

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

### [Freedom!]

St. Paul writes in Galatians chapter five verse one:

*“For **freedom** Christ has set us **free**;  
stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”*

What American doesn't like the sound of that? Freedom! Yeah!

Until you slow down to consider those words:

*“For **freedom** Christ has set us **free**”*

That sounds like circular reasoning.

This is going to take more time to parse out than at first glance.

In order to know what Paul means here, we need to know what ‘*freedom*’ is for Christians.

### [Freedom is not... worldly power.]

There once was a group of new Christian converts who were on fire for Jesus—the Galatians. But they were struggling to understand their new faith.

You see, the Galatians were Gentiles.

They weren't Jewish, like other early Christians.

Now, Jesus had come for *all people*, everyone agreed on that...

but did that mean *all people* had to first become Jewish in order to become Christian?

Did they need to learn all 613 Mishnaic laws?

Adopt Jewish worship practices and cultural norms?

(Gal. 5:6-12)

That was the view of some, who sought *worldly power* to lord over these poor Galatians.

If these sound like silly questions, consider for a moment:

These Galatians were only thinking in the way *worldly kingdoms* have always thought.

Even in a modern nation said to be “free,”

individuals are expected to *do* certain things, *act* a certain way—

*Prove* they are worthy of *worldly power*, or “*rights*.”

St. Paul's admonition to the Galatians is fitting for us:

*“If you bite and devour one another,*

*watch out that you are not consumed by one another!”*

(Gal. 5:15)

Well, as you might imagine, it wasn't long before the Galatians started doing just that.

They became so focused on *doing* Christianity, that had forgotten how to *live* it.

They were not free in Christ,

They were enslaved to the world!

So St. Paul writes a letter to these Galatians.

He tells them that Jesus didn't free them to seek *worldly power*.

That also means, whether you like it or not, Jesus did not set us free to have "rights."

Before God, you *have no rights*.

No right to Free Speech,

No right to Bear Arms,

Not even... not even a Right to Life.

The only 'rights' you bear are the rights to Death, Hell and Damnation.

That may sound harsh.

(Rom. 3:23, 6:23)

But "*the wages of sin is death,*" and "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

Then again, maybe that doesn't sound harsh.

Maybe that makes sense.

Maybe you think, "Nope. I've got no rights before God—But I've still got rights before man!"

### [Freedom is not... license.]

Well, let's think about that.

Our nation's culture would tell those Galatians

that they were thinking way too hard about the whole thing.

"*Forget those rules, man. Just live within your rights.*"

"*You do you,*" our culture would say.

In a word, our culture thinks freedom means *license* to do what feels good.

There was a young confirmation student who thought freedom meant *license*.

He chose Galatians 5:1 as his confirmation verse.

He had dreams similar to many teenagers.

He couldn't wait to get his driver's *license* so he could have freedom.

It wasn't until college that I learned the difference between *license* and *freedom*.

I was reading a book called *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis.

It takes place in a town where people have the right, the power,

—the *license*— to do and create whatever they want.

Want one of those Iowa-famous breaded pork tenderloins? Just imagine it, and it's yours.

More of a corn on the cobb sort of person? Think of it and the buttery goodness is yours.

Want to see the Hawkeyes play for a national championship?

Just think it, and you've got two tickets in your hand!

But! (There's always a 'but' isn't there?)

Everyone else in that strange town has the right—the *license*—to do what they want too.

The "freedom" of the people in the Grey Town comes *at the expense of others*.

If they want your breaded pork tenderloin? It's gone.

If they want your corncob? Sorry.

If they want the Cyclones to knock the Hawkeyes out of contention? Game over.

Suddenly “license” doesn’t sound so good to the Hawkeye fans—it sounds bad!

Some might even say it sounds like a living Hell!

That’s how C.S. Lewis intended it.

In the story, so many desires are ‘imagined into being’  
that everything fades into a dull grey.

In the story, this Grey Town *is* Hell. (Spoiler if you haven’t read it!)

Now, I don’t know if that’s what Hell is really like, and I pray none of us ever finds out.

But I do know that a place where everyone lives by “*You do you,*”  
isn’t freedom in the least—it’s fear. Eventually it’s slavery.

### **[Freedom is... for another, and by ‘Another.’]**

So what is freedom, then?

It is as Paul told the Galatians:

*“Freedom is not an opportunity for the flesh, but to **serve one another through love.**”* (Gal. 5:13)

Freedom is not *worldly power*.

Freedom is not *license* to do what we want.

Freedom is *servng one another through love*. It’s that simple.

And yet so impossible to do.

We confess every Sunday that we have failed

in thought, word, and deed to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Sometimes, we even fail to love ourselves—creatures made in the image of God.

This is an impossible task for us.

What Good News can there possibly be in True Freedom for a people like us?

*“To nations of rebels who have rebelled against [God?]”*

(Ezekiel 2:3)

Five hundred years before St. Paul, the prophet Ezekiel knew such a nation.

He heard a voice saying to the Son of Man:

*“Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel,  
to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me.*

*They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day.*

*The descendants also are impudent and stubborn:*

*I send you to them...”*

(Ezekiel 2:3-5)

God sent His Son to a people as rebellious as Israel.

A people who rejected Him in His own hometown of Nazareth,  
and once again in their capital city of Jerusalem,  
nailing Him to a Cross:

(Mark 6:1-13)

For all the times we sought *worldly power*,

For all the times we declared *license*,

For all the times we *sinned*.

It is *His* demonstration of love that was the ultimate act of True Freedom.

“*For greater love has no man than this;  
He who laid down His life for His friends.*”

(John 15:13)

**[For freedom Christ set you free...]**

In Christ and by His power, you can live as Paul says with:

(Gal. 5:22-23)

“*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*”

The Law of God is good and wise and it’s written on your heart.

Paul puts in just five words:

“*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

(Gal. 5:14)

That’s what the Holy Spirit *empowers* you to do!

As proof that anyone can do it,

Jesus even sent out Twelve of those rebellious people in today’s Gospel reading!

(Mark 6:7)

Those disciples from a rebellious people healed the sick,

fed the hungry,

even cast away darkness.

You will fail, from time to time.

We are all sinners, after all.

But that’s where God’s *free* gift of *freedom* circles back into the picture:

You are forgiven!

You are free in Christ!

You are free to serve your neighbor in love!

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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**Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**

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