



Oct 18, 2020 - The Evidence of Freedom - I Corinthians 10:12-33

OPEN

Have you heard the story of Howard E. Rutledge, who wrote *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*? In his book, Rutledge tells of his eight excruciating years (1965–1973) in a Vietnamese Prisoner of War camp. His testimony – and that of his wife – is one of God’s sustaining grace and strength.

Our theme today is not about enduring *physical* captivity. We are going to explore the emancipation which is offered to us by the Gospel – freedom by God’s grace and forgiveness. As you know, we have been considering thankfulness. Is there any **evidence** in our lives that we are grateful to God? Well, joyful freedom is a wonderful indication of a life of thankfulness.

DIG

So far, we have looked at four of seven evidences or themes of thankfulness.

Joy → Colossae Submission → Rome & Ephesus
Generosity → Corinth Celebration → Thessaloniki

Paul wanted to help 1st Century Christians navigate the collision between culture, values, and spiritual beliefs. We face a similar challenge. How do we live in relationship with Jesus, in true liberty in a hedonistic, secularized society? Paul points to the answer: *“the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* (Romans 14:17) Religious rules and regulations will not rectify the situation...nor will this lead to a life of thankfulness!

Freedom in Christ means we are rescued from the **control of sin** and the **condemnation of sin**. It boggled Paul’s mind that Christians could embrace such freedom, only to be enslaved again by self-sufficiency (“distorted Gospel” – Galatians 1:6-7). Whether you practice paganism or moralism, you are trapped in “performance-based religion” which is completely contrary to living free in Christ.

Writing to Corinthian believers, Paul challenged false notions of freedom in Christ. Remember, this was a church at the crossroads of the world. Competing cultures and religions complicated their lives. **I Corinthians 10:12-33** helps us answer the question, **how do we live in the freedom of Christ?**

[A] When we live in freedom we must be careful – vv. 12-13

Paul used the example of Israel to remind the Corinthian church that freedom can be corrupted. Though they were redeemed from Egypt they became enslaved to idolatry! And there are tragic similarities between the worship of Baalpeor (see Numbers 25) and the Corinthian Aphrodite – namely, ritualized prostitution. Paul urged that in their freedom, Christians be cautious – we are not immune to temptation (v.12). But we need not be victims either – God provides escape (v.13). Consider the Corinthians.

- Those who had worshipped **Jehovah** at the **synagogue** could return to **religious performance** (“*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” Gal 3:3)
- Those who had worshipped **Aphrodite** at the **Acrocorinth** could return to **pagan hedonism** (“*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.*” (Gal 5:13).

[B] When we live in freedom we must be responsible – vv. 23-26

Another expression of thankful, free living is to be responsible. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, *“you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.”* (5:8) To live this way means we understand that being free from the guilt of past sins is not a free pass to continue to sin.

- Freedom involves **rights** – to enjoy the liberty of reconciliation with God (see v.16 – “cup of thanksgiving”).
- Freedom involves **responsibilities** – to avoid spiritual entitlement (see v.14 – “flee from idolatry”).

Our **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** “*guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.*” True freedom includes appropriate limitations.

The source is debated but the wisdom of this statement is helpful: “My right to swing my fist ends where your nose begins.” (read [MORE](#))

[C] When we live in freedom we must be thoughtful – vv. 27-30

Responsible living leads into thoughtful living. Paul addressed a sensitive situation: meat that had been offered to pagan idols then sold in the market.

For some Christians in Corinth this represented no (more) connection to their sinful past. For others, this was a powerful reminder of their pagan past – it was a matter of conscience. How should a church family function in such situations? Thoughtfully!

- Verse 27 – *when served by an unbeliever, live in the freedom of Christ – eat the meat* (see v.25)
- Verse 28 – *when this meat is sensitive issue to another believer, limit your freedom – do not eat*

First, being thoughtful is a matter of **awareness** of the needs of others. Secondly, our thoughtfulness means a willingness to **not assert** our rights. You might be able to “take part in the meal with thankfulness” (v.30) but you can also choose to not partake out of thoughtfulness for another.

We do not face “meat offered to idols”. What sensitive situation do you face? This month Christians must consider carefully how to engage, or not participate in Halloween festivities.

Even our response to COVID-19 requires that we have a thoughtful awareness and not assert our rights to the detriment of others.

[D] When we live in freedom we must be worshipful – vv. 31-33

Ultimately, our freedom is designed to glorify God – “do it all for the glory of God” (v.31). How is God glorified by our freedom? Living in liberty expresses God’s actual design for our lives!

- Are you captive to **self-gratification**? There is a tragic paradox to paganism. What is presented as “whatever feels good, do it” is actually a trap of failure, guilt, and aimlessness.
- Are you captive to **self-effort**? In [*American Gospel: Christ Alone*](#) Dr. Bryan Chapell states, “*The messages that just say be good damn people – to their pride or to despair.*”

In miraculous contrast, God’s redemption brings us into a new, liberated and regenerated life – see Titus 3:3-7.

And do you know what else? People living in the freedom of Christ are joyful and thankful!

REFLECT

What is true freedom in Christ? It is not some mindless spiritual existence. To the Romans Paul posed this thought provoking question: “should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? (Romans 6:1). That would not be living in freedom, but would in fact, be a return to the bondage of self-centeredness!

All these qualities – careful, responsible, thoughtful, worshipful – reflect the freedom of Christ which is ours by God’s grace.

Living in true freedom shows the world that we are **thankful**. Both paganism and moralism reflect selfish behaviour – which is the enemy of true gratitude.

In his book *The Saving Life of Christ* (Zondervan, 1961) Major Ian Thomas illustrates the freedom of Christ through the experience of air flight. “By faith I step into the plane, I sit back in the *rest* of faith, and as those mighty engines roar into life, I discover that the new law of aerodynamics sets me free from the law of gravity. So long as I maintain by faith that position of total dependence, I do not have to *try to be free* from the law of gravity – I am *being set free* by the operation of a new and higher law.” (21)

How are you resting in faith in the new law – of God’s forgiveness and grace?

This week’s HOME GROUP study passage:

Romans 14:13-23