

# Freedom for...

April 30, 2023

**Open your Bibles to Galatians chapter 5! “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1**

**Not a bad verse to reflect on baptism Sunday, amen?**

## Introduction:

Picture a kite, sailing majestically in the sky on a breezy day (this time it’s a pretty one). In a way, doesn’t a kite nicely symbolize freedom? To me it almost embodies this carefree sense of freedom, weaving back and forth with the picturesque blue-sky backdrop. **Hold that thought – we’ll come back to it.**

*“It is for **freedom** that Christ has set us free. **Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**” Galatians 5:1*

## Question: What is your definition of freedom?

In his book *“Chasing Love: Sex, Love and Relationships in a Confused Culture”*, Dr. Sean McDowell unpacks this question brilliantly! He addressed it so well in fact, and in such a concise manner, that I want to share a few quotes (the basic framework for chapter 4 of the book) with you this morning, as it relates to the message that the Lord has laid on my heart. And we will come back to Galatians 5 in time!

- A. What is Freedom?** (*according to Paul, we are called to it, so we’d better understand what it is...*)
- This is a relevant question today. Humans beings desire to be free. Free from oppression, tyranny, and violence. But that is not so much the angle I am looking at this question from.

**Rather, as a human being, created in God’s image, what does it mean to be free?**

- Dr. McDowell asked a group of High School Students this question, and after some group discussion and thought, they presented him with the following definition: *“Freedom is being able to do what you want without restraint.’ In other words, the free person does whatever he or she wants without any person or law hindering them.” (P.25)*

**Is this an accurate definition? It seems to line up with how people think and act... but is it true?**

- You hear this definition come out in many ways – in songs, news articles (in what people lobby for or against), in movies and books. **Our cultural motto: “Don’t be so judgmental! What’s true for me is true for me, and what’s true for you is true for you, so don’t tell me what I am doing is wrong. You are infringing on my freedom! Stop it.”**
- One of my favourite examples is a stop sign here in town. Underneath the word **“STOP”** someone has placed the word “judging” so that the sign now reads **“stop judging”**.
  - o I have often thought to myself – what if I conducted a little experiment... what if instead of stopping at this sign, I just rolled through it into oncoming traffic. Suppose I did that and I crashed my van into oncoming traffic. Do you suppose the person I hit would get out of their car and say – **“Way to go! Way to stand for freedom! I am so glad you interpreted for yourself that you had the right of way!”** (we are Canadians, but I don’t

think we are quite that nice...). NOT A CHANCE! My guess is that they would get out and rightfully be upset with my poor judgement call.

- Because in driving, we are governed by written rules of the road. When we see a red octagonal sign, it means... STOP.
- **My excuse of “just following the sign”, or my response of “don’t judge me!” would not hold up!** (now in fairness, I get where the sign is coming from. We’ve had quite enough of hypocritical people judging others without first judging ourselves! **Matt. 7:1-6**).
- **But if we took that statement “stop judging” to its logical end** – it would be a TERRIFYING world to live in. Everyone would do what seemed right in their own eyes.
- **So then, is freedom the ability to do what you want without restraint? No! ...and yes.**
  - No... in the sense that I cannot do whatever I want. First of all, we are human beings; having limitations is kind of part of the gig. As much as I want to be able to be everywhere at once, or fly like a bird, or be Spiderman, I cannot.
    - Or just because I can do something doesn’t mean that I should; suppose your car is nicer than mine, and while you sit in church I sneak the keys from your coat pocket and drive away with it (*some of you will now be leery of sitting next to me at church!*). **Who are you to stop me – I’M FREE! That’s not how freedom works, and we know it!**
  - But also yes... its also partially correct in the sense that **IF** my desires were perfectly aligned with the **ultimate GOOD** of God, and *for* the good of myself, and others... then, the ability to do whatever I wanted would be heavenly! Or it would be... heaven!
- McDowell continues, *“Thus, freedom is not being able to do whatever you want, but **cultivating the right wants that allow you to properly love God and other people.**”* (P.26) **Brilliant!!**

Try to imagine if we had right desires within ourselves. Just imagine a world where our desires aligned with the ultimate GOOD of God! How different would that world be? **But that’s not present reality...**

- Remember how Paul struggled with this in Rom. 7? *“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** (v21-25)*

This is the freedom available to us; through Jesus Christ our Lord! And elsewhere Scripture tells us that this can begin to happen THROUGH CHRIST now, and WILL ultimately happen **IN** Christ for eternity!

