

True Freedom: Live your Freedom

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[0 : 0 0] well back in 2018 so just about three years ago I was invited over to New York to train for some church planting and so it was a great opportunity to go and learn from those who had practiced church planting in global cities across the world it was also good to go over to New York because my brother-in-law and his family stay over there so I was looking forward to the opportunity to go and see them but when I was over in New York the time was the homecoming weekend that means for those who don't know homecoming weekend is when the high school the secondary school has lots of special events and they have a homecoming football game on a Saturday night that everybody parents goes to watch the high school pupils playing football actually when I say football I mean American football I don't mean real football where they use a proper round ball so anyway we all went along to watch my nephew who was playing in the homecoming game and before the game started I think as they do in the United States in all of these occasions they wanted us to stand and sing the star-spangled banner which is the the U.S. national anthem and not being familiar with the words of the star-spangled banner I just stood there with a smile on my face mouth closed and I didn't think I knew any of the lines until it got to the climatic phrase or the land of the free and at that point there was just rapturous applause and the whole stadium the crowd burst into amazing song the volume it was so loud so the the melody line and the great cheer as I stood there it made me think that we really value freedom very highly because the U.S. national anthem is essentially about freedom if you watched the rugby yesterday Scotland against South Africa they sang O Flower of Scotland which is again another anthem about freedom freedom from the English this time and so basically I think most national anthems are about freedom why is that well it's because we prize freedom freedom is a value that we regard as being one of the most important values if not the most important value in our society it is the ultimate value it is the highest good but have you ever considered what it means to be free how should we define freedom well of course when we first think of freedom we think freedom is about being free to do whatever

I want to do freedom is the absence of any restrictions whatsoever and yet freedom is much more complex just think of how freedom actually works if you take food as an example we are free to eat whatever we want to eat whenever we want to eat it but it's also a bad idea to eat whatever you want to eat whenever you want to eat it so you can eat all kinds of junk food burgers pizzas kebabs you can eat lots of chocolate cake and chocolate if you really want to you're free to but it isn't necessarily the wisest thing to exercise your freedom in that way because we may want to restrict our freedom when it comes to what we eat why well so we can actually enjoy greater freedom the greater freedom of good health and long life we want to be able to run around with our grandkids when we're in our 70s and probably if we don't watch what we eat then that's going to be a problem when we get to that stage and so freedom isn't doing what you want without any restrictions rather true freedom comes by submitting ourselves to the right restrictions the best ones and so when it comes to christianity christianity is often seen as the enemy of freedom because people have this idea that christianity means obeying all kinds of rules and regulations it's about being religious and yet what we see in paul's letter to the galatians is that christianity is actually the source of freedom paul reminds the galatian christians that they have been set free by jesus christ and yet they were in danger of becoming slaves again well why because they were being urged by some false teachers to keep the jewish law and follow all its rules like circumcision if they were going to be proper christians but it was a kind of legalism that would destroy their liberty and so as we turn into chapter 5 and chapter 6 of galatians paul is now showing us this is what it means to live out your freedom in christ essentially he's saying this is what it means to be a christian or a follower of jesus as if you've never been to church before and you wouldn't call yourself a christian paul is showing us here what being a christian looks like and so we all need this message because we need to be careful we don't mix christianity up with legalism but we also need to make sure we don't mix christianity up with a kind of license that means you can do whatever you want to do because you can go in either direction in the christian life you can go the way of legalism or you can move in the way of license but christianity moves us not towards legalism or license but it moves us towards liberty in other words freedom and so what paul is doing here in these verses is he's urging us to avoid legalism he's urging us to avoid license so we can live liberated free lives our freedom in christ leads us to obey god not to please ourselves so let's think about what this looks like three headings this afternoon freedom comes by faith freedom rests in truth and freedom works through love so first of all freedom comes by faith paul's main point is freedom so verse one 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 these words could be an executive summary not just of this whole passage but in fact of the whole letter to the galatians because jesus christ came to set us free and so paul is talking about the freedom from

