Dear Open Door Family,

I grew up in a church tradition that was fairly rigid. Though my parents were very open about the fact that many of the things others tried to force on us were merely issues of preference, it still made it hard for me as a teenager to begin to sort through what it would mean to live a God honoring life. I did wrestle with questions like: Could I wear blue jeans to church? Could I read the New American Standard version of the Bible? Could I go swimming on Sunday? Those questions hardly seem important now. But they caused some soul searching back then. Of course the more I studied and learned and grew the more I realized that there were many areas of personal preference where godly Christians differed. So as I meditated on 1 Peter 2:16 it made me think of the BALANCE necessary to live the TRUTH of the Bible out in our everyday lives. As I thought about this verse I had to ask myself, do I ever use my "freedom" as a way of covering over or making excuses for sinful behavior in my own life?

I Peter 2:16 (NIV) Live as free men, but do NOT use your freedom as a COVER-UP for evil; live as servants of God.

I Peter 2:16 (JBP) As free men you should NEVER use your FREEDOM as an EXCUSE for doing something that is wrong, for you are at all times the servants of God.

If I am convinced that I have the "freedom" to watch TV that does NOT mean I have the freedom to watch things which dishonor God. If I say because I have freedom to watch TV it really does not matter what I watch then I am ignoring what the Bible says about the kind of things I may look at (Ps. 101:3). I could be using my FREEDOM as an excuse or cover-up for filling my eyes and mind with something sinful.

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (NIV) "Everything is permissible" - **but NOT everything is BENEFICIAL**. "Everything is permissible" - **but NOT everything is CONSTRUCTIVE**. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Here the thought of Freedom is explained in a different way. I may have "freedom" to do a lot of things but the question really should be are those things BENEFICIAL and CONSTRUCTIVE? In other words are they HELPFUL in my walk with the Lord? Are they things which will lead me closer to Jesus? Will these things lead me towards holiness or towards worldliness? I should not be asking: do I have the FREEDOM to do this? or ...watch that? or ...say this? Instead I should ask: will doing this, saying this, watching this draw me into a closer more intimate walk with my Jesus? I Love this explanation from the Life Application Bible Commentary: "Christian freedom does NOT mean that **anything goes**; believers are not free to do whatever they want or to use their freedom as a *cover-up for evil*. In other words, believers must not hide behind their freedom in Christ in order to sin. **We cannot use freedom and forgiveness as a cloaking device for** self-indulgence, adultery, or poor spending habits."

If I am truly seeking to be ALL that God has called me to be. Then I will USE my "freedom" to consciously choose to SERVE God. I will use my "freedom" to purposefully choose to SERVE my brothers and sisters in Christ. I will not let "any unwholesome talk come out of my mouth" instead I will try to make sure that the things that I say and do will be "helpful for building OTHERS up according to THEIR needs" (Eph. 4:29). WHY? Because I want what I say and do to be of help and encouragement to others and I do NOT want to GRIEVE the Holy Spirit by my words or actions. (Eph. 4:30)

PRAYER: Lord God, please help me to think of YOU first when I think about the "freedom" I have in living my life for You. Please help me to think of the impact my words and actions may have on others and help me to seek to Honor You in the choices I make.

Pastor Mark Kieft