

Set Free in Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 April 2023

Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

- [0 : 00] Our holy and ever-living God, we come before you this day and we humble ourselves down before you. Help us, we ask, to come to this place and come to this time of worship with a heart and a mind and a soul that understands that we come to you, a God that is holy, holy, holy.
- That in all that you are and all that you do, that you are without understanding by us. You are so above our mortal understanding. You are perfect in all of your ways.
- You are glorious and gracious and beautiful in all that you do. You are the God who is without beginning, a God who is without end. You are eternal in all that you are and all that you do.
- We come this day and we ask you to prepare our hearts and prepare our minds to worship you as we should. We confess that we often come to this place. We come to this time of worship.
- We come to gather around your word with brothers and sisters and our hearts and our minds are often so distracted. We often find ourselves thinking and pondering everything but your word.
- [1 : 13] We come to places of worship and we leave perhaps even having not worshipped all that much at all. Lord, forgive us for these times. We ask that for our short time together today, you would give us a heart of worship as we hear once more from your word, as we're reminded once more as to the glory and the majesty, the wonder of what it is to have you as our God.
- As we're reminded once more from your word of your glorious promises to your people. You're a God who keeps your people, who never lets your people go. As we're reminded and rebuked from the warnings from your word, you're a holy God who requires a holy life from your people.
- As we ponder these things, Lord, we ask us that you'd soften our hearts. We come this day with many things lying in our hearts and many things in our minds. As we come this day with the burdens perhaps, with the week which lies ahead of us.
- Responsibilities which perhaps loom over some here. We come just now with the disappointments, the sadness perhaps, the heartache perhaps of this past week.
- We come to this place just now before you and we know that we come to a living God. A God who is not distant, who is not far removed. A God who does not just, as it were, make all that there is and then stop caring.
- [2 : 39] We come to you. A God who is close to his people. A God who listens to those who cry out to you. We pray just now especially this day for those of our own number who are mourning.
- Those who we know and who we care for. Who are mourning the loss of a loved one just now. Lord, we do come just now. We know that even though the loss is of one who was one of yours.
- Even though the loss is of one who walked with you for the many years of her life. Lord, we know that the loss is still there. The grief is still there. The pain is still there.

We do pray, Lord, for our mourning family. We also pray for mourning friends. For our mourning community. We pray, Lord, for all who are affected by this providence just now.

We know that death speaks to us so clearly. And death speaks to us in a way that none of us ever hope to hear. But it does speak. We find ourselves reminded just how hopeless and at times just how helpless we are as we find ourselves faced with the confusion and the pain and the reality that we live in a world where we have no idea what one day or the next may bring to us.

[3 : 58] We come just now as we remember those who are grieving. We also remember those who are grieving a loss of perhaps many years ago. As anniversaries come and go and as the seasons come and go, we know that very often grief can remain so painful and can remain so strong for those who are feeling it.

And we pray, Lord, for those who are grieving a loss of loved ones. Those who are still suffering that even this moment. We know that our words often fall so short and our efforts are often so small.

We give you praise that we come just now to you. For one who is the ultimate comforter. As your word tells us that your Holy Spirit, that he is the comforter. That he offers comfort in a way and at a time where we cannot.

We do, Lord, pray for that holy comfort today. That real comfort to those who are mourning. Lord, we do pray again for ourselves here just now. We pray for any here today who are yours and who love you.

We ask you would open up your word to us. We would leave this place not just having grown in our knowledge, but having grown in our love and our appreciation for who you are. We pray, Lord, today for any here and indeed for those here.

[5 : 12] Those who we love and those who we are so glad to see here. But who as of yet have no saving knowledge for themselves. Who as of yet, at least publicly, cannot call themselves your people.

Who as of yet are saying that they do not know you and do not know Jesus as their Saviour. We thank you they are here today. We thank you that you have brought them here. Lord, that they would know that we love them.

That they would know that we are thankful for their presence with us today. But much more than that, that they would know you today. They would know you working in our lives and working in our hearts and bringing them to a saving knowledge of your Son today.

For that's why we're here. We're here to glorify and magnify the name of our Saviour. We're here today to praise his glorious name. Who is now at your right hand making constant intercession for us as his people.

As to him just now we worship. As to his name we give all the praise and all the glory. Would you pray again for our place here. For this area where you've placed us.

[6 : 43] We pray for our brothers and our sisters next door as always. As they seek to serve you. As they seek to worship you today. We pray for them and their service in this place. We pray for all your people here.

In both churches. Help us to serve you well in the mission field you've placed us in. We pray just now for those who are heavy in our minds. Our loved ones.

