

Freedom

Galatians 5:1

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/freedom/>

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

[Opening song: "The Great Divide" by Henriette Sun]

I have three favorite songs:

#1 The Hallelujah Chorus by Friedrich Handel.

#2 Free Bird by Lynyrd Skynyrd.

#3 The Great Divide by Henriette Sun—which is that song that these guys wrote! Nate and Vince wrote that! (Points back to band).

Prayer

So, Lord God, we thank you this day for our country. Thank you for those who have gone before. I thank you that we get to live here; there's no place on the face of the earth that I would rather live. I thank you, Lord God. And now I pray that you would help us to preach about your Kingdom, Lord God. We ask it in Jesus's name, Amen.

Message

[Video montage plays on the screen as The Rolling Stones "I'm Free" accompanies. Peter sings along loudly, off key, intermittently blowing a horn and yelling enthusiastically.]

"I'm free to do what I want any old time.
So, love me, hold me. Love me, hold me.
But I'm free any old time to get what I want.

I'm free to sing my song, though it gets out of time.
So, love me, hold me. Love me, hold me.
But I'm free any old time to get what I want. Yeah!"

[Video and music are turned off abruptly.]

Peter: "Hey! Why'd you turn the video off?"

Mike: "Why are you blowing that horn and singing off key?"

Peter: "Well... 'cause Vince wouldn't let me play with the band...I just wanted to play along. But it's the Fourth of July and I'm free, baby! I'm free to toot my own horn and sing what I want."

Mike: "And I'm free to turn the sound off."

Peter: "OK, I'll stop singing..."

...But maybe we should talk just a little bit about "freedom..." It's a huge topic, so maybe you could think of this as a meditation, and then ponder it more this evening as you eat potato salad and blow things up this evening.ⁱ

So... What is freedom? What does it look like?

[Image shows on screen of astronaut floating in space.]

If anyone were truly free, wouldn't it be this guy? An astronaut, untethered, floating free in space, completely unrestrained by anything or anyone? I mean, Isn't that freedom?

[Image on screen changes to a soldier in the midst of destruction and people parachuting out of military helicopter.]

Is this Freedom? No one can push you around if you've got enough firepower.

[Image on screen changes to man working on laptop in suit and tie, coming out of the top of a mountain of money.]

Maybe this is Freedom--People make money and they keep money to guard their freedom... or at least what they think is "freedom."

[Image changes on screen to a person with a crazed look on his face, bound up in a straitjacket]

Is that Freedom? If it were, wouldn't it be the ability to create your own reality...which would be a description of maybe God... or possibly insanity?

[Image on screen switches to a Spoiled Child, crossing her arms as her parents stand helpless behind her.]

Is a spoiled child free? Children who are free to do what they want, often don't want what they do. And children who get whatever they want, then often don't want what they get. It seems to me that the most childish children are those children who think they are the most grown up. Perhaps the most childish adults are also those adults who think they are the most grown up—so they take what they want, but they can no longer want what they take... for they've taken it; they've killed it.

And what do they want?

[Peter sings]"Love me, hold me... But I'm free to get what I want!"

Maybe because they always get what they want, they are incapable of wanting the one thing that will truly make them happy. They're not free to be happy because they think that they deserve everything, and so they can't receive anything.

So, how do you get freedom? And what is freedom?

It's July Fourth and a Sunday. It's the day folks skip church to celebrate our freedom, eat potato salad, and blow stuff up. And if I didn't have this job, I might be skipping church. too—so if you're

watching online later on July fifth and feel guilty about skipping church, don't think I'm any different than you.

It was on this day in 1776 that the Second Continental Congress voted to adopt the Declaration of Independence.

[Image on screen shows The Declaration of Independence]

It was the day that we declared ourselves independent of bad legislation and declared that we would create better legislation—that is “laws.” We declared ourselves independent of King George and England!

So, understandably, I'm a bit embarrassed to say that my daughter studied at the University of York in England last year. But I'm so proud to say that on July fourth of last year, under cover of night, my daughter, Becky, took some tea, found an irrigation ditch... and just threw it in! Take that England!

We declared our independence from England in 1776... Want to know my favorite bands in 1976 and pretty much up until now? The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Elton John, Queen, Led Zeppelin—and Lynyrd Skynyrd (just to neutralize the British invasion: Free bird! Yeah, baby!)

