

# POWER

“the gospel is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16)

## Freedom, Laws and Morals: What Is Freedom?

by Aaron J. Cozort

The sound bites have been flying for months. The election cycle is at full steam. There is talk everywhere about how to protect the **freedom** of Americans. There are those who will warn us of our impending loss of freedom, the loss of our American Heritage. They will point to invasive surveillance and unchecked illegal immigration and tell us to vote for them, but they will keep America strong and free.

In our society today, it is easy to get lost in the rhetoric of physical struggles for a form of freedom and meanwhile lose site of **true freedom**.

My challenge to you in this issue of POWER—**evaluate your concept of biblical freedom**. When you compare your concept to the Biblical concept, will they match, or will you find that you have bought into the earthly concept of freedom that our society adores?

No passage challenges the modern American concept of freedom more than Romans 6:18.

And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Wait—the biblical concept of freedom is... slavery? That is right. Just as when Jesus told his disciples that if they wanted to be great, they had to become the servants of all, so with freedom God reveals its true form isn't found in unfettered choice, but in losing control.

The fundamental concept of slavery/servanthood is this: **I do not belong to myself. I belong to my Master.**

You will not be free if you support a particular candidate in the election. You will not lose freedom if you vote for a particular party in the election. You cannot lose freedom—if you become a slave to righteousness.

How will you do that? Look at verses 17 and 4,

“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.” “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Find true freedom today—begin walking the Christian life at baptism and enslave yourself to the righteousness of God. No man can take that away.

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# Freedom, Laws and Morals: IN MATTERS OF JUDGMENT: FREEDOM FROM RESTRAINT OR FREEDOM FOR RESTRAINT?

by Keith B. Cozort

**W**e are living in a day and time when many desire “freedom” and based on that desire believe freedom allows them to do whatever they want to do in life. We see this attitude in the worldly minded and unfortunately within the body of Christ. Several years ago Paul Harvey, a conservative American radio broadcaster for the ABC Radio Networks from the 1950s through the 1990s, offered his news and comments about the status of the countries which formerly composed the Soviet Union. After almost a dozen years of freedom from communism he said, “Yugoslavia is in chaos. Bosnia is on life support. Albania is mired in economic chaos. Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania found freedom too difficult, they’ve already reverted to caretaker communist governments. The Russian people, free, free at last, out from under communism and free, but freedom implies responsibility and the Russians were clearly not ready for that. So crime in Moscow is pandemic, the economy is struggling and the Kremlin’s up for grabs” (Paul Harvey, Landon Lectures, Kansas State University, 9/19/2003). He perceptively points out that “freedom implies responsibility.” He would also state, “self-government won’t work without self-discipline.” The emphasis he was applying was freedom does not allow the “anything goes” mentality to be productive or beneficial to society. The same is true for the Lord’s church.

## FREEDOM

As Christians, we are free. We are made free through obedience of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1-4, 18-22). We have been given liberty, or freedom (Gal. 5:1, 13). Plus, we are free from the law of sin of death (Rom. 8:2). But what does that freedom allow?

## FREEDOM FROM RESTRAINT

As Paul Harvey pointed out, the majority of those countries under communist control thought freedom meant no restraints were now expected or tolerated. But when they rebelled against all restraints they ended up going in a downward spiral ending in economic and moral destruction.

The same is true when members of the Lord’s church decide that a benefit of God’s grace is the right to live in whatever manner which suits them. The apostle Paul asked the question,

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:1-2). Our freedom in Christ does not allow us free course for our lives.

## FREEDOM FOR RESTRAINT

The freedom we have in Christ requires us to live righteously, which means living right according to God’s standard. The only way to know what is acceptable with God is by knowing His divine word (Jn. 8:31-32).

In matters of indifference, situations or behaviors which are not clearly defined in scripture must include liberty, freedom, to choose how best to conduct oneself. This is the point the apostle Paul is making in Romans chapter 14. Whether a brother eats meat or not was a choice which was not restricted by God’s word. Either choice was acceptable but one was not allowed to demand everyone see and do things his way. Because one’s own conscience must not be violated. Our conscience can be educated or trained, but until it is changed through education it is not to be violated.

