

The Freedom of a Christian case study

Accepting the Responsibility That Comes With the Freedom of Christ

By Maya Knepp

Our faith in Christ is a wonderful thing. Through Christ, we are set free from all sins and our eyes are opened to the beauty of God's creation and the love that he pours into each and every one of us. However, with freedom comes responsibility. With opened eyes comes a confrontation of the truth of our sins and the ways in which we have harmed one another. A faith in Christ calls us not only to shed our ignorance of the hardships in the world but also to work in the service of others to combat the sins that cause suffering. This is not an easy task. Naivete allows one to indulge endlessly and live without a care in the world. But this ignorance is no real way to live. Life with eyes closed is no life at all. It is with this in mind that we must recognize our own sins and the way in which our livelihoods affect others. In the freedom of Christ, we are not only released from our sins but also must recognize our sins.

However, we must scrutinize not just our own actions but also the institutions and communities to which we belong. This is where we must recognize where we have privilege. We live in a society where some people are given advantages in life because they are of a certain race or gender or grew up on the good side of town. We were all created in the image of God, and God loves us all. So why should some of us succeed and others of us flounder because of identities and circumstances that we do not control? As renowned Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of the victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." However, I would take this

one step further. We must also acknowledge our own roles in building the wheel in the first place.

If we fail to do our part in correcting the systems that oppress others for the sake of advantaging our own identities, we are complicit. It's not just those who actively do evil who are sinful – it is also those who do nothing in the face of injustice. Recall the Good Samaritan. It is not just the robbers who harmed the man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who were sinful but also the priest and the Levite who did nothing. Just because we are not directly affected by an injustice does not mean that we do not have a responsibility to help when we can. The Good Samaritan recognized this. Those of us who are given certain privileges in life just because we are of a certain gender or race or class or ability must recognize this too.

This is why I feel called to social justice work as a white woman. I understand my privilege. I know that some of my successes in life will be based not upon merit but upon systemic advantages I have been given at the price of the oppression of others. And I recognize that Christ calls me to serve my fellow brothers and sisters of God precisely because I have this inherent privilege. It is not the responsibility of the poor to lift themselves up on their own. It is not the responsibility of foreigners to welcome themselves into this nation. It should not have to be the responsibility of the oppressed to change the systems that oppress them but benefit others. The onus resides with those of us who benefit from these systems and perpetuate them through our complicity, silence and inaction. It is up to those of us who were given the systemic upper hand to work toward a more just system where no one is left behind, instead of ignoring our institutionalized advantage that further disadvantages others in the process.

However, it is important to note that in the pursuit of a more just and loving world, we cannot ignore the voices of those who have been oppressed. We are called to stand in solidarity and work together with others, lest we accidentally create further systems of inequality.

In Romans 13:8, we are told that we “owe no one anything, except to love one another.” This love means using our freedom in Christ to its fullest. This love means actively encouraging human flourishing in others. This love means understanding that we are the neighbors of all. Since we have been gifted the freedom of Christ, we must also accept the great responsibility that comes with it.

Maya Knepp is a rising junior at Georgetown University, where she is studying Government and Justice and Peace Studies. At Georgetown, she rides on the equestrian team, works as the copy chief for the Georgetown Voice, and is an advocacy intern for Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. When she is not at school, she lives in her beloved hometown of Baltimore, Maryland.