

Only Jesus

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[0:00] Amen. I wonder how do you find a menu when you go out and eat?! How do you find a menu? Perhaps you find it quite easy to make a decision with them.

! I don't. Perhaps you're like that. You look at a menu and there's many options you could have. Sometimes you just want to eat it all. And you spend ages trying to find out what are you going to eat?

What are you going to choose from it? That's a problem I have more often than not. I was so happy about a year or so ago when Becky and I were eating out somewhere.

We had the dessert menu and I wanted all the desserts. I couldn't decide between any of them. And then I spotted towards the bottom of the menu three mini versions of the desserts that can be on your plate plus a coffee for the price of a big dessert.

And I was like, well, that's clearly made for me. Indecisive me. When it comes to living our lives, there's all sorts of options on the menu, isn't there?

[1:10] All sorts of religions, all sorts of beliefs, philosophies that we could follow. All sorts of people we could follow. All sorts of influences on social media that you could choose to live your life by.

I was watching an episode of Songs of Praise. It's a vaguely Christian program on the BBC a few weeks ago.

And they were interviewing a couple of people who said they were Christian and Sikh at the same time. And I was a bit puzzled. How can you be two religions at the same time?

That doesn't really fit with Galatians. Where Paul is saying on the menu for living your life should be only Jesus. No other.

And the problem, as we reminded ourselves earlier in the Galatian church, was not another religion, but turning to the Jewish law. Jesus is not enough, they were being told, and so they were turning to something else.

[2:20] But when it comes to the forgiveness of our sins, when it comes to going to heaven, we can't choose but to have three little options. There is only one option on the menu.

It must only be Jesus. Jesus is the only way to God. The Bible tells us. It's only by the name of Jesus that we can call out to be saved.

It's only through him, through faith in him, that we can go to heaven. The Galatians have completely lost sight of this. And so Paul, throughout this letter, is lovingly pleading with these dear people.

You need Jesus. Anything other than him is slavery. A fool was sharing with us in the prayer meeting the other day that he's heard of other religions where get something wrong and you've got to wash your face or wash something.

It's good to wash, isn't it? You'll be glad I had a shower this morning. But that's not going to cleanse my evil hearts. That's not going to sort out my sin problem. That's not going to sort out my broken relationship with God.

[3:42] The law. Following laws. Following rituals. It's a real burden.

We shared this last week. I think it might play. It's a step machine. You find them at gyms, particularly. That's what the law is like. You keep stepping up, but you're never going to get any higher.

It's not a good way to be living. It holds you in slavery. But the gospel, Jesus Christ, sets us free. We've read that verse already. Galatians 5.1. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Jesus is your only menu option.

But when we hear that, when we hear the gospel, there is two errors that we can easily fall into instead of trusting Jesus alone to save us.

[4:49] Error number one is legalism. That's where the Galatians have fallen foul. Thinking we need to do more because Jesus' work for us isn't enough.

And we start obeying those laws. Or the second thing. Don't worry about the word antinomianism. Don't worry about the word.

It means to live thinking, now that I'm free in Christ, now that I've been declared righteous in his sight because of Jesus, I am free to sin as I please.

It gives you a license to sin. But that's not how the Bible calls us to live when we're free in Christ. Yes, we can be assured that when we sin, it is forgiven if we're trusting in Jesus alone. But that's not what our freedom looks like, to just say, I've got a license now to sin, to do as I please.

[6:01] And so this passage helps us to think rightly, what does our freedom in Christ look like? And here's an illustration before we get into some points. I think I've shared this with you before, a long time ago.

I've passed my driving test. There are many of us who have passed our driving test. I've got a driving license. I am free to drive in this country. But that doesn't mean that I'm free to drive up Viaduct Road at 60 miles an hour.

I can enjoy my freedom to drive on the road as long as I do it within the laws of the road. If I abuse that freedom and go through red lights and drive over speed limits and run over pedestrians, I'm not going to be driving for long.

I'm not going to be enjoying that freedom for long. And for us who know Jesus as our savior, we are free in him.

We're free now to enjoy a relationship with him. As our father, we're his children. But we're not called to be abusing that freedom.

[7:14] If God has saved us and yet we neglect talking to him in prayer. If we do wild things, get drunk on a Friday night and think it doesn't matter.

It's okay to live like that as a Christian. If we take God's name in vain. If we lie whenever we see fit. We're going to end up in a bit of a mess. And we're not going to enjoy that freedom that Christ has set us free for.

