

**Psalm 147:5-7** Great is our LORD and mighty in power; there is no limit to his wisdom. The LORD lifts up the lowly, but casts the wicked to the ground. Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God upon the harp. (44)

## Introduction

For Quinn's 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, we brought him and a few friends to see *Frozen*. At the time I didn't know the hit it would be. A week later nearly every 1<sup>st</sup> grade girl sang the lyrics to *Let it go!* at the top of their lungs, and I knew. While I believe the movie has a profound inherent quality (of message and story), what seemed to grab the attention of seven to eight year-old girls was one particular moment: Elsa breaking free from the strictures of an oppressive environment preventing her from being who she truly is.

After an angry display of her powers, Elsa hurries off. Nothing holds her back; she's been revealed, and her only choice (so she believes) is to head off alone into the cold, dark, snowy night. And here we receive that song of liberation. As Elsa heads through snow, she shrugs off what was and embraces her newfound liberty. She's done with everything and now: *freedom*. She sings while creates as she moves through snow...

It's funny how some distance makes everything seem small  
 And the fears that once controlled me can't get to me at all  
 It's time to see what I can do/To test the limits and break through  
 No right, no wrong, no rules for me  
 I'm free<sup>1</sup>

She creates a castle, releases her hair, and transforms her drab sensible clothing into a stunning dress made of snow and ice. This moment activated chills of every person watching it deeply longing for freedom that is freedom to just be as is! I, too, found myself caught up in the momentum as Elsa rejected her captivity to what was.

Let it go, let it go/Can't hold it back anymore  
 Let it go, let it go/Turn away and slam the door  
 I don't care what they're going to say  
 Let the storm rage on  
 The cold never bothered me anyway

Elsa finally gets to just live as she wants to as she is. Elsa is the self-proclaimed queen of her kingdom of *ice-olation*. She's *free*. Or is she?

## 1 Corinthians 9:18-19, 22-23

Then what is my wage? So that while preaching good tidings I might establish the good news without expense in order not to make full use of my personal ability and power in

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<sup>1</sup> *Let it Go!* From the movie *Frozen* Written by: Kristen Anderson-Lopez / Robert Lopez Performed by Idina Menzel

the good news. For being free from all people I bring myself under subjection to/for all people, so that I might gain many more people (1 Cor 9:18-19).

In the Corinthian situation of chapter 9, Paul is still addressing those whom he addressed earlier in chapter 8. In view are “the strong”—those who feel confident in what they *know* to be true and in their faith, and those who are economically and socially empowered to participate in this or that event or meal.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 9 is Paul’s further clarifying what he means about the freedom of the gospel for the one who is justified by faith in Christ alone apart from works.

Paul explains to the Corinthians that he received the gospel freely—the good tidings came to him of no charge and was not a product of his own doing (he didn’t earn it or produce it of his own works). He confesses he is without boasting here<sup>3</sup> because he received this gift freely, and he is compelled<sup>4</sup> to preach this good news because he’s been entrusted with this proclamation in word and deed.<sup>5</sup> As Paul freely receives, he freely gives—not from threat of hell or reward of heaven, but just because he cannot do any other in his conformity to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit who is the foundation of his faith.<sup>6</sup> He hinges it all to this purpose: *so as not to make full use of my power and ability in the good news*. In other words, Paul has not employed all of his rights to receive wages for his work, which he has entitlement to; he foregoes those by working with his hands to support himself.<sup>7</sup> Thus he exhorts the strong<sup>8</sup>: *forego your own entitlement just as I have*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> And all of this is a further elaboration of chapter 6 where Paul addresses the body and what to do with it.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Thiselton *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* TNIGTC 695, “Paul has explained that the can glory or boast only where the principle of ‘freely you received, freely give’ operates, and when a renunciation of ‘rights is entirely voluntary. This cannot apply in his particular case to the act of preaching alone or to proclamation itself, for, like Jeremiah, in every account of his call Paul insists that God’s compulsion presses upon him.”

<sup>4</sup> Thiselton 696, “It is agony if Paul tries to escape form the constraints and commission which the love and grace of ‘the hound of heaven’ presses upon him. With this further logical step glorying (καυχῆμα) begins to slip back subtly into boasting.”

<sup>5</sup> Keep in mind that as Paul exhorted the Corinthians to treat their bodies well because they are the temples of God (the Holy Spirit), so to is Paul. And, thus, as Paul has received the good news, he has received it as the scribe and the scroll, as the messenger and the message in a bottle. This is why Paul is under Holy Spirit inspired compulsion to proclaim the good news: he is the temple of God proclaiming the good tidings of God (this links him with the great prophetic tradition that precedes him).

<sup>6</sup> Thiselton 697, “The whole argument hinges on sovereign grace, and that it is in freely giving in response to God’s free gift that καυχῆμα, grounds for taking delight in what one gives, becomes possible only within a framework where pressure and law do not apply: free gift in response to free gift. It is in giving that the believe receives, not as some ‘external’ reward, but through the internal grammar of the blessedness of giving which is a stamp of identification with the cross.”

<sup>7</sup> Collins qtd in Thiselton 697, “The object of Paul’s boasting is not the preaching of the gospel...Pauls’ boast is that he has not made use of the rights to which he is entitled...to support himself by the work of his own hands.”

<sup>8</sup> Martin qtd in Thiselton 698, “Paul’s pointed surrender of his *eleutheria* and *exousia* (as one of the strong) is therefore...directed precisely at those who have these things and resist giving them up, that is, those of higher status.”

