

Freedom From Bondage

Luke 4:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

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.

Times in Jesus' day were hard under Roman rule. While the Jews were free in many ways, they were also limited by the society in which they lived. During the cold winter months of Jerusalem a Roman soldier could come up to you and take your coat and you could do nothing about it. Or if you were on your way to work, a Roman soldier could come up to you and tell you to carry his 45 pound pack for one mile and you could not refuse. The Roman tax rate was more than 60%. This often caused people to live in poverty and fall into debt. And under Roman law, if you were late paying your debts, they could enslave you to pay it off through indentured servanthood. Jesus came and proclaimed freedom to people who would certainly welcome that kind of talk.

Jesus is still offering freedom to people today. Now, the world typically claims that "freedom" means doing whatever you want, whenever you want, and however you want. But as believers we understand that true freedom means leaving the path of destruction, and saying yes to Christ which leads to peace and joy in all circumstances. But even with this good understanding many still find themselves stuck in some form of bondage. So, let's begin with the question, **"What is keeping you captive from living the life God calls you to and being the person God created you to be?"** The most basic answer to this question is "sin." We are all infected with sin and it creates bondage.

John 8:34 says, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

Sin promises freedom but in the end brings bondage. It promises life but instead brings death. Sin has a way of gradually binding a person until there is no way of escape, apart from the gracious intervention of the Lord.

All of us have thoughts and desires inside of us that can be overwhelming at times. We do things we pledge to never do. And we don't get around to doing things we want to do. Paul put this struggle with sin this way: in Romans 7:14: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do; but what I hate, I do."

This is not just a spiritual concept. It actually creates bondage in the here and now. Think about telling lies. You have to remember what lies you've told and to whom you've told them. It sort of locks you in to a story that you have to keep telling. That's a form of bondage. Other sins can lead to actual imprisonment. Theft; murder; some forms of slander; some forms of sexual sin; etc. **Sin leads to bondage, but God wants us free.**

God wants us free from sin! But there are other things the Bible also mentions from which we need to be free... **oppression; fear; the love of money...** it even talks about things most everyone struggles with... Psalm 25 mentions a **troubled heart/mind; distress; anguish.** Those types of things can create a bondage within. Our minds get locked in on those troubling thoughts and we are not free to think of other things; at least not much.

2 Peter 2:19 says, **"a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."**

If it controls you, you are its slave. Thoughts, behaviors, appetites, desires, etc. Let's look a little closer at a few...

Some are in bondage to **ritualistic practices** such as some of the Jewish worship customs. Paul spends nearly the entire book of Galatians speaking out against those kinds of things. For others it is simply **legalistic standards** for yourself... "If I don't read exactly 3 chapters of the Bible every day, I have failed." God wants a relationship with you, not rituals and regulations.

Bad habits can be a form of bondage. Some cost a lot of money and keep you limited in giving to God's kingdom. Smoking; drinking; eating habits; etc. Those aren't necessarily sin in and of themselves, but they can limit your freedom and create bondage. Bad habits can become **addictions** which most everyone understands as a form of bondage.

Fear leads to bondage. It can literally paralyze your thought processes and decision making abilities. Think "fainting goats." Some choose to stay in a miserable situation simply because the fear of the unknown is too much. It keeps them captive.

Closely related to fear is the **need for approval.** That's fear of what others think. It's a form of bondage. Now, to consider how decisions affect others is one thing, but to not make a right decision because someone else may get upset, limits your freedom.

Holding grudges and **unforgiveness** are bondages. They keep you trapped by replaying the hurt that someone else caused you. You are giving them power over you without them even knowing it. You're hurting yourself far more than you're hurting them!

The past can be bondage. Typically, we think of things like we just talked about... how someone or a certain situation hurt you. Holding on to that past limits you in the present.

But the past can also bind you up even when it was good. When you focus too much on “the good old days,” you may be limited in experiencing all that God has for you now!

The truth is **we cause most of our own bondages**. *Seneca said, "To be enslaved to oneself is the heaviest of all servitudes."*

What does Jesus want to liberate you from? Take a moment and write it down. Perhaps it's something I didn't specifically mention.

