



Living in Freedom

Galatians 5:1-10

TITLE PAGE

Slavery. In our modern world slavery is something we decry. We have been a people that endorse human rights – rights that say that no man should own another and that all people should be free to determine the course of their own lives. That's not how it was in the past and in 2007 we celebrated the 200th anniversary of the passage of the slave trade act PICTURE which put an end to scenes like this in British ships and in British colonies. We all know it went on for longer than that. It still goes on today. Families in countries like Pakistan which are under pressure because they have too many children, in effect sell their children to factory owners to work on the production of cheap garments – items which find their way into UK supermarkets. Slavery is a scandal which still happens and our thirst for cheap clothing has meant that the authorities have so often turned a blind eye to slavery.

The slavery of the past put people in chains. We associate chains with slavery don't we? We all have the picture of BEN HUR of slaves on a naval galley forced to work against their will and flogged if they didn't. However in Roman times, slavery was not seen in that sort of light. Yes, they had these sorts of slave – people captured in military campaigns – but more often than not, people sold themselves or their families into slavery as this kind of bondage was better than poverty and starvation. SLAVERY of this type was usually benign as rich Romans usually looked after their slaves and a slave could be a very trusted part of the household. But it was still bondage. The slave was still controlled by another. They were still bonded to their master. They could still be sold on to a bad master.

JESUS We have learned over the past months that without Jesus we are chained up: in the control of other masters – sin, the world and the flesh. They are masters that without Christ keep us in sin and separate us from God. Yet Jesus has freed us from this bondage and made us free people – free to know God, free to worship, free to live life in God's way in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have read this morning that even though we have our freedom, we can CHAIN OURSELVES UP AGAIN by living according to the values of the world, the flesh and the devil all over again even though Christ has made us free. We'll look more at this passage this evening. For now we just need to consider that GOD has equipped us in every way for freedom so that we won't be enslaved again but we will reach the goal that God wants for us – to become mature in Him as we move on our journey with Him to his eternal presence.

GROWTH -OUR NATURAL STATE. As believers we should grow into maturity. That's God's intention for us. We, however, DO NOT INSTANTLY GET THERE. After all, in life how do we get mature? We have to grow up, we need to learn from others and we need to learn for the situations we face in life. Some people mature early – others seem to be forever Peter Pan don't they? AGE DOESN'T NECESSARILY SUGGEST MATURITY

It's the same with the Christian life. SOME CHRISTIANS NEVER LEAVE THE HIGH CHAIR 1 The problem is that so many Christians never quite get there. Paul spoke to the Corinthian Christians. He said that even though they had been Christians for a while, he spoke to them as babes – people who could not handle solid food; so bad was the jealousy and quarrelling amongst them. SOME CHRISTIANS NEVER LEAVE THE HIGH CHAIR 2. GOD WANTS US TO GROW INTO MATURITY! Churches have many old Christians, but not too many mature ones!

So we've heard God's intention for us, what Barriers are there to Christians not reaching maturity?
BARRIERS TO MATURITY

- ◆ NOT TAKING HOLD OF OUR SPIRITUAL FREEDOM. It's what the passage we read was about. In Galatia people thought that if they wanted to be Christians, they needed to jump through a whole lot of religious hoops to be close to God. It's something that has plagued the church down the century. I was reading a good book over the holiday called the Giving Gift by Tom Smail. He pointed out that people thought that to know the fullness of God in their lives they needed to do religious things – go on pilgrimages, become hermits, join a religious order, do all manner of good

deeds and maybe they would then be lucky enough to become mature. Yet God has given us freely of eternal life in Christ. He has given us His Spirit freely. All we have to do is accept the gift of freedom and then take advantage of that fact!

It's the other way around. MATURITY AND FREEDOM We can become mature in Christ because we are free and empowered. Here are a couple of definitions of maturity and freedom. Freedom is what we have in Christ. As we take up the advantages of freedom we move on to maturity – a process that takes a lifetime as we get to know God and as He empowers us by His Spirit to live and act like Jesus. The problem is that if we don't take hold of our freedom, we can't mature. WE ARE FREE OR BOUND IN ANY AREA OF OUR LIVES The trouble is that so often it's easier to either keep doing or go back to the old ways of listening to the world, responding to the flesh or being duped by the devil into enslavement again. – the house illustration

- ◆ NOT TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY We live in an age where people want to blame others for their mistakes and shortcomings. We want it to be someone else's responsibility. People don't like the idea of taking responsibility and that often starts because people can't or won't face up to their shortcomings. Whether that's not dealing with strongholds in our lives like not trusting Jesus fully, holding grudges against God, anger, unforgiveness, we need to realise that we are the ones that need to deal with it before God.

We now have a prayer team and we would encourage you to ask someone to pray with you. Not pray for you, pray with you. If you have the problem, you are the one that needs to come before God and claim your freedom in that area. We can't free you, but Jesus can but you need to realise the problem and take that before Him

NO-ONE ELSE CAN SLIDE

Do we want to mature – then we should take responsibility in our lives for where we fall short of Him.

