

## Liberty Through Self-Control

Christian Freedom Derives from Self-Government

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Every few years, we speakers have the opportunity (if we choose to take it) to speak on a subject that is appropriate, this time being Independence Day, July 4<sup>th</sup>.

This year, we will celebrate the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and America's independence from Great Britain. It is proper, I believe, in a sermon, to evaluate the state of freedom in America every now and then, especially if we can use it to measure ourselves spiritually.

If you had read this week's "CGG Weekly," which I authored, you would have seen my pessimism regarding our continued liberty in this country. To sum up the essay, our constitutional freedoms have, over time, been perverted, eroded, and in some cases, actually *stolen* from us. This has happened particularly over the last one hundred years. The pace of these diminished liberties seems to be quickening. We seem to be losing more and more. The government gives us all sorts of reasons why we should not have these freedoms, and then it proceeds to take them.

What is so appalling is that so many of the American people, and our leaders in Congress, go along with it. They hardly seem to bat an eye at it. They think it is needful for the time, and there goes another liberty. There goes another right.

We have a Left called Liberals in this country. I am beginning to believe that we should not call them Liberals, but rather Libertines (which is more like what they are). They are not true liberals. Liberal means generous. These people have gone way beyond that to where they are tolerant of everything, which I feel Libertine more exactly describes.

We have this powerful Left in this country which trumpets that they are bringing greater liberty to the American people, but what they are actually accomplishing is the exact opposite. We are actually becoming *more* restricted, and *more* controlled, particularly by the government.

For example: To protect an immoral minority in this country, which the best polls show to be only one or two percent of the entire population, the government has made them a protected minority. The recent hate-crime laws that have gone into effect apply only to those not of this protected minority. To protect a minority, which is immoral in the first place, they put the other 98% or 99% of us in a box, and tell us that we cannot do this.

What they have done—and I am not talking about beating someone up—I am talking about ***just talking***. Our freedom of speech, which is guaranteed in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, has been reduced. Now, if you say that homosexuality is wrong, and you point to a scripture, which the American people (the Christian part of America) generally uphold to be true, you are liable to be sued.

We are just following our brother Ephraim (the British, Canadians, and others). In Canada, they have some very terrible laws in this vein, under which some people have already been prosecuted. We seem to be going in that very same way. The brothers are in lockstep here.

It is going this way. In order to "protect" and to "give freedom" to certain ones, the rest of us are being shackled. Our freedoms are being taken away. I am very thankful that we have the freedoms that we have. But I am appalled that there are so few; and that we could be so much freer if we would just follow our basic law.

I find it ironic, though, in thinking about the things that have been happening lately. For instance, the President, many Senators, and many in Congress, want to give illegal aliens amnesty, and eventual citizenship—millions of them—just to solve a temporary problem in this country.

What I find ironic is that many of them have no desire whatsoever to become citizens of this country. Why? Because they believe they are better off as illegals than as citizens.

It used to be the goal of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people living in poverty or in a place of political repression or oppression to come to America. They would do whatever it took to become a citizen of this country because of the benefits that accrued to being a citizen.

Now, they just want to come here, take our money, and enjoy the benefits of citizenship without being citizens. We just roll over and give it to them free hospitalization, free emergency room services, bi-lingual considerations rather than passively forcing them to learn English, and a hands-off policy when they are caught.

What it has come down to is that in practical fact they are freer as illegal aliens than we are as citizens. They do not pay taxes, yet they get the benefits that come from being here in the United States. It is just ironic.

This kind of thinking is par for the course for human nature. A carnal person is only

interested in what benefits himself at the moment. People just do not normally think of the future and the general public, as well as themselves. There is not altruism in which you think about everyone as much as yourself. We have this biblical principle being played out again, "every man did what was right in his own eyes," as mentioned at the end of the book of Judges.

