



# FOR FREEDOM SET FREE



- It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).



**No, HE WON'T.**

**HE CAN'T. IMPOSSIBLE. FOOLING HIMSELF. PIPE DREAM. DELUSIONAL. DOESN'T FIT REALITY.**

## • For freedom Christ has set us free ...



Everything we understand in this passage, and ultimately everything we “take home” from Galatians, hinges on our ability to perceive what the term freedom means in this letter (Scot McKnight).

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**W**e have questions to answer.

- What does Paul mean by freedom in this context?
- How do we define freedom?
- Where have we learned the meaning of freedom?
- Is our understanding of freedom biblical?

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**W**e need to think biblically.

First, let's ask, where do we get our definition of freedom? Who taught us to think of freedom as we do? And who do we actually listen to?

**Americans prize nothing more highly than freedom.** The trouble is that they generally want the wrong kind of freedom. Some speak of freedom in political terms: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to vote. Others work for freedom from oppressive social structures. However, what most Americans mainly want is personal freedom. Sociologist Robert Bellah has concluded that **“freedom is perhaps the most resonant, deeply held American value...** Yet freedom turns out to mean being left alone by others, not having other people's values, ideas, or styles of life forced upon one, being free of arbitrary authority in work, family, and political life.” **In other words, what Americans really want is the freedom to be left alone.** [Ryken, P. G. (2005). Galatians. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (p. 193). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.]

If we do not diligently pursue and embrace a biblical approach, then our concept of freedom, like everything else that our minds process, will conform to the thinking of the world. The bad part (and probably the worse part of all) is when a person is thinking like the world but believes that he or she is thinking biblically.

► For freedom we are set free by Christ to follow God. Before Christ this was impossible.

Not merely difficult or hard. Impossible. We were imprisoned by our sin, without hope and under the condemnation of the law. Christ freed us to follow God. Christian liberty has never, ever been about personal liberty but always about our victory in Christ over sin, death and the devil and finding our rightful place as servants of righteousness before a holy God.

- (Romans 12:1-2 ESV) I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do **not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

So what does Romans 12:1-2 have to do with understanding Galatians 5:1? When the Apostle Paul speaks of freedom, he is teaching us a very different concept than what we have learned over the years through thinking that conforms to this world. We must allow God to teach us how to process the information of this world in an eternal context.

We must learn to think differently than we have previously to receive the mind of Christ and for our lives to be transformed so that we may put these new principles in action and discern the will of God. This, of course, includes properly handling the word of God.

- (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB95) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

When this happens, and not until this happens, we will be able to understand concepts such as freedom in a biblical context and in view of the reality of God.

**F**reedom in a biblical context.

- (Romans 6:16-23 ESV) Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, **you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?** 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once **slaves of sin** have become obedient from the heart to the standard

of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been **set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness**. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as **slaves to impurity and to lawlessness** leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as **slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification**. 20 For when you were **slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness**. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become *slaves of God*, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

► **The biblical concept of freedom is very different from the human perspective of freedom that many have assumed over the years.**

As we come to understand the biblical concept of freedom, we will be pushed to a decision between conformity to this world and transformation by God. We will either dig our heels in and hold onto the elementary (human) principles of this world, or we will receive the word of God. However, many people are incapable of receiving God's truth.

- (1 Corinthians 2:14-15 ESV) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

**The battle here** is not in identifying the very clear relationships regarding sin, righteousness, slavery and freedom in the text. **The true battle** will be over our willingness to submit to God and to receive his instruction on freedom. This process involves confession and repentance as we will see the need to turn away from our previous beliefs (repent) and say the same thing as God (confession).

► **Relevant points in understanding the biblical concept of freedom:**

1. We present ourselves as slaves to sin which leads to death, or we present ourselves as slaves of obedience (to God) which leads to righteousness.
2. Being set free from sin means we have become slaves of righteousness.
3. Before Christ we presented our bodies as slaves to impurity and lawlessness which led to more lawlessness, but now we present our bodies as slaves to righteousness which leads to sanctification.
4. When we were slaves of sin, we were free in regard to righteousness.
5. We have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God.

