

How Free Do You Want to Be?



By Jim Fowler

Writing to the Galatians, Paul declared, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free” (Galatians 5:1). Previously Jesus told the Jews, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32), explaining immediately, “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). Who sets the Jews and all men free? The Son, Jesus Christ.

Mankind was not made for bondage or enslavement. So, it is a natural desire of human beings to want to be free, especially from the bondage of religion, which is the precise context that both Jesus and Paul were referring to in the verses just cited. Religion, in whatever form, is bondage.

The English word “religion” is etymologically derived from the Latin words, *religare* and *religio*, meaning to “tie up” or “bind again.” Religion binds and ties people into strictures of performance conformity. Performance-bondage is the essence of all religion.

Religion demands that an individual engage in the self-effort of performing according to imposed standards of behavior, aligning oneself to rules and regulations of

“thou shalt” and “thou shalt not,” or participating in the rituals deemed to have meaning in that particular religious camp.

Eventually people seek to free themselves from the bondage of religion. Not an easy task! Anyone who seeks to set himself free, usually finds himself less free. Attempts to buy freedom, win freedom, or earn freedom enslave us all the more. True freedom is not self-sought, but Christ-wrought and Christ-bought. Jesus paid the price (I Corinthians 6:20). Jesus has done everything necessary (John 19:30). Jesus is the Victor who has triumphed over the forces of religion that would enslave us in human performance.

Christian freedom is freedom from sin (John 8:34-36), from being slaves to the selfishness of sinful character. *Christian freedom is freedom from the “old man” identity* (see Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22). *Christian freedom is freedom from the “flesh” and its patterns of selfishness* (Galatians 5:17).

Christian freedom is freedom from death (Romans 8:2).

Christian freedom is freedom to accept the will of God in Jesus Christ. Christian freedom is freedom to live by the Grace-filled dynamic

of God and His empowering Spirit. Christian freedom is freedom to live in “newness of life” by the “finished work” of Jesus Christ. *Christian freedom is freedom to live in victory, rather than defeat.*

Christian freedom is freedom to be humanity as God intended, deriving all from Him. Christian freedom is freedom to live in the context of eternity as a “citizen of heaven” (Philippians 3:20; Romans 8:19-23).

Christian freedom is freedom to let Jesus be our life, without anything to prove.

I am not sure that many Christians really want to live in the freedom that is theirs in Christ Jesus. Why would I make such a statement? Christians have grown up and continue to live in a performance-oriented culture, and many are not really sure they want to be free from the performance expectations of seeking to please and appease God and men. We have grown accustomed to taking credit for our performance, to all the “atta-boy” and “atta-girl” accolades for our achievements, to receiving all the certificates and awards for being the best in our class. □

Excerpted from The Issue Is Jesus by theologian/author Jim Fowler.