

The Correct Use Of Freedom

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Date: 20 September 2020

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[0 : 00] This is kind of our bread and butter, those of you who are new to the One Harbor experience. We like to go through books of the Bible and work our way through them nice and slowly.

And every once in a while, especially in the summertime, we tend to push pause, do some topical series, which we find helpful and pertinent that speak into our lives and our, you know, some of the stuff that's happening around us at any given moment.

So I want to say just a quick hello to those that are going to be listening to this online later in the week. Thanks for listening. Thanks for keeping up with us. And I know it's hard to try to feel connected into community for some of us who have to stay isolated for safety reasons.

So that's just a great way to do it. And just awesome that you are doing that. So we are going to be working out of Galatians chapter five. We're going to be looking into verses 13 and 15.

And if you have your Bible, you could turn there. If you got an app on the phone, a Bible app on the phone, you could do that. We're also going to have verses up there. So let's jump into it. It says this.

[1 : 10] All right. It's all right. It's all right. It says this, Galatians 5, 13. For you were called to freedom, brothers. 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. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

It's really more than one word, but you know, one phrase. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

You know, one of the standout words in this passage is freedom, right? And we love freedom.

America. We're all about freedom. We're the land of the free.

Everyone loves freedom. And that's why immigrants flock here and not Russia. All right? Nobody's lining up to get into Russia. People want to be citizens of a free country.

[2 : 09] People want to be in a place where there's freedom thriving. And we live in America and we grow up under freedom in this land of liberty. And we learn a lot about what that means.

We learn a lot about our individual rights. And so I'm guessing everyone here has a pretty healthy concept of what freedom is. But the question for us today is what does the gospel say about freedom?

And the passage we just read is teaching us that freedom is good, but it can be dangerous. I think our culture gets this half right.

We say freedom is good. But I think it goes much further and it's turned freedom into a virtue itself, which isn't. Freedom isn't a virtue. Living in freedom does not make you a good person.

You can do a lot of bad things with freedom. But then there's another big misconception about freedom today, and that's the exaltation of the individual. Our culture says the individual is the highest authority.

[3 : 13] Right? This idea of no one gets to tell me what to do, what to say, or what to believe. I get to determine all these things for myself. Self-determinism is the great religion of our modern free society.

And we just didn't arrive here yesterday. We didn't arrive at this point yesterday. This has been developing over the centuries. Since the Enlightenment began, man moved from being under authority to being the authority.

And this is the foundational principle of Enlightenment philosophy. And what it's done, it's produced new doctrines to guide us. All right?

And all these things have crept in and have built up this concept of what we know as freedom and liberty in America today. And what the Enlightenment did, one of the big doctrines, it taught us to

question and to be suspicious of all external authorities and institutions.

But in challenging all authority, Enlightenment philosophy itself became an authority to be challenged in a great irony. And it was only a matter of time until it turned its guns on itself.

[4 : 22] The ultimate expression of this or example of this is in Nietzsche's statement, there are no facts, only interpretations. So even all the facts at the age of science and modernity were built on are no longer to be trusted.

That's just another form of authority to challenge. And this is the postmodern dogma that we live in today, which basically says everyone gets to be right.

Your interpretation of what is, is valid. It's just as valid as anybody else's. Everyone gets to be their own authority. There is no real truth that we must come under.

After all, every truth is just a fact open to my interpretation. This is the essence of freedom today.

But is this freedom that we want to live in?

I mean, look what's happening in our nation. Freedom without authority, what does it look like? It looks like anarchy. It looks like chaos. It looks like confusion. And like this passage says, what does it look like we're doing to each other?

[5 : 31] It looks like we're biting and devouring each other. It's all over the place. You see it online. You see it in the news.

You see it in social media. And more and more, our freedom is looking a lot more like a lord of the flies. We're devolving into just biting and devouring each other.

Unfortunately, we bring that same pattern of thinking into the church. Right? We grow up in a culture. We drank its milk from the time we were babies.

And this idea of freedom and liberty is something that we've integrated into our Christianity. And the Bible doesn't call that anarchy. It calls it license.

No one's going to tell me what to do, what to believe, or how to live. This also leads to biting and devouring each other.

