

Grace = Freedom

The assembly of God was comprised entirely of slaves. Blessed by their God in a foreign land, they became the abhorred foreigners to their Egyptian hosts over the years.



In time, God made it clear that *enough was enough*. God had chosen this assembly to be His special people... a people who would have a special, even remarkable, relationship with the Creator. His special people would no longer be the slaves of any man, King, or Pharaoh.

God raised up His servant Moses to lead the assembly out of slavery and to a promised freedom in a new land.

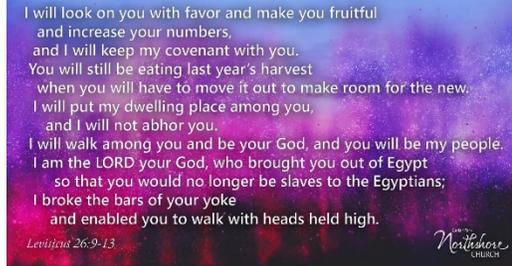
God delivered His assembly by displays of miraculous power:

- Destruction of their captors through 10 plagues, ending with a plague that would take the firstborn son from every Egyptian family, including the livestock, the most common families, and the Pharaoh's own heir
- God parted the Red Sea, as Pharaoh's army chased the people of God after the Pharaoh regretted the release of his slaves
- God's very presence leading the people by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire
- He provided specific direction regarding how His people ought to worship
- He miraculously provided food and water for their pilgrimage out of slavery to the freedom He had promised

God had His assembly just where He wanted them, freed from slavery and on their way to enjoy the Promised Land.

Here's what He said:

⁹“I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. ¹⁰You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. ¹¹I will put my dwelling place^h among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹²I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high. ¹



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Leviticus 26:9-13

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Notice the “I wills.” Five times in this short passage God told His assembly what **He** would do. They had to be used to it by now. Everything significant that had happened up until then was a sovereign act of God.

The assembly had no power to free themselves.

Without God's sovereign acts:

- They would still be toiling under Pharaoh's tyranny
- They would never have escaped Pharaoh's army
- They would be without direction, and perishing without food and water

Everything about their circumstances shouted to God's people that they were entirely reliant on God's provision and direction and deliverance and protection. There should be no surprise when confronted (or could we even say comforted?) with God's **I wills**.

If the assembly of God would live in the freedom He provided, worshipping Him, living as He described... obeying out of love for their Deliverer as acts of worship... God's people would “walk with heads held high.” This was God's promise... a promise that they could *take to the bank*.

With this promise in hand, and the Promiser leading them on their way, the assembly came to the edge of the Promised Land.

¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Le 26:9–13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

God's newly freed assembly came within reach of receiving His full promise, but decided *they couldn't handle it*. God brought His people to His promise, they took a look and decided that the risk was too great, the current inhabitants were too powerful, and they simply couldn't handle it. And, of course, they were right! **They couldn't** handle it. They couldn't possess the promise; they couldn't enjoy the freedom God provided... certainly not on their own power.

Their mistake, of course, was their notion that the battles were **theirs** to win. God had miraculously provided so far. God had freed, fed, and led them... but when it came to receiving this next step of God's blessing, they thought this next step was **theirs** to take. They wouldn't take the next step, and had they tried to take the next step on their own power (rather than relying on God's power) they would have failed miserably. They were right; **they couldn't handle it**.

When it came to taking that crucial step forward on the borders of the Promised Land, they closed their eyes of faith, and opened their eyes to the reality of their own miniscule power. They turned their gaze away from God's power and provision, and onto their own weakness... and chose, based on their correct summation of their lack of resources, to turn back.

And what is worse? A rebellion broke out among the assembly of God and what was their cry? "We wanna go back to Egypt... slavery is better than weakness... a live slave is better than a dead freeman."

This story, of course, is up *close to the front* of our Bibles... but the pattern is repeated over and over again throughout the pages that follow. It is a pattern that persists even today.

