

JAMES AND PAUL ON THE GOSPEL LAW OF LIBERTY

James 1:25: *“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”*

Romans 6:17-21: *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.”*

1. Delivered from slavery to liberty, Rom. 6:17: *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.”*

John Gill on v. 17: By "the form of doctrine", is meant the Gospel, which is the "doctrine" of the Scriptures, of Christ and his apostles... this is delivered from the Father to Christ, from Christ to his apostles, and by them to the saints [who] were evangelized by it: so such are who have a spirit of Gospel liberty, in opposition to a spirit of

bondage; who live by faith on Christ, and not by the works of the law; who derive their comfort from him, and not from anything done by them; whose repentance and obedience are influenced by the grace of God, and who are zealous of good works, without any dependence on them. This form of doctrine was “obeyed” by them; by which is meant, not a mere obedience to the ordinances of the Gospel; nor a bare hearing of the doctrines of it, and giving an assent unto them; but an embracing of them by faith for themselves, so as to lay hold on Christ in them, submit to his righteousness therein revealed, and be willing to be saved by Him, and Him alone, in His own way; and this is the obedience of faith. The reason why faith is expressed by obedience is, because faith receives truth upon the veracity of God, and not upon the dictates of carnal reason; and is always more or less attended with external obedience to the will of God; and that is rightly performed only by faith. And this obedience... was “from the heart,” real and sincere. For this reason, a hearty, cheerful, and voluntary obedience should be yielded to the Gospel; since it is from God; Christ is the substance of it; it is truth, and the word of our salvation.

2. Freedom from sin, Rom. 6:18: *“And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”*

John Gill on v. 18: *“Being then made free from sin”*: Not from a sinful nature; nor from a corrupt heart; nor from vain thoughts; nor from sinful words; nor from sinful actions altogether; but from the damning power of sin: sin brought all men under a sentence of condemnation; Christ has borne the execution of this sentence in himself for his

people; hence, as considered in him, they are free from it; and such as are born again have passed from death to life, and shall never enter into condemnation: likewise, such persons are free from the guilt of sin. Men are in a legal sense arraigned for sin, accused of it, and being convicted, are pronounced guilty before God; and awakened souls have a sense of it in themselves; but the blood of Christ sprinkled on their consciences frees them from it; though fresh sins committed bring fresh guilt, which requires the continual application of the blood of Jesus for pardon and cleansing... Now God's elect are not released voluntarily by their former masters; nor is their freedom obtained by their own power and will; but it is of God, Father, Son, and Spirit; and the Gospel is generally the means of it, and happy are those persons who are blessed with it! They are rid of a bad master; are freed from the worst of bondage; will be no more servants, as before; are delivered from the power, and out of the kingdom of darkness; are heirs of heaven, and shall enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.

3. In Rom. 6:19 and following, Paul qualifies what he said about being no longer slaves to sin: *“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.”*

Robert Hawker, on vv. 17-23: Reader! when the Apostle saith, as in the opening of these verses: Being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness; we must be cautious not to carry the sense too far. You and I are not wholly free from sin. So far from it, that it is my constant sorrow, that I am so much the subject of sin. I know, I feel, I carry about with me, a body of sin and death. In thoughts, and words, and actions, how often do I feel the working of sin in my nature. And, So little am I become a servant of righteousness, that my daily complaint at the close of the day is, how little have I lived to the divine glory. But, the Apostle doth not mean, by the freedom from sin in the one instance, or the servant of righteousness in the other, a state of perfect holiness before God. All that is intended from the words of the Apostle is, that by virtue of redemption in Christ, his people are delivered from the condemning power of sin, and are brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And as such, they have their fruit, that is, the blessed effects of Christ's redemption unto holiness, even the holiness of God our Savior, theirs by virtue of union and communion with Him; and the end everlasting life.