Our spouses. Our parents. Our children. Our siblings. Our dear friends and family. Who as of yet have no saving knowledge of you.

Lord we ask you use us as witnesses. Help us in our conduct. Help us in our own thoughts even. And help us in all that we say and do. To be witnesses. To glorify your holy name.

Lord we again ask a prayer we know is beyond our ability. That's why we ask it of you. We long and we ask to see days of renewal in this place.

- [7 : 41] We ask first and foremost for days of renewal. Starting with ourselves. For we know that where we are not renewed. Very often Lord. The world around us will not also be renewed.
- We ask Lord you renew us. And remind us of our first love. We also ask for days of revival. And days of gospel blessing.
- For the homes in this area. For many homes around us. Who have no gospel interest. Who have no gospel clue whatsoever. We ask you would revive them. Lord we ask your gospel cause would be known and loved.
- In this district. Not for the glory of this congregation. Not for the glory Lord of any minister. Not for the glory of the free church. Lord for your glory. We would see both our buildings here full.
- Full of those coming to cry out. And to know Jesus as their saviour. Until these days of blessing come. Lord help us to be satisfied with where we are. In this day perhaps of small things.
- [8 : 38] Help us to be bold. And gentle witnesses in our homes. In our places of work. Help us to serve you well. Come just now Lord confessing sin.
- Confessing that we have gone so clearly at times against you. To our shame willingly we have sinned against you. We come just now confessing that sin.
- Confessing that before you a holy God. Who cannot tolerate sin. Who cannot be in the presence of sin. We come just now begging that forgiveness.
- But also come just now knowing that forgiveness is ours. For those who know Jesus as our saviour. That his finished work guarantees for us. It guarantees for us that freedom we have in and through him.
- Guarantees for us the joy we have as your people. It guarantees for us the hope we have. It guarantees for us eternal life. That we can come just now and know. That despite our own at times waywardness.
- [9 : 38] Despite our own at times. Our sullyng and dirtyng of what you have given us. We know that through the finished work of our saviour. That we are his.
- More importantly Lord. That he keeps us. As we cling on to him. He holds on to us. Asking all these things in and through. And for his precious name's sake.
- Amen. Let's turn to God's word. Turn to God's word. And we can read. In Galatians chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5.
- It's on page 915. Of the church. Bibles. The pew Bibles. Galatians 5. On page 915. Let's hear the word of God.
- For freedom. Christ has set us free. Stand therefore. And do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look.
- [10 : 47] I Paul. Say to you. That if you accept circumcision. Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision.
- That he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ. You who be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace.
- For through the spirit. By faith. We ourselves eagerly wait. For the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.
- Counts for anything. But only faith working through love. You are running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you.
- A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord. He will take no other view. And the one who is troubling you.

[11 : 45] Will bear the penalty. Whoever he is. But if I, brothers. Still preach circumcision. Why am I still being persecuted? In that case.

The offense of the cross has been removed. I wish that those who unsettle you. Would emasculate themselves. For you are called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom.

As an opportunity for the flesh. But through love. Serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor.

As yourself. But if you bite. And devour one another. Watch out that you are not consumed. By one another. 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.

[12 : 42] For these are opposed to each other. To keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the spirit. You are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident.

Sexual immorality. Impurity. Sensuality. Idolatry. Sorcery. Enmity. Strife. Jealousy. Fits of anger.

Rivalries. Dissensions. Divisions. Envy. Drunkenness. Orgies. And things like these. I warn you as I warned you before. That those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the spirit is love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control.

Against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus. Have crucified the flesh. With his passions and desires. If we live by the spirit.

[13 : 43] Let us also keep in step with the spirit. Let us not become conceited. Provoking one another. Envying one another. And so on. Pray that God will bless his holy and his perfect word to us.

Let's again send you God's praise. Again from the Scottish Psalter. And this time from Psalm 119. Psalm 119. Again sing verse 33.

Of a psalm. Psalm 119. From verse 33. It's on page 402. Of a church psalm books.

Psalm 119. From verse 33. Teach me O Lord. The perfect way. Of thy precepts divine. And to observe it. To the end.

I shall my heart incline. Give understanding unto me. So keep thy law shall I. Yet even with my whole heart. I shall observe it carefully. Psalm 119.

[14 : 45] Verses 33 to 40. It goes praise. Teach me O Lord.

The perfect way. wing of st which. So keep thy love.

See you. et i CARE 2 wurde mine. Fear my heart.

May life. genom si. Go on and start me out to be so, give my Lord shine.

Give me my Lord heart a shout, of send me out for this.

[16 : 10] The man of something beautiful, for I delight the Lamb.