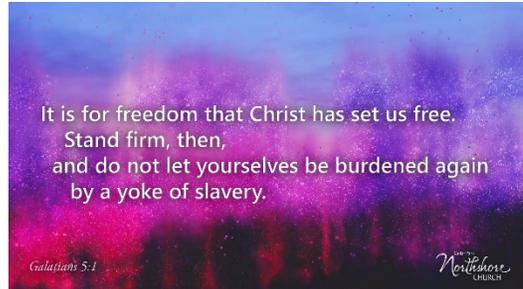
God provides, calls His people to relationship with Him, and they/we chose our own way. God frees His people, but His people find ways to make themselves/ourselves slaves again.

This is the situation we've been studying in these pages of Galatians.



This is precisely what Pastor Paul is combating when He makes this statement that begins chapter 5 in our Bibles.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.²



Through the Gospel of Grace, God provided freedom to people of Galatia. The freedom they enjoyed was as miraculous as the freedom enjoyed by the Hebrews as they marched out of Egypt over a thousand years before.

The Gospel of Grace received by the Galatians was God, again, saying “I will.”

- I will make you my people
- I will provide the way
- I will pay the price
- I will lead you in your freedom

But the Galatians were on the verge of choosing a different path... not leaving the “I will” statements to God... but saying, themselves, “I will.”

- I will make myself worthy of being counted among God’s assembly
- I will earn my standing
- I will show God and everyone else my righteousness through my religious acts
- I will beat down my own path to God

The mistake made by the Judaizers was that they made themselves the slaves of what were intended to be acts of worship. Rather than worshiping with the Law and the various rituals, celebrations, and ceremonies given by God... they worshiped the Law, and the rituals, and the celebrations, and the ceremonies. What was meant to be a means of worship had become the object of worship.

So, for example, circumcision should have been a mark of consecration to God... an act of worship. But now had become a mark of religious zealotry... a mark of some special attainment of personal righteousness... a mark that one was “trying to be justified by the law.”

² *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ga 5:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

That **intent** behind the ritual changed everything... making it no longer a worshipful act of faithfulness, but a faithless act of self-righteousness.

Is our religion comprised of worshipful acts of faithfulness, or faithless acts of self-righteousness?

Righteousness, Paul explains, is not a matter of **our** work, but a matter of God's work through His Spirit. Note what is written:

⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.³

It doesn't say, "By work we desperately pursue righteousness."

Our work in pursuit of righteousness "has no value." What does have value? What does count?

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.⁴

Love expressing itself through

- Acts of worship
- Sharing and spreading the Gospel: evangelism and discipleship
- Demonstrating love for God and by loving all people

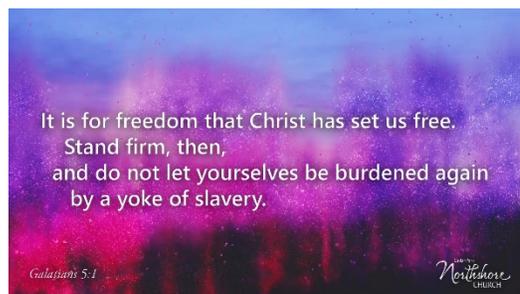
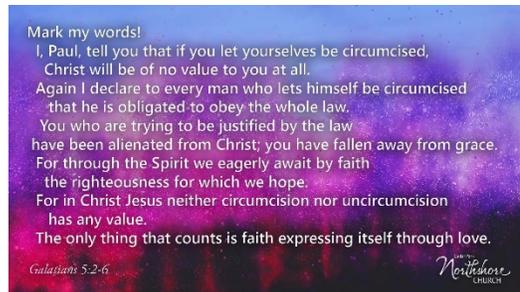
So what? What encouragement do we take away? What truth do we grasp?

God does not want His people to be slaves.

Look again, carefully, at that first verse of chapter 5.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.⁵

"It is for freedom..." That seems sort of redundant, doesn't it? But on second look, it says something profound.



³ The New International Version. (2011). (Ga 5:5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Ga 5:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Ga 5:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Why did God set us free? For freedom! Freedom is the goal. This is the “end game”... one of God’s “core values”... this is crucial to the mission of God... that we, His people, have liberty. What is the purpose of the liberty that God gives us by His grace? What is the purpose of freedom? Freedom!

When we believe this, when we understand that our freedom is God’s goal and mission, then we would understand slavery as the enemy of God’s mission.

“Stand firm then...”

Are we slaves?

