

# Freedom: A Biblical Perspective

*Galatians 5:1, 22-26; 6:7-10*  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
July 6, 2025

On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend, it is appropriate that we reflect upon the blessings of freedom, independence, and liberty – blessings that we too often take for granted in this country. But this is not a sermon on the current state of our democracy. Most of us are all too aware of its status.

Instead, when you hear the word “freedom” what comes to mind? How would you define it? The dictionary defines and associates **freedom** primarily with **autonomy, independence, and the power to make our own choices and decisions without coercion**. Our modern-day understanding of freedom in this country often comes with the belief that as long as we stay within the boundaries of the law, individuals and businesses can pretty much take on a “do as I please” approach toward life and work.

**Such a concept of doing as one pleases, however, would not have been part of the apostle Paul’s understanding of freedom.** After all, they were under the domination, control, and occupation of the Roman Empire. They were not free in most of the ways according to modern understanding. **Christian freedom**, therefore, is just that: **freedom in Christ, not freedom in and of itself**. According to Paul, since it is Christ who has set us free, we are therefore obligated to Christ as our liberator, and therefore bound to Christ’s service in the world.

The specific freedom he envisions here is **freedom from the law**, as in the ancient laws of Moses and how they no longer pertain to the issue of redemption and salvation. Instead, **it is by God’s loving grace alone that we are justified**, not by our good works or following some strict code of conduct. Paul even extended this understanding of God’s grace to include Gentile converts to Christianity, without them having to convert first to Judaism.

Again, of utmost importance to Paul is his insistence on the One who calls us to freedom - Christ. Therefore, Paul urges the Galatian Christians to remember their calling, **a calling that carries with it both freedom and obligation**. For does not freedom pose new and additional responsibilities? That’s often a hard lesson to learn, and something we all discovered while growing into adulthood.

In a biblical context, then, we are encouraged to address such social, economic, and political issues such as freedom from the bondage of racism, patriarchy, classism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and the like. We must resist any external or internal forces that try to pull in back into systems of domination, hierarchy, and exclusion. **Freedom in Christ is the power to resist those oppressive systems – not just spiritually, but materially.**

Paul reveals more about his understanding of freedom when he warns, **“do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence.”** Freedom in Christ, then, is both freedom *from* something (the law), and freedom *to* do something (providing loving service to each other). Ultimately, **freedom in Christ is about the freedom to love, to live by the law of love**. When we do this, we live in and through the Spirit of God. And Paul

provides us with a list of those signs that reflect we are **living by the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** (Gal. 5:22-23). Paul calls these traits the "**fruit of the Spirit**," and they are a gift from God. We should not interpret this fruit, however, as referring only to individual personal character qualities. Paul, as always, is primarily concerned with **the way in which the Spirit's work is made manifest and embodied in community – how we treat one another and live together as the people of God**. Therefore, Paul warns those in the church to not become conceited, competing against one another, and envying others. His vision of the community of faith is that we should embody the love of Christ in ways characterized and manifested by the fruit of the Spirit. We can use that list, then, as a **measuring stick** to see how well we are living together as a community of faith, and how well we reflect these characteristics with others in our daily lives, including with those with whom we disagree.

As one biblical commentator suggests, Paul's list can also be interpreted as something profoundly political, in its best sense, when it is lived out in community.

- Love resists fear-driven policies.
- Joy is an act of resistance in a culture of despair.
- Peace refuses the false peace of silence in the face of injustice.
- Kindness and generosity dismantle systems of greed.
- Self-control means restraining the impulses that privilege self over neighbor, ego over equity.

**Living by the Spirit isn't soft. It's subversive.** So, Paul writes in verse 25, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." According to this text, when we allow ourselves to be led by God's Spirit we will act responsibly toward each other within the context of our fellowship in and through our personal relationships with one another. Therefore, **developing, renewing, and strengthening our relationships should become a priority**.

Paul gets to the heart of the matter when he quotes a familiar proverb, "**for you reap whatever you sow**" (Gal. 6:7). We are presented here with a choice of sowing seeds in one of two fields. This metaphor is well stated in the Jerusalem Bible translation, "If we sow in the field of self-indulgence we will get a harvest of corruption out of it; if we sow in the field of the Spirit we will get for it a harvest of eternal life."

**So, what might keep us from sowing in the field of the Spirit?** Paul has a very interesting answer, and no, it's not Satan. It's **weariness**. Specifically, weariness that results in discouragement that eventually leads to giving up. Now, weariness is something I think we all can relate to. But as any farmer or gardener knows, it may be weeks or months after a seed is planted before any results are seen. Such is the case when sowing spiritual seeds. And parents certainly know this in planting seeds of wise-living with their children.

**When results are not often seen right away it's easy to become weary, discouraged, and tempted to give up.** So, Paul clearly warns, "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9). **Perseverance**, then, is an important and crucial key in living a Spirit-led life. Let us keep sowing seeds of justice, seeds of inclusion, seeds of love.

I'll end with Paul's final thought on this subject, at least in this letter. "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those of

the family of faith" (Gal. 6:10). **This is a call to expand the table to include all.** And what we are taught in today's biblical text is that Christian freedom requires a lot of hard and dedicated work. The great Protestant Reformer, **Martin Luther**, summarized Galatians' paradox of Christian freedom with these words: **"A Christian is the most-free person of all, and subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone."**

So yes, for freedom, Christ has set us free. Not just *from* something, but *for* something. **Let us walk in the Spirit and be people who resist bondage – in all its forms – and sow seeds of justice, freedom, equality, inclusion, and love wherever we – you and I – are planted.**

Amen.