[6 : 29] And that's what this passage is saying be on alert for. Man, we're called to freedom. Yes! Push, pause. Wait a second. Caveat.

Hold on. Here's the fine print. Man, but don't give any opportunity for the flesh. If you're going to do that, you're going to end up biting and devouring each other. We have to not drift from the gospel, right?

And there are two ways that we drift from the gospel. One is legalism. And the other is license. And both of those things have the same thing in common. You're in control.

You're in control. Legalism ignores the saving work of Jesus and puts it on your performance. It puts it on your works. License ignores the authority of Jesus and gives your desires and interpretations full authority.

Some of us come out of legalism and swing the pendulum so far that we fall into license. And the rest of us come out of license or loose living, whatever it may be, and swing the pendulum into legalism.

[7 : 35] But those are both false gospels. And those false gospels make you the boss. They give you control. That is not how salvation works. The gospel says salvation is a changing of authority.

All right? And so let's go back to the start of this thought of in Galatians 5, verse 1. It gives us this helpful picture. For freedom, Christ has set us free.

Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Say yoke. Yoke. Okay? This scripture, right? What does that mean, yoke?

Okay? This is a yoke. We have a picture of this. It's a yoke for an oxen. It's this heavy piece of wood or iron that went around an oxen's neck to control them. And the basic idea of this is the Bible is saying you and I are an ox.

You know? Some of us closer than others, obviously. But that's what it likens us to. Before Jesus, we're under a yoke of slavery. Slavery to sin.

[8 : 38] Slavery to the desires and principles of the world, of our culture. It's a heavy yoke. It's a heavy yoke that burdens us down.

It burdens us with guilt and shame and regrets and fears. But when Jesus saves us, he takes that yoke off. And then he puts a new one on us.

Look at what he says in Matthew 11, starting in verse 28. Jesus is saying this to everybody. Come to me. Come to me. All who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.

Then what does he say? Take my yoke. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. And Jesus is saying, come to me. Come to me. You get all these blessings. You get rest for your soul, right?

[9 : 35] You get to lay down your heavy burdens. But you have to come under my authority. You have to come under my yoke. Gospel freedom means Jesus is in charge.

Not you. Not me. Not anybody else. And I think for many Christians, we give this lip service without fully understanding all that it means.

We like the idea of being yoked to Jesus' righteousness, his power, his eternal life. But being yoked under Jesus' authority means that he is leading us.

He is guiding us. We don't get to call the shots. He does. We are yoked oxen. United him, yes. But we're also being led by him. We don't exert our will.

We actually live submitted and surrendered to his. And what is hard for us is that we don't want to be led. We don't want to be led in a loving relationship where he is the authority.

[10 : 34] Man, to be honest, we'd rather have Jesus kind of God far away handing us down a list of rules and rights that we can like kind of guide and govern us and live by. This is really less restrictive, not too interruptive.

But guess what, guys? It's also not relationship. And having a list of rules doesn't really cover every possible scenario we face in this life.

To figure out what to do as Christians. I mean, just think about this year and the decisions we've had to make. Who knew we would have to make a decision like a mask wearing in the church, right?

You know what? There isn't a Bible verse for that, right? There isn't like, it would have been nice if somewhere God said, you know, thou shalt wear face masks during pandemics. But there is no such thing.

So how do we figure out which way to go in those times? It's tough. Following Jesus is easy when the issues are clearly black and white of what we should do.

[11 : 35] But there are gray areas that we walk in in this life. So how do we wade through these and not make rules for the sake of rules, but also live out the biblical instructions of all things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial?

When do we press on one and not press on the other and vice versa? And this is where being yoked in relationship to Jesus is better than just having a set of rules.

Because Jesus gives us helpful guiding principles to keep us from losing gospel freedom without hurting each other. Galatians 5.13, the last part of that verse gives us one of those.

It says this, But through love, serve one another. Love is how the church endures in freedom and unity.

Now, let me say this about the mask illustration. Politically, hey, you're free to think what you want. You are free to think that it's maybe government overreach. You could be free to think that it should be a federal mandate.

[12 : 46] You know what? That's okay. But political thought should never govern the conduct of God's people in his kingdom. Your political position, your political party doesn't inform the kingdom of God.

