

Xplore Freedom

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 28th of September 2003.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled Explore Freedom and is based on Galatians chapter 4 verse 21 through to chapter 5 verse 12.

I cannot imagine what it would be like to be a slave. To have your basic human liberties taken from you.

Stripped away so that you could not have them. To be incarcerated against your will. Because of your colour, your race or whatever reason it happened to be.

I cannot imagine what it would be like to be a slave. I thank God that I live in a country where we're free.

[1 : 13] Kathy Freeman wrote on her shoulder, Because I'm free. Because she's free, she was able to go to the Olympics and do what she does best. Because we are free, we're able to live lives that we want to live.

We live in a society of freedom. And I thank God for that freedom. Our society loves our freedom. But is society truly free?

Does society truly understand the word freedom? Our society, one of the great catch cries of our society is freedom.

Our present society says that the great philosophy is, is that you are free to do whatever you want, whenever you want. Any old time, you just go and do it.

You are the centre of the universe. You are free to do what you want to do, when you want to do it, how you want to do it. You're free to express yourself the way you want to express yourself.

[2 : 22] You can wear what type of clothing you want to wear. You can have whatever relationships you want to have. You can explore your sexuality. You're free to do that. You're free to watch what you want to watch.

Read what you want to read. Eat, drink, smoke. You are free. You are free. Autonomy is the only ethical principle, I was told this week.

That is, basically the way you decide your decisions in life is basically based on what is best for you. You want to do what you want to do because that's what's best. That's what's most important.

You. And if anyone tries to stop you, well, there's a public outcry. If it feels good, do it. You are free. This is the society's religious philosophy of our day that we are living in. The problem is they do not understand freedom. I decided that I'd go and explore what society saw as freedom.

[3 : 26] One of the great sources of trying to find out what freedom is is to go and read the magazines that they produce. So I went to the local news agency. I said, what is the top selling magazines for those who are in upper high school, for those who are going to university?

And I said, probably the top one for men, FHM. For the top one for women, Cleo. They're the top two. So I thought, let's have a quick flip through these magazines to see what type of freedom is there.

Let me read, blokes. We'll start with us first. FHM, biggest selling men's magazine. This is from the editor in this month's issue. He talks about the fact that when you're 14, you actually don't have much freedom.

They're not the best years. You're under your parents' thumb. 14, that's not the best time. It's when you hit your 20s. That's freedom. Listen to what he says.

The truly great age comes when you hit your 20s. You move out. You can wear your underpants three days on the trot. You can smoke 50 a day. Devon becomes a daily dietary sample.

[4 : 34] And you can spend your entire pay packet on sweet, sweet liquor. Basically, when you're in your 20s, you're invincible. But then a creeping fog happens.

Obesity. Thinning hair. Mylanta antacid hits at 30. And the good times end with a thud. The music gets too loud. The actual point to reality TV becomes near on impossible to fathom. Or does this generation think that? And a Jason recliner heads your Christmas wish list. Worse, you start to recite things your dad used to say, like, Why don't those hippies get a job? Or, I remember when a can of Coke cost 50 cents. But worst of all, you actually start to resemble your father. So, for the sake of all the pudgy, bald, stinking, boring readers out there, come to page 91.

We present FHM's cure for every man ill you could possibly encounter. His freedom. They've got the key to freedom here for us.

[5 : 37] Men who are over 30, that's me. The key to freedom here. Let me read to you the list of things that you need to do to become free. To get back to that hip and happening 20s when you're invincible.

First of all, you need to not have the steroid look. You need to make sure that you don't have a bubble butt. That you don't have love handles, crooked teeth, women's hips, chicken legs, skinny neck, acne, no chin, reclining hairline, short stature, troll hands, uni eyebrow, black back hair. If you can get rid of all these things, you're there. You will be a chick magnet. That'll make you free. So then you go flipping through the rest of the magazine to see what else freedom has as a part of being a part of this age group.

This is where freedom's at. You need to have adrenaline-fueled sports cars. Hot dates. You need to be having sex all the time.

You need to be off your face. And then actually having a photo of you vomiting up on your friend's lounge. That's cool. You need to be able to explore your sexuality.

[6 : 50] This is all in the magazine that I was flipping through. You need to be able to explore your sexuality. You have to have the right fragrance. You have to have the right clothes to make the right statement.

You have to have the right TV. And you have to have the hottest-looking babe, according to the world's standards, on your arm. There's freedom for you, men. That's the freedom.

You want to have freedom? There it is. You're free to do whatever you want, whenever your time, as long as it's like this. Because that's freedom. Let's go for the women.

