Free for love

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Preacher: Debbie Gould

[0:00] But here in today's passage, as Sam has already pointed out, Paul talks about a freedom that is really very, very different. This freedom sets us apart from the rest of the world.

It's what is behind discipleship. It's what will allow Christ's people to reflect the love of Christ to each other and also to the world.
And if we understand it clearly, it will assist us in growing as disciples of Jesus and it will transform how we live each day.
And dare I say, it will also make a difference as to where the Lord takes this church here at Chatswood. Now, we've been exploring over the last weeks how Paul is challenging the Galatians to not fall for the wrong teaching by the Judaizers, not to go back to the way that they were.
They were to remember what they were saved from and to keep their eyes on Jesus who saves by grace alone, not by any extra rules or traditions we've seen where they needed to perform with perfection because we've also seen time and time again that to do that you have to be perfect and it is impossible for any of us to do that.
[1:30] And we saw in chapter 4 that the Galatians were slaves but they are now free in Christ, meaning that everyone who is trusting Jesus is free.

We are no longer slaves. Colossians 2 tells us that Jesus is no ordinary person. Many of you will know that already. He is the Son of God who came to save.
He came from the heavenlies and he broke into this world as a man because we needed a saviour, a God who saves us from our sin, the sin that was taken on himself on the cross so that we could receive the righteousness that we did not deserve and he took the punishment that we did deserve.
This was all to make us free. Romans 8 tells us that what the law couldn't do, Jesus did in being a sin offering for us.
And in Corinthians we read, we implore you as on God's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
[2:49] Or in verse 17 it says, therefore if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation, the old has gone and the new has gone. Tim Keller says, freedom is both the means and the end of the operation of liberation.

And in Luke 4, Jesus says, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.
And in Galatians now, in verse 1 it says, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
Now this verse is really a summary of the entire letter to the Galatians. For freedom, Christ has freed you.
[3:55] And then Paul says, because you have been set free in Christ, stand firm. Well, stand firm is a military term. It means to guard your post, keep alert, be strong, resist attack, and stay together, hold the line.

And we do this by Christ-centred Bible saturation, a core value here at St. Paul's, and for very, very good reasons it's a core value.
It is standing on, advancing with, fighting for, and resting in God's word, the word that saves and rescues. The word sets us free.
Now I know about this truth that we're talking about now. I know that Jesus has set me free, and I'm sure many of you also know this with all of your heart as well.

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I love the Lord. I have a good idea, be it not a complete idea, that my sin was taken on the cross. What I have done wrong, Jesus suffered for it.
[5:08] My heart's desire is to serve the Lord until my dying breath. My heart's desire is to be very flexible and to hold very loosely to any ministry that I have the pleasure of being part of.

My heart's desire is to see others grow into being better at any of the ministries, ministry roles that I am currently involved in.
My heart's desire is to always shine for Jesus in my thoughts, in my actions, in my deeds. Hmm. But I don't.
I fail on all of those accounts at various times, and I'm absolutely certain that you would also. Now, let me explain something.
Many of you know the word sanctification. It's a great word. It rolls off your tongue very nicely. I like saying it. But sanctification is that process of being made new in Christ.
[6:17] And when we acknowledge that we need a saviour and we repent of our sins and become part of the family of God, a great miracle occurs.

We're taken from spiritual darkness of this world into the light of God. Our spirits are brought to life in Jesus, where we were once spiritually dead.
That is called personal sanctification. This aspect of sanctification speaks to our being set apart from the world for God.
It's an instantaneous act of grace. And we're declared right before God and we are set apart for God to use.
Ephesians 1.4 says, For he, God, chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. 1 Corinthians 6 says, And that is what some of you were, but you were washed and you were sanctified.
[7:27] You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. This is positional sanctification. It's set. It doesn't change.

But then there is progressive sanctification. And as the word suggests, it moves. It is living out what that positional sanctification, it's about living that out.
It's the process whereby we daily become more and more like Jesus Christ through the death of our sin in our lives as we endeavour to live according to the grace in the gospel.
But we're aware that we all fail. Romans 7, this is a famous passage that you would all have heard most probably, where Paul shares, I do not do what I want to do, but what I hate to do.
And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is the sin living in me.
[8:42] So this sounds a bit like a riddle. But if Paul is confessing that he struggles with sin, I take it that it's really okay for us also to confess that we too struggle with sin.

The third sanctification, I'll come back to the other, but the third sanctification is perfect sanctification. It's the glorification of which happens when Jesus returns and he makes us perfect to be with him.
And oh, how good will that day be when Jesus returns and we are made perfect to live eternally with him. So we have positional sanctification, we have progressive, and we have perfect.
We live in this progressive section here. The Galatians were saved by grace and now they are needing to live out what that looks like.
That's what this middle section is all about. For the Galatians to obey the law as being encouraged, they would be turning away from Christ, as Paul is suggesting in verses one to four.
[9:59] But does it mean that if they obeyed the law, does that mean that they would lose their salvation completely, as it might suggest in verse four, where Paul says, if you follow the wrong teaching, you have fallen away from grace.