- ◆ NOT KNOWING THE BASIC TRUTHS People stay as old but baby Christians so often because they never get beyond the basic truths – the milk rather than the meat. This is what the writer to the Hebrews said to his readers: *Heb 5:12 There has been enough time for you to be teachers — yet you still need someone to teach you the first lessons of God's message. Instead of eating solid food, you still have to drink milk. 13 Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child, without any experience in the matter of right and wrong. 14 Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil.* We are people who need to spend time with God's word, spend time in prayer, spend time with other Christians worshipping and discussing God's word, listening to the preaching of His word, reading Christian books. We need to know our stuff. How much time do we spend with Jesus? But more than that – is it head knowledge or heart knowledge. The Bible wasn't just written for us to study, but as a way by which God can speak His truth into our lives. We have learned over the past few months that we are made righteous when we trust Jesus. We are right before God, holy, acceptable, saints. If we realise that we start from that point, then we will not fall into the bondage of constantly trying to ingratiate ourselves to God again and again or thinking we are a weak and worthless Christian – a second class believer. When we realise that we are righteous in Christ, we can get on with growing in Him.

- ◆ FAULTY THINKING 1 Let's have a few more verses from Hebrews - *6:1 Let us go forward, then, to mature teaching and leave behind us the first lessons of the Christian message. We should not lay again the foundation of turning away from useless works and believing in God; 2 of the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands; of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgement.* It's nice to be reminded of the ground of our faith but too many Christians keep going back and asking God for forgiveness again and again for something that was dealt with on Calvary – and that's why they never move on. So how do we move on – by coming to a settled position about what makes us pleasing and acceptable to God - by simply what Christ has done for us on the cross.

There is another area of faulty thinking we came across earlier and this is the area of what we called strongholds – past experiences and things we have been taught about God and about life which are just not true but we are convinced that they are. They can be ideas about God, the Christian faith or our ability to be the sort of people that God has made us free to be.

Examples – don't think God can or is dynamic in our lives
- going to Church means we keep God happy

God wants us to sweep away this kind of rubbish and replace it by His truth so that we can grow and mature. The wonder of the Christian faith is that God has made us to walk day by day with Him: to know His mind and will and to know the presence and power of the Spirit.

- ◆ NOT TRAINING OURSELVES TO DISCERN BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL – I said that many Christians get old in the faith but never become mature. Often it is because we keep trampling over the simple stuff. Let me give you that verse from Hebrews 5 again: *14 Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil. God wants us to have the solid food from His word, from a life lived with Him and the discernment the Spirit brings when we open ourselves to Him.*

Take a look at the picture. People in banks are trained to be able to see a forgery – to know a real £50 note from the many duds around. Can you tell dud faith from real? When that programme comes on telly that says something strange about the Christian faith, can you discern how true it may be? Or about someone who tells you something you though sinful for years was OK. Is it your faulty thinking or you can tell from your knowledge of God and His word that it's dodgy? What about someone who tells you God has told them something – is it true or isn't it? God has given us all we need to discern truth and lies – but we must take the responsibility of spending time with Him, spending time with His word and walk with Him if we want to be effective in this area. It really is a mark of maturity to be able to know God's will, not just in the big things, but in the little things of life too.

MOVING TOWARDS MATURITY

So, how might I conclude today's sermon called Living in Freedom. If we want to live and grow into mature people in Christ – which is what free people should do, then we have three things “to do” as it were.

- ◆ SPEND TIME WITH GOD – the Christian faith is a relationship not an idea or a discipline. How do you mature in any relationship – by spending time. This applies in marriage. It applies in friendship. It applies in family. We develop mature relationships by spending time. It's something we should enjoy doing rather than finding it difficult or a bore. As I said earlier, freedom means we take responsibility for ourselves and our actions and that freedom allows us to spend time with God and with His word. Boring? Why? God is the creator of the universe and knows everything – now I'd say that makes Him pretty interesting!! Out of that always comes a growing in faith and trust in God on a day to day basis. Others – sense of His power.
- ◆ GROW WITH GOD'S PEOPLE. As God's people we don't just enter into a relationship with God but with people. There is no such thing as a “personal” Christian or an “isolated” Christian. We grow and mature by being part of a body and growing together with God. How engaged are we with other believers. Study together, worship together, serve together, witness together.
- ◆ ALLOW THE SPIRIT TO FREE US I've emphasised that Living in Freedom is about living. The Bible wasn't written to

Where from here? FREEDOM IS WHAT WE HAVE God wants us to break the old habits we have in our lives first of all. If we have listened to the lies of the world flesh and devil we are are trying to grow from the wrong place. Break the habit! Most people don't even know how far their thinking is fully affected by these things. Freedom in Christ is a useful tool for this. It helps you reflect on those areas of your life where you're still not claiming that freedom but bound up and unable to fully grow into the Christian God wants you to be. It identifies faulty thinking, areas that you've never taken responsibility for, strongholds never dealt with and allows you to place them before God so that you be freed from them.

I've spent time over the last few months re-affirming who we are in Christ. Let's no longer be slaves but allow God to free us from those areas tat tie us back so that we can run the race in freedom.

LONG TERM VIEW

*Preached by Mark Reid, MRBC Felixstowe 30/8/09
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