

What makes us free.

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- [0 : 00] Many years ago I had the privilege of going to France and going to the areas of the old World War I trenches and just wandering around some of those old battlefields.
- They're very sobering. Very sobering. There was one of the most poignant moments was when we were at Vimy Ridge and you had the Allied trenches and then I think it was approximately 50 to 100 yards away was the German trench.
- And the two sides had been entrenched in those trenches for months. It was just, it was horrific. And then you go on to the cemeteries and you just see these rows upon rows upon rows of headstones where people have given their lives.
- And I remember, I was only a wee lad, but walking through this and there was just no words to describe it. No words to describe it.
- You know, we sit here today and we enjoy the physical freedom that we enjoy today because of those men and women who gave their lives for us.
- [1 : 23] Who have given their lives in so many wars for hundreds of years. And think of the great wars. And we think of the more recent wars.
- And we think about the men and women who have given their lives even in peacekeeping so that we can enjoy freedom here today. Think about the many people who have suffered incredible ordeals.
- You know, an organisation that comes to mind, I just think is astounding, is a help for heroes. You know, an organisation that's standing by people who have suffered and they're trying to get through life.
- They've suffered to protect our freedom. Today we're obviously in Galatians 2. We're working through this series. And we're looking at freedom, but from a slightly different perspective.
- Not a physical freedom. We're looking at a spiritual freedom. A real lasting freedom. And not surprisingly, you know, Galatians 2, it continues where Galatians 1 left off.
- [2 : 28] It's funny how that happens. You know, Paul is arguing that there is just the one gospel. Despite these false teachers seeking to undermine him and the gospel that he was preaching to the Gentiles.
- You know, there was an attempt being made to undermine his apostleship even further as the false teachers, they pointed to perceived differences between the apostles and their teaching.
- And in this chapter, we are introduced to something, a subject I think is just incredible. And that is justification. And I know you're sitting on the edge of your seat going, ooh, yeah, justification.
- And if you're sitting there and you're anything like me before I join Bible College, you go, justification, great, nice work here. What does it mean? Justification. Declared not guilty. Justification. Declared innocent. Justification. Declared righteous before God. It's a really, really important subject that Paul is introducing here to the Galatians.

[3 : 43] And wherever Paul and Barnabas and Titus were going, they were preaching faith in Jesus Christ. Without any works of the law.

And this was causing real problems. And we're going to have a look at how people rose up to accuse Paul. And we're going to have a look at trying to understand this chapter simply this morning.

And hopefully remembering something of it by exploring it under the heading, or under the title this morning of what makes us free. What makes us free? Look at the verses, verses 1 to 16.

What makes us free? Is it the law? Does the law make us free? No. If we look at the law and its impact in these first few verses of Galatians 2, my mind takes me back to the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20. You've got those Ten Commandments given by God. And those Ten Commandments, they were of incredible importance to the nation of Israel. They were God's design for his people to worship and to glorify him and to live as God intended.

[4 : 59] Don't you just love that kind of simplicity? God just made it really clear for the nation of Israel, this is the way I want you to live and to worship me. So the law is not wrong in itself.

It can't be wrong in itself, because it is based by God, in God, for God's people. And it has a clear intention.

One, that it gives a standard for behaviour. A standard for behaviour to guard from sin. And secondly, it's a way of convicting people of sin.

But it leaves the opportunity to ask for God's forgiveness. There's an incredible simplicity about what God intended with the law. As Paul writes in Romans chapter 7, the law is holy.

Its commands are holy and right and good. But what the law can't do is deal with sin. It can't deal with sin. The law is therefore just, it's a guide.

[6 : 07] It's a way to live. It's a way for the Christian to live as God requires. But we're arriving here in Galatians 2, and there's this discussion, literally about law, essentially about circumcision.

The Judaizers, they were adopting a really legalistic interpretation of the law. You know, the Judaizers, they become absolute kind of slaves to the law.

And the guilt of not fulfilling it. What a way to live, where you're living such a legalistic lifestyle. You just get caught up in following laws and you're trapped.

And that's where the Judaizers were at. And Paul had to, he had to deal with this matter. He couldn't just sweep it under the carpet. It had to be dealt with. Because the Judaizers, they were viewing circumcision as being a matter of salvation.

I was kind of expecting an intake of breath there from everyone, because, oh, salvation by circumcision?

[7 : 10] In our minds, that's just ridiculous, isn't it? But that's, that's where the Judaizers were at. You know, that they were seeing that circumcision wasn't just a matter for the Jewish people.

Well, it was a matter for the Gentiles as well as the Jewish people. the law, the law hadn't just been the Ten Commandments, it was all the other, the add-on bits.

