

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Spoiler alert, this is the end of the movie.

The scene is set, the whole movie has come to a crescendo, to this very point. After almost 3 hours of movie cinematics, plot development, and character buildup, William Wallace is shown lying on a wooden cross, bound, stretched, tortured, struggling to grasp a breath. The executioner is shown leaning over, whispering in William's ear, "It can all end, just cry out, "Mercy." The crowd of peasants and onlookers, joins in the chant, "Mercy! Mercy! Mercy!" William gasps more and the executioner quiets the crowd so the prisoner can say a word. William Wallace gathers his breath and cries out with all that he has left, all that he has worked for and struggled for, all that he has lived for, William Wallace cries out, "Freedom!!!!" ...

The Last dying breath of a revolutionary. A man who understood that freedom is not simply being free to do whatever you please. True freedom is being free to live your life for others.

Although not as dramatic, as the movie Braveheart, Paul's letter to the Galatians is just as intense (from a rhetorical standpoint at least). Paul has been criticizing and throwing punches at the Galatians for casting aside their freedom, for enslaving themselves by listening to the circumcision party and to the Jews or for following the passions and desires of their own flesh. In fact, Paul is so bold as to say in chapter 5 verse 12, when speaking about the circumcision party, that he wishes those troublemakers, "would emasculate themselves!" ...

Paul is passionate about freedom. He is passionate about the freedom that has been given to you by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul is passionate because "for freedom Christ has set us free" (Ga 5:1). But what exactly is freedom? How would Paul define it? And how would Christ see us live out our freedom?

Using our Epistle reading for today, let's examine those questions? Let's build a biblical definition of freedom.

[Freedom is living a life free from the law...]

To start, building our definition, we need to gain some context, just like the movie Braveheart is based, however loosely, on late 13th century Scotland, context is the key to defining what you mean. In this case, as I said earlier, Paul is talking for much of his letter to the Galatians about his disappointment that they would so quickly abandon the grace of the Gospel and focus instead on works of the law.

The Galatians had started to follow false teachers who preached a different gospel message. A message that said, first, you must convert to Judaism, second, you must start to follow Mosaic law, and then and only then, could you become a true Christian. The Galatians had started believing that they had to follow the law to be saved. They had effectively enslaved themselves to the law of Moses.

Have you enslaved yourself as well? Have you sought to live your life according to the ten commandments and either found yourself wonderfully successful or woefully deficient? How have you enslaved yourself?

For those of you who consider yourselves wonderfully successful, how has the burden been? Have you felt like it was easy to follow the law? Surely it wasn't, instead, it has probably been a constant struggle. A constant fight to keep the momentum, to walk the straight path and to not deviate for fun or games. You've lived a good life, you've treated your neighbor as yourself and you've done everything in your power to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Mt 22:37). Surely good things come to good people? Or do they?

On the other hand, for those of you who consider yourselves woefully deficient at living according to the ten commandments, how has that felt? Have you gone through life breaking God's laws with no consequences? Every time you've hated your neighbor in your heart have you felt enslaved to the guilt and condemnation of knowing your sin and your error?

Are you enslaved? How free are you? Has your life been lived free to do as you please, to say what you want, to treat others according to your own free will?

The truthful person would recognize that we haven't been free at all, instead, we've felt the burden of the law weighing down upon us and the guilt of breaking it.

But in Christ we are free. Like the Galatians, we are missing the point. Freedom means that we are free "from" something. In this context, we are free from the Law.

Free from the need to follow the law to earn our salvation and free from the condemnation and guilt that comes from NOT following the law.

As Paul writes, earlier in Galatians, “Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” (Ga 3:2). Freedom is trusting and relying on what Christ has done and not on what you’ve done.

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

Freedom is living life free from the law.

[free from the passions and desires of the flesh...]

So far, we’ve gotten our definition of freedom using the context of our epistle reading today, but what about the actual epistle reading. What can we use in it to further define what freedom means?

In our epistle reading, Paul spends time contrasting freedom with the desires of the flesh. Paul says that to be free is to walk by the Spirit (Ga 5:16). “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” (Ga 5:17).

So, to be free is to be free “from” the passions and desires of the flesh. Paul elaborates for several verses about what the works of the flesh are. I’m pretty sure you get it. The works of the flesh are the cravings and the acts of sin that are harmful not only to those around us but to ourselves as well.

You’d think that just the danger and the consequences of living life according to the flesh would drive us back to God’s way, but often these fleshy things just feel so good that we struggle all the more to justify our actions and ignore God’s law. But, as if Paul senses our struggle, he further warns us against them. Paul says, that freedom is not indulging in sensual desires of the flesh, because if you continuously or continually do these things you “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Ga 5:21b)

Freedom is freedom from the passions and desires of the flesh.

So, combining these two definitions together our working definition of freedom so far is: Freedom is living a life free from the law and free from the passions and desires of the flesh.

[free to be led by the Spirit for the benefit of the community.]

But that isn't all that Paul has to say about freedom. Because freedom isn't only about being free "from" something (like the law and the flesh), freedom is also about being free "for" something.

Remember the scene in Braveheart as the armies form up for the Battle of Stirling and the Scottish nobles are all ready to accept concessions and walk away, at that battle, at least as the movie depicts it, William Wallace rallies the troops with his famous freedom speech, "You've come to fight as free men and free men you are. [But] what will you do with that freedom? Will you fight?"

Paul has a similar rally cry, "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." (Ga 5:13).

Freedom from the law and freedom from the flesh is only the beginning of freedom. Because freedom "from" is always freedom "for." In Galatians, freedom is for the Spirit. Or more specifically, freedom to be led by the Spirit for the benefit of others.

Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are the results of your freedom in Christ. They are the fruit of that free relationship. For only in Christ are we free from the law and the flesh. Free to live our lives not for ourselves, but for others and in that freedom the Spirit works in us.

So then, to complete our definition of freedom: Freedom is living a life free from the law, free from the passions and desires of the flesh, and free to be led by the Spirit for the benefit of others. Or In other words, freedom is: freedom from yourself for service to everyone else.

You are free. You have been called to it. You have been redeemed by it. And free men you are. What will you do with your freedom? Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (Phil 4:7)