My pardon to thy testimony, I know to be in light.

Turn thou away my sight and hide from beautiful beauty.

How good thy good and holy with peace to quicken me.

Confirm to me thy gracious work.

[17 : 43] The quick shining of me here. How good thy good and holy with peace to quicken me.

I start along with my fear, free Lord, for good I judge and keep.

Though for thy reason I have wronged, in my truth we can lead.

Let's, for a short time, turn back to the chapter we had, Galatians, and chapter 5. In Galatians chapter 5, looking mostly at verses 1 down to verse 15, for a second text we can take verse 1, Galatians 5 and verse 1.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

[19 : 30] We were supposed to be carrying on our series in the Gospel of Mark, and it's amazing how these things work out. The series is good to carry on, but over this past week, just in discussions and through reading, the reality of how precious our freedom is in Christ as Christians has become so clear.

I'm seeing various discussions that certain groups around even our country are having these days, certain Christian gatherings are having. It's more important for us, just for a short time today, and we'll carry on our study next week, Lord willing, for a very short time, just studying together, and being reminded as to the joy and the wonder and the beauty.

Also the responsibility, what it is to have freedom in Jesus. Freedom in Jesus and in Him alone. For freedom Christ has set us free.

For those here today who are not yet Christians, you aren't yet able to say that Jesus is your Saviour.

As we discussed for a short time the freedom that Christians have, you might, I don't know, you might find yourself thinking that what you've seen perhaps of Christianity, what you've heard perhaps of Christianity, even what you've seen through all the years of living in a community, you might still be thinking that, well, Christians don't seem all that free to me.

[21 : 13] You seem bound by your Bibles, bound by your church, bound by how you do things, bound by how you think things. You're told from on high by your minister what to think and what to say.

Now, if you aren't thinking that, I can guarantee you, and I'm sure you'll know this, there are many in this world, many in this community, many in our island, who think that Christians, that we are just poor souls.

We're bound to a book that's 2,000 years old. This book which is full of fairy stories, which some shepherds wrote because we were bored one day.

A book which tells us about a God who cares for us. A book which tells us all we have to know to be saved by that God. And we think, what a load of rubbish.

The world thinks that. Our community thinks that. Some of our friends and our family think that. But as Christians, we are so bound to our rules, so bound to our Bibles, so bound to our church, and so on, that we live poor lives.

[22 : 16] The opposite of free. For those here today who know the Lord and who love the Lord, first and foremost, of course, you know that is quite the opposite.

Quite the opposite. But for those of us who are saved, perhaps when you are a bit older, some who are saved later on in life, you know the contrast, don't you?

You lived a life where you thought you were free. You were certain you were free. And then you're saved. And you realized you didn't know true freedom.

The second the Lord showed his gracious love towards you, you realized then that now in Christ you are truly free. You're now living the life you were quite literally created to live.

We spend some time in these verses today. For the Christians here, for brothers and sisters, this is a reminder that our freedom in Christ is precious.

[23 : 16] And we see here, as Paul writes to this church, it is so precious that he is willing to speak very harshly towards them. Quite bluntly, and we'll see later on, very bluntly towards them.

Because the freedom he wants these brothers and sisters to keep, their freedom in Christ is so important to him, that he is willing to speak harshly to them, so that they remember and understand that in Jesus they are free.

And that they should not give that freedom away to anyone for any reason. We'll see that as we go on. Just very simply, under two very general headings. First of all, looking at eternal freedom.

Eternal freedom. And then seeing everyday freedom. So eternal freedom and then everyday freedom.

First of all, just very generally, eternal freedom. For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

[24 : 22] For freedom Christ has set us free. The first freedom there is our everyday freedom, and we'll get to that later. The second free there is the general eternal freedom.

For freedom, for everyday freedom, Christ has what? He has set us free. How has Christ set his people free? And the Christians here, we know this. We've heard this.

But how often and how desperately we need reminding of it. Christ, dear brother, dear sister, Christ has set you and I free.

For us to understand the importance of our everyday freedoms as Christians, we must remind ourselves first as to the overarching importance, the overarching wonder and glory, what it is to live free in Jesus.

There's three ways. There's three ways. There's many ways. But just for ourselves this morning, there's three ways, three broad ways we can think of how in Christ we are free.

[25 : 30] Eternally free. Firstly, brothers and dear sisters, in Christ, you and I, we are free from the guilt of sin.

We are free from the guilt of sin. Now we know this. We hear this week after week. And so we should. But just for a second, let's think of this clearly.

As this very moment, as we sit in our pews just now, as we begin this new week trying to serve the Lord and trying to look after our families and trying to be part of our community, we live our lives as brothers and sisters, as those who are free.

