

Gospel Freedom: Don't Be Enslaved

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Preacher: Chris Bowditch

[0 : 00] Okay, first things are first, and I need you to put your imagination hats on. And I want you, or some of you won't need your imagination hats on for this, but I want you to imagine that you're about 45 years old.

That was like the oldest age I could even imagine being. Kidding. Kidding. Imagine, if you are 45 years or older, then just imagine that you're you.

But if you're 15 to about 35, imagine, if you're over 18, just imagine. What am I saying here?

Self-digging. Imagine that you're an old person of any age with the ability to make decisions for yourself.

In this example, I'm going to get us to imagine it's 45. Let's imagine you are a high-level manager in a company somewhere. You have a good salary.

[1 : 09] You've got good independence. You're pretty close to your mum. You ring her once a week, maybe twice a week. And even though you love your mum and you love talking to her, actually, you're an independent.

You're a fully-fledged adult. You're 45 all over. And you're a fully-fledged adult.

But then, you start to think to yourself, hmm, I know I'm really old and 45, but should I really have all this independence?

In fact, imagine that one day, you're an independent adult with a salary, you can make your own decisions, and there's an upcoming staff Christmas party.

And instead of doing what a normal adult would do and make your own decision, you do up a little permission slip. You go around and visit your mum.

[2 : 13] You ask her if you're allowed to go. And then she signs it and gives you permission, and you give it to your boss and say, I'm coming to the work Christmas party, mum says. So, that's absolutely ridiculous, obviously.

And if you're under 18, it's not so ridiculous to get permission from your mum or your dad to go somewhere. But when you're old, it doesn't make sense.

It's stupid. And that is kind of like, I think, what Paul's talking about tonight. That there's a set of, when you've been saved by the grace of God through Jesus, if you turn to follow a set of rules, then it doesn't make sense.

It's like going backwards in a life stage. So, just keep that in your mind. I'll try and explain that a bit more as we look through the text. So, where have you been over the last seven weeks?

If you haven't been here, this next couple of minutes is going to have saved you about five hours of your life. Clearly, though, I won't be as in-depth, so please, if you're really fascinated by all this stuff, all our sermons are available online, so go to our website and you can find the full thing with all the depth that they have.

[3 : 43] But we know, so far, in the last seven weeks, that there is no other gospel apart from the one that Paul preached. that Jesus gave up his life and he died for the sins of the whole world in order to set us free.

That's what we sort of heard in the first week. We know that the gospel comes from God, that Paul got it from God. He didn't make up something new. And, in fact, Paul actually heard the gospel that he took to the Galatians directly from Jesus himself, and he then went to the apostles and it was confirmed that they had the same gospel.

And Paul, actually, was standing so firm in the gospel that he even had to confront Peter at one stage about his weakness of going back to the law and not eating with Gentiles and following the food again.

And Paul had to stand up and say, no, no, the gospel gives you freedom. And we know that the Galatians, the people who this letter was written to, have been tempted or they are currently in the process of going back to following the law or, if they weren't Jews in the first place, adding the law onto the gospel.

And we also know that when you believe in Jesus, you get the spirit. You get that through belief. That's the key word there. Through faith.

[5 : 18] Not through works. Not through doing stuff. We know that Jesus has become a curse for us to remove the curse of the law. That was, I think, two weeks ago.

We saw that in chapter three. And we know that Abraham, Abraham, the sort of hero of the Jewish faith, actually the law couldn't have saved him because it came 430 years later.

Abraham's faith in what God said saved him. So, Paul says, why would it be any different for you, Galatians? Why would you need Jesus plus the law when Abraham, the great hero of the Jewish faith, didn't even have the law?

And we also know, this is the final thing that we know, is that the law was given to the Jewish people not to save them, but as kind of like a disciplinary, as sort of like an angry teacher.

It was there to sort of stop you doing the wrong thing, to try and curtail sinfulness. And it was given so that through it we might realise that Jesus is actually the one who brings a saving faith.

[6 : 27] That's in chapter three. And it's on all of this stuff that chapter four builds on. And so, let's dive in.

Let me read verses one and two of chapter four. My point is this, heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are owners of all the property.

But they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the Father. What falls so he's slaves and minors, that is, children, they're no better than each other, because when you're a child, you're under the care of, someone else is making the decisions for you.

