

September 2003: Walking the Fine Line of Freedom

by Aaron Greenway

Our world is getting crazier by the minute. Mel Gibson, the Hollywood actor, is taking a lot of heat right now. Why? Because he is doing a movie on the life of Jesus Christ. The liberals are up in arms criticizing him for inciting violence between Jews and Christians. If he had done a movie about the Muslims or the Hindus, putting them in a positive light, the media would have said nothing. Everything seems turned upside down, doesn't it? Jesus, for many people, is nothing more than a ball and chain, a restriction to a way of life. This is why they react the way they do, because they think being a Christian will take away their freedom.

But when we think of freedom and liberty, like the world's view of Christ, our concept may be turned around. What do I mean by this? Paul said to the Galatians, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Later he says, do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature (Galatians 5:13). But, wait a minute? I thought Christ was nothing more than a cramp in my style. I thought if I were truly free, I could do whatever I wanted. That is the lie the Enemy wants us to believe. Slavery comes from not obeying the Truth. Slavery comes submitting ourselves under the bondage of sin. Christ said, He who sins becomes its slave (John 8:34). Only Christ can give true freedom. To serve Christ is to be free. To be a bondservant of Christ is to be completely and totally free. Free from what? Free from slavery of sin. Free from its power.

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How do we gain freedom? We gain freedom first by giving our lives to Christ. And then we gain more freedom by continuing to know Christ through His Word. Christ said, “You shall know the Truth and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The more Truth we know, the more we are free from the lie. Unfortunately for the Galatians, after having believed the Gospel that Paul preached to them, were drawn away again in their legalistic practices. Someone came along one day and told them, Yes, you need Jesus, but you also need to be circumcised. The Galatians were gentiles. God cancelled that law when Christ died on the cross. And it certainly was never meant for the Gentiles. Well, the Galatians fell into the trap. Needless to say, Paul was extremely upset.

The problem is, we fall for it every day when we believe the lies. We believe lies about God. We believe lies about sin. And the battle between the lie and the truth is usually about where the freedom is. If we believe we are free in alcohol, cursing, extramarital sex, swindling others, lying, believing other doctrines, etc., we may think we are exercising our freedom. Instead, we are putting on the shackles of deceit and before we know it we can't get out it. We can't escape. But, when we believe in Christ, when we cultivate a relationship with Him based on knowledge of His Word, then we find ourselves free to be successful in Him. Success is living the abundant life. It is living above the fray and being truly happy.

Paul continues in verse 22, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. This is where freedom is truly found. Freedom is growing like a tree in a desert, exhibiting the work of Grace in our lives. It is not just going with the flow. It is not living how we please.

On the other hand, we also have to be wary of the “dos” and the “don'ts”. What do I mean by this? While sin in our lives will always enslave us, to constantly submit ourselves to an impossible standard of righteousness outside of Christ is also slavery. The Galatians were told that they had to be circumcised in addition to being Christians. In one form or another this still happens. People do it with us; we do it with others. If we are to accept others in the family of God, they have to do a, b and c, or they have to be like we are. Or in order for us to be accepted

in a church, we dare not be sick and miss one Sunday or be cast out. I have a friend who served as a missionary who told me just yesterday that she was called on the carpet for having hung out with some of the street folks to share the Gospel. She was told, "Sister, we cannot be part of the world." I was told recently that my style of music was too aggressive. If Christianity is all about what I should be doing or not doing in addition to what God has already commanded me to do, then a form of slavery has just occurred. When we don't allow others to serve and to be what God has made them to be, when we already see they love Jesus, then we have just put shackles on them. And that is exactly what Paul preached against.

Do you feel trapped in your failure, in your habit, in your addiction? Or maybe you are caught in the "dos" and "don'ts". The more you give yourself up to Christ Jesus, the more you renounce yourself, the more you saturate your mind with His Word, the more His Spirit will release you from the chains. The chains of what? The chains of guilt. The chains of the past. The chains of legalism. The chains of your addiction, whatever is holding you from truly living for Him. Only Jesus can give true freedom. Therefore, let us not become any longer enslaved to the yoke of bondage.