

True Freedom 3

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. It's great to be in with the bigger people this morning as we look at this passage and it's talking about false teaching, isn't it? And so as we look at this, we're going to think about false teaching and how do we avoid falling into the era of believing and following false teaching and how do we work alongside brothers and sisters in the Gospel.

So let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your Word, we thank you that we have the Gospel of the Lord Jesus written down for us, for us to read and understand and grow in. Please help me to teach the truth, please help us all to not be deceived but to believe what is true and to truly believe it. Amen. So the thing about false teaching is it's false, right? But it's also really sneaky in that if a false teaching came along that said, you all have to believe in flying blue elephants, you'd all go, that's ridiculous, I can spot that from a mile off, I'm not going to fall for that one.

But what makes a false teaching particularly false is people start actually believing it. It's sneaky and our passage here in verse 4 speaks of false brothers secretly slipping in to spy and to enslave. Now the issue that's being raised in our passage is that of circumcision but if someone came today and said, in order to be a Christian, you need to be circumcised, we'd laugh them out of town, right? Like obviously that's not the case, we know that's not the case, that's an obvious false teaching. Why? Well because Paul has refuted it so clearly, with such clarity, that we can see that as a false teaching for a mile off. That actually devalues the Gospel of the Lord Jesus by saying, you need something else as well as Jesus, it's obviously not true. But it was really sneaky when these guys were saying it. And so what I want us to do before we jump into the passage is just think about circumcision and see the sneakiness of this false teaching to help us be aware of other sneaky teachings that are going to come in.

So thinking back, in the Old Testament, circumcision is a big deal, right? God made a covenant with Abraham and circumcision is the God-given sign of that covenant. So that was in Genesis chapter 17, God promised he would be Abraham's God, Abraham and his descendants would be God's people. And so when God made this covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, He used the word to cut a covenant. And then the symbol of a covenant is a cut and so if you don't keep the covenant, you are cut off from God's people.

All right, so the significance is this, either your foreskin will be cut off or you will be cut off. And this was given in everlasting covenant. And then after this sign of the covenant, as God made this promise, this binding covenant with Abraham, came the law. It's related but it came later.

[3 : 25] God introduced requirements for living in covenant with Him as His covenant people. That is, if someone rejects God's laws or says, no, no, you don't need to follow those, well, that's rejecting God Himself, rejecting the whole covenant of God, right? You with me so far? So then, Christ comes as the fulfilment of all these Old Testament expectations, including the covenant with Abraham and now here's Paul running around saying that people who are not Jewish, can enjoy the covenant relationship with God without the sign of the covenant that God gave, right? He's saying they can enjoy the blessings of God without submitting to the very laws that God set down in order to enjoy those blessings. And so, when these seeming brothers slip in and say, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, you can't enjoy the covenant of God without the God-given sign of the covenant, well, that actually sounds quite reasonable, doesn't it? When they say, no, no, you actually do need to submit to God because He's given you a bunch of instructions and so you need to follow those to submit to Him to be one of His people. That sounds logical and fitting, doesn't it?

Do you see how this teaching might slip in? How it might be accepted as a godly and appropriate way to live and it makes sense and it can actually seem like someone's saying, no, no, no, no, no, you don't need to get circumcised, you don't need to follow the law, well, that's an outrageous claim, that's someone disregarding God's law, what are they, they're the false teacher. But this is what

Paul is arguing in Galatians, right? He's taking this reasonable sounding, sneaky, secretly slipping in false teaching and he's sounding the alarm on it, right? And he does it with such clarity that it's no longer a secret false doctrine but an obvious false doctrine. We know that we are saved apart from any works of the flesh, apart from law but we need to be aware of these secret and sneaky false teachings. So our passage this morning is continuing on from what Paul has been arguing from the start of the letter and particularly from chapter 1 verse 11 and 12, he said, for I would have you know brothers that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel, for I didn't receive it from any man nor was I taught it but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. And Paul's recounting his history, how he came about by the gospel, how he definitely did not get it from man but he got it directly from Jesus. And so in chapter 2, he continues to say, it's not from man but it is in accordance with and in fellowship with the key leaders in Jerusalem.

