

F.R.E.E.

**John 8:31-32 and 36; 15:12 and 17;
1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:1;
Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:1**

What It Takes to Live Freely

By

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7.2.10**

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Opening.

“To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus” in John 8:31 **“said, ‘If you hold to My teaching** [‘If you cling to it with heart and soul, not just hearing but putting it into practice’ {Matt. 7:24-29}.], **you are really My Disciples. Then you will know the Truth** [See this? Only ‘then’ will you ‘know the Truth’ in experience. ‘Only when you have walked with Me in intimacy and companionship, only when you have followed faithfully in My footsteps, will you experience the Truth I am.’], **and this Truth will set you free,”** v. 32. In v. 36 Jesus say’s, **“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!”**

Paul told the Galatians in 5:1, **“it is for freedom that Christ has set us free** [A ‘finished freedom,’ over and done at a past point of Time!].” **“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free....”** This is a beautiful word: *eleutheria*. And *eleutheria* is ‘liberty’ ...the opposite of *douleia*, or ‘bondslavery,’ in Scripture. This is **“liberty”** to do what, **“freedom”** from what? It is the liberty to engage in inessentials which bring joy to the heart, to set aside what has no relationship to holiness, spirituality, or intimacy with the Trinity {like wearing pants for women, wearing jeans for men, having a glass of wine or brewing one’s own beer, the kind of food you eat or don’t eat, how you wear your hair, whether a woman wears make-up (my personal policy as to how much make-up a woman should wear has always been, ‘as much as it takes’), or any of the other ridiculous things brilliant Biblical ‘scholars’ (small ‘s’) come up with in an attempt to exercise some sense of control}, to be the Man or Woman Christ created you to be... and nobody else.

The goal of the varying gifts of the Spirit is within the worldwide Body of Christ, and among individual Bodies of Believers, there might be harmony in the midst of diversity. **Harmony of soul in diversity of service.** This is the Kingdom of God at work in the world. Not conformity to a set of arbitrary standards, a rock-solid rigidity to legalistic norms, not guilt-based coercion or shame-based manipulation. Those are avenues the enemy uses to keep those of us who’ve been freed by the sacrifice of the Savior *bound* in religiosity.

Do you know where the word *religion* comes from? From the Latin *religio*, a word comprised of *re* meaning- ‘back’ or ‘again’ and *ligare*- ‘to bind;’ so, ‘to bind back again’ is the ultimate definition of religion. And this is exactly what it does. Instead of **“setting the captives free and releasing prisoners from darkness”** as was the Messiah’s Mission in Isaiah 61, religion stifles the soul, stunts our growth and creativity, and darkens our passion for a deeply personal God. I don’t know about you, but I don’t need any more of that! Had enough for one lifetime, thank you very much.

The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus have freed us from bondage to the Law of Moses, from the blindness of heart which veils the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ {2 Cor. 4:4-6}, from slavery to the sinful nature so we can obey God from **“a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith”** {1 Tim. 1:5}, from the futility of a life lived only for the present— with no thought of the Glorious Tomorrow in

God's New Creation {Rom. 8:21}. And what is the Apostle's ultimate declaration? **"Stand firm, then** [a command from the Lord of the Everlasting Armies], **and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."** "Don't put yourself back under bondage, don't run back to Egypt every time things don't go your way. Trust in Me, and keep on trusting in Me. *I alone* am your Deliverer."

Essay— What It Takes to Live Freely.

What does it take to be free temporally and eternally? It takes a whole-hearted trust in Jesus the Messiah, belief in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of Man, laying our faith at the Master's feet and saying, "Here it is. Everything I have and everything I am I give to You, trust and confidence that You alone can save me from myself, You alone can deliver me from the darkness of spiritual death, You alone can redeem me from my slavery to sin. You *can*; you *have*; and you *will*!" When Jesus told His Apprentices in the Upper Room He was **"the Way and the Truth and the Life"** and **"no one comes to the Father except through"** Him {Jn. 14:6}, He was not only saying all Truth was found in Him, Life— spiritual, abundant, and eternal— was bound up in Him, but that He alone was the Path to the Father, He is the entrance to relationship with God.

