

# Free To Do What?

*"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."*

**John 8:31-32**

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

The teachings of our church tell us *"that all freedom is a matter of love..."* (DP 73).

This means there are as many "freedoms" as there are loves.

Think about that for a moment...

Eating a bowl of your favorite ice cream while watching a movie at home or while reading a novel - this simple pleasure sets you "free" - that is why you do it!

The same is true for all of the other activities we freely and willingly seek out.

People talk about being in their "happy place" when they get to *do* what they love...

Summertime is often when we get to engage in these types of activities...

Like...

- spending time by the lake or the ocean or up in the mountains
- fishing, boating, water sports
- nature walks, bird watching
- get out on the open road, exploring, travelling, etc.

But of course all year long there are things we like to do that "set us free..." both as to mind and body,

Like...

- reading, writing, educating ourselves by learning new things
- visiting with friends and families
- exercising or playing sports

- fixing/creating things/hobbies/crafts
- using our particular skill set to help someone out

These types of activities bring us happiness and joy because...

- we are *freely* choosing to engage in the activity
- **the point being that no one is *forcing* us to do these things...**

no one is *forcing* us to go fishing or to go hiking or bird watching!

Of course, not all freedoms are *equal* which means not all *loves* are equal.

As much as we might like to golf or fish or cook, we know that these loves need to play a subordinate role to higher *general* loves...

- like love of country
- or love of the neighbor
- or a love of useful service...

Lower loves also need to be subordinate to higher *specific* loves...

- like the love of chastity in marriage
- the love of gaining knowledge and wisdom from the Lord's Word
- or the love of moral virtues like generosity, humility, honesty, kindness, loyalty, industry and perseverance.

This is why the teachings of our church often spend time (and emphasis) placing "loves" in categories and in a hierarchy:

For example, we're taught that there are four *general* categories of love, with the first and higher two being the most edifying and noble, and the last and lower two being less edifying and noble:

- |          |                         |
|----------|-------------------------|
| (Higher) | 1. Love of the Lord     |
|          | 2. Love of the neighbor |
| -----    |                         |
| (Lower)  | 3. Love of the world    |
|          | 4. Love of self         |

Since all freedom is a matter of love, we can start to see how edifying and noble loves like love to the Lord and love to the neighbor promise to unlock far greater and more satisfying *freedom*s than lower ones, so long as lower loves like love of the world and love of self (and our attachment to them) are willing to play a subordinate role.

This brings us to one of the most popular and frequently quoted verses in the Bible, namely that of our text: "*...the truth will set you free.*"

This quote has so much appeal to people because,

- everybody wants to be *free*,
- everybody wants to be free to do what they *want*,
- everybody wants to be free to make their own choices *without interference*.

Our country is founded on this principle, namely that of "*life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*"

**But here's the challenge and question for today - if the *truth* sets us free, whose "truth" are we talking about?**

We could all come up with scenarios, with "truths" that we *think* would make us happy, thus free. Our list of scenarios might include:

*"If I won the lottery (freedom) I'd quit my job tomorrow."*

*"If only people listened to me and did what I said, I'd be a lot happier (free)."*

*"If I had the opportunity I'd move to the country (freedom), away from people."*

*"The perfect job (freedom) would be not having to answer to anyone but myself."*

*"I would be happy (free) if I never had to deal with annoying or disagreeable people again..."*

These scenarios might contain our "truth," our concept of freedom, but are they the truth spoken of in our text?

**Well, when we are honest with ourselves, we know that there is only *one* person who can make us free, and it isn't us.**

**It is the Lord.**

In fact, our understanding (idea) of freedom rests squarely on our understanding (idea) of God (see DLW 13)...

- on how we see the Lord,
- on how we approach Him in His Word,
- on how we call upon Him in prayer...

Because...

if we don't understand *who* the Lord is (what He intends for us)...  
 if we can't appreciate *what* He is trying to do for us (save us)...  
 if we don't understand *how* He is trying to make us free (by  
 sometimes telling us things we don't want to hear)...

**...we will resist letting the Lord "set us free" in the  
 way He wants to set us free!**

To be "set free" implies we are being released from something that is holding us back, something that is holding us in bondage or slavery and that is, of course, the presence of evil and falsity both *in* and *around* us.

So, in the context of the Lord's Word, to be "set free" implies a willingness to "fight" for something we are initially ignorant of, or don't want.

It implies a willingness to confront evil because, as one passage says,

*"no matter how **similar** they look on the surface, the freedom to do good  
 and the freedom to do evil are as different and remote from each other as heaven and hell..."*  
 (HD 144).

