



# GOAL OF FREEDOM

SERIES: GALATIANS: JOURNEY FROM LAW TO FREEDOM

Galatians 5:13–15

8th Message

Joel Taylor

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This past Friday was a bit more exciting than I would have liked!

Hoping to have a quiet day at church, putting the finishing touches on this sermon, I had just arrived and sat down in my office when I received a call that the internet technician had, while drilling a hole through my kitchen wall to run internet cable, hit the water pipe. Now, it turns out that ‘hitting the water pipe’ was a bit of an understatement, in that the technicians aim was near perfect and he had gone straight through the middle of the plastic water pipe!

If you enjoy a good example of British understatement, you’ll appreciate my sister’s text: ‘having a bit of trouble with the WiFi technician,’ sent while standing in a lake in my dining room.

When I shared my tale of woe with those in the church office, they responded very spiritually with this question: ‘so Joel, what do you think God is trying to teach you about freedom, since you’re preaching on it this Sunday?’ To which I replied, ‘that freedom is good for those who are in Christ and have the Spirit, and not so good for water inside my house!’

On a more serious note, earlier this summer, I took a poll on what freedom is. By that I mean that I texted a few unsuspecting friends within the church with this question: what does freedom mean to you?

The overwhelming response was that Freedom is being able to do whatever you want without any consequences!

If we’re honest with ourselves, I think that most, if not all of us, would like that to be the case, even if we’ve been Christians for long enough to know that’s not how it really works! And yet, is there not some part of you that thinks, ‘yeah, but if only that were so. That would really be freedom, wouldn’t it? That would be True Freedom!’ I know I feel that pull.

My desire this morning is for us to discover a True-er Freedom. A True-er Freedom even than the seemingly boundless freedom offered by the ability to act without consequences.

Last week, at the end of his message, Bernard touched on Galatians 5:1, and that’s where we’re going to begin this morning, establishing our Freedom, before we move to verses 13–15 and what Paul instructs us to do with our Freedom.

**For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1 ESV)**

We have been set free for Freedom.

## So What *is* Freedom?

Let’s clarify a few things right off the bat, we are...

### 1. Always serving someone

We are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness, as Paul makes very clear in Romans 6:15–18:

**15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:15–18)**

We are always doing what someone or something wants! Let’s rethink this idea of being free as doing whatever you want without any consequences. You’re not actually free. You are serving (or in Paul’s language, you are a slave to) your own desires. It’s your own desires that are, after all, defining and driving your choices. And even if there are no legal or parental consequences to your actions, there are life consequences and heart consequences.

You only have to watch a movie or TV show where the main characters do whatever they want or whatever they feel they “need to do,” and watch the downward progression. Even before external consequences catch up to them, you can already see the toll that’s being taken on them personally, what it’s doing to them.

If we’re always serving someone, then our freedom is:

### 2. Defined by our master

So choose a good one!”Myself” is not a good master to serve! Plus, Myself has been infiltrated by sin, tainted and twisted by selfish desires. The key piece of that sin is a strong belief that God is not a good master. This deception is the same one that happened way back at the Fall, when Adam and Eve were deceived, and convinced by Satan that God was, in fact, holding something back from them. Something vital, something amazing. So they chose Myself.

This is the deception they believed:

**For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:5)**

Satan paints a picture of this wide open vista, this amazing view, this glorious *freedom* that Adam and Eve could enter into... if only God weren’t so tight-fisted, so restrictive. Those first humans were no match for such a delightfully seductive vision of True Freedom, and so they were destroyed.

And every generation since then has been unable to resist this idea, that God is holding out on them, that there is a better

freedom. We have this grand vista of enjoyment and pleasure and life, if only we could get away from this restrictive God and all His rules.

This desire for freedom to do whatever we want without consequences is not a new idea! Quite the contrary. Old as time itself, this idea has shaped human history. It has shaped the people of God, despite the Law that God gave His people to serve as a fence to protect them.

But...

### 3. Law does not fix the problem/Law does not bring freedom

The Law, which was given to God's people, was a good thing for a time. It was good because it was a fence, keeping God's people inside some boundaries, showing us the consequences of our actions and what actions we should take as the people of God in order to 'be holy as He is holy'. *But*, the Law could do nothing about what lay in our hearts, specifically our desire to do whatever we want without the consequences. All the law could do was get us (sometimes!) to do things God's way in order to avoid the negative consequences.

Now hopefully you're thinking, well, Joel, when you put it that way, who in their right mind would want law?!

To which I say, *exactly!* Although unfortunately I can't take credit, because Paul said it first. He has a habit of doing that.

Now there's just a couple of little problems here...