We get People magazine each week at my house because someone was doing a fund raiser, and now we can't seem to cancel the subscription without messing with our credit rating... Well, do you know what's on about half of all those magazine covers? Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, Princess Dianna, Prince William, or Harry—someone from the Royal Family. Good thing we declared our independence from England!

This is how the Declaration of Independence starts:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God [whatever that means] entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men...

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and... endowed... with certain unalienable Rights”?

I looked up the word “unalienable.” According to Webster's Dictionary, “unalienable” means “impossible to take away.” So, do we have an unalienable right to life? And can a government secure that right?

It's kind of weird for a government to claim that all men have this right to life, and then declare war and invoke the death penalty. Even weirder to claim that this right to life is self-evident and

unalienable. Was Thomas Jefferson unaware that all men die, and usually die when they don't want to die?

And do we have an unalienable right to liberty?ⁱⁱ For a man like Jefferson, that's an especially strange assertion—he owned 600 slaves and fathered several children by one.ⁱⁱⁱ And it's an especially strange assertion in reference to a government that was imprisoning people and wouldn't allow minorities or women to vote.

There is no earthly government that actually believes in the unalienable right of all people to life and liberty. What could possibly be more self-evident?

And yet, who on earth does not have a right to pursue happiness? I mean, Jefferson's slaves, imprisoned British soldiers, and women could all pursue happiness, right? They could all "pursue happiness...unless, of course, you think happiness can only be had by claiming your rights under civil law to do what you want. For if you do, in fact, think that you will be incredibly dependent on your government to ensure your rights and guarantee you're happiness—and in this way the principalities and powers of this world will keep you enslaved... to them.

Well, I just started way more conversations than I can finish, didn't I? But for now, I'm just asking the question: "Is freedom secured by something like the U.S. Declaration of Independence?"

"Is freedom secured by claiming your rights, and using every bit of legislation to do so?" Because we're pretty good at that in America.

Now you may be thinking: "OK, I get your point: Freedom isn't anything an earthly government could grant. Freedom is something that God has already granted, for he's given each of us a free will."

Well, what on earth is a "free will"? I realize that different people mean different things with that term "free will." But I would think a free will would be a will that is not determined by anything other than itself—a will that makes its own choices.^{iv}

Many secularists would say, "Well then, there is no such thing as a free-will, for a truly free will would be an entirely undetermined will, and that would violate the laws of cause and effect." They would say, "What you are describing is an Uncaused Cause—and there is no such thing as an Uncaused Cause."

I've heard many Christians say, "God—"(whom the Bible describes as The Uncaused Cause)— "God would never violate your free will."

The term, "free will," is confusing, and that statement is utterly confusing. The term, "free will," is confusing, and it really can't be found anywhere in Scripture, at least not in the way we use the term. And yet, there must be some term for an Uncaused Cause that causes everything else and yet is entirely undetermined by anything else.

If you really had an entirely free will, wouldn't you be the Uncaused Cause... or perhaps a bit delusional? Do you do whatever you want and want whatever you do? Do you get whatever you want and want whatever you get?^v

If there is a God and we have [quote] “free will,” God clearly violates our “free will,” and thereby demonstrates that our will is not free. It’s not free, for none of us does whatever he wants, or gets whatever she wants... and all of us die, don’t we?

To be honest, I’m grateful we don’t get whatever we want, because frankly, I’m not always too sure what it is—exactly—that I want. A lot of the things I’ve wanted haven’t made me happy once I’ve gotten them^{vi} I’m like a little child that way: I want what’s good, but I’m not too sure what the good actually is, exactly.

Many years ago, my daughter, Elizabeth, threw a fit because she wanted a buffalo for the backyard, and I wouldn’t comply with her wishes. They weren’t good, and the cost of helping her see that they were not good was too high: “Sorry about your mangled, crippled, and bleeding body, Elizabeth. But because I refuse to violate your free will, we put that buffalo in the backyard.”

Coleman wanted to be a backhoe (not drive a backhoe— *be* a backhoe). He didn’t know it was bad, but with that wish, he was wishing away his very own soul. He also wanted to eat dirt, and I wouldn’t let him eat dirt. And so, he hid from me, but I found him out, eating dirt alone in the darkness. I violated his “free will” with my will—for I forced him to stop eating dirt and made him eat pizza with the rest of the family while watching movies on TV.

