**A Gospel of Freedom (Acts 15:13-21)**

 The Gospel brings freedom into a believer’s life in order to live out the love of Christ. Greetings to you dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we continue to study the foundations of the Gospel in the early years of the Church. As we’ve said before, one of the first major issues had been to clear up the difference between a Jewish and Christian understanding of reality. The Jewish reality was under Law (the Law of Moses). The Christian reality was under Christ. The former did not give a final solution to the problem of sin in the world – the latter gave and continues to give eternal life to those who follow the Messiah. Today is the continuation, therefore, of that great subject, taken from Acts 15:31-21. We’re going to speak about just what kind of freedom a believer receives when they turn to Christ. Again, the gospel of Jesus Christ brings freedom into a believer’s life in order for them to live out Christ’s love. Let’s talk, for a moment, about this foundational principle…

 We have a life of freedom in Christ, in order to live a life of love in this world. Often the word “freedom”, which is tied to the ideas of slavery and emancipation in the Scriptures, is considered by many to refer to unbridled, absolutely independent behavior. But we know that absolute freedom or independence brings us human beings back to the days of Noah, when people forgot about God and decided to live a lawless life. In this case, (in the Scriptures for today), we see that James, the Christian Church’s first bishop or overseer, clearly expressed the expectations of the church leadership from Gentile Christians toward their fellow Hebrew Christians. Yes, the non-Hebrew new believers were not tied down to the Law of Moses, but because there were also newly converted Hebrew Christians within the church which still kept the law of Moses, the Gentile believers were called not to be a cause for stumbling for the Hebrew brothers and sisters. James’ instruction to them was to stay away from the immoralities of pagan worship, in other words the temple sexual immorality, as well as to avoid all manner of sexual activity that was outside the biblical creation-based command for marriage and procreation. He advised them to avoid eating meat from strangled animals, probably to avoid the extra blood that was not drained and sill remained in the food, a possible cause of disease, as well as to avoid bloody meats all together, something that was expressly forbidden in the Old Testament for Jews and could be a cause for stumbling for new Hebrew-Christians just coming out of Judaism but still practicing the food restrictions. In a word, even though Gentile Christians were totally free, they should not become stumbling blocks to their Hebrew brothers by eating bloody food, and they also needed to stay away from their former pagan sexual immoralities. Why? Because not only was their turn to Christ supposed to be complete (re the immorality), but they were also called not to be a cause for scandal among those that still followed the Law of Moses (but trusted Christ for their salvation), since the land was still under the influence of the reading of the Law of Moses in the synagogues.

 This instruction by James is akin to a believer who gets scandalized from a fellow brother or sister if they had a glass of wine, because the first considers drinking as improper or unholy for a Christian. If that is the case, why would you drink while you are eating with that brother or sister, even if you do enjoy a glass with your food, knowing that their spiritual and emotional state is going to be shaken and they are going to be shocked at your behavior. It is better to keep the unity and peace among each other than to have our own personal whims and preferences fulfilled and to see the brother or sister weaken or be sickened spiritually by our behavior.

 Therefore, yes, we as Christians are a free people. We have been freed from the Law of Moses. We do not need to follow their laws which have been a bondage to them. However, if a believing brother or sister has a custom which does not affect your faith and who would get scandalized if you broke their custom, it would be better for you to submit to that custom (albeit temporarily) and to keep the atmosphere of love and peace with that brother or sister. This can include both matters of food and other such customs. However, this temporary submission to another’s custom assumes that the habit or custom does not contradict the truth of Christ’s salvation or its importance or primacy.

 So, yes, we are free but not in a selfish way or in a self-aggrandizing way. Yes, we are free to love, but always staying faithful to the Lord and submitted to His authority.

 We have a life of freedom in Christ, in order to live a life of love in this world. The Gospel brings freedom into a believer’s life in order to live out the love of Christ. May the Lord Bless you all. Amen.