

Freedom's Dark Underbelly

The Wrong Freedom Produces Disastrous Results

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America is a nation that has been founded on the principle of freedom. Our Declaration of Independence lists many reasons why we believe that we should be a free and independent state. Colonists fought for their independence from Great Britain during the Revolutionary War through some incredibly tough times, such as the winter in Valley Forge. Our Bill of Rights deals with the freedoms we believe are God-given to us as Americans, as humans. These are: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom to defend yourself, freedom from illegal searches and seizures, from incriminating ourselves, and so forth as we go down through the Bill of Rights there.

We fought a civil war in which half a million American men died to free our country from the shame of slavery. Our founding documents talked all about freedom, and here we were keeping others of our citizens in bondage. Our nation's premier secular holiday is Independence Day, and we celebrate that every year. Our songs talk about things like let freedom ring and all that sort, and we call this country the land of the free. It is almost like freedom is part of our DNA, so to speak. To be American is to be free. That is how we think.

We are so enamored of our freedoms that we are quick to create new rights just out of the blue, sometimes, so that we are free to pursue whatever we want to do or whatever we want to have. We come up with things like abortion rights, sexual rights, gender rights, animal rights, environmental rights, workers' rights, and now we are getting into immigration rights. We want the right to free housing, free health care, free education, free technology.

Those are all those people on the Left that want that. They want Bernie Sanders to give them all that stuff. They want free cell phones and computers and free Internet and all that, and all their student loans paid off. They think that is a right. It is part of what it means to be an American. It is their

birthright, they think. The Supreme Court, of course, has failed to confine our rights as Americans to those truly given by God and encompassed by the Constitution. And so we could lay a lot of the blame there, but it really comes down to all of us.

From the above, we would think that Americans would really know what freedom is and how to articulate a definition of freedom. But when asked what does it mean to be free, people generally have a difficult time answering. Most often the reply is some version of, I can do and say what I want to. That is what they think freedom is, just having unfettered liberty to say or do whatever they want to do. Of course, the more intellectual among us answer a little bit more philosophically and these things that I am going to say next all come from a discussion board of people who consider themselves thinkers, you know, they are the intellectuals among us, and it was asked of them what does it mean to be free, and these are some of the answers they gave.

Freedom encompasses an enormous landscape of ideas. To some, true liberty is freedom from attachment to people, objects, desires, vices, laws, standards, and choices. What they want is complete autonomy. It is difficult to imagine any state of meaningful freedom in which one cannot exercise some agency in choosing one's work, residence, spouse, or political views. Even so, these intellectuals say freedom cannot be viewed only from the perspective of the individual and individual rights, but must at some point also be considered from a societal perspective which imposes restrictions on individual freedom to make allowance for the rights of others. And to others, true freedom really resides within the soul. It is a way the mind views the self and the world. In this case, one could be chained to an oar or whipped by an overseer, yet still be free. (And that is the end of those quotes.)

All of this, when it comes down to it, begs the question, do we really know what real, true freedom is? Here is some useful dictionary definitions. At least they have people who seriously think about these answers, put them in dictionaries. I have got six of them. These are all freedom. The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint. That was the most common answer when people were asked on the street, and they got that one right, although it is very incomplete.

Another one is the absence of subjection to foreign domination or despotic government, independence. That is what we received when we rebelled against England. Another one is the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved. That is pretty obvious. Once the shackles come off, you are free. Another one, the state of being physically unrestricted and able to move easily, so you are not bound and you are free to move as you will. A fifth one here, the state of not being subject to or affected by a particularly undesirable thing, meaning something like freedom from want so you then have the ability to have things.

We also have here number 6, the power of self-determination attributed to the will. The quality of being independent of fate or necessity.

Freedom, we can see, covers a lot of ground. There are a lot of things that go into the idea of what freedom is. And these are not just modern conceptions. We can find all of them in Scripture, and many of them or most of them in history, particularly among the Greeks. They had great ideas of freedom or great in terms of, not necessarily good, but they thought they were. They were very philosophical, and they were very deep thinkers.

