

Explore: What Is True Freedom?



Living in the Vine can sometimes sound confining to us, rather than freeing. In this activity, students read excerpts from the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church about the nature of true freedom, answer multiple choice questions, and discuss their answers with the group.

Supplies Needed for Each Student

- copy of *What Is True Freedom?* (see following pages)
- pen or pencil

Activity

1. Read the first page of *What Is True Freedom?* aloud with the students.
2. Have students work individually on the multiple choice questions.
3. Working in pairs, or with the whole group, have students select a few statements and discuss their answers.

What Is True Freedom?

The parable of the vine (John 15) tells us that we can be fruitful only when we abide in the Lord. In fact, the story continues and says that the greatest love a person can have is to lay down his own life for his friends. We are the Lord's friends if we do whatever He commands (John 15:13,14). This might sound like slavery, not freedom. Can we be free if our lives are completely committed to the service of others?

The Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church explain what *true* freedom is. Read the following excerpts, complete the multiple choice questions, and discuss your answers.

When people have been regenerated they enter for the first time into a state of freedom. Previously they have been in a state of slavery. It is slavery when evil desires and false ideas predominate, freedom when affections for good and truth do so. As long as people are in a state of slavery, they are not aware of their situation. Only when they enter a state of freedom do they begin to do so.

When they are in a state of slavery, that is, when selfish desires and false ideas predominate, people who are subject to them imagine that they are free. That however is sheer falsity, for they are at that time being carried away by the delight that comes from doing what they love. When people are led on by any kind of love, and follow where it leads, they imagine that they are free. However, it is devilish spirits who carry them away. People imagine that they are in absolute freedom, and go so far as to believe that if they were robbed of this state they would be miserable, in fact they would hardly have any life at all. They believe this because they are unaware of the existence of any other kind of life.

People don't become truly free until they have been regenerated [spiritually reborn] and are being led by the Lord by means of loving what is good and true. When they have entered that state they know and perceive for the first time what freedom really is, because they can at that point know what true delight in life is, and happiness is. Before this they do not even know what good is, and sometimes things which are good are called evil. When people who are in a state of freedom from the Lord see the kind of life that goes with evil desires and falsities, and even more when they experience it, they are as appalled by it as people who see hell opened before their eyes.

A life of freedom, or freedom itself, means being led exclusively by the Lord. Quite a number of obstacles stand in the way of someone being able to believe that that kind of life is a life of freedom. One obstacle is that people experience temptations, which are permitted to take place so they may be freed from being ruled by devilish spirits. A further obstacle is that they have formed a false impression of what heavenly life is like (see *Arcana Coelestia* 892).

The condition however of one who serves the Lord by doing according to His commandments, and by being obedient in that kind of way, is not that of a slave; rather, it is that of one who is free. For perfect freedom consists for a person in being led by the Lord. The Lord breathes the good into the person's will from which his actions spring; and although that good comes from the Lord, the person nevertheless has the feeling that his actions are from himself, that is, he does them in freedom. This freedom exists with all who abide in the Lord; and coupled with it there is indescribable happiness (*Arcana Coelestia* 8988.2)

Multiple Choice

Circle the answers that you think are correct. There may be more than one correct answer.

- 1) People who do whatever makes them feel good
 - a. are acting in freedom.
 - b. may be enslaved by selfishness.
 - c. cannot tell whether they are doing something good or evil.
 - d. feel that they are free.

- 2) People who are led by evil spirits
 - a. believe they would die if they couldn't follow their passions.
 - b. think they are making good choices.
 - c. are aware of the choice they are making.
 - d. are experiencing the choice that true freedom brings.

- 3) People who lead a selfless life of service to the Lord
 - a. are miserable slaves to His will.
 - b. experience indescribable happiness.
 - c. experience true freedom.
 - d. may experience poverty and hardship.

- 4) People who follow their selfish passions
 - a. don't have any idea of what heavenly freedom is.
 - b. feel enslaved by their evils.
 - c. know the difference between being led by heaven or by hell.
 - d. have no idea that their lives are not good.

- 5) People who serve the Lord
 - a. know and understand the slavery of evil.
 - b. don't know the difference between being led by heaven or by hell.
 - c. know they are going to heaven.
 - d. are free to do whatever they want.

Discuss

Choose a few of these statements to discuss. Use the readings to support your answers.