Free, totally free from the guilt of sin. You're free from the guilt of your past sin.

For the life you led before you were saved. Perhaps a life that you would be horrified just now if I was to read out your past life just now.

[26 : 40] The things you did, the person you were, what you said, what you were like to people. And he's sitting here thinking, I assure you, I am cringing with you of the thought of the past life.

What you once were, how you once were, what you once did, what you once enjoyed doing, what you once longed to do, the things you once said, things you enjoyed saying, the thoughts that once just controlled your mind, but made you tick day by day your passions and desires, which you were felt so free in, and so happy in, which were rebellion after rebellion after rebellion, which were blasphemy perhaps after blasphemy after blasphemy, which were evil perhaps after evil, which were so sad and so heartbreaking and so destructive to your mind, perhaps your body and to your soul.

These past sins, which perhaps, if we're being very honest, these past sins, which we covered this before, even next door in the prayer meetings looking at spiritual warfare, these past sins, which Satan just loves to throw at us, and why does he use our past sins against us?

Because it works, doesn't it? It works. Nothing works better when you're just feeling so low as a Christian. Satan then reminds you, do you remember when you X, Y, Z, when you thought this, when you did this?

Do you remember these years you spent doing that thing or saying that thing or acting that way? Do you remember the company you once kept? Do you remember the places you once went to?

[28 : 27] Do you remember everything? It works, doesn't it? It works so well. Satan uses that so well. The reminder for us this morning is that, dear brother, dear sister, we are free from the guilt of our past sins.

Free. You're perhaps not free at times from remembering your past sins, but that's a burden you place in yourself.

As you bring to mind your past sins, and this is just to the Christians, to the brothers and sisters, as you bring to mind your past sins, as you try and perhaps relive and live in regret, that's not from the Lord.

That's from you or from the evil one or from both of you combined at times. The Lord does not recall the sins he has cast into the depths of the sea. The Lord has made clear to us, has he not, again and again, but when he saves someone, what happens?

That person is cleansed. What happens? Their past, their history, it is gone. Washed, clean, purified.

[29 : 43] We'll sing this later on in Psalm 51. Just the reality of a past life being removed. And you feel, dear brother, dear sister, when you feel that past life come back, when you have perhaps the regrets and just, when you feel so bad for what you once did or who you once were to others and to the Lord, don't wallow in that reality.

Catch yourself, stop yourself and go to God's word. Go even to passages like our passage today and remind yourself even from this first verse that you are free.

You are free of the guilt of your past life. Perhaps you still suffer the consequences for it. That is true. We still live in a sin-sick world. Perhaps those who you once wronged and you were once perhaps so evil towards, perhaps there's still unforgiveness there and pain there.

We live in a sin-sick world. Perhaps you still in your body suffer the consequences. Your mind perhaps suffer the consequences of your past life. We live in a sin-sick world.

But the Lord no longer holds your sin against you. I'm not saying that as a minister in a pulpit. I'm not saying that as someone up here.

[31 : 01] I am saying that from God's word. Not just to give you or to give us all a pep talk this Sunday. No, this is God's reminder from his word to us today that in Christ we are free.

Free from past guilt of sin. Past forgiven. We're also, of course, free from our present guilt of sin.

And here's where we begin to perhaps feel uneasy. We think, well yeah, our past sin forgiven. I can agree to that. But surely the sins I've committed yesterday and today, the harsh words that I thought and the things I said and the things I did, is that truly forgiven from me just now?

Does the Lord really forgive that quickly? Well he does. The same power which forgave and forgives your past sin, it's the same power of forgiveness that forgives to our shame our ongoing sin, our ongoing waywardness.

And we know we're not saying here that, and Paul, we've covered this before about Romans 8, Romans 9, us being reminded that we're free in God and that God forgives our sins, that is not permission to sin.

[32 : 20] And that's often said that if we preach this way, we teach this way, well if you say that God forgives the sins of his people, if God will keep forgiving the sins of his people, are you not saying then and giving permission then for Christians just to sin freely?

Well I'm forgiven, that's okay, as it were, ticket punch, going to heaven anyway, so I'll live as I want to live as a Christian. Well, a Christian who's thinking that way is either so backslidden in their faith or perhaps they've never truly understood the gospel in the first place.

For the Christians here today, the brothers and sisters, when we hear and are reminded that God forgives even our current sin, not just past sin, but our ongoing sin as it were, our current ongoing sin, for the Christians here, does that give you this joy of thinking, well that's good then, I'm sorted, I can go as sin as I want?

