

# True Freedom 2

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Loving Father, thank you for making yourself known to us, showing us the way of salvation through faith in your Son. We ask you now to teach us through your Word.
- Give us ears to hear, minds to understand, and wills ready to obey, so that we may serve you eagerly for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Amen. So if you've got an outline in front of you, you'll see I want to begin with a question. What makes for a good evangelist? What would you say are the most important character traits or competencies for a faithful and effective evangelist?
- I guess there might be lots of kind of helpful answers to this question, or at least a few. One of my favorite lectures from Charles Spurgeon starts like this. If I were asked, what in a Christian minister is the most essential quality for securing success in winning souls for Christ, I should reply, earnestness.
- And if I were asked a second or a third time, I should not vary the answer. And by earnestness, Spurgeon means fervency. He means passion. He means sincerity.
- [ 1 : 2 2 ]     When you're talking about heaven, rejoice. When you're talking about hell, lament. When you're calling people to repent, plead with them, beg them. When you're telling people about the love of Christ, show them with all the warmth and affection that you can muster, just how good it is to be loved by Christ.
- And how wicked it is to reject his grace towards us. And Spurgeon has a very helpful lecture on this in his lectures to my students. His whole lecture is really helpful. I think he's right on the money.
- But of course, there are some other things to say. An evangelist needs to know the gospel really well. That's pretty important. And we talked about that last week.
- And then there's being able to communicate the gospel clearly. I think another important character trait of an evangelist, though, if I can put it this way, is people-pleasing.
- I'm thinking of 1 Corinthians 10, of course, where Paul says, Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.
- [ 2 : 3 7 ]     That's 1 Corinthians 10. It comes just after that famous passage in 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul talks about becoming all things to all people. To the Jew, I became as a Jew in order to win Jews.
- In other words, I don't think it would be too much to say that Paul was a fanatical people-pleaser. He was ready to flip his lifestyle upside down, this way and that, to accommodate those who he was seeking to evangelize, not to cause offense if he could help it.
- He was prepared to change his clothes, his routines, his cuisine. He traveled across the Mediterranean. You name it. He was always prepared to go the extra mile to save the lost.
- So that's at least four things so far. A faithful and effective evangelist needs to be earnest, have a clear understanding of the gospel and be able to articulate it, and needs to be, at least in one sense, a people-pleaser.

But of course, that brings us to our passage this morning. And notice how Paul apparently contradicts himself in the very first verse of our passage.

[ 3 : 46 ] Verse 10. Paul says, For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God, or am I trying to please man?

If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Now you see the apparent contradiction. Was Paul a man-pleaser or not? And of course, in our own concern to be faithful and effective evangelists, even if we're not kind of capital-E evangelists or great missionaries like the Apostle Paul, but in our own way, as we try to be faithful witnesses for Christ, should we be trying to please people or not, or both?

But then when and why and how? Now, the first thing to notice, I think then, is that verse 10 kicks off with a little word for. So what is Paul trying to explain here?

If you think back to last week, or cast your eye up to verse 1, Paul began by explaining that he was not commissioned as an apostle by men. He was not made an apostle from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

That is to say, Paul sees himself as an ambassador from heaven, an ambassador from the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word apostle just means a sent one, an emissary, a missionary.

[ 5 : 10 ] An apostle, and Paul wants to stress right at the very beginning, that he wasn't sent by men. He was sent from God, from the risen King Jesus, seated on his throne in heaven.

And then in verse 6, Paul spoke about his astonishment that the Galatians have so quickly deserted the gospel, he preached to them, and moved on to something else, a different gospel that really was no gospel at all.

And then if you were here, you might remember the key verses that Paul repeats twice in verses 8 and 9. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel, contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel, contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. And so I think the 4 in verse 10 is there because Paul knows he's being offensive.

Do you see that? I mean, he knows you can't say that. He knows that's outrageous. To call for someone to be damned. To call for someone to be condemned.

[ 6 : 22 ] To suffer the wrath of God. Surely that's not Christian, is it? You know, what happened to love and peacemaking and respecting other people's views, Paul? Building bridges, creating dialogue.