Really, that's looking again to ourselves. Looking inward. Looking to our own desires. And that's not going to be good.

Our hearts are sinful. Sin is still lurking in there, isn't it? Deceives us. It can only be through Jesus that we're saved.

It's only in him that we're free. So what does that freedom look like? Three things from this passage. And actually, I think the rest of Galatians helps us to think about this.

[8:26] So keep coming over the next few weeks as we explore. What does this freedom look like? Well, firstly, we're free to stand. Free to stand. Stand firm. Stand firm.

Stand firm. Stand firm. Stand firm. Stand firm is the call there in verse 1.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm. Stand firm. And do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Stand firm. Remember that the only option for living is standing on the work of Jesus. Jesus alone. Only Jesus. Jesus. when it comes to God when it comes to our relationship with God there is no other place to stand we're free to be indecisive about other things like menus, like choosing three desserts in one we're not free to follow three different parts of living we need to stand firm on the work of Jesus and it's important, so important for these Galatians that they hear this truth because they've got people coming to them with other options on the menu not just Jesus, but law and circumcision and ethnicity do you see that there in verse 2?

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 people were saying, go back to the law go back to your testament and its ways be circumcised but do that, Paul says and you are showing that you're not trusting in only Jesus you're taking two things off the menu when there should only be one you cannot have both

and so if you go ahead and do this Christ will be of no value to you Christ is of great value in him is fullness of life but if we're saying I'm not going to trust in him I'm going to do that outward work of circumcision then that's no good that's of no value verse 3 and 4

[11:19] Paul makes it even clearer again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the law as if you go ahead and do this well then you've also got to have law on the menu you're showing that's the way you want to live not the gospel way not the only Jesus way stand firm on him and his work don't let yourselves be burdened by the yoke of the law Paul says to them down in verse 11 this 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 he's saying to them I wouldn't be persecuted if I preach that you can be saved by circumcision you wouldn't have a problem with me because it would be appealing to our human egos it would be appealing to that desire to contribute something to our salvation and he's making sure don't be swayed don't be swayed by others and for those that are trying to persuade you there's more on the menu verse 12 says this as for those agitators

I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves I will let you think and imagine the consequences of that yourself but this is how serious it is this is how important it is to stand firm on only Jesus and Paul is saying this in love for them verse 7 you were running a good race you were doing so well and I could cheer you on but now you've come off course you were running on the right track and now you've gone way off but it's not too late to come back into the race it's not too late to come back to Jesus and remember you're free in him come back and remember Jesus has done everything for you so you don't need to be going off to be circumcised you don't need to be trying to follow the law stand firm in Jesus it's vital for salvation stand firm the reformation was an extraordinary time in church history the predominant view in Europe and beyond was salvation by works at that point in terms of Christian things legalism do this do that and God will be pleased with you and you may know that the thing that triggered the reformation was Martin Luther a monk in Germany and he at one point was climbing up these steps in Rome and not just walking up them as you might ordinarily do on steps but sort of crawling on his knees going up and down them as many times as he could to try and get some time off purgatory and then these words came to his mind from the Bible that says the righteous will live by faith and I thought no Martin what am I doing it's faith in Jesus that's how I made righteous not by climbing up and down these steps and then maybe I'll get to heaven no faith in Jesus alone and sort of a way you can summarize the teaching of the reformation time is in five solas five alones salvation is revealed in scripture alone by grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone and for God's glory alone and really that's a summary of the teaching of the Bible you could summarize Galatians like that that's what Paul is saying to them salvation it's revealed in scripture alone by grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone and for God's glory alone so why look anywhere else don't mess about with this just stand firm on it stand firm on Christ it is like we need to sort of draw this imaginary circle in our lives and stand ourselves in the middle of it and that circle says Christ

I'm standing on Christ alone and I won't go anywhere else because he is the one I depend on for my salvation but that's the way we ought to be living that's the way we need to remind ourselves of every day is how quickly we can go to the legalism or the other way of thinking oh I can just do as I please no stand on Christ we ended the service last week with these wonderful words on Christ a solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sands we're in trouble when we look away from Jesus we're on sinking sands we're in trouble when we forget all he has done for us stand firm on the rock that is the Lord Jesus Christ and they make such a difference when we're living life in this world if we're standing on him because there are so many things in life that are uncertain we don't know what disaster what crisis will be ahead for us this week next month next year one thing could change and everything changes we've seen that in politics this week it seems there's a growing number of people who want

