

Moments *for* You

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Theme: Freedom



4 THINGS THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT FREEDOM

As the United States of America celebrates Independence Day on July 4, it's worth noting the nation was founded upon the idea that God created human beings to be free. The Declaration of Independence states that people "are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

But what is "liberty," exactly? Is freedom based upon the country where you live, or can it have a deeper meaning?

Here are some key ideas from the Bible about freedom—including how to find true freedom in your life.

1. PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR IT FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS

The quest for freedom is a theme found throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Just three chapters into the story of God's creation, humanity gave up its freedom by choosing to rebel against God. From that time forward, the perfect freedom God created in the Garden of Eden was gone, and the long-term effects were both physical and spiritual.

The Old Testament of the Bible records how God's people lost their physical freedom time and again as various empires overtook them (most notably the Egyptians, as recorded in the book of Exodus).

The loss of physical freedom was often tied to spiritual disobedience like worshipping false gods. But time and again, the one true God forgave His people and rescued them. When God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He was foreshadowing the

arrival of Jesus Christ, who came to free humanity from sin—the spiritual slavery that leads to death.

Today, many people are living in spiritual slavery without realizing it. They chase false gods of money, success, personal comfort and romantic love—only to realize they still have an emptiness that can't be filled by any of those things.

2. GOD'S ANSWER TO OUR LOSS OF FREEDOM HAS ALWAYS BEEN JESUS CHRIST

When Jesus began His short period of ministry on the earth, He announced He was the One that God's people had been waiting for since the fall of humanity. He did this by reading a particular passage from the book of Isaiah—a passage His listeners knew was referring to the Messiah, or the Savior of the world.

The words had been written hundreds of years earlier and spoke of a new freedom that was coming in the future. When Jesus stood up to read, He was saying the future had arrived. Liberty would come through Him.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

3. JESUS CAME TO FREE US FROM DEATH, SIN AND ANYTHING THAT ENSLAVES US

The core message of the Christian faith—the Gospel—is that Jesus Christ rescues us from the slavery of sin and offers true freedom in this life and beyond. This is what Jesus said:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever

believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Good News—the best news ever—is that faith in Jesus frees us from the death we deserve for sinning against God. It frees us from the punishment that would be inflicted upon us at the end of our lives for the evil things we’ve thought and done.

While Christ followers still battle with sin, they are no longer slaves to it. Through the power of Christ, His people can be set free from the bondage of greed, vanity, pride, pornography, addiction, abusive behavior, gluttony, selfishness—and any other sin under the sun. Here’s what Jesus said about the freedom He offers:

“If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34-36).

4. GOD GIVES US FREEDOM TO CHOOSE OUR OWN PATH

God created human beings, not robots. We don’t have to accept the freedom He offers us through Jesus Christ. He gives each person the free will to accept or reject His salvation. But the Bible warns that Hell is a real place where real people end up when they knowingly reject the truth.

Likewise, those who choose Christ are not forced to obey Him at every turn. But God makes it clear: the best life is one that’s devoted to honoring Him. As the Apostle Paul explained to some of the first Christians:

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

FINAL THOUGHTS ON FREEDOM

From cover to cover, God’s word points to freedom in Christ. And God doesn’t leave us wondering how to grab hold of the freedom He offers. It starts with acknowledging our brokenness—and admitting we are slaves to sin. And it ends with choosing Jesus and following Him daily. Only He can break the bonds of slavery and lead us to true freedom, now and forever.

Choose Jesus today, and find out what true freedom feels like.

—Billy Graham.org, condensed

FREEDOM TO APPROACH GOD

In Old Testament days, the Jewish people had constant and blatant reminders that their sin separated them from God. God manifested His holy presence above the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 25:22). But if anyone casually attempted to approach Him there, they would die! In addition to the many, continual sacrifices necessary to maintain communion with Him, one very visible physical reminder of this separation was a large curtain. It sectioned off the Holy of Holies where God dwelt, from the rest of the temple and beyond, where men dwelt.