What happened to winsomeness, Paul? And so in verse 10, Paul explains his fiery language, or at least he doubles down on it.

For am I now seeking the approval of man? Or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I was still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

In other words, he keeps digging, doesn't he? In for a penny, in for a pound. He's saying, I don't care if people are offended.

I'm not trying to please people. I'm trying to please God. The word for seeking approval there in verse 10 is an interesting word. It's usually translated persuade.

[ 7 : 19 ] Persuade. So the CSB, for instance, the Christian Standard Bible, even in this context, goes for persuade. For am I now trying to persuade people or God?

Is what the CSB writes. You can probably tell why most translations kind of avoid that. Because it sounds a bit weird to talk about persuading God of something. But actually, I think that sort of gets at the idea.

Is Paul's manner attractive to his audience? Could he have made more popular vocabulary choices? Well, most certainly. If he were merely trying to persuade people.

But you see, he says he doesn't care. He's trying to persuade God. You might have heard the old saying that preachers should only ever preach to an audience of one.

And that is just an old axiom I was brought up on. It was kind of drilled into me throughout my training. The point, I hope, is obvious.

[ 8 : 24 ] It's not to try and whittle down your audience with boring anecdotes and unintelligible vocab. You know, until it's just you and probably my faithful wife sitting there.

But the point is that God is always in the audience. God is always listening. And in the end, it's only his opinion that matters. Because God's opinion is not just opinion.

It's truth. So, is God persuaded by Paul's argument? That's the question Paul cares about. Does God find Paul winsome, attractive, and pleasing?

Is God pleased with his apostle? After all, that's what an apostle is for. An apostle is supposed to please his superiors. To do the bidding of the one who sent him.

If the message is offensive, let it offend. If the message is frightening, let it terrify. If the message is wonderful, let it thrill.

[ 9 : 25 ] If the message is all of the above, like the gospel of the Lord Jesus, then the job of the faithful apostle is to communicate all that clearly. Not to massage it, or adjust it, or reshape it in the name of winsomeness, according to the itching ears of the hearers.

Likewise, in verse 10, Paul calls himself a servant, though the word is *doulos*, so I think a better translation would be slave. And the difference between a slave and a servant is important, because a servant doesn't necessarily have to serve, whereas a slave has to serve.

A servant or an employee might choose to leave, or choose to negotiate, whereas Paul sees himself as a slave of the Lord Jesus, owned by him, bonded to him, indebted to him.

Paul doesn't clock on and clock off. He doesn't serve Jesus on Sundays, or nine to five. Nope, he is full time, 24-7, at his beck and call, serving with every fiber of his being, every minute of the day.

He only sleeps, he only eats, when his master wants him to. And notice Paul lays down a decisive choice for all of us here. You can either serve Christ, or please people.

[ 10 : 50 ] But you cannot do both. You see the logic. Paul says, if I were still trying to please man, I would not be a slave of Christ.

You see, if you choose to please people, you cannot be a slave of Christ. In fact, the language is even stronger than that in the original Greek. There's the little word, *ever*. Paul says, if I was still trying to please man, I would not ever be a slave of Christ.

That would just never be an option. That would just never be a thing I would do, if I were after pleasing man. You see, there was a time when Paul tried to please man.

I will come to that in a moment. But he's not still trying to please man. That time is over, because he's become a slave of Christ. Which brings us to verse 11.

Paul is not trying to please man. Again, we get a four. Four, I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

[ 11 : 55 ] For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. So the question is, who owns the gospel?

It's one of authority over the gospel. Who gets to dictate the message Paul preaches? And the way he preaches it, and the message we preach.

Paul says, not men, but God. Because Paul did not receive his gospel from any man, nor was he taught it. No, he received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Clearly, Paul is talking about that moment on the road to Damascus, when he was stopped in his tracks by the appearance of the risen Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus met him, he said to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And he said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.

