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Presentation Transcript
Freedom in Christ
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We've been working on a series called mental Health and the Bible. We just finished two parts of the series on mind control and the tendency for some people to surrender their will to others who are sometimes abusive and controlling. Today we are stepping out of that series to focus on the Christian way of preventing that kind of abusive mind control. The Title is Freedom in Christ.

Would you not agree with me that to really understand the Bible, we need to know the social context that the writer was writing in? Very important, isn't it? You can't just jerk something out of its context and not understand what was going on when he wrote it – especially true in the time of the New Testament, I think.

People always relate to what's happening to them, based on what's going on around them and on what has happened to them in the past, don't they? I'll give you an example. We read the gospels and we wonder how the Jewish people could be so blind to all the scriptures about the Messiah. I mean, even His disciples just didn't get it! That's amazing, because Jews were taught, from the time they were little, the Old Testament. They were all very familiar with the Law and the Prophets. They'd read every word of it. So why did they misunderstand it so completely? Well, they were reading the scriptures from the perspective of a conquered people. And they were longing for release from Roman oppression. They were looking for a Savior to come and save them right now! So the part about Jesus' second coming – with a rod of iron – to deliver His people really resonated with them. So that's what they focused on. That's where all their energy went – to those scriptures. And the part about being meek and gentle, and being sacrificed, well, that didn't fit in so good with what they needed – they thought – so they kind of ignored that. It's what people do. So that's an example of how it's so important to understand what was going on at the time to understand why things happened like they did.

So Paul uses a term in the New Testament – *freedom in Christ*. What did he mean when he was saying that? What was going on in his head? And what might it have to do with us today? Since

social context is important for understanding biblical things, let's kind of get the social context of what was going on in those times. When Paul was walking the Damascus Road on his way to persecute the church, the world was more at peace than it had even been in the history of the world. And that peace was provided by the Roman Empire. Everywhere there was civil order. We take that for granted today, because we've all lived a whole lifetime in country where there was civil order. But this was, pretty much, a new experience in the world. In times before Paul and Jesus, governments only *took* from people and didn't provide much back. Rome, for all its faults, understood that if you wanted to control the whole world, you had to give them some kind of reason to submit. So one of the things that they did was bring law and order to the world. Criminals were caught and punished. Laws were enforced and observed. Because of that, it was possible to travel without as much fear as in the past. There was a mail system that actually worked. There was a currency that you could count on, so it was less likely to get ripped off. But all that order came at a high price, didn't it?

Besides being more at peace, the world was also in more bondage than it had ever been before. There was only one state and it was Rome. And there was only one master and he was Tiberius Caesar. And there were the centurions of Tiberius Caesar, who quelled the rebellions. And there were the tax collectors of Tiberius Caesar. They took the grain from the fields and the flax from the spindle to feed the legions and fill the tax coffers of the caesar. And there were the impressors, who found unwilling recruits for the circus. And then there were the executioners, who imposed harsh Roman law to quiet those who had been proscribed.

The people were there to serve the state. That was the way it was thought of. People who thought differently, or who got out of line, were persecuted. Those who looked different, or came from far-off places, were disdained. There was contempt for human life. What was the life of *one* man in a crowded world? That was kind of the way they thought about it at that time. If one person was going to disturb the status quo, better for that person to die than for there to be unrest.

It was not uncommon for Roman tax collectors to take land. If you want tax money from people, and they raise crops, if you take their land from them, they can't produce any more crops, can they? They would take their work animals. They would even take their children from them and sell them as servants and slaves to pay the tax bills. It was not uncommon to see thieves or dissidents hung up on trees or walls – left to die and decompose in the Mediterranean sun.

We saw last week that this government is used in the book of Revelation as a symbol for the last oppressive system to rule the earth. It was *so* bad, *so* controlling, *so* harsh that when God wanted to show how bad it was going to get at the end, He used that system as an example. We're told, in Revelation, that this system is the devil's way of controlling and ruling people. He would like to impose order on us, but not for *our* good – for *his*.

