

The Freedom of God

Personal Breakthroughs:

Romans 7:21 – 8:14

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His words brought his colleagues to their feet shouting “To arms, to arms!”, and drilled into our souls that freedom is more important than life. Closing his speech, Patrick Henry said:

The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

America fought its war of independence believing that without freedom we exist rather than live. We know in our hearts that human beings, made in God’s image, should serve no one except by choice. In America we know the call of freedom.

God in the Bible reveals that there are *freedoms*. In Matthew 16 Jesus pictures humanity locked behind gates of Hell or Hades. Gates implies that there a series of confinements and freedoms. Jesus gives to us the keys of the kingdom to unlock the gates and free the captives.

The first gate is a gate out of darkness. The Bible says:

Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. (1 John 2:11, NIV)

Humanity lives in a dark cell. We suffer anger that robs our ability to see. Our eyes, ears and heart close off to truth. The Apostle John sees this as judgment. When his countrymen rejected Jesus, he quoted Isaiah:

He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn — and I would heal them. (John 12:40, NIV)

Who is the “he,” the agent of judgment that blinds our eyes? The Apostle Paul wrote:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel... (2 Corinthians 4:4, NIV)

Paul noted that there was a veil hiding the truth even as his countrymen read their Bibles. He wrote that its removal is freedom that comes with the Spirit of Jesus:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:17, NIV)

He writes that we, as a result of the Spirit, begin to reflect Jesus’ glory and are increasingly transformed as we see him with unveiled faces. Indeed, Paul later wrote:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6, NIV)

The first gate of freedom is when God’s light pierces the darkness and we see the glory of God in Jesus. We confess that Jesus is Lord only when the Holy Spirit gives us that freedom. When we do that, we’ve walked through a gate out of a terribly dark cell.

I suspect that the Holy Spirit has given most of us here freedom to believe and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We have walked through the first gate. We might have done it as a small child. However, there are other gates and freedoms.

In the 8th chapter of John, Jesus taught that whoever sins is a slave to sin. He said:

If you hold to my teaching... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32, NIV)

Jesus said this because of sin’s power to deceive. We suffer a prison of deception and must hold to Christ’s teaching, so that we’ll know the truth that sets us free. He declares:

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36, NIV)

That is exactly what Paul is talking about in today's Scripture. Although we are freed in Christ from the eternal consequences of our sins, there is a principle of sin that continues to enslave us. It makes us miserable persons who serve sinful impulses rather than the will of God. But Christ himself is the gate out of this confinement. He is the way, the truth and the life. His presence in the Spirit completely changes everything. What follows is some of the how.

When you read *sinful nature* in Paul's writing and the rest of the New Testament, the actual word is *flesh*. Flesh describes a body and soul together. When a soul parts from a body, the body is ready to return to dust. Adam and Eve were made body, soul and spirit so that they could live in fellowship with God. When they sinned, they died in spirit. They were alive in the flesh, but they no longer could fellowship freely with God; nor could they give birth to children with spirits alive to God. All their children must be born again, born of the Spirit. Knowledge of God was largely memory and physical interventions of God. People lived their life in the flesh, in body and soul. They lacked the presence and wisdom of God because they were dead in spirit. They often trusted other spirits and developed ideas of themselves, life and God that were contrary to the truth. They developed habits of thought and activity that were destructive.

When we put our faith in Jesus and he comes and reestablishes our connection with God, he doesn't destroy our soul and body. He doesn't destroy the flesh that acted as slaves to sin. We still have the thoughts, beliefs, relationships, and habits of the flesh. Using a different metaphor, we still have any consequences that a house occupied by drug addicts or gangs might experience. Jesus moves into our house with us, but the rats are still there, feeding on the garbage left by our destructive choices. The garbage has to be cleaned out, rats evicted and a

new way of living begun. That is the situation that the Apostle Paul describes in chapter 7 and 8 of Romans. We need now to live by the Spirit and put to death the deeds of the flesh.

The flesh sees the garbage and rats in our lives and sows doubts about our salvation. We doubt that we are children of God and saints called to be holy. The Spirit, however, tells us there is now no condemnation because we are baptized into Christ Jesus, and we are to focus and walk prompted and instructed by his Spirit. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Bible, the Spirit-gifted family, which is the church, are all a part of Christ's cleaning and restoring project in us so that our lives become the workmanship of God rather than an achievement of our flesh.

Many gates open for us as we walk away from the prisons erected in our flesh, including soul disorders (psyche is the Greek word for soul, so think psychological problems) and body diseases (physical ailments) that are related to the garbage and rats that gained entry through our sins.

Now there is another gate. It is the gate of physical death. The Bible says:

The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:20-21, NIV)

God subjected his creation to death with the vision that one day it will no longer suffer sin and death. Instead, as children of God, we will live like God, without sin and death. That freedom draws near with Christ's return; and according to the Bible, we can hasten its arrival.

The kingdom of heaven has already invaded this earth with signs of eternal life. Every healing of our soul and body is a sign of what is to come. It is heaven breaking through death's dominion on earth. We live in a time of breakthroughs. Indeed, this is your time for breakthroughs. Will you believe the good news?