That doesn't, does it? It brings us to our knees, doesn't it? It brings us to our knees as we're reminded we worship a God who loves us, who forgives us, who keeps us, who cares for us, who sees us in our brokenness day by day, who sees us as we fail him day by day, and who still says what?

Who still looks on his people and says, you are mine, bought and kept the precious blood of his Son. Past sin, present sin, we know where it's going and even more uncomfortable for us, we are forgiven of his sins we've not yet committed.

[34 : 02] Such is the grace of our God. Such is the glory and grace and love of our God. And it should hit us.

It should hit us as we ponder that reality as we seek to live a God-serving life just now. This new week, we begin this week, we strive, we hope to serve the Lord and to see chances to serve him and to share the gospel and to point what's around us to Jesus.

We live in his freedom knowing that as we fail, as we fall, as we falter, he has forgiven his people. Dear brother, dear sister, he has forgiven you and I.

Our sin, the guilt of our sin is removed from us. We also have freedom from the worry of wrath. So we have freedom from guilt but also freedom from the worry of wrath.

God, has he not, he's gone from being judge over us, judge, righteous judge over us to when we come to know Jesus he then becomes father, loving, gracious, kind, ever forgiving, ever keeping father who gives good gifts to his precious children.

[35 : 27] From judge to father. We covered this, we said this quote before but God goes from frowning to smiling. It's one of the Puritan quotes and I've quoted this about five times in the game, I still haven't googled properly which Puritan said it, but spurts and quotes it from the Puritans that God no longer looks on his people with a frown.

He no longer looks on his people with a frown. God goes from frowning on us, at least how we understand it, we have him with respect as we're hovering over us, looming over us, watching us, waiting for you to make your mistake and then to cut you off, you're done.

He goes from judge, righteous, justified judge who is exceeding all your sin, who sees all your darkness, who is waiting there to rightfully, justifiably destroy you for your sin to free in Christ, free from the worry of wrath to father, kind, gracious, loving father, who is aware smiles on his people.

He goes from always looming over us to always holding us. You are free from the worry of wrath because on that cross our saviour was there and he what?

He became sin for us. The father looked on the son, his eternal, glorious son and on that cross our glorious saviour, the second person of the Godhead of all the power and glory and majesty of the divine nature that he has.

[37 : 24] He's counted a sin. As a father laid onto him the eternal and we don't understand this and praise the Lord those of us who are Christians will never have to understand this.

The father placed on the son the full punishment, the full eternal punishment that's deserving of all the sins of all his people.

Jesus bore all the wrath of the father that was meant for you and I. Which means we are free from a worry of wrath.

And finally, we are free. We are free from the worry of eternal death. This is of course not the Christians' ultimate hope.

No matter what this life may look like for us and for some here this life is a hard life. For some Christians here life can be so painful, so complicated, can be so at times just so hard going.

[38 : 39] We are free in the knowledge that his precious, precious purchase has purchased for us. No more fear of death, eternal death.

We might still fear physical death, of course physical death, but there's still pain and heartbreak and fear and worry attached to that. There is no shame I would argue in fearing physical death, but dear brother, dear sister, there is no fear for you and I for spiritual death.

You and I have spiritual life through our risen Saviour. Eternal freedom, eternal freedom, freedom from the guilt of sin, freedom from the worry of wrath and freedom from eternal death.

We could go on for the next few hours with all the freedoms, all the glorious realities of having Christ, but just these three for us just now. For freedom, Christ has set us free.

That brings us to the first freedom now, this freedom, this sense of everyday freedom. Eternal freedom leads us to hopefully understanding better our everyday, and by everyday, it's probably the wrong word to use, more ongoing freedom, but everyday just rhymes or matches with eternal, everyday freedom, our ongoing freedom, our natural living, breathing freedoms as Christians.

[40 : 14] For freedom, Christ has set us free, Paul writes to the Galatians. Why were these progressors Galatians needing reminding of their freedom?

Verse 2, Luke, I, Paul, say to you, if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law, and so on, and so on.

What's going on in Galatia? What's going on in this small church? What's going on in this quite new church? There's trouble. There's trouble in Galatia.

There's some real problems going on in this small gathering, and Paul is having to remind these Christians that in Jesus they are free eternally, but also in Jesus they are free ongoing.

They are free every day. There's circumcision being done in the church of Galatia. Now, for those of us, we've heard this plenty of times before, we know what circumcision is.

[41 : 24] It was the bodily sign that God gave to his people in the Old Testament to show their belonging to him, or to the males to show their belonging to him. There's plenty of sermons there for us for the future with the Lord's help.

But when Christ came, when the church starts again, when the free reality of the gospel enters in, when God then, we see from after Pentecost, when the church begins to grow and expand into the Gentile nations.

