



*FREEDOM
&
Morality*



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&
Morality*

**Companions
to
Privileges and
Responsibilities**

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Freedom and Morality

*Aim of This Essay on Freedom and Morality:
To attempt to reach answers by asking questions
more than giving answers,
believing that
those who ask shall receive,
those who seek shall find and
those who knock, shall be have doors open for
them ...*

This is our heavenly Father's promise to His children everywhere. However, if we ask, seek and knock but refuse to receive, find, walk through open doors in His footsteps, when He has given to us our request, shown Himself to us and opened His Kingdom's door to us, we will break His heart and the hearts of others who love us because of Him. Your wounded heart will also not be healed.

Pause

Are we ready to listen, to think and to discuss?

If so, here we go ...

Two questions:

1.

Why discuss freedom in a world which seems so free-for-all, not only in the soul of westerners but also in the soul of blossoming Asians, the giant community that has awakened to face the world? Why don't we just flow with the changing social currents of many nations where press reports portray more of the sad than happy events everyday? Are not those doing harm to others practicing their sense of freedom?

2.

Why bother about discussing morality when many are fighting for the acceptance of the relativity of human behaviour and when some are even proud to call themselves "amoral", as if that means they are above moral norms?

Reasons for Present Discussion

1.

True freedom is a gift from God to mankind whom He created in His image (Genesis 1). God is free to choose, so humans are able to choose. God loves, so humans are able to love. Though He knows that a free person may disobey Him, He took the risk, out of love for mankind. Yes, man and woman will one day freely choose to love Him.

Pause ...

Close your eyes and imagine how you would feel when your little son or daughter spontaneously rushes into your arms and shouts ...

"I love you, Daddy! I love you Mummy!"

Therefore, we want to discuss about freedom because it is God's good gift to us to enhance our relationship with Him!

If man chooses His friendship above all else and remains loyal to Him always, both God and mankind rejoice. However, Genesis chapter 3 informs us that mankind chose to compete with the One to whom they owe their existence. Competition was evil from the beginning because it splits hearts, marriages, families and societies. Hence, the God

initiated mutual loving friendship was broken between mankind and God, subsequently, between man and man (human beings, not just between males and females). Since that tragic event in the Garden of Eden, men and women lost their freedom to be as God has meant them to be.

Pause ...

*Reflect on how you will feel
if your child competes with you in order to become
greater than you
and thinks that you are selfish in hiding the skill of
being great from you.*

Read Genesis 1-3 and feel with the God of freedom.

Therefore, we need to talk and think about the gift of human freedom because it means so much to the Giver, the great and holy God Himself.

2.

Once, Paul the apostle, wrote to his Galatian brothers in Christ,

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

(Galatians 5:13)

We need to talk and think about human freedom because there is a thin line between freedom and human license in our words and actions.

Having damaged personalities due to personal and community sins, whenever an opportunity arises, we are more prone to turn the God given freedom into a license to do whatever we like, as in the case of Eve and Adam. Such opportunities come in the form of temptations to run away from God ordained laws written in our hearts for eternity (Ecclesiastes 3:11, 12:1, 13-14). But let us try to define freedom first. What is freedom to an ordinary man in the street?

Definitions

(Though a particular dictionary is quoted as an example, you may like to look up other resources for definitions.)

Freedom (noun)

The Oxford Advanced Genie Dictionary defines freedom as :

“the right to do or say what you want without anyone stopping you.”

Wow ... that is great news for someone, whether old or young, who wants to have his own way all the time!

Morality (noun)

The Oxford Advanced Genie Dictionary defines morals as :

Morals (noun)

“principles concerning right and wrong or good and bad behaviour”

Hence, to be moral is to choose to do good for self or others (Ephesians 2:10). To Christians, it also means having a civic consciousness while waiting for the new heaven and earth.

Immoral (adjective)

“(of people and behaviour) not considered to be good or honest by most people”

Hence, to be immoral is to choose to do bad to self or others e.g. feed the lust of men, greed for quick money but break up homes.

Amoral (adjective)

“not following any moral rules and not caring about right and wrong”

Hence, to be amoral is to appear to be insensitive to good or bad due to a distorted conscience where guilt is not defined as sin against the holy God but whether one gets caught and punished for bad done to others, or not. Sometimes, seemingly amoral people are classified as psychopaths or sociopaths.