This idea (every man did what was right in his own eyes) is essentially anarchy. Every man is his own law. The carnal person's mind sees this license as "freedom." It is their ultimate freedom to human nature to have no restrictions—no law—telling it what it can or cannot do (Romans 8:7). The carnal mind is enmity against God, and it *cannot* keep the law of God. It cannot do it because it is so deceitful, and influenced by Satan's nature.

William Penn once wrote, "Law without liberty is tyranny." This is very true. If you have all law, and do not give anyone liberty, you have put everyone into bondage. Law without liberty is tyranny. Liberty without law is license. Liberty under the law is freedom!

He got it right! He understood that true freedom exists only when the excesses of human nature are constrained by moral and ethical laws that have the good of all as their aim—under which everyone must live, equality under the law. Everybody has to conform to the same moral, ethical laws.

As I have mentioned before, our country's laws seem headed in the other direction. Laws are being enacted, on the one hand, to demolish the standards of moral conduct that men have for centuries deemed proper and good. On the other hand, these laws favor, not the common good, but the views and practices of the very few.

If this trend continues, we can expect more of our freedoms to become restricted, and perhaps even abolished, because we are moving in the direction of *unequal* under the law; and license—every man doing what is right in his own eyes.

So, what about us as Christians living in this atmosphere of declining freedoms? What is our personal state of liberty? Are we realizing our liberty in Christ? Do we know how to maintain Christian liberty? Do we know where it comes from and how we can continue to have it?

Such are the things I want to talk about in the remainder of my sermon today.

Now I think that many people in our secular society, and I dare say the many of those who profess Christianity, believe that living the Christian life, as shown in God's Word,

would "cramp their style." The Christian life, as the Bible reveals it, would be confining, restrictive, binding, and uncomfortably oppressive.

God's Word puts human nature in a strait jacket. Therefore, we cannot do anything "enjoyable," or even fun. Everything in Christianity has a somber gray to it. Human nature thinks that Christians are caught up back in time like the Puritans, or the more restrictive sects that have sprung up in the American past. They think that Christianity is a dour religion, one in which there is no joy, essentially enslaving. I believe that is the mind of many people. They do not consider Christianity and freedom in the same breath.

Of course, if you look at it in terms of Protestant Christianity, they think that Christianity is all about freedom—license. There is no law. They will not come out quite that way and say it, but Protestant Christianity is essentially antinomian—against the law.

Satan certainly wants to project this image and impression of God's way of life as cramping and restrictive. Like all of his impressions, all of his devices, this one is a lie in part. Because there is a little bit of truth to it, it is so deceptive.

On the other hand, God wants us to understand that His way of life is truly liberating—from beginning to end. I want to show you that by going to three passages, Christianity is all about liberty from start to finish.

To start our look at this, turn to Luke 4:16-19. I will read the whole passage, but I really want one phrase. This is at the beginning of Christ's ministry. In effect, this is the first thing that comes out of His mouth. This is on His mind as He begins His ministry.

**Luke 4:16-19** So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the LOORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LOORD."

Actually, two phrases here speak of this. "To preach deliverance to the captives," and "to set at liberty those who are oppressed." A major purpose of Christ's ministry, of His coming to earth as a man, was to proclaim liberty to all of us who are in bondage, who

are suffering oppression.

This is not imprisonment, but this is enslavement to Satan, sin, and the dictates of human nature. Jesus came to announce that Satan's regime was over—or at least was being defeated so that it could be over.

Here it is, at the beginning of His ministry, He tells us a major reason why His Father sent Him to us: To preach, proclaim liberty! And, not just to proclaim it, but to do it! He says to preach deliverance, and He says to set at liberty—to free. He said not just that it is happening, but He came to do it.

I want the first clause Galatians 5:13:

**Galatians 5:13** For you, brethren, have been called to liberty.

Not only did Jesus come to preach it, and to set us free, but also our calling's purpose is to give us liberty—to set us free. Our calling, itself, is to liberty. It frees us from Satan's grip, and this world's corrupting influence. It gives us the opportunity for the first time in our lives to choose to live in a way that pleases God—that will bring true blessings to us.