So like I said, these ideas are found either literally in Scripture or by implication. And doctrinally they are present to some degree but especially the principles found in the first and last definitions: the power to act or speak or think as one wants and the power of self-determination attributed to the will, which is also known as free moral agency. The ability to make moral choices and judgments to determine one's path in life. And there is an important caveat to that, and that is that that choice that you can make to have the ability to make moral judgment is done without external compulsion or coercion. *You* make the choice. That is your free will.

God grants *Christians*—I want to make sure you get the emphasis there—God grants *Christians* freedom to conduct their lives as they choose and to determine their destinies. This does not mean that our decisions are without consequences, because we can make mistakes, and we often do. But we have been given the authority, the freedom to decide for ourselves as Christians. I need to emphasize this, that *this authority or right or privilege is confined to Christians only*. We are the only ones that have the ability to make true choices, especially in moral areas.

Johann von Goethe once wrote, "None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free." This is the state of billions of people on Planet Earth who think they are free. But they are actually enslaved to their own desires, to the whims and the dictates of this world, and of course to the pervasive influence of Satan, the prince of the power of the air who broadcasts his evil attitudes, his anti-God attitudes throughout the earth. They are not truly making choices. They are not making their own choices. Not in the sense that we can as Christians.

But they are being swept along by a flood of thought patterns, attitudes, habits, and behaviors that they cannot fully reject with their carnal mind. But they simply accept these things and replicate those things. I am sure many of you older folks remember that Mr. Armstrong back in, I think it was the 80s, put out a booklet called *A World Held Captive*. And that is the idea that came through that booklet. That this world was enslaved or imprisoned by Satan the Devil and all the false attitudes and standards and ideas that he has put out there. And they are confined, and only Jesus Christ in the work that He has done can break them out of that prison.

And so we have this concept that I have been talking about that only Christians truly have the right to choose because they are free. They have been freed, delivered, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and been able, through the Holy Spirit of God, to make good choices, right choices, and thus to have true freedom. Much of this societal and moral disintegration that is occurring in America and in the West at large, particularly in the nations of Israel, is doing so under the banner of choice, of freedom, of rights that they believe that they have the authority, the right to make these decisions that take them further and further from God. And I call this, and this is the title of my sermon here, "Freedom's Dark Underbelly."

What they have done, these people in the West, particularly in the nation of Israel, is that they have taken good and right principles of freedom and they have moved them to the extreme, whether on one extreme or the other, and at the same time they have jettisoned the complementary principles that check or restrict it. Those complementary principles are either laws or general standards of conduct. They have just thrown them away and said, "I'm free to do whatever I like," and when that happens, the result is

immorality, hedonism, excess, dissolution, and disaster, ultimately, and death.

Christians need to have their guard up against this sort of thing. The Bible, especially in the New Testament, makes an earnest plea to the people in the church not to follow this siren song of freedom. Because it can lead in the wrong direction if it is not held together by doing God's law, living God's law and the standards that are in God's Word. This dark underbelly of freedom is a false, perverted, deformed, twisted freedom. One of our hymns that we sing, one of the American national hymns that we sing, "America the Beautiful," talks about freedom in law, liberty in law.

That is true freedom where you have freedom to make choices, but they are confined or restrained by law, by some sort of standard that channels freedom in the right direction. But we are slowly, or maybe quickly, throwing those things overboard, and all we have is freedom now, and that is going to lead down a very bad road. It always does.

So we need to be careful that we do not get carried along in the wake of all of that and find ourselves far from God when or if we ever wake up to it.

If you will, please go back to the book of Genesis with me. We are going to start in Genesis 15. We have been right around this area in many sermons recently. We are going to read a series of verses in Genesis and Exodus to give a historical background of the Bible's view of freedom. Most of it begins with the children of Israel being in Egypt and coming out. So starting here in Genesis 15 we will go from verse 12 to 14. This was after Abraham's sacrifice there before God.