So, this is how we become free. Now that we know the Son of God as Savior and Sovereign, now that we've taken our first fumbling steps down the Path of Life, how do we *stay* free? How do we live in the *fulness* of Jesus' freedom day in and night out?

F.R.E.E.

Freedom begins with the letter 'F,' and the F stands for **faith**. Faith is the heartbeat of grace, the lifeblood of the Gospel. There's no other way to receive from the mighty, merciful hand of the Father except by faith. *Grace is how God gives; faith is how we receive*. The author of Hebrews says, **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,"** 11:1. You see this? Faith is such a deep-hearted belief, such a foundational trust in the goodness of the Father's heart, it can rest in what others only **"hope for"** and it can see with certainty what is invisible to the human eye. **"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"** {NRSV}; **"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen** [Like the redemption of our bodies, the Return of the King to claim us as His Own, an Eternity in His Presence ruling and reigning alongside Him in His Kingdom.]. **It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead"** {TLB}. Faith *lives* in the realm of the spiritual and the eternal, with one foot in the physical and the temporal. But always, *always* reflecting and remembering that what goes on in the invisible, the spiritual, and the eternal is infinitely more important than what is happening around us in the temporal.

It takes faith to walk with God. It takes faith to hear from God.

It takes faith to see the full glory of the Father in Jesus Christ the Son— and to live by what we know of God because of what we’ve seen in Jesus! It takes faith to access the Holy Spirit’s power; it takes faith to pray with an undoubting and undivided heart. James tells us when we ask in prayer, we “**must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man**” or woman “**should not think**” they “**will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man** [*Dipsuchos* is literally- ‘two-souled.’], **unstable in all he does,**” 1:6-8. Peterson translates this passage, “**Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. People who ‘worry their prayers’ are like wind-whipped waves. Don’t think you’re going to get anything from the Master that way, adrift at sea, keeping all your options open**” {*The Message*}.

It takes faith to live by the power of the Resurrection in the present form of Creation, awaiting the consummation to come in the future, when our bodies will finally receive their redemption. Paul speaks boldly and believingly to this very issue when in Romans 8:19 he say’s, “**The Creation waits in eager expectation for the Sons of God to be revealed** [This Day is coming at the *Parousia* of Christ, the Return of the King.]. **For the Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope** [in complete confidence] **that the Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the Children of God,**” vv. 20-21.

Again, Paul say’s in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “**We live by faith, and not by sight.**” We live, and can only live, by faith in the presence, power, and provision of the Trinity. It’s the Life we’ve been called to, is it not? We can’t see them with the physical eye, therefore, we must look through the eyes of faith in order to get a grasp on spiritual realities. In Ephesians 3:11 Paul mentions the “**eternal purpose**” of *Abba* {the redemption of a fallen Creation, the welcoming of Gentiles into the Kingdom of God on equal footing with the Jews, making us “**heirs together with Israel,**” “**members together of one Body,**” and “**sharers together in the Promise**” of Life and fulness and freedom in Jesus}, the purpose “**which He accomplished** [consummated and completed] **in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Then he says, “**In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence,**” v. 12.

Here’s the kicker. **No one really knows the strength of their faith {or the depth of God’s grace} until it’s been tried in the furnace of affliction.** Until it’s been purified by the flames of sorrow and disappointment, pain and disillusionment, you have *no idea* how precious is this place of intimacy with *Abba*, this Home where your heart resides— **cf. Romans 5:1-5.**

R is for respect. Respect, like trust, is a key component of love. So, respect for God and Man is *love* for God and Man, a love for the Trinity which motivates me to love those around me. And love them well. To see the deep spiritual connection between faith on one hand and love on the other, we have to understand hope— meaning *confidence* in Christ, *assurance* in *Abba*— is the bridge between the two. To see this as