Biblically we cannot escape the idea that there is no such thing as absolute freedom. On this Earth, whether a person is a believer or an unbeliever, we are always a slave and always free.

## Freedom in the context of society.

Rainer Salomaa gives us this perspective: With the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent lifting of the iron curtain, Eastern Europeans jubilantly celebrated the freedom they had long been denied.

However, some of the first "freedoms" to be exercised in these formerly communist countries were indulgence in pornography, prostitution, drug abuse and organized crime. [What Does It Mean to Have Freedom in Christ? <https://www.ucg.org/the-good-news/what-does-it-mean-to-have-freedom-in-christ>]

In his article—What Does It Mean to Be Free?—Jacob G. Hornberger quotes Johann von Goethe:

Johann von Goethe once wrote, **"None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."** [He goes on to say that] "Goethe's statement perfectly captures the plight of the American people in our time." [And then he asks and answers this question:] **How do Americans acquire such a mindset? The primary vehicle is public (i.e., government) schooling**, a system where most children are educated by the state from the time they are 6 years old through graduation at 18. [<https://www.fff.org/explore-freedom/article/what-does-it-mean-to-be-free>]

It is important that we realize that the concept of conformity to this world is broader than just addressing our sinfulness. **Conformity to this world means that the person has been imprisoned to thinking and actions as dictated by human principles and philosophies.**

- (Colossians 2:8 ESV) See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, **according to human tradition**, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

We must understand the difference—the infinite gap—between the standard of thinking of fallen, finite humans and the mind of a holy, infinite, eternal God. The distance in thinking and acting should compel us to fall at the feet of God and to tremble before his holy word. As Christians we now have access to the mind of God through his grace, and only now we are able to receive the things of God. We must never assume that we know these things merely because we are Christians.

This is why Paul exhorts us to present ourselves fully to God as a living sacrifice and to resist conformity to this world and to embrace the renewal of our minds. Too often professing believers in Jesus Christ have this reversed. They embrace this world's thinking and resist biblical thinking and thus do not know the will of God.

Thinking that conforms to this world complies with prevailing social standards, attitudes, practices of the natural person. **This compliance leaves out the ways of God making it impossible for the natural person to know—either intellectually or experientially—the will of God.**

With this in mind we must understand what happens when we do not allow Paul's concept of freedom to replace the thinking that conforms/

complies with the prevailing social standards, attitudes, practices of the natural person—we remain imprisoned to the elementary principles of this world. We live as mere humans and neglect our inheritance as sons of God in Jesus Christ.

## Freedom in the context of government.

In the context of government Katharine Gammon asks and answers the question What Is Freedom? “Freedom is the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint, and the absence of a despotic government.”

Here are the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

She then gives a brief explanation of: Freedom of the press ... Freedom of assembly ... Freedom of expression ... Freedom of speech ... and Freedom of religion ... [<https://www.livescience.com/21212-what-is-freedom.html>]

## Freedom as commonly defined.

Let’s continue by looking at some common definitions for freedom that conform to the thinking of this world—definitions that are acceptable to the natural person but at times contrary to the biblical perspective of freedom.

1. Freedom is the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.
2. Freedom is the state of being free from the control or power of another; personal liberty.
3. Freedom is exemption from external control, interference, regulation, etc.
4. Freedom is defined as the state of being free, independent, without restrictions, or release from prison.
5. Freedom is the state or quality of being free, independence; a being able of itself to choose or determine action freely: freedom of the will.
6. Synonyms: autonomy, independence, liberty, self-determination, self-governance, self-government, sovereignty.

## The delusion of absolute freedom.

These common definitions all seem to lean toward some type of absolute freedom—without hindrance, without restrictions, without restraint.

