

Liberty From Sin, Not Liberty to Sin

Jesus came to set us free! This is one of the fundamental truths of the gospel, repeated over and over again in the New Testament. As expressed by Paul, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1, NIV). In the words of Jesus himself, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

But what kind of freedom do we have in the Lord? The New Testament speaks of different aspects to our liberty. For example,

- We have been released from serving God through an external legal system “so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom. 7:6).
- We have been delivered from slavery to Satan and the fear of death (Heb. 2:15).
- We have been set free from condemnation and guilt (Rom. 8:1-4).

In Jesus, we are no longer prisoners, and when the Lord announced His mission in what is often called His “platform speech” in Nazareth, He declared that God had sent Him “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed (Luke 4:18).”

And since the ultimate bondage is bondage to sin, the ultimate freedom is freedom from sin. Jesus brings us into liberty, but it is a liberty that can be misunderstood or abused.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he was very concerned because they had fallen into a Jewish-based legalism that

taught these Gentile believers that unless they observed the Law of Moses and were circumcised, they could not be saved. Paul confronted this error head-on, emphasizing the freedom they had in Jesus.

But it was a freedom that could be abused, and Paul confronted this dangerous error as well: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature [the flesh]; rather, serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13; see also the warning in 5:19-5:21).

In similar fashion (but in a very different context), Peter wrote, "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God" (1 Pet 2:16; see also the warning in 2:11).

Paul explained this in Romans 6:18-22: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. ... But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

All this is quite clear and, for the most part, totally obvious. Yet in recent years, a very strange message has been gaining momentum, one that virtually states that Jesus has set us free *to sin* rather than *from sin*.

Of course, believers who embrace this concept don't flatly say that the Lord has set them free to sin, but they say everything other than that.

For example, a friend tells you excitedly about a movie he just saw, one which is laced with profanity, nudity and sexual scenes. You say to your friend in surprise, "But I hear that's a really filthy movie. Why in the world did you see it?" He replies, "I'm free in the Lord, man. You're not going to put me under some old legal system. I've been liberated from that kind of bondage." What a bizarre concept!

When you are liberated from prison, you don't go back to live in your prison cell. When the shackles are taken off of your wrists, you don't put them back on. Why would you? What kind of liberty is that? And who would ever think of saying, "Hey man, I'm free! If I want to put the shackles back on, that's my right."

Only a demented person says to the doctors who pumped her stomach after a massive drug overdose, sparing her life, "Thanks so much! You pumped my stomach and saved my life so I can overdose again."

Sin is our mortal enemy, and there is nothing good in sin, only evil and death and deception and bondage. And sin is so ugly that it cost Jesus His very blood.

Why in the world would we want to indulge in the very thing from which Jesus delivered us? It not only makes no sense, it also undermines a foundational truth of the gospel, namely that Jesus sets us free from both the *penalty* of sin and the *power* of sin. We really have been liberated!

How odd it is that many believers today boast of their freedom in Jesus as if it provided a license to sin, the very thing Paul warned the Galatians about.

I would recommend that the next time someone abuses the concept of liberty in Jesus and liberty in the Spirit (see 2 Cor 3:17), throwing around the "I'm free" line, just ask them: Then why are you making yourself a slave again? If He cleansed you, why are making yourself dirty again?

Jesus died to give you a brand new nature, not a license to indulge the old nature that brings only destruction and death.

It's really pretty simple, isn't it?

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