

# They Won't Take Our Freedom

Galatians 5:1-15

9 October 2022 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

**Big Question:** What is the purpose of the freedom that we have in the gospel?

**Big Idea:** Jesus frees us from law we can't keep so that we can serve others.

## Introduction

I wonder what makes you feel free?

I don't mean what makes you feel cheap, but what makes you feel like you're unbound, unrestrained and unrestricted?

As many of you will know, we've been on holidays the last few weeks.

One of the things I love about holidays is the feeling of freedom.

Physical freedom to escape the rat race of the city and get out into the wide, open spaces of the ocean or the outback.

But it's also the freedom from the constant background buzz of responsibility, letting all the troubles of everyday life and ministry disappear in the rear vision mirror.

Perhaps you think of freedom as being something like more like lazing by the pool or as simple as being able to go to the dunny without little people interrupting you.

What's your picture of freedom?

All those things I've mentioned promise us freedom, but they don't really offer us true freedom, do they?

Cutting off a toxic relationship, quitting a job, stepping back from social media, going to live as a hermit in the middle of nowhere, moving out of home and not having to listen to your parents anymore.

All these things might give us some degree of freedom – there's probably some value in all of them – but they don't offer us true and complete freedom.

No matter how bad your parents were, moving out of home is still going to come with a different set of problems.

For some of us those problems might be better than living at home, but for most of us they're not.

Lying by a beach drinking mocktails might sound delightful, but sooner or later the bill's got to be paid.

These things might give us rest and respite for a short period of time, but despite the promises, they don't offer true freedom.

This weekend for our Church Camp at Home, we've been thinking about freedom.

Yesterday afternoon, Geoff helpfully took us through 1 Corinthians 8-10 as we looked at the freedom we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It was a great set of talks that challenged us to think about how we're living and using our freedom

We looked at what Paul said about giving up our rights and using our freedom for the benefit of others, even at some cost to ourselves.

This morning we're going to look at freedom for a different angle.

Paul's letter to the Galatians in the New Testament is all about freedom.

A kind of freedom that that's much bigger and better than the kind of freedoms that we often look to.

The gospel provides us with the ultimate freedom – freedom from ourselves.

Freedom from our slavery to our sinful nature.

Freedom from the penalty of sin.

If we trust in Jesus, then we're not facing an eternity separated from God and his goodness.

And freedom from the power of sin so that we don't have to sin anymore.

We're not compelled to keep on sinning like we once were.

It seems like sheer madness that, having tasted that freedom, we'd want to do anything that would put that freedom in danger.

Paul can't believe that anyone would follow another gospel, "which is really no gospel at all" (1:7).

Any other "gospel" isn't good news – it's bad news – because it's slavery rather than freedom.

But that's exactly what the churches in the region of Galatia were in danger of doing.

They were under threat from a group of people called the Judaizers.

Remember, this letter wasn't written all that long after the time of Jesus.

The message of Jesus' death and resurrection travelled from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and then out to the outlying areas of the known world.

Regions like Galatia.

Where did the first Christians come from? They didn't just appear.

Some of them were converted from other religions – worshipping all kinds of different gods like the Roman and Greek gods.

Many of the first Christians were converted from Judaism though.

Which makes sense because the fulfilment of all the promises made to the Jews by God Almighty find their fulfilment in Jesus.

He is the hope that they were looking and hoping for.

The Judaizers were a group of people in the church.

They quite happily called themselves Christians, but you could tell who they were because they started saying that you've got to add some extra things on.

If you really want the fullness of God's blessing (they'd say), if you really want to please God, then you've also got to follow the Torah, the Jewish Law as a Christian.

According to them, you can't be saved by faith in Jesus alone, but by Jesus AND the Law.

In other words, they'd basically de-converted from Christianity.

They're hitting the rewind button and going back to Judaism.

You can have a Jewish Christian – that's someone who is a Jew by blood but comes to see Judaism fulfilled in Christ.

But these Judaizers, although they might say stuff about Jesus, they're missing the central truth of the Christian faith: grace.

Grace – a gift from God that can't be earned.

There's nothing we can do to earn our salvation; we simply need to trust in Jesus alone by faith.