Absolute: free from restriction or limitation; not limited in any way; free from imperfection; complete; perfect; not mixed or adulterated; pure; complete; outright.

But can that really be true? Even aside from a biblical perspective, in the context of society or politics, is there a freedom that comes close to absolute

freedom? No. Not even close. It seems that the concept of freedom that many hold is a delusion—an idea that has no basis in reality.

We have probably all heard someone like the grumpy, old man above exclaim: “Well, I’m going to do as I d\*#@#n well please.” No, they won’t. Because they can’t. Impossible. There are restrictions and limitations and hindrances and restraints at every level of our lives—social, personal, psychological, physical, intellectual, etc.

Don’t we have to admit that the idea of absolute freedom is impossible? Even the richest, most powerful person on the planet is limited in some way.

## Freedom in Galatians.

We will look at other Scripture texts to help us learn what biblical freedom is, but first we need to look at our immediate context—the letter to the Galatians. What do we learn from Galatians?

- (Galatians 1:3-4 ESV) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.
- (Galatians 2:4 ESV) Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery.
- (Galatians 3:13 ESV) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”
- (Galatians 4:4-5 ESV) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

## Freedom—incompatible with “under the law.”

**What has been the big, huge contention in Galatians? Adding aspects of the law—specifically circumcision—to the gospel versus a gospel of grace through faith alone.** In 2:4 we see that the false brothers came to bring them into slavery. Slavery to what? To the law. To works.

So what is the slavery? Submitting to the demands of the law. The imprisonment that comes from submitting to teaching that demands working as opposed to believing.

- (Romans 4:4-5 ESV) Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

Under the bondage of the driven mindset a person continually bears the heavy burden and the unrelenting demands that they must do more to earn or to keep their salvation. **This person is enslaved to the burden of working for his or her salvation—i.e. the continuous demand that they must do something to gain or to keep God’s favor.**

# Freedom is living in God's grace.

And what is the freedom? Freedom is liberation from slavery or restraint or from the power of another; the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved. Biblically, then, we observe that freedom is liberation from sin, death and the devil.

## ▶ Victory over Sin ...

- (Romans 6:18 ESV) And, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

## ▶ Victory over Death ...

- (1 Corinthians 15:56-57 ESV) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## ▶ Victory over the devil ...

- (Genesis 3:15 ESV) I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
- (Romans 16:20 ESV) The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
- (Hebrews 2:14 ESV) Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.
- (Revelation 20:10 ESV) And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

## ▶ Victory because of God's mercy and grace.

- (Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.
- (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We have been set free to walk in the grace of God. Set free for freedom by Christ himself, so we must understand and accept the satisfactory work of Christ on the cross as the full and complete payment upon which our justification is based.

- (Galatians 5:1 ESV) For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

**True freedom, therefore, is not self-fulfillment. It is not merely political independence or social equality. It is not the kind of liberty that leads to license, the freedom to do whatever we want or believe whatever we choose.** True freedom

means liberation from sin, death, and the devil. And by the grace of God, this is exactly the kind of liberation Christ has come to provide. [Ryken, P. G. (2005). Galatians. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (p. 194). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R

Publishing.]

## ▶ An either or decision.

The decision is either/or not both/and. You either choose law or grace. There is no in-between. If you accept circumcision or water baptism or any other work, then you are obligated to keep the whole law.

- (Galatians 5:3 ESV) I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

Why is that? Because law and grace do not mix. You choose one or the other, whether or not you are even consciously aware of your decision and the consequences of that decision.

- (Romans 6:16 ESV) Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Attempting to add anything is submitting ourselves to the slavery of works. But more than that, submitting to any work is a denial of the complete work of Christ on the cross and the grace of God.

