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REAL FREEDOM
A Life Based on God's Word

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FREEDOM DEFINED

John 8:31,32, 36. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on 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."

Every person desires real freedom, a freedom only revealed in the inspired Word of God. The Bible clearly teaches that everyone who commits sin is a slave. Jesus Christ alone, the Great Emancipator, can set sin's slave free. (John 8:34-36) Having been delivered from bondage to sin by God's saving and sanctifying grace, the free man continues to walk in the light. (I John 1:7) To him comes knowledge of the truth which makes him free indeed.

True freedom is doing God's will from a compulsion of love rather than coercion of men. "If ye love me, keep my commandments," Jesus said. (John 14:15) And from experience the apostle comments: "... His commandments are not grievous." (I John 5:3) One freed by God's transforming grace serves God because of love, a love-response to God's first loving him. Like the Psalmist, the free man exclaims, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my

heart." (Ps. 40:8) Freedom is the privilege of doing God's will at all times, in all places, under all circumstances because one really wants to do that more than anything else in the world!

However, the desire, determination, and delight of doing God's will do not automatically make one know what is right or wrong in all things. How does one find God's will when something is not an obvious black or white but rather a foggy gray? Where the Bible speaks plainly, God's will is clear. But the Bible mentions nothing of automobiles, airplanes, acid rock, radios, TV, space shuttles, nuclear energy, nor things yet uninvented. To have done so would have bewildered previous generations of Christians. Though the Bible does not speak specifically of many things, we are not left to grope through life in a fog. Inspired writers laid down principles whereby every Christian in every age can, with the Spirit's help, determine what God's will for him is. Free from conflicting opinions of men, whether bad or good, saints can discern God's will for themselves and have the privilege of always doing right because they want that more than anything else.

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SCRIPTURE ENJOINS BY COMMANDS

Scripture clearly enjoins some things as commands which convey right or wrong for as long as God sits on His throne. (Ps. 119:89) Three kinds of law were given to the Israelites: civil law for the people just released from Egyptian bondage, ceremonial law which was fulfilled in Christ, and the moral law of God. The moral laws, as briefly set forth in the Ten Commandments, have never been abrogated. Jesus Himself approved the moral law even while emphasizing that keeping its spirit is more important than following it to the letter. (Mt. 5:17-48)

God's moral law, designed for our good (Deut. 6:24), is not relative or dependent on whims and practices of man; His law is absolute, based on His own unchanging holiness. Men may ignore or despise it., break it or set it aside; but in the end they will be judged by it. We who live in a permissive, promiscuous, and perverted society must remember that what the Bible calls right is absolutely right and what it pronounces wrong is absolutely wrong.

The Bible defines all unrighteousness, disobedience, and disbelief as sin. (I John 5:17; 3:4; James 4:17) Romans 14:23 specifically addresses areas about which even Christians disagree: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." If you are not confident of God's approval, for you it is sin. To illustrate: Unless a man is blind, he need never ask his wife "Honey, is this shirt all right to wear?" when the shirt is unsoiled and unwrinkled. There is no question. The question arises only when he wonders how much dirt and how many wrinkles he can wear and still be considered clean and neat. In short, if it is doubtful, it is dirty. If that is true of garments, how much more is it true in spiritual things!

Scripture also commands separation from the world in affections (I John 2:15-17) and actions (II Co. 6:14-7:1), declaring that friendship with the world is enmity with God. (James 4:4) But what is the world? Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines it as "worldly affairs; the aggregate of things earthly; the whole circle of earthly goods, endowments, riches, advantages, pleasures, etc., which, though hollow, frail and fleeting, stir desire, seduce from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ."

To be separate from the world is more a matter of spirit and attitude than of personal contact. Too often we interpret separation to mean isolation and pull ourselves away from sinners in order to be holy; thus the world goes to hell unimpeded by our influence. Jesus revealed the fallacy of this attitude. He mingled freely among all people, even ones the Pharisees despised; yet He was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26) In John 17:14-18 Jesus said of His followers: "I have given them Thy word: and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from evil. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. As Thou has sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world." As Jesus was not isolated from the world but insulated from its evil effects by the Holy Spirit, so are His followers to be.