Again, this is a sermon for another day, but we see that circumcision is stopped. Circumcision was the old covenant sign of the Lord keeping his people.

Now, what the new covenant sign is, that's a whole other series, but just as a taster for a future thing, that circumcision, some would argue, myself being one of them, but circumcision is now shown in our baptism towards our children, but that's for a future discussion, a future sermons.

But either way, circumcision is no longer needed to be done. When Christ came, the old covenant physical covenant sign is stopped, and the church is clear on that. The church is very clear on that.

[42 : 47] And we see here that there's some teaching has arisen in the church in Galatia. There's some teachers, or one teacher perhaps, who is teaching that in order to be truly saved, to be genuinely saved as a Christian, to really show how much you are one of Christ, to really show how special, to really show that you are believing in Jesus, you must, you must take on the old covenant sign of circumcision.

Now, not to be too graphic, but it's one thing for a small child to be circumcised, quite another for what's going on going on here for adults before an ascetic, and they're being told and being taught they must be circumcised to love Christ fully, to show their allegiance to Christ fully.

what's happened? What's circumcision showing? The physical act, as horrifying as the image is, and as painful as reality is, the problem here isn't the actual circumcision.

The problem here is what's led to this strange teaching entering into the church. This small gathering of Christians have begun to believe that in order to be saved properly, and to live lives as Christians properly, they must not just listen to God's word, but take on board also man's word.

In this case, this man or this group was teaching that he was circumcised. Thankfully, not a problem for us today, but in one sense, things haven't changed in the slightest, have they?

[44 : 47] There's no one today teaching us that to be a proper Christian, we must be circumcised. There are some groups in the world which still teach that, but that's not our concern or worry in our culture, thankfully.

But we still have the same root problem, don't we? We still find ourselves, including myself, all of us as brothers and sisters, we find ourselves still being drawn back into the thinking that to be a proper Christian, to be a real Christian, Christian, the Bible isn't quite enough.

Now, we would never say that, or perhaps think it so bluntly, but our actions betray us. We must dress a certain way, speak a certain way, think a certain way, act a certain way, conduct ourselves in a certain way.

Now, the caveat here is, for all we're about to say, the caveat is, we're not saying these things to be done in an unbiblical way. We're not saying, because we're saved, we can dress however we want, and act however we want.

We've covered that before. We're not saying that. We are saying, is that for anyone to teach and to say that to be saved properly is scripture plus X, Y, and Z, we're going back to our brothers and sisters in Galatia, and we are circumcising ourselves in just the same way.

[46 : 13] We're acting in just the same way. We're being robbed of our freedom in Christ. A few examples from these verses we have here of how Paul shows them what it means to be robbed, and really what we're getting at here is that the Galatians had entered into what we would call a sort of legalism.

Now, legalism has plenty of definitions, but for our dealing here, legalism, we can take a simply saying, to be saved, we must have more than the Bible gives us.

We must do more than the Bible commands us, and really, we must do more than God tells us. It's a Bible plus, it's the Jesus plus, that's a simple way of understanding legalism.

There's plenty of avenues we can go down, and time is not with us just now for that, but for just now, legalism, for us to understand it, for this text, it's Jesus plus anything else.

For the Galatians, it's Jesus plus circumcision. For us today, in our culture, our context, it's Jesus plus plenty of other things, and we'll see that as we go on through these verses.

[47 : 31] So what does legalism, what does having Jesus plus something else, how does that rob us from our freedom as Christians? Christians? How does forgetting that in Jesus we are free, how does that affect us as Christians?

Well, first of all, verse 4, it robs us of our security. Verse 4, you are severed, this is Paul speaking to those who are being tempted to be circumcised, you are severed from Christ, you who be justified by the law, you have fallen away from grace.

Again, he's using harsh language to these brothers and sisters, he's speaking to them almost as if they aren't saved anymore, he wants them to grasp just how much danger they are in. If they accept circumcision, if they believe to be saved means Jesus plus something else, how they speak, how they eat, how they dress, how they act, within Christian limits, Paul is saying to them, you are severed from Christ, you are severed from Christ, you've given away your security in Jesus.

In Jesus you are free. By adding to the gospel, by saying to be a Christian means salvation plus something else, you are severing yourself.

You are cutting yourself off from Jesus himself. You're in very dangerous ground, very dangerous ground.

[49 : 01] You are destroying your assurance. You're destroying your assurance. I believe Jesus, I love Jesus, I want to serve Jesus, but also in your mind you think you have to fill in the blank yourself, you have to do X, Y, and Z to be a proper Christian.