- (1 Corinthians 1:17 ESV) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

**Some people believe water baptism is necessary for salvation, while others regard it as a harmless add-on or a precautionary measure. Their attitude is—What does it matter? Why not just in case? What can it hurt? Because water baptism or any other work nullifies the grace of God and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.**

- (Galatians 5:4 ESV) You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.
- (Galatians 2:21 ESV) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

We will examine this more thoroughly when we get to that section, but **we see that those "who would be justified by the law" have fallen away from grace because they have tried to hold to a "grace-and-law" position which is not possible. The choice is grace or law.**

**The person who adds a work of the law (something you must do) to the concept of grace no longer "has" grace but has fallen away in their comprehension of grace and do not have an understanding of grace as taught in Scripture.**

This is what all of the works salvation groups—Roman Catholic, Mormons, Restoration Movement, etc.—fail to grasp. No matter how plausible and articulate their explanations and definitions of grace, when they add anything to faith alone, then it is no longer grace. **If your theology insists on your justification being based on any work, then you are blinded to the biblical concept of grace.**

In his web post—The Goal of the Gospel—Bob Deffinbaugh illustrates the point in this way.

A few years ago I was asked to visit an elderly couple who desired to be baptized in the church

where I served. I went to visit them to discuss this matter, as I always do, and as we also do as a church.

...

After knocking I was cordially invited in and after some small talk, I pursued to the purpose of my visit. **"Tell me why you want to be baptized," I inquired. "Well," the husband responded, "you see my wife and I are getting along in years. We have done nearly everything we can think of to make certain that we are going to heaven, but we have not yet been baptized. We thought that we would not leave any stone unturned, and so we would like your church to baptize us."**

Needless to say, after trying to make a clear presentation of the gospel, I had to inform this couple that I could not baptize them under such circumstances. To them, baptism was a minor inconvenience but well worth the effort if there was any chance that it would enhance their spiritual well-being. [<https://bible.org/seriespage/14-goal-gospel-galatians-51-12>]

## U nder grace means obedience.

**Our freedom in Christ never means "now I can do what I want."** We have been set free to live in the grace of God. Grace is never self-directed. The person who wants to believe that Christian liberty means personal freedom in action and direction does not have a clue.

- (Galatians 5:13 ESV) For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

**Grace leads to righteousness.** Being under grace means not just obedience but that we are slaves of obedience to God.

- (Romans 6:14 ESV) For sin will have no dominion over you, **since you are not under law but under grace.**
- (Romans 6:15-16 ESV) What then? Are we to sin because we are **not under law but under grace?** By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience [to God], which leads to righteousness?

**Under grace** not only leads to righteousness but establishes a kingdom of righteousness because grace reigns through righteousness.

- (Romans 5:21 ESV) So that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Under grace** means that we are obedient from the heart to the teaching of the Holy Spirit and have become slaves of righteousness.

- (Romans 6:17-18 ESV) But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

## G race strengthens our hearts.

Grace is sound, biblical teaching that strengthens our lives and brings spiritual health and growth.

- (Hebrews 13:9 ESV) Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, **for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace**, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

The old Princeton theologian Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) asked a question that continues to trouble thoughtful Christians today. He wanted to know why "Christians commonly are of so diminutive a stature and such feeble strength in their religion."

There are many answers to this question, but here is the one that Alexander emphasized: There is a defect in our belief in the freeness of divine grace. To exercise unshaken confidence in the doctrine of gratuitous pardon is one of the most difficult things in the world; and to preach this doctrine fully without verging towards antinomianism is no easy task, and is therefore seldom done. But Christians cannot but be lean and feeble when deprived of their proper nutriment. **It is by faith that the spiritual life is made to grow; and the doctrine of free grace, without any mixture of human merit, is the only true object of faith.... Here, I am persuaded, is the root of the evil; and until religious teachers inculcate clearly, fully, and practically, the grace of God, as manifest in the Gospel, we shall have no vigorous growth of piety among professing Christians.** [Ryken, P. G. (2005). Galatians. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (pp. 195-196). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.]

## U nder grace means under grace.

Under grace means that we are no longer under the law. Our principles for living have dramatically changed. We are no longer slaves to the ways of this world but sons in the kingdom of God.

