

Freedom by Don Henderson

The last time I discussed the subject of freedom I referenced the song “Me and Bobby Magee.” If you are old enough to recognize the song you might remember the verse that goes something like, “Freedom just another word for nothing left to lose, and nothing that’s what Bobby left me.” Most would not count this secular song as having anything to do with Christianity; but I tend to find Jesus almost everywhere. And, the above verse seems to indicate that our notion of freedom is not all it’s cracked up to be.

Let’s compare our ideas of freedom with those put forth by Jesus in the Gospel of John, Chapter 8.

In verses 31 & 32 Jesus says that if you follow his word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. So, if we hold to his teachings, accept his constraints, believe and do what he says we will be free.

That direction is completely opposite to what the world teaches. To be free is the absence of constraint. How can one be free and be limited? The first Amendment to the Constitution gives us the right of free speech. We can pretty much say and do anything we want with little or no restrictions.

But, do we really practice the freedom that we hold so dear? Take the subject of food. I really like food. I spend time every day thinking of what delicious delicacies I can fix for the meals of the day. I would say I am free to eat whatever I want. Unfortunately, I have an annual medical checkup. The nurse always ask me the same question, “If you could change anything pertaining to your health what would it be? My answer, “Lose weight.” I bet many would answer the same way. The truth is we try to eat healthy foods.

But, at the same time, we want our food to taste good. In other words we choose the most liberating constraints. I believe that is what Jesus is offering. He says he is the bread of life. He is saying, “I am the best and the most liberating food.”

In verse 34 Jesus points out the enemy of freedom. He says sin is our enemy. Isn’t it interesting that our culture would say that most interference to freedoms comes from the outside. For instance an employee may complain that his boss is too restrictive. There are all kinds of so called external enemies of freedom.

Jesus says that our enemy lies within. We are made a slave of sin. Let’s look at a couple of ways we become slaves to sin. One, we are disobedient to our Creator. What do many say, “Nobody is going to tell me how to run my life.” The Bible says we were created in God’s image. To be disobedient violates our own created nature. We are not free to become who we were created to be. Next, sin makes us be self-centered. Sin causes us to use people instead of serving them.

To test out what Jesus is teaching let me ask you, “Have you ever been in love?” If you have then you understand that being in love means you lose some of your independence. True love and desired secular independence can’t exist at the same time. Let me prove my point. Recently, I went into the hospital for a pre-surgery appointment. My appointment was at 8 AM so I figured I would be through by 10 AM. Because the Doctor was delayed he didn’t see me until 10 AM. I was then informed that I had to visit five other hospital locations to complete my

pre-surgical workup. I was there for the rest of the day. My concern was not over the additional tests or the increased time of my visit. My concern was to notify my wife so she would not be worried by the delay. You see we were created to be in love. By being in love we set aside our feelings in order to serve others. Therein lies true happiness.

How can we find this freedom that Jesus offers? Jesus tells us by comparing in verse 35 the relationship between a servant and his master and a son and his father. A servant's relationship to his master depends on him doing what the master says. In other words, if he follows the rules he will keep his job. This is the theology of major religions and society that preach good works will keep you in favor with God. If you don't follow the rules God will punish you.

A son's relationship to his father is different. If a son messes up his father increases his support. His father does whatever is necessary to restore the son. This relationship is built on love. A relationship built on works makes God your boss. A relationship built on love makes God your Father. What are we looking for a boss or a Father?

If you're like me you will answer the Father's call to become son. Let's skip forward a few verses to verses 56-59 to find out how to become a son of the Most High God. When asked by the crowd how Jesus knew Abraham, in that Abraham lived many years before Jesus was on earth he answered "Before Abraham was I am." Now this must have really bothered the crowd, because they picked up stones to stone him. They must have known the Old Testament scriptures in Exodus 3 when the Lord spoke out of the burning bush to Moses and said tell the people "I am that I am." So, what made the people so mad? Jesus here in John is saying that he is God. And, he as God has come in the flesh to pay the penalty for sin. He has come to free mankind from the bondage of sin. Romans 6:14 says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace. Man can be transformed from a slave into a child of God by love and that is true freedom. We are free to become who the Lord created us to be.

Which freedom do you choose? A freedom bought by works or a freedom bought by love. Janis Joplin in the song, "Me and Bobby McGee" chose worldly freedom with her Bobby McGee. But, Bobby deserted her leaving her with "nothing." And, "nothing" can lead us into darkness. Is that the meaning and purpose you desire for your life? Why not choose light? Why not choose wisdom? Why not choose eternal life? Why not choose Jesus?