Separation is commanded not only in affections and actions but also in appearance. Kenneth S. Wuest's translation of I Tim. 2:9-11 is noteworthy: "Likewise, I desire that women be adorning themselves in apparel that is fitting to their sex and their position as Christians, having along with this modesty and sober-mindedness; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or very costly garments, but with that which is fitting for a woman professing godliness, adorning themselves by means of good works." The passage suggests that a Christian's clothing is to be distinctive, decent, and decorous.

Distinctive attire clearly declares one's sexual identity, the result of physical birth, and reflects one's Christian experience, the result of supernatural birth. Such distinction is supported relative to clothing in Deuteronomy 22:5 and hairstyles in I Corinthians 11:14-15. For instance, Paul's teaching about having the head covered was contrary to customs of Corinthian Greeks and the practice of Jewish and Roman men; thus, Christians were to be distinctly separate from the world.

Next, a Christian's dress is to be decent, i.e., modest, sensible, and economical. Its modesty covers the person properly without shouting for attention. Peter describes this as "the ornament of a meek (Greek: "gentle," "mild") and quiet (Greek: "tranquil") spirit." (I Pet. 3:4) A Christian's apparel is also sensible and self-controlled, for the word Mr. Wuest translates "sober-mindedness" also means "soundness of mind" or "self-control." In other words, a Christian is to dress deliberately and thoughtfully to please and glorify God rather than to be like the ungodly world.

Decency of Christian appearance also means that it is economical as indicated by the words, "not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or very costly garments." Fashions of Paul's day called for women to braid strands of silver or gold into their hair. Peter's instructions about adornment mention "wearing of gold." (I Pet. 3:3) In Greek the word for "wearing" has the prefix "pen," a prefix we know from the word perimeter. So Peter is speaking out against the "wearing around of gold." In the minds of the inspired apostles the wearing around of gold was not part of proper Christian testimony! Although a Christian's clothing is to be economical rather than extravagant, the most economical is not always the cheapest in the beginning.

Finally, according to Paul, the clothing of Christians is to be decorous -- "that which is fitting for a woman professing godliness." One cannot imagine the Virgin Mary in a bikini when the angelic announcement was made or, for that matter, at any other time. One should dress properly to meet the Lord (John 21:7), manifest godliness, and enhance rather than detract from good works. Dowdiness or carelessness in grooming never glorify God nor add effectiveness to witnessing. Some have done great things for God who were unkempt, but it was in spite of -- not because of -- their unkemptness. Their influence for good would likely have been far greater had they been more concerned about their grooming.

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SCRIPTURE ENLIGHTENS BY PRINCIPLES

Although the Bible clearly declares some things to be right or wrong, defines sin, and demands separation from the world, it does not follow that because something is not definitely called wrong it is right. Because the Word was written for all men of all nations for all time, it does not speak of fads, fashions, pastimes, or inventions peculiar to any generation. Thus, Christians have always found themselves needing to know the will of God in areas where there is no consensus of opinion even among good and scholarly men. The saint is not left, however, to the mercy of conflicting opinions. God has provided, through Scripture, principles to assist each Christian in determining what pleases God and what does not. Such principles allow each of us real freedom: the privilege of always doing right, by God's grace, because we want to do it more than anything else in the world. Jesus said: "If ye continue in my words, then ye are my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." Freedom comes from the principles of divine truth.

A principle is a generalization stating how to live. Three criteria mark a Bible principle. First, it is continuous, that is, timeless. Anything applicable only to a certain time period which then lapses is not a principle upon which to build for eternity. Besides being continuous, principles must be cultureless and constant.

A cultureless principle is valid for every culture, anywhere on earth. Only the extremely uninformed are unaware of the great cultural differences over long periods of time or between nations. For instance, in America borrowing an article and not returning it is stealing. In Haiti, however, unless the lender specifically asks for the item to be returned, it is considered an outright gift. Who is to say that one culture is more honest than the other? "Thou shalt not steal" is a command applying to both cultures which God will use to judge each.

Deuteronomy 22:5 states one genuinely cultureless principle: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garments for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord." This cultureless principle mentions no specific articles of apparel but is general enough to apply anywhere for all time. The Pulpit Commentary notes that the phrase "which pertaineth unto a man" means literally "the apparatus of a man, including not just dress but implements, tools, weapons, and utensils." The verse affirms the principle of maintaining distinction between sexes as established in Genesis 1: 27, 31: "Male and female created He them."

"Shemales" or "shims" were not part of God's creation. Breakdown of the clear sexual distinction is a primary cause of the contemporary plague of homosexuality and lesbianism.