So we're looking at setting out the gospel and then the resistance and then fellowship. So verses 1 to 3, Paul says he's been to Jerusalem, he's then gone to Syria and Cilicia, which is his hometown Tarsus, sorry this is chapter 1, and it's also where the church of Antioch was, where he and Barnabas served for a while teaching. And then after 14 years, he heads back to Jerusalem again, with Barnabas and with Titus. And he's writing about what happened before his first mission journey, when he met the Galatians. So he's gone on this journey, he's met the Galatians, he's now writing a letter to them and he's writing about what happened before he met them.

Why is he writing to the Galatians, telling about his travels? He's not just writing his memoirs, he's writing to tell them he didn't get the gospel from man. He's showing them how unconnected he was from the church in Jerusalem. And so he barely had any contact with them, he says. He saw Peter and James only on one 15-day trip and then he didn't see them again until 14 years later, he went back there. And that was when he saw any other apostles. So why did he go back? Verse 2, he says, I went up because of a revelation and stepped before them, though privately before those who seemed influential, the gospel I proclaim among the Gentiles. So he went up because of a revelation and secondly to make sure that he wasn't or that he hadn't run in vain.

And so as to the revelation, well scholars have debated the timing of when Paul wrote and what is he particularly talking about here when he's talking about this Jerusalem visit? Is it one we've got recorded in Acts and which one is it? I take it that it's the one that Luke records for us in Acts chapter 11.

[8 : 13] So if you flick back to Acts chapter 11. So Paul has been in Antioch and then when he's there, there's a prophet that comes. So chapter 11 verse 27 says this, Now in these days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone, according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

And so, I take it, Paul is going to Jerusalem then, in response to revelation, as he says in Galatians 2 verse 2, the revelation that was given to Agabus, that there's going to be this famine.

And so then, he goes to Jerusalem with gifts from the church in Antioch, with this advanced famine relief, for the famine that's coming to those in Judea. And, while he's there, then, also meets privately with these elders.

And he sets before them the gospel which he proclaims among the Gentiles. He does it privately, which I take it is for their sake, laying down what he preaches just to see if their understanding of the grace of God accords with what he preaches.

And there's two things to look at in this part of verse 2. Firstly, the people that he meets privately. And secondly, what's with this whole running in vain question? So, who's the them, firstly?

[10 : 04] Those who seemed influential. Why does he refer to them like that? And he does this weird thing all the way through this chunk of the Bible, right? So, verse 2, he says, those who seemed influential.

Verse 6, those who seemed to be influential. What they were makes no difference to me. God shows no partiality. Those, I say, who seemed influential. Verse 9, James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars.

Why is he being so sketchy about how he refers to the leaders of the church? So, you've got Peter, first, foremost amongst the disciples.

He was with Jesus after denying him, was restored to leadership by the Lord himself. You've got John, son of Zebedee, who ends up writing the Gospel of John.

He's the disciple that Jesus loved. You've got James, known as James the Just. He's the brother of Jesus himself. He's the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

[11 : 06] All right? So, these are some bigwigs. And Paul is saying, oh, you know, these guys who seem to be influential, they seem to be pillars. Why is he so casual with these leaders and these apostles who were appointed by the Lord himself?

What's going on? But this is his whole point. My Gospel is not from man. And he's making the point, he is not under the authority of these church leaders in Jerusalem.

He is, in fact, under the authority of Jesus Christ. He doesn't take orders from them. And though they seem to be influential, they do not influence him.

But he's not separate from them either. He went to set before them the Gospel he proclaims in order to make sure that he hadn't or wasn't running in vain. I'll tell you, this is not him checking to see if his Gospel is right.

He got that from Jesus himself. He's checking whether his work is going to be in vain because while he's preaching, there's no difference between Jew and Greek.

[12 : 13] All are saved through faith in Christ. Well, maybe the Jerusalem elders have a different Gospel which is going to undermine his work and deceive his people. He's not concerned that his Gospel is wrong.

He's concerned that people aren't going to follow it. They're going to be led astray. And so, Paul wants to show two things. He wants to show his Gospel is not from man, it's from Jesus.

His Gospel is also not different to what's proclaimed in Jerusalem. So he's writing to the Galatians to set those two things before them. It's the same Gospel. Because what's the result of this private meeting with those who seem to be influential?

Verse 3, The Gospel that Paul has been preaching includes that the sign of the covenant is not needed to be part of the covenant.

See, this isn't just, come on guys, like just ditch the traditions, ditch the symbols and like let's just get to the heart of things. He's actually saying the covenantal requirement that God established for being in covenant can be disregarded.

