

VIDEO 4

FREEDOM



We follow Jesus, are led by his Spirit and formed by his Word. We understand our identity as communities of his people called to make him known. Our next value refers to the way in which we work together...the posture we have towards others, both within and beyond our communities.

From the beginnings of our story through to our various contexts here and now, Baptists have valued freedom.

In the 1600s one of our early pastors, Thomas Helwys, penned one of the first books ever written advocating for religious freedom. For this, the King of the day put Thomas in prison, where he died. But the copy of the book that Thomas gave the King has been preserved at Oxford University library and the impact of his words shape the world we live in today.

Freedom is an interesting word in our culture - it could imply that there are no restraints or boundaries, 'I can do whatever I want, and it doesn't matter how it impacts anyone else'. However, our take on the value of freedom is different, and is much richer and more life-giving. Our faith gives us **healthy and helpful guidelines** to live by - guidelines that focus on loving others, being part of what God is doing in the world, demonstrating the love of Jesus, and inviting others to know him. Jesus sets us free, that we might serve him.

At the individual level, we value **freedom of conscience**, that is, the space for each person to discern, share opinions and ideas, and, disagree with others. It's OK to challenge one another and, in love, to continue to seek common understanding.

We will not shy away from controversial topics just because they might be difficult. The key is that when we disagree or offer alternative perspectives, we **remain in healthy relationships** and practice love towards one another.

This value is echoed in the way we relate as communities of faith at regional, national and international levels. We value what each part brings.

We come together in Baptist associations and unions, emphasising that we choose to be in voluntary relationships of cooperation and accountability. We work together to have a **broader reach and impact** than each one could have alone.

Freedom is practiced in what has historically been known as the separation of church and state. Others might know it as freedom of religion. Baptists have always advocated that the church be free from state control or interference. This does not mean the separation of faith from politics, because who we are as followers of Jesus will influence every aspect of our lives.

But it does mean that followers of Jesus will live out a different way of being community within our society. We do not aim to manipulate or coerce others to live according to our beliefs. Instead, we aim to show a way of living that surprises, stimulates questions and invites others to participate. Freedom also inspires us to have a **communal, prophetic voice** within our society. Our hope is that our way of life and words of truth will transform the structures and systems of our society.

As we experience freedom in Jesus, we also seek religious freedom for all, particularly in our multicultural and multi-faith context. We will advocate for the opportunity to speak into our world the hope and flourishing of the gospel, but we always seek to do so with gentleness and respect.

We might need to keep finding new words to describe what this looks like in practice, and we will always seek new ways of living this out. But we value the freedom we experience in Jesus and is demonstrated throughout our Baptist history, both of which enable us to be who we are today and to look forward to the future with confidence.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us in our faith communities. We honour the legacy they have left us and the guiding values and frameworks from the Scriptures that have been entrusted to us. And we are grateful for the freedom we have been given within this to respond to the new challenges we face, as we live out what it means to follow Jesus and lead his people where we find ourselves right now.