Someone else is sort of in control of your life. Just like a slave, whether they're an adult or not, has someone else in control of their life.

So he's all saying here, slaves and minors are the same. And the reason he's using this analogy is because Gentiles, by the Jewish people, were seen as slaves.

[7 : 37] And so what the Judaizers, the people who were trying to make the Galatians become more Jewish, what they might have been saying is that Gentiles are slaves, Jews are the children of God, you need to add the law onto your faith.

Paul's saying, no, actually, children and slaves are the same. they don't have freedom.

But, there is a difference. That is, a child can become free as a coming of age. And for Jewish people, this is the promise of God's Messiah.

Paul continues in verse 3, he says, so with us, while we were minors, while we were children, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world.

So, when the Jews were children, when they were minors, they were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world. What is an elemental spirit?

[8 : 43] Well, I guess, the thing that I found helpful to think of when I was thinking of elemental spirits was like, elemental still, instead of an American accent, because that's what they sort of call primary school, I think, in America.

anyway, it's sort of like, the elemental spirits, I think, are sort of the first things. And so, what he's talking about here is, perhaps the law, perhaps Gentile paganism, it's like the first thing, particularly if he's talking about the law, it's the thing that God revealed first, first, but if you stay there, then you're enslaved to it.

Now, try and get your head around it a bit more. It's a bit like a person, when you teach someone to read, you get up, you put up that poster on your kindergarten wall, and you've got A's for apple, B's for banana, C's for cat, et cetera, et cetera.

If you stay there, if that's the own, if that's your full grasp of the English language, A's for apple, B's for banana, C's for cat, then you can't continue on, you are in, you're sort of stuck, your understanding is stunted.

It's not a bad thing to start there, it helps you to understand the English language, but if you stay there, then you're not going to get very far in life. So he says, we were enslaved to the element of the spirit of the law, that is we were stuck in the first things of the law, but now Jesus has come, there is something greater.

[10 : 31] And so that's who he goes on to talk about in verse 4, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law.

Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being, he was born under the law, that means he was born as a Jew, his whole of life was directed by the law of the day, he lived according to the spirit of the law, although, and because he was living according to that spirit, he clashed sometimes with the Jewish people of the day, because they had sort of misinterpreted God's law.

But Jesus lived in full accordance with the spirit and the heart of the law, and that's kind of what we see earlier on in the Bible, that the law is actually really all about, it's about the heart, loving God with all your heart, but it does give a set of rules to be followed, and Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law.

And it's by being born under the law that Jesus is able to take away the curse of the law that Paul talked about in chapter 3, verse 10. Let me read it for you.

All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all things written in the book of the law. Now it's evident that no one is justified by God before the law, for the one who is righteous will live by faith, but the Lord does not constone faith, on the contrary, whoever does the works of the law will live by them.

[12 : 08] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Jesus was born under the law, and by being under the law, he was able to take away the curse of the law from us.

Verses 5 and 6, the second part of verse 5 and 6, Paul says, redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as children.

And because you are children, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. This is the key part of tonight's message.

Because our redemption is through Jesus, who lived a perfect life under the law, because he took the curse from us, then we can be adopted as children of God.

God. And perhaps your mind goes back to the fact that Paul's kind of just been describing the Jews as children, as minors, and it's a different, he's using the analogy of young person or child differently here.

[13 : 22] The first one, the minor, the child, is more like a younger child. He's saying Jews, when they were under the law, they were like a younger child.

But now he's saying you're adopted as a child. He's switching the analogy to saying a child with the full rights, a child who is an adult, who has the rights that come with being a child.

A child obviously never stops being a child. I'm still a child of my parents, even though they live in another state. but my relationship to them has changed.

And he uses the word adoption here. He says in order that we might receive adoption as children. Now this doesn't mean we have lesser, we're a lesser kind of child.

It means we are a fully fledged child of God. In Roman law, which is the analogy falls in here, an adopted child had full rights, full member of the family, much like adopted children today.

[14 : 37] Jono, who's on fire as one of the pastors here, he has an adopted sister, and he calls her her sister, calls her his sister, and there's no thought about her being anything other than his actual sister.

And so when we're adopted as children of God, that means we're adopted as his actual children, just much like Jesus is God's actual child.

