

Spiritual Freedom

Dub McClish

Introduction

Surely, one of the most appealing themes of the New Testament is freedom or liberty in Christ. Sadly, many have mistaken liberty for license, freedom for lack of law or restraint whatsoever. At least one entire book (i.e., *Free in Christ*) has been written advocating such erroneous concepts. This article will examine the passages outside of the New Testament books of John, Romans, and Galatians that relate to this theme.

Spiritual Freedom in Acts

Peter addressed the apostles, elders and other brethren in Jerusalem during the climactic discussion of whether or not circumcision was to be bound on Gentile Christians as follows: “Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear (Acts 15:10). The “yoke” by which the Gentiles (and Jews as well, v. 11) were not bound was circumcision as a religious practice (v. 1), and, by implication, any of the law of Moses (v. 5; Gal 5:1-3). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28) the apostles and elders wrote a letter to the Gentile churches (v. 23) declaring that no one had authority to bring them under the bondage of the law of Moses (vv. 24, 28) They were free men in Christ, but from what? Not from any and all law, but from the law of Moses. Nothing in Acts 15:1-29 indicates that **Christian** freedom means that one is free from all law.

Spiritual Freedom In 1 Corinthians

Paul referred to a liberty possessed by the Corinthian saints: “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Cor 8:9) The liberty mentioned here related to eating meat that had been offered to idols (v. 1). To eat such was a matter of indifference to God, making one no worse if he ate nor any better if he abstained (v. 8) because an idol is not really a god (vv. 4-6). Therefore, one was at liberty to eat such meat without sinning as a general rule.

However, weaker brethren who were not so informed or convinced must be considered. If they should see a stronger brother eating such meat in his liberty and be influenced themselves to eat it, contrary to their convictions, they would sin (vv. 10-11, 13) One must forego a privilege or liberty which he would ordinarily have as a Christian, if it causes another

to stumble and be lost (vv. 11–12). We must not exercise our freedoms even in such innocent things if such is not helpful or edifying to our brethren (1 Cor 10:23). There is no hint in this passage that freedom in Christ means freedom from law of every kind.

In 1 Corinthians 9:1 Paul, asked, “Am I not free?” The question implies an affirmative answer; Paul was declaring his freedom in some respect. It is quite possible he meant that he was a freeman as opposed to a slave and as such, he was entitled to wages for his labor (the subject of most of the chapter). He reminded them that he was an apostle and that he had the same right to forbear working to support himself as did the other apostles (vv. 1–6). While he was free to expect and receive their support for his preaching efforts, he chose not to exercise that freedom in Corinth (vv. 12, 15–19) lest it be a hindrance to the cause of Christ (v. 12). Paul’s freedom here was one which he was willing to forego for the sake of others (as he urged upon brethren in Ch. 8). There is certainly nothing in this passage to indicate that we are free from any and all law. Indeed, later in the chapter he pointedly said he was not “without law to God, but under law to Christ” (v. 21).

Spiritual Freedom in 2 Corinthians

Paul also wrote of liberty in Christ in 2 Corinthians: “Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17). Paul’s arguments throughout this chapter show that the liberty of which he wrote in this context was liberty from the law of Moses, the old covenant, a covenant of death and condemnation (vv. 7, 9–11). Once more, there is no hint in this passage that those in Christ are free from all law.

Spiritual Freedom in James

James wrote of Christian liberty:

“But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing” (Jam. 1:25).

The law of Christ referred to by Paul (1 Cor 9:21) is here called “the law of liberty.” It is a law system that liberates men from accountability to other systems of spiritual law (Mat. 28:18). It frees those who obey it from the guilt and dominion of sin (John 8:31–32; Rom. 6:18). Yes, there is freedom in Christ. However, James affirms that Christian liberty and law are harmonious, rather than competitive or contradictory as many moderns affirm.

Spiritual Freedom in 1 Peter

Peter warned of the misuse of freedom in Christ: “As free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God” (1 Pet. 2:16; cf. Gal. 5:13; Jude 4). That

which Peter warned of is still with us. Those who declare that God's grace so covers their sins that they need not worry about "commandment-keeping" have fallen prey to this foolish reasoning. Those who argue that they are not under any kind of law because they are "free in Christ" use this as a "smokescreen" for all sorts of wickedness (e.g., living in an adulterous marriage). While acknowledging that we are free in Christ, Peter taught that we must live as "bondservants of God," which means to honor His Law, keep His Commandments.

Conclusion

In summary, the passages discussed above emphasize that under Christ none is bound by the law of Moses, with the warning that our liberty is not to be confused with license to offend a weak brother or to ignore the Law of Christ. Most certainly, there is freedom and liberty in Christ. However, there is no New Testament context in which said freedom is defined as being without limits, laws or restraints from God through His Son. In Christ there is liberty **and** law.

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