

## Freedom and Love

Galatians 5: 1 “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.”

Christ has set us free from slavery to sin, condemnation, guilt, the power of Satan and the world. But what many who use their freedom liberally don't seem to understand is that Christ has also set them free from self-centredness.

Galatians 2: 20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” Many enjoy their new found freedom and use it liberally even when, at times, it means trampling on others and condemning them when they don't agree with them on issues of freedom. This is not using freedom with love and freedom without love isn't the freedom that Christ intends his followers to have.

1 John 3: 14 “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.”

1 Corinthians 8: 1 – 13; 10: 14 – 33

1) Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. (8: 1 – 8; 10: 14 - 22)

- ⌘ We might know a lot of theology, know the Bible, know the character of God, know how free we are in Christ, know what discipleship is, know how to do ministry, know the strategies to reach people for Christ but if we don't have love all this knowledge doesn't mean anything to God.
- ⌘ Without love all this knowledge does is make the knowledgeable person proud and conceited.
- ⌘ The man who loves God is known by God. God is love (1 John 4: 16) and so when we love God He acknowledges that we belong to Him. But we cannot love God and not love our brothers and sisters.
- ⌘ Love is not merely a passive “not harming them” but a proactive “doing what is good and beneficial to and for them.”
- ⌘ In this case Paul was dealing with the issue of food sacrificed to idols.
- ⌘ We need to understand a few things here:
  - An idol is not really a god at all and there is but one God and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But Paul does recognise that there are demonic influences behind idolatry. (10: 20) It is this aspect that we need to be aware of.
  - If we show any allegiance to any other god at all we will arouse the Lord's jealousy (10: 22)
  - Some people have come from backgrounds that still see such food as defiled. Some believers from Hindu background won't eat beef and some believers from Muslim background won't eat pork. Will we eat dogs or cats as they do in North East India or China? If not then don't force others to eat everything that we eat.
  - Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.
  - Matthew 15: 11 “What goes into a man's mouth does not make him unclean but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean.”
  - In saying this Jesus declared us free to eat anything.

2) Do not be a stumbling block to the weak believer (8: 9 – 13)

- ⌘ Paul warns us that the exercise of our freedom should not become a stumbling block to the weak.
- ⌘ Mark 9: 42 “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.”
- ⌘ If our freedom allows us to do eat food that is sacrificed for idols it is not a sin in itself. However if a new believer from Hindu background sees us doing that he/she might get the idea that it is OK to follow Christ and also continue following Hindu practices

- ⌘ Another area is that of drinking alcohol. The Bible never forbids drinking alcohol – it forbids drunkenness. There are many believers who feel free to drink alcohol as long as they keep it in limits and don't get drunk. That isn't a sin. However there might be an alcoholic in their midst who would feel that it is OK to have a drink but would probably end up getting drunk. The leading of a weak brother into sin would be the sin.
  - ⌘ Paul says that when we sin against our brothers in this way we sin against Christ.
  - ⌘ There are many other areas of freedom that we could exercise that could be a stumbling block to the weak.
    - Dress code – modern & other religious clothing (Sari or Bhurka)
    - Jewellery and make up
    - Smoking (many prominent godly men of the past smoked. But does that make it right!!)
    - Raffle for a good cause (is it gambling or seen a donation to the cause if you lose!)
  - ⌘ Principle of freedom exercised in love:
    - “Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.” (8: 13)
- 3) Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial or constructive (but all things edify not KJV) for the winning of the unbeliever (10: 23 – 33)
- ⌘ Our freedom exercised in love is relevant, not only within the church, but towards unbelievers as well.
  - ⌘ We are free to eat anything from the market without raising questions of conscience. (10: 25)
  - ⌘ If we are invited to an unbelievers house we are to eat whatever is put before us (10: 27)
  - ⌘ Luke 10: 7 “ Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages.”
  - ⌘ Accept people's hospitality without grumbling even if they put something in front of you that you don't like.
  - ⌘ This might also include denying our freedom to eat anything so as not to be a stumbling block to someone coming to faith in Christ. We don't eat pork in our house so that we are free to invite Muslims home that they may be saved.
  - ⌘ The exception is if they volunteer the information that the food had been offered in sacrifice to their idols. By refusing to eat it you might come across as offensive but you are making a stand that you do not partake of anything related to other gods.
  - ⌘ We might be asked to attend Hindu weddings or other functions. What does our conscience tell us?
  - ⌘ Believers have the freedom to participate in non Christian meals and functions with a clear conscience but need to know when their participation becomes a stumbling block to others then it is wrong.
  - ⌘ The principles are:
    - Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others (10: 24)
    - Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (10: 31)
    - Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. (10: 31 – 33)