Genesis 15:12-14 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve, I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions."

Here is the prophecy that Abraham's descendants would go down into Egypt and during a certain period they would be enslaved. Now, let us go to Exodus the second chapter and see this beginning to be fulfilled. We will begin in verse 23 down through verse 25.

Exodus 2:23-25 Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.

We are just going to keep reading. Let us start in chapter 3, verse 6. He says,

Exodus 3:6-10 Moreover He said [He is speaking to Moses on the mount], "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Let us move forward to chapter 19, verses 1 through 4. Israel has finally arrived at Mount Sinai.

Exodus 19:1-4 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the

wilderness of Sinai, for they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself,'"

And that is as far as we will go there. As I said, this is the historical foundation on which the biblical doctrine of freedom or liberty is built. It starts with an actual occurrence of deliverance. The people were in bondage. They were cruelly treated there in Egypt, and God brought them out. So the whole story, as we saw it, the emigration from Canaan to Egypt to avoid famine and then this eventual fall into slavery to the Egyptians, their entire sojourn there covers about 430 years, and about half of those years they were enslaved.

What is brought out in some of these passages that I just went to is that they were helpless in their condition there, in their circumstance. They could not do anything to make themselves free. The only thing they could do is cry out to God, and He heard them. Now, if we would go back to Exodus 2 where He hears them at that time, an interesting thing is written there in verse 25. "God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them."

It is that last little phrase "God acknowledged them" that is so interesting. You could say that it could be "God looked on them and made Himself known to them." That is one way to understand the idea. But what it does more than anything, it is a clear indication that God Himself initiates the process of deliverance to freedom. He is the one that did it. We could say, well, the children of Israel cried out, but really the first act that actually moved them or began to move them out of slavery into freedom was what God did.

And what God did was, as it says in the New King James, He acknowledged them. Acknowledged is literally knew, God *knew* them. And the source that I looked at said that this means "to take note of, to notice with a view to caring." To notice, whatever the object is, with a view toward caring for it. Now, if we would go to Deuteronomy chapter 7, verse 8, we would find

there that it says that God chose Israel not because they were the greatest among the peoples, but because He loved them. He acknowledged them. He knew them with a view toward caring for them, for loving them.

In any case, we understand that He took an intense interest in them. He took an intense interest in them and then took the first step to make them free. And we see that start to unfold with God calling Moses up on the mount, seeing the burning bush, and it started rolling downhill from there, and God was there active every step of the way. But it began with God taking notice with a view to loving them. And this is still going on. God continues to do that. This is analogous to the Christian doctrine of God's calling, of God's election. He is the one that looks down and sees people of the earth and He chooses. He notices one here, one there, and elects them, chooses them, decides to call them. He is the one that initiates it.

So we can say here that God is also the initiator of freedom, of true freedom.

Now when we get to Exodus 19 we notice what He says there, that He drew Israel to Himself. Well, first of all, "He bore you on eagles' wings," it says there in verse 4 of Exodus 19. And we know that they did not go out literally on the wings of eagles. But to God's perspective He did draw them on wings of eagles.

This is a metaphor of saying that He did all the heavy lifting. We could say in more, let us say, doctrinal type of language, more theological language, that He was active and sovereign every step of the way in freeing them from bondage. Their participation amounted to just a sliver of belief. That is all it took. Just a little bit of belief and following Moses out of Egypt. That is all, really, they had to do. They maybe had to overcome a few fears and do things that they might not have wanted to do, but essentially God did the work to call them and bring them out and give them freedom. Like I said, this is all encapsulated in the statement that He brought them, He bore them on eagles' wings.