We were not free before. We were confined. We were enslaved, and we had to follow Satan. We did not really have a choice. We just weakly followed the dictates of human nature. We did not know the good that could come from doing what God says, because we were deceived into thinking that what we were doing was just fine. Nevertheless, God has to call us and wake us up to the fact that things are not just fine—that we are actually in slavery. We are in bondage to ourself, and to Satan. We need freeing. We need redemption. The calling is a wake up call to live a different way so that we can have true freedom.

Let us use the Sabbath as an example.

How many people do you know who were keeping the Sabbath before they were called? There were a few who have done it. People have been called out of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Some people have found the Sabbath on their own, and because God said it, they should do it. Some people have come from Judaism.

They did not really keep the Sabbath properly. They did not know the real reasons for it from God. They were just following a physical command. Therefore, they would set the Sabbath day apart without really understanding why, and what God wanted them to get

out of it.

Our calling has freed us to keep the Sabbath, and to keep it properly. Our calling opened up our eyes to the fact that we were in bondage to a seven-day workweek when God said that His workweek is six days. He says, "I give you the seventh day for something so much better!"

It frees us from a day of work. That is just on the physical side of things. Beyond that, there is a great deal of spiritual rest, rejuvenation, and understanding which comes from Sabbath rest.

You see, when we were in the seven-day workweek, we could not have a relationship with God. But, when God revealed to us His six-day workweek, with one day reserved for Him, then we had a whole day to spend with Him, and have a relationship with Him! When there is a relationship with God, with this sort of intimacy, the blessings just come rolling in. Everyone is happier! God is happy and, we are happy. That comes because we are in tune with Him. We set aside that day for that particular boost of the relationship with Him.

So, when it is truly kept, as God says in Isaiah 58:13-14, the Sabbath is no longer a burden, as some people would think it to be. Those not called would think, "Give up a whole day? When would I wash my car? When would I go to the ball game? When would I play golf? When would I watch this movie, or that show? When would I have time for my family? (I am giving them the benefit of the doubt on that one!)"

God says that when you keep the Sabbath day, it is no longer a burden because it becomes a delight! It is a joy! It is an idea that those who have not been called to liberty would never consider.

Remember that from the very beginning Jesus' mission was to preach and set us at liberty. The second thing is that we were called to liberty. We were called to be free. Now the third thing is found here. Paul says:

**Romans 8:18-23** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with

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birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. [This is the end part of the liberty. Actually, this is the true beginning of the liberty.]

In the way that we are approaching it here, this is the goal. The glorious liberty of the sons of God is the goal of Christianity. Jesus came to preach that, and to accomplish it; and not only were we called to it, our goal is liberty—glorious liberty—liberty that we cannot even really imagine right now.

It says here that the whole creation is just waiting—like with bated breath—for us to be changed into spirit. That will free the whole creation—animate and inanimate—to do what God made it to do. In response to the liberation of God's children, the earth will explode with productivity and prosperity. That is what Paul is saying here. The whole creation is groaning right now because it wants to be freed from this corruption. The corruption is bondage. It is enslavement.

When those bands are taken off, by the revealing of the sons of God as spirit beings, the whole earth is going to rejoice. This is one thing that will make the Millennium so wonderful. Real freedom—true liberty—is going to be extant.

What we are seeing, here, is that liberty is one of God's chief aims in His plan.

So, how are we doing in pursuing liberty? You see, we think of liberty in this country as ***independence***. We are "free" to do whatever we want to do. ***God sees liberty in a more broader and glorious picture.***

I want you to see how this works. This next passage has been misunderstood terribly by a large part of professing Christianity. Perhaps some theologians understand it intellectually, but in practice when it comes down to the way they apply it, it has been horribly misconstrued.

**Romans 8:1-4** There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to

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the flesh but according to the Spirit.

As I said, there may be some Protestant theologians out there who understand what this actually says, but it does not come through very often in their writings. This makes me think that they do not really understand this at all.

