

Free To Be Lawless?

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The “Magna Carta,” and “Bill of Rights,” give testimony to the fact that Americans, and Britons, especially, have historically treasured the ideal of “freedom.” But despite such historic love of freedom, are we really free?

Of all the nations in history the United States, perhaps more than any other, has committed itself to the ideals of personal freedom and liberty. Our Declaration of Independence declares, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” The preamble to our constitution states that among the purposes for its adoption is that of securing “the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”

In pursuit of the principle of freedom our nation won its independence from Great Britain in a bloody war. Over 10,000 Americans sacrificed their lives in the name of liberty to win that war.

While freedom was won for this nation by the vision of its founding fathers and the heroics of its early patriots, along with the intervention of Divine Providence, Americans of other generations have also been required to defend with their lives the ideals of freedom and liberty. A bloody civil war, rooted in conflict over the evil institution of slavery in the United States, led to the deaths of an estimated 620,000 men in the line of duty (“Civil War Casualties,” civilwar.org).

On D-day, June 6, 1944, British, American and allied soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy to liberate Europe from the grip of Nazi oppression. This was part of a years long struggle against Axis nations who sought to conquer and enslave the world. And these are only a few examples of the struggle for freedom among Americans, Britons, and people of other nations who have cherished the ideal of freedom.

Despite the historic British and American love of freedom, despite the sacrifices Americans, Britons, and others have made to secure and defend freedom, though, are we really free?

To many Americans and Britons, both in the past and especially in the present, freedom means being free from the restraint of law, especially God’s laws. Even many Christians believe that freedom in Christ means freedom from the commandments of God, because that’s what their ministers have taught them.

Often the teaching is very subtle, implying that the principle of love overrides any requirement to obey more specific commandments. For example, we find this statement from a publication of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.: “The man who really loves God and his neighbor doesn’t need any laws or rules to tell him what to do or not to do...” (cited in *Baal or God*, Herman J. Otten, p. 261). An article which appeared in *Campus Encounter*, a publication of the United Campus Christian Fellowship, states in part, “...we would not qualify freedom by demanding responsibility” (cited in *Baal or God*, p. 262). The authors of the material cited above sanction premarital and extramarital sex in the name of love. And the latter also advocates bisexual relations.

Does freedom in Christ imply lawlessness? Do we have freedom in Christ to neglect and violate the commandments of God, as some who claim to be Christian believe and teach? What did Jesus Christ himself say? “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” ([John 8:31-32](#)). Notice the implications of Jesus’ words.

(1) First, not everyone who claims to be a disciple of Christ — a Christian — is indeed (or truly, as the Greek may be translated) a Christian, but those who abide in Christ’s word. To abide in Christ’s word is to hold fast to it, to keep it, to live by it. Anyone can profess to believe in Christ. But as Biblical scholar A. T. Robertson comments, “Continuance in the word (teaching) proves the sincerity or insincerity of the profession. It is the acid test of life” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 5, p. 149).

(2) Second, Jesus said of those who are truly his disciples, “...you shall know the truth....” The real disciples of Jesus do not live under deception and ignorance but in the light of truth. What is truth? Jesus said God’s word is truth ([John 17:17](#)). God’s word includes his commandments. The Psalmist wrote, “You are near, O Lord, And all Your commandments are truth” ([Psalm 119:151](#)). And Jesus is the very personification of truth ([John 14:6](#)). Jesus obeyed the will of God ([John 5:30](#)), and he lived a perfect life of obedience without sin ([1 Peter 2:22](#)).

Paul wrote that the knowledge imparted by the gospel is veiled to those “whose minds the god of this age has blinded” ([2 Corinthians 4:4](#)). But a true disciple of Jesus has shining in his heart “the light of the gospel” — “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” ([2 Corinthians 4:4, 6](#)). What does this mean in practical terms?

Paul is drawing a parallel between Jesus Christ and Moses. When Moses had received the commandments from God which were attached temporarily to the physical covenant with Israel, his face shone with the glory of God ([Exodus 34:29, 2 Corinthians 3:7](#)). Something of God’s nature was reflected in Moses face after he had come down from Mount Sinai. But the Israelites were afraid to look on the glory of his countenance. And a veil was placed over his face, symbolizing the veil of spiritual blindness which afflicted most of the Israelites ([Exodus 34:30-35; 2 Corinthians 3:7-15](#)).