Now we understand, we have read these events and what happened in the wilderness enough to know that the children of Israel saw their deliverance from Egypt merely as a personal or national thing, that they were now free from slavery. They could become a nation then and they were free

individually and they could do as they wanted to and that is as far as their idea of freedom went. They were a lot like modern Americans who think that freedom is simply being able to do what they wanted to do. But God looked at it quite differently. And we can also see it in here in Exodus 19:4. It is in that final phrase "and brought you to Myself."

Do you remember when God told Moses what to do? He told him to go down and tell Pharaoh to let the people go out into the wilderness and sacrifice to their God. That was always the idea from God's point of view. He wanted them to come to see Him and to worship Him and so He encapsulates all that thought into this "brought you to Myself" phrase at the end of verse 4. That was how He looked at freedom, which was far different from their view of freedom. Remember their view was that they were free from slavery. They were now free to make their choices.

But to Him their freedom was in being brought to Himself. In other words, there was an individual, political, or social freedom. That is how they thought of it. To Him, to God, freedom is a relationship with Him. They thought negatively, we are no longer slaves. That is how they thought of freedom. He said, "No, that's not real freedom. Freedom is knowing Me and coming to Me." And of course He does all the heavy work to bring us to that point. Even now as Christians, He does all the work. We just say, "Yeah, this is right," and follow.

But He is doing the calling and He is doing every major act that needs to be done in order to bring us to Himself. It is the same thing. That is freedom to Him, that now they are in a relationship or we are in a relationship with Him. That is how true freedom works because now we have a relationship with a God who can tell us what's what. What are the right choices? What is going to make the best of a situation? What decisions can we make to have the best results in the end? That is real freedom.

But the Israelites and God were never on the same page. Because they were only looking at freedom from a physical point of view, not the spiritual point of view that He was.

We are still here in Exodus, so let us go to Exodus 32. (David mentioned this in his sermonette.) This is the incident of the Golden Calf when the Israelites

debauched themselves. And it has always amazed me at how quickly this happened after they were given the law. It was within that 40-day period when Moses went up on the mount.

Exodus 32:1-10 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him [or had become of him]." And Aaron said to them [this is another amazing thing, that he just so quickly gives in. I mean, in the Ten Commandments movie, they show him, you know, resisting a little bit, but God does not.], "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

Then they said, "This is your God, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord." Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your God, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

Of course, Moses then pleads with Him not to do so for God's own name's sake. But it did not take long for the cycle to go from freedom to the dark underbelly of freedom. It was just a matter of weeks, days even. Here they

had gotten the law, heard the voice of God on the mount. They had even said that we will keep the covenant. They signed it there. They ratified it in chapter 24. And just a few weeks later, here they were taking to themselves another god, a golden calf, and they were using it to have a feast to the Lord. They were syncretizing so quickly. But it did not take long for that cycle to go from freedom to this perverse freedom.

They had just seen all those plagues in Egypt and how God had kept it from them over the last seven plagues. They had seen the annihilation of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. They had seen all those mighty works just recently. The sound of those great things happening was still in their ears. And then, within a few weeks, they fell into complete moral, spiritual, religious abandon. These Israelites had gone through the paces of God's liberation of them. But inside in their minds, in their hearts, they had never truly signed on to His program. They had never made the commitment. Not truly. They spoke words but it is clear they did not mean them.

And they went from a true freedom where they were brought to God to a very deplorable, perverse freedom in which they debauched themselves. They were still carnal, obviously. And their behavior proves it. They were not free. They really were not free. They were still in bondage in their own minds. They certainly were nowhere near the kind of freedom that God thinks of in terms of having a relationship with Him. They were essentially saying here in chapter 32 that they had rejected Him as being their God. They were rejecting the relationship.

No wonder God was incensed. He had done all those works for them to bring them to Himself, and they were essentially thumbing their nose at Him, turning their backs. He thought He could get a better people, maybe, out of Moses. But of course that did not happen.

Now we can see a spiritual analogy to this in the book of I Corinthians. Let us go there to chapter 3. A well-known little passage here. These Corinthians were very close to doing a similar thing. But they were called of God and in the church. This is why I am making this warning because it can happen to us too.

I Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. [How does he know this?] For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like [mere] men? [The word mere is not in the original.]

Now he could see them. You know, this is a letter that he had written after he was living there among them, and these reports had come back to him that these new members of the church within, you know, several months or a year or two of being called, were going back into their ways before they were converted. We can go to chapter 5 if you want and find out that they were even going into sexual sins that they should not have been going into, where a man had his father's wife. That is how far down, how carnal that they were. And Paul was terribly concerned for them because they were proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were not converted very much, if at all.

And the divisions that they had in the church and all the envy and strife that they were going through there within that congregation was showing a witness of being still very carnal. They had gone through the motions, like the Israelites, of achieving Christian liberty. But their behavior proved to Paul that they were not truly converted. Yes, they were babes in Christ. They were young in the faith. But even though God had offered all of these things to them, they had not truly gotten on God's train. They were not really with the program. Because they were not matching their behavior with what they purported to believe.

The proof here is in that last phrase "You are behaving like men." Not *mere* men. Men. This is something we really need to understand about conversion. Truly converted people act less like men and more like God. I know that is a simple statement. But people should be able to see every one of us and say that person is different. He does not or she does not act like other people. They are not acting as carnal. They are acting as spiritual. After this, Paul later gets into things like live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit. That sort of thing.

That is what we should be doing. That is what shows our conversion. It is not these mental things in our head where we agree intellectually about something. It is that *and* that we are fully under the program and that we are making the changes to conform to the image of Christ. See, that is, that we are conforming to God. We are becoming more like Him, and so Paul could look at these people in Corinth and say, "You're behaving just like the other Corinthians out on the street. You're not converted, you're still carnal. Because you should look more like Jesus Christ than you look like them or act like them."

As converted people go on to perfection, as is written there in Hebrews 6:1, they grow in true liberty (getting back to that a little bit). And remember what true liberty is according to Exodus 19:4: Being brought to Christ, to God. So when we grow in true liberty, this means that we grow in closeness or likeness to God. If you want to know somebody that is truly free, it is the person who is close to God.

Let us go back into the historical record here back in the book of Judges, chapter 2, verses 7 through 20. The author of Judges, maybe that was Samuel, whoever it was, lays it out very clearly for us so that we can see this cycle that runs from deliverance and freedom by God, to having a faithful people, to the people going into apostasy, and then because of their apostasy they go into bondage, and then when they are in bondage they cry out to God and He delivers them again. And then it just goes around and around and around the same cycle. You see it in the book of Judges. It happens, you know, every other page or so there is a new judge and the cycle has been repeated. But I want you to hear it here.

Judges 2:7-20 So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. When all that

generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

Then the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so. And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge, for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. Then the anger of the Lord [of course] grew hot. . . [again and He caused them to be oppressed].

This is the way it always works. Remember I said deliverance and freedom, a period of faithfulness, another period of apostasy, and then they go into bondage and oppression. And then, of course, God raises a judge and brings

them into freedom again. Israel experienced this up and down cycle throughout the period of the judges. Everything that is in the book of Judges goes just like that. God would raise up an Othniel or Deborah or a Gideon or a Samson and they would have rest and peace for 20, 30, 40 years, whatever it happened to be.

Then the Israelites would go after other gods and sin like the nations around them. And then God would punish them by allowing them to be defeated and plundered by one of the nations that surrounded them, and He would have to raise up another judge. And this just happened over and over and over again throughout this about 400 year period of the book of Judges. An up and down history in which they went from freedom back to bondage and had to be delivered again. You could say that Israel had a difficult time handling freedom. They could not do it. They could never maintain it.

They certainly had a thirst for freedom. And look at modern Israelites. We have a thirst for freedom too. And they would cry out to God to deliver them and return them to freedom when they were subjugated. But when they were left to themselves with this freedom that God gave them, they always forsook Him and sank into idolatry. And notice that it was idolatry that God points out here as their biggest sin, their biggest problem. Now this makes perfect sense because remember how God defines freedom or at least the way I have chosen to express it: that freedom is closeness to God, freedom is bringing those of us to Him and that gives us freedom. That is the cause of our freedom.