Protestants use this to say, "Those who have accepted the blood of Christ can no longer be condemned through sin. Therefore, because they cannot be condemned through sin, since Christ has lived righteously for them, they don't have to become righteous themselves." That is essentially what they have taken out from this. They encapsulate this in a very catchy phrase, "Jesus has done it all for me." It is as if they say, "He lived righteously, and He died so that I won't have to live by the law."

That is what it comes down to. It is another facet of their doctrine of eternal security. That is the exact opposite of what this passage actually says. It does not say that Jesus did it all for them so that they do not have to do the law. It does not say that.

But, what does it say? In short, Paul teaches that Jesus Christ's sinless life—lived without sin for 33 1/2 years—and His sacrificial death, as a perfect sacrifice—free us from the condemnation of sin by paying the penalty in our stead. It was only by a perfect offering of a Being such as Him, our Creator, who could pay the debt of sin for us, and for all mankind.

This is simple theology. We all understand how this works. Jesus Christ's life given as a perfect sacrifice pays for our sins. Therefore, we are no longer under the condemnation of sin. He paid the penalty for it. That much is simple.

Thus, Paul goes on to say that while we are in union with Him (which is the understanding of Romans 8:1), "those in Christ Jesus," (through the Spirit—union with Him—when we live by His Spirit); sin cannot condemn us because we are living in the Spirit. When we are doing what is right, we are not sinning. It does not condemn us.

If we do stumble occasionally (as it says I John 1:8-10), He is quick to forgive us our sins because we are in union with Him. We are sincerely trying to do what is right and proper in His sight, and to please Him. He is very happy to forgive us our sins, so we are not under that condemnation.

We are free, then, from sin—not from the law. Why should we be freed from the law? The law tells us, as Paul says elsewhere, what sin is. The law can condemn us if we

break it, but that is only as far as it goes. We have been freed from sins through Christ's sacrifice, but the law is still binding. We are not freed from law. Actually, here, in Romans 8:2, it said, "the law of the spirit of life in Christ has made me free from the law of sin and death." That is so poorly translated. Here the word "law" should be "guidance." It is translated here as if we were freed from the Ten Commandments, as if we have been freed from God's law.

Let me read this with the word 'guidance' in there: "So the guidance of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the guidance of sin and death." Does that not make more sense? Paul is saying exactly what he ended chapter 7 with. He was saying that even now, every once in a while, sin gets control of him, and he does what he does not want to do. That is the law—guidance—of sin and death rearing its ugly head, and making Paul do what he did not want to do. But, he said there is another law, the law of spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We can grab onto the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, and be rescued from the guidance of sin and death. In addition, he says, "Thank God that this can happen through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is the same with us. If we are living by the Spirit, these takeovers by this law (guidance) of sin and death happen only occasionally, we hope. I trust that this is the way with you. Generally, we are following the guidance of the Spirit. Every once in a while, we slip up, and follow the guidance of the sin and death. When we do, we have to repent. Through Jesus Christ, we have quick forgiveness.

This is what Paul is explaining. We are not finished yet. We have only gotten through verse 2 of Romans 8. Verses 3 and 4 talk about what Jesus Christ did for us that the law could not do.

What was it that the law could not do? It could not forgive us! The law could not do it because it is weak in the flesh. There is no way that the law could justify one by any fleshly type of keeping it. It does not work that way.

If you were to go to the book of Hebrews, there is no forgiveness of sin in the law or the Old Covenant. The blood of bulls and goats cannot forgive sin. There is nothing we can do in terms of keeping God's commandments that will save us.

We are saved by grace. Justification is through the blood of Jesus Christ.

**Romans 8:3** For what the law could not do, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh," [in His flesh. And He did it by keeping God's law perfectly, and then

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dying as the perfect sacrifice.]

Again, in verse 4 (this is where it comes down to you and me), it says that when we walk according to the Spirit—that is according to the guidance of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—when we walk according to the Spirit, we are also *free to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law!*

Did you get that? Before we were converted, before we were called, as we tried to keep the law, we could not do that. It was impossible.