Example

Dr. Y is specialist doctor who has three other equal partners in a private hospital. The other partners appointed him as the finance officer of the company. Much later, they discovered Dr. Y has altered figures in the accounts and cheated them of a large sum of their income. They forgave him though he was relieved of his role in finances but stayed on as a colleague. One of his partners commented:

“Dr. Y does not seem to show any guilt, shame or embarrassment over his crime. He simply carries on as if nothing has happened.”

Is he moral, immoral or amoral and to who?

The Problem with Some Definitions

If we follow the definition that freedom means doing whatever we want without heeding caution or rule, then freedom will rapidly become *license for selfishness and greed* in work places. It will also whitewash the sexual license that has already turned marriages and family life into *empty deserts* for many people.

Inevitably, moral norms will be challenged generation after generation if their principles are accepted as relative by those wanting to do anything they like in family and society. However, morals are not relative since God has imprinted the desire for Him in every man and woman born into this world. Together with the desire for God is the need to know His holy presence and hunger for His righteousness (Romans 1 & Matthew 5).

We must admit that, in spite of the ease with which we use the words *freedom and morals*, everyone is prone to misuse even the very own standards each sets for himself/herself, not to mention God's unchanging ones. In our original fallen nature, we will tend to turn freedom to license to feed our self-centeredness.

License is freedom that knows no bounds. It is freedom which accepts no limits, which refuses to submit to any structure. License is freedom gone wild ... like the waters of a dam that has broken through its barrier (rules, guidelines, principles) which alone can control its power in order to turn its wild energy into much needed electricity for the good of people.

However, out of His great love for mankind, God speaks out in order to provide a framework within which freedom is free to act. Jesus says in John 8:32:

“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

“Truth about what?” you may wonder. Truth about the love and grace of God, the holiness of God, the fear of the true God who owns all, the God who is not afraid of our competition but yearns for His children to stay within His carefully planned boundaries so that they will be safe to be really human with and for Him forever. He wants His children to be free to be loved and to love.

Yet, Christian kids and adults are often so caught up in activities that we forget that so many of our children do not enjoy the freedom to be fully His. We are like adults playing with toy guns when the battle is hot. We so simply take for granted God’s love and gifts for us that we do not find time and make effort to research, pray and think through basic issues, like freedom, in order to shine a light into the minds and hearts of deeply searching boys and girls.

Example

A 16 year old boy attended a church youth meeting on the invitation of his teacher at school. He came from a poor family and knew what it was to be prudent while receiving a scholarship from the school for his upper secondary school days. After a few sessions at the youth fellowship, he commented to his Christian teacher:

”These people (his peers who were called Christians) have no substance. I have not been able to see or hear anything in the youth group that has any answers for my life. They cannot offer me anything.”

Three years later, when the teacher met her student again, he had given up looking for answers through the church.

Food for Thought

Are our young lives focused on Christian activities or are we helping youth to think for themselves so that their conscience may be guided by the word of God? Jesus prayed,

*“Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.”
(John 17:17).*

Are we giving our youth clear guidelines as to what they should believe, how they should live, or what a church should be like apart from the usual "Christian" activities.

Have we ever informed them and shown them that Christianity is nothing more or less than the Christ-bought Friendship with the one and only true and living God? Have we shown them what absolute loyalty to Jesus, the liberator from sin, self, the evil one and death, means?

If not, the currents of the world will continue to sweep them into a permissiveness that has flooded our communities and branded even church youths. Is there any observable differences between those who purport they are God's children and those who do not?

The church youth mentioned in the above example were so like the world that there was no difference in their thinking, words and behaviour in 1966. Are we much different today? If we are better off, then why are we suffering from the signs and symptoms of wooly thinking and action, and of the hiding of problems (e.g. addictions, sexual immorality, greed, rebellion against authority, materialism) under the carpet of surface middle-class dignity?

Will a few dynamic testimonies of healing and miracles cleanse us of the hidden lack of morality?

*“Lord, help us, we pray... our children need You ...
we need You ... intervene, we plead!”*

Where Did the Problem Start?

Paul urged God’s people in Romans
12:1&2:

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s
mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God
– this is your spiritual worship.*

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this
world, but be transformed by the renewal of your
mind. Then you will be able to test and approve
what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and
perfect will.”*

If the renewal of the mind is necessary for transformation of lives, then, the problem of relative morals in church must have started with doctrinal permissiveness such as is commonly taught and lived today, through the dilution, distortion and narrowing of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some call these other gospels e.g. prosperity gospel, eschatology gospel, speculation gospel and etc. etc.