Whatever you find yourself being tempted towards, whatever perhaps cultural quirk of your own culture you find being drawn towards, to really show how Christian you are.

Paul tells us, Jesus plus anything, scripture plus anything that's not founded on scripture, you're in dangerous, dangerous ground.

Because once you begin to fall short of your own unscriptural expectations, you begin to find your assurance being damaged, don't you? If you set yourself up to do this and to do that, to act this way, to do this certain thing, this certain way, to really show how saved you are, when you begin to not do these things or find these things impossible to do, these man-made things you've given yourself to do, your assurance begins to crumble and crumble and crumble away.

You rob yourself of your own security and your faith, your own security and your salvation. You also rob yourself of your hope of salvation, of hope itself.

[50 : 36] Look at the hope we have in verse 5. For through the Spirit by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness, through the Spirit by faith.

The hope of eternal perfection, the hope of eternal righteousness, the hope of eternal life. and the sad reality is that man-made theology and man-made teaching and man-made practice, which has no true biblical undergirding, even though it might sound holy and look holy, if it's not based on Scripture, man-made teaching leads to thinking, and that leads us to lose our hope.

And we've seen this, and we know this, I think of examples myself which now, of dear brothers and sisters who love the Lord, but have based their faith in certain things other than Jesus, and good things perhaps, at times holy things, but it's not Jesus.

And the second these things begin to fade away or change, or they become hard to follow their own man-made rules, they lose hope, they doubt their salvation, they doubt their own care for the Lord.

Act this way to really show your sin, as we said. Dress this way, do, say, think, X, Y, Z, this way, to show you really love Jesus. Sounds good, feels good sometimes, but does not add to your salvation.

[52 : 17] Legalism kills hope. Legalism makes you point inwardly to yourself. And the irony is, often, the legalistic things we often fall into, sound very holy and sound very good.

But rather than turn you to look at Jesus, they turn you inwardly, don't they? Oh, I didn't try very hard today. I didn't do X, Y, and Z very hard today. And rather than look to Jesus, you end up looking more and more to yourself at how much of a failure you are to your own man-made rules.

And Jesus and the gospel, his freedom he's bought for you, is left somewhere in the background. Legalism, it kills hope. It kills the joy of what it is to be one of the Lord's people.

And very briefly, legalism stops us or prevents us from real unity. verse 6. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Only faith working through love. As we've all know and seen not just in our own history as a church, as an island, but seen even in our own lives and seen, if we're honest, even in our own hearts this very moment.

[53 : 47] As we add anything to the gospel, as we add rules and regulations to those coming to Jesus, add rules and man-made regulations to those who want to live well as Christians, we make ourselves us and them.

Now there is a clear gospel boundary of us and them, those who know the Lord, who love the Lord, who serve the Lord, those who don't. That is the clear gospel boundary we stick with.

Within that, of course, we have different denominations and there are some secondary issues on baptism and everything which means we perhaps can't worship together, we perhaps can't worship together on the Lord's day, but we're still brothers and sisters, we still love one another, we still call one another brother and sister.

we're not talking about secondary issues, that's fine perhaps, but the truth is, as we add to the gospel, we make those who don't adhere to our own specific additions to the gospel, as perhaps not even part of the gospel at all.

Well, that group over there, they don't dress how we dress, they don't worship how we worship, their history isn't like our history, I don't think they're going to make it.

[55 : 15] And we think that's silly, but we do it, we've done it, ourselves we do it, we do it all the time as a gathering sometimes to our shame, not speaking of course of ourselves here, but as Christians generally, we do it.

They're somehow different to how we would do things, therefore they have no hope. And we kill gospel unity.

Legalism kills true, beautiful gospel unity. But our sisters, we would otherwise work alongside and serve alongside, we close ourselves off, we close the door to them, and the gospel, which could flourish in our hands together, is not made use of.

To summarize legalism, the gospel plus anything, it is the enemy of the freedom we have in verse 1.

For freedom Christ has set us free. For freedom Christ has set us free. The question is, as we come to an end just now, how do we guard against the legalism the Galatians found themselves engaged in?

[56 : 36] How do we here, in our own family gathering here, how do we guard against the danger of legalism creeping in? Of Jesus plus something creeping in?

Of Scripture plus something creeping in? Thankfully for us, our forefathers gave us many things, but the confession of faith and the whole Westminster standards, amongst other standards, are there for our benefit.

Just a quick reminder, I'm sure we all know, but for any who are perhaps not quite sure, the confession of faith, it is a secondary standard. It was compiled by faithful, by many hundreds at the end, of faithful men seeking to really be a summary of the Bible, a summary of what we believe.

