

Living Free

BOB HEERSPINK

When you think of freedom, do you connect it with taking responsibility for your neighbor? Liberty, license, responsibility; how do all these things connect together? That is what Paul talks about in the passage from Galatians that we will be looking at today. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink. Dave, there is a lot of talk today about liberty, about freedom; in politics there is a big movement right now that I see around us to stress personal freedom, libertarian issues; liberty defined as: Hey, I am free to do my own thing.

DAVE BAST

The whole free market argument; that is big today. That is an illustration.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; and the notion that I cannot be hemmed in. I have got to do my own thing. Let me be free to be me. And as Christians, we talk a lot about freedom and about liberty; but sometimes I think to myself: Okay, how do these things really connect together – what we see going on in society and Christian liberty that we practice as disciples of Jesus?

DAVE BAST

Yes; is Christian freedom somehow akin to libertarianism or free market ideas, or is it something special? Is it something different? But certainly it is a huge theme in the New Testament, and I think it is one of the most difficult ideas that we have to grapple with as we are working our way here through Galatians.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, when I think back as a young person growing up in the '70's, it seemed like at least in my Christian tradition there were these issues identified as Christian liberty issues; and they were things like can you play cards? Can you watch TV on Sunday? Should you ride your bicycle on Sunday? What about movies? You know, they seem now to be kind of small potatoes, and that is where we focused in on issues of liberty.

DAVE BAST

I was thinking about this myself just recently because our daughter is now out on her own. She is single. She is making her way in the world, supporting herself; and to help make ends meet she got a part-time job in retail, and she had to work on Sundays. I didn't say anything to her about it, but she just as a matter: Well, I have to if I am going to... And I kept thinking: You know, when I was young we didn't even get a paper on Sunday because you made the delivery person work. The idea of working on Sunday, you would have just said: No, I won't do it; then I won't take the job.

BOB HEERSPINK

You wouldn't go to a restaurant on Sunday.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; so I will refuse that. It is a matter of Christian principle. Now, is it liberty to allow that? I don't know. I struggle with that even as a parent. What do I say?

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, that would be a good topic to discuss when we talk about what it means to be Sabbath keepers; but I think the point you're making is well taken. We have taken the whole notion of liberty and we have shrunk it down to just some gray areas of the Christian life, when actually, when you go to the Bible, freedom, liberty, is just this huge theme that runs its way from the Old Testament right to the New.

DAVE BAST

A very positive theme...

BOB HEERSPINK

A very positive theme.

DAVE BAST

It is presented as this wonderful blessing that is ours in Christ. We are free; free from what, though; and free *for* what?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, in Galatians 5:1... As we have been studying Galatians, we come to this very powerful verse, where Paul says: For freedom, Christ has set us free; stand firm then and do not submit to a yoke of slavery. I mean, he really encapsulates all what Christ has done for us as setting us free from slavery to sin.

DAVE BAST

I think we have to explore that idea of what are we free from? What does he mean by: For freedom Christ has set us free? And surely, it is not controversial even to say that it begins with freedom from guilt – freedom from the burden of having to please God by our own efforts – the whole idea that we are made right with God through faith, and that sets us free. One of the great Christian classics of all time is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the main character he named simply Christian, and Christian sets out from his own city of Destruction toward heaven, and as he goes he has this huge burden on his back. I mean, think mountaineering backpack that just weighs him down, and there is a wonderful scene where he comes toward the cross. It is on a place somewhat ascending, Bunyan says, and as he draws near to the cross and looks up at it in faith, the burden suddenly falls off his back and tumbles into an open, empty tomb...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; I remember the scene.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and it is seen no more. So, that is certainly the beginning of our freedom – freedom from that load of weight, and the freedom of conscience to just say: I am accepted by God. Praise God!

BOB HEERSPINK

And Christian doesn't take that backpack back to himself.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; he doesn't pick up the guilt again, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

Because that is what we tend to do, because the danger is then we think as we make our way forward, okay, we are going to live God's way; we are going to earn God's favor; and Paul says in this passage: No, there is no yoke of the law that is on us in terms of fulfilling God's expectations by which we are saved.