I think Jon showed the greatest wisdom at that time. One day, Susan took him shopping for shoes back when there were these people called “shoe salesmen.” Well, the shoe salesman asked Jon, “Jon, do you like the blue sneakers or the red sneakers?”

And Jonathan turned to Susan and said, “Mommy, do I like the blue sneakers or the red sneakers?”

And Susan showed even greater wisdom than Jon, for she said to Jon: “I don’t know Jon. Tell me how you feel about the color blue and the color red.” She knew Jon wasn’t free, but she wanted to help Jon to be free—free to choose the Good. And in the case of sneakers, it was a small and rather inconsequential decision. So, Susan freely chose to help Jon freely choose the good—what he enjoyed and that didn’t hurt anyone else.

Well, I was just saying that the term “free will” is an awfully confusing term. And when some people use the term, I find it not only confusing but actually a bit terrifying, for it seems to me that they’re talking about some extremely consequential decisions.

It’s my experience that people will often use the term “free will” once they’ve given up on Love. And so, troubled by someone that’s made a host of terrible decisions (like drinking themselves into oblivion or losing one more job because of laziness) people will say, “Well, God won’t violate our free will. No need to feel sorry for them: free will.”

Sometimes we say stuff like that in order to blame others for their bad decisions—“Well, they did choose it, and God gave us free will.” And we say stuff like that in order to justify ourselves with our good decisions—“Well, I deserve a vacation, big salary, and a boat; I freely chose to work hard. And so, all this wealth rightfully belongs to me... and not them.”

And it’s my experience that Christians will often say stuff like this to explain why they will be rewarded with endless bliss in a place called “Heaven,” and their enemies will be tormented with endless pain in a place they call “Hell.” They’ve given up on Love... and God is Love.

See, I suspect that the thing that we often call “free will” is actually bad will. For if one thinks that their own will is an entirely free will, they will—most likely—will away all other wills that don’t will what they will. That’s why spoiled children are not happy children. That’s why powerful people, rich people, and delusional people are often tremendously lonely people.

Rich and powerful people have the means to make other wills comply with their own will—but those other wills are not free wills, but just an illusion. And delusional people just create that illusion in their own mind—a false reality, in which they’re always right and everyone else is always wrong.

Perhaps, the only way to know that you are not creating your own false reality, and thus not utterly alone in bondage to an illusion, is to ask yourself:

- “Are there things in my reality that don’t agree with me?”
- “Are there events that cause me to suffer, that is, not get my will and not get my way... for then I probably didn’t create those events?”
- “Are there people with whom I don’t always agree, who turn out to be right and reveal that I’m wrong—for those people would be real people?”

It’s ironic, but the process of falling in love is the process of finding another will that violates your own will—that is, a will that doesn’t agree with you. It’s the process of finding another will that violates your own will, and then freely willing to surrender your free will to that other will. That free decision is a sacrifice, and that sacrifice is called “love.”

Well, my point is that what we often call “free will” is really bad will, and so with our supposed “free will,” we will ourselves into outer darkness, where men “weep and gnash their teeth.”

[Image on screen switches back to the astronaut floating in the darkness of space]

We will ourselves into a place like this—a place where we will be affected by no one, a place where we are entirely alone, and so love is an impossibility. With the thing we often call “free will,” we will ourselves into hell.

So far from being saved by our free choice, we’re damned by the very thing we call free choice, and so need to be saved from the very thing we call our “free will,” which turns out to be bad will. In other words, we need to be saved from our bad judgment by someone else’s good judgment. We need to be liberated from bondage. Not just some of us, but all of us—humanity, that is, “*ha Adam*,” the Adam.

People say, “It was Adam’s free will to take the fruit from the tree.” And yet, Adam wasn’t free to choose the good—since he obviously didn’t know what it was; he didn’t have knowledge of good and evil.^{vii} I wouldn’t call that a free will so much as a random will.^{viii}

But call it whatever you will, Adam’s supposed “free choice” was revealed to be a bad choice, and once he exercised that choice, he discovered that he wasn’t free, but enslaved to sin—and that’s bad will.