the burden of keeping the law in order to be accepted by god now the issue for the galatians was circumcision because they had been deceived into thinking that they needed to become like jews in order to be proper christians and it might sound irrelevant to us but christianity can always be distorted into a form of legalism where you keep these rules and then you're a proper christian and so those who are christians can be tempted by it those who aren't christians can be confused by it and it's the thinking that god accepts us on the basis of what we have done on our religious performance instead of on the basis of what jesus has done through his work on the cross and so paul says mark my words i paul tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised christ will be of no value to you at all paul's saying that if the galatians choose to be circumcised then they're putting their confidence in what they do instead of what jesus has done so getting circumcised was saying that jesus isn't enough in order to be saved by god it's got to be jesus plus this physical thing that you do and so paul's saying that jesus is of no value to the galatians if we can get to god by the things that we do and that doesn't make any sense paul says again i declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law so paul's saying if you start going down this road this legalistic road where you have to do things in order to be accepted by god then it's a tough road to go down because if you think that you will get there by obeying the law what the law actually requires is obeying 100 of the law 100 of the time in other words you need to be perfect which is impossible nobody is perfect nobody can do it so paul's saying you put yourself in this impossible position if you give jesus christ a body swerve and you try to get to god by the things that you do so legalism for the galatians wouldn't help them draw closer to god it would actually turn them further away because attempting to get to god through what we do will never work and that's why paul's warning here is so strong he says you are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from christ you have fallen away from grace so he's saying you can't have both law and grace as the way of salvation law and grace don't mix it's a bit like oil and water if you've ever tried to mix oil and water it just doesn't work and notice that paul says that they've fallen away from grace not that they've fallen out of grace in other words the galatians were in danger of relying on themselves and their law keeping rather than relying on god's grace in order to be saved and so this is the test of whether someone really is a christian true followers of jesus rely solely on jesus to be saved not their human efforts because the message of galatians is that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in christ alone so paul says verse 5 for through the spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope by faith we wait with hope in other words we don't anxiously strive believing that our salvation depends on what we do and that's why circumcision has got nothing to do with it because it isn't about

what we do so he says verse 6 for in christ jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love it's not that paul was opposed to circumcision but he objected to it as being a requirement for salvation the galatians didn't need it to be true christians because the only thing he says that counts is faith in jesus and that faith expresses itself through love now paul's going to come back to love later and so we will but before we move on we should be clear that freedom comes by faith paul had to urge the galatians not to attempt to be justified by getting circumcised and keeping the law that would be a return to slavery and being burdened by this yoke of keeping lots of religious rules and so we need to be alert to the same danger today because we can still attempt to justify ourselves before god by the things we do even if they are good religious things like going to church getting baptized giving money reading the bible going to a prayer meeting performing some leadership role in church we can think that all of these things count towards god's acceptance of us and all these things are good sure they are yep but they can't put us right with god because only jesus can put us right with god and so if we see all these other things like some kind of there there's a ladder and all these things are rungs on the ladder that we do them and we climb and reach up to heaven then we've missed the point of the good news of jesus christ which is we can never reach up to heaven or make it ourselves that's why we needed jesus to come and to rescue us so just think about it and this is essentially what paul's saying here why would god send jesus to die on a cross if we can make it to god ourselves thankfully our standing before god doesn't depend on our efforts because if it did well we'd always be full of either pride or despair pride because we're doing well despair because we're doing badly instead it depends entirely on what jesus has done which is why we receive that by faith so that's the first thing freedom comes by faith the second thing is freedom rests in truth verse 7 to 12 so paul says you were running a good race who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth so he's using an athletic metaphor you know if you watch the olympics in the summer running a race you've got to stick to your lane anyone who cuts in on anyone else is a cheat and they're disqualified and so what paul is saying here is that the galatian christians they came to faith in jesus christ and they were going well they were running well they were doing what they needed to do but the false teachers had come in and they cut in on their progress they were distracting them they'd hindered them they were thrown off course by this false teaching that was coming their way and it stopped them from obeying the truth and so paul says that kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you so the false teachers were dangerous and so what paul does is he quotes a proverb to show how lethal their distorted message was it was lethal for the church verse 9 a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough now i doubt whether paul had ever seen the great british bake-off i wish i had never seen the great british bake-off biggest waste of time ever