<sup>9</sup> Thiselton 697, “This verse explicates the point just made above. Only by gratuitously proclaiming the gospel gratis can Paul go beyond the preaching which God has pressed upon him as an inescapable, not voluntary, task, and

And then with grand emphasis Paul dives deeper into the concept of gospel founded freedom: *being free from all people I bring myself under subjection to/for all people* (v.19).<sup>10</sup> I love studying languages. The more I study different languages, the more I enjoy my own language and the nitty gritty of grammar, word choice, and sentence structure. So, here I am compelled to highlight the importance of prepositions and cases because Paul is intentional with them. To speak of gospel freedom, for Paul, is to speak not only of freedom *from* other people (Ελευθερος...ων **ΕΚ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ**, the genitive prepositional phrase of separation) but precisely that this freedom *from* is hardwired toward freedom *to* and *for* other people (πασιν, the dative case carrying with it the “to/for” prepositions, the case of the indirect object).<sup>11</sup>

For Paul, to be truly free is seeing your freedom *from* as freedom *for* and *to* other people. For “the strong” in Corinth this means that their freedom, if it truly is freedom, is not about an ardent insistence for their entitlements and rights. Rather, it’s for the weaker: those who don’t have what they have, those who don’t have access to what they have access to, those who are restricted in their ability to move about and do this and do that because of their dependence on other people and institutions.<sup>12</sup> Paul tells “the strong”: *to/for the weak I became weak in that I might gain the weak* (v.22). And then he concludes with *...to all people I became all things so that I might rescue some*. It is anathema for Paul that the believer would use her freedom to secure her entitlement. Instead, for Paul, his freedom from having to justify himself through works of the law is now freedom for those trapped in totalitarian religious and social systems. For Paul, this *is* the definition of what it means to act like Christ;<sup>13</sup> this is cruciform humanity in encounter with God in the event of faith that produces true freedom.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

So, back to Elsa. Is Elsa free when she tromps off into the wild winter night? Is she free as she constructs that stunning palace and her new persona unburdened by demands and

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there by go the extra mile.’ To do this, however, he must forego a right, as he pleads with ‘the strong’ among his readers to do.”

<sup>10</sup> Thiselton 700, “Since ελευθερος is so strongly emphatic, we may retain the positive term free ... to denote the Corinthian catchword taken up by Paul, but also combine it with NJB’s subtle use of the negative *though I as no a slave to any human being, I put myself in slavery to all people...*”

<sup>11</sup> Thiselton 701, “Paul very subtly but also emphatically presses in what precise sense Christian believers and Christian leaders are free and in what sense voluntary slavery performs a wholesome, even essential, saving purpose in Christ-like obedience and love for other.”

<sup>12</sup> Thiselton 705 “In this context the weak may mean those whose options for life and conduct were severely restricted because of their dependence on the wishes of patrons, employers, or slave owners.”

<sup>13</sup> Thiselton 706, “The weak stand in contrast to those with ‘social power, influence, political status...ability to competence in a variety of areas’ and by contrast have ‘low social standing’ and crave for identity, recognition, and acceptance. Paul’s foregoing of his rights to a ‘professional’ status by functioning as a religious rhetorician for a patron and toiling as an artisan demonstrate his solidarity with the weak both as a missionary and pastoral strategist and in Christlike behavior.”

<sup>14</sup> Thiselton 708, “Paul does all that he does to make transparent by his everyday life in the public domain the character of the gospel which he proclaims as the proclamation of the cross..., which derives its character, and not simply its ‘benefits,’ from Christ himself.”

expectations of others? No. She's not free. She's not acquired freedom but imprisonment. Freedom *from* when it stops there becomes a prison of the self. In order to maintain that type of freedom you must always pull back and away until you're isolated. Then you must defend that isolation because freedom (strictly) *from* can never be free in the presence of another person. If my freedom is defined solely as freedom *from* (the law, from others, from obligation, from demand, etc.) then I'm not free because I can neither participate in those things nor not feel threatened by their presence indicating my limitedness. I'm not free if I'm limited by the threat of external things; this *is* the definition of enslavement. If I must have my way, I'm not free.

Elsa doesn't become truly free until she figures out how to use her power in the presence of other people. Once she realizes love is the controlling factor, she's released unto real freedom and can exist as is with others—not in her freedom *from* fueled by anger and rage keeping her isolated but freedom *from* that is drawn by love to be freedom *to* and *for* other people. Compare what she creates to protect herself from others and what she creates for others: in her freedom *from* she builds an ice palace, locking her away from others and in her freedom *to* and *for* she summons a summer snowfall, lays out an ice skating rink, and a snow cloud to protect Olaf.

Beloved, you're free. God in God's freedom freely descended because God so loved the world, the creation, the cosmos, so loved you to rescue everything and everyone from the powers of sin, darkness, and death; this is the content of the gospel, of the good news made flesh in Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. That divine freedom is now our freedom *from* the powers of sin, darkness, and death to be free by faith and not works into grace, light, and life *for* and *to* others who are also the objects of divine love. To "share in the nature of the gospel"<sup>15</sup> is to stand with the oppressed, the marginalized, the suffering and hurting, the wounded and sick, the hindered and ostracized. (There is no better expression of freedom than to willingly stand in solidarity with struggling humanity.) Where there are the sick, we become as the sick to rescue the sick from death; where there are those fighting for the right to breathe, we become as those fighting for the right to breathe to rescue those who are fighting for the right to breathe from death; where there are those who have been displaced, we become as those being displaced to rescue the displaced from death. In our freedom *from* we count it not for us to seize for ourselves but *for* and *to* others; for it is this very thing God did for us.

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<sup>15</sup> Thiselton 707, "To stand alongside the Jews, the Gentile, the socially dependent and vulnerable, or to live and act in solidarity with every kind of person in every kind of situation is to have a share in the nature of the gospel, i.e., to instantiate what the gospel is and how it operates."