God sees this, all we have to do is look at what Paul told the Corinthians at the close of his incredible discourse on the limitless love of Jesus. **“And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love”** {1 Cor. 13:13 NIV}. *Faith leads us to hope, and hope leads us to love.* Faith brings about an assurance, a confidence, dare we say a comfort even {not complacency, but a level of comfort} in our relationship with the Master, and from the experience of being loved unconditionally— just as we are and not as we should be— we learn to love others without expectations. To love them without imposing upon them our desperate need for validation and identity, and all the unrealistic expectations which come with those. Here it is in Peterson’s paraphrase *The Message*: **“for right now, until that completeness [of Eternity comes], we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.”**

To **“love extravagantly”** is the New Command of Christ and the summary of Jesus’ teaching {Jn. 13:34-35; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14-15; and James 2:8-13}. In Jesus’ Farewell Discourse to His Disciples {John 13-17}, He connects *inseparably* our love for the Trinity with our obedience to *Him*— specifically the **“New Command”** to selflessly and sacrificially love other members of the Family of Faith. **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you,”** John 15:12; v. 17: **“This is My command— Love each other.”** If you look at the context of John 14:15-17 {a pretty solid principle of Bible study} you’ll see the promised Spirit is the power energizing us to do this. Five times in this section of Scripture He speaks of His **“command”** for His Apprentices and each time it relates to our obedience in this endeavor— John 13:34-35; 14:15; 15:12, 14, and 17.

Jesus called loving God with a whole and undivided heart— every aspect of our being: will, intellect, emotion, creativity, conscience, imagination, memory— and loving those around us as ourselves **“the greatest”** and **“most important”** of any command which exists. Now, listen to me, and open the eyes of your heart, especially those of you who’ve been trained, as I have, in the ‘hermeneutically sealed system’ of Dispensationalism. **There is no difference whatsoever in the outworking and application of:** [a] what Jesus said to His Jewish Followers in Mark 12:28-34; [b] what He says to *all* of us who have followed Him in the Life of Faith in John 13-15; [c] what James went on to say to the earliest Christians in 2:8-13 as He declared a **“love”** of **“your fellow man as yourself”** the **“Royal Law;”** and [d] what Paul says to the Community of Christians in Galatians 5:13-14 and Romans 13:8-10. **“All the commandments are summed up in this single sentence: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to those nearby, to the other [whoever he or she happens to be]. Therefore love, self-less and sacrificial, is the fulfillment of the Law”** {RRExp}. *Love is the relational reality behind how the Law was supposed to work in and among the People of God.*

Who are the People of God in the Age of Grace? **We are.** And we are called to love, and to love in a way the world can scarcely comprehend— to serve and to sacrifice, to shed our blood if need be, to give our lives for one another should the Cause require it.

My God, my God, how far we've strayed from the Biblical model of the earliest Church. Peter says we are a "**chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that**" we "**may declare the praises of Him who called**" us "**out of darkness ...into His wonderful light**" {1 Pet. 2:9}. What does this look like in practice, not in theoretical thought or doctrinal statement, but in action ...feet on the ground and boots in the mud? Do we have any historical examples of 1st century Followers of Jesus actually believing and following Jesus? You bet, and here are the Scriptures to form and inform us.

Cf. Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35; James 2:14-17 and 1 John 3:16-18.

E is for **enthusiasm** {*en + theos* = 'God within us'}. The ancients Greeks believed the exuberance of emotion we generally call 'enthusiasm' was evidence of the gods at work within someone. God within us, the Spirit *indwelling* us, the Trinity residing in our hearts is our Source of Life and Power, providing us with the ability to live in ways which don't come anywhere near naturally. To live, literally, the Life Jesus lived: to say the things He said and do the things He did. This is our right, our privilege, our prerogative. **You can live just like Jesus did.** The same type of strength, the same source of joy, the same kind of compassion, the same amount of mercy, you can stand on the same ground of grace as the Son of Man.

In Galatians 4:6 Paul said, "**because you are Sons** [And not slaves. I.e., legal heirs of all the wealth, riches, and resources of Heaven.], **God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba, Father.'**" He repeats this idea in Romans 5:5 where he says, "**and hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.**" If the love of God is being poured out within our hearts *through* the Holy Spirit, then He must be at work there, right? Paul teaches us in 2 Corinthians 1:22 that God has "**put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**" So, according to the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit Himself, the Spirit of God dwells within our hearts.