## **B. Cultivating Right Desires**

We need to pay attention to one word in particular that McDowell used: **cultivate**. That’s a helpful word. Ultimately that is what Paul goes on to describe in Galatians 5 + 6, which we will return to shortly.

- There is a process of cultivation leading to changed desires within us! (*sanctification*)
- Desires that align with God’s purpose for our lives. Desires that lead to life, not death, for ourselves as well as for others!

- How do we get there? Lets look at another important word McDowell used: **restraint**. (*freedom means life without restraint??*)
- “...freedom comes not from resisting restraint, but submitting to the **right restraint**.” (P.26)

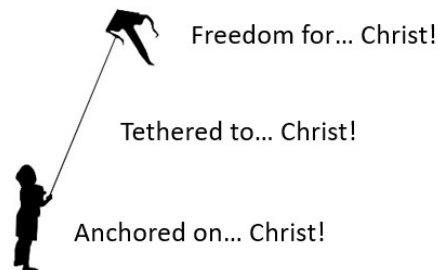
**Back to the analogy of the kite. Can you still see that kite, soaring in the air, magnificent and free?**

Consider this; *a kite is only free so long as it is under restraint*. I’m not overly smart – I couldn’t tell you the science behind what makes a kite fly, but I can tell you this: If you were flying a kite and someone walked up with scissors and cut the line, what would happen?

- Bye bye kite!
- You see, the kite only works when it is bound by a string, tethering it to the operator down below. The kite is anchored to something else, giving it the ability to fly! You cut that string... the kite is “free from” its anchor, and begins its ‘free fall’ to the ground.
- The kite requires ‘restraint’ in order to accomplish what it was made to do; fly! When is the kite truly free? Only when it is tethered to the anchor. Only then is it FREE FOR its purpose!

You see... many people (including some Christians) misunderstand the premise of freedom to mean “the ability to do what I want without restraint.” **McDowell concludes...**

- “According to the **Christian worldview**, true freedom is not a matter of doing what you want without restraint, but cultivating the right wants and living in obedience to God’s will. In other words, freedom results when our wants align with the will of God.” (P.27)



*“It is for **freedom** that Christ has set us free. **Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**” Galatians 5:1*

**Consider this verse again.** We are called to enter true freedom. This includes a “freedom from..” our old way of life (sin – likened to a yoke of slavery). **This is BURIED WITH CHRIST in the likeness of his death!**

But the Gospel also includes “**freedom FOR**”, meaning an invitation into a new way of life, the one we were made for, which was made possible because of Jesus! **This is RAISED TO WALK in newness of life!**

- **With this verse in mind, compare it to Jesus’ words in Matthew 11, “Come to me, all you who are weary and **burdened**, and I will give you rest. **Take my yoke upon you** and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**” (v28-30)**
- Understand the analogy: A yoke is a heavy wooden harness that connects two oxen. It’s a powerful figure of speech – Jesus is inviting us into a life of apprenticing (discipleship) under

Him! He came to teach and model a new way of living; Kingdom life! This required freedom, because you and I were already under a different yoke: the yoke of slavery to our sin!

- Whereas our old slave master was harsh and intent on our destruction, Jesus is GENTLE and HUMBLE IN HEART. Are you kidding me?!? No wonder Paul tells us to guard against going back to the yoke of slavery. (we won't have time to go here... but consider the story of Israel in the exodus. Why would they ever want to go back, right!? Yet have you read the story??)

**As you know, I have the privilege of being a part of the Church Renewal network of pastors. I meet weekly with pastors around our country in online mentoring.**