I noticed in Clio that the major headings are fashion, beauty, sexy, man, and body. Let's just have a couple of look at these topics. In fashion, you've got to have the right clothes, or lack thereof.

You've got to have the sports girl look. That is, you've got to have that look of take a break whenever you feel like look. You've got to have the sassy crops from Portman's, or the solo writer fit.

[7 : 50] You've got to have the symbolic jewellery from Goldmark. All these things. You've got these things, there's freedom for you. What about beauty? Well, there's this new product that you've just got to have.

The Glow Bite J-Lo. It's a new cream you put on you, and you'll have that glow just like J-Lo. You've got to have it. You've got to have that killer hair without killing it.

You've got to have those sunset eyes. Those sexy tootsie tips. You've got to have that peekaboo body just in six weeks. You've got to have those eyelashes.

You've got to have that lush fantasy from Revlon, because they'll give you that, Revlon. And relationships.

Cleo just seemed to be all about relationships. The latest thing is SMS courtship, where your fingertips do the flirting.

[8 : 48] You need to be able to break up whenever you want. Your well-being and your relationships, that's where it's at. This is freedom.

Free to do whatever you want any old time. Did you sort of sense that it wasn't quite freedom? Did you notice that it doesn't sound free at all?

You see, the sad reality of this great cry of freedom of our society is, is they put you, the individual, at the centre of it all.

That freedom only comes about when you are at the centre. And the problem is, this philosophy of freedom that our society has, is not freedom at all.

It is a cruel and wicked master. You ask the alcoholic how they feel about their freedom.

[9 : 50] Their freedom to drink. Ask them how they feel about how free they feel. Or better, ask those who live with the alcoholic, how they feel about that person's freedom to drink. Ask the person who sells their body, so that they can earn enough money to supply the drugs.

Because they're free to have those drugs. You go and ask that person how free they feel, selling their body on the streets. Ask most women how they feel about the beauty and fashion myth. How free they feel to be who they are. Ask most working people how free they feel, when they've got the pressure to keep their jobs, so they can pay their expensive home loans, or their most expensive car.

Ask anyone who's been sleeping around, how satisfied they are in their sleeping around. Better off, why don't you go and ask those who've been abused by people sleeping around, left heartbroken, left behind.

Ask the children of those people how they feel about this sleeping around attitude. Because that's the freedom, isn't it? You're free to choose whatever relationships you want to. You can break up in your relationship.

[11 : 05] We're heading towards a 50% divorce rate. You're free to do whatever you want to do. But ask those who are involved in it, how they feel about it, about your freedom. I found an interesting article in the local paper that came out to us this week.

In it, they quoted that in a national youth survey of 2003, that depression and suicide is one of the top three issues concerning youth.

Depression and suicide. Let me tell you some of the other highly rated issues that the youth saw were serious issues. Drugs and alcohol, abuse, sexual assault, family conflict, relationships and sexuality, and bullying.

A Keystone community support worker from the Inner East Mental Health Service said this, Feeling disconnected from the community was probably the main reason for the increase in youth depression.

Young people may not feel very connected to their families. Feeling isolated from peers and school bullying were also major contributors. We're free to do whatever we want.

[12 : 18] We're free to have whatever relationships we want. But at what cost? Is it truly freedom? This worldly philosophy, and every other worldly philosophy is like it, is like a hook.

I don't know if you've ever saw the ad that was a couple of years ago, a smoking ad. And the bloke has this cigarette, and inside is a fisherman's hook, and he puts it to his lips just as the hook comes through and hooks him on the lip.

Very graphic, this hook. The idea being that you start on cigarettes, it's just a life of being hooked onto it. The philosophy of this world is addictive.

It is not something that sets you free. It is something that ensnares you, enslaves you. It does not bring the freedom that it promises.

Well, we've looked at slavery briefly, where your basic human abilities are taken away from you. We've had a look at the freedom that the society proclaims to have.

[13 : 32] Surely the church has got it right with freedom. We know what freedom's all about. We're not sucked into all that philosophy of mumbo-jumbo out there. We've got it right, haven't we?

But in tonight's passage, Paul says that even the church gets it wrong. That even the church ends up being no different to the slavery that is found out in society.

A slavery where we try to do things. Try to earn God's approval. Rather than resting in what God has done for you.

This is the final plank in Paul's arguments to the Galatians. Here was a church that had some teachers coming in and saying, you want to be free, then you need to go back to the Jewish Old Testament laws and you need to start obeying them.

