

SSG Monthly**September October 2005**Where Have You Been, Joe?

I'm sending this article a month later than I planned to. I apologize for that. This is a big deal I'm writing about this month, and the main reason for my delay is that I couldn't share with you a message about freedom if I weren't living free myself. I wanted to field-test this freedom stuff to see if it really worked, and I decided I wouldn't share this message if it turned out to be hollow ideas I couldn't implement. In fact, I felt doubly warned about this topic in 2 Peter 2: "They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered them." God apparently takes this topic very seriously. And so do I. I've tried redefining freedom in my own life, and I've found that it unmistakably works! As you read this article, I pray that you will see the wisdom in what Jesus, Paul, Peter, and others are teaching us, and that the true freedom that Jesus offers will take root in your life. It's something to celebrate!

Redefining FREEDOM – October 2005

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. - John 8:36

Throughout history, people have longed for freedom. Millions lost their lives fighting for freedom in the Revolutions of the USA, France, Mexico, and Russia. The United States of America was borne of an all-consuming desire for religious and democratic freedom. We have continued to fight for freedom in many wars and conflicts since. The preservation of freedom is the key reason why so many free men and women have chosen the profession of arms today.

While I thank God and all those who have sacrificed for the democratic freedom I enjoy today, this is about a more personal freedom. I'm talking about freedom to live a life uninhibited by things that would spoil it. It's the freedom to live the kind of life we really long for and feel inescapably drawn to: an abundant life to the fullest.

The question is this: Is freedom found by embracing religion or in the absence of religion? There certainly is a form of religion that heaps unmovable burdens upon our shoulders and shackles around our ankles that we're powerless to break free of. Most world religions are this way. Dave Roeber, a U.S. Navy veteran wounded in Vietnam who travels the world to speak to thousands about Christ, says that the god of the Muslims asks their sons to die for him, while our God sent His only Son to die for us. Many people pervert true Christianity and create a false religion that enslaves people with a legalism that is taught no where in the Bible. In any society where spirituality is applied with shackles or handcuffs, some violent or catastrophic escape mechanism is sure to follow.

God tells us of His true intention in Romans 8:20-21, "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." Jesus came to liberate His followers, so that faith in Him would bring a life marked by love, joy, wisdom, passion, endurance, and freedom.

Moving On Out

I'm writing as a recent college graduate who has been faced with this question head-on since I've plunged into the real world. I moved 2,500 miles away from my family and my friends to a place totally unfamiliar to me – the West Coast. When I face new forms of temptation and more opportunities to indulge my sinful desires than ever before, what will I do? Will I be faithful? What will motivate me to live a holy life in the long run? I had learned a lot, but I had much left to learn before I would posture myself to live a life worthy of the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

What Freedom is Not:

Indulging Your Sin and Enjoying Communion with God

Before I could embrace what real freedom is, I had to dispel some lies and discover what freedom is not. A lot of 20-somethings like me run off the deep end as soon as they are out from under the supervision of their family, college, or church. Doing the right thing was too much about pleasing people and not enough about obeying and loving God. I saw the point where selfishness, peer pressure, or inconvenience can tempt us to compromise our standards and try to manipulate our Christian life to fit sin neatly in. Or, many people reject Christ altogether. When they're on their own, many people avoid or run from Christianity because they see it as enslavement to fun-extinguishing and life-draining rules.

But all we have to do it remember all the times we've sinned and how far that made of feel from God, and how enslaved we knew we were. Freedom is not indulging our sin and enjoying communion with God. Countless people have confused the term "freedom" with sinful rebellion. Ravi Zacharias, my favorite modern modern apologist, explains this confusion in his masterpiece *Jesus Among Other Gods*:

During a forum that I took part in on the subject of evil and suffering, an atheist asked me, "If you found out that God did not exist at all, what would you immediately do that you are not doing now out of fear of Him?"

That, alone, tells you the mind-set. There is a kind of antinomianism—an antilaw state of mind. "If God would get off my back, I could do many more things." One may well ask, "If there were no policemen to look out for, what kind of speed would you drive?" or, "If there were no criminal justice system, what kind of crimes would you commit?" or, "If nobody would ever find out, what wickedness would you engage in?" In short, it is a failure to see that the unguarded heart actually makes a prison for everyone—a prison where there are no rules

One sin is never the remedy for another. Freedom is not indulging your sin and enjoying communion with God. We cannot have both. Sin separates us from God. I wrote in my last article about some of the consequences that sin has in our lives, even when we are saved and being sanctified by Christ.