Added to this challenge of thinking we couldn't possibly be slaves to our own selfish habits and attitudes is this passage:

*"Doing evil freely **seems to be a kind of freedom** but it is actually slavery since this  
 freedom comes from loving ourselves and the world, and these loves come from hell" (HD 142)*

For example, we might give someone "a piece of our mind," or shout at them or criticize them and in doing so feel that it was therapeutic and "freeing," but then realize later on that what we did was likely *not* coming from a good place!

So, if we know that only the Lord can set us free, it makes sense that we would want to know *how* He does this since we need to be willing participants.

The book *Divine Providence* says there are laws governing the way the Lord leads us that people don't know about. It then goes on to reveal five specific "laws" or ways in which the Lord sets us free.

It's worth taking a moment to briefly identify each one of these **because *all* of them are about freedom.**

The **first law** ensures that we act in "freedom according to reason." The Lord wants us to be able to make our *own* decisions, willingly and rationally, and not under (physical or mental) duress or pressure.

The **second law** tells of how the Lord protects our autonomy, the feeling that life is our own, while simultaneously encouraging us to recognize that without Him we can do nothing.

The **third law** describes how the Lord protects us from being compelled by others to do things against our will, while simultaneously encouraging us to nevertheless compel *ourselves* to make good choices based on our faith.

The **fourth law** describes the Lord's effort to help us see that the truths of the Word are the *only* means by which evils may be recognized and shunned. We may create our own god, our own "truths," in the hope of freeing ourselves, but only the truths of the Word contain the *power* to save us!

The **fifth law** tells us that we won't ever feel the Lord leading us in the ways just described but that we should nevertheless *believe* and *trust* that this is precisely what He is doing to lead us toward heaven (see DP 70-190).

So many things could be said about these five laws of Divine Providence but perhaps the most remarkable (and merciful) aspect of them all is that the Lord *never* compels or pressures us to accept Him or the truths of His Word or anything of religion.

As one teaching says, there is no way we could choose the Lord's Way unless we had the freedom "*to contemplate both what is evil and false and what is good and true*" (HD 143).

This is a such an important principle to remember because just as the Lord never takes our freedom away by forcing His will or truth upon us, neither should we take the freedom away of others by forcing our will or ideas upon them!

Another key point implicit in these laws of Divine Providence is that not only is the Lord our Creator, He is *also* (more importantly) our *Savior*.

**Everything that the Lord is doing to set us free is in this context.**

In other words, the Lord leaves us in perfect freedom to accept His offer of *salvation*,

His way, His truth, His life,

**...on our terms, and at our own pace.**

We started this sermon by reflecting on the incredible freedoms we enjoy, especially in the summer months like:

- spending time by the lake or the ocean or up in the mountains
- fishing, boating, enjoy water sports
- nature walks, bird watching
- freedom of the open road, exploring, travelling, etc.
- reading, writing, educating ourselves, learning new things

The Lord wants us to enjoy the taste of these "freedoms" so that we may gain an appetite for the deeper and higher freedoms that await us.

The Lord wants us to experience...

- the freedom of letting go of selfish habits and wants

- the freedom of facing our giants, our fears
- the freedom of taking the "road less travelled" - swallowing our pride, admitting when we are wrong or have caused harm to those we love
- the freedom of loving and serving our neighbor with no thought of reward or recognition
- the freedom of engaging in causes/uses greater than ourselves...

These are the freedoms the angels of heaven enjoy, freedoms which unlock heaven's happiness because they, like us, wish to be "set free" from the slavery of selfish and material wants and needs.

Of course, these freedoms are hard-won and are sometimes not felt or appreciated until years later when the bitter disappointment and hurt of our struggles and trials have faded into the background.

We struggle because we are doing battle against the *lies* of the hells,  
                   lies we either "bought into,"  
                                   or lies which made us the unsuspecting victim.

Yes, the truth will set us free! But let us make sure it's the Lord's truth we are using, and not the "truths" (the god) of our own making, for there is only one Person who can make us free in the way our mind, our soul, longs to be free!

Let us "rise up" into the higher loves awaiting us, the higher freedoms that help us see as the Lord sees, and hear as the Lord hears, and speak as the Lord speaks.

Let us do this by ...

- going to the Lord in His Word and learning from Him
- accepting the Lord as our Savior and Redeemer
- devoting ourselves to uses and causes greater than ourselves
- humbly and willingly serving the Lord and our neighbor.

**AMEN.**

Lessons: *Exodus 13:3, 20:2, John 8:30-36, Divine Providence 73, HD 141-142*