

By Russ Gressett

I have recently been meditating on the word “freedom”. In the scripture below the context is our walking by the spirit ... not by the letter of the law and not by the flesh.

Galatians 5:1

It was for freedom (liberty) that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (bondage).

Have you ever noticed the battles that go along with “being a doer of the Word” as laid out in the verse above. It’s definitely a verse that can be difficult to “do” on a daily basis. The last part of the verse refers to decisions that are our responsibility to make pretty much on a daily basis. We tend to go toward what I refer to as a false freedom of doing what the flesh wants to do or what religion has programmed our soul to do when in fact Paul refers to those tendencies as slavery and bondage. We know he is right, but we get hoodwinked because we see taking those paths as the comfortable position that really has our best interests at heart. It doesn’t rock the boat ... remains politically correct ... keeps everybody happy, etc. A move toward comfort (of whatever kind) can often lead us astray and into bondage.

Let’s face it, we can all catch ourselves in reluctance to the Holy Spirit’s leading at times because we are just not totally convinced that obedience in that area would truly have our best interest at heart. It’s a trust factor. “Well, what if this happens if I do that?” Or, “If I do that, they will think this or say that ... then where will I be?” Or, “I am just not sure this is God. I better just wait.” These are all things that we’ve likely heard ourselves say at times and offered up as a convincing excuse to ourselves of why or why not to “do”. These decisions actually keep us from freedom.

One of the greatest freedoms that God gives us is the ability or freedom to trust Him to take care of each day. Not each month or each year ... but each day. Living in a “daily” trust is where the true freedom of God resides for us. We get all messed up when we look down the road and cannot see what God will do in the midst of our fears and worries and anxieties. We can only see what “we” will do and then our eyes get off of His wisdom and His instruction. Jesus’ prayer was, “Give us this day our daily bread”, not “Give us this year our yearly bread”.

It doesn’t mean that God will not speak to us about the future and about things to come. He will and does, but it will generally be strategic on His part when He does. He will not do so with specifics simply to alleviate our fear and worry and anxiety. He requires us to rest in Him daily to alleviate those rascals. Just like our children are not worried in the least about how supper will make it to the table tonight. God

will just say things to us like, “My grace is sufficient”, “trust and obey”, “why worry about tomorrow, today has enough trouble of its own”, “Cast your care over on Me”. These are the kind of responses that mature us in our faith toward Him and in Him, but not necessarily the kind of responses that bring comfort to our mind, will and emotions.

So, when we are in unrest, worried, and anxious about the future, then all of the sudden we get a “word from God” about the future, we best be careful. We may be on our way around the mountain again ... fooled by the magnificence of our soul and flesh (and maybe a devil or two). God wants us resting in the freedom that is portrayed by His unconditional love for us. Namely, that He does not decide to care for us, look over us, lead, guide and direct us based on our performance. He simply does it because we are His. All of His instructions to us fall in that bucket.

Living in daily freedom requires us to live in the understanding that appearances and/or circumstances are not necessarily reality from God’s line of sight. For instance, many times we appear to be the bad guy, but we’re not. We appear to be close to financial ruin, but we’re not. We appear to be getting no where in leading our friend to Jesus, but we are. Appearances are not true reality if they do not line up with the will of God.

God’s resources are not limited to what we can think of or see. If there is something that God has placed in our heart, but we cannot “see” how it can happen, be encouraged ... enter into freedom, because God is not limited to what we can “see”. God has so many ways to do what He wants to do that it never requires us to do or say something we should not do or say. It never requires us to manipulate others. It’s simply not required. We should never doubt God’s ability to work beyond us. If we do, it messes with our ability to hear Him ... or we will pre-conceive what we want Him to say to us.

Freedom lives in just doing what God instructs in the secret place where our agendas do not interfere. We can live in true freedom daily with the comfort of knowing that God can and does work beyond us without any problems whatsoever. He loves to surprise us with the way prepared and the crooked places made straight while we have rested in Him. But, He also loves the maturity that is built in us by our not knowing everything in advance and having to operate in faith. He did say by the way that we (the just) are to live by faith.

Eve did what she thought was best for herself in the garden because she bought the lie that God had other motives that were not in her best interests. Her own selfishness caused her to see a selfish motive in God. So much of what we decide to partake in is driven by our lack of sight, or refusal to see, that God is working on our behalf (not might be ... but is). So we miss initiating the actions that should be produced by our truly walking in freedom.

God does not require us to protect ourselves at someone else's expense as a general rule. If we hold up man made, religious standards to ourselves or to others and motivate ourselves or others to conform to them out of a fear of what will happen to us if we don't, we are really in no better position than are the sow and reap preachers that motivate people to give from a base foundation of greed.

Galatians 5:13

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Most of the time we read this verse above and think of something bad or sinful in our human rationale. Actually however, it really can mean many things and situations that we often overlook. "An opportunity for the flesh" really means doing the opposite of the verse's last statement, "... but through love, serve one another". We should ask ourselves what the opposite of that statement is and how it can manifest in our daily lives.

Freedom is not in the midst of "I have to" ... it's in the midst of "I get to". "I get to" what though? Serve others! In Romans, Paul speaks in numerous places about being led by the Spirit and following after the Spirit. We are led by the Holy Spirit when we let our born again human spirit dictate our decisions. That is the part of us that truly communes with the Father. Freedom from bondage and slavery is in that place. That place will crucify the flesh and will cause it to conform in instances where it is not comfortable. It's on the backside of these occasions where freedom wells up inside of us and becomes tangible and invigorating ... joyful.