Now, interestingly, Paul knows these Galatians really well and he has great confidence that they are not going to turn their backs away completely.
because we see in verse five, he says, but by faith, we eagerly await through the spirit, the righteousness for which we hope.
He knows that they're going to be to turn back to Christ. He has such a confidence in the Galatians that they will follow the gospel of Jesus.
Now, this is a situation that many of us know only too well. We have friends and we have loved ones who have declared a saving faith in Jesus at some stage in their life, but they have lost their

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way and seemingly lost their faith and they are far away from Jesus today.
[11:14] We want to know, are they saved? When Jesus returns, will Jesus know their name and call their name to be his own. Now, let me say, first of all, nobody knows what really is in the heart of any individual.

Only God knows that. But what we do know is in Romans 8, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.
But scripture also tells us that we have a purpose. Our progressive sanctification, that middle bit that I told you about, will indeed confirm if the first bit, the positional sanctification, was real.
Okay, so it's important. What we're living in right now is really important. That is, the way we live reflects if we are truly saved.
Now, let me state very, very clearly that that does not mean that a person cannot turn back to the gospel they heard once when they were younger or whenever and that stops them from repenting of living far away from God.
[12:45] That can happen. The story of the prodigal son is a typical case in point. That son, he turned away from his father, you'll remember. He lived a wild life, but he realised he was foolish and he returned to the father with a heart filled with repentance and was welcomed with open arms.

You see, there are many who live as if it doesn't matter what they do. They believe that once they said a prayer to Jesus, a prayer of repentance, and because Christ offers forgiveness and freedom, they think it's okay to live in any way they would like to from that moment on.
I certainly have friends who live that way. I have friends who believe that they are Christians because they said a prayer and they were baptised, but they choose not to fellowship with any other Christian people.
They choose not to actually read their Bible. They choose to live a promiscuous life, and yet they still are living under the wrong attitude of thinking that the grace that God actually had given them that that will cover all of their sin for all times.
Now, earlier I mentioned the older brother of the prodigal son. Well, the younger brother equally fell for the trap of living how he wanted to. he had a hard heart and had an expectant heart of having everything come to him.
[14:32] He too was under sin, and he took advantage of the grace that was given to him by his father as well. This taking advantage, this living as if it doesn't matter what I do, this is called living by licence.

It's by rejecting the call to live a holy life. Verse 13 in our passage says, you, my brothers, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love.
Freedom in Christ is not a freedom to sin as we saw before, but it's a freedom from sin. It's not a freedom to ignore Christ and his word.
John 14 says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.
Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own. They belong to the father who sent me. The Galatians, on the other hand, were being encouraged to live by legalism and add rules and regulations to the gospel.
[15:59] Licence and legalism are different sides of the same coin. They are both enemies of the gospel of freedom.

Living either by license or by legalism will not save you. There is only one sure way to live. It is the gospel of freedom.
That is freedom from our sin but it is also freedom to something. What is this freedom to?
Well, it's a freedom to love. Verse 6 says, for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
The saving gospel doesn't give us license to live how we want. It gives a freedom. It gives ability and desire to live how God wants.
[17:06] As Christians, we do not attempt to produce perfect righteousness in our own lives by our own efforts. hope is not in ourselves.

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It is in Christ and Christ alone. More than that, the Christian life is hoping for what we already have. This sounds really very strange to the world because worldly hope is not a gospel hope.
Worldly hope says, oh, I hope this works out. I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow because I want to do something. Gospel hope says, I know that this will work out.
It means that we have total assurance. Paul uses it in verse 5 simply meaning that we're awaiting this righteousness.
We don't work or strive for it. We know that it is coming so we can wait eagerly and not anxiously. What is it that we're awaiting?
[18:14] It is a completely right record and right relationship with God. Paul is saying that we can live today in the light of our certain hope, a guaranteed future, a glorification and be welcomed by God and his open arms one day.

God has made us heirs. It doesn't mean that we're left sitting on our hands doing nothing though. By faith the Holy Spirit enables us to experience the presence of Christ in the here and now. By faith the Holy Spirit enables us to enjoy the commands of Christ and these commands are not burdensome but they are free.
Freedom in Christ is demonstrated through love and selfless service to others. Gospel truth is never limited.
Gospel truth is never intended to only be believed. Gospel truth is always intended to be obeyed and shared.
[19:46] Let me say it again. Gospel truth is never intended to just be believed, to just be head knowledge that you hold on to for yourself.

Gospel truth is always intended to be obeyed and shared. Love for God shows itself in our love for others.
The two are inseparable. Verse 14 says the entire law is summed up in a single command, love your neighbour as yourself.
How do we do this? Living in freedom to love, loving others is serving others.
It's about not wanting everything to be about me. Now many of you know that I have a six-year-old grandson, gorgeous Lincoln, and I had the joy of having Lincoln stay with me for a couple of days in the holidays.
[20:53] Now Link is a typical six-year-old. His world revolves around him. He wants everything for himself, be it food, be it time, be it goods, be it anything, he's a typical six-year-old.

