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Transcript

Freedom in Christ – A Deeper Meaning

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Today we're talking about *Freedom in Christ – A Deeper Meaning*. *Freedom in Christ* is a term that Paul gives us in Galatians, the second chapter. Let's read about it, starting in verse 3. He says here:

Galatians 2:3-5 – *But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*

In this context, what is Paul talking about? Well, since the issue is “should Gentiles be circumcised?” some of the Christians thought they should be. But the church leaders got together – in Acts, it's recorded – and they saw that, since circumcision was originally related to a covenant God made with Abraham, and then later added to the law of Moses, because the keepers of the law of Moses in Israel were all sons of Abraham too, it wasn't necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised. In fact, they discovered in Acts, it wasn't necessary for anyone now, because anyone could be a part of the Israel of God, which is the church – both Jews and Gentiles. And which church has a New Covenant – no longer Abrahamic and no longer Mosaic, but Christian – of which Christ is our High Priest.

Circumcision, we're told in the New Testament, is now of the heart – the spirit – rather than the flesh. Just as obedience to the law of God is still a part of the New Covenant, but now of the spirit, it is much more applicable because it involves intent now.

So now, Christians were free from the former covenants and free from the control that Jewish leaders, and Judaism, and also Jewish Christians who didn't understand – with all the man-made rules that had been added as after-thoughts to the law of God – no longer enslaved by those imperfect rules. If you'll remember, Jesus said that the Law and the Prophets – not the man-made part that the Jew had added, but the entire Law and the Prophets, including the Ten

Commandments – were condensed into two major New Covenant laws – love God and love fellow man. That’s what we focus on now.

So, that’s one way to think about freedom in Christ – free from the other two covenants and free from following man-made rules of the Jews.

Now, moving to another aspect of *freedom in Christ* that’s in the Bible, in John 8, Jesus said:

John 8:32 - ...*the truth will set you free.*

So, what kind of freedom is He talking about here? Well, He was talking to some people who were *slaves to sin*. That’s a direct quote. So, He’s talking about freedom from sin, which is the violation of the law of God. Truth, He said, would set them free from living sinful lives.

So, what else can we think about here? Well, freedom from sin, Jesus said, comes from believing what God says – which is true – instead of believing what the devil says – which is lies. And He says that the devil induces us to sin by his lies, but God’s truth frees us from those lies and from the sinful way of life that they engender. So, that’s another one.

Now, freedom from sin’s penalty. We can also think about the freedom in Christ that Paul spoke about – not only as freedom from committing more sin in our everyday lives, like Jesus said, but also freedom from the penalty that we should all have to pay for our past sins. That freedom comes from Christ’s sacrifice. We call it *grace*.

Look in John 1:14.

John 1:14 – *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace* – which is freedom from sin’s penalty and death – *and truth*. Grace and truth. He was filled with it.

So, we have three applications of the idea of freedom in Christ – freedom from the older covenants of Abraham and Moses, which Jewish Christians wanted to enforce on the church, freedom from sin in our lives as long as we follow God’s way, and freedom from the penalties of sin, because Christ has paid the penalty for us already.

So, in all three cases, truth leads us to these freedoms. But, are there more ways to understand the concept of *freedom in Christ*? It seems that there are a lot more – way more. And some of it may – if we understand it – save our eternal lives in this present age. So, let’s carry this a bit further.

I read once, in a biology text book, that life first evolved as a simple single cell and then it evolved from that. That’s the theory. The problem is, however, that there has *never* been a simple cell of any kind. And when we think about how God operates, we look up and we see the

universe, and the further out we can look – with all the new telescopes – they have them mounted out in space on spacecraft – the further out we look, the more it seems limitless. \

And when we look into a cell, for example, the deeper we look, the more complex it is. Did you know that, in some cells, there are little vehicles with wheels on them that move things from one part of the cell to another – food and so forth – I think. And every living cell has in it information – information coded into the cell – that the cell follows to live and to reproduce and perform its other functions.

So, where did the information come from? Well, some of the most brilliant scientists, when faced with the challenge of explaining how intelligence – information – where that came from – but not wanting to say it came from God or some sort of higher power, have said it must have come from aliens. Can you imagine that? But then, where did aliens, intelligent enough to deliver information, come from – if they even existed at all? No proof of that.

So, the creation, David tells us, is proof that there is an intelligent God, who distributes information to every cell in every body. And the point here is, that God is the kind of God, who the more we look into anything He has created – any body, any plan, any knowledge, any concept – the more there is to learn yet. And when He makes a statement, such as the Ten Commandments, or the first beatitude – *blessed are the poor in spirit* – or the statement that *the truth will set your free*, the more we understand about it, the more we know that there's more yet to understand.