Paul, the apostle, would make a similar argument when he wrote to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians chapter 8. He answered a question raised by the Corinthian brethren concerning whether it was permissible to eat meat which had been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:1). His response is that the idol is nothing, it is not deity or a representation of deity, so the meat is not contaminated or made uneatable simply because it had been used in a false religious worship to a false pagan god. But he still required the brethren to be considerate of one another’s conscience whether they did or did not believe it was acceptable to eat the meat. Paul would even say, “... if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Cor. 8:13).

We have freedom in Christ to live righteously before God and not bound by sin or its burden as long as we are “walking in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7). But we must not demand everyone see things exactly like we do no matter how their conscience directs them. We should expect from one another, “In matters of faith, unity. In matters of indifference, liberty. In all things, love.”



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\*Truth.FM was Co-Founded by one of POWER's editors, Aaron Cozort

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# Freedom, Laws and Morals: HOW SHOULD ROMANS 1:32 BE APPLIED TODAY?

by Anthony Mertz

Is it ever right to take God's vengeance into our own hands when it comes to putting others to death? Some Christians quote Romans 12's "never avenge yourselves" and answer: "Never!" Others quote Romans 13's "he does not bear the sword in vain," and answer: "sometimes!" And others quote Romans 1:32's "those who do such things deserve to die" and say: "always!" Which is it?

Romans 1:18-32 is an indictment against changing our view of God so that we can live however we want. In light of such an attitude Paul says: "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (vs18 - ESV). Then he lists the kind of sins that are deserving of God's wrath. Though some like to cherry-pick and isolate the sexual sins Paul lists, the sins at the end of the chapter solidify it: Paul is talking about every sin imaginable! All sin deserves God's wrath. Those who practice sin deserve to die. This is all of us! Chapter one is not talking about the government's reaction to civil or moral lawlessness, but rather is describing God's reaction to sin. On its own, this section has nothing to do with capital punishment.

In chapter twelve, Paul shows that vengeance does not belong to individual Christians. He commands, "Repay no one evil for evil... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God" (vs17-19 - ESV). He even quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (ESV). Is the practice of sin deserving of death? Yes. Does any individual have the right to take such matters into their own hands? No. To do so is to "repay evil for evil" and to be "overcome with evil," because vengeance is not ours alone.

However - and this is a big however - in chapter thirteen, Paul gives one instance where man can take God's vengeance into his own hands: when civil authorities are upholding the law. If governments are allowed to have laws but no means of backing them up with punishments, then the law becomes meaningless. Therefore, Paul calls the civil authorities, "an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (vs4 - ESV). Governments are given authority to punish (carry out God's wrath on) wrongdoing. In the past, God's vengeance has included everything from exile to capital punishment, so capital punishment must be a valid means of punishment for governments to use today. But do we leave room for mercy? While every sin deserves death (Romans 1:18-32), we must remember that even God has not always passed the sentence

of death when it was warranted. Cain, the very first murderer, did not suffer the death penalty; he was exiled. Therefore, by authorizing governments to punish lawlessness, God does not demand they use the death penalty, He merely allows.

What about governments misusing this authority? God will deal with them in time. However, just because a government abuses God's vengeance does not mean their legitimate authority is undermined. As a Christian, it is possible to oppose how my government uses the death penalty and still agree that they do have God's authority to put citizens to death for their crimes.

We must make sure not to get "vengeance happy," but must also make sure not to become so disenfranchised with our government's form of vengeance that we take away from them something God has never given us the authority to take away. What if your government punished all forms of lawlessness, but didn't use the death penalty? It is within their right. What if they punished every form of lawlessness with only the death penalty? It is within their right. However, given other principles in Scripture, the ideal is more a balance of the two.

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# Freedom, Laws and Morals: THE TOUGH LAWS TO OBEY--WHEN GOD'S LAW SUPERSEDES MAN'S

by Adam B. Cozort

**I**t is the late 60's A.D. and the Lord's church is being broadly persecuted for the first time by groups other than the Jews. It is a dangerous time for Christians, many are being wronged simply because of their religious beliefs. The results were the loss of businesses, homes, and even lives. A number of the Lord's apostles died during the latter half of this decade, including the apostle Paul.

It is in the midst of these events that Peter writes these important words:

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:11-17)

Peter reminds his brethren they are only pilgrims in the physical world. Therefore, it is important they do not get so bogged down in the physical fights they lose the spiritual war.