DAVE BAST

So, do you think that is what he is getting at when he says: Stand firm, therefore, and don't take up that yoke of slavery or that burden. Is it guilt again?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think it is more than that because in Jewish circles at this time they would talk about the yoke of the law, and the yoke of the law was actually something they *wanted* to take on; and Paul now describes trying to save yourself by obeying the law is really a yoke of slavery, and you don't need to take that on. Your freedom is in Christ; and I think the place to begin with Christian freedom is to really celebrate this lifting of the burden. I mean, put yourself in Christian's place. The backpack – this huge weight – has rolled off, and we really are free.

DAVE BAST

Do you connect this at all with Jesus' word: Take my yoke upon you and learn from me? Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden? It kind of sounds somewhat similar, doesn't it? Take *my* yoke upon you...

BOB HEERSPINK

Well see, that is where we really have to push, I think, Dave, on this notion of, okay, once we get to the point of saying we are free from our sin, we are free from our guilt, we are free from fulfilling God's expectations through the law, what more is freedom? Because there has to be more in terms of the way we live. It is the question of so what do we do now? And as we come back to this passage in Galatians 5, we are going to find that Paul gives us some very interesting instruction as to what real Christian freedom is as lived out in the Christian life.

DAVE BAST

Well, and that is what we are going to look at in just a minute, but first we want to remind you that it is listeners like you that make *Groundwork* what it is.

BOB HEERSPINK

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DAVE BAST

Plus, your responses to the "we are wondering" questions on the website there help us prepare for upcoming programs. Finding us is easy. Just visit our website, groundworkonline.com.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, we have been talking about what it really means to be free in Jesus Christ, and we saw in Galatians 5:1 that Paul talks about what that means in terms of our guilt, in terms of trying to measure up to God's standards, earning our way into heaven by being good; and Paul says: You know, you are free from that. That burden is cast away from you. But later on in Galatians, he comes back to this concept of freedom and he really defines Christian freedom in a way that I think is pretty shocking to people today who basically want to say: Hey, liberty is really me doing my own thing.

Let me read what he says. It is in verses 13 and 14 of Chapter 5. He says:

¹³You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free; but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love. ¹⁴For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your

neighbor as yourself.

DAVE BAST

Which is a wonderful and profound statement, and it helps us get, I think, more close to the heart of the really Christian idea of freedom; and Paul begins by saying something negative. It is not freedom to indulge our sinful nature, or to put it more simply even, it is not freedom to sin. As you referred to, Bob, the popular attitude is: Well, if I am free, I am free to do whatever I want.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Isn't that what freedom means? I can do what I want and nobody can tell me otherwise; and even then, we generally limit by saying: Well, as long as I don't hurt somebody else; but I am free to indulge my appetites; I am free to... you know, just try an experiment and make my own rules.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, I find it so interesting that in this passage, where we would think Paul would take, now, the whole idea of law and just throw it away... because, after all, we think freedom and law are opposites; they are antithetical. Paul comes right back and says: Well hey, being a free person in Jesus Christ means that you are very concerned about the Law – about what he calls the Law that is fulfilled in the command to love.

DAVE BAST

Yes; he has been talking also contrasting faith and law all the time, and you would almost expect him to dismiss the law all together, but no, here it comes back in in Galatians 5 as a positive thing; and I think Paul is helping us maybe to understand a profound truth about our own human nature, and it is this: The illusion that we are free to do whatever we want actually leads to a kind of slavery.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

We become... when we start down that path, we suddenly and very quickly discover that we are slaves to our own passions, we are slaves to our appetites; look at the problem with addiction that people have: I am free to look at what I want; I am free to try what I want; I am free to drink...

BOB HEERSPINK

Think of what the Internet has created.

DAVE BAST

Oh, yes; or addiction to substances – substance abuse; and people wake up suddenly and realize: I am enslaved. I am enslaved by this. How do I break out? How do I get free? The freedom that we have in Christ can help us to break that addiction, certainly, but it is not license; it is not complete liberty to do anything and everything; rather, it is also freedom *for* doing something positive, which is to love our neighbor.