With our [quote] “free will,” we all choose bondage. That’s the overarching theme of the entire Old Testament.

And now I know what some of you, or maybe all of you, are thinking:

You're thinking, "Well Peter, if there's no free-will,

- then we're all just determined, that is, predestined...
- then we're all just robots, incapable of love...
- and then there is no such thing as persons..."

And that's true...if there is no such thing as "free will."

But you know, there is one type of person that really doesn't have free will, or much free will; perhaps they just have like a seed of free will. A type of person that we really don't blame for bad decisions, for this type of person doesn't yet have "the knowledge of good and evil." A type of person that isn't free to choose the good, and yet, is determined by another person—a parent—to one day choose the good in freedom. And that type of person is called "a baby."

And didn't Jesus say, you must become like little children to enter...? And aren't spoiled children those children who think they're grown up—even declare that they're grown up—when, in fact, they're not grown up. And when little children declare their independence, don't they often just experience more bondage instead of freedom?

Well, I, for one, am very happy that we declared our independence from Great Britain and King George. I'm just saying that although it may be a foretaste and a sign of freedom, it's not real freedom.

Americans have a Declaration of Independence. And believers also have a "declaration of independence," which is ironically, a declaration of dependence on a king. It is perhaps most clearly stated in Galatians 5:1.

I wish we had time to look at all of Galatians, but we don't—and so that's your homework for this week: read Galatians. But the theme of Galatians is summed up most concisely in Galatians 5:1.

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

Right off the bat, it reveals several fascinating things.

#1 In case you thought I was saying that your freedom doesn't matter, Paul is saying that your freedom really matters. It matters so much to God your Father that he arranged for you to take his Life on a tree in a garden, all so that you would see him give his Life on that same tree in that same garden... all so you might know that he is Good and then choose him in freedom.

His free will is that you would will all things in freedom.

"For freedom Christ has set us free..."

So,

#2 If Christ set you free, then you were not free when he set you free.

So, of course, God won't violate your "free will" if you don't have free will.

But, whatever the case, your freedom does not save you. And yet it is “for freedom” that you are saved. For freedom, Christ has set you free.

#3 If Christ set you free, when you were not free, then it is God’s free will that liberates you from your own bad will that you thought was your “free will.”

And so, God’s free will to save you is obviously stronger than your own bad will to damn yourself—your bad will you may have called “free will.”

Jesus actually is God’s free will, God’s Word, God’s Judgment, God’s Choice. You are not saved by your free choice, but by God’s free choice. That’s the whole point of “election,” by the way; not that some are chosen and some are not chosen, but that you were chosen when you were unable to choose.^{ix}

It’s God’s free will that liberates you from your bad will that you thought was your free will. So, when you suffer in this world, when you don’t get your way in this world, when you die in this world—you naturally think that God is violating your will. And he is. He’s violating your will, but not your free will; he’s violating your bad will that traps you in outer darkness, loneliness, death, and hell.^x

Salvation is the violation of your own bad will that you think is free will.

And so, St. Paul’s Declaration of Independence is a Declaration of Dependence upon the free will of God... that is stronger than you. His name is Jesus. And the name “Jesus” means “God is salvation.”^{xi}

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

Now, in case that’s still confusing (and I’m sure it is), when thinking about freedom, I find it helps to ask, “Freedom from what?” And also to ask, “Freedom for what or to what?”

The Western Church has been good at asking “Free from what?” And the Eastern Church has been good at asking “Free to what?”

So first, let’s ask, what does Jesus set us free from?

Well... bad will that we think is free will, that is sin. (What sinner doesn’t think they are free... at least at first?) He sets us free from sin.



Figure 1 "Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena (1420)

But to be more specific, he sets us free from:

#1 A lie.

The snake said, "Surely you won't die." Death is separation from Life. And then, he tempted the Adam to take the fruit from the tree in order to make himself in the image and likeness of God. He tempted him to take knowledge of the Good that, we now know, is the Life.^{xii}

Do we have an "unalienable" right to life? Jesus is "the Life."

Do we have an "unalienable" right to Jesus?

Do you have a right to Life ...or is your life 100% gift?

