

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Truth in Contradiction
TITLE: The Freedom Paradox
SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:13-17
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Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear—either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

The highest value in our world today is freedom. Freedom. It's the one thing we all agree on—people need to be free. However, many people in our world today don't feel that Christianity has much to contribute to the conversation about freedom. Secular people see Christianity as an authoritarian system of do's and don'ts that actually oppress people and gets in the way of personal freedom. The modern, Western idea of freedom is *freedom from*—"I am only free when I am free *from* all external constraints, restrictions, or structure that would limit me from doing whatever I want (as long as it doesn't hurt someone else). And if that's true, our biggest problem is God, because if there's a God, then ultimately, I have to answer to him. Modern culture's definition of freedom is freedom *from*, but the Bible's definition of freedom is freedom *for*. That certainly raises questions like freedom *for* what? Whose values? Whose purposes? The problem with defining freedom as freedom *for* is that—while we all agree that freedom is the highest value—we don't all agree on how freedom should be defined, especially if your definition limits my personal freedom.

The Bible makes it clear that the Good News that Jesus proclaimed was a message of freedom (Luke 4:18 and John 8:36). But true freedom is paradoxical. The Bible teaches that if you live with a freedom *from* mindset you end up a slave, but if you make yourself God's slave, you end up free. ???

1 Peter 2:13-17 — Notice the paradox in v.16—"Live as free people *and* live as God's slaves." To understand this paradox, we have to unpack this whole idea of freedom *from* and freedom *for*. First, the Bible tells us very clearly that there is no such freedom as freedom from all outside restrictions so I can do whatever my heart desires. For one thing, the Bible tells us that everybody is a slave to something. *How so?* (John 8:31-32, 34, 36; Romans 6; The First of the 10 Commandments).

Everybody lives for something. Everybody is committed to something. All commitments have built-in restrictions. And because that's true, there's no such thing as freedom from all external constraints and restrictions. There's no such thing as "you can do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt anybody." No, the Bible tells us that everybody is a slave to something.

The Bible also tells us that true freedom is finding and living within "liberating" restrictions; namely, the "liberating" restriction of how God designed us to be. God made you *for* and has given you freedom *for* living in a loving, committed relationship with him. You find true freedom only within the loving, liberating restriction of being in a loving, committed relationship with God. Why? Because that's what God created you for.

The problem is our hearts are full of competing desires that enslave us (1 Peter 4:2-3). Deep in our hearts, we have competing desires that enslave us because we're doing whatever we want, instead of wholly wanting for what we need. *What do we really need? What is the "water" the human heart needs to live in order to thrive*

(1 Peter 2:17)? Live as free people and live as God's slaves by living in a committed, loving relationship with God and also in committed, loving relationships with everyone else. Jesus says, "Here's what you were built for—Love God more than anything else and love others the way you love yourself." The problem with the modern definition of freedom is that it's really nothing more than selfishness. And love and selfishness are mutually exclusive. It's only when God liberates you from your selfishness that you become really free.

But the truth is, even as Christians, we're not as free as God says we are. Sometimes those competing desires get the best of us and knock Jesus out of first place in our lives. We need to grow in the freedom that God has gifted to us in Christ.

Two practical applications:

1. Learn to live out of your new identity—live as *free people* who are *God's slaves*. Pray regularly: "God, you have set me free to serve you and to serve others? Today, I surrender every desire in my heart that may arise to compete with Jesus having first place.
2. Keep your eyes on the cross (1 Peter 1:17-20,25). Jesus gave up the glory of his heavenly freedom so you and I could be free.

For Discussion —

1. Why do you think "freedom" is the highest value in our world today?
2. What is your favorite "freedom" story and why?
3. Put into your own words, the prevailing definition of modern, secular culture's view of freedom.
4. Why doesn't the popular idea that true freedom is "*freedom from*" hold up? Why does it fail?
5. How can Christians say that nobody is really free and everybody is a slave to something?
6. Why is it that all commitments have built-in restrictions?
7. Explain why true freedom is finding and living within "liberating" restrictions. What are some examples of "liberating" restrictions?
8. Take some time to talk about how competing desires can rob you of the freedom God has given you.
9. What does *freedom for* mean? What has God made us for?
10. What reminders do you need to live out this Freedom Paradox this week?