The vast divide between God and men could be crossed only by the high priest, once a year. During the Day of Atonement, through a series of rituals carefully followed, the high priest entered behind the curtain to atone for the nation’s sins.

What a blessing that the need for this centuries-old practice ceased at the death of Jesus Christ!

On the cross, Jesus cried out “It is finished” (John 19:30), breathed His last breath, and at that moment “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split” (Matthew 27:51).

Jesus Christ was God in flesh, God with us. He brought Heaven to earth. He did what was necessary to restore access to our Creator. He rose from the grave and now sits at the right hand of God, interceding on behalf of those who have trusted in Him for salvation from sin and its consequence—spiritual death and eternity in Hell. He provided the way, instead, to eternal life.

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5 NIV).

Through Him, we have great freedom to go straight to the Father and receive forgiveness, salvation, and life everlasting. No sacrifices. No priest. No curtain. Just Jesus. He took the place of all those symbols of separation and bridged the great divide.

“In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12 NIV).

In one of his signature works, “The Pursuit of God,” A.W. Tozer wrote: “Ransomed men need no longer pause in fear to enter the Holy of Holies. God wills that we should push on into His presence and live our whole life there...It is more than a doctrine to be held; it is a life to be enjoyed every moment of every day.”

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

—Tricia Kline

FREEDOM FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH

“It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Some try to set aside the fear of death by concluding that after death there is neither a Heaven to seek nor a Hell to shun. Others simply try to avoid thinking about death and its consequences. Still others try to convince themselves that they certainly would not be condemned to Hell. Unfortunately, none of these solutions to the dilemma of death is adequate. We must take heed to these warnings:

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart” (Proverbs 21:2).

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 14:12).

These texts warn us against seeking to find our own way, to trust our own ability to deliver ourselves from the fear of death. It was Jesus Christ who brought the solution to sin and death. Jesus Christ was the Son of God, without sin. When He died, He died for our sins, not His own. He suffered the wrath of God, the punishment which our sins deserved and demanded.

When He rose from the dead it proved that God was satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. When we acknowledge our sin and trust in the death and resurrection of Christ in our place then we are freed from the dread of sin and death, and enter into the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life.

How, then, can death be a source of fear for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ? The devil no longer has a death grip on us, one which makes

us slaves of the fear of death. We now have the sure hope of eternal life.

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

The Christian does not cling to this earthly life, as though this was all that there is, but longs for Heaven. Death is the doorway to Heaven, and thus it holds no fear or dread for all who are in Christ, by faith in Him.

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LOVE: THE LIMIT TO CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

Before Jesus died on a cross, God’s people lived under a detailed system of laws that served as a moral compass to guide their lives. The Law (found in the Old Testament of the Bible), while powerless to grant salvation or produce true freedom, nevertheless pointed the way to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:19–24). Through His sacrificial death, Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law, setting believers free from the law of sin and death. God’s laws are now written in our hearts through the Spirit of God, and we are free to follow and serve Christ in ways that please and glorify Him (Romans 8:2-8). In a nutshell, this is the definition of Christian freedom.

Christian freedom involves living not under the burdensome obligations of the Law but under God’s grace: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

In Christ, we are free from the Law’s *oppressive system*, we are free from the *penalty* of sin, and we are free from the *power* of sin. Christian

freedom is not a license to sin. We are free in Christ but not free to live however we want, indulging the flesh: “For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13, NLT). Believers aren’t free to sin, but free to live holy lives in Christ.

In Romans 6, Paul explains that, when a believer accepts Christ, he or she is baptized by the Spirit into Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. At that moment, the believer ceases to be a slave to sin and becomes a servant of righteousness.

Only Christians know true freedom: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). But what does Christian freedom look like in a practical sense? What are we free to do and not do? What can we watch on TV? What can we eat and drink? What can we wear to the beach? What about smoking and drinking? Are there limits to Christian freedom?