I get letters, e-mails frequently from people who want to argue with me, "that it is impossible for human beings to keep the law, and that is why Jesus Christ came and kept it for us."

I sometimes want to be really snotty, and say, "Did you know that Jesus Christ was a human being, and He lived 33 1/2 years and kept the law—perfectly? Not one sin in all that time? Are you calling your Savior a liar?"

Now, true, those of us who are enslaved to Satan cannot keep the law. But, once we are freed by what Jesus Christ did, we can keep the law. That is what it says in verse 4. Jesus came, and did what He did, so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled. Was it fulfilled by Him? Only partly—His righteousness is attributed to us so that we can go before the Father and have a relationship with Him. It says, "so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled **in us** who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

What it says is that when we walk according to the Spirit, we are also free to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. You see, by giving us His Spirit—by freeing us from Satan, and giving us His Spirit—we are free to keep God's law.

Now, we are going to do it imperfectly. Even Paul says 20 years after he was converted, he was still messing up (Romans 7), and that is why the blood of Jesus Christ continues to cleanse us from all sin. It is good for every sin, for every person, for all time. That is how applicable it is.

Because we can walk in the Spirit, because we have communion with God, because we have this power residing in us, we can keep what God requires to attain righteousness. This is not saying that it is easy. It just says that now we are free to do so. It is now possible. Therefore, we have no excuse.

In terms of Christian liberty, the sacrifice of Christ combined with our calling frees us *from* condemnation for our past sins, and frees us *to* put on righteousness by living God's way in the Spirit.

It does two things: It not only frees us from all the stupid mistakes we have done in the past, and frees us from continued enslavement to Satan, it also frees us *to do something*—that is, to keep God's law, to be righteous, to follow God, imitate Christ, to grow into the stature of our Savior.

This was impossible to have done before that calling, and before being given freedom; but now we can. This is what Paul goes on to say in verses 6 through 8.

**Romans 8:6** For to be carnally minded is death [living by the guidance of sin and death], but to be spiritually minded [living by the guidance of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus] is life and peace.

They are total opposites! If we live according to the guidance of sin and death, we are going to die. There is no justification. There is no salvation. That is it. We are dead. It is just condemnation. But, if we live in union with Christ through His Spirit, then the end is going to be life and peace. Freedom makes that possible. Freedom that is given through Christ's death, and through God's calling, and then, through the giving of His Spirit that allows us the strength to do these things. Why?

**Romans 8:7-8** Because the carnal mind is enmity [hostile—irreconcilable] against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Those with a carnal mind are not free to please God. They are not at liberty to please God. They cannot because they are fighting God. It is only when we have and use God's Spirit that we are free and able to keep God's law.

The carnal mind fights against it, and will not be subject to it, so a carnal person cannot and will not please God through obedience and submission to His righteous standards. It is not going happen. Conversely, a person with God's Spirit can, and truly desires to conform to God's standards of righteousness, which would bring life and peace.

Have you ever wondered, when you are going through Paul's writings, where he got some of his material? I wondered that while I was going through Romans 8. Then I

thought, "He got that from Jesus Himself."

Jesus talked about this very same thing—freedom. Jesus said the same thing here in John 8 that Paul said in Romans 8. (It is also interesting that both are in their eighth chapters.)

**John 8:30-32** As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

**John 8:34-36** 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."

This is essentially the same thing. Now, Jesus does not mention the Spirit, here, which Paul does quite frequently. But, that is kind of subsumed—the Spirit, then, is kind of under the surface—and encompassed by the work of Christ Himself, in John 8.

So, instead of talking about the Spirit doing this or that, Jesus Himself said, "I do this." or, "The Son does that." He was speaking in the first or third persons.

Now the idea of such things as union with Christ is here. It talks about being His disciples indeed; along with the idea of freedom from sin ("whoever commits sin is a slave of sin") and that if the Son frees you, you shall be free indeed. Freedom to speak the truth, and live it comes through the Son.