However, a true disciple of Jesus sees with spiritual eyes the glory of God, the nature of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, “who is the image of God” ([2 Corinthians 4:4](#)). And seeing clearly the image of God in Christ, through his word ([2 Corinthians 3:16-17](#)), true Christians “with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” ([2 Corinthians 3:18](#)). In other words, with the power of God’s Spirit, real disciples of Jesus Christ become like him – imitating the sacrificial love and obedience of Christ, knowing that he left “us an example, that you should follow His steps” ([1 Peter 2:21](#)).

About 1445 B.C. the people of Israel had become slaves in Egypt. God had determined to free the Israelites, to liberate them from bondage ([Exodus 3:7-8](#)). And so, following a series of supernatural plagues on Egypt, whose Pharaoh had refused to release the Israelites from bondage, God led them out of slavery ([Exodus 12:51; Numbers 33:3-4](#)).

When God (in the person of Jesus Christ — [1 Corinthians 10:1-4](#)) led Israel out of bondage he did not leave them in ignorance of his will. He revealed to them the Passover,

the commandments, the Sabbath and the Holy Days. As Nehemiah wrote, God gave his “good Spirit to instruct them” through the teaching of their prophets ([Nehemiah 9:20](#)). He gave them a government and a ministry to lead them in an organized fashion.

Moses said to Israel, “For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” ([Deuteronomy 30:11-14](#)).

If God did all this for Israel under the Old Covenant, would he do less for spiritual Israel under the New, a better covenant? Jesus promised his disciples that the Spirit of God would “guide you into all truth” ([John 16:13](#)).

One who is truly a disciple of Jesus then has a broad knowledge of God’s truth, revealed through Christ’s word and Spirit. As he obeys the things God reveals he gains more understanding because “A good understanding have all those who do His commandments” ([Psalm 111:10](#)).

All real disciples of Jesus Christ do not have exactly the same level of knowledge or spiritual maturity of course. But all who are and expect to remain disciples of Jesus will “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” ([2 Peter 3:18](#)). “Sanctify [set apart to God’s holy purpose] them by Your truth,” Jesus prayed to the Father ([John 17:17](#)). It is said that “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” ([Ephesians 5:26-27](#)).

The word “disciple” comes from the Latin word *discipulus*. *Discipulus* means learner, or student, as does the English word “disciple.” The Greek word μαθητής (*mathētēs*) used by the writers of the New Testament means the same. A real disciple of Jesus is eager to learn from his word, and God in turn actively reveals to him the understanding of the truth through his Spirit ([1 Corinthians 2:6-16](#); [Ephesians 1:17-19](#)). The life of a true disciple of Jesus is not a life of spiritual darkness and blindness, but of spiritual growth and vitality, living in the light of God’s word, including his commandments.

(3) Jesus went on to say that whoever keeps on committing sin, who lives in sin, the transgression of God’s law ([1 John 3:4, KJV](#)), is a slave of sin ([John 8:34-35](#)). “Commits,” (Greek: ποιέω [*poiéō*]), is in the present participle form, meaning to keep on sinning, practicing sin as a way of life, as opposed to repenting and seeking to overcome. “Note the use of ποιων (present active participle, continuous habit or practice)” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

As long as one continues to habitually and willfully break God’s laws, or neglects to keep them, he is not free, he is a slave to sin.

(4) But, Jesus explained, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” ([John 8:36](#)). What are we made free to do, live in sin? No. Jesus had just said he who lives in sin is not free, but a slave. He said a disciple of Christ must live by his word, and that the truth, God’s word, as we live by it, makes us free. What Christ delivers us from is not the commandments of God.

Christ, through God's Spirit, and through his own blood, delivers us from the law of sin and death, the carnal nature that is hostile and contrary to God ([Romans 7:22 – 8:4](#); [7:14](#); [8:7-8](#)).

Christ through his sacrifice and the giving of his Spirit sets us free from sin and death. He empowers us, if we are truly converted, to bear the fruits of holiness. That does not mean that we never sin. But it does mean that we do not consent to the presence of sin in our lives. It means living in a state of repentance, with an attitude of mind geared toward obeying God out of a pure motive of love.

Many have stumbled thinking that Christ frees us from the obligation to obey God's commandments, thereby guaranteeing that they will remain slaves to sin. I hope that you won't make that mistake.

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