false doctrines that the church denominations have used for centuries to keep people enslaved in fear. (Yes! Ideas that are wrong TAKE AWAY FREEDOMS!) We are free to know God and to learn more of His wonderful plan of redemption for everyone who has ever lived. If this knowledge leads us to a realization of our sinful natures and a desire for reconciliation with God through belief in Jesus’ sacrifice, we are on our way to true Christian liberty (a liberty of the mind) -- the ONLY true liberty available at this time.

In this Gospel Age (the time period from Jesus’ baptism to the present) when God has been developing His church, the only ones who are truly offered this liberty are those who have dedicated their lives to following Christ. The law they are subject to now is the law of love, which restrains the natural selfishness of the human nature (Galatians 5:13-14). But in the Millennial Age to come, the world will be offered the same opportunity to follow this law of love and, if successful, they will have eternal life! What a promise!

Christian liberty is not an excuse for casting off all restraints and running wild. That way enslaves others and leads to anarchy. Liberty in Christ gives us the spiritual freedom and joy to choose to live righteously, to humbly follow in Christ’s footsteps, and to daily practice the fruits of the spirit as defined in Galatians 5:22-23 -- all of which are liberating. It is the freedom to study God’s Word and prove to ourselves what is true about His character and plan. It incorporates the ideas of self-restraint from things which challenge true freedom and liberty and responsibility. It can only be achieved by being subject to the highest standards of righteousness. We become free to

Return to 2023 Index

expand our understanding and focus -- from self-serving behavior to offering to serve the message of God who is the definer of freedom. Ultimately, those who now follow Christ will participate in a “ministry of reconciliation” in God’s kingdom, bringing the world of mankind back to God and the freedoms He will institute (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

Right now, the world is subject only to futility (Romans 8:19-21). As it goes on its self-indulgent way, mistaking license for liberty, it is incapable of pulling itself out of the death sentence it is under. But the wonderful liberty that Christ offers, under the law of love, can secure for all the fullest liberty for each individual without infringing on the liberties of other individuals. This is an important concept. True freedom NEVER hurts or tramples on the rights of others.

When we really consider what this true liberty and freedom does for the church now, and will do in the kingdom for mankind, what a burden is lifted! It will mean for humanity the end of selfishness, greed, oppression, wars, illness, and ultimately death. What an amazing future God has intended for us!

Return to 2023 Index