BOB HEERSPINK

But, Dave; this is not just loving your neighbor. I mean, the way he describes it here... he says: Serve each other in love; and literally what he is saying is: Become a slave to those who need your love. I mean, he is really saying: Hey, the real nature of freedom for a Christian... it is to enter into slavery. It is to become a servant to those around you.

DAVE BAST

I think of a famous quotation from Martin Luther, who was the great student of Galatians, and wrote a magnificent commentary on it, and then a treatise... One of his earliest Reformation doctrines was called a treatise on Christian liberty; and in the beginning of that, on the first page, he puts the paradox this way: A Christian is perfectly free; the lord of all; and a Christian is completely bound; the slave of all at the same time. So, at the same time, slave and free. We are free from the law as a means of pleasing God; we are free from guilt. In some sense, we are free even from the Pharisaical rules and burdens of others, but we are also bound to serve one another in love.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I don't think this would make any sense to anyone except when you stand before the cross. We talked in a previous program about how Paul displays Christ crucified, as it were, before their eyes; and anyone who says: Hey, I don't understand this... and I sometimes struggle with this. I mean, what does it mean to really be free and a servant? I want to get rid of those responsibilities toward other people, not take more on; and Paul would kind of take me by the shirt and he would drag me over and he would say: Okay, look at the cross. Look at what Jesus did. Look at the pattern for his life. He emptied himself. He became a servant (Philippians 2) so that he might become the greatest gift of love that the world has ever seen.

DAVE BAST

And speaking of Philippians 2: ⁵Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ. He is a model in that sense. I thought about just now that old Army slogan: Be all that you can be. Do you remember that?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

In a sense, our freedom is given to us in order that we can be all God intended us to be, and that is to be models of love the way Christ was. I find that really exciting, to think of it in this way: God can set me free from the slavery to my own appetites, my own passions; but he can set me free in order to become what he created me to be, which is the image and pattern of Jesus Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

And you know, I ask myself: Okay, where do I see this in my own life? And so often I find that marriage, family, is really a powerful metaphor for who we are as God's people. You think about being married, making that commitment to another person, and you know, people kind of laugh about: Yeah, marriage, the old ball and chain; but the truth is, in marriage, being free to serve another person, being free to love another person sacrificially... on a human level, that is one of the places where I have received some of my greatest fulfillment as a Christian. It is the same with kids. You know, you have your family, and your children turn your life upside down. There is this huge commitment now that you are making; but as you serve them, you have this sense of freedom that you have really never had before as to whom you are as a person.

DAVE BAST

You know, I would like to kind of pursue this a little bit more, though, because I think this is a beautiful idea: Free to love; but churches don't seem like very free places, and often very loving places; and so, I would really like to kind of push on how to make this real and...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, get beyond the family into the church.

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; and beyond the theory of a nice idea to what about the reality of all the expectations we lay on each other, and how does it play out with that?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, lets talk about that after we take this break.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into the scriptures to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

Bob, as we bring up this wonderful idea of Christian freedom, it is freedom from... from the law as a means of pleasing God; from guilt, the guilt of our sin; freedom for not sinning, but loving our neighbor as ourselves. It is not license, but it is a freedom to enter into the kind of people God created us to be – to enter into that kind of life; but my problem is, a lot of churches, especially conservative Christian churches, don't seem like very free or loving places, you know. There is this sort of strait jacket that seems to be put on people by the expectations, the unwritten rules, the traditions and the laws... what happened to Christian freedom?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think we have to distinguish first of all between what the Bible clearly commands us to do – you know, we are not questioning the fact that the Bible says there are these basic truths with regard to how a Christian life is lived out – and the fact that there are really gray areas, where we have freedom to make decisions, and they deal with how we live out our Christian faith within our culture; and some churches are very good at basically taking those gray areas and saying they are black and white. You know, here are the rules; here is what you do on Sunday; here is what a Christian does with regard to entertainment; this is how a Christian dresses...

DAVE BAST

Or politics, maybe; politics.

