



FREEDOM

'Free at Last! Free at Last! Thank God Almighty, Free at Last!'

Tony Lane

Freedom is at the heart of the Christian faith, as is illustrated by the famous quotation from Martin Luther King. Jesus taught that 'whoever commits sin is a slave to sin' but that 'if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:34, 36). This has implications at the social and political level, as Martin Luther King demonstrated, but here I shall focus on what it means for us at the personal, individual level.

Freedom is a deceptively simple word. In order to understand it we need to ask "free from what and free for what?" Paul makes this point in Romans 6:15-23. We don't have the option simply to be "free". Once we were slaves of sin but free in regard to righteousness, but now we have been set free from sin and become slaves of God.

So what does it mean to be free? What does it mean for the four stages of our existence: as created by God before the Fall, as fallen and sinful, as redeemed here and now and, finally, in glory.

As created by God, Adam and Eve were in a position of being free either to sin or not to sin. That they were free to sin is clear from the outcome. That they were also free not to sin is not stated as such, but follows from the fact that they were created good. They were created with the possibility of turning astray, not with the inevitability of doing so.

The fall into sin brought with it a bondage to sin. As fallen people we are no longer free not to sin, we are enslaved to sin. That does not mean, of course, that we have to fall for every temptation, that we can never say 'No' to specific sins. Even the alcoholic can sometimes decline a drink. But we are not free simply to give up sin — not even for Lent. This is not because we are externally coerced; the bondage is to our own natures. We are enslaved in the way that the addict is enslaved to drugs, not in the way that a sex slave is forced to act against her will.

Conversion brings with it a measure of freedom from sin. By God's grace we are set free to serve God. But this is something that, as with salvation in general, we enjoy "already, but not yet". We are free to love and serve God in a way that was not previously true, but we do not yet enjoy perfect freedom from sin.

It is in the Age to Come that we attain perfect freedom. Then there will be no more sin and we will be fully 'free from sin and slaves of God'. We will no longer be free in the sense of being undecided, of wavering between good and evil. That sort of freedom will be past history and

instead we will have the perfect freedom of total righteousness. Sharing God's nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and being like Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2) we will be free from the possibility of sin.

'Once we were slaves of sin but free in regard to righteousness, but now we have been set free from sin and become slaves of God.'

[Tony Lane is Professor of Historical Theology at London School of Theology.](#)