So, we've detailed three things about it, and yet, there's probably, maybe, an infinite number of meanings. But let's look in Romans 11:33. Paul said:

Romans 11:33 – *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments....* I mean, you can look at something as simple as, let's say, the Sabbath and the Ten Commandments. Keep the seventh day holy. To understand it, we can't! It's inscrutable, because God is so deep! *For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?* No, He's ours.

So, it's quite possible for Jesus to make a statement that would sound simple enough to our spiritual impoverished and simple minds, but which is limitless in its applications – an overarching, supreme concept! And this is one like that. So, follow along with me and in this story as I attempt to unravel one thread of all of this.

Let's start with Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve lived in the Garden, they got to make a lot of choices. They had a lot of freedom. Adam got to choose the names for all the animals. He could pick whatever he wanted. God gave him the freedom to do that. Since his job was to dress and keep the Garden, he could choose how short to cut the grass – if they had grass – and which limbs to lop off the trees, and where to plant various things, perhaps. And even the devil was free

to come into the Garden. Adam and Eve were free to listen to him. And then, free to form their own opinions about what he said and what it meant. And since John tells us that the One who created these people...I suppose we could even call it – their freedom – freedom in Christ, in a manner of speaking, because He was speaking to them.

But they made some really terrible choices with their freedom. And they listened to and believed the lies of the devil, and so became his children instead of God's. Now, that might sound like an extreme statement. Jesus was talking to some people, and He said, "You're of your father, the devil!" And why were they? Because they listened to him and believed him rather than Christ.

So, by the time Moses came into the picture several thousand years later, Israel surrendered the freedom that they had in Abraham to the slavery of Egypt. And they had *no* choices, except to work and live a miserable existence, or stop working and die. They were slaves of Egypt, just as Adam and Eve had become slaves to the devil and to sin.

But God freed Israel. Freedom is His way. He took them to a new home – a land of milk and honey – and He set up *His* kind of government for them. I don't know if people recognize what that looked like, but in this utopian government, and during the time of the judges, there were rules, but no police, no army, no national government, no city governments, no HOAs, no kings, no presidents, no senators, no congressmen, no lobbyists, no elections, no deep state bureaucracy, no welfare paid to the poor and exacted from the rest. There were tribal and clan leaders and there were judges, but all of those people – from what we can tell – worked for a living. There weren't paid from some tax fund. So, there were no taxes to be paid for any of that. Now, there were tithes to be paid to maintain the religion of God – God's government. So that was ten percent, which is a pittance compared to what we have to pay in all the taxes now. I heard a thing once where how much would a loaf of bread cost if there were no taxes? Well, it would just be pennies, even to this day. Because everybody's got to get enough out of that loaf of bread to pay all the taxes for all the parts that they play in the making of the that bread. And because there was no system, there was no way for the pathological to control the mentally healthy – because they weren't taxed and their economy thrived. People were able to make money more easily, and because they had more money to spend, there was more money to spend on other people's businesses. So it kind of blossomed.

I don't want to be political, but I read once recently that the Trump tax cut took effect was the year that more money went into the federal government than at any time in history. Now, how could that be if he dropped taxes by ten percent? Well, because people took that money and spent it on things. And the people that received the benefit of that money paid taxes on it and it just became a positive spiral that was just ever growing. It boosted the economy and made everything bigger, so everybody was making more money. So, they were making way more money in tax income – the government was – just by cutting taxes, which is kind of counter-intuitive. You have to understand how it all works.

In God's system, even then, God knew that the more intelligent, when combined with pathology, would seek to take everything from those who just wanted to be left alone and live their lives. So, He made a simple rule, administered by a very few judges, who volunteered their time. All land, which is where the wealth came from back in that day – not from computer chips – all land had to go back to the original family that owned it every fifty years.

Now, you'll remember that when they came into the land, God divided the land up so everybody had some. So, there was no way to become obscenely rich and powerful, so long as these rules were observed. So, the few simple rules that God made kept people, pretty much, healthy and fed. And all those who owned land – and that would be almost everyone – would not harvest their crops completely. They would leave the corners of the fields, so that the poor would have something to eat. So no bureaucracy to administer it. What if somebody was too sick to go get it? Well, that's where the community came in. Everyone was to take care of everybody else – take care of their neighbors. Everyone was instructed to take care of those who could not take care of themselves – elders, orphans, sick – that sort. If a road needed to be built, the community just got together and built one. You can bet there were no unnecessary roads built so that someone could skim off the top of the construction job. Nobody got rich off government contracts because there weren't any.