When I learned these things, I realized it was time to kill the lie and redefine freedom in my own mind. I believed the Bible; John 8:36 establishes that Jesus makes us free, and John 10:10 shows that Jesus came to give us life to the full. But Paul and Peter both warn us that freedom doesn't mean we can live as free men and still indulge our sin. Galatians 6:13 says, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." Peter makes the same point, in verse 2:16 of his first letter: "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of

God.” And why not? If we’re not under the law, and if we’re under grace and God has paid the price for our sins, why shouldn’t we be “free” to do anything we want to? There are a lot of reasons, but the biggest one is that by indulging our sin we are doing the very thing that made Jesus have to come and suffer and die for our sins in the first place! Hebrews 6:6 tells us that doing this would be, “crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”

What Freedom Is

1. Freedom from the Consequences of Sin: We know that if we are saved (Romans 10:9: “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”) then God has forgiven us our sins. (Psalm 103:12: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”) This is where freedom starts: those who are saved are free from the fires of Hell and free to go to Heaven. (Romans 3:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”)

2. Freedom from the Obligation to Sin and the Pain Sin Will Cause: Have you ever gotten fed up with the pain that comes from doing what is wrong? It’s the pain that Paul laments in Romans 7. A while back I wrote: “I’m fed up with suffering that follows my own sin and foolishness. That’s the one source of pain I just have no energy to cope with. So praise God, for I don’t have to!” Romans 8:12 promises this: “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.” We are not bound to sin, and so feel the pain, shame, and regret that follows!

3. Freedom to Live the Life We Truly Long for; the Life God Has for Us: We are free to live the life that God has called us to, and we are free to (avoid) anything that infringes on that life. No man is more miserable than one living in conflict with his conscience.

Romans 6:14 says “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” Erwin McManus, a dynamic pastor from California, explains what freedom that grace brings does mean. Many times we think of the Ten Commandments as the pinnacle of spirituality--the standard with which we can gage how well we’re doing in our Christian walk. But the Ten Commandments are not the highest standard for Christian living, they are the lowest! Think about what God is asking of us, McManus jokes: ‘Uh, could you not kill anybody today? And could you not steal other people’s stuff and not sleep with their wives?’ The law is baby food, like a rule to ‘Stay in the yard,’ for a kid who keeps running toward the road. If he were mature, he would just avoid the road on his own and his parents wouldn’t have to make strict rules to keep him safe.

This is the freedom that Jesus offers us, and that I have embraced. We are free to live our lives! It doesn’t all click for us right away. Sometimes I’m reminded of all the mistakes I’ve made, and I hear a depressing thought whispered in my ear, “Remember that? You are what you’ve done, and when you made that mistake you showed your true colors. You are no better than that angry comment or that lustful night. That’s who you are!” But God’s Word says that statement is a lie from the father of lies! That mistake or blunder we made that time was totally uncharacteristic of whom we really are. That’s why it’s such a big deal – God wants us to start living like His Son that He’s placed within us! (See 1 John.) We who are saved know the joy of walking with Christ, and the joy of growing and becoming more like Him. We know the joy of winning battles, of resisting temptation, and of making a difference for the Kingdom of Christ.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Jesus declares that we are free to truly live!

The Newsboys sang a new song from Promise Keepers last weekend that captures the joy of the freedom God is offering each one of us.

I am free to run
I am free to dance
I am free to live for you
I am free

Let's grab hold of this freedom with minds awake and hearts engaged, and let's never let go.

- *Joseph Knable*

Braveheart

OK, I just couldn't bring myself to put the obvious Braveheart quotation in the article. But it is something to consider, since Ephesians 6 tells us that we are in an ongoing battle (which is why I subtitled my book “Winning Your Battle for Purity.” And, since Braveheart is such a cool movie, here is the quotation:

WILLIAM WALLACE: I AM William Wallace! And I see a whole army of my country men, here, in defiance of tyranny. You've come to fight as free men, and free men you are. What will you do with that freedom? Will you fight?

SOLDIER: Against that? No, we'll run, and we'll live.

WILLIAM WALLACE: Aye, fight and you may die, run, and you'll live... at least a while. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing to trade ALL the days, from this day to that, for one chance, just one chance, to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take away our lives, but they'll never take... OUR FREEDOM!

[*Crowd cheers*]

Weapons for War

In a journal or someplace important, write down what kind of life you want to live. Make a list of all the things that fit into that life, and make another list of things that don't fit into that life. Pray through this as you write. What would God have you add to those lists, or what would he have you omit?

Share your list with a trusted friend or mentor.

Share Your Story!

This is what I have been learning this month. What about you? What's your story regarding sexual purity? If you have a story to share or feedback from reading the book or this article, please go to www.josephknable.com and click on "Contact" and then "Share Your Story." I hope to hear from you!

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