

NOT JUST FOR SUNDAYS

# TAKEAWAY

Free

Part 9 – Freedom Misuse

August 22, 2010

## Unchecked Freedom

We have spent the last couple of months in a series concerning our freedom in Christ. After looking at all that God has shown us, what comes to mind when you think of the word freedom? With your definition in mind, take a look at one of the definitions from the Random dictionary: “The power to determine action without restraint.” According to this definition, freedom is or has power. Webster’s dictionary lists “license” as a synonym for freedom and includes this comment: “License implies freedom specially granted or conceded and may connote an abuse of freedom; i.e., freedom without responsibility may degenerate into license.” I find it interesting that even secular sources recognize the inherent dangers that come with absolute or unrestrained freedom.

When I think of freedom, I am surprised by how much my mental image of that word has changed over the years. When I was young, and when I was new in my relationship with God, I was sure that freedom meant the liberty to do whatever I wanted...and not feel badly about doing it nor receive any consequences because of it. Coming from a very legalistic, strict upbringing, it’s not surprising I felt that way. As I grew up and moved away and began to make choices for myself, I learned the hard way that many of the things I wanted to be “free” to do ended up enslaving me. Christ knows this about us. He knows that some of the very things we think will make us happy end up hurting us and keeping us in bondage. Now when I think about freedom, I think about being free *from* those addicting, enslaving things that I once wanted the freedom to do. Now I think of being free *so that* I can worship God with a pure heart, *so that* I can help others instead of being wrapped up in my own problems and bondage, and *so that* my children will learn what true freedom means much earlier than I did. My freedom now has a purpose that is greater than just pleasing my own selfish desires.

Some may genuinely ask the question: “If the blood Jesus shed on the cross covers everything I have ever done and ever will do, why does what I do matter?” Well, let’s ask that question another way. Suppose your teenage child came to you and asked if they were free to drive as fast as they wanted to...up and down the private drive you live on since there is no posted speed limit. True, they wouldn’t be breaking a law. But what if you shared this drive with a family that had small children? While your child might be free to do what he/she wanted, not considering the safety of others could have some serious consequences. This may be a simple analogy, but you get the idea. How does 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 fit into this picture? What about 1 Peter 2:16? How does this relate to the idea of “license” and how it can lead to abuse?

I would gladly drop any freedom I have in Christ in certain situations if I felt God’s Spirit prompting me to give that up for Him and/or for someone else’s benefit. While in Mexico on a mission trip, I visited some towns where only the town prostitutes wore makeup. Do I feel I have freedom in Christ to wear makeup? Of course. Did I wear makeup in those towns during that time? No, I did not. I wanted to give the best impression of Christ that I could, and that meant adapting to my present surroundings and being free to not wear makeup for a time.

We desire to serve others by not becoming a stumbling block, and we want to let the Holy Spirit control our actions. We don’t want to be enslaved to others’ opinions or fall back into the “System 1” trap of legalism and people-pleasing. Where is the balance? There is a tension that will always be present between these desires. It’s a tension that actually helps bring balance...a pressure from one side to please God instead of man, and a tension from the other side to put others’ needs above our own. Read Matthew 22:37-39. What does Jesus say is the greatest commandment? What is the second that “is like it”? Now read Galatians 5:13-14. How is the whole law summed up? Jesus said the two most important commandments were to love God and to love others. There is the tension, and there is the balance. I wouldn’t love God first and best if I allowed my love for another person to move me away from God or cause me to disobey His laws. I wouldn’t be loving others and putting them ahead of myself if I allowed the freedom God gave me to hurt them or trip them

*Why does your freedom in Christ look so much like my captivity before Christ?*  
~ Erwin McManus

up in their spiritual walk. If one side overwhelms the other, the balance is lost. Obedience to and love for God will always lead us to love others and relate to them in the healthiest way possible.

### WARNING NOTICES!

- *Blanket made in Taiwan: Not to be used as protection from a tornado*
- *Electric router made for carpenters: This product not intended for use as a dental drill*
- *Hair dryer: Do not use in shower*
- *Silly Putty: Not for use as earplugs*
- *Household iron: Never iron clothes while they are being worn*
- *Underarm deodorant: Do not spray in eyes*
- *Cardboard dashboard sun shield: Do not drive with sun shield in place*
- *In the manual of a chainsaw: Do not attempt to stop the blade with your hand*
- *Stamped on the barrel of a .22 caliber rifle: Warning: Misuse may cause injury or death*

Did some of those make you laugh like they did me? Sadly, all of these warning labels came as a response to some misuse of the product. These statements, however silly, became necessary to protect companies from potential legal and financial ramifications.

We know we have been granted freedom in Christ. He came so that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). But what are we doing with that freedom? Do we risk becoming like those who file frivolous lawsuits just because they can? Do we sometimes fall into a mentality of, “Let me push the boundaries as far as I can to serve my human and fleshly needs the most; after all, I’m free, right?” Read Romans 14. Paul is not saying we can’t enjoy the freedom of Christ. Rather, we should be aware of where that freedom is taking us, what it is doing to our relationship with God, and what it is reflecting to those around us. “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Romans 14:8 NIV).

If we truly want to be in tune with the heart of the Father, we need to be asking, “How will this affect my walk or my friend’s walk with you, Lord?” If there is any question, then we shouldn’t do it. When we understand that consideration for our brother or sister is the only thing stopping us, we know we are still free—just not free to harm someone else. If we focus on what makes us feel good, or what seems right by man’s laws, we will quickly be led astray. Without a Spirit-guided check on our freedom, we will grow dull to the effects our behaviors have on ourselves and those around us.

How about you? Are you willing to place healthy checks on your freedom? Or does the very idea annoy you? Be honest with God about where you are with this. For me, one of the greatest freedoms we have in Christ is this amazing access to God the Father. He has given us the freedom to bring anything to Him that needs work—anything inside of us that is still broken. He can and will change us so that we better reflect Him and the freedom He is offering to the world.

*(The Corinthians) had confused the true basis for Christian behavior. For them it was a question of knowledge and rights. For Paul it is a question of love and freedom. Knowledge and rights lead to pride; they are ultimately non-Christian because the bottom line is selfishness—freedom to do as I please when I please. Love and freedom lead to edification; they are ultimately Christian because the bottom line is the benefit of someone else—that they might be saved.*

~ Gordon Fee

**Note:** The weekly publication of Takeaway is being discontinued—at least for a season. If you would be interested in serving on a future Takeaway team, please send an email to [brccinfo@blue-ridge.org](mailto:brccinfo@blue-ridge.org).