To be adopted means you have full rights, and so we have full rights as children of God. God. We are adopted into the same inheritance, that's what being a child is about, it's about getting an inheritance from your parents, we are adopted into that inheritance that Jesus has, the blessing, the glory, the honour, all of that comes to us through Jesus and our adoption as God's children.

The other thing that our adoption brings us is a father, a parent. He says, you're adopted as children, and because you're children, God has sent the spirit of his sons into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Now the word Abba is the Aramaic word for father, and the special thing about the reason that it's included here in a book that was written not in Aramaic but in Greek, is that that's the very same word that Jesus Christ, Son of God, used when he was on earth to address his father in heaven.

[16 : 28] He used the word Abba. You might hear something say, if we get to call Jesus our big daddy or something, what I actually think it's trying to get at is that we get to have the same intimacy with God that Jesus, the very Son of God had when he was on earth.

We're adopted into that same intimacy, not by our own doing, but through the spirit who cries out, the spirit who lives in us and cries out. And the word there cries out, it's not just like, sort of like a soft word, like he sort of cries out, Father, help me.

It's a real desperate kind of cry out. It's like, I need you, I love you, Father, Abba. And Jesus has redeemed us and through Jesus we are adopted by the spirit and Jesus cries, the spirit of Jesus, sorry, and he cries out in us and says, God is our father.

God is your father. If you trust in Jesus, do you believe that? Do you believe that you have the same full rights as a child that Jesus had?

Do you believe that it is not about how well you know the Bible? It's not about how well you know systematic theology or that you even know what those two words mean.

[18 : 11] It's not about how well you can live up to a moral code. It's not at all about what you do and what you don't do. But what it's about is about Jesus.

It's about Jesus bringing about in you an adoption as God's child. It's about Jesus, the spirit, the spirit of the sons, Jesus spirit, the Holy Spirit as we know in us calling out God, you are my father.

It's the spirit that will be working at saying, God, I know that I'm a failure. I know that I step up. I know that I can't live up to your standards. I know that I'm not good enough for you. I know that I have doubts about whether you exist sometimes.

I doubt some of the things written in the Bible. I trust you. I'm all yours. Through nothing I have done, but through everything you have done, you've redeemed me, your spirit lives in me, and that's why I can call out father.

And we are saved from the slavery of having to do things our own way.

[19 : 19] And we are, it says in verse 7, if we're a child, then we are also an heir through God. It means that we, like Jesus, have a great inheritance waiting for us because through Jesus we are adopted as children.

And if you think this is the only place it says in the Bible, then let me read to you just now from Romans chapter 8. You can click there if you want it on page 919.

814. It says this, For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a Spirit of adoption.

When we cry, Abba, Father, it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if we're children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

If in fact we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified glorified with Him. When the fruit of God comes into our hearts when we trust in Jesus, then we are able to be co-heirs with Christ.

[20 : 46] We share in His inheritance and we share in the same kind of life that we live, the life of suffering. That doesn't necessarily mean getting beat up all the time, but we live in a life where we have to constantly be denying ourselves and following Jesus, taking up that cross and following Him.

Paul then moves on and sort of applies this fact that we are adopted children with full rights. He says, formerly when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods.

That is, formerly, when you didn't know God, you worshipped idols. When you're not a Christian, you worship idols. You might not think that's what you're doing, but that is actually what you're doing.

Your life is centred around maybe the idol of yourself. It might be centred around the idol of your job. It might be centred around the idol of sex.

There are any number of things that you could worship. And it's not that those things are bad. Sex is not bad. Work is not bad.

[22 : 06] What is bad is the worship of them. The fact that they dethrone God and we glorify the gift and not God, the great giver of those gifts.

So when you're not a Christian, the Galatians, when they didn't know Jesus, they were idolaters. They worshipped idols. But now, however, this is verse 9, that you have come to know God, or rather been known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits?

How can you want to be enslaved to them again? Now that you know God, how can you go back to the first things?

Now that you know the great depths of fantastic English literature, or whatever it might be, how can you go back to the ABCs?

How can you go back to things that are not as good as what you currently have? Why, when you have Jesus, when you have the Spirit of God, when you're an adopted child, would you want to go back to a system that was designed to contain sinfulness until you got to the point where Jesus came?

[23 : 23] It doesn't really make any sense. Why would you want to be 45, or whatever age you imagined you were, and still getting your mum to sign your permission slip to go to your work party?