[13 : 21] And after setting this before the Jerusalem church leaders, they agreed with his Gospel. And though Titus, the Greek, was with them, he wasn't forced to be circumcised.

But they accepted that he could enjoy the fellowship of covenantal blessing of God without that ancient and God-given sign of that blessing. Because these things have been fulfilled in Christ, which we'll continue to look at as we go through the book of Galatians.

And there's a great encouragement for us here. The encouragement is this, right, that this is the Gospel that we have written down. It's straight from Jesus Christ to Paul the Apostle, written down for the Gentiles and here we are reading.

This Gospel came directly to Paul and he's written it down and we are reading. He is affirmed with the other church leaders, it's the same Gospel.

We can be confident in the truth of what Paul has written. So, know the Gospel, love the Gospel, live it out.

[14 : 29] This is the truth that God has given to us, directly from Jesus to Paul, who's written to the Galatians which we're now reading. And Paul gives us more detail on the issue at hand in verse 4.

And so, think about resisting these false brothers now. Verse 4, he says, yet because of false brothers secretly brought in who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so they might bring us into slavery.

Do you see, the issue here is not well-meaning brothers who just need better teaching. No, these are false brothers. They're not brothers at all. They're liars. They are secretly brought in.

They slip in to spy out our freedom. They're sneaky. They don't come with big, bold heresies that you can spot from a mile off.

They come with lies that sound a whole lot like truth. They come as spies. And what does Paul say their goal is? To enslave.

[15 : 36] To take the freedom that Christ has won through His blood, to take people out of that glorious freedom, and into a slavery of law-keeping and signs which lead to death and not to life.

What is this freedom that we have that they're spying on? This is the first time that freedom is really raised here and it's a big theme in the book of Galatians. What is the freedom that's being spied out on?

Well, the whole world is under sin. Galatians unpacks this whole freedom for us in the Gospel and it's wonderful news isn't it? Outside of Christ, everyone is living an empty way of life in slavery to sin and in fear of death.

The Old Testament law imprisoned everything under sin. That is, the law points out that you're a sinner, that you cannot live with a holy God. You can never be righteous by following the law. It highlights your sin and your need for a saviour. And Galatians goes on to speak about this great freedom which is that Jesus Christ gives us freedom from both the law in that we're made righteous through faith in Him, not by keeping rules and gives us freedom from slavery to paganism or today's secularism or any other empty source of hope in that we're now inheritors of the blessings promised to Abraham.

[16:59] So, we don't fear the curse of pagan gods, we're free from that. we don't fear the curse of HR departments or governments or the judgment of our own sin, we don't fear death because we have these faithful promises of God.

We are made righteous through Jesus Christ, we are sons of God. Though we may be persecuted, though we may suffer all these things, the curse of various people or various things and suffer death, we don't fear these things because we've been adopted as sons of God, heirs, given God's Spirit and it's not a conditional promise based on our efforts, based on our performance, based on race or status or things we do, just simply believing the promises, believing that our sin has been taken away, that Jesus is alive as our Lord forever, that we're clothed in Him and in Him, everything that's His is ours.

So there's nothing that we can do that means God will love us less, we're His. There's no sin left that God will ever hold against us.

That's a freedom from guilt, that's a freedom from an empty way of life. It's not a freedom from pain and discomfort, it's not a freedom to do whatever you want but it's a freedom from futility, it's a freedom from following after worthless things to a freedom of knowing and living in the blessings of God and a freedom to actually walk with the Spirit of God.

A freedom that we're righteous in Christ, we're going to inherit those promises given to Abraham through Christ without kowtowing to any requirements that others might want to impose on us.

[18:47] Why would you submit to a yoke of slavery? Why would you let anyone bewitch you away from the promises of the living God who's adopted us? His Holy Spirit who leads us clothed in His Son who gave Himself for us that we might live in the glorious freedom of God's Son, righteous in Him all by His grace.

But these spies, they wanted to take people from that glorious freedom that we enjoy in Jesus and enslave them back under law which would take away their righteousness.

It would say, yeah, I'm going to try and earn my righteousness by law keeping which is impossible which means they would be cursed and doomed. Take away the sufficiency of Christ's death for them and so no longer would they be trusting on Christ's death alone for their salvation but they would be trusting on something else and not Christ.

