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Looking at the text you will see that Paul is again having to prove himself as to what the Corinthian church was saying contrary about him.

The problem we have here before we even get into the question, Am I Not Free, we have to ask first and foremost what do you mean by free. In modern times we use the word free in so many ways like

- Are you free for lunch?
- Are you offering free consultation?
- Where is my free gift?
- Am I free to speak about my country?

So what do we mean by free? So when we talk about Christian liberty we have to ask ourselves what exactly are we free from, what does the gospel first and foremost free us from so that we may know what is it exactly that we are free of and what therefore are we still commended or what we are still chain what we are still inclined or guided or lead or called to do. Understanding this differentiation just a little bit will help us understand what Paul is trying to say as a whole. To help us with that I have some quotes from Christian philosophers who talks about freedom. C. S. Lewis writes

"The lost enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded."

What he is pointing to us is that the first freedom that we were given was actually freedom to live under the protection and guidance of God. So we may be free to roam, to manage, to live and to walk and to get a job and to live life and have children but all under the guidance and protection of God. However, the first freedom that we demand of was freedom from God. When Adam and Eve took the fruit they actually asked to be free to define what is good and bad for themselves and that is what we call an elicit freedom and because of that one demand, in breaking that one rule God had to input 619 commandments to the people of Israel so that we may even get a hint of what God had actually wanted us to be in the first place.

When the Israelites went out from Egypt out of slavery and now when they went to the land of milk and honey and build Jerusalem and supposed to be a new people, a new freedom in Christ they were under judges for a while but even they after a while demanded the same thing, 'we wanted to be free from God, we wanted to be free from judgment, therefore we wanted our own king.' So we have what we call an elicit freedom, a freedom that we demanded that in the end made us slaves to our sin. Sin is the consequence of us rebelling against God. C. S. Lewis also said it nicely this way

"If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having."

Of course C. S. Lewis knew at the very core of every human being because we are selfish creatures, we want to survive by ourselves, we would therefore go into the bad because the bad will only help us, is the way that we will keep ourselves to survive. What else then rides on freedom, love. When you love you give your love freely. When God gave his love for us he gave it freely. When we are filled with joy and we express it, we express it freely. We don't need to pretend to be joyful, something happens to us and then we respond in joy and then also goodness. Because I am free to do either/or, when I do something good it then becomes of value because it is out of once effort, but C. S. Lewis also points out that every time when we have the chance to do what is right we tend to do what is right for us and so freedom instead of keeping us free enslaves us because of the sinful characteristic in our hearts, we cannot deny that.

In the midst of this whole setting of freedom where there is potential for both good and evil, therefore in light of this freedom Philips Brooks then says this

"God's terrible insistence on human freedom is so absolute that he granted us the power to live as though He did not exist, to spit in His face, to crucify Him."

It is only in this landscape of freedom which we have abused that actually God would then plan to send his son to be abused for us. So why then does the gospel then make such a difference, because Jesus by his sacrifice makes us truly free, free even from the consequences of the wrong that we would normally or naturally do and that should have us respond in joy. So in understanding this am I not free. Indeed, I am free, but not without understanding what God has therefore called us to truly be. So we need to see therefore how does Jesus use the word free. Now this is of course a lot of songs use this statement a lot, whom the son sets free is free indeed. We need to look at it in context really quickly.

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. **32** Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you **free**."

This truth is the gospel, the realization that none of our good deeds will ever-ever make amend of what we have done wrong but also the truth is that Jesus is the son of God, that Jesus is the one that will reconcile us back to becoming God's children, but they didn't understand him. So they answered him.

33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" **34** Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. **35** Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. **36** So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. **37** I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. **38** I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father."

So we see here is that the freedom therefore is actually in the son who through Jesus Christ adopts us into becoming children of God not just from Abraham from which then has all the promises and what we must do to obey and to which then every time when we do wrong we will also bear the consequences of that.

39 "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did. 40 As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41 You are doing the works of your own father."