You know, it was what we were talking about last week, this Gospel Plus. But they had a law plus. It had all these tons and tons of laws which were creating this stairway to heaven. And it was just this massive list of the steps that they had to follow to show this moral fitness to enter heaven.

I'm like, whoa, what a way to live. What an incredible way to live. Paul must have been kind of tearing his hair out going, why are you trying to live like this? Why? And so it wasn't trivial because the supporters here of Gentile circumcision, they were placing their trust in the act of circumcision.

They were placing their trust in the law rather than in Christ. And it's, it's the revelation of Jesus Christ that has motivated Paul to resist completely the Gentiles being enslaved by the law.

[8 : 31] Paul's heart for the Gentiles is, I don't want you to get drawn into what the Judaizers are thinking about being the way of living. I don't want you to have that because I have this revelation of Jesus Christ that I want you to share in.

And so, Paul travels to Jerusalem 14 years after he'd been there last. He'd been going there and refining his gospel. He thought he had it kind of sorted, but he goes, he goes off to Jerusalem so he can discuss the matter of circumcision.

He can discuss his doctrines, his theology with the Jerusalem leaders to ensure that his views and his doctrines were right.

What I like is that Paul met them privately. He sent, he sent no letter. He sent no messenger on his behalf.

You know, in our context, there was no email sent, there was no Snapchat. The discussion was personal. It was face to face. See, Paul, he needed to be really honest.

[9 : 38] He just needed to talk this stuff out in the open. And there was absolutely going to be no opportunity for skirting around the issue. So I like with Paul, he's straight talking. I think of straight talking and I do think of some of you Scotsmen.

You like a little bit of straight talking. And Paul is speaking the truth in love of the gospel. I think Paul's showing just incredible wisdom.

He's not arguing for the sake of it. He's arguing on a matter of doctrine. And as I said last week, we'll be wise to take heed of such wisdom.

Not arguing over minor matters in our churches too. And believe me, there's no condemnation on this church. Every church you go into, there are people who are complaining and raising minor matters.

And they're getting caught up in them. And really, we need to see beyond those. We really need to see beyond them. In verses 6-10, Paul is recalling how he explained to the Jerusalem leaders that he shared the gospel with the uncircumcised, the Gentiles.

[10 : 53] That Cephas, so that is Peter, he shared the gospel with the circumcised, the Jews. Clearly, there's actually this whole unity in the gospel.

And despite so many different denominations today as a result of differences of opinion and interpretation and disagreements over the years, what unites is firm doctrine.

Firm doctrine. You know, there is no contradiction between the apostles in the New Testament. One gospel, one Christianity.

And it's the same today. Because there's been no change in the gospel. At no stage there's been a change in the gospel. Like Paul and Peter, we may have different commissions.

But that's all within the great commission of God as we are commissioned with God in his plan. And that is the gospel.

[12 : 01] So different ways of living it out, different ways of reaching people, different groups of reaching people, but one gospel. There's not one of us that's going to get to heaven without believing the biblical gospel.

The authority of scripture, the exclusivity of Christ are of such central importance that we have to stand for them just like Paul was.

The world could take our jobs, could take our health, could take our time, but it cannot have our souls.

what is lovely is that Paul and Peter, they left that meeting in Jerusalem and they were united in that one gospel.

They were fighting for truth and clearly fighting for truth has value to it. There's a real worth to fighting for the truth. But all of a sudden then, in verse 11, you've got it written that when Cephas, Sir Peter, came to Antioch, the situation has changed.

[13 : 17] The venue has changed. They've moved from Jerusalem to the cosmopolitan city of Antioch and here Paul is defending the uncompromising gospel. He's clear still to resist those who contradict the gospel and he needs to confront a fellow apostle.

Peter. Of all people, Peter is having to confront. Peter, a pillar of the church. Peter, who'd stood up and so vehemently and passionately defended the gospel in Acts 1, 2 and 3 and I've been reading those in preparation for Southern Ireland and it's going to be some of my sermons are based on those and I'm just like, wow, look at Peter standing up there and just this whole passion of preaching the gospel.

Peter but here he'd lost his bottle. Peter had messed up. Peter was running scared and fearful of a minority pressure group known as the Circumcision Party.

just thinking, I'm not sure I'd want to put on my CV all clubs and that I'm involved with.

I'm involved with the Circumcision Party. But Peter, he'd yielded to the pressure, to the compromise of his personal conviction.

[14 : 43] He compromised his faith despite God's revelation contribution personally to him in Acts 10 and 11. It's staggering, isn't it?