BOB HEERSPINK

This is how a Christian votes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; and when that happens, Christian liberty gets really narrowed and put into a box.

DAVE BAST

And how quick we are to judge those who disagree with us on that particular issue; but don't we also have some responsibility... you know, "the weaker brother or the weaker sister"?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; there is a great example of that in Corinthians, where actually Paul applies these principles to a very practical situation. It is not a situation about eating kosher foods; it is really a different kind of table question. It is whether you can eat meat sacrificed to idols; and in Corinth that was about the only meat you could come across; it was meat that had been sacrificed in the temples, dedicated to the gods; but because there was so much of this meat, it was just turned over to the meat markets for sale; and what do you do? Can a Christian buy that meat and sit down to a good steak? Paul says: Yes, go into the meat market; buy the meat. Don't ask whether it was dedicated to idols. Take it home and enjoy it. It is a good gift from God; but, if a

weaker brother comes along and says: Hey, do you know what you are eating? That was meat dedicated to an idol. If that is going to become a stumbling block to that young Christian, then says Paul, walk away from it.

DAVE BAST

A stumbling block in the sense of something that would cause that person who is weaker in faith to sin against their own conscience.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

I think that is a very key point that needs to be emphasized, because in my experience I have had a lot of times when conservative Christians challenged me on this or that or the other thing: What are you doing that for, or why do you have this? And it wasn't like they were going to be tempted into sinning themselves; they just wanted to judge me for doing that.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; I remember shooting baskets with my kids one Sunday night and somebody coming by and saying: Hey, you are doing that on Sunday...

DAVE BAST

Oh, goll...

BOB HEERSPINK

And it is like: Yes, I am, but my conscience is clear; and this was a strong enough Christian that I knew I was not creating a stumbling block for him...

DAVE BAST

Exactly.

BOB HEERSPINK

And he just kind of smiled, and he understood the dynamics and walked on; but there are Christians who would say: I am not the weaker brother, I am the stronger brother, and that is why you have to do exactly as I tell you in these gray areas.

DAVE BAST

That is why I have found it helpful to distinguish between giving offence and taking offence. We need to be careful not to give offence to people who are weak in their faith. A great example: Don't drink with an alcoholic and try to entice them to drink with you. That is pretty clear, but there are many who are quick to take offence at what we do, and they are not, as we pointed out, they are not tempted to do something themselves against their own conscience. They just want to prevent us and get us into their box; and for that situation, I like to say with Paul as he wrote to the Corinthians: It is a small thing for me to be judged by you. I don't even judge myself. God is my judge, and that is part of Christian freedom; recognizing God is my judge and I don't have to live up to *your* expectations for me, dear brother or sister; that is your problem.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; I think that is an excellent way of setting up the dynamics here; and I think, too, to move beyond just thinking about Christian freedom as dealing with the gray stuff. That actually, Christian liberty invites us to just blow open our lives in sacrificial service to others. You know, I think if we do that – if we think about what it means to freely love our neighbor, some of these little squabbles that the Church engages in over gray areas will just kind of slide away.

DAVE BAST

One of the things that I think is helpful is to ask yourself what is motivating me. Either to do what I am doing or to not do what I am not doing, and if the question is I am basically motivated by fear of what the neighbors might think, that is a question that our freedom should call us to just dismiss. Don't worry about that. We are free from that. If my motivation is really: In your face, boy; I am going to show you, you conservative so-and-so that I can do this; that also ought to be out of bounds for us. That is not the kind of liberty that we have in Christ. But if our motivation genuinely is that I am acting out of love – out of the conviction that God has freed me to do this thing and to do it for you or to do it for someone I don't even know, that is Christian liberty.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that liberty, Dave, is really the freedom to love as perhaps we have never loved before. I know a couple that adopted a number of children, even as they got older; and people said: Why are you doing this... you know, taking so much on? And they just ignored what other people said and did it anyway; and in a way, I saw them as really exercising the freedom – the liberty – to love as God loves.

DAVE BAST

Well, thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation today, and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join in the discussion.

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