What does "on the backside" mean? It means freedom comes when we choose to win by obeying the instructions of God ... after the battle. There is always more victory to walk in and more freedom to experience. Listen to this experience I had and hopefully it will bring more clarity to what I mean. Recently, a business partner of mine (Darrell Hardy) and I had a wonderful experience over the lunch hour at a Cajun restaurant in the Clear Lake area of Houston. We were about finished eating when the owner of this establishment came out into the dining area and got everyone's attention. This restaurant owner had seen one of his patrons wearing a t-shirt that said something along the lines of "Soldiers For Christ" and it moved him to take a moment and testify and exhort the people in his restaurant. He made a decision toward freedom and decided to "do" Galatians 5:1. He decided not to be entangled by a yoke of bondage that said, "Don't step out". He decided to walk in more victory and experience more freedom.

This man started by thanking all the people and hoping that they enjoyed their meals, but then proceeded to give glory to God for what He had recently been doing in his life. He made the statement that Jesus was the way, the truth and the life and that we were all in a real battle for our souls. He later invited people to

come back to his office if they needed prayer or felt the conviction power of the God and wanted to ask questions, or to receive Christ.

I felt extremely privileged to have been at that place at that time. I told Darrell that we had just experienced a true divine appointment. He agreed. But here's the deal on how this applies to real freedom. It seemed like this guy was doing this for the first time. You could just tell. I could literally see this guy putting his flesh under and ushering in freedom to his life, his experience and his business ... and us. It was not an easy thing for him and I don't think he was in full understanding how what he was doing was being received by the patrons until everyone gave him an ovation after he had finished. That is when he experienced real freedom. That's when he accomplished the real doing of Galatians 5:1. On the backside of what he did, I know he was jumping up and down on the inside.

Freedom and liberty is present in the midst of life. That's how I know the restaurant owner experienced a burst of freedom on the inside after "doing" what was on his heart. It had a true impact on all present. That's how what Paul ties together with being led of the Spirit meshes together with standing fast in the freedom in which Christ has made us free. Our spirit is that part of us that is alive to God and able to live in intimate fellowship dragging along the flesh and bringing it into submission, all the while impacting the world around us. That life expands and blows up on the inside of us as we obey. That's what our man at the restaurant was experiencing as he dragged his flesh into obedience.

Recently, I was driving to the office and I'd not even made it out of the neighborhood when I passed a man walking along a popular walking trail beside a golf course. As I passed by, I distinctly heard these words in my spirit, "It's not too late for that man to finish all that I have put in his heart to do." I heard it plainly on the inside. It wasn't the sort of statement you just hear driving down the road on a typical day, you know? But, I just kept driving. After a few hundred yards it was like I heard another statement, or question rather, that went like this, "Do you think I told you that just so that you would know it? Turn around and go tell him! He's the one that I want to know what I told you."

So, here I am faced with a decision like we all face every day in differing ways. Do I choose freedom or bondage? Notice this is not a sex, drugs, rock-n-roll flesh thing, but a "serving others" flesh thing. Do I yield to my flesh that really doesn't want to waste the time, or do I refuse to give opportunity to my flesh and instead, through love, choose to serve as the verse says? Do I drag the flesh toward freedom or let the flesh pull me into bondage. What's it going to be?

We face these decisions daily. They are constant, and I think we fail at them more than we succeed at them. Well, I turned my truck around (of course I did! ... I'm not telling one of my failure/bondage stories ... this is freedom story). I pulled over in a small parking lot about the time this man had reached that same parking lot in his

walk (amazing how that just worked out, huh?). I got out of the truck, walked up to the man and said "Excuse me sir, could I visit with you for just a quick second? I am a Christian man and I am sure this will sound crazy to you, but as I was driving by you just now God spoke to my heart and said that it was not too late for you to accomplish all that he had placed in your heart to accomplish. Not sure what all that is, but I just had to stop and tell you." Tears began to well up in this man's eyes as I spoke these simple few words to him. When I finished he responded and said, "Well, I am a Christian man as well and you don't know how important those words are to me. I have been in despair recently due to a number of health issues. In fact, I am from out of town and staying with family while I see doctors down in the medical center and I have a very important appointment just this morning. Your words tell me that everything is under control and in God's hands."

I encouraged him some more and when I got back in the truck I felt like exploding on the inside. It was freedom. A new dose of it! I was free and that man was served and knew without a doubt that God was mindful of him. True liberty! Probably the same thing that was happening to the restaurant owner when he walked back to his office that day at lunch ... same thing that has happened to you on numerous occasions I am sure.

Here is the exhortation ... let's all stand fast in freedom ... daily. Let's don't do it every now and then, but daily. Let's not give opportunity to the flesh by saying "no" to opportunities to serve others. Why? Because **it was for freedom (liberty) that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (bondage).**

Prayer:

Father, help us each day to focus inward always seeing opportunities to stand firm in freedom. Help us to see the putting under of the flesh as being related to serving others as opposed to just being things like saying no to sex, drugs, rock-n-roll and typical "flesh stuff" that religion has defined. Intensify our recognizing Your hand at work in serving others so that we can get involved with what You are doing daily. Amen

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