

3. FREEDOM IN OUR FELLOWSHIP



1. INTRODUCTION

1. We have seen that the Lord intends for us to enjoy fellowship together in His church which has:
 - a. The **intimacy** of a family
 - b. The **interdependence** of a body
 - c. An **acceptance** of one another despite our differences
2. This type of fellowship may really grow, it may really succeed in a local congregation, but it's important to understand certain **concepts** regarding fellowship:
 - a. The **proper use** of our **freedom** in Christ is one such concept, because -
 - b. **Failure** to understand the **nature** and proper **application** of **liberty** has **broken** the fellowship of many churches

In this, the third in our series, we'll look at the nature of *our freedom in Christ* and how it affects our fellowship with one another.

2. THE NATURE OF OUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST

Let's begin by defining the **nature** of freedom in Christ:

a) We enjoy freedom in Christ

1. Jesus **offers** freedom to all His disciples (*we need to respond*) - John 8:31,32,36
2. Paul taught that Christ has made us free and that we should be careful to **stand fast** in this liberty - Gal 5:1
3. James refers to the 'perfect law of liberty' - James 1:25; 2:17

b) The nature of this freedom

1. So, does this mean we are totally free from any sort of obligation? That is:
 - a. Are we free to '*do our own thing*'?
 - b. Do we have responsibilities to no-one?
 - c. Are we free from having to be concerned about others?

... of course not!

2. We should be careful to understand the **context** of freedom in Christ. What's it all about?
 - a. Jesus was promising **freedom** from **sin** - John 8:34-36
 - b. Paul referred to **freedom** from basic elements of the Old **Law**, warning against returning to that Law - Gal 4:3-5,8-11
 - c. The 'perfect law of liberty' is a blessing only to those who are "*doers of the word*" - James 1:21-25
3. The truth of the matter is that we have been **set free** in order that we might **serve**.
 - a. Being set free from the slavery of sin, we can be servants – actually '*douloi*' - of righteousness - Rom 6:12-16 ... which means ...
 - b. We are now free to *serve one another* through love - Gal 5:13

As Paul reveals in Gal 5:13-15, there is a very real danger of abusing our liberty to provide an opportunity for the flesh. Christ died to give us freedom **from** sin, not to give us freedom **to** sin! Freed from sin, we need to be careful how we use this freedom, especially in our fellowship with one another.

3. HOW DOES THIS FREEDOM RELATE TO FELLOWSHIP

a) The church at Corinth: a case in point

1. The situation:
 - a. Brethren were claiming to have true knowledge about eating meat sacrificed to idols - 1 Cor 8:1-6
 - b. By their example and influence, they were encouraging others to violate their conscience - 1 Cor 8:7
 - c. Those who so violated their weak consciences (i.e. were persuaded to do what they believed was wrong) were sinning - Rom 14:23
2. But even if there was true liberty in Christ to eat such things, Paul counselled against it. Why?

Because it was a stumbling block to those weak in faith and this abuse of knowledge and liberty was causing brethren to sin, which in itself is a sin against Christ - 1 Cor 8:9-12

3. Paul provides himself as an example of the proper use of freedom:
 - a. He is willing to go to extremes in service to his weak brother - 1 Cor 8:13
 - b. Though an apostle, enjoying freedom in Christ, he is willing to place limitations on his freedom, in order to save others - 1 Cor 9:19-23

4. He concludes his treatment on this subject with a command for us to follow his example - 1 Cor 10:31-11:1

b) Paul gave similar counsel to the church in Rome

1. The strong in faith are to be considerate of those weak in faith - Rom 14:1,13
2. Even if it means giving up things that are right within themselves - Rom 14:14-23
3. The strong in faith must bear with the beliefs of the weak; seek to encourage, correct and build them up – all of which follows the example of Christ Himself – Rom 15:1-3

c) Imagine the fellowship where these principles are followed

1. Rather than just trying to please ourselves, there would be serious efforts to build up one another.
 - a. We wouldn't just think of the value of assembling for our own personal benefit – remember this action is required, but focus on its purpose.

Heb 10:23-25 “23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to *stir up* love and good works, 25 *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as is the manner of some, but *exhorting one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

- b. We would also be concerned about the impact of our absence on others
2. We would be patient with those weak in faith, willing to give up liberties in Christ in order to serve as Christ served.
 - a. We wouldn't want to press issues or ideas on those whose consciences could not allow them to take part
 - b. Instead, we would seek other ways where we could accomplish the same goals
3. An atmosphere of love, service, and unity would exist, in which fellowship can develop and grow to the glory of God.

4. CONCLUSION

1. The fellowship we enjoy in Christ is a precious thing, made possible by the work of Christ on the cross - Eph 2:13-16
2. Yet, that fellowship is also a fragile thing, **easily disrupted** through our **misuse of the freedom** we have in Christ, i.e. by the actions of individual Christians ... we need to be very careful
3. The solution? To have the “*mind of Christ*” in our dealings with one another – Phil 2:1-8
 - a. Fellowship in one accord is possible, but only when we heed the warnings given by

Paul to the Philippians:

- Do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit
 - Value others better than ourselves
 - Look out for the interests of others
- b. Only by following Christ's own example, of humble service, can we ensure of having fellowship in one accord
- Will we follow the example of Christ in how we use our freedom in our fellowship?
 - Are we now willing to take our own wants, desires, agendas etc. to the Cross, becoming like Him, and build the type of koinonia – close fellowship – He desires?

Remember:

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.” Gal 5:13

Scriptures For ‘Our Life Together - 3’

- i. John 8:31,32,36 *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

James 1:25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

James 2:17 “... faith without actions is dead”

- ii. John 8:34-36 *Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Gal 4:3-5,8-11 So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. 4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. 8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

James 1:21-25 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what

it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

James 2:17 *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

iii. Rom 6:12-18 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

Gal 5:13 *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*

Gal 5:13-15 *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." 15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

iv. 1 Cor 8:1-6 *Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But the man who loves God is known by God. 4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*

1 Cor 8:7 *But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.*

Rom 14:23 *But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

1 Cor 8:9,10 *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?*

1 Cor 8:11,12 *So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.*

1 Cor 8:13 *Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat*

again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

1 Cor 9:19-23 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

1 Cor 10:31-33;11:1 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. 1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

v. *Rom 14:1,13 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.*

Rom 14:14-23 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. 22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Rom 15:1-3 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

vi. *Eph 2:13-22 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

Phil 2:1-8 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of

others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

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