

Article 4: Freedom from Sin

Art Thomas

Fowlerville Freedom Center

Why do we call America the “Land of Freedom”? Is it because we have no laws? Nope. It’s because we DO have laws. The “inalienable rights endowed by our Creator” are lawfully attacked and defended everyday in Washington. As a result, we get to have freedom and a comparatively safe land to live in.

God’s Kingdom is very similar, but much more efficient. God Himself is both Judge and Jury. He is the Author and the Interpreter of the Law. And His law is simple:

Matthew 22:37-40—*Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two (NIV).*

And yet people turn their noses up at such simplicity. They don’t love themselves. They fight with their neighbors. They hold bitterness, resentment, and jealousy in their hearts. They gossip and backbite. And worst of all, they rebel against God.

Even in the church, we tend to look at God’s law as though it doesn’t apply anymore. “Oh, Jesus fulfilled the law. There is no condemnation for me if I only believe.” Sorry, but you’re wrong. Just because you believe that Jesus died and rose again does not mean you can keep living like the world and expect to get into heaven on grace alone.

Matthew 5:17-20—*[Jesus said,] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (NIV).*

We need to stop showing contempt for the Law of God, and start obeying Him because He knows how to keep us out of prison. We must also realize, however, that Jesus already knows our weaknesses, and He did not come to impose an impossible religion on us. God never tells a person to do something

without also providing the power and ability to carry it out. Jesus said His burden is light!

So where's the balance? If it's impossible to keep the law, why would God ask me to? How can God expect me to be perfect? If His burden is supposed to be light, how come it's so hard to live like Jesus? How can He be so unfair?

Let's clear all this up. God has provided a way to stand up under temptation and live a victorious Christian life that is free from sin. You won't be one hundred percent perfect, but you will be free from the prison of separation from God. In fact, the Bible tells us that if we claim to be without sin, we're liars, and Jesus is not in us; but at the same time, it also says we'll stop sinning. Is this even possible?

FREEDOM FROM SIN

In the ministry God has given me, I often speak to young people. Once, it came to my attention that several teens in my church's youth group were using something I said as a "license to sin." They heard my teaching about sin being first of all a "state of being" rather than an action (I'll explain this later), and then they started to justify their activity by arguing, "Art said sin isn't actions, it's separation from God—and God still talks to me, so what I'm doing must be okay."

As soon as I heard how Satan had twisted this teaching and led these kids astray, I knew I had to address the issue. The next Sunday at our worship gathering I corrected the matter publicly, not knowing how widespread the lie had become. Frankly, I told them with revelation from the Holy Spirit that God had not been talking to them; they were listening to demons. If they had been listening to God, they would have heard Him pointing out their sin and calling them to repent. Sinful actions are EVIDENCE of a sinful state of being. If your actions aren't lining up with the life of Jesus, you don't have a relationship with God!

See, Jesus didn't die so you could live any way you like and get away with it. He died so that you could be *forgiven* for living "any way you want"! Once you're forgiven, it's time to live in obedience to God—otherwise you trample the cross as though the sacrifice of Jesus did nothing for you. Just as "freedom" does not mean "lawlessness" in America, "freedom" in God's Kingdom means knowing and obeying Him.

Galatians 5:13—*My brothers and sisters, God called you to be free, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful self. Serve each other with love (NCV).*

Jesus has made you free by paying the penalty for sin that you deserved. But if you live as though He did nothing, then you have not accepted His sacrifice at all! To truly embrace the sacrifice of Jesus we must have a daily reliance upon His grace to keep us free from sin. If you KNOW the Truth, He will set you free! It's about having a relationship with Him that has nothing to do with religious practices, rituals, or laborious adherence to rigid commandments regarding what's right and wrong.

RELATIONSHIP VERSUS RELIGION

At the very beginning of time, God gave Adam and Eve a beautiful garden to live in. Trees of every kind could be found there. But there were two trees that were especially important.

The first was the Tree of Life. Eating the fruit of this tree would have kept Adam and Eve alive for all eternity, so God gave them free access to this tree.

The second was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The fruit of this tree, however, was forbidden. In fact, God said that if they ate the fruit they would surely die. But in order to make love and obedience genuine instead of forced, He made it possible for the fruit to be eaten. That way, Adam and Eve would have a free will to obey or disobey—to love or reject God.

We all know the story—Satan comes and tempts Eve to eat some forbidden fruit, and she then hands some to Adam who was standing there with her. They both eat, and ultimately they are kicked out of the garden and kept away from the Tree of Life.

And here's why I share this story: As Christians, we are made citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. And according to the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John, the Tree of Life can be found in this Kingdom. We once again have access to eternal life because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sin and made the Kingdom of God accessible. But we have a choice on this earth whether we will live as citizens of the Kingdom or as people of the world.

