

# Freedom in Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] In the title of our sermon this evening, Freedom in Christ, are the three points that we're going to follow through, God willing. First point, called, called by God to be free, we'll explore what that involves, what that indicates.

And then secondly, our freedom to serve, serve as we serve God and serving one another. And then thirdly, the freedom that we have in the Holy Spirit, freedom in Christ.

Last Sunday, if you remember, last Sunday was Remembrance Sunday. And last Sunday, so much was made and quite rightly made, or quite rightly said, things said about the freedoms that we enjoy as a result of the sacrifices made by those who gave their lives in conflict, who gave of themselves to protect our nation and to protect so many nations from the evils of, well, particularly in the Second World War, the evils of fascist rule.

We have and were spared the oppression of a totalitarian regime, a totalitarian rule that actually destroys freedoms.

A rule, a particular kind of rule that imposes restrictions on our behaviour, particularly what we call the leader principle.

[ 1 : 32 ] The principle that demands blind obedience to whatever the leader decrees. And the influence being things like the removal of democracy, the politicising of worship that becomes, in fact, worship of the leader.

And at the same time, the removal of true worship, the true worship of the one true God. The kind of society, the kind of regime that destroys our freedom or seeks to destroy our freedom to think independently of the leader.

And we have to say that Britain was a hair's breadth away from that removal of freedoms, certainly in 1940-41. And we thank God for the preservation of our land from that kind of total rule by evil leaders.

So much, of course, was said of that last Sunday. But there's a freedom that we didn't hear the politicians mention last Sunday. There's a freedom that really wasn't heard much even on Remembrance Sunday or indeed on Remembrance Day itself, last Wednesday.

And the freedom that wasn't really mentioned at all, even last week, is that freedom that believers have in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's that freedom that Paul emphasises here in his letter to the church in Galatia, that church situated in modern-day Turkey.

[ 3 : 10 ] It's that freedom that we rejoice in, even in personal restrictions. You who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, you who are in Christ, you have a freedom the world knows nothing of.

You have a freedom that no pandemic can impact. You have a freedom that's, well, it's yours not by right, but by grace, by God's grace.

It's a freedom that we give praise to God for, and it's a freedom that none of us must ever take for granted. You have to ask, of course, what is that freedom that the world outside Christ doesn't know anything of?

What's the freedom that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ know of and are blessed in? Well, it's a freedom. It's a freedom.

Or we might even ask, many ask when we hear of the word freedom, is it a freedom to do what you want to do and, well, God will forgive you anyway? Is that the kind of freedom that we're talking of?

[ 4 : 18 ] Absolutely not. Certainly not. So what is that freedom that we're speaking of when we think of that freedom that the Lord's people have in Christ? Well, to answer that question, we turn to Paul.

We turn to what Paul has been given through God's inspiration. What Paul teaches that helps you to see that the freedom that you have in Christ is a freedom, aye, a freedom to glorify God, a freedom to glorify God and enjoy a freedom that God has blessed you with, a freedom that truly

does set you free, a freedom in Christ.

You see, in Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul's already been emphasized, free from the oppression that, well, that some in the church were trying to apply to Christian converts.

They were trying to impose what was called a faith plus salvation, faith plus works, faith plus conformity to the ceremonial law, and particularly in relation to circumcision.

But Paul's strenuously been teaching that that's not right, that's wrong. Because Jesus paid the whole price for your salvation.

[ 5 : 40 ] Jesus obeyed the law fully, and he did so for us. He suffered the law's penalty. He faced the penalty of death for us.

The salvation that Jesus won for us by his death is all of grace. And so you're to believe and trust, trust in Jesus' finished work on the cross.

And as Paul says, therefore, we're free. Free from the power of sin. Free from the demands of the law to conform to the law as a means of salvation.

Because Jesus has done that work for us. We can truly say, we who know the Lord Jesus as Savior, who trust in him, that we're free.

That you're free. Think of it like this, with this illustration. You know, in the current way that food is packaged, food's labelled. Labelled for the sake of our health.

[ 6 : 38 ] And there's so much nowadays that we see in food packaging that says, free from. Free from the various ingredients that, you know, would cause, whether it be an allergy or some kind of intolerance.

You know, if we were to eat food with particular ingredients. Things like gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, sugar-free. And foodstuffs are now labelled to indicate that the food that you eat actually will protect you if you have a particular intolerance or allergy or allergic reaction to any of these ingredients.