That's how you're going to enjoy a relationship with God. And tonight we're going to see that Paul says, no, this is slavery. Before we start looking at the passage, why don't I pray for us?

[14 : 41] Let's pray. Father, as we think about this issue of freedom and slavery, we pray that you will help us to be people who understand your word. That your spirit will give us our ears and hearts to listen.

Father, that we will recognise that true freedom is found in you. We pray this in your son's name. Amen. It would be good for you to have your Bibles open at page 947.

947. For this next part that I'm going to do, I'm going to need some helpers here. So I wonder if Danny and his good wife could come up. I wonder if, who is my other helper? Thank you, yes. And I need two other helpers that I haven't picked yet. Steve, you would be good. Thank you. And I need one other, Vaughan.

Up you come, Vaughan. Here are my little actors. This next part we're about to look in the Bible in Galatians can be a little bit tricky. So I thought it might help us if we have a look at some people just standing here.

[15:51] It might just help us. Well, I don't know about you, but it hasn't helped me much at all at the moment. Let me try and fill you in the background. Danny, if you could step forward a moment. Here we have Abraham.

Abraham is a character in the Old Testament. He was a man who trusted in God's promises. He was quite old and he had no children. He had a wife, Sarah. Would you please? Yes, that's you. Yes. Here is Sarah. They were quite old and they had no children whatsoever. I chose the right people, didn't I?

And they had no children, but God had promised Abraham that one day he would have a huge great family. Now, Sarah thought this was a bit of a joke and she couldn't believe, you know, being quite old, being a grandmother, at the age of a grandmother, not being a grandmother, but being quite old, that she would have any children.

So she got impatient waiting for God to bring about his promises. So she got her slave, Hagar, and said to Abraham, Abraham, I can't bring you any children, so go and have children with my slave.

[17:04] Thank you, Ashley. Well, a child was born to Hagar. Thank you, Steve. Here he is here.

There he is. Beautiful. Some time later on, though, Sarah, according to God's promises, did have a child. His name was Isaac. Thanks, Isaac. Over you come.

Come over here. Stand next to your parents. That's the way. We always want to break up the family, don't we? Here we go. Now, this is the picture that Paul starts in the passage tonight. He talks about saying, having a look here, look, you know, there was Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, and they had two sons, but Hagar, remember, she was a slave, and she had a son who was also the son of a slave.

And here we have Sarah, and she has a child, Isaac, a free child. So there we have the free child. Now, Paul wants to point out fairly clearly at this point.

[18:05] He says, look, this is in verse 23, he wants to sort of say, look, this over here, Ishmael, that's him over there, Ishmael, he's born according to the flesh, but Isaac here, he's born according to a promise.

Here is the promise. God promised the child, and here it is. The other side over there, taking it into their own hands, and a child born according to flesh. He goes on to give it a little bit more vivid image there.

As the story goes on, there's a bit of rivalry between here. The sons start playing up, and Ishmael starts giving Isaac a bit of a hard time, and so what ends up happening is Ishmael and Hagar are sent away.

Now, if you can just go and sit on this chair here, because Paul later on, in this passage we're looking at, says that they're actually driven away, and they're a part of Mount Sinai.

Now, can anyone tell me what is the significance of Mount Sinai? Mount Sinai? Law was given. The law was given at Mount Sinai.

[19:14] Here we have the child, the slave, and the slave of the child, and there they are, sitting on Mount Sinai, representing the law. What do you think Paul's trying to say here?

Paul's trying to make a bit of a point. Slavery? Slavery is found in the law. And then he goes on to talk about, well, the free woman and the free child here.

They actually represent a city, and so if you want to go up into the pulpit up there, lovely family, off you go, up there. As a part of Paul speaking here in this passage, Paul says, this family here, the slave family, they represent Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem there and then. Because in Jerusalem was where the Jews were. There it is there, the Jews, representing, we've got Mount Sinai, we've got slavery, we've got Ishmael.

There they all bundled together. But Paul says, of the free woman and the free child, their city, it's the heavenly Jerusalem. It's the Jerusalem above.

[20 : 21] You can see that in verse, I think it's, is it 25? Or 29? Anyhow, it's in that passage there. It talks about, there they are in the heavenly Jerusalem.

And Paul is saying, if you want to be free, then this is the place to be. This is where freedom is. It's not there, but there.

Now let me make a few points about this that Paul makes. The first is, if you want to know something about freedom, true freedom, true freedom, it is found in promises.

You see this family here, this child is born, a part of this family, according to a promise. Slavery, you want to know what slavery is all about? It's about the doing.