Do you have an "unalienable" right to freedom, such that you can just demand freedom and take your freedom... or is your freedom also a gift?^{xiii}

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

So, Jesus frees us from #1 the Lie and #2 the Law.^{xiv}

That's what Galatians is all about: the "yoke of slavery" is the Law. The Law is the knowledge of Good and evil, carved in stone, written in a book, or dead and hanging on a tree. The Snake said, "Take knowledge of good and evil from the tree, and use it to save yourself, create yourself, make yourself in the image of God."

When we took Christ's life on the tree, we took living knowledge and turned it into dead knowledge—all because we believed the lie that we could make ourselves in the image of God with our knowledge of Good and evil.

Read Galatians and you'll see: Jesus frees us from #1 the Lie, #2 the Law, and #3 the flesh.

The flesh is this body of death, that thing we grow by consuming the life—the life which we usually call “food.” And yet, the problem with the flesh is not that it consumes life—in fact, Jesus, who is the Life, even said, “This is my body; this is my blood. Eat me. Drink me.”

The problem is not that we eat food, but that we take food for ourselves and don’t share it with our neighbors. And we don’t share it with our neighbors, for our flesh only feels its own pleasure and its own pain. But imagine if you actually felt your neighbor’s pleasure and your neighbor’s pain? Then you and your neighbor would be like... one Body.

Jesus frees us from #1 the Lie, #2 the Law, #3 the Flesh, and #4 “the elemental principles (or spirits) of this world,” Galatians 4:3: the “*stoicheion*.” In other places, I think Paul refers to them as the “principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness.”

The United States may be the best principality and power of this world. But it is still a principality and power of this world. They all invite you to save yourself from bad legislation with more legislation, and no legislation can save you from legislation and your own bad will

It’s a very seductive lie (#1): that you can take knowledge (#2), and so create a self (#3), to impress the principalities and powers (#4).

It’s a very seductive lie that turns an innocent will into a bad will that thinks it’s a free will.

Well, it’s because I think I have to create myself, save myself, and justify myself that I can’t just be myself... my true self. I’m most in bondage to me.

You know, it’s often such torture for me to write a sermon. I think I have to prove myself, and so I struggle to just express myself.

Can I show you my favorite sermon ever written?

[Image shows on screen of a child’s drawing of shapes and scribbles in colorful crayon.]

I’ve kept it in my office drawer for years—I used to have several just like it. I think Elizabeth wrote this one when she was just two or three.

When I would be struggling to write a sermon, she would see me struggling and write these sermons for me. She wanted to help. She never asked if her sermons were good or bad; she didn’t know if the sermons were good or bad because she didn’t know what good or bad was. It was just in her nature to write them as an expression of her love from me... and her love for me was my love for her, returning to me through her. And none of that love really belonged to either of us.

She wasn’t trying to be good; she just was Good. And so she wrote sermons for me, and she was happy, and she was free. And to me, nothing could be more beautiful.

I suspect that’s how God judges my sermons—whether or not they are free expressions of my love for him. My love for him must be who it is that I truly am. If so... who I truly am has gotten trapped deep down inside of all my anxieties about me—the “me” that I think I should be, the “me” that I am trying to justify; “I” am trapped in “me” like a breath in a jar of clay.

You know, Elizabeth used to write these sermons for me, until someone taught her how to write and how to judge her own writing, and then she stopped. She started trying to do good, unaware that she was good, and that's bad.

And yet, that bad will turn into something even better, for one day she will return to the garden and "know it for the first time," and once again write sermons for me in freedom. And not only will I be able to read them, you will be able to read them, and everyone will see that they are good... including Elizabeth. She will know the Good, and freely do the Good, and know that the Good is the One who makes her Good.

I don't know if I explained that correctly, but Jesus sets us free from our false self, so we can be our true self; so, we can live his Life—his Life, which is the constant and free decision to Love as he is loved by our Father.^{xv}

Galatians 2:20 · Paul writes:

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [literally: "the faith of the son of God"], who loved me and gave himself [literally: "handed himself over," "betrayed himself"] for me."^{xvi}

Jesus sets us free from bondage to ourselves, our own ego. And he sets us free to live Life, and he is that Life. He sets us free to Love, and that's what it is that we all truly want. That's the Good.

The biblical word for free will is "Love." God is Love, and real Love is God... and God is Free. God does not violate free will in you, for free will in you is his own spirit in you—like breath in a jar of clay.