By adding a requirement to salvation, they're denying what Christ has accomplished, they're denying the glory of Jesus Christ, they would need to keep all requirements of the law which would result in them being cursed, not blessed.

Christ. And so Paul spotted these lying spies and he says he refused to submit to them at all and so the truth of the good news of freedom and eternal life through the blood of Jesus is preserved and upheld for the Galatians and for us.

[20:12] And this is the way with heresies, with false teaching. The ones that are obvious are the ones that have been fought previously. Someone sounded the alarm on them and now we know and recognise them.

Such heresies as Jesus is not God. You are saved by works of the law. It doesn't matter how you live because you're saved by grace.

Unless you speak in tongues, you're not a Christian. These are all false teachings that have been fought and have been made clear. But there's false teachings that will come that will sound reasonable at first.

that secretly seek to infiltrate and to enslave. There'll be false brothers who come as spies. And I think there's a variety of things that it could possibly be and they're going to be sneaky.

And when we think false teaching, I bet we can all think of like, oh, that way out group over there that believe way out things. I would never fall for that way out thing. But what about the sneaky

things, the things closer to home?

[21 : 20] I think some of those things might involve things like syncretism where we have our Christianity but we also take on some of the world view of this world and we try and just have them compatible some way.

And so things like when God says you cannot serve God and money, we go, yeah, yeah, that's true, that's true. Ah, but I can do it.

I reckon. Where we think actually some of the values of this world, well, maybe they're not all that incompatible.

Maybe I could live for a bit of this and a bit of that. Where follow your heart, you know, sounds like, well actually, what else should I do?

What else should I be following? Where all kinds of other things might come and might creep in and might just say, actually, there's something else here that I'm following and not just Christ.

[22 : 23] There's something else which is dividing me away, just sneakily, just subtly. But we need to be careful. We need to be on guard. We don't need to know every false teaching because people are going to be inventing all kinds of ways that have stored the Gospel.

What we do need to know is the truth. We need to know it well so we can spot it, so we can repudiate that falsehood when it arises.

So, keep reading your Bibles, keep being part of a small group, studying it, come to the Good News course when it's on, keep knowing the truth, loving it, living it out.

Do you notice how Paul responded in verse 5 to these false brothers? To them, we did not yield in submission even for a moment so the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you.

And sometimes I think that we Christians in various times and places can get this wrong. You see, the way of life for Christians, right, what we do, how we live, is submission, isn't it?

[23 : 34] We all submit to God, we submit to lawful authority, to governments, rulers, husbands, parents, masters, everyone submits. But sometimes we can continue that attitude of submission in wrong directions.

We can submit to sin instead of resisting it. We can submit to sinful commands from authority instead of resisting them. We can submit to false brothers and their teaching rather than resisting them.

We submit to God and the authority that He's placed but we don't submit to rejection of God and His Gospel. We don't submit to perversions of the Gospel.

Christians need to stand and resist. We need to know the truth, do not acquiesce for the sake of peace, do not just go along in order that maybe an opportunity for evangelism might arise later on.

Hold fast to the truth. And then in verses 6 to 10 Paul speaks about fellowship. And so in verse 6 Paul says the elders in Jerusalem added nothing to him.

[24 : 40] They recognised that Paul had his Gospel straight that is. Position doesn't guarantee correctness and so for example the whole idea that the Pope who speaks there's a Pope who speaks infallibly that's absurd isn't it?

As Paul said chapter 1 if we are an angel from heaven preach a different Gospel let them be accursed. God judges without partiality regardless of what people are who they are.

And as Paul has affirmed his Gospel doesn't come from man nor did these men add anything to it rather what do they do? They acknowledge his apostolic ministry. So in verses 7 and 8 you've got two groups Paul is to go to the uncircumcised and Peter to the circumcised but there's just one Gospel.

There's only one good news going to both groups. The uncircumcised they can stay uncircumcised for salvation because salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

There's true freedom in him. And these missions do you notice they're entrusted by the Lord Jesus who's at work through both Peter and Paul in their apostolic ministries.

[25 : 59] Apostle means sent and chapter 1 verse 1 Paul was sent he's an apostle not from men nor through men but through Jesus Christ and God the Father he's sent to the Gentiles by Jesus himself.