It's about the law. First thing, freedom. Freedom is in the promise. That's where freedom is. And Paul points in verse 28, he says, you, that is the Galatians, you Galatians, you have been set free.

[21 : 28] You are children of this family here. Now being a part of a family is very important. Now, you know, you can, you know, family trees are very important and, you know, it'd be good to be a part of certain families.

I guess, you know, the royal family and then you might be the Packer family and you've got all these different family lines. Well, according to the Jewish custom, to be a part of Abraham's family, that was the family to be a part of.

That was the family. You wanted to be a part of any family? Be a part of Abraham's family and all the generations because that was the family that God worked in. Don't be a part of this slavery family.

Ishmael and his generations, don't be a part of that because that's slavery. In verse 30, Paul makes another point about this whole picture that he has before him. Just like Sarah and Abraham drove away the slave, those who want to bring slavery into the church, we need to drive them away.

As Christians, we are to have nothing with those who want to bring slavery into the church. The next point that I want to make is that for those who are actually listening to this back then, this was absolutely scandalous.

[22 : 47] Paul's using the story in a bit of a funny way. He's using it figuratively. He's not using it the way that you would normally talk about the story of Hagar and Sarah and Abraham. He's using it figuratively to make his point.

You see, those who were the false teachers said, if you want to be a part of God's family, then you've got to do these laws. just like Abraham here. You see, Abraham, he did the law by circumcising himself and circumcising his son.

Now, for those who aren't clear what circumcision is, it's removal of the foreskin of a man's penis. That's what circumcision is. It was a part of the requirements of the law. That was what they were claiming, the false teachers.

We need to be like Abraham, part of his family. That's what we need to be like, obeying the law, being circumcised. But Paul says, no, no, no. Those who want you to be circumcised, they're in that camp over there.

They're slaves. You can sit down now. I think we've illustrated the point. A bit of a clap for him. That would be good. Thank you. Paul rounds off this section of the story of Hagar and Sarah in chapter 5, verse 1.

[24 : 10] If you turn there. He says this, For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

Paul wants to make it very clear that where you have your freedom, your freedom comes in Christ. The freedom that the world longs for is found in Christ.

The freedom that we enjoy here as a part of being church is found in Christ. And Paul makes the point, don't be burdened down by slavery.

I don't know if you've ever seen the great yokes that are put on an ox's back. It's a big lump of wood and it basically goes over the shoulders of the cow and it's basically there so that they can then tie all the other cows to it and they can tie their big logs onto the back of that or whatever it happens. It's this brace that sort of holds it and it's quite heavy. And Paul says if you go back to the law about trying to earn God's approval by doing things to try and keep us a part of God's family, well then you're just putting this great lump of wood on your back.

[25 : 22] It's putting you into slavery. Jesus says in Matthew that his yoke is light and easy. Jesus is the one who removes this yoke from us, that removes this slavery.

Paul says therefore do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. In the last part of the passage from chapter 5 verse 2 through to verse 12 Paul then brings all his arguments together.

He wants to bring it all together and try and make I guess a bit of a case for everything that he's been saying and he wants to use a particular example that is circumcision in this whole case.

And so he starts there in verse 2. Listen, I Paul am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised Christ will be no benefit to you. In verses 2 through to 4 here Paul gives this very strong warning.

If you go back to slavery, go back to try and winning God's approval, going back to trying doing the things that will keep you as a part of being in God's family, Christ will be no benefit to you whatsoever.

[26 : 34] There will be no benefit there at all. Once again, I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised, that is, obliged to obey the entire law.

A couple of weeks ago we saw that the requirement of the law was if you want to obey one law, you've got to take the whole lot with it. If you want to be circumcised, well, circumcision doesn't just come with that law, it comes with the entire lot.

And the problem is if you don't keep that entire lot, if you don't get 100% and all that, well then you're not going to win God's approval. Law is slavery.

It is hopeless to try and obtain benefit from God by doing. You must admit to all of it if you're going to take on one part of it.

In verse 4 he shows again what Christ came to do. You want to be justified by the law, you who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ.

[27 : 37] You have fallen away from grace. The whole point of the Christian message is we can't do it at our own efforts. If you want to be a part of God's family, there is nothing that will make you acceptable before God.

It is a gift given to you from God. I was talking to someone just this week who said, my mum is a good mum. She is good.

Surely that will get into heaven. Our goodness will not get us there because we fail in so many other areas. We do not meet the 100%.

The problem is if we try and rely on our own efforts, then what we're saying is we have no need of Christ. We can climb our way to heaven.

heaven. The reality is it is by his death on the cross that Christ paid the penalty for us. It is a message of divine grace. Verse 5 says, notice there, that you don't earn it.