But Free Will is not a thing that you possess. Free Will is more like a person who possesses you. And yet, he does not rape you; he romances you, for he (Free Will) longs for you to be free as he is free. He longs for you to fall in love with him, for you see that he has willed to sacrifice his own will, that your will would be free.

When we take free will as a possession, we will every other will away and will ourselves into one enormous, self-centered, lonely person. But God is not one enormous, self-centered, lonely person; God is three enormous, other-centered, not lonely persons that constantly give themselves away.

God is three persons, and one dance of absolute freedom, called Love. Jesus is the Logic of Love; Jesus is faith in Love; Jesus is Love giving himself to you and setting you free to dance with him and all creation.^{xvii}

So, if you're worried about your freedom, don't be. You have been predestined by God for absolute freedom—more freedom that you can currently comprehend; so much freedom, it would terrify you if you really saw it right now. For freedom, Christ is now giving you his own freedom, and that's not just freedom *from*, but freedom *to* create reality.

And yet, because that freedom is Love, you won't simply create your own reality; you and I will create our reality—God is creating, has created, and will create the Kingdom of God through you. We will all sing our individual songs, but it will all be one song, and no song will ever be sung out of tune, or out of time. We will each toot our own horn, but together we will form a symphony. We will

be free to do what we want... any old time. So, “love me hold me... cause we’re free!” We’re free to get what we want, and we’ll want exactly what we get.

Your free will and my free will will harmonize with every other free will, and it will all be Love—the free will of God—and that’s Beautiful; that’s the Good. We will be what we truly are, the Dancing Body of Jesus the Christ.^{xviii}

For, who is Jesus the Christ but the will of God in human flesh—human flesh united under one head, to whom we all belong and all long to obey? And what is Heaven, but everyone doing what they want and wanting what they do, and getting what they want and wanting what they get. And that’s Love.^{xix}

[Image on screen of astronaut again floating in space.]

I’m just saying that the liar will tempt you to think that this is Free Will. One will that has willed every other will away and willed itself into the void.

But this is my favorite picture of free will.

[Image on screen shows Peter’s dad dancing with Peter’s little girl]

This is a picture of my father surrendering his will to my daughters will, and my daughter surrendering her will to my father’s will. This is a picture of both of them dancing to the same song. And they are happy; they are free.

The United States of America is my favorite country in the world. But make no mistake, this is our Declaration of Independence. [Peter points to the communion table.]

Communion

On the night he was betrayed by all of us, the Free Will of God in human flesh took bread and broke it saying, “This is my Body given to you. Take and eat and do it in remembrance of me.” And in the same way, after supper, he took the cup saying, “This is the Covenant in my blood (the Life is in the blood) poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.”

As you worship, we invite you to come forward, take the bread and receive the wine, and declare your freedom. Freedom from:

- From the “Principalities and powers of this world.”
- From your flesh, your body of death that only feels its own pleasure and pain.
- From the law and your constant obsession with justifying yourself.
- From the lie that our Father is not good.

So come, declare your freedom *from* sin—your bad will that you thought was free will. And declare your freedom *to* love and be loved, forever without end, in the very image and likeness of God.

With our bad will, that we think is free will, we all choose bondage. But God sets us free from our free will, that's really bad will. He sets us free from bad will, to will his will—and his will is absolute freedom; it is Love.

Benediction

Father, we thank you that you're the king, and you're our Dad. And Jesus, you are the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit; you're the breath of the Father...and you are free. So, if you will for us to come home and to be with you, it will happen. No matter how much we will to eat dirt in the backyard. That's good news. In Jesus's name, Amen.

And so, may you today celebrate your freedom. Freedom from Queen Elizabeth (she can't boss you around!); you don't have to listen to The Beatles if you don't want to. –But celebrate an even greater freedom! Celebrate that God has set you free.

And now you may be thinking to yourself, "OK, that's neat. I hear that at church—but I don't feel so free. Got arthritis in my toe, and my back hurts... I'm getting old and can't seem to control basically anything in my life." Well, remember that your Father is setting you free from a bad will that you thought was a free will.

I still remember looking down at Coleman, with dirt caked around his mouth, telling me he didn't eat any dirt, and tears running down his cheeks...and then making him come inside so he couldn't eat any more dirt. He had to eat pizza with everybody else.