- More recently I started a small group with a few other YA's from our church and began working through the CR Grand Story lessons with them.
- It has been so good to work through the material with those in my group. This is my second time through (+ the sermons at church), and the more I study the Bible **Canonically** (as a Grand Story) the more lightbulb moments I have.
  - o Most recently we covered the lessons on the Davidic Covenant and I had once such lightbulb moment! **When you think 'King' – what is the first thing that comes to mind?**
  - o When I think King I think RULING others. I think power & control. I think freedom!
  - o As kids we like to imagine what life as a King or Queen would be like. Being a King means being Free to do what I want, how I want, when I want (with style).
- In 1 Samuel 8, Israel cried out for a king to lead them. I used to think that this was wrong of them (*and they were in the wrong*). But not for requesting a king. It was that they wanted a king **"such as all the other nations"**. The kings around them ruled on their own authority.
  - o Israel would be different.
  - o God already foretold Israel that they would have a king before they asked! He even described how that king should act in The Law (**Deuteronomy 17**).
  - o Pastor Ray writes, *"Right from its birth Israel's government had been a theocracy, in which God ruled as their King. (Deut. 33:5)... God wanted Israel's human king to be in full submission to the real King of Israel, who was the Lord Himself. The human king would be a viceroy or deputy of the TRUE King!"*
  - o So in Israel, the king would be different – **not** free to do whatever he wanted.
- The reason why I bring this up is because there is a picture for us when we look at the kings of Israel. God put them in positions of power (freedom to rule), but expected them to submit to the rule of the real King (The Lord). Of course, we know that they failed miserably in doing that.
  - o Even David, the best of the kings of Israel, failed to remain under God's rule.
- Did you know that Scripture says that we will one day **'reign with Christ'**? Yes, for that is how the next age is described. **"To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne."** **Rev. 3:21** **"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on earth."** **Rev. 5:10**
  - o **I wish I had time to unpack this more.** But here's what I am getting at. Scripture says we are 'seated with Christ in the Heavens' (**Eph. 2**)... and that the future of those that are victorious in Christ is to "reign with him" – This will require freedom, but not the type of freedom that says we can do whatever we want.
  - o **Do you know what Heaven will be like?** It will be bliss because we will finally be free to reign BECAUSE we will be able to perfectly submit to God.

- Dallas Willard used to say (as well as Richard Foster), that the Christians response to the Lordship of Jesus is training yourself for Godliness (Spiritual Disciplines). Thus in effect, the disciplines are “TRAINING for reigning with Christ!”.
- You could tie that into our purpose and calling from Genesis 1:26 (we were created to ‘rule over the earth’... have dominion over it). But that’s for another sermon.

**C. Cultivation Requires Restraint** *(by ‘restraint’ we mean some form of external tension, rule of life, a pathway or grounding anchor, such as the string of a kite or a yoke on our neck)*

You may ask, where does restraint play into this? Aren’t we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast? (Ephesians 2:8-9)

- Indeed that is true! We are not saved by our earning. That is in opposition to the Gospel. But when we are saved the Holy Spirit begins a work within us, transforming us from the inside out, and we participate with God in this process (which involves effort).
  - Titus 2, *“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” (v11-14)*
  - [OPTIONAL] Romans 8:13, *“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”*
- Did Jesus not say that the wise man (woman) would take his words and put them into practice?
- Lets read how Paul puts it as we conclude this message;

**Read Galatians 5:13-25**

**D. Walking in Step (How to be Free)**

- If that word ‘restraint’ is bothering you, might you consider supplementing it with the phrase ‘Walking In Step With the Spirit’?
- That’s how Paul describes it. I like to think of it in terms of Adam and Eve in the Garden (before the Fall). What did they do for fun? They walked with God is the cool of the day!
  - Friends, freedom in Christ is the invitation to walk in step with God. To journey through life at the cadence of our Creator. Not rushing ahead or falling behind.

**1** To be clear, the Lord starts and sustains this process. *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* Jn. 8:36 *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”* Galatians 5:1

**2** Transformation is from the inside out. **Sin deformed us, the world looks to conform us, religion/self-help seeks to inform us, but only the Lord can TRANSFORM us.** This isn’t by us, its by God through us.

**3** Our participation matters;

- Its here we begin to cultivate the right desires. And it includes ‘disciplines’;

- i. **Confession & Commitment** (saying no, saying yes)
  - ii. **Knowing God through the Word & Prayer** (The H.S. has an insatiable appetite for the Word of God, and there we learn the language of prayer!)
  - iii. **Stillness & Rest** (slowing down, trusting God, accepting limitations)
  - iv. **Fasting & Feasting** (both aid the Maranatha cry!)
  - v. **Solitude & Godly Community** (time alone, time with others. Time in only one or the other leads to shallow experience of the Christian life)
  - vi. **Study & Sharing** (time forming your own Biblical worldview, as well as sharing the hope of Jesus with others around you)
  - vii. **Worship** (declaring who God is!)
  - viii. **Baptism!**
- I cringe when I hear people refer to the above as legalistic or burdensome. Each of the above listed (and more that I missed) are a GET TO. They are a gift. They are life giving channels towards a loving God!