[ 13 : 00 ] Now, I won't get you to go back to Acts chapter 9 now, but you remember when Saul, slash Paul, did eventually enter the city, he was met by a man named Ananias. And Ananias had been pretty reluctant about meeting with Paul at first, but the Lord said to him, go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. And so Ananias went and found Paul, and after Paul regains his vision and gets baptized and so on, Luke tells us, immediately, he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, he is the son of God.

And all who heard him were amazed and said, isn't this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem, of those who called upon this name, and has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?

But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. Now you see, the point is that when Paul was converted, he was also commissioned.

When Paul was converted, he was also commissioned. He was told what to do. He became an instrument in the Lord's hands.

[ 14 : 27 ] And to some extent, we all are. I mean, Paul was converted in a very unusual way and commissioned to play a unique role in salvation history because he was to be a pioneer for the Lord Jesus, breaking through new frontiers, reaching into new territories.

The persecutor was to become the preacher. The enemy was to become the instrument. But in some ways, we all are. No matter what your background or the little parts that we might play, that is what it means to belong to the Lord Jesus.

We belong to him as his slaves, as instruments in his hand. He gets to tell us what to do, doesn't he? And we listen gladly and obediently.

And notice that the crux of Paul's message, the gospel, the big announcement, the good news, the great news, that Jesus commissioned Paul to preach was that he is the Son of God.

Jesus is the Son of God or that he is the Christ. And Paul shows people the proof. In other words, he is the risen king, the ruler of the new world, the Lord of both Jews and Gentiles, the one to whom God has given all authority in heaven and on earth.

[ 15 : 40 ] Jesus is the new and better Adam, the new and better Israel, the new and better King David. And so in Galatians, Paul is arguing, in verses 11 and 12, he's saying, I don't have authority to change this gospel.

The gospel I receive directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. And neither does anyone have authority to change the gospel. I said this last week, but I'll say it again.

It doesn't matter, does it, in the end, if the preacher seems very authentic or affable or earnest or winsome or wise. It doesn't matter if he has a PhD or this qualification or that qualification.

It doesn't matter if he's written a bestseller and all the big names say it's wonderful. It doesn't matter if he did MTS with Who's He What's It and was trained at the right theological college and supports the right missionary society and was ordained by the grand poobah, so and so.

I think if history has taught us anything, it's that institutions and denominations and churches and even great people often trade on their reputations long after they deserve them.

[ 17 : 01 ] In fact, the truth is, in our theological colleges and denominations and institutions and missionary societies, the fight is always on in our own hearts.

The fight is always on to keep us faithful to the gospel and focused on the gospel. One day, the Gospel Coalition will inevitably stop preaching the gospel and I do pray that that day will not come very soon because I'm on the Gospel Coalition committee.

But if it does, we mustn't be so blindly loyal that we'd rather have the organization than the gospel or the name than the reality.

And one day, ES will not be evangelical and the FIEC will not be worthy of the E and SLBC will not be worthy of the B. If you can keep up with all the axioms in evangelical churches.

But anyway, another old axiom worth remembering. You cannot institutionalize the truth. You just cannot. The gospel does not belong to any one man or any one group of men.

[ 18 : 12 ] It is God's gospel. You can't bet it down with doctrinal statements or something. It is our privilege and duty to proclaim it, our responsibility to believe it, with or without man's approval.

Which brings us to point three. Paul's testimony. This is where Paul backs up what he's been saying by providing the back story. Again, you notice how tight the argument is here.

We've got another four in verse 13. Four. You have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born and who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

So notice a couple of key things that are important to Paul's argument here. First, he talks about his former way of life and his radical transformation. And I think his point is that just that the transformation was so extraordinarily sudden and unexpected and unusual that it kind of points to a divine intervention.

[ 19 : 49 ] Only divine intervention would seem to be able to explain it. It's not as if Paul was brought up Christian or even liberal about his Jewish faith. It's not as if his Gentile mixing ideas developed over time or his doubts about Jewish distinctiveness grew.

No, he says he was stopped in his tracks. He was confronted by the Son of God precisely at his most fanatical moment while he was on his way to destroy God's church and this new way.

He hadn't been having doubts about his life. He was full throttle, full steam ahead, seeking to destroy God's church. But he says this was God's plan all along.