**John 8:32** "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Now most of us, if you did not know better, would probably think that the word "know" is intellectual; that you have it in mind—something that you have learned. But, that is not what this "know" means.

It is a sad thing that we do not have a better term in the English language to explain this. We use the word "know" very broadly. But, this "know" is an intimate term. It is relational, or experiential. We *know* because we have a relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ (Fill in the subject.) We *know* because we experience something having to do with the truth—in

this case.

It is the "know" of an intimate relationship like a man and his wife. A man and his wife, having lived together for years, know so much more about each other than they know about anybody else.

What Jesus is saying here is, if we have a relationship with the truth, if we experience the truth through application of it in our lives, what is the result? Freedom!

You know—you have experienced—the truth at an intimate level because you done it, or have attempted to do it. It produces liberty. He is talking about intimate knowledge from practical use. If we use the truth, and make it a part of us, then that truth is going to make us free.

The key (this whole section of John 8 runs all the way through verse 47) to this entire passage is in Jesus' first words in verse 31, "If you abide in My word. . ." If you get that part, the remainder of this section becomes very clear. Because, what does He go on to talk to the Jews about?

They were saying, "We have never been slaves to anyone." Jesus said, "Really? You have been enslaved to your father the Devil this whole time." And they said, "Come on! You are the one with the devil." And He said, "Do you know how I know this? Because you do the works of your father the Devil. If you were really sons of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham. The works of Abraham were the works of God."

It was obvious who the father of these people is. It is the Devil, not Abraham, whom they claimed. If they had been doing the works of Abraham, they would have seen Jesus and said, "Another man doing the works of Abraham! We love Him!" But they did not. They wanted to kill Him, all because He did not do *their* works!

They did the works of the Devil, and He did the works of God. They are hostile one toward the other. Look at the hostility here! Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples, and you shall be free." That is the key.

Now, the way it is translated in the King James Version, and the New King James Version, using the word "abide," really makes it sound theological, old fashioned, difficult—intellectual concepts. "Abide" is only a five letter word, but we seem to have lost the real sense of this in the last four hundred years or so, since the King James Version was written.

Let us read John 8:31 in a few modern translations:

**Amplified Bible:** "If you hold fast to My teachings, and live in accordance with it. . ." [This is a whole lot easier to understand than "abide."]

**New International Version:** "If you hold to My teaching. . ."

**Today's English Version:** "If you obey My teaching. . ." [That one is really simple.]

**Contemporary English Version:** "If you keep on obeying what I have said. . ." [That is probably closer, because the idea is of abiding—of continuing.]

**The Living Bible:** "If you live as I tell you to. . ." [That is pretty simple.]

**The New Living Translation:** "If you remain faithful to My teachings. . ."

That is what Jesus is saying! It is not some mysterious, complicated, or mystical thing He was teaching them. He was saying, "If you do what I tell you, you are My disciples—you are following Me. And you will have the truth, and the truth shall make you free." That is not a hard concept. "Do you want freedom? Do what I tell you! I have brought the truth."

This is really simple. *Christian liberty is tied directly and inextricably to submission and obedience to God's Word.* That is it. If you put them together, that is what He is saying.

Any kind of liberty that does not include conformity to God's standard is not true liberty. You have just turned it around. That is what Jesus, our Savior, says here. The only real liberty, the only good liberty, the only liberty He endorses is living under God's Word. Simple. It is not hard. But this goes against the grain of human nature, and the assumptions of our common ideas of what liberty is.

Most people take a libertarian or libertine position on freedom, believing that freedom means that we are free to do whatever we like as long as it does not harm anyone else. Libertines and libertarians believe, when it is all boiled down, that they are free to do whatever they want, even if it does harm themselves. They think they are "free" to take drugs; or drive foolishly with excessive speed on the road; or to live recklessly; or to be sexually promiscuous; or to defy authority. That is what they think freedom is.

I think this is the general idea of freedom in this country. Some of the great thinkers of history have concluded rightly that this idea of freedom as license is absolutely wrong. Now it is interesting that many of these were professing Christian men who were familiar with the Bible. And even some of the others who were Stoic philosophers who lived at the time of Jesus and Paul. You wonder if maybe they heard something. I do not know.