[28 : 45] It's something that you have to wait for. That God holds us by his spirit. In verse 6, the Jewish law then is irrelevant to Christians. Let me read it for you.

For in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. The only thing that counts is faith working through love. Well, then Paul moves on.

He is utterly shocked that his church should go back to doing these things. He's alarmed, he's perplexed. Look there in verse 7. You're running so well. Who prevented you from obeying the truth? Such perversion does not come from one who calls you.

He then goes on to talk about how not only you've been tripped up in your race as being a Christian but it only takes a small amount of yeast. You put a little bit of yeast in some flour and it penetrates right through the whole lump of dough and then after a while it will raise up into a big bit of bread. Well, it only takes one or two false teachers to infiltrate the church, to try and change it, to try and bring this message of slavery. But Paul says they won't get away with it.

[29 : 58] Paul is confident of it, that the Galatian believers will see through this false teaching and those who are responsible will be disciplined. Look there in verse 10. I'm confident about you and the law that you will not think otherwise but whoever is confusing you will have to pay the penalty.

In verse 11 he then brings another issue that he hasn't spoken about very much at all. There is this issue of I guess some confusion.

His opponents have been saying that well Paul, he's actually saying to other people that they need to be circumcised and Paul is just infuriated by this. So they look in verse 11.

But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I'm still preaching circumcision? You see, Paul's not preaching circumcision. Yes, it is true that Paul said to Timothy it would be a good thing for you to be circumcised because of his ministry to the Jews.

But Timothy is not doing it to win God's approval. Timothy is not doing it to earn his way to heaven. He's doing it for the sake of the gospel. Paul's been persecuted for the gospel.

[31 : 09] He's been given a hard time. Let me read on. Look here at the second part of verse 11. In that case, the offence of the cross has been removed.

The cross is offensive to many people because it takes away from what they can do. The Jews wanted to work their way to heaven. It was all about them being at the centre.

And Paul is saying no, I'm not going to take the offence away. Well, to impress upon his readers how hostile he is towards these legalistic Judaizers, he in the end ends up with a sarcastic comment expressing his crude exasperation of those who are the false teachers.

Look there in verse 12. I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves. What Paul is saying, I wish they would just go the whole whole. Paul uses a little bit of a play on words here. Not as he's talking about the very graphic painful description of what he's talking about there. But he's also saying, I wish they would just remove themselves completely away from you.

[32 : 20] Cut yourselves off from your church because they are no good. What Paul is saying about freedom is, you want freedom? Freedom is found in Christ.

Therefore, those who are incarcerated, those who have their freedom, their earthly freedom taken away from them, well, they can still enjoy freedom, freedom in Christ.

Corrie ten Boom. Let me read to you at the back of this book. Corrie ten Boom stood naked with her sister Betsy, watching a concentration camp matron beating a prisoner.

Oh, the poor woman, Corrie cried. Yes, may God forgive her, Betsy replied. And again, Corrie realised that it was for the souls of the brutal Nazi guards that her sister prayed.

Both women had been sent to the camp for helping the Jews. Christ's spirit and words were their guide. It was his persecuted people they tried to save at the risk of their own lives.

[33 : 20] It was his strengths that sustained them through the times of profound horror. Corrie ten Boom, she was free. She'd been set free in Christ, even though she was in the midst of slavery.

For the slavery of our world, slavery to all the different philosophies of our world, the message of Christ breaks the bondage of sin. We have been set free from it.

The third point that I want to make is that as Christians we are not to go back to religion of doing. We have been set free.

Let me just make a few points in light of these three things. The first is that we need to be not deceived by the power of enslavement.

religion is very easy to get trapped into the philosophies of our world. It's easy for us as Christians to get trapped into thinking that doing is what God wants.

[34 : 29] God has done it all for us. We are to live lives that bring him on and on glory. Not because that will win his approval. Not because that will keep us in heaven.

But because of what God has done for us. Don't be sucked into the world's views. Don't be sucked into the slavery that people want to bring into the church.

That slavery that says you must read your Bible every day to be a Christian. That you must not clap your hands in church. The slavery of these do's and don'ts. We have been set free from all those things.

That doesn't make you a Christian. But on the other hand as we see in the next couple of weeks. Being set free doesn't mean we can do whatever we want to do. We have been set free to serve one another.

We have been set free to serve and love other people. To bring forth the fruit of the spirit. May we be people who live lives of freedom.

[35 : 32] not slavery. Amen.