- Tyranny – While we are not treated like “property” as the Hebrews were under Pharaoh, we might allow ourselves to be enslaved by other forces... such as our work or the perceived expectations of others.
- Sin – Christ sets us free from sin. Without God’s saving power through Christ, we are slaves to sin.
- Self-righteousness – Freedom from sin isn’t just one “get out of jail free card.” God doesn’t clean us up once and hand our lives back to us to carry on in hopes that we won’t mess up a second chance.
- God – Do we operate as if we went from being a slave to being God’s slave? God doesn’t want us to be slaves at all... not His slaves either in that we are slaves to some sort of religion. Have we allowed ourselves to be slaves to our religion, thinking this is what God requires?

Religious people often seem to be **afraid** of freedom. Have you noticed that? It seems that religious people, especially those that might be labeled conservative, fundamentalist or even extremist, are more concerned about what we **can’t do** than what we do... more about *taking away* from life than *living life*.



Religious people who are mainly about making and keeping rules seem to confuse freedom **from** sin with freedom **to** sin. They seem to worry that if they don’t maintain strict control, then everything will be out of control. So they clamp down, on themselves and anyone else they can control.

If we mistake **grace** for freedom **to** sin, then we **are** missing the point entirely. Grace is freedom... freedom from sin.

But here's the thing... we are not going to get ourselves to freedom, or anyone else to freedom, by merely taking away freedom.

We see an example of this *playing out* before us in the news of the day. This has been a rough week for our nation (and the world) as evil has been on full display. Last Sunday I said that Charlottesville seemed a long way away... but literally within hours the same sort of hate was on display in the heart of Seattle. Throughout the week the rhetoric has remained hot and the response of our leaders, including the President, has rightly been scrutinized.

While this is a complex issue, one of the questions at the heart of all of this has to do with **freedom of speech**. Should racists, bigots, Nazis and the like be allowed to spew their hateful rhetoric in public, in written publications, and online and such? Or should we label it *hate speech* and outlaw it?

Is the answer to bad speech (even hate speech) less speech? Do we outlaw certain words, or phrases, or even attitudes? Do we **forcefully clean things up**?

Or is the answer to bad speech more speech? Is the answer less freedom or more freedom? I am sure it is **more** freedom. I think the answer to bad speech (even hate speech) is more speech.

Of course that only works if good people speak up.

We must speak up for love, respect, and equality. We need to shout that there is a higher, better, beautiful way. We can shout with our words, of course, but we probably **shout** best with our actions... with service, and hospitality, and acts of kindness, charity, and compassion.

And just as the people Moses led to the edge of the Promised Land could not possess it in their own strength... and just how the church in Galatia could not attain righteousness by their own work... we must realize that we have little hope of defeating evil in our day, or in our lives, in our own strength. We need the power of the Gospel. Each of us needs the power of the Gospel. Our church needs the power of the Gospel. Our families and neighborhoods and cities and nation and world needs the power of the Gospel.

Sins of racism, hate, violence, and terror will only be truly and completely defeated when hearts are changed by the Gospel. There is no superior race... only a superior Savior.

This power expands beyond mere speech, but to all of our freedoms. When we see freedom perverted into freedom *to* sin... we must shout that there is a higher, better, beautiful way... with our words and our actions, living out the Gospel. The Christian life should be lived in the most robust, loving, fun, and vibrant way possible... this life of freedom should be compelling and fulfilling. (And there is more on that in the verses ahead... *tune in* during the weeks ahead).

The Gospel calls us, and empowers us, to live life abundantly. We must meet evil with freedom... freedom *from* sin.

That is true in an outward-focused way as we think about culture. It is just as true in an inward-focused way as we examine ourselves.

When we see evil in our own lives and hearts, our best response isn't to merely try to control it or outlaw it in ourselves. We must always remember the One who says "I will." It is God who frees us. When enslaved by sin and our desperate efforts to control, we need abundant doses of freedom... freedom that comes from God... freedom from sin.

Today is a day to believe... and pray. We have reserved a few moments today to pray. We can pray for our country. And pray for ourselves. We can pray today for gifts of courage and wisdom and inspiration to stand up and speak up for freedom... freedom from sin through the Gospel, through believing and trusting in Jesus.