

564 Me and My Freedoms

“FREEDOM! We are FREE! To get our message across, we are FREE to SAY and DO whatever we like, wherever we like, and whenever we like! The effects of our words and deeds on other people do not matter, for our rights and freedoms are supreme and must not be interfered with by government or police”.

The above sample of typical belligerent words sums up recent goings-on in Britain and elsewhere, with regular, widely-broadcast, mass “pro-Palestinian” demonstrations held in major world cities. The decision to allow one such march to go ahead, from Hyde Park to the US Embassy in London, on Armistice Day, 11th November, was particularly controversial: was a large, noisy, angry demonstration appropriate on such a sensitive national day, bringing with it the added risk of counter-demonstrations thrown in? Thankfully the marches went off more or less peacefully, but still included blatant, pro-jihad, anti-Jewish chantings over which the police evidently showed little concern.

Two brief, topical examples make the obvious point that freedom of speech and behaviour is of course NOT limitless: Suella Bravermann’s exercise of “freedom of speech” as Home Secretary, in telling some blunt truths about mass demonstrations and illegal immigration, was cut rather short with her being sacked; and the freedom to protest silently and prayerfully outside abortion clinics has been made illegal. So – as Bible-believing Christians, what is the place of freedom within our own Christian lives and discipleship? And, on a wider front, where, and on what grounds, are limits to be placed on individual freedoms within society itself?

First of all, thanks be to God, all spiritually-conceived Christ-accepters have been made free from the demands of the old Jewish Law in terms of forgiveness, salvation and conduct (John 3.3-5, 14-18, 35-36). Jesus explains to new Jewish believers in Him, “If ye continue in my word, [then] are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8.31b-32, 36, KJV). This freedom from the Law’s demands has been won by the Father, through the voluntary death of His sinless Son, as a

free gift to us (Romans 5.15-17); our “old man”, chaining us to sin, has been “crucified” by Christ’s death in our place and on our behalf, so we are now freed from sin, we are “dead with Christ” and “we believe that we shall also live with Christ” because of His, and hence our, resurrection (from Romans 6.5-11). Good News indeed!

These precious spiritual freedoms are immediately followed by their practical implications in the next verses, Romans 6.12-14, starting with – “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof ...”, and in verses 19-23, more teaching of the same – “righteousness unto holiness ... free from sin ... servants to God ... fruit unto holiness ... everlasting life ... the gift of God ... eternal life”. There is a fine summary of these Gospel truths in Galatians 5.1 – “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” – a bondage to sinfulness, and to mere rule-keeping in the futile hope of meeting God’s standards of holiness by our own efforts. Again in I Peter 2.16, the Holy Spirit teaches us through Peter – “As free, and not using your liberty as a cloke for maliciousness, but as the servants of God”.

So here is clear teaching from God’s Word as to the nature of our freedom in Christ, won for us as a free gift and at such great cost. Yes, in one sense we are free in Christ to do whatever we like! – counting on the Father’s fresh forgivenesses through Christ’s blood shed on our behalf. But that would be to abuse the mercies of God. Instead, being dead to sin and freed from sin’s grip, we set our wills under the Holy Spirit to Christ-abidingness, to obedience, to fruit-bearing, to good works, to holiness, and to bringing, even if in tiny ways from ordinary lives, glory to Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (egs., John 15.1-8 / Ephesians 2.8-10).

Christian lives lived like this are thus playing their part in wider society, showing the folly and the sinfulness of the “Me and My Freedoms” mentality now all too prevalent around us. Individual freedoms must inevitably be limited by law or custom where appropriate, for the well-being of others and for the normal functioning of any society. Unsurprisingly the Lord God in His Word has had it right all along in His giving us His “two great commandments” – “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy

heart, soul, mind and strength” and – “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (from Matthew 22.36-40 / Luke 10.27 / (Deuteronomy 6.4-5)). By God’s grace in Christ, with these two great commandments in the hearts and lives of leaders and people in any society, angry, selfish, false assertions of limitless freedoms will have no more place.

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