

We focus on true freedom (verses 1 and 19) or 'liberty' as they call it in the USA.

1. Positives: We recently had elections, where we could freely vote for our candidate. We are not living in a totalitarian state.

Exodus tells us how God sets his people free from slavery in Egypt. He then gives them their own country and freedom. Jesus brought us freedom from sin; this is strongly emphasised in Romans, which we are studying on Thursdays. The Bible is the story of God who sets his people free.

2. Personal freedom. We have freedom of choice – but my choice **limits** others. E.g., if I take a pet, not everyone will visit me. If I drive through the High Street at high speed, people can cross the road and house prices drop. I am free not to buy stuff, not to give in to adverts, not to watch the football tonight.

A state which guarantees freedoms (e.g. freedom of speech) automatically also limits my rights (e.g. to offend others). Freedom is never absolute.

3. Our freedom is also **limited** by our age and ability (physical and mental). And none of us is free to choose or to determine our own nature. We are as God created us. Our gender is a given for 99.9% of us. It is nonsense to tell children that they can choose if they want to be a boy or a girl. We are free to be ourselves – but physical condition limits our freedom. Total freedom will only exist in God's future. It is eschatological.

4. In church we also have freedom – but if I behave in a weird way, I may offend you, so I won't. We are free to clap and/or to raise our hands in worship.

In our passage Paul says that he will refrain from eating meat if it hurts others. He explains how he will live as a Jew among the Jews and as a Greek among the Greeks, in order to win people from each group. He explains that he has a right to payment by the church, but also the freedom to forfeit that right. We are free to do what is good for others.

5. Freedom can be dangerous, especially without norms and love. We need love to guide us. The Bible in fact tells us that humans can't handle freedom: Adam and Eve were free to eat from any tree bar one, and they chose to eat exactly that one. Cain was free to do much good, but he chose to murder his brother Abel. We humans get tempted and we struggle to resist the tempter. Yet after Christ we are free not to sin (Romans)! And we have the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us safe.

6. Our freedom is not absolute. We need to take account of each other; we are free to serve each other. Galatians 5:1: 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.'

Galatians 5:13: 'You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.'

Now reflect: are you free? If yes, how do you use this freedom? If no, what can you do about? (See Hetty, Sohan or me if you want to speak about these things.)