What would happen if we believed this, if you and I embraced this, began to *live* by *faith* from this relational reality— the Spirit who raised Jesus from the grave now lives within me? **Your life would never be the same, nor would those of anyone around you.** It would change our lives irreversibly. This is the last thing in the world the enemy wants you to know. **Because the Battle is set against your heart, against the very Life of God within you.** And because Satan knows once you get your heart back, once you begin to live 'enthusiastically' {from God within you}, once you choose to no longer dwell in darkness and defeat, to stand forth from the shadows of shame, his designs for your life are *done!* His game is finished, *finito*.

The final 'E' is for **energy**. While 'enthusiasm' is God at work *within*, 'energy' is God at work *without*, that is, in the world outside our own personal walls.

‘Energy’ comes from the Greek word *energeia* meaning- ‘operative power, effective power, power in action, power which produces something.’ Now, in the New Testament this word is always used of supernatural power, sometimes God, sometimes Satan, but always above and beyond what Man can produce. E.g., in Colossians 2 Paul speaks of a spiritual circumcision, the circumcision of our hearts, as being accomplished when we were **“buried with”** Jesus **“in baptism and raised with Him through”** our **“faith in the power of God [energeia], who raised Him from the dead,”** v. 12. As Paul prays for the Ephesians in 1:19-21 he says the *dunamis*, the dynamic power of God, is like the **“working [energeia] of His mighty strength which He exerted in Christ** [Here we have the verb form *energeo* = ‘which He put forth effectively, which He set into action’] **when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present Age but also in the One to come.”**

Paul in Philippians 3:20 speaks of the Day of our Resurrection, our ultimate deliverance from the very presence of sin, and say’s, **“we eagerly await a Savior from”** Heaven, **“the Lord Jesus Christ who... will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body,”** v. 21. Paul say’s He’s able to do this, **“by the power which enables Him to bring everything under His control.”** This **“power”** is *energeia*, and *energeia* is ‘divine energy, effective energy, power in action.’ What it’s saying is He will subdue every ounce of arrogance and opposition. He will place everything and everyone under willful submission to divine authority one day. “He will bring all things within the divine economy of His Kingdom, His rule and reign over all Creation.” Now *that* is power! And this same power lives within us, this same power dwells in each of you as Sons and Daughters of God, this same divine energy, this same effective power, the Holy Spirit-energy in action, lives within our hearts.

Finale.

To live in and out of the freedom for which Jesus gave His Life, we must commit ourselves to it, consecrate ourselves daily, even hourly to a Life of Faith {living by trust that God is greater than my needs, and infinitely greater than my wants, and in the end as long as He has purposed my existence on this planet, *He* is responsible to see to my provision... not the stock market, my dividends, the cash I’ve hoarded away or the weapons I’ve stockpiled}, Respect {which is living by love, or as Paul put it in Ephesians 5:2, **“live a life of love”**}, Enthusiasm {the fundamental recognition God Himself, Creator of All that Is, dwells within my heart}, and Energy {this is where faith, love, and the Spirit within come together ...in my deep-seated belief that the glorious gifts which God has given me must be given away in return, and this is how the world will know I belong to the Master}.

Christian author Brian McLaren defined the mission of the Church in his first book as “more and better Christians,” believing connecting the two concepts with ‘and’ was very forward thinking, rather than choosing one over the other— more Christians or

better Christians. He had opportunity years later to revise the book, go back in and make some necessary changes, and add a chapter on the Mission of the Church. When the book reappeared under the title of *The Church On The Other Side* it included a definition which had begun as “the purpose of the Church is to *be* and *make disciples*.” He found it infinitely better than the original, but still a bit individualistic, so he added “the purpose of the Church is to be and make disciples— in *Community* with one another.” This, he felt, added the necessary element of Family, a Community, a Brotherhood, emphasizing how our discipleship is not breathed in or breathed out in isolation. Something was still missing, though, and then he added six words to the end



and found what had been lacking: a direction which pointed to the world outside our walls.

“The purpose of the Church is to be and make disciples— in Community with one another— for the good of the world.”

For the good of the world, indeed.