Why would you do that if you knew there was a better way? That's what he's saying. Why would you want to be a slave when you can be free?

Why? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years. Paul's saying, excuse me, Paul's saying for the Galatians, they're turning back to idols.

it looked like observing special days and weeks and months that they had to, they thought if they observed these things they'd be more holy or God would accept them more.

And for us, it's like us to think what are those things that we turn to after coming to Jesus? See that?

[24 : 27] It's easy for us to have faith in Jesus once, which is all you need to do, it's a one-time thing, I trust Jesus to the Lord of my life. But then it's a daily process of remembering that that's what we've done because for us it can be very easy to try and go back, to try and do good in order for God to think that we are good.

Maybe there are certain rules that this church has that we don't explicitly say but they're just sort of the social kind of code of our church, certain ways of speaking or dressing or whatever it might be that actually show that we have sort of added to the gospel.

Like Wayne said a few weeks ago, if we all wore stripy shirts, horizontal stripy shirts, apologies to anyone wearing horizontal stripy shirts, but Wayne said it first. If we all wear horizontal stripy shirts and if someone comes in wearing a plain green shirt and we sort of think well, probably not a Christian, they'd have better fashion sense than that if they knew how good Jesus was.

Then we've added to the gospel. How do we do that in actual serious ways? What are those things where we actually do think maybe it is dress code, maybe someone walked in here with rips in their clothes or wearing K-marts or thongs instead of Havanas that we would actually think oh, you're not as cool as me.

Maybe you're not a Christian. I think that we have a tendency to turn the fruits of the Spirit that Paul eventually gets to a bit later in Galatians into fences for what I've called the elite.

[26 : 20] And in doing so, I want to suggest that if we do that, we enslave ourselves inside the pen, inside those fences.

So, Paul says, live by the Spirit, live according to the Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

In many other books, we're given a whole range of other things that the Spirit of God working in us produces. Paul says, live like that.

Live out of the power of the Spirit within you. And what we do is we sort of take some of those, we take some other things in the Bible, and we sort of work out which ones fit our way of living best, and we sort of knock in the pegs around ourselves and say, right, if you can fit in to this fence, it doesn't really matter what the Spirit's doing in you.

As long as you appear to fit inside this fence, then we're cool with you being part of that church, but if not, then that's okay, but once you trust in Jesus, you've got to jump inside this fence.

[27 : 42] We sort of make it about conforming to our own set of expectations rather than to becoming more like Jesus.

and the symptoms of doing this are that instead of saying we encourage each other, we've got to live by the Spirit. You've got to grow in your love, in your compassion, in your joy, in your peace, in your self-control.

Instead of saying that, instead of saying you are God's child, God's child, you have full rights as a child, God's Spirit lives in you.

How awesome is that? How much should we want to love and serve and care? Instead of doing that, if we had to construct a fence, we say, don't do that.

You've stepped outside the fence. Come back in. We can tend to be more harsh. We can tend to, you know, someone like you come along and they don't know much about the Bible.

[28 : 45] They don't have as good a reformed theology as you do or they don't know much but they might be heading in the right direction.

God might be calling them. The Spirit of God might be at work in them. And if we construct a fence by which to judge people, then we're in danger, I guess, of ruling the wrong people in and the wrong people out, which is not even our job, as it happens anyway.

That's God's job. Our job is to encourage, and sure there's rebuking that, but to encourage people to walk in the Spirit.

And Christians are people who God has adopted as His child. And the way we know is not by whether they can live up to a set of rules, not by whether they do good works, but it's about whether they have the Spirit of God in them which cries out, Abba, Father.

See, Christians have a way of life that is distinct, not because we are rule followers, but because the Spirit of God dwells in us and makes us more like Jesus.

[30 : 13] The reason there are things Christians are known for not doing is not because Christians don't do those things, it's because the Spirit of God works in us and makes us want to serve and love God and when you're doing that, you just don't do those things.

You don't want to do those things. We've got to figure out a way as a church, as Christians probably worldwide, as myself included, how we can be strong on sin but stronger on the grace of God that comes to us as children of God who have the Spirit living inside us.

The next section here I really want to be really, really quick on and just touch on a few things.

Verse 12, Paul says, become like me and what I think he says here is he's saying become like me and base your life on the Spirit, base your life on faith, not on law.