So Jesus then separates them even from Abraham because Abraham acted in obedience and in faith. He was free to say no but because of the joy of knowing one true God he therefore followed by faith. He saw glimpse of the gospel. Now Jesus is actually building up a case slowly against them. The Jews then said,

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47 Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

Son of the devil that is who we are without God, because we end up going back into our selfish nature, going back into our own self, that freedom that we want so much, even freedom from God then brands us that we are actually not really free, we become children or even slaves to sin.

So throughout the entire time therefore when we thought that we were free and there are no consequences for our wrongdoing, we were still listening to the little voice that still wants to make ourselves God. So we then find out truly that freedom is not what keeps us alive, freedom is not what actually Jesus is giving without any parameters but actually Jesus is trying to save us from what we think is freedom when we actually become slaves of our sin.

What therefore is the freedom that God is actually giving us through the gospel?

To help us realize who we are and we are children of God we are therefore to be who we are truly called that is to be children of God and so even Paul teaches this in his testimony in the book of Acts. He says

38 "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Acts 13:38-39

There is actually a twofold here. We are free by being forgiveness of sins and then we are also free from the law. Paul teaches this also

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. **2** Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. **3** Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. **4** You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. **5** For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. **6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Galatians 5:1-6

Now the Galatians church was struggling as to whether what therefore we should follow, are we Jews first then Christians or should we therefore acknowledge that we are free under Christ and so Paul is actually giving us the assurance. We are called to love because that is the trait of God which he actually made us for. He made us to love Him and he has made us to love one another. Romans also just affirms that. In fact, this is how the love of Christ actually comes out in the way that we also live.

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! **16** Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? **17** But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. **18** You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. Romans 6:15-18

So are we therefore truly free. The answer is actually yes, we are free but we are free to be who we really ought to be and who should we really therefore ought to be, we ought to be in obedience to God and we do so joyfully. That is the gospel work in our hearts, that is how we can see people change by the work of the gospel. Peter also says this similarly

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. **12** Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. **13** Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, **14** or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. **15** For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. **16** Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. 1 Peter 2:11-16

Now when we know all of this freedom, what therefore is Paul speaking about when it comes to being free. He affirms these three things

- Free from sin
- Free from the law since there's no more consequence for sin for those who believe in Jesus.
- Freedom in the Father through Jesus who calls us to truly live freely like Him.

So Paul ask this question, am I not free? Yes, he is free from the law, he is free from sin and its consequence and he is therefore free to be who God had actually called him to be, His child.

What Paul is actually trying to do is that because the Corinthian church in context back to this to the actual passage that we are looking at right now is that in 1-Cor chapter 9 it is assumed therefore that the Corinthian church were questioning Paul's apostleship. He wasn't really one of the 12 apostles, yet he is now regarded as an apostle. So people started to say, he is not an apostle because he is not one of the 12. He is not an apostle as he is not taking any money or support from us, because if he truly is an apostle he should be asking for a fee to which then we will pay him and then we say that yes he is our apostle, we are supporting him. He is also not an apostle because unlike Peter we don't see him changing people by the thousands, like the 12 disciples in Jerusalem. So we see again Paul charging at the Corinthian church again with rhetorical questions, am I not free, of course he is free. Am I not an apostle, he is an apostle. Have I not seen Jesus our Lord. That is the qualification of being an apostle. Are you not the result of my work in the Lord, because he actually went to Corinth and he actually help plant the church there. They themselves are the proof of his mission work.

2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. 4 Don't we have the right to food and drink? 5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? 6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?

So Paul is actually saying that we are an apostle so therefore we do have these rights. We actually have a right to a life full-time in ministry and we also have the right to a family life, because Peter and some of the other apostles had wife and children and churches were supporting them. So Paul is saying, yes we are apostles, sure we are not like Peter who has a family and of course if we want to if we actually needed to look into ministry full-time we would. But Paul does not demand of those rights, but he proves it a number of times and Paul in his quick witted way uses various kinds of illustrations to prove his case. He speaks in many-many layers.