Coleman was actually here back at home this weekend, and we went Jeeping—I didn't say this to him, but I could've said this to him: "Coleman, everything that's mine is yours. And I own the backyard. Have at it!" (Peter laughs.)

But he doesn't want to eat dirt anymore. And so your Father, even though he may seem like a tyrant at times—He's Good. And he's setting you free to will all things, a new creation in freedom. And to know, like Elizabeth will one day know, that she's Good. And that she can live from that place. And her Father delights in that place.

In Jesus's name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ If you want to do some reading, outside of Jesus and St. Paul, I've found Martin Luther, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and David Bentley Hart to be most helpful and insightful. But the topic still makes my head spin.

ⁱⁱ "The demand for absolute liberty brings men to the depths of slavery." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.monticello.org/slavery/slavery-faqs/property/>

^{iv} We may say broadly that free thought is the best of all the safeguards against freedom. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* p. 107.

^v If you really had a "free-will" wouldn't you do whatever you want—you'd decide it and so you'd do it—and nothing would stop you. And you would get whatever you want—you would decide what you want and get whatever you wanted unrestrained by any reality other than your own... That would mean that you were insane (for you would be creating your own reality), or you would be God, the Uncaused Cause that causes everything that is.

^{vi} I would think, that if you actually had free-will, you could say to Pikes Peak, for instance (if it got in your way)... You could say "Be taken up and cast into the sea," and Pikes Peak would go flying through the air all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, and you could drive straight to Cripple Creek without having to drive around.

In our current state, if everyone had free-will, isn't it obvious that we'd all soon be crushed by flying mountains, and none of us could get to Cripple Creek; we'd all be crippled.

^{vii}

Reformed Theology normally explains the development of freedom as follows:

In the garden Adam had "free will" but he wasn't free to choose the good because he didn't know what it was.

Once he/she took from the tree, he/she began to know what the good was, but could no longer choose it in freedom. He/she was in bondage to sin.

Once he/she saw Jesus Christ (eschatos adam) crucified and risen from the dead, once he/she saw that the good was grace and he/she was forgiven, Adam could begin to choose the good in freedom. In other words Adam could begin to Love.

Once Adam has passed through Judgment—fully died and risen from the dead with Christ—he/she will only choose the good in freedom. Adam will be made in the image of God. Adam will love as he's been loved.

^{viii} Freedom is a being's power to flourish as what it naturally is, to become ever more fully what it is. The freedom of an oak seed is its uninterrupted growth into an oak tree. The freedom of a rational spirit is its consummation in union with God. Freedom is never then the mere "negative liberty" of indeterminate openness to everything; if rational liberty consisted in simple indeterminacy of the will, then no fruitful distinction could be made between personal agency and pure impersonal impulse of pure chance. And this classical and Christian understanding of freedom requires a belief not only in the reality of created natures, which must flourish to be free, but also in the transcendent Good toward which rational natures are necessarily oriented.

David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall be Saved* pp. 172-173

^x It's not your good decisions that create God's Grace.
It's God's Grace that creates your good decisions—your faith.

^x See? If God sets you free, when you were not free, it means that God's will to save is stronger than your will to be damned.

^{xi} So, if it's your will to damn yourself to hell...
And it's God's will to save you from hell, God's will, is stronger than your will and he can will to give you a new will, a new heart, a new want-er...
And actually do it, such that you'll freely choose to declare your independence from this world, by declaring your dependence on him.
That is, You'll fall in love... with Love—Our God is Love, and he is Free.

^{xii} What was on the tree? The Good in human flesh.
And the Good in human flesh is also the Life.
Wasn't the snake saying, take the Good and the Life and make yourself in the image of God—it's your right.

^{xiii} Freedom is a gift, not a right. Freedom is a gift, such that if you take your freedom, you actually lose your freedom, for freedom is a gift and you just crucified and consumed that gift—of freedom. If only freedom would rise from the dead, we might all be free.

^{xiv} Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."
Jesus is the truth, and the name "Jesus" means "God is salvation."
He sets you free from the lie that you must be your own salvation.