So when we come to think of the freedom that we have in Christ, we can say it's a free from. Free from the spiritual context that, you know, we see the freedom that God gives to us that protects the Lord's people from all that would damage a right relationship with God.

Free. Free from the dominion of sin. Where sin offends a holy God. Free from the guilt of sin.

Because Jesus has brought on the punishment that you and I deserve.

Free from the demands of the law to conform to the laws as a means of salvation. Because it's grace by grace you've been saved through faith.

[ 8 : 01 ] Not that anything that we've done to merit salvation. And the more that we look at this freedom that's ours in Christ, the more you'll seek to live that free from life.

And you'll truly indulge and engage in that freedom to live for Christ, to live in love for Him, and to live in loving others. Because it's the freedom that you've been given to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself.

But before we look at the various practical aspects of that freedom, we do need to be aware of the, if you like, the source, the source of our freedom. And that source, of course, is in God.

As we read in verse 13, the first part of verse 13, where Paul writes, you were called to freedom, brothers. Called to be free.

Paul's using this wonderful expression of being called. Called to be free. This is the amazing privilege of every believer.

[ 9 : 09 ] You've been called by God. Called to be set free from the power of sin, from the dominion of sin. And just as God called you in the initiative of grace and called you to be His, God called you when He chose you, when He called you out of darkness and brought you into His marvellous light.

So, in that calling, He's called you to know the blessings of freedom, freedom in Christ. And it's a calling that none of us must ever take for granted.

Don't let it slip away from your conscious awareness of the love of God for you. And Paul's stressing here that that calling from God has a responsibility.

You and I have a responsibility to live by that calling and to do so in active obedience, obedience and in living a life of freedom, freedom from sin and freedom in Christ.

But then notice that Paul, immediately after he's mentioned this calling, you were called to freedom, brothers. He alerts us. He alerts his readers to be aware of the temptation to think that now that we are free, they're no longer under the slavery of the law, as he says earlier in chapter 5, verse 1.

[ 10 : 33 ] They're not now to think that they're free from the law's demands to obey God's law. We don't have that, as it were, that freedom to break God's law and indulge our sinful nature.

And there is that temptation, of course, to think that we can all of a sudden disregard God's law and disregard the Ten Commandments because we're now under grace and not under law.

Paul's reminding the church there in Galatia, Galatia, as he's reminding ourselves. See, the law still has to be observed. Of course, it's not the means for our salvation.

But when we obey God's law, we're showing the evidence of salvation in our lives. We're showing the evidence of saving grace. That's the evidence of the love of God in our hearts and our lives that's going to be seen in our love for God as to how we obey his law and how we love one another. We're still to obey the commandments. The commandments, as Jesus summarized, in love, our love for God and love for our neighbor as ourselves. And in that freedom then, that freedom to love, and Paul tells us we have that freedom to serve.

[ 11 : 52 ] So we read in verse 13 and 14 again, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, as an opportunity for the sinful nature. But through love, serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Back in the late 4th, early 5th century, it was St. Augustine, the North African theologian, who really, I suppose, summed it up so well when he said, love God and do as you wish.

Love God and do as you will. Now, of course, that meaning isn't, you know, that somehow you do do what you want to do irrespective of what God declares in his word to be honoring to him.

We don't do whatever we wish irrespective of what Jesus taught about how we are to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. that surely when a person truly loves God with all her heart, with all her soul, then our actions, your actions, will flow from that love, that freedom to love according to all that God has commanded you in his word.

And the Christians will, the Christians wish, the Christians pleasure, if you like, wouldn't be for self, but for God. And what you wish wouldn't be if you truly love God and continue in that love and you love God with all your heart, your wish wouldn't be to indulge in sin, but to indulge in Christ-like love for others.

[ 13 : 29 ] And it's that neighbor love that Jesus spoke so often of in his ministry. And so that being the case, then, the commandments, the commandments that we find in God's word, the commandments that concern neighbor love, we have to see in the context of freedom, freedom to serve one another rather than freedom to indulge in so many things that we are so tempted to indulge in for even a selfish disregard for our love for our neighbor.

So we'll honor our parents in love and freedom. We won't steal. We won't commit adultery. We won't covet our neighbor's possessions.

We won't indulge in lies. Because all these commandments deal with neighbor love. And they reflect the freedom that we have in Christ to love one another.