7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? 8 Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. 11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? 12 If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

Of course he is saying we therefore deserve a salary, we deserve some expense in order to be able to live a life accordingly because we are supposed to live as to how we are called to live, but we do not use this right. The Corinthian church is also therefore asking, if Paul were to ask money from them, does that make us his boss. There are some churches that always have the assumption in the back of their head, just because we pay our pastors we can tell him what to do. So Paul is saying that if you think that giving us a salary we therefore become your staff we rather not have it because you don't understand the work of the gospel. You have the freedom to pay by all means but we rather not take it because if you do give it to us you may say okay, we end up becoming slaves to the apostle because we had to pay him a wage. Sounds like a lot of other pastors that we hear in the

United States, they preach the gospel and they need a jet plane. So we did not use this right. Paul then elaborates here

13 Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? **14** In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

What Paul is actually doing is that he is elevating the whole idea of being called to ministry to the likeness of the priesthood and the Levites. The priest and the Levites have no land. They were not allocated any land. They do not have places to stay, their job is to stay by the tabernacle and serve the Lord. Their job is to stay by the temple in Jerusalem and live of what goodness comes through the temple. In one of the Talmud it is recorded that there was a time where during meal times the priest and the Levites will get in line and they have a long stick. They were to go to a pot of stew which was prepared for them collectively and they have to take that stick and poke it into the bowl, whatever they are able to poke on that stick is their food for the meal, because it is given by God. So What Paul is saying that as being called into this ministry in Jesus Christ is the same likeness of being called in the temple that we may not have anything, we don't need anything because God will provide. How did God provide? Through the community of Christ. So he is tweaking in this likeness. In all of this he says I have rights but then he says I won't take it.

15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. **16** For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! **17** If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. **18** What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

So Paul is neither obligated nor given any incentive to do ministry. So he is actually displaying the sincerity. He is actually giving testimony of the spirit that is working in his heart. He says that I am not forced to do this ministry. I am not even being paid to do this ministry, I am doing this because of the gospel. It is the spirit's work that has actually prompted me. We should therefore also my dear brothers and sisters have this urge, because whom the Son set free, he really did set free. If he sat us free based on the promise of belief, wouldn't you want to go and help and tell others as well that is the prompting of the gospel. So he preaches voluntarily, he therefore has a reward. He is not being pushed or paid to do it because otherwise it will just be a job. He gives up his freedom not just for anyone, he gives it up for everyone.

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. **20** To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. **21** To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. **23** I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

So we see Paul's motive to submit to another's law. It is not because he is obligated or he must but because he knows that this is the best way to reach out to those people that they may hear the

gospel. He rather would be as if he is not like under the law but he will obey the law of Christ which is the gospel and he does all this for whatever harvest God may bring (numbers doesn't matter).

We do this by all means that we may possibly save some and all that is for the sake of the gospel. Now the final picture that gives us in our mind is that, I don't just do this for a moment, I do this for a lifestyle. So here what he says,

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

So a lot of people say that, is there a possibility to lose your salvation here. The answer is no. Paul is not emphasizing that side of the spectrum. He is actually emphasizing more on being persistent and consistent like an athlete. One example is this, if a person wants to get physically fit he works hard and he exercises every day. It takes a few month or even a lifestyle of six months to eight months to even see even one of your six packs, but to finally see the distinctive lines it takes some months. Then you had to keep on training and had a go at it and you are doing it because not just to get it for like a day or two, you want to get it for the rest of your life. So that kind of training we want to be good not just for a day but all the time and in the end of the day what therefore is the prize. A sprinter for 10 seconds every four years, the Olympics. For that 10 seconds for four years he would run 100s and 100s of hours focusing every single step, not wasting every single movement, making every single day count even if he is off season to make sure that on that last 10 seconds, it becomes a 10 second that worth it and he may possibly win the prize. Friends, Paul is actually calling us because if we say that we know the gospel, don't just know it for a day, run with it, work with it, train it, don't just share the gospel once a week share it every day. Practice and train and you may be rejected dozens of times while you share the gospel but that one moment that you did and he did say yes, you just changed his life. What about yourself? You become therefore reassured of the prize that you already had been given, the prize that will last forever and that is our relationship with God.

So two questions I have for you.

- What are you a Christian for?
- What are you free for?

Are you just a Christian so that you may have your little seat in that train that sends you to the gates of heaven. No Christ has called you from the beginning of time to do what you are naturally called to be, to be free children of God calling others onto him. That is the goal and that is the reward that will last forever.