In 1 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul gives a practical illustration of Christian freedom: “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (1 Corinthians 10:24). Our freedom in Christ must be balanced by a desire to build up and benefit others. When deciding how to exercise our Christian freedom, we ought to seek the good of others before our own good.

LOVE IS WHAT LIMITS CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

Paul emphasized that unity and love in the body of Christ are more important than anyone’s personal convictions or Christian liberty: “Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block

or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Romans 14:13).

Paul’s message to the New Testament believers and to us today is this: even if we believe we are right and have Christian freedom in an area, if our actions will cause another brother or sister to stumble in his or her faith, we are to refrain out of love.

—GotQuestions.org, condensed

FREEDOM IN FORGIVENESS

Have you been hurt so deeply that you feel trapped by the pain? Living with the memories of the offense feels like you’re locked in a stone fortress. Roaming the dark hallways, you search for an escape from the looming images of betrayal that line the walls. No way out appears, save one—the way of forgiving.

You want to forgive. You long to break through the bitterness, to have relationships that honor God. But part of you craves vengeance. “It’s not fair!” your inner voice screams. In anger, you yearn to hurt your offender for hurting you, to even the score. And so you live as a prisoner of pain, shut away in this lonely, desolate place. How can you find freedom?

The process of forgiving begins with a decision. You must decide that you’ve been locked up in the house of tortured bitterness long enough. Now it’s time to leave for good, to pack your bags, and set out for a new home. Your decision to forgive must start with the resounding thump of a door shut behind you and a determination not to go back.

As you begin your journey, you can know that the Lord walks with you through this process, and He’s a trusted guide (see Psalm 32:8-9). You’ll need His comforting hand in yours because the next steps toward forgiveness can be the most difficult.

Grieving the Loss: True forgiveness requires feeling the hurt. Get to the source of your pain by acknowledging your feelings. Pouring out your heart helps the grief emerge, an essential part of the healing process.

Canceling the Debt: Having faced your feelings, you are better equipped to fully forgive. Forgiveness requires that you cancel the debt owed. In that process, you release the person into God’s hands. You release the anger to God and trust Him to handle justice toward your offender (Romans 12:18-19).

The God Who Forgives: If you are not quite ready to cancel the debt owed you, spend some time meditating on Bible passages that teach about forgiveness. When you draw near to the righteous Judge and consider His word, you’ll be able to adjust your focus to see your offender through His eyes. God’s heart of forgiveness is shown clearly at the cross. There, as men crucified the Son of God, Jesus responded, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). His heart toward us is exactly the same, for “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Romans 5:8,10). Through Christ, He has cancelled the debt we owed Him (Colossians 2:14). God’s forgiveness extends to the worst offenders and to anyone who wishes to receive it—not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

God Enables Us to Forgive: God enables us to likewise forgive those who have offended us. Only then can we be set free to experience life as He intended (John 10:10). What God commands us to do, He empowers us to do by His Spirit. True forgiveness is

foreign to the world, but not to those who have been made new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). God has poured His love into our hearts by His Spirit (Romans 5:5), and our hearts truly can rejoice in canceling others' debts to us.

Finishing the Process: The process of forgiveness isn't complete without self-examination. Is there any sin you've harbored in your own heart? How about the sin of unforgiveness? Our bitterness and anger towards an offender often make it impossible to relate to him or her without sin. First, agree with the Lord concerning your sin (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9). You may want to make a list of your offenses to help clearly define them. Then, if appropriate, go to the person and ask for their forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24). This is not the time to lay blame for their offenses against you, but a time to admit your own wrong.

What If the Person Refuses to Reconcile?: Forgiving and asking for forgiveness only opens the door to reconciliation. If the offender refuses to take ownership of the offense, restoration of the relationship is unlikely. You have done what the Lord requires. You have done everything you could to make peace (Romans 12:18). The rest is in the Lord's hands.
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CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

“For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). What exactly is this Christian freedom that Paul talks so much about in Galatians?