If a crime was committed, it fell to the community to take it to the judges, and then the judge would tell them to execute justice – whatever that was. There was one instance mentioned that was really graphic and horrible. I think it was in Judges where a woman was horribly violated, then murdered by a gang of thugs. And the community was so outraged by this that they sent parts of her body to every tribe in the land. Now, that was a shocking act, but it helped the people in other places be enraged, too, about what had happened. And the nation sent a number of men to the site of the crime, and they eventually found the culprits and put them to death. And word got around, so there was no more gang activity for a while after that. Everyone was free to go back to their homes, back to working their land, and there was peace.

And, if they were attacked by other nations, God would appoint someone to gather an army, and then He would fight their battles for them, we're told. There is one spine-chilling account in Joshua 5, where Joshua, who was the leader of Israel at that time, was about to lay siege to Jericho. And while plans were being laid, he looked up one day, and he saw a man with His drawn sword in His hand. I think He may have caught Joshua a bit off guard. And Joshua said to Him, "Are you for us or are you one of our adversaries?" And the man looked him in the eye, and said to him, "I am the commander of the armies of the LORD." So, we know who that is, don't we? Joshua was standing face to face the One who led God's army to the earth at the last trumpet – Jesus Christ. So, guess who won Jericho? Without losing a person.

So, this land – the first nation God had ever led – was a land of incredible freedom – freedom from military conscription, freedom from taxation, freedom from crime, freedom to make a life unimpeded by politically motivated regulations and people. And, of course, they had to follow

the laws that had been laid down, but those laws were not to control them, but to steer them away from trouble, so they'd be free to live happily. And, if they wanted to participate in the utopia, they had to choose to follow those laws. But, at least they had a choice.

So, notice what God tells them in Deuteronomy 30, verse 15:

Deuteronomy 30:15 – *See – look! – I have set before you today life and good, death and evil – those two choices – one or the other.*

V-19 – *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you – this is in 30, verse 19 now – I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.*

This is the same thing God said to Adam and Eve, and say to every one of us – from those days in the Garden until right now! We have the freedom to choose whom we will follow. And that is freedom to *choose* Christ and freedom *in* Christ, because He gives it to us.

So, now that we know what God's government is founded on – it's founded on freedom in Christ – and saw what it looked like when it was a real thing in the Old Testament, let's compare it with what we see across history right up until this time.

Let's start at Babel. After the flood, God told the sons of Noah to disperse and go all over the earth, repopulating it. But some of them, after a while, didn't want to do that. So, they went to the plain of Shinar, we're told, to build a city with a really tall tower – probably so that they could see enemies coming from all directions. And there was a despotic ruler at the core of it all. He's even named in the Bible after all this time. His name is Nimrod. Back in those days, they didn't have machines to build things, so it says they made bricks and built this city and this tower. So, how did they pay for all the labor to do all the work, and build all the bricks, and where did they get the materials? Back then, all the ancient civilizations were driven on the backs of slaves. And huge taxes existed to pay for the feeding of the slaves and the building materials. And, of course the wars they had to fight to capture big populations to keep them working as slaves. So, it was all about taking freedom away from people – the people in the nation – through taxation and the capturing of people to work as slaves.

I read a quote from Genghis Khan recently. He said, "I will unify all Mongols under one banner, even if I have to kill half of them to do it." He lived around the 1200s AD, right? So, right away, we see a picture there on the plain of Shinar that was the pattern for almost all human governments since then, up until democracy. I mean, even if you think about Rome in the time of Jesus, you can see it there. And think about Europe after Rome until democracy – royal families exacting huge taxes from the serfs that worked for the royals, since they owned almost all the land. It was exactly the same government plan as at Babel. And every government, pretty much, you can look at all through history ran that way. Maybe, once in a while, there might have been a

benevolent king, but most of the time, it's the people that seek power that wind up in those positions.

So, in Babel, and in most every human government since then, the operative word there is not freedom, but control. After 5,000 years of human government enslaving everyone, people finally got fed up with it, and the Greeks came up with the idea of a republic. From that came the idea of a democracy. And finally, King George of England decided to tax people, who he considered to be his property, without including them in those represented. And some of the young men in America, who weren't represented, set up a democracy and fought the royals of the land for their freedom. One of the statements at that time – actually adopted as a motto for one of the states – was *live free or die*. That all started out well. They did win and they were free, but as time has worn on, we find the rich in control – like they always have been – and those under them saddled with increasing taxes, and conscription, and regulation, and welfare, and other forms of control. And now that we have computers, it's possible to control people in an entirely new way.

Did you know that, in China, right now, if you speak out against the government, or engage in protests, for example, or don't do what is imagined by those in control as your civic duty, you might go to the store only to find that your credit card won't work anymore. Or, you may go to work and find out that your employer received orders to lay you off. So, they call it a social credit system. You build credit by minding your own business and keeping your mouth shut and letting the government do whatever it wants. Then you get credit points for it. So, you get to keep living in your apartment, which they own, and getting a salary, which they regulate, and all of that. So, that's going on right now in that country. Today, as we speak even, over thirteen million people have been locked into their apartments because of Covid. And to make matters worse, most of these nations are top heavy with debt from buying the votes necessary to stay in control, or to continue the flood of tax money into their own pockets, and they're all in need of economic salvation from somewhere.