This first one is from Seneca, a Stoic philosopher, who was born about the same time Jesus, about 4 BC. He lived up into the reign of Nero in 65 AD. So, he is generally contemporary with the apostle Paul. In fact, Nero put Seneca to death for getting involved with a plot. But, Seneca said: "To obey God is perfect liberty."

A thought just occurred to me—I wonder if Seneca was present when Paul appeared before Nero. I do not know. It is an interesting thought because Seneca and Nero were friends for a while. I just wonder if Paul, in his defense made some statements like this, and Seneca, being a Stoic, apt to think along these same lines, picked this up from him. I do not know if the date is right for this, or not, but it would be interesting to find out—maybe a question to ask when in the Kingdom!

"To obey God is perfect liberty." Seneca was a pagan! But, he understood this concept.

Epictetus, was also a Stoic philosopher, a bit later than Seneca, maybe 55 AD to about 135 AD, had this to say: "Freedom is not procured by a full enjoyment of what is desired, but [rather] by controlling that desire."

Now we go forward in time by quite a bit. Edwin Burke was an Irish-born English statesman and philosopher who lived from 1729 until 1797. This was during the period of the enlightenment. And the time when the revolutions were about to begin, or had begun.

Edwin Burke wrote in one of his books, "Men are qualified for civil liberties in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral change upon their own appetites." He understood that freedom—real freedom—is not just doing whatever one wants to do, but is controlling the appetites. He also said, "Men of intemperate minds can never be free. Their passions forge their fetters."

Benjamin Franklin (you all know him) an American statesman and philosopher lived from 1706 to 1790, said one time, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom." Virtue.

John Adams, the 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States, who lived 1735 to 1836, wrote,

"The preservation of liberty depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the people." If the people become immoral, and uneducated, he says that they are in for chaos.

Now, this next one is not one of the great intellectual thinkers, but he is a man who thought about these things because of his employment. Dean Smith, coach of the University of North Carolina basketball team, taught leadership to his players, as well as teamwork. There are a lot of great principles that can come out of sports. John Wooden has just tons of interesting quotations because he learned them through playing and coaching the game basketball.

Dean Smith said, "The disciplined man is freest of all." The disciplined man is freest of all because he knows his bounds.

Several of these quotations mentioned "discipline," "character," "virtue," "control." These are the keys to maintaining Christian liberties. I will call it **self-control**. Liberty under Christ is maintained through self-control. Look at Proverbs 29:18. This is a memory scripture.

**Proverbs 29:18** Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

Now, that does not mention self-control outright, but the idea is there in the word "restraint." Lack of restraint or self-control is produced when there is no godly standard to follow. When there is not something there imposed from a beneficent God who puts boundaries upon proper behavior, people are going to run wild. There is no liberty in that. That is confusion and chaos. That is the way it is getting to be today.

**II Timothy 3:3** . . . without self-control. . .

That is one of the signs—the hallmarks—of this age. People feel free to give in to their wildest dreams. That is what it is: Wild! "I can do anything I want!" But, all it ends up to be is anarchy—license.

Solomon goes on to say that where a righteous standard exists and is followed (obviously the righteous standard is still there and has been for millennia), people are blessed. "Happy is he who keeps the law!" Blessed, joyful—other ways "happy" can be translated.

There is true meaning to life when there is control. Why are people happy and blessed? People are happy because they are not bringing harm onto themselves, or to anyone else through wild behavior—deviancy. They are not bringing on destruction and death through sin. That is why there is happiness. Nobody is crying. There is no more shame and guilt.

This is what is being talked about in Revelation 21, when God the Father is ready to come down.

**Revelation 21:3-4** And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things [of this world] have passed away."

That is why people will be happy and blessed! Everybody will be living in freedom, self-restrained under the law of God. They will be blessed.

