

Freedom in Christ

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 22 February 2018 20:29

Those whose claim to 'Christian' is false or badly informed, tend to say that reformed or Calvinistic Christians think they can do whatever they like. This is based on their misunderstanding about our 'freedom in Christ'. Of course, if they did not use this excuse, they would find some other 'reason' to batter genuine Christians! So, what does this phrase really mean?

Even as a fresh new Christian I realised "*There is freedom only in restriction*". When applied to our Christian faith it means we are bound to Christ as servants, and only when we observe and practice this servanthood do we know true freedom (1 Corinthians 7:22).

This might sound odd when we read, say, Galatians 5:1:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

On the one hand we are told we should not be caught-up in bondage, and on the other hand we are told we must become servants of God. The difference is that sin places a heavy yoke on us, binding us to sin and Satan, which we cannot escape by our own will; whereas when we are saved we willingly become the servants of Jesus Christ, out of love and desire.

We are made free by Christ, through our salvation. This is why it is possible for us to choose to do either good or evil, a choice no-one has as unsaved slaves of Satan. Yet, some, in the guise of fellow believers, try to drag us back down into the murky depths of slavery to sin.

"And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:"

One reason unbelievers hate us, is that we have this freedom, and because such freedom highlights their own miserable sinful lives. Many of these people are false brethren. That is, we know them as 'brethren' only because they attend a local church. This type of 'closet' sinner

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mouths compliant words of God, but deny them in their hearts. They hate those of us who interpret wisely and live holy lives, and so try their hardest to bring us down again to their own sinful level. Once we submit, we lose our opportunity to have freedom; we cannot ever lose the gift and ability to be free, but we allow others to dismiss our freedom for a shameful season.

Galatians 5:13

I have heard many complaints from those who loathe the scriptural nature of Calvin's followers, that they use Christian love to commit sins. In particular Arminians and JWs make this complaint. So do Romanists. They are so shrouded in human demands, they think we must 'do' something to keep ourselves free (works). They reject outright that our salvation already gives us freedom to think, speak and act. However, they think this means being wanton, even sinful, which is the opposite of what our freedom really means.

"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

The 'liberty' we have is *eleutheria*, which means we can do, or not do, as we wish outside of salvation itself. It *can* also mean to be licentious, but this is not freedom in Christ. This is qualified in the verse – we have been chosen to have freedom in Christ, but we may NOT use that freedom

"for an occasion to the flesh"

, i.e. to commit sin. Instead, we must use it to love the brethren and serve them. Doing service to one another is a result of having freedom and love. It does NOT mean doing whatever we like. Indeed, for a true believer this is unconscionable. The only believers who act without warrant are those whose Christian lives are ruled by self and not by God and His word. This is shown in the next verse:

2 Corinthians 3:17

"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

"That Spirit" is the Holy Spirit (though it can equally apply to the spirit of God – His mind and heart). And where He is (in a life) *"there is liberty"*. Indeed, when a person is saved God automatically endows him or her with freedom in Christ, which includes the will to do good or evil, but veering towards doing what is good and sinless. This means we are NOT 'automatons'. The one who claims salvation and yet constantly veers away from good and

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towards sin, is a suspect soul, whose salvation is questionable. Such must be disciplined and retaught.

John 8:32

When a man or woman CLAIMS salvation we can reasonably expect them to obey God and to love the light and good. This is because they have been turned away from their former love for sin, and will have a continual thirst for truth, as declared by the Lord. (If they do not, they are suspect 'Christians').

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

I have known some who claim Christ and yet have fallen badly. Yet, deep within their souls they show the glimmer of truth. This is because no matter how badly a person might sin, if he is saved the truth of God cannot help but shine through the darkness he lives in. This fact has repeated itself time and again in my experience of people who sink to a low spiritual level. The one who is unsaved but pretends to be, will easily and gladly lose their pretence of salvation, which can be found in their demeanour, thinking and statements. So, those who sink into sin but still show the light of God, however dimly, are in a very poor state of spirit, but are still my brethren. Sadly, for whatever reason (and I have come across many reasons), they cannot appear to rise above their sin and outward worldliness.

Whilst this inability is of their own choosing, when the Holy Spirit touches them again, in His mercy, their soul will suddenly return to a rightful place in God's eyes – there is hope for the sick soul that repents and turns back to God! As John 8:36 assures us: *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."*

Sadly, a huge number of Christians think their 'freedom' is to live as drones, faithful replicas of their pastors and fellow believers... fellow sinners! Though using biblical words their minds are fixed firmly to their earthly allegiances, making them just as much slaves as when they were unsaved.

