

Attention:

We live in a world obsessed with freedom, boasting more choices, more autonomy, and fewer restrictions than ever before. Yet, we see record highs in anxiety, addiction, and isolation. We have the freedom to do whatever we want, but we are still so easily enslaved by what others think of us, by our habits, and by our fears.

Imagine living your entire life behind iron bars, never knowing they were unlocked the whole time. Tragically, that is how many of us live our spiritual lives. We have been rescued, forgiven, and adopted into the family of God, yet we still walk around dragging the chains of our past, our guilt, and our shame.

Need:

In Christianity, you have more freedom than you do bondage as long as you live in Christ rather than flawed public opinions. As a follower of Christ Jesus, you must make a choice to live free in God or stay bound by the status quo. Never take directions from someone who is lost. Too long now, the people of God have been bound by fear, dictated by fashion management, and governed by public opinion rather than the Word of God. Do not let the social culture of today, limit your liberty in Christ. Find more freedom in being practical than being traditional.

Background:

Written around A.D. 62–64, Acts is filled with human fear, disarray, and formations of the apostles as they spread throughout the world, taking the gospel far beyond Jerusalem. The gospel is preached to the poor and the wealthy, the Africans and the Asians, the Europeans, the Mediterranean world. Sin has spread to all men, and all men can be saved as they respond the good news of God’s message of hope. The book shows how the early Christians were stimulated to pray, fast, fellowship, and move into the presence of an ordinary life to the presence of God. These early believers are a symbol of commitment, evangelism, obedience, and zeal for God, which serves as an example for the present-day church.

God has been using Peter mightily to preach to the Jews and also the Gentiles. After preaching to Cornelius’ house, many Gentiles were saved, and the tides of Christianity were shifting in Jerusalem and enlarging in a powerful way. A mighty move of God was sweeping through Israel. As the fame of Jesus was spreading through the preaching of the apostles, King Herod Agrippa began to persecute the church. He would do so by jailing anyone that preached Jesus, the Son of God, the resurrected Savior. The king feared an overthrow if things got out of hand.

Becoming intolerant, King Herod had James killed, the Lord's apostle. When King Herod saw killing him pleased the people, he also apprehended Peter and locked him in prison. While awaiting his trial, the church prayed. In the middle of the night before his execution, the Lord sent two angels to deliver Peter from prison. It was so vivid that he did not know it was real until he was led to freedom. Peter saw the evidence of the power of prayer.

1. Stuck Between a Hard Place and Chains (v. 5-6).

- a. Peter was chained in a difficult position, waiting to be executed.
 - i. If there is no freewill, why commandments?
 - 1. The result would be predestinationism.
- b. Jesus was labeled and scandalized because He ate with sinners.
 - i. *"Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?'"* (Mark 2:15–16).
 - ii. Jesus used this opportunity as a display for repentance than cleaning up first.
 - iii. Not everybody that it is in your corner is rooting for you to win.
- c. Double Standards Illustration: A Christian grandma refused to eat dinner with her gay granddaughter and her girlfriend, claiming it was a sin to eat with sinners, housing her drug-addicted grandson.
 - i. Many fight over casinos but go on cruises with them.
 - ii. They fight over alcohol but entertain restaurants with it.
- d. Do not allow your situation to be your final destination.
 - i. Many are getting high, drunk, having sex, playing church and claiming Christ.
- e. Things might be hard right now, but prayer is the key.

2. Christian Freedom (v. 7-8).

- a. When the angel of the Lord appeared, Peter's chains fell off.
- b. Too many are living like a hog and expecting the hog pin to change.
 - i. Chains have to fall off of you before your situation.
 - ii. If not, you will be bound at the next place
 - iii. If you can't get along with people, time will tell who the problem is.
 - 1. *"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."* (John 8:36, NKJV).

- iv. Radical freedom is challenging what is traditional by what is practical.
- c. A man left his church because his pastor preached against alcohol. The time came when his only daughter would graduate high school. As they were going to celebrate her graduation, her dad tells her boyfriend, have my daughter in by midnight. That night they got a phone call that his daughter had been in a car wreck. They go to the hospital and she is pronounced dead. This father was angry. He was beside himself. Unwilling to reason, he had lost all composure and self-control. He despised the boyfriend and sought to kill him for killing his daughter. He gets home and goes to the cabinet to get a drink and sees a note, “Dad, I know you wouldn’t mind if I took a drink to celebrate my graduation.” It was then when the father realized that it was not the boyfriend, but it was him who supplied the mechanism that took the life of his own daughter. Now he wished he would have honored the preacher than run from church.
- d. Get delivered from what people think about you, and you can be used.

3. Power Trumps Superstition (v. 9-11).

- a. Peter was not only delivered, but he defied the expectations of the Jews.
 - i. Some cannot pray for themselves or the people they love.
- b. Superstition relies on fear to avoid bad luck, or God’s punishment.
 - i. Believers live on blessings (Num. 23:20-21).
 - ii. Faith confronts fear:
 - 1. Fear grips the soul.
 - 2. Fear is a cancer.
 - 3. Faith sees a river in the desert—Faith framed the worlds together.
 - iii. *“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” (Hebrews 11:3, NKJV).*
- c. When you are free, you think different, you worship different, you talk different.
- d. **God Uses People to Set Others Free Illustration:** In 2013, Charles Ramsey saved three Ohio girls that had been imprisoned for nine years by Ariel Castro. The sad part is his neighbors never knew the monster he was until freedom showed up for them. Ramsey said that God placed him there to free these girls. Jesus will use anything or anyone to set people free from a turbulent condition.
- e. Know there is power when a church prays in one accord.