Some might object that this is not a timeless principle, arguing that the context is outdated and unrelated to twentieth century America. Careful study of Deuteronomy 22 in its entirety reveals many other principles still recognized today. Verses 1-4 establish the principle of acting in love toward one's neighbor. Verses 6-7 deal with compassion toward animals. Is this outmoded? Long before the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or crusades to prevent extinction of species, God had concern for animal life! Verse 8 notes a homeowner's responsibility for the safety of those on his property. Today we buy homeowner's liability insurance and build railings.

Deuteronomy 22:9-12 pictures the principle of separation. Now, as then, it would be folly to plant mixed seed or plow with an ox (a clean animal) and a donkey (considered unclean). Separation was also emphasized in the command not to mix wool which typifies uncleanness with linen which represents righteousness. Although the rule forbidding the priest to wear woolen garments in tabernacle service has nothing to do with fabrics today, the principle of separation from uncleanness is relevant. Jews were to be different from heathen (verse 12); for Christians the spiritual application of II Corinthians 6:14-18 is similar. The remainder of the chapter sets forth principles of chastity incorporated in laws today.

Not only does this extended survey of the chapter show that Deuteronomy 22:5 is in a context of other timeless principles, but careful word study confirms its timeless relevance. The Hebrew word for "abomination" literally means "morally disgusting" or "morally detestable." Elsewhere the word is applied to adultery, bestiality, and idolatry -- all moral issues. The word never connotes breaking of civil or ceremonial law but rather marks moral transgression. Any breakdown of the distinction God made between the sexes is forever a sin that is "morally detestable" to Him.

A Bible principle is not only continuous and cultureless but also constant -- as unchanging as God Himself. God will not change His mind on the point. Though men choose to disregard or break it, they will in the end be broken by it. Just as God does not repeal the law of gravity for one who jumps from a skyscraper, so He will not annul one of His principles for anyone who chooses to break it.

Several principles helpful to Christians wanting to live godly lives appear in I Corinthians. Some scholars believe this book, written to Christians in Corinth about 55 A.D., to be the first New Testament book to have been composed. If so, it was addressed to converts from raw paganism who faced a bewildering array of problems with nothing to guide them but the Old Testament. In these circumstances God led them from wrong to right, not by a list of do's and don'ts which would have had limited, short-term value, but by a series of principles to guide them in every possible circumstance. Because these are principles, not specific "rules," they have never-ending value for all desiring to know and do God's will. Four passages in I Corinthians give six principles.

The first three are expressed in I Corinthians 6:12: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient (good); all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the

power of any." The twice repeated "all things are lawful for me" must be considered in context. Verse 8 speaks of the wrong of defrauding a brother. Because wrong is never right, this must be excluded from Paul's meaning. The following verses list those who cannot enter heaven: unrighteous, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners. (verses 9-11) Verses 13-20 solemnly warn against immorality. Inevitably one concludes that Paul is not saying that any of these things is lawful (proper) for Christians. What he is saying is: "All things not forbidden in Scripture are lawful for me."

These initial principles can be posed as questions:

1. Is it permissible in Scripture? If not, it is forever off limits to the Lord's freed man. God's Word stands: "Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin."
2. Is it profitable to me? "All things are not expedient (good)." Will this be good for me spiritually? mentally? physically? If not, I'll lay it aside as a weight that would hinder my being the Christian I should be. (Heb. 12:1)
3. Is it powerless to enslave me? "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Can I easily control it, keep it controlled, and give it up? If it might master me, I'll have nothing to do with it. I refuse to be the slave of anything but Jesus.

The next principle is stated in I Corinthians 10:23-24. Although verse 23 repeats I Corinthians 6:12, verse 24 points away from the personal good of 6:12 to the welfare of others: "All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but everyone another's good (well being)." Principle four is:

4. Is it positively helpful to others? Will it provide a good example? Will it build up or tear down the faith of others? Will it help them be their very best for God? Romans 14:21 says, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." I have no right to indulge in things that will be detrimental to brothers and sisters in the Lord.

A fifth principle derives from I Corinthians 10:31: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The principle is clear:

5. Is it pleasing to God? Will it exalt His name, His holiness, His love, His power, His mercy, His grace? Is there anything about it that will disgrace His name, grieve the Holy Spirit, or hinder God's work? If I cannot please God with this, I shall not do it though a multitude of professing Christians say it is permissible. (Ex. 23:2) I will leave them in God's care and live to glorify Him alone.