The one thing Paul's really clear about is that we certainly don't need to add the Law given to Israel on top.

The Judaizers might've called themselves Christians, but they were denying the very heart of the gospel message and so they're not really Christians at all.

They were denying the one thing that makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world.

Salvation in Jesus, the solution to life and all our problems, doesn't lie in what you can do.

It lies in what Jesus has already done.

I'm sure you've heard it put like this before:

Jesus + Nothing = Everything

Jesus + Anything = Nothing

John says that Jesus can set us free.

And if he sets you free, you really are free.

**John 8:36** NIV11 <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

To then go and add on any other requirements – like the Judaizers were doing – is totally crazy.

If I was to paraphrase what Paul says about them, it'd be that they're absolutely nuts. Stark raving bonkers. Completely irrational.

Add any more rules to trusting in Jesus alone is to move from freedom to slavery.

It's a backwards step.

Like a criminal who gets released only to commit another crime so that she loses her freedom again.

**Galatians 5:1** NIV11 <sup>1</sup> 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.

## Outline

In our passages this morning, we're going to see that you'd be nuts to try adding anything to Jesus.

**Jesus frees us from law we can't keep so that we can serve others.**

In this passage, Paul gives two problems and one benefit.

- False Freedom (vv2-6)
- Fight for Freedom (vv7-12)
- Freedom for Philia (vv13-15)

## False Freedom (vv2-6)

Firstly, he addresses the false freedom of the Judaizers.

The Judaizers were saying that circumcision was essential to being a Christian.

That might seem pretty hard to believe in twenty-first century Australia where it's considered barbaric.

Yet in the Old Testament, it was the key physical symbol that marked you out as belonging to the people of God.

It was the sign that showed that you followed Torah, the Law.

We know that the Judaizers in Galatia weren't the only ones saying this because according to the history of the early church that Luke recorded:

**Acts 15:1** NIV11 <sup>1</sup> Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

Paul's got a really different take on things.

Far from thinking that there'll be any advantage to following the requirements of the Law like circumcision, he says that it has the potential to ruin everything.

It's not required and so requiring it undermines grace.

He backs this up in chapter two by saying that there was no reason for Titus, who was Greek, to undergo this painful procedure.<sup>1</sup>

But every reason not to because it would add works to grace.

**Galatians 2:3** NIV11 <sup>3</sup> Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.

It's like getting your first, brand new smartphone.

Some of you can't remember what it was like before smartphones, but you probably remember what it was like not to have a phone at all.

It's like having a smartphone and then going back to your trusty Nokia 3310 or no phone at all.

Clearly a backwards step.

Or back in the day, the upgrade to Windows 95 was dramatic.

Going back to Windows 3.11 was a backwards step.

It's just inconceivable that you'd take it.

Paul says that if you think that you have to get circumcised, then you've got to keep the whole law.

You can't just pick and choose some bits and not others, and that's burdensome.

If that one law is absolutely necessary, then so are the other 612 laws of the Old Testament are as well.

Old Testament laws a bit like Pokémon, you've got to catch 'em all.

Back in chapter three, he made clear that to have life under the Law, you've got to do everything the law says, perfectly (3:10-12).

And the thing is that you can't.

You simply can't make yourself right with God by following the Law.

That's not freedom, that's slavery to be constantly trying to be righteous in a way you can't ever achieve.

The problem is that they're trying to be JUSTIFIED by the law, verse four.

Paul's clearly talking about salvation here.

Trying to be justified – made right with God – by anything other than Jesus alienates you from him.

It's not grace anymore.

Now you've got salvation by works, not salvation by grace.

The only way to be saved is by grace.

There's absolutely nothing that you can do to earn your salvation.

There's nothing that you can do to make God pleased with you.

Or to put it in even stronger terms like Paul does: you're saying that what Jesus did wasn't good enough.

If you've got to do more to be saved, then what Jesus did wasn't enough.

Perhaps you're wondering what to do with Timothy?

So was I because in Acts 16:3, Paul puts him under the knife.

Is Paul a hypocrite because he encouraged Tim to get circumcised. What gives?

Unlike Titus who was Greek, Timothy was Jewish by race and by training.

The other difference is who they were ministering to and so we get back into the territory that we covered yesterday afternoon.