You see verse 15. Paul says God set him apart before he was even born. That is, God had predestined Paul's conversion and commission.

God had predetermined it. He had foreordained it. In the end, it wasn't Paul who had planned this for his life. In fact, Paul set about to do the exact opposite. He sought to destroy the church.

[ 20 : 55 ] But God had a different plan for him. God had different purposes. And in his good time, God called him by his grace. Again, this is how it works with every Christian, actually.

Those whom God predestines, he also calls. Romans chapter 8, verse 30. The second thing to notice here, I think, is that Paul stresses his independence from the other apostles.

Again, this establishes in the strongest possible terms that the gospel does not belong to any man. Not even to the apostles, which is remarkable if you think about it.

The apostles were not given a monopoly on the truth. This, of course, is one of the great errors of the Roman Catholic organization, that they locate authority in terms of apostolic succession rather than in the gospel itself.

They say that the pope is the spiritual institutional descendant of the great apostle Peter. And that's why anyone outside of the Roman Catholic church is not authorized to interpret scripture or to preach the gospel.

[ 22 : 08 ] But, brothers and sisters, and especially any of our friends here from Roman Catholic backgrounds, it's great to have you. Let's have a think about this verse together. Because, you see, from the very beginning, God deliberately sidelined apostolic authorization by appointing Paul directly.

Paul's ministry was not authorized by the apostles, but directly by the Lord Jesus himself. And remember last week, Paul said, even if he should change the gospel and come back preaching a different one, the Galatians are not to believe him.

In other words, you cannot institutionalize the truth. This is not my gospel or your gospel. It's not the Protestant gospel, the Reformers gospel, or the Roman Catholic gospel.

It's not even the apostolic gospel, ultimately. It's God's gospel. And it's true, independent of the preacher or the organization proclaiming it.

And thirdly, notice what the revelation was and God's purpose in revealing it to Paul. God was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, verse 16.

[ 23 : 29 ] Again, think back to Acts chapter 9. This is the gospel that Paul preached from the very beginning, that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Christ. And from the very beginning, he was commanded to take that gospel to the Gentiles.

Jesus is not the king for Jews only, but for Gentiles too. He's the king of the whole world. And Jesus is not the king for law keepers and good people and Pharisees.

Quite the contrary. Why do you think he died on the cross? Because he came to rescue people like us, sinners, law breakers, outlaws.

Jesus himself tells us in Luke's gospel that he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Those who are well don't need a doctor, but the sick. And so finally, although Paul wants to make absolutely clear that his gospel was not authorized by the apostles, he also wants to state categorically that his gospel was in agreement with the apostles.

In agreement. So there are two prongs to get here that are very important. Paul's gospel was independent from, and yet in agreement with, the gospel preached by the other apostles.

[ 24 : 43 ] Verse 18, then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Kephas and remained with him 15 days, but I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

In what I'm writing to you before God, I do not lie. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ Jesus. They only were hearing it said, he who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy, and they glorified God because of me.

You see what he's saying? He says, after three years, I did go up to Jerusalem, and I met a couple of the apostles. He was there for about two weeks. That's, sorry, after his trip to Arabia as well, before he left and headed back up north.

So in verse 22, he was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea. That is, literally, they hadn't seen his face. He was unknown with respect to his face, but in verse 23, they had heard about him.

They hadn't seen his face, but they'd heard about him, and they rejoiced. They glorified God on account of him. In other words, any attempt to drive a wedge between Paul and his Judean counterparts is nonsense.

[ 25 : 58 ] And you see, again, how this is so important for Paul's argument, don't you? Because the Galatians have been led astray by some men who came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised, according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

And no doubt they were saying, you know, that Paul is an innovator, a novelist. This free grace open to all Gentile loving gospel is not what the apostles down in Jerusalem are preaching.

It's not what Jesus preached. And so Paul is having to defend himself and defend his gospel, because it is God's gospel, and there's no truth to these claims. And of course, this is still really important for us, because if Paul's gospel is not the gospel, then Christ is not really our Messiah, assuming that most of us here are Gentiles.