Finally, chapter 10:32-33 states: "Give none offence -- (i.e., occasion to stumble) neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved." Rephrased, the principle is:

6. Is it proper in the eyes of men? I will avoid any apparent inconsistency of life that might turn others from the Lord. I will live so that no one -- Jew, pagan, or Christian -- will stumble into hell over me. The Christian is to "abstain from all appearance of evil." (I Thess. 5:22) So concerned was Paul about influence that he determined, "If meat make my brother to offend (stumble) I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend (stumble)." (I Co. 8:13) If the deed or word is unchristian in the eyes of the Jews, the world, or the church, it is not for the child of God.

These six principles applied to all aspects of living in our time and culture whether it be occupation, recreation, personal grooming, or possessions will clearly indicate what is right and what is wrong. Take whatever confronts you and prayerfully, with the Spirit's assistance, ask and answer these questions:

1. Is it permissible in scripture?
2. Is it profitable to me?
3. Is it powerless to enslave me?
4. Is it positively helpful to others?
5. Is it pleasing to God?
6. Is it proper in the eyes of men?

By the time you have finished, if not before, you will know whether the answer is "Go! Go!" or "No! No!"

Within the framework of these principles God gives personal convictions. A personal conviction is given to an individual by God, based on principles of His Word, to protect him at a weak point in his present stage of spiritual experience and maturity or to keep him from being a stumbling block to others. This definition will not satisfy some courts of law, for unsaved men -- not understanding the intimate relationship of a holy soul with its Maker (I Co. 2:1416) -- will find the concept of personal convictions connected with deep spirituality alien. Our aim is to have the approval of God, the Judge of judges.

Personal convictions are not cause for boasting. Neither are they to be forced on others, for God deals with us as unique individuals. A ridiculous example clarifies this. Imagine that the Bible says, "Eating ice cream and cake is questionable." Mr. A is exceedingly fond of ice cream but dislikes cake. Consequently, God deals drastically with him about the problem of eating ice cream but never bothers him about cake. On the other hand, Mr. B cares nothing for ice cream but has a weakness for cake. As a result, God deals strongly with him about his problem of eating cake but does not need to deal with him about ice cream consumption. Each is dealt with at the point of weakness not of strength. As God deals with us, we must walk in the light if we are to be victorious and God-pleasing.

Measuring up to standards forced on us by others is galling; but personal convictions, followed because of love for Jesus, will free us from bondage to all men both good and bad. Bishop Charles V. Fairbairn of the Free Methodist Church told of a woman who was saved when fashion dictated that women wear feathers in their hats. Blessed of God, she shouted the aisles service after service with the feather waving from her hat. Some of the saints, deeply distressed,

soon told her she couldn't have the feather and be a Christian. Sweetly, she removed the feather. The saints rejoiced. But something had happened. Thereafter she sat silent and unblessed service after service. Then, to the consternation of many, she returned to church with a feather in her hat. They were sure she had backslidden. But a strange thing happened. In that service she was blessed and ran the aisles shouting the praises of God! She had come under bondage to the opinions of others. Until God Himself spoke to her about the feather, she wore it and shouted. When He spoke, she quickly removed it for His sake and continued to be blessed and be a blessing. She was the Lord's freed woman.

Personal convictions will keep you as steady as the Rock of Gibraltar and as sweet as honey when you are around those who do not think as you do. tithers may be more -- or less strict than the Lord has led you; but because the issue is settled between you and the Lord, you will not feel threatened nor need to be either defensive or offensive in your stand.

CONCLUSION

When the Bible was written, inventions not yet discovered were not mentioned. God knew such things would come, but prior instruction as to their rightness and wrongness would have been confusing nonsense to every prior generation. We do not know what may next arrive, demanding our attention and requiring decisions; but the timeless, cultureless, and unchanging principles of God's Word will remain. By them, every saved and sanctified person can determine what is right or wrong for him individually.

Real freedom results from the saving and sanctifying grace of God and the personal application of Bible principles to every area of life in every situation. "Then said Jesus to those that believed on 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 makes you free, ye shall be free indeed."

A disciple is free from Satan, sin, and self. Free, too, from grinding bondage to men's opinions, the saint has the privilege of always doing right because he really wants to do it more than anything else in the world.

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THE END