Timothy didn't do it for people who claimed to be Christians (like the Judaizers in Galatia), but for people who claimed to be Jews – people who don't consider Jesus to be the Messiah.

I also think we can also answer that question from verse six.

If you're in Jesus, then it actually doesn't matter whether you're circumcised or not.

See, getting the operation or not isn't really the thing that matters to Paul.

It's what you understand by it that makes the difference.

If you think that's the thing that's going to change your life, then it's not.

Circumcision isn't harmful or bad or sinful or stupid or old-fashioned – you can take it or leave it.

The thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

What ultimately counts isn't lying or stealing your way to the top.

Or even having a good time along the way.

That's actually an empty path, verse six:

**Galatians 5:6b** NIV11 The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

You might think, that's all very crazy, but what's it really got to do with us?

After all, most of us aren't in any danger of becoming Jewish.

Well, you might be surprised to know that there are people who do exactly that.

I think they kind of get drawn in by the idea that Judaism is where it all started and then it sort of becomes that you've got to practice certain stuff to be a fully-fledged Christian.

Aside from that though, I think that this has relevance for all of us because all of us are in danger of losing our freedom.

Yesterday, Geoff talked about cheap grace.

There's a genuine error if we say that we're saved by grace and so it doesn't really matter what we do.

That's not taking seriously Jesus as the Lord of your life.

I'm groaning that I'm about to say it, but "justification isn't just a vacation."

Here we see the opposite error which comes by adding anything else onto Jesus.

We call this legalism.

I like Todd Wilson's definition: "Legalism is treating that which is good as though it were essential."

What you think is essential pushes out that which actually is essential – the gospel.

The way that you parent, financial management, Scripture memory, prayer, mission involvement, or coping with health.

They're some common things that we can make essential.

Scripture teaches us that faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus alone will save us.

Not pride in any of these other things as a means of being a better Christian.

This's true theologically, but it's also true practically.

We tend to talk about what we love and what excites us.

When we start adding things on, that's the stuff that we find ourselves talking about and focusing on and the essential truths of the gospel get sidelined.

So, a good way to stop ourselves from falling into that trap is to make sure that we keep focusing on the gospel.

Keep talking about the central truths of the gospel and there just isn't going to be space to let anything from the edges dominate.

We need to be careful of what we might – even accidentally – try to make necessary for salvation.

Neither voting Labor or Liberal, or even One Nation or the Greens matters, but faith working through love.

Neither Arminianism nor Calvinism ultimately counts, but only faith working through love.

Neither hymns, Psalms only nor contemporary music ultimately counts, but only faith working through love.

Neither the Extra Spiritual Version, the Nearly Infallible Version or the Kingly Jargon Version, the Close Enough Version or the Controlled by Southern Baptists Version, but only faith working through love.

Neither premillennialism nor amillennialism ultimately counts, but only faith working through love.

Any other freedom other than the freedom that come from faith in Jesus alone isn't freedom at all.

It's slavery.

Don't go backwards by trying to add anything on to the gospel.

## **Fight for Freedom (vv7-12)**

Secondly, fight for the freedom of the gospel.

There are people who will try and steal your joy by trying to steal your freedom.

Paul is warning about people who are joy killers because they're freedom killers.

I like how one person has said:

*“We know we've lost sight of what ultimately counts in the Christian life when we begin to lose the joy of living the Christian life.”*

You need to be on the lookout for people who try to kill the gospel by adding to it.

There were people in Galatia who did it on purpose and they were telling other people to do the same thing.

Whether it's accidental or on purpose, you can't give ground on this because it's so important.

This is so important that Paul was prepared to fight for it.

**Galatians 2:4–5** NIV11 <sup>4</sup>This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. <sup>5</sup>We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

We all know that road rage isn't a good thing.

You're driving along in traffic when someone cuts you off.

Road rage is that urge to make some comment about their parentage, their eyesight or to speculate about which cereal box they might've got their licence from.

Not godly responses.

But Paul seems to be quite happy with a little bit of spiritual rage.

He describes the Galatians as running a good gospel race when these Judaizers come and cut them off.

It seems like Paul used a witty double-entendre here in the Greek.