It is under this premise he tells them to, "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (2:13). The word translated "ordinance" is the original term *ktisis*, meaning "creation, institution" (Rogers and Rogers, 572). What Peter is telling these Christians is every hurdle (whether from Caesar, a governor, or some other provincial leader) created – jump it. If it is a tax, pay it. If they say you cannot have this business – change businesses. If they say you cannot live here – move. Notice that Peter does not say Christians are only obligated to fulfill these creations if they are legitimate, fair, and righteous. He says clear every hurdle.

Why? "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (2:15). He put it another way in chapter 4: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let

him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:15-16). If Christians are going to suffer, let it be because they are Christians, not because they refused to uphold some man's law when the observance of that law would not damage their relationship with God.

We hear a lot of discussion in our world today about the Constitution, individual rights, states' rights, and the like. In the midst of these discussions there is generally much bluster and bravado set on the table about the way we will or will not respond if such-and-such a law is passed. Yet, before we begin declaring our human rights under the Constitution there is a greater question that must be asked: What does God want me to do as a Christian? God gave us the answer in another passage in the same book.

In chapter 3, Peter states we are not to render evil for evil (vs. 9). If we want to see good days, do not speak with evil or guile (vs. 10). We must seek peace and pursue it, recognizing that the Lord is over all. He hears our prayers and sets his face against the evil-doers (vs. 11-12). If we are to suffer, it must be for righteousness' sake, not because we have turned to doing evil like those around us (vs. 13-17).

Being pilgrims in this world, about which should we be more concerned – the physical laws our rulers pass, or the spiritual lives at stake each day? It is not wrong to fight (within the law) for a better town, state, or country. But let us never forget that God rules the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:17). It is his laws and ordinances that must be upheld at all cost. Man's rules and laws change constantly, but the laws of God abide forever.

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### WHAT IS FREEDOM IN CHRIST?

by Robin W. Haley

As Americans, we know a great deal about freedom. We love and cherish freedom. After all, we live in "the land of the free!" Freedom grants certain rights and demands certain obligations. Our rights or privileges are based not upon our own desires, but upon the limits placed on society and the resulting order. Just so, we live in peace because of "law and order." Law is that legislation formulated and handed to the people. Order is that law enforced. The result is peace in a civilized society. The opposite is chaos, anarchy, rebellion and turmoil. Every straight-thinking person wants the former, not the latter.

As Christians we enjoy the best freedom. This is the freedom which is rich beyond compare and endures forever. This is the freedom from sin, the freedom as found only in Christ! Sadly, American Christians understand more about democratic freedom than they do Christian freedom. This is fairly easy to prove. In fact, you can prove this to yourself even now as you read. Do you agree with the basis of freedom in our country as described in the first paragraph? If so, you are capable of understanding Christian freedom. But, are you willing to apply these same two principles of law and order? Are you willing to recognize that Christian freedom is based upon law, the law of Christ (I Cor. 9:21), and upon order or enforcement of that law, effected through obedience (Heb. 5:9; Jn. 8:36)?

Too many believe in a different form of freedom. Many who claim to be Christians preach and teach a freedom that is

based on what they call a freedom from law, a freedom built upon a perverted view of God's love, a "law of no law." They say, "We have the right to believe and practice as we choose." (In another article, we shall explore what the Bible teaches about "our rights").

This rebellion against God's law is also a form of freedom. It is the freedom Paul speaks of in Rom. 6:20, "For when ye were servants of sin, ye were free in regard of righteousness." When anyone, Christian/or non-Christian, presents themselves to sin as obedient servants, they are free regarding righteousness. Of course, we understand that Paul is teaching that this kind of freedom is actually bondage!

Reader, do not be fooled into believing in this sort of "freedom" as though you may live as you please, while naming the name of Christ. "For freedom did Christ set us free," Gal. 5:1. "For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only use not your freedom for an occasion for the flesh," Gal. 5:13. Please understand that when you became a Christian, you were called to freedom, but not to freedom from law nor to do as you please! Remember the words of Gal. 5:16,17, "But I say, walk by the spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; THAT YE MAY NOT DO THE THINGS THAT YE WOULD" (that you please, NASV).



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