In ancient Hebrew culture, to “know” is to experience something or someone intimately. Therefore, to “know” good and evil is to intimately experience both good and evil—to have a genuine understanding of each through participation.

Adam and Eve went from pure innocence and eternal life to a personal encounter with disobedience, which opened their eyes to the difference between good and evil. Suddenly, there was a shift in how they approached God. They no longer came boldly and freely to Him. Rather, they hid because they had noticed their nakedness.

Knowing good and evil distracts us from God by causing us to look at ourselves instead of Him. And when we see ourselves and how unworthy we are, we hide from Him. Here we have one of the biggest obstacles to intimacy that can be found in the worldwide Church today: dead religion.

Religion is a set of rituals, beliefs, and laws that may or may not be in line with Truth. We use religion to help us gauge our spirituality. If we're following our religion perfectly, we feel good about ourselves; so we feel like we're close to God. If we've deviated from our religion, we're ashamed; so we avoid God. And worst of all, we eventually start to judge others based on our religion. Suddenly they're labeled as either good or evil based on our standards rather than based on God's standards.

All the while, we miss the whole reason Jesus came. Our Lord was crucified and rose to life so that we could be free from the Law of sin and death. We can have our purity and innocence restored! We can be rescued from the prisons we've put ourselves in! We can be FREE!

Are you living according to the freedom and innocence of the Tree of Life, which has been provided to you by Jesus? Or are you still being tempted by Satan to live according to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Our biggest problem these days in regard to God's Law is that we just don't follow it. The Bible says that if we break just one part of the Law, we're guilty of breaking all of it. And if we've broken the entire Law of God, then the full weight of judgment required by the Law will be brought down on us. But Jesus is the solution for our guilt and shame. He purchased our freedom and innocence with His own blood.

The second biggest problem in regard to the Law is that we're still fascinated with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We still focus on ourselves. We still focus on outward actions rather than the condition of the heart. So we ask questions like "Is it okay to do this or that?" or, "Is this a sin?" We're still looking for a greater knowledge of what's good and what's evil rather than looking for a greater knowledge of God.

Purity is not a matter of actions but of the heart—I don't care if Hitler walked an old lady across the street; that action is not evidence of inner purity. Pure actions do not produce a pure heart; rather, a pure heart produces pure actions. The same goes for sin: evil actions come from an evil heart. Sin is not first of all a matter of action but rather of the heart's condition. If you see that your actions are evil, it's because you do not have the heart of Jesus. You need to repent and seek to know Him better.

THE "INSIDE JOB" OF SIN AND DEATH

Sin is not first of all an action; it's a state of being. The actions we normally call "sins" are actually just evidence of our "sin."

Sin is literally separation. If I sin against you, I've separated myself from you—if I sin against God, then I've separated myself from Him. God, on the other hand, does not sin; He will never leave you nor forsake you. If you find yourself separate from God, it's not because He sinned; it's because you sinned.

Sin is foundationally the state of being in which we are separate from God, falling short of His glorious perfection, and living contrary to His plans and purposes. When we are in sin, our actions follow suit. We start to lie, cheat, steal, murder, envy, throw fits of rage, act jealously, and much more. These actions are typically called "sins," but they are really just evidence of our "sin."

This may just sound like a game of semantics, but knowing the difference will revolutionize your Christianity. We often fail when we think that "sin" is merely an action. The result of this belief is that we assume we're in relationship with God until we finally commit a sinful act. Then (if our conscience hasn't been ruined) we feel bad and remorseful.

If, however, we view sin as a state of being, we can be free from sinful actions. For example, I used to confess to my pastor and other Christian friends all the sinful things I did in the past couple days or so. It was discouraging because I knew better, but I couldn't stop myself. But when I finally understood the difference between sinful actions and the state of being called "sin," things changed.

Now, I openly confess when I haven't been living in relationship with God. Then I repent and get back to my relationship with Him. That way my sinful state of being is dealt with before it can degenerate into sinful actions.

I still slip up now and then, but it is always when I've allowed my own sinful desires to entice me and drag me away from God. If, however, I keep my focus centered on knowing God and drawing near to Him, I don't sin.

Take your time reading the next few scriptures and examine your own life in the light of them:

1 John 2:3-6—We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did (NIV).

1 John 3:4-10—Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother (NIV).

If you've been a believer for years, but you still do not reveal the nature of Jesus in your everyday life, I have some somber news for you: you're not a Christian. It's not enough to simply believe there's a God—even the demons believe that. You need to know Him. As you can see, real Christianity involves freedom from sin as we seek to know God more.

Take some time in prayer. Get to know Jesus. Get to know the Truth; and He will set you free!

[NEXT ARTICLE: Knowing God](#)