So it's in this social context that Paul and Peter and the church functioned. The word *freedom* had associated with it the *longing* for it, because they did *not* have it.

Now, for Jewish people there was also a religious context. And certainly Paul and Peter were a part of that. The Jews, who lived in the holy land at the time Jesus, had a history of both slavery and freedom. They were first oppressed as slaves in Egypt.... I guess first, maybe, we should say that they were all free people. Then they went into slavery in Egypt. Then God saved them out of that and they became the greatest nation on the face of the earth. Then, because they disobeyed God, He allowed their foolish ways to take them into slavery once again – to the Babylonians. And five hundred years before Christ, at God’s direction, they returned to the holy land from Babylon, and they rebuilt the temple, the city and the wall around the holy city, Jerusalem. So they reestablished their religion and their culture. And although they were subject to Persia for a time, they were more free than they were when they were in slavery in Babylon.

Now the *attitude* of the religious people, when they came back from slavery, was one of making sure that God never had an excuse to punish them again. So the idea was to construct a wall around the Law, because they went into captivity because they broke the Law. So they were going to construct a wall around the Law so that you couldn’t even get close to breaking it. So they created what is called the *oral law* – the traditions – that went *beyond* the requirements of the Law of God. An example would be – there’s a term used in the Bible – *a Sabbath’s day journey*. Nowhere in the Bible – in the Law part of the Bible – is there ever a specific distance given to limit travel on the Sabbath. You can’t find it. That was a part of their oral tradition. If we limit how far people can go, and make that limit so small that it isn’t really working, then there’s no way anybody can break the Sabbath. That’s how they thought about it. So that’s an example of the oral tradition and the purpose of it.

When Jesus arrived on the scene, there were the Pharisees, who, as Jesus put it Himself, sat in Moses’ seat. They had created this long list of do’s and don’ts, amplifying the requirements of God’s original Law. They gave more weight to the oral law that had been handed down than they did to the Law of God. Let’s read some about that in Mark 7, and verse.... we’ll read quite a bit here, because this is very instructive.

Mk. 7:1 – *The Pharisees* – it says in Mark 7:1 – *and some of the teachers of the law, who had come from Jerusalem, gathered around Jesus and saw some of His disciples eating food with hands that were unclean, that is unwashed.* And it says in parentheses, in verse 3, *(The Pharisees and all Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders – not to the law of Moses, but to the tradition of the elders. So this was a part of that oral law, too. And they observe many other traditions, such as washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)* So the Pharisees and the teachers, of Jesus asked, “*Why don’t your disciples live according to the traditions of the elders instead of eating their food with unclean hands?*” So now we’re going to find out what Jesus thinks about the oral law. “*Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. As it is written, ‘this people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain. Their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commandments of God and are holding on to the traditions of*

men.” And He said to them, “You have a fine way – He got a little sarcastic, didn’t He? – you have a fine way of setting aside the commandments of God in order to observe your own traditions. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘anyone who curses his father or his mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might have otherwise received from me is Corban’ – that is, a gift devoted to God – then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.

Jesus’ point was that only God is smart enough to make laws that really work. And when we think that we’re smart enough to amplify that and augment it, we always wind up causing ourselves and others to actually end up breaking the true Law of God.

Here’s something else He said. Matthew 23:13.

Mt. 23:13 – *Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. Now I want you to notice what we’re going to find out here. In the first part of this that we read, He blames the Pharisees for what they did to the Law. Right? It sounds like they are the ones who are going to be in trouble and the people are not, doesn’t it? Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter in, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you teachers of the Law! And Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are!* So you see the kind of people that are affected by that kind of teaching bear responsibility, too, don’t they? It affects them. And it causes them to become *like* the Pharisees! Turning ordinary people into unthinking fanatics.

