

“Called to Freedom”

To be set free from the rule and burdensome taxation of the British came at a high cost for our forefathers – some who paid for this freedom with their very lives. How sad it would have been, if – in setting up a new form of government – they would have, once again, placed a burdensome yoke on the citizens of this country.

Thanks be to God that our Constitution guarantees certain rights for the sake of freedom. We are blessed to live in the United States of America – free to live!

In our text, the Apostle Paul directs us to Jesus Christ and the freedom He gives. “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Having gained your freedom – at a very high cost – He warns you not to throw it all away, by submitting once gain to a yoke of slavery.

Dearly beloved, Christ died FOR YOU. He took all your iniquities as His own – He endured all of God’s wrath at sin – He became the curse – shed His blood, gave up His life – FOR YOU – so that you may be free – free to actually live as God created and desires you to live. A life which He Himself declares to be “very good.”

Are you living as a free man, or a slave? The knee-jerk response is to say, “of course I’m a free man” --- but are you? The apostle doesn’t warn us for no good reason.

Remember that old evangelism question? “If you were to die today, would you go to heaven?” Do you find yourself wanting to say something like – “Well, I hope so” (but sounding very uncertain)? Or, “I need to do this, or not do that, before I can be certain.” “God will not love me unless I _____.”

Notice how the focus is on you – what you need to do, or stop doing. And when the focus is on you, there is no certainty – which is to say, there is no freedom.

The Apostle Paul writes to your fellow Christians in Galatia who have also been set free through the blood of Jesus Christ – and yet – they are in danger of submitting once again “to a yoke of slavery.”

For the Galatians, the yoke was being circumcised. There were some in the midst teaching that you HAD to be circumcised to be a child of God – and without it, God’s favor does not rest upon you. Others to whom Paul ministered were told you had to keep the OT dietary and Sabbath laws – or you were cut off from God.

What is your yoke? Does the uncertainty of God’s love for you haunt you? Do you tell yourself that, “God will not love me unless”? Unless I go to church every Sunday. Unless I prove to Him how sorry I am for what I’ve done. Unless I stop smoking, watching porn, cussing, stealing unless I stop sinning?

Notice – it’s all about I, I, I – what I must do, or stop doing. God’s love for me is dependent upon me. That’s a yoke which makes one to be a slave. [P]

Making our obedience to God’s Law the means by which we are saved is a yoke of slavery – because we do not keep His commandments. But we also abuse the freedom we have been given when we throw out God’s Law altogether – when we say, “I’m free in Christ, forgiven, now I can do whatever I please!”

Like a boat, it doesn’t matter which side you fall out of – you get wet either way. So also with misusing God’s Word and abusing our freedom in Christ. So the Apostle Paul warns us: “For you were called to freedom, brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

We are actually abusing God Himself when we say – “He loves me, so I don’t have to go to church, I don’t have to have anything to do with God.” Or, “Christ forgives me, so I guess I’ll keep on getting drunk.” Dearly beloved, Jesus didn’t set you free only to have you run back and become a slave to sin all over again!

Paul is very clear. DO NOT submit again to a yoke of slavery! And, DO NOT use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh!

So what IS the Christian to DO? Simply this – trust that Christ HAS forgiven all your sin, that “It is finished” – that God DOES love you and is with you – and that He has good use for you in this life.

Faith in Jesus Christ not only sets you free from sin and from the condemnation of God's Law – it also brings forth the fruit of love in your life. Rather than living in the slavery of guilt, shame, selfishness, addiction, rage, and so forth – you are free to serve your neighbor.

What does it mean to live as a free man, as a Christian? It means that Christ's forgiveness and salvation sets you free from spending your life trying to work your way to heaven – and now you can use your time, your life, your energy, to serve one another.

Yes, the danger of submitting to the yoke of slavery remains – living as if you have to speak well of your neighbor OR ELSE God will not love you – thinking you have to stop getting angry with your spouse OR God will not forgive you.

NO, Christ's blood releases you from the burdensome condemnation of the Law. And NO, it's not okay with God for you to sin – but Christ has set you free from the bondage of your sin. Through the blood of Jesus Christ you are forgiven – and free to take care of your neighbor – simply because he needs your care!

St. Paul says that a free man walks by the Spirit – he is a hearer of God's Word – by which the Holy Spirit leads him to trust in Christ so that he can live as a FORGIVEN sinner.

The Holy Spirit crucifies our sinful nature and its selfish desires – and a new man arises, in whom the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) – all the things your fellow man desperately needs.

With His Body and Blood, Jesus releases you from slavery today. No yoke. No condemnation. No guilt/shame. His Body and Blood "for you." His forgiveness to liberate you. His Spirit – so that you may walk, and live, in His freedom. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.