And when did they go into bondage? When they turned their backs on God and became close with other gods. So idolatry is the exact opposite of true freedom because idolatry is the negative, the opposite of true worship. So it was clear that the only result of going away from God, of worshipping other gods, was going to be subjection. They were not going to have freedom, because that is as far away from freedom as you could get. Israel simply misunderstood freedom. Just like modern Israelites, modern Americans.

To them, freedom was the same as what modern Americans think that freedom is: the ability to make one's own choices, full stop. I am free to do whatever I want to do. That is the modern Israelites, the modern American's definition of freedom just as much as it was the ancient Israelites. And you

might ask, somebody who might not know too much, well, what is wrong with that? What is wrong with being free to make your own choices? And the problem is that it is incomplete. I mentioned this in the introduction. True freedom does include the ability to choose what we are going to do and what we are going to say. That is part of true freedom. It is not wrong. But there is a whole lot more to it.

However, if we take just that part of the definition that we have the ability to choose what we want to do or what do we want to say, taken to its extreme that leads to madness and confusion. What is in the book of Judges? What is the most famous words of the book of Judges? I will read them to you. Last sentence of the book. It is the theme.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king [meaning there was no authority, no standard maker, no lawgiver, etc.] in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

You follow that formula and you get the up and down cycle that the Israelites went through during the period of the judges. And what happens is that ultimately you end up in slavery again. Because just doing what you think you should do or say what you think you ought to be able to say leads to madness and confusion and destruction and subjection. And that is the road that America and the West are galloping on at breakneck speed. We are going the way of Israel during the time of the judges.

So the freedom to choose, to decide what you are going to do and what you are going to say must be accompanied by a standard within which your choices are made. There has to be some principle, some guideline, some set of laws, some standards that are going to channel choices in the right direction.

But that is what we are going through now. There must be laws and principles that guide our choices to produce ethical and moral results. You have got to have those principles and laws or we are going to end up, . . . well, freedom to choose without all these other standards ends in decline and subjection and destruction and death.

Let us go into the New Testament to John 8. One of my favorite chapters of the book. We are going to read that section where Jesus spoke about truth and freedom. Because now we are bringing in this idea of the law, the standard that has to be side by side with the ability to choose, the freedom to choose.

John 8:30-36 As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him [Notice that the audience were believing Jews.], "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?" And Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

Notice the progression here in the early verses of this passage. If we continue in Christ's word, if we continue in what He taught us, God's Word as a whole, the whole counsel of God, we are His disciples. That is one of the proofs that shows that we are His disciples, that we practice God's Word and we continue in it. If we are His disciples, then we will know the truth because He is teaching it to us. We are in this relationship with Him, and He is giving us these morsels of truth that we can add to our lives, and the truth clearly contains things like God's law and the principles of His Word. That is why He is teaching us. He wants to give us right and good understanding so that we can put them into practice.

So if we know or follow the truth the result is freedom. So it goes from continuing in God's Word, being His disciples, knowing the truth, and having freedom. And the Jews' reply, which is absolutely ridiculous, it is a ridiculous lie, "We've always been free." They did not have a clue. Even these Jews that believed on Him, they did not have a clue what true freedom was. But they had been in subjection. They were right at the moment in subjection to the Romans, and they had been slaves to the Babylonians and to the Egyptians, and who knows who else during those up and down times

that they had gone through. They were totally blind to real freedom. So they do not understand.

So Jesus, in the last part of this passage starting in verse 34, has to try it from another tack. And so He says, when we sin as a lifestyle, when we are habitually sinning like people out in the world do because they just do not know better, they are just following their carnal nature, we are proving that we are the slave of sin; that it has got a hold on us and has corrupted us, and we just do what it wants. We are in bondage to corruption. A person cannot be delivered from this kind of slavery except through Christ's saving work, what Christ does. He pays for our sins through His blood, and He raises us from slavery to freedom. We become, instead of slaves, we become free sons, free daughters of the Kingdom, and we are going to go on to the Kingdom of God.