And I guess that's a good challenge for us. Are there people in your life who you would like to become like who are basing their life on faith and not on the law?

[31 : 38] And are you the kind of person who people might want to become like? Do you have the kind of role in this church where people are going to become like you, they're going to look up to you?

And let me say that it's actually not about being good enough to have that role. You might think, oh there's no way I could ever be in the kind of role where people might want to be like me because I'm not a good enough person.

That's the confession of a closet legalist because it's not actually about being good enough because no one is good enough.

It's about being desperate enough for having the spirit of God working in your life. It's about being an adopted child of God, which everyone is who has the spirit in them.

And we get that when we believe and trust in Jesus. That's the kind of person that you want to be like. Sure, there are levels of maturity and things, but primarily being a Christian is about living a spirit filled life because you're a child of God.

[32 : 46] And then Paul talks about a whole range of things about how they welcomed him when he was ill or had a physical infirmity.

No one really knows what's going on. Maybe it's that he was blind. It says you would have torn your own eyes out. I'm not really sure. But I think that again, there's a warning there to us not to judge by the outside, but to judge by the inside.

Paul came and he was someone maybe not worth listening to, but by listening to him, because his life was based on faith, not words, he was able to bring them to God's children.

And finally, the last couple of verses, they show us that the Galatians are actually God's children. And so Paul, their pastor, he's in the pains of childbirth, but he desperately wants them.

to become more like Jesus, to see Jesus be birthed in them. He says, my little children for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

[33 : 57] I wish, my little children for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. He's in pain for them. He really wants them to become more like Jesus.

They are Christians, but there is a process, an end goal that happens of becoming like Jesus. So let me just try and wrap everything up and tie some things together.

We have to be careful. Some Christians, and I'm not in favour of this, some Christians, they understand the need not to be legalistic about their faith, and so to do this, they minimise sin.

They play down the fact that humans are sinful, or they maybe even just think, well maybe there is no sin, and people can do just whatever feels right, because it's about the heart and feelings and whatever.

I am not saying that is how we ought to live. we have to find a balance between being a people who love God and hate sin, but being a people who focus on the heart of people and their position as children of God, as opposed to whether or not they can do X, Y, and Z.

[35 : 20] We have to focus, I think, on the work of the Spirit in the lives of each person. I think it's obvious from this letter that the Galatians were Christians, they had believed in God, and it was their faith and their belief in Jesus that made them righteous, but they were tempted to add to their faith, to add on a system that meant they could earn the salvation that they already had, they could build up some credit points with God.

And the big message of Galatians is you cannot earn your salvation. Even if you were to be the best person you could be, it will not be enough.

Paul says, it's through Jesus alone that we are saved. It's through Jesus alone that we are made his children. It's through Jesus alone that we can call God our Father. It's through Jesus alone that we are made free.

So let me encourage you to live by the Spirit. Live as a child of God. that's what you are. Flee legalism. Flee a religiosity that promotes a self-righteousness.

Yeah, I'm pretty good. I didn't do the five big sins that Christians always talk about. I didn't have an abortion this week. I didn't watch porn this week. And I didn't swear this week. I'm a good Christian.

[36 : 45] Free that kind of legalism and focus rather on the Spirit of God as he transforms you to become more and more like Jesus. By God's grace through Jesus' death, you are or can be an adopted child of God, an heir with Jesus Christ, and share in all of his blessings.

By the grace of Jesus Christ, you can become more and more like Jesus Christ and overcome sin. Do you believe it?

I found this prayer on a blog of a bishop that may not put it in high standings, but he's a good bishop.

There are such things. And I thought it was appropriate, so I'm going to finish by praying this prayer. O Holy Spirit of God, come into my heart and fill me.

I open the windows of my soul to let you in. I surrender my whole life to you. Come and possess me. Fill me with light and truth.

[38 : 11] I offer to you the one thing I really possess, my capacity to be filled by you. Of myself I am an empty vessel. Fill me so that I may live the life of the Spirit, the life of truth and goodness, the life of wisdom and love and guide me today in all things.

Guide me to the people I should meet and to the people I should help, to the circumstances in which I can best serve you, whether that be by my actions or by my sufferings.

God, please help me to dethrone myself in my heart and to make you my King. Amen.