Keir Starmer out when a year and a bit ago he had so many votes and won the big majority and looked like he was going to be prime minister for the next five years maybe he will be but it's all in doubt maybe that will all change soon things in life are so uncertain so fragile the only place for real

solid certainty is in Christ the solid rock solid certainty that if I fall into sin tomorrow I'm still covered by his righteousness because he shed his blood for me solid certainty that if my family turn their backs on me I'm still loved by him because I stand on Christ solid certainty that if I should die tomorrow I know where I'm going to go stand firm on Christ and one way to help us to be standing firm on Christ

[19:01] Christ is by coming together and taking the Lord the Lord Supper that the Lord Jesus has given to his church and this evening is an opportunity to do that the first Sunday mornings of the month third Sunday evenings if you can be there at one or both of them in a month so important that we do to help us to be reminded of the work of Christ the finished work of Christ that we stand upon secondly we're free to wait free to wait and we use the word hope rather badly we say things like I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow thinking it probably will rain tomorrow or I hope my train isn't delayed that's optimistic or I hope they win the match we want it to happen but we don't know if it will happen but hope in verse five is not that it may happen it's confident expectation verse five for through the spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope confident expectation we are hoping for righteousness but what does that mean we're waiting for our home our eternal home we thought a bit about it last week

Jerusalem that's above the new Jerusalem new heavens new earth place where righteousness will dwell and in in Jesus Christ we are free not to think that this is going to happen if I do enough good maybe I'll get there by the skin of my teeth no in Jesus and in what he has done for us we are free to think that's where I'm going because he has shed his blood for me and I stand in his righteousness we wait with confidence we wait confidently expecting heaven but as we wait and we live with that old self still there there's a sort of war going on and I think we'll think a bit more about this next week there's a war going on between the two natures the old sinful nature and our new self in the

Lord Jesus Christ hence why we might be prone to legalism to trying to do works to save ourselves even if we know we stand in Christ there's sort of something in the back of my mind which makes me think if I don't do this and God doesn't please with me it's because of our sinful nature which wants to be proud about our achievements when actually in terms of our spiritual achievements all comes from Christ and his work in us or it's why we might be deceived by our sinful nature into thinking well it's okay if I live as I please today live as my sinful desires want it's okay because I'm declared righteous but no we are made righteous in the

Lord Jesus Christ and we should mourn our sin and we should look forward to a confident expectation that one day we're going to be home and we're going to the place where righteousness will dwell for through the spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope we're awaiting!

final full righteousness this world is not our home we're not all completely sorted now we are covered in Christ righteousness but we await an eager expectation being fully righteous being at home where we will no longer turn our backs on God no more will we hurt others by our sin no more will we feel that shame that sin and its consequences bring we'll be at home where righteousness dwells and that will be wonderful and so we shouldn't make ourselves feel too comfortable in this world should we we're not at home it's okay to be a bit uncomfortable with how the world is because we're not home yet we're not in the home of righteousness and yet

[24:35] I guess we do try and make ourselves feel as comfortable as we can we try to renovate our homes to make them as comfortable as possible we try and get the car we long to drive we want to go and eat the best foods that we can eat we want to find that one that we want to marry we want to be just comfortable with a certain pattern of sin that helps me are we really waiting something better are we eagerly awaiting something better are we eagerly looking forward to being at home where righteousness dwells the world where our God will dwell with us where sin and evil will be done our way with good with for good are we looking forward to that home because we are now free in

Christ and we're free to eagerly awaited it's a freedom you won't find in any other religion or in any other philosophy because all the others will say if you're good enough I don't know if I'm good enough but Jesus says I've died for you I've won this for you you are free to wait for home freedom in Christ means we stand firm on him we stand firm on his finished work and we eagerly await the righteousness to come and thirdly it means we are free to love free to love and verse six says this for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love so once circumcision and uncircumcision whichever side you're on it's not actually going to do us much good either way we're going to become proud proud oh

I'm I'm circumcised I'm a follower of the law or proud I'm not circumcised I I know that I'm I'm free in Christ I'm proud of that look down on those that believe they need to do more there's no place for pride in that way circumcision doesn't have any value the only thing that has value is faith expressing itself through love it's where faith comes in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which causes us to look outward circumcision or uncircumcision following that that looks inward faith looks outward to one who's done it all for us the key verse in the book of Galatians is this to verse 20 I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me the life we live now is by faith in