It is because only sons and daughters can have a relationship with God and with His Son. Only those that are truly disciples have made the New Covenant with God in which His laws are written on our hearts and minds. Those are the only ones that can have true freedom. The Son makes you free. That relationship that you have with the Son, that is what makes you free. Your love for Him makes you do what is right and good, which He teaches you, because that is the proper response, the proper worship of Him is to obey Him.

And so there is the guideline within the things that He has taught us, the principles, and then once we have that guideline there, that nice hedge that we can walk through, we can make right decisions. We can now make truly informed choices. And those truly informed choices will lead us toward the best ends. And the best end of all is the Kingdom of God and eternal life in that Kingdom.

So real freedom, according to Christ, rests on a relationship with truth. Or we could say obedience to the truth might be better. When we live within the bounds of God's way of life within the relationship that He has made with us, we can experience true freedom. Because it is not only the ability to make the choices, it is being able to make them within the law, within what God has said is righteousness.

Let us go to Romans 6. There something similar is said here by the apostle Paul. We will start in verse 15. He states it a little bit differently. The context is a little bit different, but Paul's argument here in Romans 6 is essentially the same as Jesus' in John the 8th chapter. He says,

Romans 6:15-23 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! [God forbid.] Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. [You were redeemed to that.] And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free [put that in quotes] in regard to righteousness. [You were liberated from righteousness. You did not have to do it because you did everything that sin wanted you to do.] What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? [Where did that lead? Where did being a slave of sin lead?] For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness [that is the end, holiness], and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here He is saying that though we have undeservedly been freed from the penalty of the law through the blood of Christ, the law still has its place in our lives. And that is, the law still is that guide to show us the way to righteousness and on to holiness. If our deliverance from sin is an act of redemption, which he says there in verse 17, or I should say, since it is an act of redemption, that it is a buying back of us or paying off a debt, we are now indebted to the One who bought us, the One who paid the debt.

So, in a sense, even though we now have true freedom, we have merely (maybe merely is not the right word), but we have switched masters. We have gone from obeying Satan to obeying Christ, or we could say, we have gone from being slaves of sin to being slaves of obedience or righteousness, or put it more starkly, we have gone from being slaves of death to slaves of life. But we are still slaves. We could even say that the human life in general is one of submission from start to finish. We are always under authority. The chief decision we have to make is *whom* to serve. Who are we going to serve? Because we have got to serve one or the other. We are not to the point where we are able to not serve. We will actually always serve. But who will it be?

That is something we have to get a grip on. That even though we were slaves out there, we are slaves in here too, because we are in subjection now to God and not to Satan and all the things out in the world, or even to our own carnality. But when we are slaves of God the end is good. But when we are slaves to Satan, the end is death. If we submit to Satan and to sin, we will get death as a wage. That is what Romans 6:23 says. That is our payment for being slaves to unrighteousness. But if we submit to God and to His righteousness, which leads to holiness, we will receive life and true freedom as a gift of God, even though we are still in subjection to Him.

Do you think Christ is free? Yes, He is but He is still subject to the Father. And He says, as we saw earlier in John 14:28, that He admits the Father is greater than He. And so being brothers and sisters of Christ that is our same end as well. So there is really no question or no argument about which is the better life, which slavery is better. The slavery to Jesus Christ or to God and to righteousness is the much better choice. I had a thought about this while I was putting this together. That in a sense, we have the same decision to make as what the angels were given. They were to choose who they were to serve. One-third of the angels chose to serve Satan and two-thirds of them chose to serve God. And that is exactly the same choice that humanity has.

But we can really only make the right choice when God initiates His calling and gives us faith and starts to work with us by His Spirit. And then we could have that true freedom.