And then verse 9 he says that when James and Cephas and John who seemed to be pillars perceived the grace that was given to me that is they saw what was already true they saw that God had entrusted Paul with his task and sent him they didn't authorise him they didn't give him permission he didn't need that he didn't come from them but they recognised God's grace of what

was already happening and they acted in accordance with it by extending the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and to me that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised so one gospel two different groups multiple messengers there's a mission a mission to make Gentiles saved and to make Jewish people saved it's not a mission to make Gentiles Jewish it's that circumcised and uncircumcised would both trust the

Lord Jesus Christ through the one gospel of his atoning death on the cross and his resurrection is Lord of all there's not any other requirement than faith in Jesus as Lord to receive the covenant blessings of God's people but then you've got verse 10 and it kind of seems to come out of nowhere doesn't it but it's actually very closely related to everything verse 10 only they asked us to remember the poor the very thing I was eager to do and the poor I take it are the Judean Christians and so what James and John are asking is for Paul to remember the poor believers in Jerusalem that is these two missions are not separate it's not just that it's the same message going out to two different groups but there's a mutual love for one another the blessing of Christ came from the Jews to the Gentiles and so Paul as he goes to the Gentiles with their comparative wealth are to remember the poor in

Judea and Paul affirms he's eager to do so and he backs that up with his actions and so Paul visited Jerusalem Acts 11 with an offering from Antioch for relief from the famine probably on this same visit that he's describing now because he did care for the poor he'll later do at least one more trip bringing offerings from many churches including those in Galatia to Jerusalem where then he gets arrested and he stays under arrest all the way to Rome Paul consistently cares for the poor in Jerusalem this is what he says Romans 15 verse 25 he says this at present however I'm going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints of Jerusalem for they were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings this is the point that

James Keffer and John are making when they ask Paul mutual fellowship and love and though the whole of Judaism in the Old Testament was about being separate from the Gentiles and being God's holy people now in Christ there's this remarkable fellowship across Jew Gentiles circumcised uncircumcised one people in Christ Jesus and with that comes a remarkable fellowship of love so what does this all mean we're on the same mission with other believers so we need to extend the right hand of fellowship with others that the gospel might be proclaimed to all we need to accept the hand of fellowship that others extend to us we need to work together as God's people in various mission fields with the same gospel so how can we extend and receive that right hand of fellowship how can we work well together with other believers because we can't extend that hand others to enslave us there's some who come with those sneaky hidden reasonable sounding teachings that lead us astray and we need to not yield to them for a moment in submission and to stand firm against them and their teaching uphold the freedom that we have in

[30 : 49] Christ and work with others who are proclaiming that same freedom so how do we do that we need to be discerning don't we the first thing we do is rejoice in the gospel freedom that we do have go deeper into it and know it and love it and live it out the more that we know the gospel the more that we obey the gospel and love what the Lord Jesus done and glorify him the better equipped we're going to be able to spot things that are false teaching the better that we love Christ the more we're going to see something that comes to actually rob Christ of some of his glory the more we're going to actually be able to say wait a minute if I did that I'm not actually trusting fully in Jesus then anymore I'm actually trusting in something else as well or whatever it might be secondly how do we actually have fellowship with others do we have fellowship there's so differences with other churches but we must have the gospel right must be living in accordance with it we must be glorifying the

Lord Jesus that salvation comes only through faith in him there's nothing that someone needs to do which is going to rob Christ of his glory but live in obedience to him so our gospel comes from Jesus Christ himself it's a good and it's a glorious freedom that we have in him we're now free from an empty way of life we're free to live for Jesus Christ and obedience to walk by the spirit we have this amazing gospel so know it well that we might resist those who come to enslave us that we might stand firm against false brothers that we might extend fellowship with other real brothers to those who by God's grace have been entrusted with the same gospel and are proclaiming it faithfully that we might be on mission to see people know and trust and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ let's pray

Father we thank you for the good news that you have sent the Lord Jesus to rescue us from this present evil age we thank you that Paul has received the gospel directly from the Lord Jesus and has said it before the Galatians clearly here that we can read it and know the truth of it please help us to know this gospel deeply and richly and live in the freedom of it that we might have joy in it that we might stand firm against false teachings false brothers that might come to seek to enslave us we pray that we might work well with other Christians we might have fellowship with them that the good news of the Lord Jesus might be proclaimed faithfully and you'll be saving people for your glory Amen