Jesus who's given himself for us that's where our freedom comes from and what Jesus has done for us is the most extraordinary self giving self forgetting thing anyone has ever done we sang that song earlier about Jesus being the servant king the one comes to serve lay down his life for us in love to serve not to be served and the greatest act of love this world has ever known is surely him the king of all God laying down his life for us at the cross when we look outside ourselves in faith to the work of Jesus for us when we begin to grasp that great love that he's shown to us surely our response should be to love him who's given his life at some immeasurable cost and then to love others as he has loved us surely we are free to do that in the freedom that his love has won for us perhaps before we came to

Christ any sort of motivation to love others was done because we wanted to feel good about ourselves in some way yes maybe we cared for the person that we wanted to help but also wow look at what we've done I helped my neighbor cut my grass look at the good that I've done but Christ changes things and we want to help others we want to help the neighbor who can't cut their grass because we care about them perhaps they've done nothing to deserve that for us they're not very nice to us but we're offering that help because of the love that we've been shown by the Lord Jesus who said you're sinful you don't deserve any good from me and yet I'm giving myself for you what an awesome love and Paul goes on to talk about love later on in the passage 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!

[30:32] in love for the entire law is fulfilled as yourself so verse 13 we're called to be free but again as we've said do not use that freedom to indulge the flesh instead love and love Paul says is the fulfillment of the law I thought they were being discouraged away from the law you might be thinking hang on a minute remember how Jesus sums up the law of God can sum it up in these two sentences love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself love the Lord love your neighbor that's what the law is helping people to see that they need to do it's like the driving test pass it and you're free to obey the if we're set free by the

Lord Jesus from the power of the law that holds us in slavery we're free then to obey the law of God in the sense that we want to be loving the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind we're free to do that in Christ we're free to then love our neighbors as ourselves knowing that if we fall it's okay Jesus has done everything to forgive us but we are free to do that that's how life is best lived and love should be on display in the church we are the most free people in the world in Christ so love one another that's what Paul is encouraging this church to do the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command love your neighbor as yourself verse 15 if you bite and devour each other watch out or you will be destroyed by each other if we forget our love for

God and our love for others and use our freedom to do as we please it's going to be messy sin is going to be involved we'll be looking out for the interests of ourselves rather than the interests of others and it will be like we're biting and devouring one another that's not a nice picture but it can happen through our words through our actions perhaps we start ignoring someone who's upset us and they don't know why we're ignoring them they didn't realize they were being upset by them perhaps we start gossiping about someone in the church who's upset us in some way or who just frustrates us perhaps we seek to stir rumors about someone in church life love that's biting and devouring one another that's not living the life of love that we're called to live

Jesus himself said to his disciples by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another we've been loved by him so we should love one another and in that love people may see something of the Lord Jesus Christ that's what we're praying for for next Saturday for the music evening we want to invite guests in let's pray that they see Jesus on display in us pray that they see us loving one another as Christ has loved us and that can be a powerful witness and then not long after that Christmas services will follow let's pray that the love of Christ will be on display in this place not only preached here but also on display in how we're looking after one another and those who may join us by

God's grace to encourage you do you see people loving one another in our fellowship just this week I've seen people offering to help others in need people visiting others who they're concerned about in church life people offering meals to others who are in need of them at the moment people genuinely wanting to know how others are and how they can be prayed for people it's a real joy to see God's people loving one another and so let me encourage you that that seems to be the case amongst us as it should be and so we praise the Lord for that but in a congregation of our size this morning there could be some that are biting!

[35:53] and devouring one another in one way or another and perhaps the response for a few of us might be that we need to go and make peace with someone this morning to go and say sorry about something that we've said about them to ask for forgiveness or to go and tell someone I forgive you I'm sorry for holding that against you Christ has forgiven me why wouldn't I forgive you one final thing on this love perhaps you feel this morning that your love for

God and your love for others is weak how do we help ourselves in that well surely it is by faith that we need to be looking back to the love of God that he has shown to us at the cross to remind ourselves that it wasn't for any good in us that he gave his life up for us and yet he did to remind ourselves of that great and tender love of God that he should give himself to die such a horrific! Agonizing death in our place and when we consider that great love of God shown to us at the cross surely we respond in only one way saying love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all there is only one option on the menu to be right with God and that is Jesus alone who saves us and in him we find we are the most free people in this world and we're free to stand we're free to stand firm on his work for us we're free to wait for our eternal home where righteousness will dwell and we're free to love others because of the great love that's been shown to us a