- (Galatians 4:3-7 ESV) In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Under grace means that we are no more slaves to lesser gods. We now belong to a different kingdom and worship a different God.

- (Galatians 4:8-9 ESV) Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Grace means that we are not enslaved to the

elementary principles of this world. The “rules” have changed forever for believers as we now live in the kingdom of God’s unmerited favor.

► **Seems right—ends in death.**

Since Adam and Eve the people of this world have taken it upon themselves to decide what is good and what is evil. The result is a deadly prognosis and a false hope of heaven which produces statements such as ... “I’m basically a good person.” “I believe my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds.”

**The problem is a faulty, human standard of measurement. The person who trusts God alone has abandoned all human standards for sin and righteousness and has accepted God’s holy measure.**

The result of accepting God’s holy measure? We see our sin and rebellion for what it is—as God sees it—and throw ourselves on the mercy of God and trust him to save us. Adding nothing.

**F**reedom is living in God’s grace.

**Grace is freedom. We now live in the favor of the King of the universe. We are God’s favored ones—the “teacher’s pets” of the universe.**

- (1 Peter 2:9-10 ESV) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**F**reedom is living in God’s world.

Mary was favored by the Lord. Now aside from obvious differences in how Mary was favored and how we are favored, I believe we can learn much from her experience.

- (Luke 1:26-34 ESV) In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, **“Greetings, O favored [grace-bestowed] one, the Lord is with you!”** 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, **“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor [grace] with God.** 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

► **What might we learn from Mary?**

1. The Lord chose to bestow his grace on Mary. Mary specifically. His plan. His design.
2. The Lord initiated the work of the Holy Spirit in Mary’s life.
3. **This event was very troubling to Mary. Why?**

**Because God changed the rules and her world was turned upside down. Her life was no longer dictated by the principles and reasoning of humans. The physical laws of of this world no longer applied. A virgin was going to have God’s baby boy.**

Mary asked—**“How will this be?”**—because in Mary’s world virgins didn’t have babies.

4. The news was so troubling and disruptive to her universe that she was struggling to discern even the angel’s greeting.
5. This interruption (or intervention) by God into her life was frightening. Again, everything was changing. She was a young woman with wedding plans and looking forward to a good life with her carpenter husband Joseph.
6. **Mary’s new life in the favor (grace) of God was incomprehensible to her. She would become pregnant and have a son who would be called the Son of the Most High. Mary said, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” Virgins don’t have babies. Mary may have been young and naive, but she knew that much. Virgins don’t have babies.**

**F**reedom means a new Master.

**King Jesus is now our Master. Grace rules in this kingdom.** Do we understand that? We see that from an earlier verse.

- (Romans 5:21 ESV) So that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our kingdom is now one of grace. No condemnation. No threat of the wrath or anger of God. No frown from God. Set free.

- (Romans 8:1-2 ESV) There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.
- (Romans 5:1-2 ESV) Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

**F**or freedom Christ has set us free.

- For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1 ESV).
- (John 8:35-36 ESV) The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
- (1 Peter 2:16 ESV) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.
- (2 Corinthians 3:17 ESV) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

## Appendix: Commentary Notes

**Sin and the law pay wages, but the kingdom's currency is grace.** Most of us are accustomed to applying elbow grease. Like the gardener, we believe that life is governed by a direct proportionality: The more grease we use, the smoother everything goes. In fact, we pride ourselves on our ability to overcome obstacles. A lack of natural gifts can be overcome with hard-won skills; sheer determination, fortitude, and elbow grease are all we need. There is something to be said for that, after all; it seems to work so well in so many ways. And that makes it difficult to imagine such an attitude as toxic when transferred to salvation and spiritual transformation.

The truth is counterintuitive. Merely trying harder doesn't make you holier—although it does make you holier-than-thou—because it doesn't promote faith and dependence upon Jesus. Trying harder doesn't cause you to love God more; it replaces Jesus with your efforts as the object of your faith.