- We aren't in our right minds. You can thank sin for that!
- Being under the Law allows us to keep our ungodly desires, even if the Law prohibits us from acting on them. Revenge is the perfect example of this; we may never act out our desire for revenge (because of the Law and the consequences), but that doesn't prevent us from thinking up a hundred different ways to get said revenge. And that can be quite satisfying in its own right...or so I've been told. Absolutely no personal experience in this area, not this guy!

### 4. Christ fixes the problem/Christ brings Freedom

But now, Paul says, Christ has fulfilled the Law, i.e. taken it to its final intended destination and then gone beyond. Christ has paid the penalty (all the consequences) of our law-breaking, brought us into a right relationship to God, and given us a second chance to live in God's True-er Freedom. Not only that, but for those of us who have accepted Christ's free gift of a second chance, God has sent His Spirit into our hearts. His Spirit enables us to live in Freedom and to deal with our hearts that desire to be free from God.

So what is Freedom?

Well it's not doing whatever we want; that's the fast-track to slavery!

And it's certainly not doing whatever others want us to do; that's the faster-track to slavery!

Counter intuitive though it sounds, the path to greatest Freedom is being a slave to Jesus Christ (how Paul often refers to himself). But, Christian or not, we will constantly be fighting against this concept until we fully accept that there is no option where we serve no one. We are always serving a master. Outside

of God, the best we can hope for is to at least be serving *ourselves* (versus being forced to serve someone else). But we've already seen that that is no Freedom.

In fact, God is the only master who delivers freedom! Plenty of other masters promise Freedom, but those promises always prove false, like a mirage in the desert.

This is a concept that takes a while to fully digest and take in. But for now, let's move ahead and see...

### what to *do* with our Freedom!

**13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. Galatians 5:13-15**

In verse 13, Paul says two things; do this, and don't do this:

1. DO serve one another through love
2. DON'T use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh

Then, in verse 14, he expands on the *do*. And in verse 15, he expands on the *don't*.

This passage has got to be the simplest passage in the entire book, as in easiest to understand. And yet, as is the case with all these 'easy-to-understand' passages, it is so hard to live out!

### First, the *do*

Serve one another in love, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

In middle school group (otherwise known as ToHu), we've been going through Galatians as well this summer.

Last week, I was heading towards the end of my teaching (we too were covering Hagar and Sarah). I was mid-flow, expounding on the wonderful truth that we are no longer slaves, but sons and daughters, not children of the slave woman but children of the free woman, when this hand goes up. I pause for the question, thinking perhaps something wasn't clear about what I was saying, and instead am presented this question: 'so does this mean we no longer have to obey any rules or laws?'

Great question!

The key to answering this question is contained in the *do*. Serve one another in love, and love your neighbor as yourself.

While most of us naturally think that the Law is more demanding than our new Freedom, and therefore that Freedom's lower standard of morality must leave us vulnerable to sins, on closer inspection it becomes clear that Freedom in Christ actually calls us to a much *higher* standard.

The Law did indeed call God's people to love their neighbors, however it also put restrictions on who exactly one's neighbor was. Generally speaking, that was the Israelites and any aliens living among them. Jesus said, you know those people you hate (those dirty Samaritans)? Well they're your neighbors, and, by extension, so is everyone else.

The Law did indeed call/require God's people to serve each other (as a requirement for living in community), but the Law could do nothing about how you felt about it. Jesus calls us not only to serve one another, but to actually have love in our hearts while we do so.

The Law is satisfied by the completion of an act of service, no matter how resentful we feel while doing it. Jesus, not so much!

Sometimes, in the church, we are afraid to tell people they're truly Free. We like to include a few caveats or guidelines (which are really just rules and a new Law). Heaven forbid that people actually thought they were free! We shudder to think what might happen then. Something close to anarchy, or other nightmarish situations, plays through our minds.

If we are to believe Paul, though, everything would look the same, if not better! The Spirit at work in our hearts, calls us to a far higher standard than the Law could ever call us to.

And so, although we say it's because we don't trust people, we must ask ourselves if in fact we do not trust that God's Spirit is powerful enough to transform people's hearts.

It's hard to blame to us! We have seen the depths of the darkness within our own hearts, and we have experienced some of those depths in other people's hearts directed towards us. And I do not belittle or take anything away from the horror of that. I know the horror that I feel when I look at the depths of darkness within my own heart.

No! It is not that the darkness is any less, but rather that the Spirit of the Living God is greater than we seem to acknowledge. This is, after all, the Spirit of God that raised Christ Jesus from the dead, the third person of the trinity, you know, *God!* This Spirit is up to the task, more than capable of handling the challenge, and sufficient for all the transformations that all of our hearts require.