That's not how it works. God isn't Republican. He's not Democrat. He's not Libertarian. He's not Socialist. He's not Communist. He's no other ist or ken that is out there.

He is a theocracy, not a democracy. Every nation and form of government on earth will pass away. Only one will continue into eternity.

And in his kingdom, love does not take a backseat to personal liberty. Love provides the boundaries and limits of our liberties.

But we have to be careful to understand what love is. What does that mean? What does it mean to be loving? Jesus describes the highest form of love for us.

[13 : 50] In John 15, 13, he says, There's no greater love. There's no greater love than this. That someone laid down his life for his friends.

Our freedom in Christ, our freedom that Christ gives to us that we live in is surrendered to this law of love. It's guided by this law of love.

It's controlled by this law of love. And so what does that lead us to do? It says, We lay down our rights for the sake of others. Really, Jesse?

That doesn't sound right. Yes. Look at 1 Corinthians 9. Paul talks about his rights. His simple right to earn a living through his preaching of the gospel. But instead of demanding his rights, he lays them down.

In verse 15, he says, But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision, for I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground of boasting.

[14:53] But for Paul, laying down his life doesn't stop at getting paid. 1 Corinthians 9.19, he goes on to say this, For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all.

Though nobody is my master, I choose to live as their servant. Why? That I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law.

That I may win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law. Not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ. That I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak. That I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people. That by all means, I might save some.

[16:01] I do it all for the sake of the gospel. That I may share with them in its blessings. So in Galatians 5.13, when Paul says, Through love, serve one another.

This is what it looks like lived out, right? He talked the talk and he walked the walk. Paul was so free in his freedom that he could lay down his freedom.

He was free to lay down his freedom. And that is what we are called to do as well. Though we are free in love, we choose to be servants.

Here's the thing, guys. When love is lacking, freedom is in a tenuous place. USA right now is a great example. We're big on rules. We're big on rights.

We're light on love. We're a free country that is abiding and devouring each other. We're a free country that is in a tenuous place. Political parties are fighting for power.

[17:03] Our hope is in control and owning the other side. And we have to be on guard. We have to be on guard to keep that out of the church. The greatest in Jesus' kingdom isn't the one who's in control and has power.

The greatest in Jesus' kingdom is the servant. And being a servant calls us to lay down our rights to serve others. Andrew Peterson, he's one of my favorite contemporary Christian artists.

I think he gets it right when he says, when he's saying, sorry, love is not a feeling in the chest. It's bending down to wash another's feet.

That's what love looks like. That's what serving one another looks like. It's taking the lowest place. It's choosing the place of weakness.

Not being forced into the place of weakness. Choosing the place of weakness. That's what Jesus did in his mission to earth. To bring salvation and to bring his kingdom.

[18:10] He put on weakness. He robed himself in a fragile human body that was heading to death. He left his throne in heaven. Laid down his rights to endure heat, hunger, and hatred.

Then we see him stoop a little lower. He bends down and washes his disciples' feet. All the crud and the dung from the day on their feet.

He bends down and washes them. A rabbi teacher didn't do that in his day. That was too low. That was for the lowly slave or the lowly servant.

But that is what greatness looks like in God's kingdom. You might be thinking, man, that's a big ass, Jesse. Maybe too big. But I want to challenge us as Christians.

Consider what's at stake. Why did Paul and Jesus make themselves a servant to everybody? To seek and save the lost. And we lay down our rights because that is what Jesus' mission requires.

[19:22] We make ourselves servants to everyone for the sake of Jesus' mission. It's not the legalistic church that reaches the lost.

It's not the liberal church that reaches the lost. It's the loving church. It's the serving church. It's the laying down their life church that reaches the lost.

And it's always been this way. And it will always be this way. So, how are we doing as a church in this area?

How are we doing? That's the question for us. And before COVID, we were probably doing really well. I think as a church we were doing well. But to be honest, COVID did more than take away some of our freedoms.

We lost some of our servant heart. I know I have. When my freedoms get taken away, I tend to get preoccupied in holding on to what I got left.

[20 : 22] I start looking out for myself. And while I'm so busy looking out for myself, I can't look out for others. But Jesus challenges me.

His life challenges me. He challenges us. Look at what he does. Look at what Jesus does in his darkest hour on the cross. John 19, verse 26. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son.