That's why Paul there in verse 14, why he's saying that when we indulge in the flesh or as we might put it, we may indulge in our sinful nature, we're actually seeking to gratify self.

Having that selfish mindset that disregards and denies the needs of others. Because if you think that your newfound freedom in Christ is simply a license to indulge in selfish desires that gratify our sinful nature, we're actually not loving God and we're not loving our neighbor in self-giving love, the love that we ought to give to others.

[ 15 : 11 ] If you are called, as Paul remember has said, you're called to freedom. Freedom from sin and not freedom to sin.

You don't have freedom from sin. You've been given a freedom from all that would draw you away from all that truly honors and glorifies God, from all that would sanctify your life in the Lord Jesus. And if we need any reminder, any reminder of what that license looks like, we'll just look at the world around us. Look at the delight that the secular world has and seems to be more intent in showing even that world that removes and removes and keeps removing the God-given boundaries that God has given us.

And the world, the secular world without Christ, delighting to remove these boundaries in the name of freedom. And the so-called freedoms that the secular world delights in.

Freedom such as freedom to choose, freedom to define one's gender, freedom to live as I please, freedom to indulge in whatever my senses tell me to do.

[16:29] Freedom to destroy life in the name of progress. Freedoms, of course, there are no freedoms at all, but in fact, they're the complete opposite. They're the examples of, in fact, the examples of slavery that Jesus warned against when he declared in his ministry, when he declared that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

And that's slavery. That's slavery as a product of license. License that actually wants to remove restrictions, but it's actually denying God-given freedom.

It's a mindset, it's a way of life that in fact enslaves, it enslaves the appetites, the appetites that keep demanding more and more, that never satisfy the God of self.

The proper use of Christian freedom in a relation with others, it's not to serve self, but it's to serve one another. It's what Paul's telling us here at the end of verse 13 and confirms there in the summary statement that we read in verse 14 where he wrote, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

And that freedom that the Christian has, the person in Christ has, it's a freedom to action. I mustn't use the freedom that I've been given to indulge in self.

[17:56] So I mustn't use my freedom to ignore my fellow believer and any lack of love towards him. And the freedom that Christ gives you, that you have in Christ, it's a motive, it's an incentive, it's a desire to be as Christ and to seek out the lost, to have compassion on others, to give of self for the sake of others and their need.

and it's that relegation or relegating your own needs, even behind the needs of others. It's service, not self.

It's service that actually delights to be a slave, but not a slave to sin, but a slave, a slave of the Lord Jesus, a servant of the Lord Jesus, and yes, even a slave to our neighbour.

It's that sacrificial love, that love that gives of itself. that's the kind of love that's seen in our freedom in Christ, your freedom to serve, your freedom to love others, to love God and to love others sincerely from the heart.

And it's really a beautiful expression of true self-giving love in your heart when the evidence is seen in a person's growth and grace, when that person is seen to be more and more Christ-like indulging in that freedom to serve, that freedom from self and freedom from captivity to sin.

[19:28] Of course, as we read there in the passage, there's a painful reality, the painful reality of the opposite, as Paul tells us in verse 15, the opposite of serving one another in love, and the opposite is the ugliness of division.

as Paul tells us in verse 15, but if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you're not consumed by one another. And Paul really is showing us here in the most, really the most stark language, the ugliness of the lack of love within a fellowship.

He's using, as we said, particularly strong language, graphic language even, to show the ugliness of division, the lack of love, the not exercising our freedom in Christ to love God and to love one another.

Then if you watch nature programs of wild animals attacking one another, you'll see how Paul's illustration fits. If you see how the attacks are really intense, you see the lion's mouth just puncturing and killing to devour the helpless beast that it's attacked and overcome.

The lion's showing no mercy. It's only got a desire to kill and destroy for the sake of self. And what Paul's referring to when he's speaking of the opposite of love within a community, well, it's strong, it's devastating.

[21:02] He's showing what it's like to indulge in the sinful nature when, well, when we want to do things our own way, when we want only, what we lust and desire from our selfish desires.

And we care nothing for the needs of our neighbour. And it's that mindset, it's that practice of failing to love one another, it only leads to devastation and destruction.

Because lives are destroyed by selfish greed. Lives are destroyed by selfish minds. And that self-centred arrogance that really shows no compassion, no concern for the needs of others when we think of ourselves as even better than others.