Patterns in Some Churches Today that Reflects the World More than Reflect Christ:

- Preach what resonates with our desires without follow up action e.g. Quiet acceptance of active homosexuality though outwardly preach against it by sweeping the problem under carpets while rejecting the man or woman in pain and sin.
- Do as what society does in words and actions e.g. *“Ayooohh ... a bit of gambling also cannot ... investment is wise ... when I gain from my shares, I will give more for God’s work ...”*
- Produce confused believers who do not know what to believe in after a few years as a Christian. Probably half of today’s preachers need to go back to good evangelical seminaries for lack of clear biblical teaching to feed the flock (Titus 1:9). Yet, the usual excuse is e.g. *“But we cannot because our congregations need us!”* or *“We don’t need more studies... as long as our people’s felt needs are met e.g. sickness healed, business prospering ... we must be doing the right things and are biblical.*

- Do as we please with our lives and possessions because we got it by our hard work.

e.g. *"God will bless the poor and needy through others."*

or

"Better be careful if you want to help the single mother they may not be trustworthy!"

- To reach out to the youth, we must allow some of what they ask for ...

e.g. *"Pyjama parties are modern and OK. It's the old folks who are nerds, not us. We are not so silly as to go all the way with physical closeness ... may be hugging and kissing, may be molesting ... yes."*

If a reporter were sent to your church to seek your stand on issues like divorce, gambling, addictions, homosexuality, abortion, how would you answer?

"Oh, let me do my research first ... come back next month"?

or

You have already prayed, researched and have a ready answer for your faith?

Discipline for immorality, greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, swindling, idleness, for example, seem to be lacking (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). When we do discipline, we go to the other extreme of torturing the poor sinners.

“Lord, how do we live like You ... in judgement, remembering mercy?”

Lack of genuine distinct moral guidelines may leave us tip-toeing within our Christian community and guessing whether the other person and ourselves are for real or are hypocrites. Our young people see through it all ... that is the gift they have ... fresh and discerning because of their stage of development.

For Christian teenagers brought up by Christian parents, Bible teaching has been much ingrained in their minds for years. However, being at the brink of making adult decisions, they do sometimes get confused and sad when they see their parents or aunts and uncles doing the very things they taught them not to do.

*No, most youths do not expect their adult mentors to be perfect but they do expect them to own up when they do wrong.
Are we humble enough to show them the way to repentance and change?*

To be moral means more than what NOT to do ... it also means what we do ...

Signs of Lack of Morality

- We fail to care for those God specifically call us to care with the excuse that they may not be honest ...
“Be careful how much money you give them ...”
- We horde and pass on tons of wealth to our children and grandchildren even when they already have so much ... while others in our nearby estates have so little. We accuse our maids for stealing or eating too much when we do not even give them enough salaries, food or a decent room. Is that being moral? We thank Him for blessings meant for our own clan only. Is that moral (1Timothy 4:4; 6:17)?
- We automatically do things because *“It has always been done this way ...”* for all to see e.g. publish names of fund contributors publicly in churches or in organisations. This is contrary to Jesus’ words. Is this still moral (e.g. Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18, 23:5-12)?
- We pray but for what purpose? To get more blessings for ourselves? To be more spiritual? Or ask God to show us how to love others for others sake and not ours?
- Obey human rules more than fear and obey God?

- What prevents our receiving truth and ensuing freedom to choose righteousness, holiness, love, joy, etc. (the ingredients of the fruit of the Holy Spirit) which God has prepared for us for eternity?

- Immorality is also:
 - boasting, the lust of the eyes, ambition, impurity (1 John 2:15-16; James 2:14-26, 3:13-17; Colossians 3:5).
 - seeking self-development for self's sake (e.g. the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-25). Why? It is because to be moral is to do good to others, not just to self. And Jesus indicated that our words and actions do affect those in contact with us ... for good or for bad (Matthew 5:17-20). Therefore, stumbling self or others from following God all the way is also immoral.
 - lack of submission to the relative human authorities God has placed over us till Jesus comes to be the King of kings and Lord of lords e.g. governments, church elders (not just local but overall denominational or national elders), parents, unless it is a matter of idolatry (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15)
 - idleness or laziness (1 Timothy 5:15; Proverbs 31:27).

Our youth long to see reality in adult life. Are we real?