On occasions some have angrily demanded that I discipline those they consider to be a 'backslider'. But, their idea of 'discipline' is the equivalent of hitting the sinner with a spiritual mallet! There is certainly a time to strike hard, but in most cases it is my duty to speak gently

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and encourage the person to think and do what they know is right, using God's word as a prompt. I have to remind the one sinning to look back on his or her salvation, and to live up to it, by again grasping the freedom they were given... they are already free, but now need to cast off the shell of sin put on them by Satan. It can be done because what they have is freedom "indeed"... it is a cast-iron promise!

Romans 8:1-4

Those of us who are saved cannot ever be condemned, because we are "*hid in Christ*". Such privilege, however, comes with a demand for our obedience: that is, we must "*walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*"

Thus, our freedom is conditional upon our holiness. Our salvation will always remain, but the spiritual quality of our earthly lives requires us to obey. Indeed, this is God's law (v2): instead of being subject to sin and death, we receive the "law of the Spirit".

To be freed from the sins of the flesh, Jesus Christ came to die in the flesh, thus paying the penalty we should have paid ourselves. In this way we fulfil righteousness, when we walk in purity and holiness. We can never be as perfect as the Lord Who saved us, but we must strive to be, to show we have been accepted by Almighty God. All of this is freedom. We are not forced to obey or to be pure; it comes from hearts saved from sin and which love the Saviour. Yet, this freedom in Christ means our lives are restricted to what is holy.

It is a fact that those who are unsaved can only do what is sinful, and many roam the things of worldliness without hope. What they begin to desire becomes onerous and unloved, as sin grips them in a vice-like hold that cannot ever be removed. Thus, what the unsaved think is freedom to choose is a complete mess of evil that cannot be shaken off, hence millions who suffer depression and anxiety. It takes the gift of salvation to exchange our lives of endless sin for lives of utter freedom, where servanthood to the Lord is as free as the eagle flying up to the sun.

Romans 6:7

"For he that is dead is freed from sin."

To the untaught this statement is bizarre, but it is true. When Jesus was crucified His body took away the sins of the elect; the "*body of sin is destroyed*" (v6) and so we do not need to serve our old master, Satan. Jesus rose from the dead, and we shall do likewise. Meanwhile, when still on this earth, we can choose between good and evil, because we are free to do so.

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However, we choose good because it is now our spiritual gift from God; though we may also choose evil (we sin many times because of the 'old man' who urges us to fall to temptation), we have no acceptance of our sinfulness from God, only reproof, which demands our repentance.

In other words, to choose what is evil is a bad response that must be negated if we are to return to the approval of God. Even this is freedom – the unsaved have no option but to sin, for they cannot repent. Read Romans 14 and see how this freedom works out in daily life.

1 Peter 2:16

To return to the misled charges of doing what we like because we are saved... we find a rejection of this in 1 Peter 2:16, which tells us

“As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.”

Clearly, those who charge us with sin through our freedom are ignorant of these texts. This is only one example given by God of how our freedom in Christ must be used in line with His will and character. Yet, how many wicked 'Christians' in our churches are vicious, sometimes in the extreme, towards those who are fellow believers? Are these vicious folk, who often spread lies about others, really believers at all? There is room to question their claim if they remain malicious, seeking the harm of others by word, thought or deed.

Before this verse we are told we must dispel the liars (“the ignorance of foolish men”) with doing good and honouring all men, loving the brethren whilst fearing God. There are many more such restrictions if we are to keep our freedom in Christ, so the accusation of gratuitous sin in Christians is a wicked lie of spiritual enemies.

We are set at liberty by God (Luke 4:18) to preach the Gospel so that others might know freedom in Christ. Those under sin can know deliverance from evil men and the demands of Satan, and those who are bruised by sin and the world can know liberty. This liberty, *aphesis*, is remission from the world, forgiveness for our past and future, and to breathe the fresh air of Heaven though still on this corrupt earth.

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Our freedom in Christ is the result of His suffering in our stead. He therefore deserves our obedience and love. When we return love and obey we know His freedom in full, in every circumstance. So, do not think our freedom gives us licence to sin and do what we wish. No, our freedom is a direct willing response of obedience to our Saviour and Lord, a state never to be despised or abused.

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