

# Why the Freedom Myth misses the mark

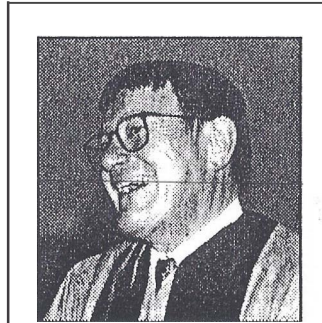
**H**ere is an idea that I think has caused a lot of trouble for a lot of people. It is this — that each of us should be able to say and even do what we feel like saying or doing, whenever we want and no one should be able to say “no” to this freedom of ours.

This “Freedom” Myth sometimes goes on to say that if someone tries to say “no,” they are rejecting us because they fear us or want to keep us from being free and fulfilled. What this sometimes popular myth really teaches is that the enemy of my own fulfillment as a person is restraint in any form.

We have seen extreme examples of this “freedom rights” demand at work in which some people claim the right to create special “militias” and special “courts” to attempt to isolate themselves from the rest of the nation and its ordinary laws. But most of us practice this myth in less publicly dramatic ways. We just don’t want any interference with what we think are our rights.

The irony is that we do not really believe it even though we are slavishly attached to it. Have you ever watched a group of kids set up a sand lot football or soccer game? The rules are essential to the game and they work out the rules before the game begins in earnest. There is no game without the boundaries. Runaway freedom makes every game impossible, and we know it.

We also know, from personal experience, that self-restraint in our lives has a good effect and does not destroy



**From Your Pastor**  
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either our real identity or our real freedom. Any potential athlete who hears the coach’s rules and restrains the desire to smoke cigarettes or use alcohol and drugs in order to compete on a swimming or basketball team knows that the restraint against smoking and drinking does not thwart that person’s real self or real freedom. Rather, it enables basketball or swimming to be part of that person’s life and fulfills a dream and ambition toward athletics. Tobacco and alcohol actually sabotage the dream and, in some cases, roadblock the whole experience of athletic competition. Smoking and inhaling has never made anyone freer or more fully human, any more than eating too little or too much food makes us more fulfilled.

As Christians we discover our worth in our belovedness that comes from God, who first made us and who redeemed us. It is from these two grand foundations that we have our truest identity. Then from those starting places, God sets each

of us on our personal journey with unique gifts and skills and possibilities that we are to steward throughout our lives.

I am meeting more and more teenagers today who have seen the hollowness in the myth that being sexually active is what everyone does to be successful in human relationships. The fact is that these youth who endeavor to save sexual intimacy as the sign of lifelong commitment are the ones who experience the profoundest feeling and joy of romance. It is decidedly no more romantic to announce to a prospective new girl or boy friend that you are very experienced in sexual intimacy than to be able to say that you have smoked every brand of U.S. and European cigarettes and you are an expert on them all.

In both cases, your experiences make the person wonder if you will have a problem with a long-distance hike or if you have a sexually transmitted disease. Neither of these makes you more attractive or more mysterious or more exciting, though both may make you tired out and cynical.

Freedom is not doing whatever I want to do, when I want to do it, and where I want to do it. Freedom is equilibrium, style, stride, quality, meaning. Freedom is not having a semi-automatic weapon in my car — it is the enjoyment of positive relationships with people, it is kindness that spills over, it is purpose for living.

Most of all, freedom comes from doing the will of God. And when I stumble, it is feeling his strong and good hand of forgiveness there to lift me up so that I can start over again.