

STREET WISE 7: CHRIST AND FREEDOM

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36, NIV)

LAND IS LIMITED. If the course you typically play is bordered by houses, you already know this. You can only go so wayward before you’re in someone’s backyard. With the OB comes a penalty and perhaps a renewed commitment to practice. In golf, you’re able to record your best score for the day only if you play within the boundaries and adhere to the rules.

Many people are not aware that this same standard is true when it comes to ourselves as well. It may be they recognize it in regard to their bodies. Eat and drink as much as you want with whatever ingredients you want, and the consequences are unlikely to go your way. Diabetes, heart disease, even some cancers—these can have origins directly connected to what you feed your body.

And then there is your soul. This, too, can be badly plagued by our own bad decisions. When we mistake freedom for anarchy and ignore the “governors” God has put in place, we set ourselves up for the consequences of frustration and worry and relational strife, among others.

Worse, when we reject God and his ways for our lives right through to the end, we inflict a mortal wound on our souls. A lifetime of saying, “I don’t want you,” to God establishes the criteria for the scales of his justice to be tipped against us. We cannot raid the wedding feast of Christ the bridegroom, dressed in all the wrong clothes, and expect him to say, “Ah, no big deal” (see Matthew 22:11-14).

Yet here is one of the greatest truths in all the New Testament: In Christ, we are made free. Jesus’ words in John 8 promise it. A few lines ahead of today’s verse, we also encounter the often commandeered reference: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” But we cannot forsake the context. What the Son sets us free from is sin. What he sets us free from are our religious attempts to gain God’s favor. Neither of these offers us life as Jesus does.

The freedom that brings life is no different than any other freedom. It comes with parameters. Though we begin as sinners ruling ourselves, we only enter the game for real when we submit our self-rule to the rule of the King of all kings, beginning here: Give him your heart in faith. Now in his family, as a son, as a daughter, you read his words afresh. You say, “How can I obey these words, Lord? I want to follow them all as one who has been given freedom and life in you.”

Opening questions What kind of course makes you attend to your game better—one where wide angles make you choose your lines or where narrow fairways keep you aiming down the middle?

READING John 8:31-41; Galatians 5:13-25

Freedom and boundaries (John 8)

What was at the heart of Jesus’ contention with the religious leaders? How important is it to obey the words of the Lord, even as people who are free in him?

Ill-used freedom (Galatians 5)

Reading the whole of the passage, what would you identify as examples of freedom being misused? How do we refrain from gratifying the desires of the flesh? What part does Christ play in keeping us from sin?

Well-used freedom (Galatians 5)

Now what examples do you find of freedom well-executed? How does the closing line of verse 23 advance the idea of freedom in Christ? How can you obey the directive to keep in step with the Spirit?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/SIBP6IEq0VI>