The Judaizers are trying to keep the true Christians from obeying the truth by cutting them off, using circumcision.

The kind of persuasion that cuts you off from freedom and the gospel isn't the kind that comes from God.

It's not the truth, but it'll work through the whole lot if it's left unchecked.

That's the point of the little analogy about yeast that he gives there in verse nine.

But Paul's confident that they won't fall into that trap because it's a trap that leads to getting a penalty.

Like speeding will earn you a fine, adding to the gospel will cost you eternal life.

Paul says that's not what he teaches.

Remember that he himself was a Jew who converted to Christianity and he copped a lot of flack for it.

Even the Romans respected Judaism as an ancient religion and for the most part, allowed them to do what they wanted.

If he was teaching Jesus + Judaism, then there wouldn't be a problem.

There'd be at least a veneer of unity, but not based on truth.

He's more interested in pleasing God than man (1:10) and so he's been persecuted for what it teaches.

He's willing to wear the persecution because the Christian message is foolishness to those who are perishing.

That there's really nothing we can do to save ourselves sounds deeply and profoundly stupid.

That your life can and will be profoundly changed by believing in a bloke who got himself executed two thousand years ago sounds ridiculous.

The cross is offensive because it says that you simply can't dig yourself out.

Your works are disgusting and smelly.

Your best thoughts and efforts count for absolutely nothing.

That's absolutely offensive.

But it's true.

So, we will fight for Christian freedom and lift our large heads high.

By nature, I like to stir people up and be controversial.

I generally try my best to not do that unnecessarily when I'm preaching.

And when it comes to controversial topics in particular, I typically try to take my cues from Scripture.

I do my best not to go beyond what Scripture says.

And what I find is that Scripture is often happy to go further than what I'm really willing to do.

This's one of those places.

Paul says that these agitators may as well got the whole hog.

If they're going to try and cut others off, he wishes that they'd cut themselves off instead.

Go the whole way and take out their own power so that they can't reproduce.

Verse 12:

**Galatians 5:12** NIV11 <sup>12</sup> As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

We need to fight against those who want to take us from the gospel that gives us freedom.

Beware of anyone who tries to tell you that you need to add anything to what Jesus has done for you.

I'm serious.

Anyone including (and perhaps especially) me.

The apostle Peter was a spiritual giant.

A wimp at times but a close personal friend of Jesus during his earthly ministry, and a spiritual leader in the church.

In chapter 2 Paul talks about how he had to stand up to Peter when he started adding to the gospel.

Even Barnabas was led astray.

But he did it, not to win the argument, but because that very gospel was at stake.

We need to fight for freedom.

## Freedom for Philia (vv13-15)

Finally, freedom for Philia.

By the way, I want to make clear that I'm picking up on the Greek word for love here, not the largest grassroots feminist festival in Europe.

In verse thirteen, Paul begins a long appeal.

It's an appeal to his fellow Christians – brothers and sisters and not the Judaizers.

This leads into the famous words about the fruit of the Spirit that you probably know in chapter five.

Paul reminds them that, quite simply, to be Christian is to be free.

As we just saw, that's what God's called us to.

I don't know about you, but I'm not sure that I talk about the Christian life that way very often.

I'm not sure that I even THINK about the Christian life that way very much.

Do you remember when you became a Christian and it felt like a huge weight had been lifted from your shoulders?

That moment when you realised that you were freed from having to impress people anymore (including yourself) because you are unconditionally accepted by God.

As Christians, we're free from the cycle of constant disappointment because we can't keep God's Law.

Freedom from the crushing weight of trying to be good enough.

That's true, but I need to recalibrate in my head that freedom's about me.

From a young age we get taught that freedom is about being able to do whatever I want.

Who's heard of a primary schooler being asked to speculate about what they'd do if they have three wishes or if they won a million dollars.

Perhaps a great creative exercise, but built on the assumption that having either of those things will give you the freedom because you can do whatever you want.

We all know how people typically answer that question – using our freedom to indulge ourselves.

A pack of Tim Tams that never runs out? Yes, please!

Paul says the complete opposite.

Because we've been saved, we've got the freedom to serve.