So, this is an entirely different system, based on control, not freedom. Where does it come from? Well, there are other ways, beside economics, that tell us who's driving all of this.

I was watching a YouTube short recently, and there was a young woman arguing with some people about Roe vs. Wade. She said, "We're not murderers! What's taken out of a woman's body during an abortion is not a baby. It's just some biological matter." Somebody in the audience said, "It has a heartbeat." She said, "That's not a heartbeat. It's an electrical impulse." Now, those of you who know your Bibles, who more than any other being in heaven and earth wants to dehumanize and kill us all? Who is that? Well, let's look in 2 Corinthians 4:4.

2 Corinthians 4:4 – *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ – which is freedom – who is the image of God.*

So, you can see here what is has happened. There have always been two systems to choose from in the world – God’s and the devil’s. One is about freedom, which comes through Christ, and the other about slavery, which is spawned by the devil. One about good, the other disguised as good, but leading to evil.

So, that takes us in a slightly different direction for a minute. Let’s read in Hebrews 5. Let’s talk about spiritual maturity and what it is at base. Paul said:

Hebrews 5:14 – *But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

So, which kind of government is good? The free kind. Which kind is bad? The controlling kind. Good from evil.

So, the question I have to you is this: In the context of this sermon, do you have the spiritual maturity to discern good from evil when it comes from your government? Or, any government? Or, any person? Can you tell, when a new law is passed, if it’s good or bad? Can you tell when government programs, or agencies are begun, or monies appropriated, can you tell whether that’s going to be for good or for evil? Is it going to be for freedom or control? According to the Bible, if we’re spiritually mature, we can tell. And the greatest litmus test of all this, is it about freedom or control?

Let’s look at another crystal clear example. It’s in Revelation 13, beginning in verse 11. John said:

Revelation 13:11 – *Then I saw another beast – a beast is symbolic for government – rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. So, a lamb is a picture of Christ – the Lamb of God – yet this beast, even though it has somewhat of the appearance – something about it is like – Christ, yet this beast speaks like the dragon, who is the devil.*

So, we need spiritual maturity to tell the difference here between good and evil. Is it good? Or, is it just evil disguised as good?

V-12 – *It exercises all the authority – or control – of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast – it’s not that they get to choose. It forces them to it. So, this government is about power and authority and control. And it forces people to worship something other than God – instead of worshipping God. Continuing then – I broke into the middle of verse 12: ...whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people – so it’s very deceptive! It mimics some of the things that people of God have done – and by signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the*

image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. So, this creature representing itself as Christ, and yet, is really of the devil, is going to kill off everyone it can find that worships the other power – and that’s God. So, this is going to cause the people of God – who are in the middle of all this – to have to choose – to live free or die. Some of God’s people will be forced to that choice. Verse 16 – continuing: *It also causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.* I mean, if that isn’t social engineering, I don’t know what is. It’s a program to force people to follow the beast’s government or die. I mean, if you can’t buy, you can’t buy food. Right? You can’t sell, you can’t make money. And it says in verse 18: *This calls for wisdom* – so this is about the need for spiritual maturity here – the wisdom to discern good from evil – and to know what to do if caught up in it. It says: *...let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.*

Now, a huge amount of time and effort has been expended, futilely trying to identify someone, or some organization, or some nation, or some amalgam of nations as this power. But I don’t think this is for anybody but the people reading it at that time. So, the verse is not so much about us identifying who it is – who will do this – but knowing *what* they will try to do, and being able to identify what they’re doing, and identify the programs that they’re establishing – what they’ll look like. And we can just look at the way God operates and the way the devil operates, and we can know.

So, how do God’s people need to respond to this? What do they need to keep in mind? Well, just use some humorous, contemporary aphorisms: Who’s your daddy? Or, who you going to call? When you’re in trouble, who do you go to? Well, some people are going to go to the beast and get marked so they can buy and sell. But other people are going to go to God. Or, maybe the words of the song by that talented Jewish boy from Hibbing, *“It may be the devil, or it may be the lord, but you’re going to have to serve somebody.”*

So, that choice is sprinkled throughout our culture. It’s always good, as Jesus said, to try to avoid the unjust judge and blend in, but He also knew there is a time coming when we are not going to be able to hide from it. And it will be a case of *live free or die in Christ*. So, at which time, all those who die free in Christ will also be resurrected to eternal life, where they will watch those who just killed them be killed themselves. The irony of it! The finality of it! The justice of it! God be praised for His gift of freedom in Christ to all of us!

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.