You know, I wonder what Paul thought when he read Matthew’s recollection of Jesus’ words – having been a Pharisee himself. Having been a *fanatic* himself. In – I think it was ’78 – there was a bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden, where these two robbers came in with machine guns, held five people hostage for five days, strapped dynamite to their bodies, and threatened them all repeatedly. One of the women who had the dynamite strapped to her body later started a defense fund for one of the robbers – or maybe all of them...I can’t remember – and became an advocate for her captors. I explained it last time we talked about this why that happens. There’s similar things like that going on here, too, when we talk about people becoming *twice as much a son of hell as you are*.

Let’s go to John 11. I want to show you what the Pharisees’ reaction was to Jesus’ frontal assault on their oral tradition.

Jn. 11:45 – *Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. And then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are*

we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs! If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” So what are they worried about? Well, they’re worried about the nation. You know, you don’t want to upset the apple cart. One of the things about the Stockholm Syndrome is that when you’re in the grip of an oppressor – a captor – you just try to go along and maintain the status quo. You don’t want them to get upset because then they’ll blow! And that’s exactly what the Romans did. When there was an uprising – like there was in 69-70 AD – they came in and they tore the temple down to the ground! There was always a *huge* overreaction when there was insurrection. And everybody knew that. So they were terrified. So that was one of the things they were worried about. And what was the second thing they were worried about? Actually, they put this first. *Our place*. They saw that Jesus was more spiritually powerful than they. And they saw that everyone would follow Him if He was allowed to continue speaking – because He could do miracles and He had wisdom. And that meant that they would *lose power*. And notice what comes next:

V-49 – *Then one of them, Caiaphas, who was the high priest – the high priest! – that year, spoke to them, “You know nothing at all! – you dummies” – that’s what he’s saying – “you do not realize that it’s better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”* So he has the same attitude the Romans do, doesn’t he? Better to lose one guy than everybody fall. Who’s attitude is that? Where does that attitude come from? That comes from the devil, doesn’t it? It is also interesting in verse 51:

V-51 – *He did not say this on his own, but as the high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation – and not only for the nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.*

And it says in verse 53:

V-53 – *And from that day on, they plotted to take His life.* God caused this self-serving man...his words became prophecy about what Christ was going to do.

So the Pharisees wanted to be free of Rome so they could continue to oppress and control the people. They had the same attitude the Romans had. They were control freaks – no better than the Romans. So these men sat in Moses’ seat, and with the Romans, they were really both doing the devil’s work. *You make them twice the sons of hell as yourselves.*

Okay, so we’ve looked at some of the Bible context of the time – Roman peace and order at the price of oppression – then a Jewish history of slavery and freedom. Jewish reaction to slavery in Babylon was to tighten up on the rules. Their application of religion was similar to the Roman application of civil control – same kind of approach. So, when we read about freedom in the New Testament, there was no civil freedom. There was no religious freedom either. That’s the

kind of situation they were in. We have both of those in this country, don't we? We have freedom to move about and we can worship as we please.

So let's move to the post-resurrection New Testament now. In the New Testament, there are three aspects of freedom that are discussed. The first, and most important, and the greatest, and the most often discussed, and most well-known is the freedom from sin. That's what this festival is about. That's one reason I saved this presentation for the spring festivals, because we're celebrating our freedom from sin and from its penalty – eternal death – through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So let's go to Romans 6, and verse 16, and see what Paul has to say about freedom from sin – thinking that it's in the context of no freedom of religion and no freedom of civil government.

Rom. 6:16 – *Do you know that when you offer yourselves to someone – to obey him – as slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of righteousness. I put this in human terms, because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity, and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.*

I was thinking about two women that I saw on *Larry King Live* last week. They'd come out of this polygamous cult – this big thing that's going on down in Texas – some time ago, actually. One came out ten years ago and one was just out the last year or two. They both talked about a change of perception that came over them once they left the compound. You know how all these cults always have compounds? That's where they can control all the information. They used to think that their cult was free and that living outside it would enslave them to sin. But once out, they experienced this huge change of perception. They realized that there were many people outside that were more willing to help them than there were people inside – that they were more free outside than they were inside. But see, they didn't realize that they had been enslaved until they got out and saw the whole picture.