That's the main point

Freedom from Law doesn't mean freedom from all moral obligations – quite the opposite – but it's not a freedom to serve ourselves.

Have a look at the second half of verse 13:

**Galatians 5:13** NIV11 But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

This's a profound insight that's not coming from me, but from Paul and ultimately from God himself.

Life under the law causes more sin, but the life of freedom is the life of love.

The Christian freedom won for us by Jesus at the cross will be expressed in love.

More literal translations of the Greek will show Paul's wordplay more clearly.

Don't use your freedom to indulge, but to be slaves of one another.

Apart from Jesus, no one has ever been able to keep all the obligations under the Law.

Here we discover that the whole law can be fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself", verse fourteen.

Notice that the law isn't just summarised in this verse.

The whole Law is FULFILLED in living out the command to love your neighbour as yourself.

The freedom that's found in Christ is the freedom to be able to live out the command that fulfils the whole law.

Perhaps you're wondering about Matthew 22 and the discussion Jesus has with one of the experts in the Law in Israel.

Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God and the second is like it – to love your neighbour.

Paul's not denying that.

It's only when you're in Christ and have been freed to truly love God that you're free to love others.

In fact, you can't really love others unless you love God.

I think that one of the helpfully confronting moments in the Life Course (which starts on Monday!) is when we talk about the two greatest commandments.

At our time and place, people are generally happy to talking about loving others.

Just quietly, I'm not sure that what most people mean by that is truly altruistic love of others so much as finding fulfilment in yourself by helping others, but that's another story.

The much more important point is that I find many people are keen about the love others part of what Jesus says – that's essential – but they fiercely say that the love God part is optional.

God's saved us from our sin so that we'll love him and serve others.

Don't miss the importance of this because the stakes are probably even higher than you think.

If you don't use your freedom to humbly serve one another in love, you're going to harm each other.

To use Paul's words, we'll destroy each other.

We'll bite one another up, chew one another up and then spit them out.

Is there anything uglier than seeing Christians tear each other apart in the blogosphere for the world to see?

I know you've seen it happen.

Two Christians going at it hammer and tong – getting personal and playing the man or woman and not the idea – using their freedom in Christ to indulge their flesh rather than to serve humbly in love.

Yes, there is something uglier and that's when it happens in person.

Truth matters and there are lines that we need to draw, as Paul clearly does in this passage.

He's not just allowing anyone who calls themselves a Christian a free pass if they're messing with the gospel.

So often, it's the way we do things that are the problem more than the way we do them.

How something's said is often more important than the content of what you're saying.

Christian free speech means being slow to tear each other down over things that aren't the gospel – things that are preferences or just plain unclear.

We haven't been given freedom to indulge our fleshly desires, but to love others.

## Conclusion

Freedom is a wonderful gift from God.

God has called us to be free from the slavery to sin which constantly entangles us and enjoy the freedom to be able to serve others.

That's the blessing you've received, if you're a Christian.

If you're not a Christian, what are you waiting for?

Freedom awaits if you'll confess your sin and turn to Jesus!

The great irony is that we think that if we live as kings and queens, then we'll be free.

But true freedom is found when you have Jesus as king.

Freedom is so precious that it's worth grabbing hold of tightly and fighting for.

Only the gospel and the gospel alone can free us.

We've come to fight as free men, and free men we are.

What will you do without freedom? Will you fight?

We will give our lives, but they will never take our freedom.

Okay, it sounds better when William Wallace says his version, even though his version of freedom isn't actually near as good as what the gospel offers.

So we'll close with Paul's words from chapter six instead:

**Galatians 6:14–15** NIV11 <sup>14</sup> May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup> Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 2:3

# They Won't Take Our Freedom

Galatians 5:1-15

9 October 2022 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

**Big Question:** What is the purpose of the freedom that we have in the gospel?

**Big Idea:** Jesus frees us from law we can't keep so that we can serve others.

## Discussion Questions

1. What's your mental picture of freedom?
2. Who were the Judaizers and what were they teaching?
3. What are the problems of adding things to the gospel?
4. How would you describe legalism in your own words?
5. How important to Paul was defending gospel essentials?
6. What does it look like to use your freedom to indulge the flesh?
7. What are the consequences of using your freedom for yourself?