So, we've dealt with “what has you in bondage,” and we've touched on “who is keeping you captive?” As I said, we are our own worst enemies, but there is another enemy that wants us stuck in bondage. It's not the person who caused you pain. It's not the circumstances of your past. **The real enemy is the evil one**. Paul puts it this way in **Ephesians 6:12**: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

We're fighting an enemy whose sole purpose is to kill and destroy everything, especially that which belongs to God. There is a dark power all around us and it is seeking to destroy, divide and conquer. So **to really be free begins with an understanding of our true enemy and captor**.

John 8:31-32 says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. **32** Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**"

The truth is this... sin keeps us in bondage; and there is a real spiritual enemy that is working to destroy us. Jesus' mission is to set us free from all of this. Colossians 1:13 says, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” And Colossians 2:15 tells us that he “disarmed the powers and authorities... by the cross.” Those powers may be strong, but Jesus has already defeated them and provided for freedom.

John 8:36 says, **“if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”**

Freedom comes through Jesus and being born into God's kingdom. Jesus came to open the eyes of people not only to see evil for what it is, but to see the kingdom of God and the true freedom it offers.

Jesus didn't try to defeat evil with evil or by having a stronger army. Jesus submitted himself to the cross but then experienced victory three days later through the resurrection. Jesus won by submitting to God's plan. **We can be free by submitting to Christ's lordship.**

In the temptation in the wilderness, the devil took Jesus up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. He tried unsuccessfully to tempt him with what the world has to offer. We also are tempted by those things and when we focus on their values, then we are in darkness. But when we realize that Christ has overcome the enemy and we submit to his lordship, then we are in the light and the devil has no influence in our lives.

Jesus' statement in Luke 4 is a quote from Isaiah 61 and it goes on to say, "to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." God wants us free to experience gladness and praise rather than the despair of bondage. He wants to crown us with life instead of death. When you put on the crown, you're a member of the royal family.

Remember when Kate Middleton's pregnancy had such media coverage? It was everywhere! People lined up outside the hospital for days! Why was that birth so important? He's the heir to the throne. But here's the thing: the crown in Britain and royalty is ceremonial. They have no power whatsoever. But you? You have received the crown of righteousness and have been anointed with authority and have joined the mission against evil. You are not just a recipient of the freedom he gives, but a sharer of that freedom to others on behalf of Christ.

So when evil rears its ugly head and that which binds seeks to hold us captive, we need to remember that we serve a powerful God, who is over all things. We don't have to be in bondage!

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Let me make this even more practical. Here are some things you can begin doing right away that will lead to freedom...

Romans 6:22

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. *(the work is already done; **give yourself fully to God** and those other things won't be able to keep you in bondage)*

2 Corinthians 3:17

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (**enter in to God's presence**)*

Psalms 118:5-7

In my anguish I cried to the Lord, (**pray**) and he answered by setting me free. **6** The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? **7** The Lord is with me; *he is my helper*. I will look in triumph on my enemies.

Isaiah 58:6

Is not this the kind of **fasting** I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Proverbs 11:21

Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished, but *those who are righteous will go free.* (contrast with liars)

Proverbs 16 warns about the inevitable bondage that comes into the lives of people governed by willful rebellion, pride, arrogance, strife, and malicious trouble-making. But it also describes the liberty and satisfaction that come from practicing **humility, trust, careful conversation, and self-control.**

Philippians 3:13-14

one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (**put the past in the past; focus on the future**)

Galatians 5:13

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.** (*this can overcome the "poor me" bondage.*)

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your lives free from the love of money and **be content** with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (**be grateful; gratitude can set you free from discontent and self-pity**)

Do you want to be free? You can be through Jesus Christ.

Freedom Reigns (video)

Bring your lists to the altar as a symbol of giving them over to Jesus. Then spend some time praying and calling out to God for freedom and deliverance. (Close and invite to a "bondage burning" outside in 10 minutes.)