Then he said to the disciple, Behold your mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home.

Even up on a cross with nine-inch nails piercing his wrists and his feet. With a back ripped wide open from being whipped with barbed wire, basically.

Bleeding out to death. He's concerned about his mother's welfare on the cross. I've never been in a trial quite like that.

[21 : 30] But I know when I am in the trial, my first thought is, what about me? But Jesus' love puts others first. Serves them no matter what.

Guys, if you're here in a Christian, this is not a love that is foreign to you. We know this love because he first loved us. And the Bible says he pours his love into us, which means Jesus' love is our experienced reality.

We know this. But sometimes we trade it. We trade it for worthless, meaningless tchotchkes that seemed so important at the time.

I want to say this. I think the biggest danger we face as a church today is a return to something I thought we'd left behind in the late 90s, early 2000.

And that is the elevation of putting our hope in politics. The church made a big mistake in the late 70s and 80s and early 90s by doing that.

[22 : 40] Now, politics is important. I'm not trying to diminish in saying, like, you shouldn't vote and that's not a big deal. And it's a privilege and an honor for us to be able to do that in our country.

But we can easily drift into thinking that the hope of America is in having the right political party in power. There's a little sign coming out of my neighborhood.

It says, save America, vote, insert the party name. I kind of get what they're meaning.

But if our hope for salvation for America isn't Jesus, as Christians, we've gone way off the rails.

Our hope is in Jesus. Our hope for this nation is in God moving. Politics is downstream of culture.

[23 : 48] Culture is downstream to what's going on in the hearts and lives and beliefs and faith in the people of the nation. Not the other way around. Our hope is in God.

Our hope is in God moving mightily. And it starts with us. I'm convinced that Satan's tactics for the church to get us off mission is to sidetrack us into caring too much about politics.

Into caring too much about who gets voted in. Where we spend so much time pushing for our candidate and listening to news and political podcasts.

We're not really spending time on our knees. This nation doesn't need a well-informed church that knows all about what's happening in the latest news cycle.

This nation needs a church. That is crying out for God to move. Crying out for God to change hearts. Crying out for God and his spirit to be poured out so men and women and children live and surrender to him.

[25 : 18] And just in case you're struggling with this idea, think about Jesus' life. Great example of love. Great example of love. How many political statements did he make?

Did he ever speak against Roman occupation while he was on earth? Did he ever praise or promote Simon the Zealot's pro-Israel political position?

No. I mean, the closest you get is Pilate kind of putting it to him. It's like, they're saying you're the king of the Jews. Are you this political uprising thing? And he's like, my kingdom may know this world.

As disciples of Jesus, our highest allegiance is to his covenant, not the Constitution.

We are citizens of heaven first. We are citizens of heaven foremost.

[26 : 28] And even in gray areas in our life when we're trying to figure out what's the right way to do, what's the right way to live, we don't run towards the Constitution to help us figure that out.

We run to his covenant. We run to the gospel. We run to his truth. And we let it inform us. What does it say? We're called to freedom.

Through love, serve one another. Don't use that freedom for license. Use your freedom to lay down your freedom.

If I can have the band come up, the question for us today, what is Jesus calling you and me to give up? What is the surrender that he is calling us to?

If you're here or you're listening to this and you're not a Christian, Jesus is calling you to give up your freedom, your rights, the yoke you're living under right now, this heavy burden, this heavy authority, this guilt, this fear that you're wracked with, that you carry around.

[27 : 47] Jesus is calling you to come to him, to come under his authority and surrender it all. That's what salvation is, surrendering it all to him.

He's inviting you today into his freedom. If you're here and a Christian are listening to this, we're going to take communion in a moment.

But first, let's take a minute. Let's take a minute as Christians to examine ourselves. What do we need to surrender? What is God calling us to surrender in our lives that is blocking, loving, and serving others?

What are we doing? That is blocking, loving, and serving others. And man, this is a great time just to confess that. Trust that the Holy Spirit's going to show you what that is.

Confess that to Jesus and repent to him. Just take a moment to do that and when you're ready, take communion.

[28 : 49] Let me pray for us. Lord, Lord, there is nothing in earth that we need besides you and nothing in heaven that is better than you.

Make that real in our hearts today. Amen.