

As Americans, we love freedom! We just celebrated our nation's independence, our freedom, from the tyranny of King George of England. Freedom is in the life-blood of Americans!

From our early forefathers and mothers that desire for freedom has been passed down to all of us. If you think about it, everyone except the Native Americans who were already here; came to America because they were seeking freedom.

When the Pilgrims arrived they were seeking religious freedom. Generations of men and women have followed the dream of the Pilgrims and our founders as they sought freedom- religious, economic, political, etc.

But freedom is about more than a location- a place apart from tyranny and oppression; freedom is the longing of the human heart to be all that we were created to be!

That's biblical by the way! Turn to Genesis 2:15-17 (Bibles available or use the YouVersion Bible app on your smart phone.)

I think we know the story of Creation well enough to establish that the world which God created was perfect. Genesis tells us that with each day of Creation God said it is 'good.' And when God created Adam and Eve he pronounced them 'very good.'

From our beginning, humanity had purpose and meaning within a relationship with God. And within this framework God set Adam and Eve free to enjoy the garden paradise; *to be all that they were created to be!* Now look at this passage in Genesis 2. READ v.15-17

Note here that these are God's first words to humanity. And they are not a negative but a positive- you are free!

Adam and Eve were free. They were free to work and care for the paradise God gave them. They were also free to eat of any tree in the garden...except one!

Andy Stanley says, "It's interesting that when God had the world just the way he wanted it, there was just one commandment." One commandment to enjoy life, one commandment in a world of freedom; don't eat from this one tree.

We were created for freedom. And right here we learn a very important lesson about freedom. Freedom, the freedom *to be all that we were created to be*, is found in a relationship with God in which we are obedient to God. God granted that freedom to Adam and Eve; and all they had to do to maintain that freedom was to live in relationship with and obedience to *one* command from God.

Isn't it interesting that if you ask most people they would say that freedom is getting out from under God's rules, not obeying them. For many people their image of God is

someone who wants to limit their freedom not give them more freedom. And that idea was the lie that the serpent spoke to Adam and Eve!

The serpent slithered into the Garden with a false concept of freedom. He presented Adam and Eve with the lie that they were not really free until they stepped outside the truth of God's commandment; literally outside the relationship with God.

Adam and Eve bit into that lie and we've all been on the hook ever since!

As a result, we believe that freedom is not about obedience to God but doing what I want free of anyone else, their rules and any conditions that might be put on me. *I am not going to be all that God created me to be I am going to be who I want to be!*

Simply put, freedom is all about me. Many people live with that idea that freedom is being able to do whatever I want, whenever I want, wherever I want. But that is not freedom; that is selfishness!

Now before we leave this story of Adam and Eve I want you to make an observation. Before Adam and Eve choose to disobey God the Bible describes these two as *naked and unashamed*. They were truly free in the sense that they didn't require anything to cover up who they were – they were free to be themselves; and they were not ashamed – in other words they lived guilt free. They were like a toddler who throws off all their clothes and runs free!

If you want a description of what true freedom is it is 'naked and unashamed.' It is being all that you were created to be in a community of people that are being all they were created to be as they live in obedience to God's truth.

But, if you want to see the result of our selfish freedom notice the images used to describe Adam and Eve after they freely chose disobedience- they covered up their nakedness from one another and they hid from God. Does that sound like freedom? Does that sound like being the person God created you to be?

If we are going to understand what true freedom is and that in Christ we find our freedom; then we need to begin with understanding that true freedom is about a relationships with and obedience to God and not the selfish choices that we make.

I want you to think about this in your own life for a moment. When you are living in obedience to God you are willing to lay your life open for anyone to see-including God. But when you take your freedom and express it in selfish ways that go against the truth of God's word; in most cases you want to hide it from the eyes of others because you would be ashamed otherwise.

The lie that was perpetrated on humanity from the beginning of time was that freedom came in obedience to our own selfish wants and desires; not in obedience to God. And sadly enough when we bought into the lie we found ourselves trapped, enslaved, and captured in our cage of selfishness; rather than experiencing true freedom.

They traded truth for a lie; one perfect relationship for a relationship where they become slaves to selfishness and sin.

Like a bird that was raised in the captivity of a cage; we think we are free but in reality we are still captives to the bars that hold us back from true freedom!

Fast forward to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:18. In Luke 4, Jesus begins his public ministry by entering the synagogue on the Sabbath and reading from the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to *proclaim freedom for the prisoners* and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

At the very beginning of Jesus ministry he announced that one of the main purposes in his coming was to set us free. Jesus has the key that can unlock the prison doors that keep us captive; but to set us free from what? Thankfully, Jesus answers that question in his conversation with the Pharisees found in John 8. READ John 8:31-36

Like most people today, the Pharisees couldn't conceive of themselves as needing to be freed from anything. In their minds, they were already free! But that is how sin works. It makes us believe that we are free while all along we are really captives- captives to our selfishness which is another way of describing the word sin.

And the only way to be set free from our captivity is to, in Jesus words, remain faithful to his teaching. What does Jesus say, "If you remain faithful to my teaching; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

There's that idea again; freedom- real freedom- is found in obedience.

You see many people live as though they are free, but the reality is we traded real freedom for a false sense of freedom when we placed our selfishness above our obedience to God.

Jesus made it very clear to the Pharisees that if we want to experience true freedom it comes by way of obedience to the life and teaching of Jesus.

I think I found a good explanation of how we find true freedom in our lives. True freedom is found in living out what Jesus told his disciples is the greatest

commandment: “love God and love others.” Jesus says living within that commandment; that is the freedom for which we were created.

If everything we do demonstrates love for God and others; then we are free! So, true freedom is found in living out love for God and others! That means placing God first in our lives and likewise placing others above self.

So what can we do to begin living in this freedom?

First, we need to admit to ourselves that we’ve been trapped in a cage of selfishness which the Bible calls sin and bought into the world’s lie that freedom is found in selfishness.

Second, we need to commit ourselves to seeking out the truth of God’s word daily and living it out in ways that are obedient to the truth as we develop our relationship with Christ.

As a result of disciples living in this freedom we will personally begin to become all that God created us to be.

As we live in obedience to God’s word we will find that true freedom brings joy and blessing into our lives. No longer will we find the truth of God to be a stumbling block, but instead a building block upon which we become all that we were created to be!