Paul's talking about that here. Most of us who did not grow up in the church. when we first encountered the Law of God, it felt restrictive to us because we weren't used to keeping it. But as we got used to it, then we came around and we had a change of perception, and we realized, "Oh, living this way makes life *better!* And what I used to do was enslaving me to the penalties of that way of life" – one of which – which I never thought of when I was a kid, of course – was death. So there's that thing that happens to Christians. There's a change in perception.

V-21 – *What benefit did you reap at that time from the things that you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death. But now you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God. The benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

We experience a profound change in perception when we become converted. We think what used to be restrictive is now freedom, and what we used to think was freedom is now restriction. There are so many scriptures about this. *If you know the truth, the truth shall make you free. And if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed!* You know, it's fine to feel free for the moment and to do whatever we want to do, but then we die later. So really, it's much better to live life God's way and not suffer the physical penalties in this life, and then to live forever with Him. That's real freedom!

Let's go to 2 Peter 2, and read something that Peter said. Talking about a situation they had in the church – this is a big issue with the church – after the resurrection.

2Pt. 2:19 – *While they promise them freedom, they themselves are slaves of depravity. For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and again are entangled in it, and overcome, they are worse off at the end than at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to have turned their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit" and "a sow goes back to her wallowing in the mud."*

You know, one of the other women that was held hostage in Stockholm, after she was released, later married one of the robbers. Married him! Some people want to go back, don't they? They want to go back to their captors. Some people in ancient Israel wanted to go back to the onion and the garlic and the leeks of Egypt. Some people spend a time in religious dedication and then give it up later in favor of an old life. So that is one of the big issues that raged in the church.

The other one was *freedom to worship*. We talked about this a little. The biblical stand is, *Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your mind*. God has to come first. He is always *first*. There are things that Jesus said more directly related to government. In Matthew 10:28, He said:

Mt. 10:28 – *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Now back then, the government killed bodies. They can't get away with that today – at least, most of the time they can't. But back then they did it with impunity. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell.* That's pretty much a reference to whom we have to give allegiance to when push comes to shove – when there's a contradiction.

Lk. 20:19 – *The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest Him immediately, because they knew He had spoken this parable against them and they were afraid of the people. Keeping a close watch on Him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest, and they hoped to catch Jesus in something He said, so they might hand Him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned Him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” And He saw through their duplicity and said to them, “Show Me a dinarius.” So they gave Him a coin. And He said, “Whose portrait and inscription are on it?” And they said, “Caesar’s.” He said to them, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, to God what is God’s.” He didn’t let them catch Him there. Then it says: They were unable to trap in what He had said there in public, and astonished by His answer, they became silent.*

So the nation He was born into was a subjugated nation. But they were allowed, at times in their history, to worship God their own way. Jesus functioned in that subjugated system. He practiced His religion and put God first, even in spite of the Jews and in spite of the Romans. Sometimes He accosted people directly, and other times He just very carefully maneuvered around. And that’s one example: *Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God what is God’s.* It’s interesting that He really didn’t take that much exception with the Romans. It was the *Jews* – the religious freedom issue – that was what really got Him going, wasn’t it? He knew how to navigate the Roman system, but He went head on and directly at the laws of men.

There’s a third kind that they talked about, too – which we’ve already mentioned – and that is *freedom from the commandments of men.* That was an issue in the New Testament church. Jesus said, *They worship Me in vain and their teachings are but rules taught by men.* Paul talks a lot about this. It’s in Galatians 1:1.