However, morality makes sense only when we are free to choose the good instead of the bad in this world, out of love for God, above all else.

Hindrances to Human Freedom to Choose and to Do Good (To be Moral)

1. Fear

- Fear of fellowman's opinion
- Fear of retaliation by fellowman or the evil spiritual forces around them
- Fear of exposure of personal sin/ weakness/mistakes

2. Pride leads to

- Selfish ambition for self and family
- Masked and shallow life that is unreal in a needy world

Where shall we go from here?

Remember:

We are freed from something for **something else**

Examples

- We are freed from the weights and sins in our lives so that we can run lightly towards Jesus who waits for us (Hebrews 12:1-3)!
- We are freed from evil spirits/ drunkenness so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:24-26; Ephesians 5:18).
- We are freed from our sins to become God's kingdom and priests to serve our Father God (Revelations 1:4-6).

Encouragement to Seek the Freedom to Choose to Serve God

- Have a holy fear of God alone.
- Receive the truth about the God of truth and grace and about man who is a condemned sinner needing His grace.
- Know that God's rules free us from attachments other than Himself so that we are freed to choose good, like Jesus the man could and did, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told the Jews who had believed in Him,

“Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free”(John 8:32).

Truth about What?

The truth about the grace of the God who knows we cannot save ourselves from sin and its condemnation but who has done everything needed to justly forgive us and freely bring us home to Him, our true and everlasting Father, through the sacrifice of His beloved Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus is full of grace and truth
(John 1:14).

Jesus asked His Father to *sanctify us by the truth* which is the Father's word to Jesus the incarnate Son and to us (John 17:17).

If the Son of God sets you free, you are free indeed (John 8:36).

In contrast ...

- Why did the religious leaders choose to catch Jesus in the dark (Matthew 26:55- 56; Luke 22:52-53)?
- In spite of all that Jesus has taught in His time on earth, Pilate still asked ...

“What is truth?”

However, Pilate did not wait for an answer and missed the truth ... at that point in time.

If you want some answers, read on ...

Implications of Scriptures Quoted

1. There is no real freedom without knowing the truth i.e.

Know the truth about something/
someone

→ the ability/freedom to choose
(John 8:32)

2. Truth = What is real about someone/
something

Truth = The Person Jesus (Who He is
and His character as seen in
His life. read John 14:6)

= God's word i.e. the power to
effect change (e.g. God said,
"Let there be light" and there
was light".)

= About how to return to God
(man's destiny determined by
how we respond to His call to
return to Him: John 8:36)

3. Therefore, only Jesus can set us free to choose good. The alternative is to be ultimately prone to choose bad or evil.

When we have been freed from the bias to choose bad and are able to, and want to choose good, then morality (good speech and behaviour) makes sense because :

- The motive to do good is out of reverent loving fear of the holy God.
- God then provides the power to choose and to do good.
- Lasting contentment comes from fulfilling God's destiny for us.
- Then we shall have the godly character to take responsibility for the privileges entrusted to us in this world.

Examples

Pilate chose to ignore to establish the truth about Jesus but chose to fear man out of fear of a riot and his consequent position before his human emperor.

Pilate was therefore not free to choose good, in spite of his wife's spiritual input, but chose to do evil instead.

Fear of losing favour in Caesar's eyes has trapped him from being able to make a just and moral choice.

In contrast

Joshua, a man freed to be God's child and servant, gave the Israelites a choice, in Joshua 24:14-15, while he chose to worship and follow God who has shown Himself faithful to him.

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord".

Influenced by such a moral servant-leader, the Israelites of those days chose to serve God too.

Practical Considerations for God's People

How does a Biblical definition of Freedom and Morality affect us?

1.

The authority to exercise our freedom is restricted by the One who freely gives it to us. God alone has the prerogative to do that.

e.g. in the choice of a spouse.

- In 2 Corinthians 6:14, we are commanded to be equally yoked.
- In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, we are exhorted to take a wife in a pure and honourable way.
- In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 we are ordered not to commit adultery.
- In Matthew 5:27-28, we are commanded not to fornicate or lust.

But God gives us the freedom to choose who to marry. Certainly, there exists a wide choice for those who remain within the above guidelines!

2.

We are free to have direct access to God through praying for ourselves and praying for others. However, we are not free to always tell others what to do or depend on their 'prophetic word' before seeking God directly.