A man who was standing for God has messed up and suddenly he's withdrawn from spending this time and eating with the Gentile Christians. What Peter has allowed to happen is the law to take priority in his life and all of a sudden Peter isn't behaving or acting in accordance with the gospel.

Paul publicly confronts Peter to uphold the truth of the gospel and just to see Peter corrected so that Peter could turn completely from being a slave to the law.

I'm sure that Peter knew that what Paul was saying was right because they did share in the same theology.

We've just covered that in verses 1 to 10. They shared in the same theology of justification by faith and so Peter would have known that he needed to sort his behaviour out. Peter faces the truth the truth that they both state their lives on Jesus Christ.

[16 : 13] They both trusted Jesus. They did share in the same theology and I love it because as Peter stands up and he faces the truth what happens to Peter?

Peter is reformed. Peter is renewed and it all happens without judgment and without condemnation of Paul. Peter deals with this matter.

He turns from the law and the negative impact it was having on him and it's not mentioned again. A bit like when God deals with our sin.

It's not mentioned again. It just disappears. Peter has repented and despite probably the pain at a time, I mean, what a feeling for Peter to stand there and be confronted by Paul.

Kind of been a nice experience. But that was it. It was dealt with. Peter was free again. He wasn't seeking to justify himself knowing that he was justified by God, by faith alone.

[17 : 30] I was thinking about the phrase of actions speak louder than words. And they do, don't they? We may believe the gospel, we may have studied the word of God for years and years.

Many of you here may just love the word of God like I do and been studying it and studying it. But if our actions don't match the truth of the gospel, gospel, what witness and example are they providing?

The way that we're living, what kind of scene does that set for the people around us? Wouldn't it be good if we lived with a greater fear of God than that of man?

A greater fear of God than of man. See, the law that the Judaizers were so enslaved to was the whole thing about the way they stood before, really before men a lot of the time.

They had a greater fear of man than they did of God. And we'd be wise to learn from this as well. See, we mess up, don't we? Put your hand up because you've never messed up in life.

[18 : 49] It's easy to point the finger at others. Every single one of us has feared man more than God at some stage in our life. We've all been a hypocrite at some stage.

Perhaps some of us are leading a hypocritical life at the moment, making out everything's just fine, but behind the scenes, criticizing, digging, having a go, living a life that actually isn't what everyone seems to think is the way you're living it.

we've all lived in a way that's not the gospel way. We've all done it. We need an understanding of the big picture of the grace of God.

We need to look up and see the grace of God and understand the greatness of God to put ourselves in some perspective. Paul writes to the Galatians and uses the situation with Peter to illustrate what happens and needs to happen when people mess up, when they follow the law rather than grace, that there's to be no judgment, not humanly speaking.

It wouldn't be good if we corrected rather than condemned one another. Corrected rather than condemned. built each other up rather than tearing each other down.

[20 : 22] To speak and share the gospel, to see a person released and free again in Christ. Living out the truth of the gospel and Peter and ourselves will not be impacted or driven by the law to such an extent that we become justified by the law and that's what we will avoid.

The law is a marker, a marker. It was for Paul and Peter a guide and I want us to be very, very clear. The law cannot save one of us.

The law cannot save one of us. The law can never make any one of us acceptable to God. If we return to our title, what makes us free?

Is it the law? Paul? No. So what makes us free? You get to verses 17 to 21 and we have our answer. Paul is clear in verse 13 that the law drives us away from God.

So if it drives us away from God, we're not going to know freedom. So it can't be the law. God is righteous, we are not. We are under judgment of God because we are our unrighteous sinners.

[21 : 37] Every single one of us. I remember as a lad, I didn't like hearing that. And nowadays I remind myself continually, I am just a sinner saved by the grace of God.

But Christ, Christ is the one who reconciles us back to God for he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When sin is taken away, the judgment, the wrath, the condemnation of God are also taken away.

Hallelujah. And it's the apostles' doctrine that justification declared innocent before God is by faith alone.

A doctrine that the apostles agreed on earlier in the chapter and without God's justification we cannot be in fellowship with God. There was an argument by Paul's accusers at this time and there's opposition who would still argue along this line today on the subject of dying to the law which is that justification by faith was that a Christian justified by faith is then free to sin.

They argue that if God justifies bad people what is the point of being good? Because justification weakens a person's sense of moral responsibility. Paul responds with, in my Bible, verse 17, certainly not.

[23 : 04] You can imagine this sheer indignation that someone who is justified by faith can continue to sin. Certainly not is how Paul responds.

How can he respond like that? Because he's aware that the old things are passed away and all things become new when you become a believer in Jesus Christ.

And isn't that good? God's old self just disappears and I am so thankful for that. My old self has just passed away and all things have become new.