in my life but paul knew about baking he knew about baking because he knew that just a tiny bit of yeast if it goes into the dough will spread out into the whole batch and so he wants to illustrate either that it just takes a tiny bit of law to contaminate the gospel or it just takes a tiny bit of teaching to infiltrate and spread through the church or maybe both so false teaching doesn't always seem like it's a big deal and yet what paul's saying is it does a great deal of damage that's why he's urging these galatians to hold to the truth he says i am confident in the lord that you will take no other view the one who is throwing you into confusion whoever that may be will have to pay the penalty so paul's confident that these galatians will reject the false teaching and the false teachers and they will hold to the truth the truth of the gospel of jesus christ that paul taught them not only that he's confident that the ringleader isn't going to get away with it because he'd have to answer to god for the trouble he was causing christ's church because we can be sure that god will judge everyone who speaks every false word but in contrast to the false teachers paul shares his own experience in verse 11 brothers and sisters if i am still preaching circumcision why am i still being persecuted in that case the offense of the cross has been abolished so it seems like paul's opponents were wrongly suggesting that he was preaching circumcision he was preaching their message so paul refutes this as nonsense because he was actually being persecuted it wouldn't happen if he was preaching the same as the false teachers and the reality is paul was being persecuted because he was preaching the message of the cross of christ and that is a message that tells us we can do absolutely nothing to get right with god we needed jesus to come and die on a cross to deal with our sin before god could accept us and so the message of the cross was offensive to the false teachers because it was saying that their legalistic way of life their legalistic attempts at trying to relate to god was an utter waste of time and so the cross of jesus christ will always be offensive to people who think that god will accept them on the basis of their religious performance and their good works because it smashes human pride the human pride that refuses to believe we are nothing more than a poor helpless hopeless sinner under god's wrath deserving god's condemnation and on our way to hell to think that we can avoid that by what we do is to reject and be offended by the cross of christ the cross is the only way we can be rescued from hell and i think that's why paul's words here are so strong verse 12 he says as for those agitators i wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves strong words even vulgar language here and paul is saying what you think he's saying the word he uses here is cut off to be cut off and so it is strong and yet it's hardly surprising is it in an argument where it's about the pointless nature of circumcision and those who want people to be circumcised that paul would

[18 : 45] use that argument against them and say don't just cut a bit off but chop the whole thing off and in the old testament emasculation disqualified people from participating in israel's worship in the temple and so paul is essentially saying the false teachers should be disqualified from the people of god they should be cut off from god's people because they are preaching a message that isn't the truth and so it just reveals how wicked their false teaching was and how wicked false teaching can be paul's words are strong because the stakes are so high and the stakes are always high when it comes to the truth of the gospel because what we're talking about is not just another message about how to change your life not just another lifestyle you can follow that isn't what christianity is about christianity is about the salvation of men and women about going to heaven or going to hell and so that's why his words here are so strong and and if false teaching isn't resisted at every point as paul is doing here it's just going to spread like yeast in a batch of dough and i'm sure we've seen false teaching spread its way through churches haven't we even spread its way through whole denominations because if leaders don't teach the truth then people don't follow the truth and so false teaching tends to start by being accommodated in the church and then it's accepted in the church and then it's adopted in the church and that's why galatians continues to be crucial for the church today and why we should not be naively taken in by false teachers and their false teaching because freedom rests in truth so freedom comes by faith freedom rests in truth and freedom works through love so paul has been urging the galatians not to lose their freedom in christ he's been warning against the legalism of observing the law which is a form of slavery he calls it but legalism wasn't the only threat to their freedom legalism was a threat but license was also a threat and license is freedom taken to the absolute extreme in other words doing whatever you want whenever you want without any restrictions as the paul's already said don't lose your freedom through legalistic religious observance and now he's saying don't abuse your freedom through licentious sinful behavior because freedom is never a license to do what you want so what does the way of freedom look like well he tells us verse 13 you my brothers and sisters were called to be free but do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh rather serve one another humbly in love so a message that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone and christ alone might cause some people to think that you can do whatever you want when you're a christian if god has forgiven you in jesus christ then surely it doesn't matter how you live because you can always be forgiven but paul's saying here a freedom is never a license to indulge in sinful desires instead he says use your freedom to serve one another in love verse 14 for the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command love your neighbor as yourself he's reminding the galatians that christians shouldn't ignore god's law altogether yes there are aspects of the law circumcision religious and jewish rules and rituals they're no longer