I believe that for those who know God, God will usually speak to them directly first before sending others to pass His messages to them UNLESS, for example, they have been stubborn for too long. This has been the experience of those who have walked with God through the ages. Biographies of Christians testify to us how the sheep of the Good Shepherd truly can hear His voice and follow Him. Prophetic utterances, if truly from God, are usually to confirm or encourage the child of God today. They are not the common primary means used to pass messages between two persons who love each other deeply.

In today's churches, many have been trapped by those who simply use these words, sometimes against all godly counsel,

“The Lord says ... I am to do this or I am to do that because Brother A or Sister B prophesied about me like this ... ”.

What a tragedy for God's beloved children unless the prophecy has been tested to be true in several ways. God's children, like lambs and sheep, should be secure in *daily listening to the Good Shepherd's voice* without having to depend on others' words. We need to guard against any unintentional or

deliberate human manipulation of our actions, especially in issues related to fund raising and having authority in church.

3.

If we lack wisdom to exercise our freedom to make certain moral choices, ask God for it (James 1:5).

This is one prayer He would love to answer positively! But we must mean business with Him for what is the use of wisdom if we do not use it? It is like manna that is not meant for keeping too long.

4.

Jesus has made us free from the intense lifelong effort to be perfect on our own merits.

He loves us into becoming people free to accept our limitations by His having fulfilled the whole law of God for us, thus taking us off the treadmill of salvation by works. Humans bind us to serve their fantasies but God frees us to know Him and enjoy Him forever!

5.

God frees us to enjoy His parenting.

For example, loving parents' joy of watching their children play together needs no description!

6.

Jesus freed women from their false low self-esteem through appreciating them, mentioning them, taking time to listen to them and relating with them according to their mannerisms, which He has given to them as Co-Creator with His Father.

For example, Mary Magdalene was among the last to view Jesus body and was the first witness of His resurrection (Mark 15:40-41; 16:9). Jesus' often quoted words "I am the resurrection and the life" were spoken to the insecure perfectionist, Martha, who was transformed by the grace of His eternal companionship. Women have also been declared joint heirs with their brothers in God's huge family (1 Peter 3:7).

7.

God frees us from our attachments to people, work, possessions, power and status so that we may choose simplicity because we just have to focus on being attached to God, our first love; first in priority and first in intensity.

8.

Since we own nothing and can create nothing out of nothing, everything we have are for us to use to please God. Hence, we are freed from the fear of want because He will provide for all that we need. Everything we receive, therefore, is by His grace, which is undeserved mercy.

We are free to count and enjoy the good gifts God gives to us, like a toddler running around with freedom as he explores the world - the playground his heavenly Father has custom-made for him! What a privilege!

9.

We are freed to choose to take responsibilities for our new lives in Christ.

We are able to apply the principle of stewardship principle which actually forms the most realistic worldview. We are free to worship the truly holy and loving God and free to control our weaknesses till He gives us the new bodies to live in a place where sin does not exist. We are free to take responsibility for our thoughts, words and action before a watching world of real battles, real love and real victories in Jesus Christ alone!

What Then Should We Do with the Freedom and Morality that Christ has Bought for Us?

Firstly

Don't give up His freedom and morality for fake freedom and morality

BECAUSE

... If the Son of God has made you free, you are free indeed!

Secondly

We cannot be moral alone but we can do it together.

Starting now,

Let us invest in lives of freedom and true morality by investing in lives precious to God. Have you ever considered that the treasures in heaven Jesus mentioned are actually God's beloved human beings, not mere tangible rewards?

Let us use our minds to read His word authored by writers inspired by His forgiveness, healing and friendship.

Let us intercede for and share this new freedom and basic morality in Christ with our families and neighbours near and far,

To the end that...

ALL WILL KNOW that HE IS LORD!

**Books to Read as an Appetizer
(Let us pray and hope that Malaysian
Christians will stand up to write for
Him on things that matter to
His church and world.)**

1. *Runaway World*
by Michael Green, IVP 1968
2. *Freedom and Simplicity*
by Richard Foster, Triangle/SPCK 1981
3. *Freedom & Discipleship*
by Jeram Barrs, IVP 1983
4. *Freed to Serve*
by Michael Green,
Hodder & Stoughton 1983
5. *Freedom from the Performance Trap*
by D.A.Seamands,
SP Publications 1988
6. *Call to Love*
by Anthony De Mello,
S.J., X.Diaz del Rio,
S.J., Gujarat Sahitya
Prakash, Ananda, India 1992



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