He's a gorgeous boy, but he's a typical six-year-old. The sad thing is many of us adults want to live like the six-year-old. I want to live like a six-year-old sometimes.
I want to actually but that's not what this is about. Gospel freedom actually helps us to grow up to be the adult, not the six-year-old.
Our world doesn't revolve around just us. Now being free in Christ calls for something radically different.
Christ empowers a change in us to love in such a way that is counter cultural to what society thinks. Christian freedom is about discipleship.
[22:04] It allows the world to see Jesus in us because of the way that we love each other and the way that we love the world. That is an awesome responsibility my friends but let me say the great thing is that God doesn't leave us to do it all on our own.

We have the Holy Spirit to help us. Christian love is saying that you would deny yourself and give whatever is needed to another person.
There are plenty of ways that we can do this. It can range from a simple smile that you might give to somebody who serves you morning tea. It might be a smile for a shopkeeper.
That's Christian love. But it might be bigger than that. It might be offering to provide a meal to somebody who is having a tough time and just to give them a little special treat.
It might actually be coming and helping with kids here at Kids Church. It might be helping with kids at ESL or even helping with ESL.
[23:13] And let me just plug, ESL desperately needs a helper on Friday mornings because we've now got two families, so three children, coming to ESL and we cannot actually have the second mum come if we don't have a second person looking after the kids.

So that would be terrible if we had to tell that mum that she can't come. But we can do things that would actually help in many and different ways. Here at St Paul's, you will find in our vision series

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an abundance of ways in which you can serve here at church.
But it's not just serving here at church and loving here at church, it's about loving out in the world also. So there's many, many ways.
Might I also say that we are also encouraged to love and to love means that we will resolve any conflict quickly so that sin does not fester and we do not get a bitter heart.
Now, we have set as one of our core values, humble authenticity, where we want to deal with hurt quickly and appropriately and with the appropriate people.
[24:34] And so that is another way that we actually show that we love. If we cannot resolve conflict here in our church at St Paul's, we have absolutely no chance of being able to reflect how to solve conflict out in the world.

So we need to do it well here. That's humble authenticity, one of our core values. And, you know, sort of, there is no end to how we can love and serve, my friends.
We need to understand that this freedom we have is because we serve a new king. We are not obligated to return to our old ways of living.
to be fooled into living by license or by legalism as the Galatians were being encouraged to do is just truly foolishness.
We need to understand that we are going to be tempted because Jesus hasn't returned just yet to take us home.
[25:37] And so in the meantime, when we're in this middle section, we are going to be tempted. and when Jesus returns, he will make us totally new, he will make us totally perfect, he will sanctify us.

But for now, we live in this world where temptation exists and at the same time, we live with the hope of heaven. But we cannot stop that temptation, but we can choose what we do with any temptation.
temptation because King Jesus has called us to be holy. It's about being alert to the fact that we all have weak spots and if you don't know your weak spots, you need to go home and ask the Lord what your weak spots are.
Where do you get tempted most? What lies do you believe in your head that make you cause you to live in a different way? Because once we know our weak spots, then we can resist the temptations when they come.
Well, these last verses of our passage help us with how we are to live. You need to believe. You need to know what you believe.
[26:54] Okay? We need to read God's word. We need to pursue Jesus. Be active in our response to the freedom that Christ has won for you and he has won it on your behalf.

It's about this active pursuit, being alive to Christ. If you are not actively pursuing Christ, then you will be sliding back either into legalism or into license or maybe both, depending on how you wake up on a particular day.
Friends, we don't grow by accident. If we never read our Bible, we never pray, we never apply what we learn, if we limit when we're around Christian community, we will focus on what are worldly things and we will not focus on Jesus.
You won't grow because you are not pursuing Christ. Christ. You can allow sin to reign or you can choose to confess and to grow.
Trying to deal with sin on your own will just get you into trouble and you will constantly fail. You need to confess to the one who has taken it on the cross for you.
[28:21] But remembering the gospel, preaching it to yourself day by day, you will know that the Spirit of God will empower you to receive the grace of God, to not only confess the sin when needed, but will give you a heart to serve, a heart to love, a heart that will live not wanting there to be anything that stands in the way of you encouraging, and loving others as Christ desires for you to be doing.

Why can we be confident in this? Because Jesus in his death and resurrection gave up his life and by this life gave us a freedom to love to the full, to be loved and he gave us a heart to serve others beyond anything that we would naturally choose by ourselves.
The world will have different views on what freedom is really about and what it looks like. But friends, we have freedom to love.

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It's a freedom that comes with the gospel. Let's be the church that reflects the freedom that Christ has given us. Amen.

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