In verses 17 to 19 Paul writes that a person could not be saved by obeying God's law. They could not be saved by God's law. Paul is, what he's doing is he's taking that legalistic stairway that Judaizers have built and he is literally tearing the stairway down.

Saying there is no way to heaven by the law. And he is just tearing the stairway down. No one is able to keep God's laws perfectly.

[24 : 19] Not one of us can keep God's laws perfectly. We can't lead such a moralistic route to get to heaven. Why?

Because inside of us our very DNA is polluted with sin. Our very DNA and you can't deal with that. You can't deal with that sin personally and in a moralistic legalistic way.

So God's way of salvation and freedom from sin could only be found in Jesus Christ. Not by the law. Not by our own efforts.

Because these things can never ever substitute for faith in Christ. Never ever substitute for faith in Christ.

And we get to Galatians 2.20 and I love this verse. And it's key to understanding what the experience of dying to the law and a life in Christ is like.

[25 : 22] You see, salvation by faith, it makes us free. Free. And free indeed. No longer under the condemnation of sin by the law.

I remember that day I became a Christian and I'd never known freedom like it. Do you remember that day you became a Christian?

You knew freedom for the first time. Freedom from the guilt of sin. That was the law condemning you. And in Christ you become free. free. The law can never justify.

All it can do is accuse and terrify. To live by the law is to die to God. So you live by the law, you're excluding God. But to die to the law is to live to God.

If we want to live for God, we've got to die to the law. We've got to throw off, throw off our self-reliance. We've got to throw off our own self- confidence. I can do it my way.

[26 : 29] We've got to throw it off. We've got to stop climbing the moralistic stairway that we might instead find life through faith in Christ Jesus.

In verses 19 and 20, God looks at believers as if they have died with Christ. That their sins dying with him and they have become one with Christ.

they have become one in his experiences. Our Christian life, our conversion, our transformation by Christ begins when in unity with him we die to our old selves.

Per Romans 6. the doctrine of the false teachers in Paul's day is the same today. Teaching that if you want to live for God you must live after the law.

Do this and do that and then you're going to get to heaven. And we hear that still today, don't we? Paul on the other hand, what he's teaching is you cannot live for God unless you are dead to the law.

[27 : 32] I want you to think about law like ivy as it creeps up a tree and it slowly engulfs the tree and then gradually just squeezes the life out of it.

Thankfully, if we are dead to the law, the law can have absolutely no power over us. Consider the point that if we are dead to the law and the law is dead to us, how can it possibly contribute anything to our justification, to our innocence before God?

There is nothing left for us but to be justified by faith alone and it centres upon Jesus Christ. And what I love here at the end of this chapter is that Paul cements his argument in verse 21 that justification is through if justification is through the law, then Christ wouldn't have needed to die.

So anyone who insists that justification, declared innocent, declared righteous before God, can be done by the law, is saying that Christ didn't need to die.

And what they're really doing is they're undermining the very essence of the foundation of Christianity, of faith in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 06] And they void the very grace of God that makes Christ, and it makes Christ's death meaningless. If that's the case, isn't that utterly dreadful?

That really is dreadful. That you can be justified by the law and Christ becomes meaningless. Denying the nature of God, denying the rescue mission of Jesus Christ for the whole of humanity, for you and me gathered here this morning.

The fact that God sent his son as the perfect sacrifice must therefore mean that the law was insufficient. believers today may still be in danger of acting as if there was no need for Christ to die by replacing the Jewish legalism with their own brand of Christian legalism, of their own kind of laws that they need to follow to live out their life and live out their faith.

And those kind of people, they're giving people extra laws to obey. By believing they can earn God's favour by what they do. And not dying to the law, they are not trusting completely in Christ's work on the cross.

I'm going to read a few words from Martin Luther, the father of reformation and for whom Galatians was just pivotal in him waking up and smelling the coffee, if he had coffee.

[30 : 42] He says this, on the question of justification, it is a matter of life and death. It involves the death of the son of God who died for the sins of the world.

If we surrender faith in Christ as the only thing that can justify us, the death and resurrection of Jesus are without meaning. That Christ is the saviour of the world would be a myth.

death. Some will object that the law is divine and holy and let it be divine and holy. The law has no right to tell me that I must be justified by it.

The law has the right to tell me that I should love God and my neighbour, that I should live in chastity, temperance, patience. The law has no right to tell me how I may be delivered from sin, death and hell.

It is the gospel's business to tell me that. I must listen to the gospel. It tells me not what I must do but what Jesus Christ, the son of God has done for me.

[31 : 48] Friends, what makes us free? Is it the law? No. What makes us free? Dying to the law and placing our faith in Christ alone.

Amen. Amen.