

## Understanding Our Freedom In Christ

By Dave Urbanski

Pastor Scott this past Sunday led us through the final message in our series on the conscience as it relates to living out the Christian life — and his message was all about our freedom in Christ.

Indeed, the Bible certainly makes many things very clear in terms of how we should live — but sometimes the Bible doesn't make it obvious how we should live. Pastor Scott talked about these "gray areas" and offered a number of examples (e.g., parents who homeschool their kids versus parents who send their children to public schools; believers 21 and older who choose to abstain from alcohol versus those who, in moderation, do not.) You get the idea.

With that, Pastor Scott went through six Freedom Principles we should consider.

**Freedom Principle #1** — *I have the freedom and right to do whatever is not forbidden explicitly in Scripture. I have the responsibility to take a stand for the freedom I have in Christ. My choice is between God and me.*

Check out what Galatians 5:1 says: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

But even though we have this freedom in Christ, we can still sin within that freedom. Romans 14:23 reads, "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

In the end, each believer's conscience determines each believer's actions — and no believer should be forced to abide by another believer's conscience in the gray areas. "I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?" — 1 Corinthians 10:29

With that, Pastor Scott warned us about the dangers of legalism — setting absolute rules where Scripture does not. Paul warned the church about it, too: "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath." — Colossians 2:16

What does this all mean with respect to the conscience? Pastor Scott said, simply, if you take part in an activity your conscience tells you is wrong, it is sin. (Romans 14:23) On the other hand, if you know you should do something and don't do it, that also is sin. (James 4:17)

The bottom line, Pastor Scott said, is that God wants us to be internally motivated, which in turn affects our external behavior. Want to know the opposite of that? Look no further than the Pharisees of Jesus' day! The Pharisees created extra rules on top of Scripture that put an undue burden on Jewish people. The Pharisees were most

concerned about external behavior and cared little about the heart. Because of this, Jesus called them “whitewashed tombs” — clean on the outside, but full of decaying, rotting bones and flesh on the inside. Let’s not be that!

So, yes, we have plenty of freedom in Christ — but Pastor Scott’s next five principles put limits on that freedom...

**Freedom Principle #2** — *I have a responsibility to limit my freedom in Christ for the sake of other believers who may stumble.*

We may have a great grasp and handle on our own freedom in Christ, but new believers or immature Christians may not have done the work to arrive in a similar place. So while we’re still free to do certain things Scripture doesn’t forbid, “weaker brethren” may not be there yet. Do we really want to risk confusing them or discouraging them by acting on our freedom that they may not yet understand? As Paul might say — may it never be so.

“And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” — 1 Corinthians 8:11-13

**Freedom Principle #3** — *I have a responsibility to limit my freedom in Christ for the sake of non-believers because winning them to Christ is the most important issue.*

This is more or less the same idea as Freedom Principle #2, except that the affected parties are non-Christians as opposed to Christians. The situations may vary from Freedom Principle #2, but the bottom line is that you don’t want to partake in something your conscience tells you is permissible when doing so may influence a non-Christian away from Christ.

As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.”

**Freedom Principle #4** — *I must limit my freedom when it indulges my sinful nature.*

Look at the previous 1 Corinthians verses — Paul wrote almost the exact words in 1 Corinthians 6:12, but with an important difference: “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything.”

This principle addresses the person you see in the mirror, period. You know what drags you down, what tempts you, what influences you to sin. It’s “big stuff” all the way down to “little stuff.” The Lord cares about all of it; he wants you to follow him perfectly (even though that will never happen on this side of heaven). What are your bad habits, your

problematic tendencies? Get to know what your sin nature targets and ask God's help to steer clear of those areas.

"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." — Galatians 5:13

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." — Proverbs 4:23

**Freedom Principle #5** — *I need to be careful about imposing my personal convictions on someone else, thus erring by judging others.*

This is what Pastor Scott previously referred to under Freedom Principle #1. We may have developed a wonderful do/don't list for ourselves, but maybe we shouldn't go around telling everyone they need to adopt it, too. And by all means, avoid starting to believe you're better or more spiritual than everyone else because you adhere to your own personal do/don't list that others "could never hope to match"! (Romans 14:1-8, 1 Corinthians 4:5, Matthew 7:2)

**Freedom Principle #6** — *I must submit myself to those whom God has placed as authorities in my life, recognizing that leaders (e.g., parents, pastors, government) are obliged to encourage others to live godly lives, warn them about the dangers of life choices, and impose limitations when necessary.*

And why should we do this? Romans 13:5 spells it out: "Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." Pastor Scott called it a valuable concept which will help guide how we live — and we should pay heed.

I loved how Pastor Scott ended his message, noting that being free in Christ should never overrule our call to love and serve and put the needs of others above our own needs. As 1 Corinthians 9:19 reads, "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them."