applicable god's moral law is always applicable and is always to be obeyed and so paul's saying here the law is fulfilled in keeping this one command love your neighbor as yourself so we obey god's law not to be saved but when we are saved we want to obey god's law and it involves loving our neighbor because if we think freedom is a license to do what we want then we'll just fail to love each other and that was happening amongst the galatians verse 15 if you bite and devour each other watch out or you will be destroyed by each other the language suggests that we're they were acting like a pack of wild animals their behavior was anything but loving and that is the implication of living by works without grace it ends up being displayed in unloving behavior towards our neighbors so let me just try and illustrate this with a with a dog illustration if i'm honest um it's amazing how when you get a dog the dog helps you understand christian theology far better than when you didn't have a dog and so this is a story about a dog about some dogs actually that i found in a book and i've just developed it and embellished it a bit further so just imagine three dogs okay so three dogs we'll give them three names first dog is called legalism second dog is called license you can see where this is going third dog is called liberty legalism license and liberty so legalism is a dog and he spends all his days from morning to night chained to a lamppost his territory is clearly defined but he is severely restricted and so he snarls at other dogs he snarls at other people he whines and he barks anytime anyone comes near he's not a happy dog obviously because he's enslaved by his surroundings and that's legalism second dog is license now license spends all his days from morning till night wandering around the streets he's got no owner and so he is a law unto himself he does whatever he wants whenever he wants he goes from one dustbin to the next dustbin sniffing around following his nose because he's never satisfying he can never get enough and so he ignores other dogs and he ignores other people he's not interested because he's only interested in himself and he only cares about himself but he is not a happy dog either and he's also enslaved he's enslaved to his basic desires that he has to indulge that's license so there's legalism there's license and the third dog is liberty now liberty walks by his master's side or if he's at home he just sleeps contentedly and he's nice wee bed all cozy and warm and there's no lead to restrict his freedom because he never strays very far and he's always obedient to his master's call his master loves him feeds him cares for him looks after him and so liberty actually wants to obey his master because he never feels threatened by other people they're no threat he never feels threatened by other dogs he knows his master will look after him and so he has got the right restrictions he's free but with the right restrictions and guess what liberty is a happy dog so can you see what is going on here these three dogs illustrate three kinds of people or three ways of living life so there are

the legalists and they are trapped by religion they're restricted by rules that dictate how they should behave and they reckon that if they perform well within these certain boundaries then god will accept them and they generally think that they're better than other people because of their good performance and so they tend to snarl and whine at people who don't follow the rules that they follow and they get annoyed with them and deep down they actually resent having to do all this stuff so they don't do it out of a sense of joy they just do it out of a sense of obligation and they're not happy people can tell by their faces and deep down inside they're not happy on the inside because they're actually slaves so that's the legalists and then there's the licentious people who hate any restrictions on how to live life so they've got no moral compass they don't care about lying cheating stealing sleeping around or whatever they do what they want whenever they want with whomever they want without worrying about the consequences and they think they're completely free and completely in control and yet they wonder from one thing to the next thing from one person to the next person and so the reality is that they are actually enslaved to their desires they can't stop indulging themselves and they're not happy people either and then there's the liberated there is those who have been set free by jesus christ who don't try to relate to god through their legalism and who don't try to avoid god through their licentiousness rather they enjoy their liberty because they have discovered that god has accepted them by his grace despite what they are and so they're free from trying to justify themselves by their religious efforts and they're free from being enslaved to certain behaviors and yet they are never more free never more joyful never more alive than when they obey their loving father in heaven they willingly surrender to him knowing that his law is actually best for their lives and guess what they're happy they're so secure in god's love for them that they are ready and willing to go and love and serve others that's what it means to have life and liberty it is for freedom that christ has set us free and so stand firm then in loving god as your master as the gracious god who has given you life love god and love others love god and love others love god and love others