It's not inspired, perfect, it's not perfect, it is man-made, but it's good, it's useful, it's very good, it's very useful. And in this situation, these men who work so hard, who often spent at times weeks working almost through the night to do this work, they say this concerning our freedom and our freedom as Christians, but also concerning how it is we decide what it is we believe as Christians.

Confession of Faith, first chapter and section five. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation or the traditions of men.

[58 : 35] As Christians, everything we believe is either from the Bible or can be proved, really proved and clearly demonstrated to be a scriptural principle.

The example is scripturally we must meet together on the Lord's day. scripturally we must meet together on the Lord's day. How often do we meet together on the Lord's day? Does the Bible give rules for that?

Is it good to meet together as often as we can on the Lord's day? Yes. Midweek meetings, is that scripturally there? You can argue it is but some argue no.

Is it a good thing to meet together and pray for an hour on a Thursday? Yes. And so on, so on, so on. Everything we do as Christians, as we say as Christians, we either find it in the Bible or it is clearly a good biblical principle.

And you test that. Well, you test that. If someone says to you, if someone adds something to Scripture, if someone says, well, to be a real Christian, you must dress like this or speak like this X, Y, Z.

[59 : 41] Do you know how you find out if it's right or not? It's not complicated. It doesn't require four years of seminary training. you push it. Respectfully, gently, lovingly, carefully, you push it.

To be a Christian, you must, whatever, you must, you must go to church and a prayer meeting and a, you must go to prayer meeting.

You must then also give a certain amount of tithing. You must, as our friends perhaps in some congregations would teach, you must give a certain amount of money.

You must give a certain amount of money to the church to be considered a Christian. You push it. You push it. You push it. And you see very quickly that the X, Y, and Zs, that people add on, they rarely withstand scriptural pushing.

You ask them again to either show you clearly in scripture where it is, or, as the confession tells us, to show us clearly in scripture the general rules where we can find a basis for doing what we're saying we should do.

[60 : 54] It's either in scripture clearly laid out, or it's there by the tone and by the context. It's there by the general teaching of God throughout the ages.

We think we are so far away from the legalism our brothers and sisters in Galatia faced all these many years ago. And we are in many senses.

But being honest, and we all know this to be true, each one of us have faced and will face legalism. Brothers and sisters who are well-meaning and who love the Lord, but who want us to act in ways, perhaps would like me to preach in ways which sound good, which feel holy, but are not from scripture, are not good, are not God glorifying.

In the end, legalism, it sounds like it glorifies God, but legalism does nothing but glorifying man, glorifies a person seeking to make themselves look better, sound better, act better.

Our whole life is based on Jesus, on his finished work. For freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

[62 : 16] Let's bow our heads in that, a word of prayer. Lord God, we come before you, we thank you for the gift of your word, we thank you Lord, for the great reminder and the promises we find in it, you're a God who has given freedom to your people through the Lord Jesus Christ, through his finished, his perfect work, we can know for certain that we are free, eternally free, free from all the wrath, free from all the guilt, but also we can know that as we seek to live our lives day by day, we live as a free people, not bound by man-made rules, but bound by you, bound by your word, bound by what it is we find in it, what we can deduce from it.

Lord, you forgive anything that was said not in accordance to your word, we give you praise as always that the power is not found in the preacher, not found in the jar of clay who stands here, Lord, the power is in you as you preach and you teach us through your living word.

Help us as we sing our final item of praise, we praise you Lord and thank you Lord for the one who leads the praise, who leads the sung praise. Lord, help us to leave this place having grown in our love, understanding and our worship of you.

Ask all these things in and through and for Christ's precious name's sake. Amen. Let's close by singing to God's praise from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 51, Scottish Psalter and Psalm 51.

Scottish Psalter, Psalm 51, and sing verses 14 down to verse 17, it's on page 281. Psalm 51 on page 281.

[64 : 00] O God of my salvation God, me from blood guiltiness set free, then shall my tongue aloud sing off of righteousness, my closed lips, O Lord, by thee, let them be opened, then shall my praises by my mouth abroad be published.

Psalm 51 verses 14 to 17 to God's praise. O God of my salvation reflect e■it Himsi peace upon Messiah bring Indiana who sj Steven who he all eaten who she though O God may excel be out of glory who■ who shall f■red ye trem ■■ yea, how my righteousness might lossed yet so high by This heaven B coordon

Then shall our presence by my heart Abroad be salvation For the desire not sacrifice Else would I give it be Now will the wealth of earth Of perish but of delight be Abroad be salvation

To the heart of Christ in sacred place Abroad be salvation To the heart of Christ in sacred place With the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ And the love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Both you now and forevermore Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Thank you.