Now Paul mentions here that what happens when we are slaves of sin, and he says in verse 19, jumping in, "For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness." But it was that first part I wanted; that what happens when we are slaves of sin is that our iniquities, our sins never stop getting greater, more intensive. It just seems to build and to build, Paul says, lawlessness leading to more lawlessness. Others, like the Holman Christian Standard Bible says greater and greater lawlessness. The New American Standard says lawlessness resulting in further lawlessness. And the New International Version renders it ever-increasing wickedness.

That is just the way it works. It is a principle that once something is sown, more is reaped. That is just how it is. You put one seed into the ground, you are not just going to get one fruit out of that, you are going to get many fruit on the plant that is grown from that seed. It is the same as here in terms of sin. This brings us back to the idea of freedom's dark underbelly. People do not realize that they are slaves. They think they are free, but when they use their so-called freedom the result is ever-increasing sin, iniquity, wickedness, lawlessness, licentiousness, and bondage and addiction. And many other terrible things. That is just the way it is. And it is proof that they are not really free. Even though they think it is freedom, it is not, and it will not end well.

Let us go to II Peter 2, if you will, as we start to wind this up. We will begin in verse 18. He is talking about false teachers here.

II Peter 2:18-22 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. [He is talking about us. They can lure us through these great swelling words.] While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption, for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way

of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But as it happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

So Peter here is warning us that there are voices out there that speak, preach, freedom. And they want to ensnare the ones who have been granted true freedom already. Peter is saying we can fall for the siren call of these false ministers or even ideas coming out of the world that preach freedom, that preach license under the guise of liberty. You have heard it. We are free from the law. We have the right to choose. You are free to live any way you like. You can live however you want as long as it does not hurt anybody else. These are some of those siren songs that if we let them get into our minds can lead us down this very dangerous path.

Those preachers do not realize it, but they are really preaching slavery under the guise of freedom, of liberty. And it leads to those pollutions of the world, the lust of the flesh, the decadence, and all manner of corrupting and disgusting, disgraceful conduct. We see that in the world daily. In further warning, Peter says those who fall for it are far worse off than they were before they were called. They are in a much more dangerous position.

So I am saying we have been warned. And this is not the only place in the New Testament where this comes up. We have got to watch out for people trying to tell us that we can have freedom apart from the law, apart from God's standards. It is not possible. It leads to slavery.

Let us finish in Galatians 5, verse 1. Now the context is false teachers trying to convince the Galatians that keeping the law would justify them before God. So it is the opposite direction than what Peter was talking about. But Paul's argument works the same in the context of false teachers saying we do not have to keep the law at all. Really those are two extremes, and they both lead to bad things. But notice what Paul says here.

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free [that true liberty], and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage [those other ways that are going to lead us from Christ].

Let us drop down to verse 7.

Galatians 5:7-14 You ran well. [He is saying you had a good record.] Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you to Himself. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. [There is somebody in the congregation, some false teacher that is leading them astray, and God will judge that.] And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I would wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off! For you, brethren, have been called to liberty [and this makes an awful lot of sense if we remember that liberty in God's mind is closeness to Him]; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [That is, within the bounds of God's standard. As a matter of fact, he says here] For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

If you are loving your neighbor as yourself, as you truly are, you are also loving God. And vice versa, if you are truly doing it the right way. So all the law is fulfilled in that in which you can show by your conduct that you are loving one another.

That is real freedom. Take that liberty that you have been given, that closeness to God, and turn it into good works and good actions and reactions among the people of the church. It is a precious thing that we have been given this true liberty, and the last thing we want to do is to give it up and return to the slavery of sin which we were under before. That would just be awful.

So yes, we among all people in the world are truly free. If we give it up, all that we will receive in return is a yoke of bondage and death. Instead, Paul says, use that freedom to serve one another in love, fulfilling the law, and so be true disciples of Christ who will inherit the Kingdom of God.