Gal. 1:1 – *Paul, an apostle – notice what he says here – not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead, and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches in Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of God our Father. You see, they needed delivering, didn’t they? They were in a tight spot. And by the time he wrote this, the Roman system was really starting to dial in on Christianity. It was really becoming a lot harder to be a Christian. They had switched from Saturn, whose day was Saturday, and they were now worshipping Mithra, the sun god, whose day was Sunday. So Christians were starting to stand out a lot more all of a sudden. They did need deliverance from that. Grace to you, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you, by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel, which is really not another. Only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. So when you distort the gospel of Christ, that means*

some man has started trying to add or take away, right? Commandments of men. *But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. For we have said before, and so say I again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the favor of men or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.* I'm going to read that again. *If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.* You see, you can't do both of those things at the same time. *For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.* Of course, we know the issues there had to do with the oral law, and also the parts of the law of Moses, that had to do with the old covenant, that were no longer in effect, because they represented other covenants or the sacrifice of Christ.

Let's read, in 1 Corinthians 7, something else he said about this.

1 Cor. 7:20 – *Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't worry about it. Although, if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freed man. Similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.* That guy was so smart about the way he used words, wasn't he? *You were bought with a price. Do not become the slaves of men.* What is all this about? It's the same issue Jesus fought, actually. We're supposed to be free to worship God according to the word of God, without the constriction of human beings. Because every time somebody tries to make it better, they make it worse.

You know, the Pharisees tried to intervene between God and their peers. They were trying to make people obey the Law, but they wound up causing people to break it. And in the New Testament church, there were some people who tried to gain control of the congregations, so they could rule over people, and they used the very same issues. The parts of the law that were fulfilled in Christ they used as a leash to try to control people. They didn't want people to understand that they were now under a new covenant – no longer under the oral law, which was strictly a tradition of men.

Why would you think some people were trying to control so much? Well, everybody likes control. I don't like my car to not stop when I don't put on the brakes. I don't like the accelerator to go to the floor when I'm not pushing it there. I want to be in control of my car. I feel better. I feel safe. Right? But then there's this faith thing. There are some things where it's okay to be in control, and you should be, but then there are other things where we shouldn't. We should be in control of ourselves and not so much worry about other people. And also – and this is a really smutty thing to mention – there was money. There is a lot of money in religion. People tithe. And they want to support their religious beliefs. They want to donate, and they want to help the poor, and they want to honor God by giving back some of what He's given them. So there's money there. And Paul and Peter even mention that as one of the motives for that kind of thing going on.

Well, I've come to a third point in the sermon and that's contemporary applications of those three kinds of freedom. I think you guys have already connected the dots, haven't you? It's essentially the same issue today as it was back then. We talk about freedom from sin. It's worse now I think. If there was ever a culture that was held captive to sin and the penalties of it, *we* are. It's just a constant stream of people who come through my practice who are suffering from the violations of the laws of God and don't even realize that's why they're having such a bad time. People don't know what to do to avoid problems because they don't have the lamp to show them how to stay out of trouble.

I was blown away a few weeks ago when I was watching this guy, Glenn Beck. He had Jeff Foxworthy on his show. Between comedy deals that they'd show – clips from Jeff – they got to talking about religion. Jeff Foxworthy said on cable television that he thought the law of God was given to keep us out of trouble. You know, not very many people really *know* that these days. So I kind of sat up out of my half-asleep state and took note of that. But you know, we, as a people, can be so happy that we *know* the difference between right and wrong, and what's good for us and what isn't, and that we have been washed clean of our sins, and that we know the importance of obeying God. That is a *huge* blessing.

I have been a minister for a long time and I've talked to a lot of problems (laughter) – a faithful Freudian slip – I've talked to a lot of people *about* problems, and I always thought that people in the church had a lot of problems until I started working with people who are not a part of it. And I'll bet you in a year I've run into more people with worse problems than all the whole time in my life as a church pastor. I haven't seen as many people, but the problems that people come in the door with are worse than *any* of the problems that...it's just amazing. Even if we're not very good Christians – even a half-hearted effort – saves us quite a bit of trouble.