And still today, people do attack Paul and try to separate him out from Jesus and the rest of the apostles. The tactics haven't changed in 2,000 years. Still, you can read liberal scholars who pit Paul's gospel against Jesus' gospel, who paint Jesus as kind of always gentle, meek and mild and peaceable, a simple Palestinian preacher with love for all mankind.

And then there's Paul, a callous, intellectual, full of subtleties and nuances and deep-seated psychological issues. You know, his letters are always dealing with guilt and sin and the need for atonement.

[ 27 : 29 ] Jesus preached the kingdom, but Paul twisted and abused his master's words to push his own agendas. It's kind of frightening stuff. It sort of reminds me of one of those political ads where Paul is pictured in black and white, looks like he's just eaten a baby squirrel or something like that.

You know, look at this monster. You wouldn't trust him with your salvation, would you? But friends, don't believe a word of it. There is no difference between Jesus' gospel and Paul's gospel, because there is only one gospel, and Paul faithfully preached it.

Jesus and Paul preached at different times in salvation history, right into different audiences, but Jesus commissioned Paul, as his faithful representative, to pioneer the next stage in salvation history, to bring the gospel of the Lord Jesus to us.

So it's time to wrap up. I began with the question, what makes for a good evangelist? And we thought through a few suggestions, earnestness, knowledge of the gospel, clarity in being able to articulate the gospel, and funnily enough, a passion to please people, to reach the lost no matter what changes or adjustments need to be made to our lifestyles.

But of course, what this passage is about, what makes for a good evangelist in this passage, is that dogged determination not to please people, but to please God.

[ 29 : 01 ] So let's add at least one more thing to our list, one thing required of the faithful and effective evangelist is resilience and a thick skin. We all like to be liked.

I know I do, and I'm sure you do. I hate the idea of being unpopular, of getting into trouble. I'd love to get a call from the vice-chancellor of UQ saying, hey Josh, great job, we're all really proud of you.

And when you walk through the great court, people smile at you and show respect and appreciate what you're doing. And of course, I want my kids to be proud of me and my wife and Roy and Karen and Gary Miller and Philip Jensen and, you know, and all of you and all the people down in Sydney, I just want to be widely admired.

Some of that, of course, is okay in its place. But it's not okay, is it, if it gets in the way of pleasing God and serving Christ.

And remember the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 6. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.

[ 30 : 13 ] Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. For behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets. Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

prophets. The shocking thing that Jesus is saying, that I personally find so hard to believe, is that real joy is found in being disliked, in being unpopular, in being despised and divisive.

The apostles were treated as the scum of the earth. Remember last week, Paul was attacked and abused in every town he visited in Galatia. a narrative started to form about what a difficult man he is, because he remained faithful to the gospel and to the Lord.

And the gospel is always the sweet fragrance of life to some and the pungent stench of death to others. Of course, people might attack you just for being an offensive jerk.

Suffering is not a sure test of faithfulness. We all know that, don't we? But if you never suffer, it is a sure test of unfaithfulness.

[ 31 : 27 ] If you never get rejected, if you never get despised, if you're never hurt or slandered or threatened or ostracized by those around you, then it's a sure sign that you're nothing like the Lord Jesus, that you must be ashamed of him, that you need to repent.

And my friend, take courage and pray for boldness and speak up in the power of the Holy Spirit. And so resilience is the other necessary character trait of a good evangelist, strength and backbone and the ability to endure.

Let's pray. Loving Father, we thank you for our Apostle Paul, the Lord Jesus, that you commissioned him to bring the gospel to us.

Thank you that he did not seek to please us, to please people, but to please you, so that we can trust his words, knowing that what he has told us is not just itching our ears or what we want to hear, but what is true and good, the truth about the Lord Jesus, that we can save us from this present evil age so that we can enjoy the kingdom of the Lord Jesus forever.

We pray that you would help us too, to be faithful to the gospel, to believe it, to articulate it clearly, to have the backbone and the courage to keep proclaiming it even when it's unpopular.

[ 33 : 06 ] We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.