People think of us as mad being utopians because we believe that this time is coming in God's Kingdom. God says that it is! It may take a while. It may be beyond our lifetimes. Who knows? But if we have self-restraint, and self-control, and if we master ourselves, the time will come when we will be there and enjoying that happy time, that blessed time.

Go back to Galatians 5:16. This is very much connected to what Paul said in Romans 8. The same ideas come in here. Remember also, that Galatians 5:13 says that you brethren had been called to liberty. That is what is on his mind—Christian liberty.

**Galatians 5:16-17** I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh [This is the same thing as Romans 7 and 8. These things are in contention with each other.], and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

This is almost the same wording Paul used in Romans 7; he did not do the things that he wanted to do. He is talking about this same process—this war within us—whether we will follow the guidance of the Spirit, or whether we will follow the guidance of sin.

**Galatians 5:18-21** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. [You are not under the condemnation, he is saying. Same topic here.] Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are [He is going to give us a list, now, of these things that are produced by the guidance of sin and death.]: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, [licentiousness, debauchery] lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies [factions], envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Why? Because they lead to death! You will not be there! It is just as simple as that! These things do not lead to the freedom of everlasting life in the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. They just lead to annihilation.

**Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [Where does Paul end up when he is talking about Christian liberty?] self-control. Against such there is no law.

If you can control yourself, you will not be under the condemnation of the law; we control ourselves under God's law, God's standards. If we are in control, we will not end up dead. That is what sin does. Sin kills (Romans 6:23).

**Galatians 5:24** And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

They put those feelings, those impulses, into the stocks. They put them in shackles. They have beaten them down. And Paul uses an even stronger metaphor; they have crucified them, which was the most vile punishment of all. Paul said to take it to that extent.

In another place he talks about mortifying the flesh—killing. He does not mean literally killing it, but he means to put it down so that it cannot get up again!

**Galatians 5:25** If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Now, as the fruit of the Spirit, self-control is listed last. Why did Paul do this? I think there might be two reasons. Either this is what is ultimately produced—meaning that this may be one of the last things that the Spirit produces as a fruit. It does take an awful long time to learn self-control.

But, I lean a bit more toward thinking that Paul listed self-control last, because it is the one that Paul wanted to stick in our minds. He wanted it to be the last thing we heard so that we would take it with us and apply it in our walk with Him. We are to be self-controlled in everything we do.

The word that Paul uses here is "enkrateia." In addition, if you know anything about Greek, you know that this literally means "in strength." The implication is having power and rule within oneself, and over oneself. You are strong in yourself, and over yourself. It means to be inwardly strong—to have self-mastery.

To many of the Greek philosophers, this was the chief, or one of the chief virtues to control their emotions, desires, impulses, and their actions so other men would not sway them. And it should be one of our virtues as well.

If we live in union with God, His Spirit will produce as a fruit the ability to govern ourselves despite what our decadent deceptive heart tries to lower us into. Remember, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it (realize it)? (Jeremiah 17:9)

But, with God's Spirit we can, and are free to be guided by Him and produce self-control. And I should add here that this is not so much a struggle to avoid sin—we do enough of that—but to do as Jesus did during His life and ministry, which was to set His mind to pursue and do good always. If you are doing good, and have self-control so that you pursue the good, and do the good, you do not have time to sin.

Sin will not affect you because it will not have a hold on you. It is not your guide! Your guide is God's Spirit.

**Galatians 5:13-14** For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Liberty Through Self-Control by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

That is the self-control we have to learn. To put down our fleshly desires, and instead use the strength that is in us that God has freed up to do what is right and good. That is self-control. That is self-mastery.

So, I ask, how free are we? God through Christ has given us the freedom that we could in no way purchase for ourselves. We are no longer under the condemnation of sin. We are free under Christ.

How well are we maintaining our liberty? How well are we abiding in God's Word? (That is the key, remember?) How much self-control do we have? Ultimately, it is self-control, along with the help of God's Spirit that is going to produce liberty.

**Galatians 5:1** Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Let us, then, pursue liberty by governing ourselves!