**The opposite of faith isn't unbelief—we all believe something and live our lives in light of it. The opposite of faith is self-reliance,** trying to get dividends from God by self-effort, programs, routines, systems, or rules.

*Bush, D., & Due, N. (2015). Live in Liberty: The Spiritual Message of Galatians (p. 151). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.*

John Piper has said, "Slavery is when you choose to deal with [God] as a banker who needs your investment to produce dividends for his customers."<sup>2</sup> If your aim is to increase dividends, Christ will be a poor fund manager. **The dividends God pays aren't based on our investment, but his.** The reality is this: There's nothing we can do that will make God love us more than he does already, nor is there anything we can do that will make him love us less. Christ is the surety of that. Denial and hopelessness are remedied only by living in this truth more deeply. Otherwise every force of the world, the flesh, and the devil will conspire to drive us back into ourselves, to redirect our attention onto our performance—filling us with pride when improvement seems at hand or despair when it doesn't—rather than looking at the cross objectively before us.

*Ibid. (p. 149).*

**The freedom Jesus has to offer is emancipation from the old slaveholders of humanity: sin, death, and the devil.** Every human being is born into this triple slavery. We are born in sin, and thus we are evil by nature. We are destined to die, having been made mortal by God's curse against Adam's sin. Finally, we are tormented by the devil, who tempts us to sin and seeks to drag us down to the very pit of hell.

*Ryken, P. G. (2005). Galatians. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (p. 194). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.*

The language of redemption in 3:13 and 4:5 is conceptually similar to freedom; in both these texts redemption is from a situation having to do with the law: "the curse of the law" in 3:13, and "those under the law" in 4:5. And now in 5:1, Paul goes on to warn

about a yoke of slavery, language that almost certainly refers to the law.

*Moo, D. J. (2013). Galatians (p. 320). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.*

Earlier I referred to **a phenomenon that I, and others, call "Jesus and..."** Whether or not readers have heard it put that way, everyone has experienced it and practiced it. **It simply refers to adding something, whether consciously or not, to Christ as the basis for our justification.** We do it in all sorts of ways. In Galatia and other stops along Paul's missionary journeys, there was pressure to practice circumcision in addition to faith in Christ. For Paul, adding to Christ for justification meant preaching another gospel, which is no gospel at all.

*Vickers, B. (2013). Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair. (R. A. Peterson, Ed.) (p. 167). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.*

The problem for the circumcision party, the Galatians enticed by them, and Peter (at least temporarily) is that they all failed to understand three things. **First**, the law was never meant to justify. **Second**, God's intended purpose for it was accomplished. **Third**, the Messiah had come and the era of law was over. Believing Jews had been set free from the curse of the law but were now trying to reach back and hold to particular points of law as part of their relationship with God in Christ. Through the gospel, Gentile believers were released from their slavery to the sin of idolatry, but were now tempted to believe that they must add works from the law to their faith in Christ. In light of the gospel, all attempts to find identity and self-justification on the basis of works are all the more horrible.

*Ibid. (p. 166).*

**The point of all this is that we love works and turning things into works.** We love what we can see, point to, take pride in, and boast about. Works are, after all, so much easier than faith. Anyone can do things, but believing? That is a different story altogether. We are no different than the Galatians tinkering around with the law; we just have different ways of expressing it. The irony is that many of us spend a lot of time, paper, and ink speaking against works righteousness and the dangers associated with those who want to make works part of justification, all the while unaware that we like to do the same thing. It is just that our attempts at self-justification are more subtle, more orthodox, and more acceptable.

What we need is to see that everything, whether our ministries, traditions, associations, institutions, practices, or preferences, can be potential sidetracks from justification by faith; **we can become slowly enslaved to good things that quietly lead us away from Christ.** We need Paul's message to the Galatians: Christ has set us free from works (of the law and otherwise), and we are free to live according to faith and conscience (before the Lord), so why enslave ourselves and others "to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more" (4:9)?

*Ibid. (p. 167).*