POWER TO DO WHAT WE OUGHT

Christian freedom is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin. As Martin Luther put it, freedom is not the right

to do what you *want* but rather the power to do what you *ought*. In the Christian sense, true freedom is not doing whatever you dream of doing or acting on every wild idea; it is choosing to do what God approves because you know that will bring you the greatest happiness today and the deepest joy in eternity. Those who know the Lord have the power (by the Holy Spirit) to choose that which produces the highest and best eternal good.

CALLED TO FREEDOM

Freedom is a wonderful word but it is also a dangerous concept. True freedom leaves us with all sorts of choices to make. Freedom does not mean that we do not struggle with sin any longer. We are not yet free from the presence of sin. That won't happen until we stand face to face before Jesus Christ. Nor are we free from the pull of the flesh that leads us into sin. We are free from the bondage of trying to please God through ancient ceremonies and religious rituals, and we are free from the overwhelming guilt of sin that was like a mighty weight around our necks, pulling ever downward.

But sin itself remains with us and even in us. Are we free? Yes! But freedom can be misused.

FREEDOM LEADS IN TWO DIRECTIONS

“Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh [sinful nature], but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). The biblical Greek word translated here as “opportunity” is a military term that refers to a base of operations that an army establishes in enemy territory. From this base of operations the army can then launch attacks in various directions. You can misuse your freedom by allowing the flesh to have a “base of operations” in your life from which all sorts of sinful actions spring.

We are born with a fallen human nature that stays with us in one form or another until the day we die. Even though we are redeemed and made new creatures by Christ Jesus, the flesh is always with us, pulling us down, dragging us back to the world, and enticing us to every sort of moral and spiritual compromise. It is the flesh that pulls us toward lust, anger, hatred, bitterness, violence, cheating, adultery, perversion, malice, envy, greed, and every other sin we can think of.

Biblical freedom is never freedom to sin; it's freedom *from* sin. It's the power to overcome, to get up and fight the battle again and again and again.

LOVE FULFILLS THE ENTIRE LAW

"The whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). There is a better way than indulging the flesh. Paul calls it serving one another in love. But there is irony in this. The word "serving" comes from a Greek word that means to be a slave. We are set free from our slavery to sin by the power of Jesus Christ. Having been set free, we are called to become slaves to one another in love for Christ's sake.

The emphasis on love is all-important because it is not law on the outside but love in the inside that makes the difference. Laws can never change the heart. Christianity works because it changes people from the inside out. When Christ comes in, He changes everything. The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who lives within us (Romans 5:5).

It was love that motivated God to send his Son to the earth. "For God so loved the world that He gave...." Christ flew from Heaven to earth on

wings of love. True love sees the need and then moves to meet the need even at great personal cost.

In His final message to His men before His crucifixion, Jesus declared that love was to be the distinguishing mark of His followers: "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

AVOIDING MUTUAL DESTRUCTION

Because freedom leads in two directions, we either use our freedom as an excuse to sin or we can use our freedom as a means to serve others. If we choose self-indulgence, we risk destroying our friendships and tearing apart the family of God.

Two simple equations make the choices crystal-clear:

- Liberty + Love = Service to others
- Liberty – Love = Freedom to sin

Seen in this light, we can understand how love fulfills the whole law. It is the lack of love that causes men to hate their parents, commit murder, commit adultery, steal, lie and covet. It is the lack of love that leads to bitterness, anger, threats, and to verbal and physical abuse. It is the lack of love—and the presence of self-centered egotism—that leads to pushing others around, demanding your own way, arguing over minor issues, and dividing the body of Christ. If we truly loved our neighbor, those sins would be impossible. Where God's love reigns, sin cannot abide.

All of us want this kind of freedom. We were born for it, made for it, and created by God to enjoy it. It is a freedom that goes far beyond the cheap substitutes offered by the world.

Brothers and sisters, we are called to this freedom. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. God grant that we should live as free children of the Living God. —Ray Pritchard, condensed