And there's a warning here for each one of us not to make our freedom in Christ an excuse to exercise a loveless, cold, uncaring, denying of love for a brother or sister in Christ.

What do we have? we've been given that God-given solution to the temptation to indulge in our sinful nature. And that true Christian freedom, that freedom that's expressed and well-expressed in self-control and loving, loving our neighbour, serving our neighbour, obeying the law of God.

[ 22 : 30 ] How is it possible? How is it possible to live that way? we're sinful creatures. We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. How can we live that life of freedom in Christ?

Paul gives us the answer here. And the answer is by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, how alone keeps you truly free to serve and obey our loving God.

The Spirit gives and enables you and I to live a life to the glory of God and to the good of others. It's that freedom in Christ, our point that we find in verses 16 to 18.

And let's read these verses again. But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh for these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

If you're led by the Spirit you're not under the law. This is how Paul begins this next little section. He begins it by saying but I say, but I say, in contrast to a lifestyle that simply seeks to gratify self, in contrast to a lifestyle that withholds love from our neighbour, power.

[ 23 : 58 ] Well, in that lifestyle that's constantly arguing and bickering and quarrelling biting and devouring, well, that's an ugliness that's, as it were, devoid of the power of God and the love of God.

But in contrast to that, Paul tells us that we live by the Spirit. Every Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit. you have a new power, a new dynamic in your life.

It's not of course to say that we'll never sin again this side of eternity. We still sin as Christians. We know now there's that spiritual warfare within us, that war between the flesh, our sinful nature, and our new status in Christ.

There's that war between the flesh and the Spirit, the two diametrically opposite. And so Paul's bringing us to see clearly there in verse 16 that if we live by the Spirit, we're not going to gratify our sinful natures, we're not going to gratify the flesh.

You see the contrast, the contrast is so clear. What the sinful nature desires, what the flesh desires, well, is to please self, and that's a rebellion against God, gratifying our sinful nature, even in denying, love to our neighbour, but to love our neighbour as we ought, and given that power, that enabling by the Holy Spirit within, and the outworking of that spiritual life, because as we read on in that chapter we read in chapter 5, and maybe God willing next week we'll explore that more fully, the Spirit filled life, the God glorifying life, the fruit of the Spirit that we see at the end of chapter 5 there.

[ 25 : 55 ] When we're living by the Spirit, when we're led, as Paul says, led by the Spirit, we're going to exercise that freedom to serve one another in love and obey the law, and be led by the Spirit.

It's not just a passive thing, it's an active thing, it's that willingness to be led by the Spirit, and to live a life that glorifies God and that freedom that we have, to love God and our neighbour, ourselves, free from the conflict of these wars within us, the wars that seek to drag us away from our service to God and to one another.

There is a conflict, Paul tells us in verse 17, there's a conflict that's real and experienced by each one of us, you who love the Lord. Paul, of course, himself could recognise that in himself, but it's that active seeking to live by the Spirit and to fulfil the Lord's requirements to love God and our neighbour as ourselves.

That's what we are to be and to do. So, giving this rather shorter service this evening, let's just sum up what we've been considering.

If you've been led by the Spirit, if you are led by the Spirit, you're going to exercise that freedom in Christ, that freedom from the dominion of sin, the power of sin, and you're not going to exercise a licence to sin.

[ 27 : 28 ] You're not going to seek to exploit your neighbour, but rather you're going to seek to show love to your neighbour in active service, whatever the various practical activities that service involves.

You're not going to disregard the law, you're not going to all of a sudden just remove the commandments from your life. Of course, you're not under the law in the sense of depending on your obedience to the law for your salvation.

Remember, you've been accepted, you've been received in Christ. He's fulfilled the law. But you and I would seek to live by the Spirit and yes, keep the law, keep and obey the commandments.

Keep the word that sanctifies you and truly show, show it by your actions, show it by your love one for another, show it that you truly are free in Christ, free in him, free to love God, free to love your neighbour, free in Christ who gave himself for you so that you might be free.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we give you praise and thanks that we know that true freedom in Christ, your Son.

[ 28 : 54 ] We thank you, Lord, that truly, as Jesus said, that we've been set free and we truly know the exercise of that freedom in love, even as the Lord Jesus Christ came in love.

So truly, may we truly love one another and may we serve others as we serve you, as we live these lives of sacrificial service in your name.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. Hear us, Lord, as we exercise even that joy, that rejoicing in praising you.

Continue with us now, Lord, we pray. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.