^{xv} Galatians 2:20 Paul writes "*I have been crucified with Christ.*"
You may remember that Jesus had a yoke—it was a cross.
And he said take my yoke upon you—you see, it crucifies your old self, your pride, your ego, the thing that enslaves you.
In Galatians 5, Paul writes, "*do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*" and that slavery is to yourself, your own ego.
Jesus has a yoke that crucifies that self, and Paul has born that yoke, but not alone; he's born it with Christ.
Galatians 2:20 Paul writes "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [literally: "the faith of the son of God"], who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

^{xvi} What can I do?
I can watch "me" die.
Every good decision (Faith, Hope and Love) is watching "me" (sin, old man) die.
I can watch "me" live.
Every good decision (Faith, Hope and Love) is watching "me" (Christ in me) rise from the dead.
I can observe my own creation and be eternally grateful.

I can be humbled and exalted.
I can live to the praise of God's Glory.
I can have faith in Grace, by Grace.
I can Love because I'm loved.
I can choose the Good in freedom.

I can do nothing... and everything. Who am I?
"It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for me."

^{xvii} Faith is always a decision. It is always in the decision of faith that we have a share in the sovereignty of the Word of God and are therefore truly what we are.
Who decides here? Without hesitation we must confess that, first of all and fundamentally, it is not we ourselves who decide. In every case, if we believe, we believe in the consummation of the sovereign act of the Word of God. In every case, it is the work of the Holy Spirit which happens to us. We have noted above that the Word of God is sovereign by the fact that this happens in divine freedom. We have no power over it; it is not at our disposal. We have no claim upon it and we have done nothing to earn it. For in that it happens, in the adoring choice of the truth, in that we believe—all such claims (as that we have the power to be able to believe) and also all such demands (as that we must accomplish our own believing) are struck to the ground. In faith we stand before God as sinners, saved by the fact that our sins have been forgiven us. In faith we acknowledge that we deserve wrath and rejection, the wrath and rejection which Jesus Christ has taken upon Himself in our place, in order to place us, whose life is glorified in Him, in the light of the divine grace. We can only choose as men who have already been chosen! Where is left a room for boasting, as if we had wanted and accomplished something ourselves? And where is room left for any sort of law, according to which we might have to construct in whatever way our own salvation and our own service to God? But by the very fact that, when we believe, God Himself in the sovereignty of His Word has decided about us, faith as our own act can have no other character on earth than that of a decision!

Karl Barth, *God Here and Now*, p. 27-28

^{xviii} God is Love. God is Free. God is Good. God is all-powerful. God has or God is "Free will."
God's Word is the expression of, or is, God's will. God's Word became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.
God's Will is also creation. God speaks creation into existence. God is still speaking creation into existence in us and all around us.
Evil is the absence of God's will.

God wills that we would encounter that which he does not will—evil, the void, the absence of his manifest presence.

God wills that we would encounter that which he does not will, that we might freely will his will.

Our will is not free until we will what God wills. God's will is a "symphony" of wills in harmony with each other and himself through His Logos.

As long as we will what God does not will, we create a false self and trap our selves in "outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth."

A good free will is Love. God is Love.

A good free will in me is the Spirit of Christ in me.

The unfinished "me" is the cause of all my bad choices.

God is the cause of all my good free choices.

Another way to say it: Love in me, is God in me. God is love.

Therefore, whenever I'm proud of my "good free will" its no longer "good" nor "free" but sin.

Whenever I'm grateful for my "good free will," I live to the praise of God's Glory and my will is free and I'm good—in the image of my father.

We have each been consigned to disobedience—we were each placed in a situation where we would listen to the snake and take from the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil in an effort to make ourselves in the image of God.

God has mercy on all—we will each see that God is Good, for God is hanging on that tree. We took his life (the Good) and he gave his life (the Good). He is Love. Love is not a dead list that exists in our mind or in some book (the law describes love, but is not love). Love is our living Lord. God is The Good. When I see this, I trust Him—that's called Faith.

None of us have a good free will until God creates a good free will in us. A good free will is Faith in Love. And God is Love. A Good Free Will is created in us by the Word of God crucified and risen from the dead. His Spirit in us is faith in us. When we cry "Abba Father" it is His Spirit rising in us—even "incarnate" in us. We are His Body.

We are each being created in God's Image. He will not fail.

^{xix} Secular freedom is *having* to do what you *want* to do. Religious freedom is *wanting* to do what you *have* to do.

Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, p. 109