Indeed, if you have trusted in Jesus Christ and committed your life to Him, that work has already begun, and is a continuing and ongoing work in your heart and life. In fact, even if you have not yet trusted in Jesus, the simple fact that you are here, listening to God's message of freedom, means that, even now, God is performing that freeing work.

### **There is, however, a *don't* that we can choose**

Don't bite and devour one another!

What I find most interesting about this *don't* is the reason not to do it. Paul doesn't say, 'don't bite and devour one another because that's really mean,' or, 'because that's gonna make life unpleasant for those around you,' or even 'because that's gonna cause disunity within the church.' Although all those things are true, he simply says, 'watch out or your biting and devouring will be turned on *you*, and you will be consumed.'

You don't enter into this kind of behavior because of *you*. It's you that's going to be consumed. And I don't think Paul is saying that the other effects are unimportant, but in terms of freedom, it's very important to understand that if you go in this direction with your freedom, you will be consumed by it, and, in terms of your freedom, you will no longer be living in freedom.

This is not really a theological comment about losing freedom/salvation, but more that, quite simply, you will not be enjoying (or living into) any of the freedom that you could be enjoying in Christ. You will be consumed by this attitude of biting and devouring.

This is a very practical manner. When we are tearing someone else down, how much freedom in Christ are we experiencing? However difficult, discouraging, and enslaving it may be for the other person, Paul clearly says that it will be enslaving for us!

I think we know this to be true. Bitterness, critique, gossip, verbal attacks—none of these bring freedom! They are obstacles that we throw in the way of the Spirit's freeing work in our lives.

The world is a cut-throat place, especially here in the Bay Area. Whether at work, school, keeping up our social status, maintaining our place in our friendship groups, moving up at work, or even at home (wherever we allow these attitudes to creep in), there is much tearing down, much biting and devouring.

Friends, brothers and sisters, it should not be this way among you. It should not be this way in our church, in our families.

It is so easy to be critical, to tear down, to bite and devour. I do this to my wife, to the church leadership, to church services, to friends. And you know what? None of it brings freedom! None.

PBCC is known as a grace-based church, and compared to many other churches, we live in amazing freedom. But compared to the full Freedom God wants for us, we are nowhere close!

I want Freedom!

And no matter how you feel on this particular morning, the Spirit of God, the powerful Spirit of the Almighty and Living God inside you, wants Freedom!

We know all this! We know that we have Freedom. (Well, I'm sure hoping you do after this summer in Galatians.) This probably isn't brand-new stuff to most of you. We know we have Freedom, but we don't live in Freedom. And herein lies the issue...

### **How do we live *into* Freedom?**

Our Freedom is already fully given to us. Living *into* that Freedom is a process. It that takes time. Firstly, it's definitely not about human effort. It's not about trying to make God's promise happen by our own strength, on our own time line, as Ishmael & Hagar represented in our passage from last week. It's not about doing more or being better or anything like that. And I don't believe there's a switch we can flip or a silver bullet that will just 'make it happen.'

Living *into* our Freedom happens through our relationship to God, as we walk by the Spirit. Living *into* our Freedom happens in relationship to our Master. Living *into* our Freedom happens slowly (or so it often feels to us). But living *into* our Freedom *happens*—not as fast as we would wish, maybe, not in the way we would choose, perhaps. But by the grace of God, by the sacrifice of the Son, and by the continual, transforming work of the ever-present Spirit, living into our Freedom *happens*. Praise God!

Next week, Ryan will take us through the second half of chapter 5, where Paul expounds what this looks like in greater

details. That's going to be very helpful in fleshing this all out. But this week, I'd like to simply give you a chance to respond.

True-est Freedom is only found with God as our Master. He calls us to serve one another in love, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This happens not by human effort, not by trying harder or being better. This happens by submitting to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, allowing Him to continue His freeing work in our lives.

And so before we close our service, and all the concerns of our lives come back into the foreground, I want to invite you receive prayer. We all need to experience more Freedom in our lives. None of us are fully living into the Freedom that is available to us. I invite you to spend time communicating with God and enjoying His presence, His freeing presence. Pray with your neighbors, with your friends and family members, and pray for each other. Give and receive a blessing on the work of Freedom that God's Spirit is already doing in your hearts, that it would continue, and that it would increase. My desire is that this blessing will allow you to live into your Freedom in greater and greater ways.

*As you submit to the transforming work of the Spirit in your life*

*May you serve one another in love*

*May you love your neighbor as yourself*

*And may you know the True-est Freedom, a life lived in relationship to the Father, because of the sacrifice of the Son, through the transforming power of the Spirit!*

*It is for Freedom that Christ has set you Free!*

*Go in True-est Freedom!*

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