Freedom to worship. You know, this nation was founded because of discrimination – financial and religious. And the brilliant men who crafted our founding documents...you know, the smart ones left. They came over here, because they were tired of just following another sheep's backside around and just doing what they were supposed to do. They came over here to find freedom. They crafted our founding documents and they were *stimulated* to create a free nation because of the oppression that they'd experienced.

I think of George Washington's act of *voluntarily* surrendering his commission and refusing to take control of the government, even though he *could* have. That sent a shock wave around the world! It did! The people in France. That caused the French Revolution – that and their huge debt they'd built up freeing us. You know, we make fun of the French today, but we probably wouldn't be a country if it weren't for them. They built up such a debt fighting the British off of us, that actually, unintended consequences of that were the revolution. The people saw what was going on here and *wanted* the kind of freedom we had. What happened first here is still influencing people around the world. Even in Muslim nations, the educated folks are clamoring for democracy and freedom.

Of course, we're gradually losing ours, and I'm afraid that if we have more attacks on our soil, that'll be an excuse to take even more away, but...a lesson of history.

Then the third issue, of course, was freedom from religious constraint. And as we saw, there was a battle going on for control of the people, for power and money. No different today. I was thinking about it...most of the mainstream Christian groups in the United States are not run by one person, or even a little group of people. They have a whole system of democracy. People get elected in and out, and from generation to generation, they transition power smoothly. Doctrines are decided by different methods, but mostly a system of maintaining doctrinal integrity that includes the consideration of others. They've also found a way to have an organization that still allows people to express themselves spiritually. They have the *freedom* to do that. It seems that with our COG background of authoritarian rule, we are in our organized groups, for the most part, *way* behind – *WAY* behind on that.

I think about the gifts of the Spirit, and how I never learned anything about that in any of the churches of God I was in before. I can't help but believe that that's a frightening concept for the ministry – to consider that God could work among people other than them. "They might take away our nation and our place." We're afraid we're going to lose control – just like the Pharisees felt when they saw that Jesus was doing things that *they* could not do. So they became afraid. When confronted with the work of the Holy Spirit and somebody else, they opted to go defensive. He had to go. Those guys became monsters and fiends back in Christ's time because of that issue.

There's a young woman I know who is a gifted teacher. She told her pastor she was going to attend the Park City Feast of Tabernacles – was going to teach youth classes there and help the kids learn more about God. Do you know what her pastor told her? He told her that if she did she would never do anything in her congregation again. When asked, "Why?" he said, "Because you would be breaking the unity of our church." You think about how that approach affects the members of that organization. It *diminishes* them. It *constricts* spiritually. It disconnects them from God and it disconnects them from their brethren in the church. That young woman came to Park City and met a whole lot of dedicated people that she never would have met if she hadn't come there. Now she has a bigger connection among the people of God. So actually, by going to that new place, she increased, in a small way, the unity of the church. And she was also able to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit to use her giftedness to care for children. If she had obeyed her pastor, then she would not have been able to do those things. And I believe, by the results of what happened, he wanted her to.

That's the crux of the issue. Are we going to follow God or are we going to follow the conventions and the rules and the traditions of men?

1 Cor. 7:22 – *For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's free man. Likewise also, he that is called being free, is Christ's servant. We read that, but we didn't read this. You are bought with a price. Be you not the servants of men.*

If you are Christ's servant, then you are washed free of your sins. And if you are the servants of men, you're *not* following Christ and so you are *not* free of your sins. When it says to obey *God*, that's a part of the package! We have to stand up for ourselves and for what God is doing in us.

As Paul walked through the ancient world, preaching the gospel, he battled a government that was becoming increasingly hostile to his faith. And he battled a controlling movement, within his own church, that wanted to pull people back under control. It was a movement that he had once supported fanatically. He'd been on *both* sides of the control issue. But it is for *freedom* that Christ has set us free. *Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*