

# True Freedom 8

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our Father in heaven, thank you for your word and we do pray as we hear it this morning that you'd teach us, rebuke us, correct us and train us in righteousness so we might be thoroughly equipped to work in the good works you've prepared in advance for us to walk in. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well if there's one man in history who stands out for the gospel, it would have to be Martin Luther. He was a 16th century monk, German reformer, that's who he was.

He rediscovered grace in the midst of the Roman Catholic Church. Freedom, forgiveness, totally through trusting in the finished work of Jesus at the cross.

It was a time when religion made rules and regulations about the way you had to behave and things you had to do to be saved and you'll know that, many will know, he wrote the 95 theses and stuck them on the wall, on the door at the Wittenberg Church.

He taught and preached and wrote lots of books and he was persecuted for his stand for the gospel of Jesus against the Roman teaching of the time.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] At an assembly in the city of Worms of Germany, he was put on trial for his faith. He was asked if the books whose titles had been read aloud by the council were his and whether he would stand by the contents, some of which was considered heretical and a threat to the church's authority or whether he'd recant and deny them.

If he chose to recant and repent of the works, he'd be welcomed back into the church. And so, at one level, the way they said for being made right with God and being okay with God.

But if he refused, he'd be branded a heretic and could be burned at the stake. That was a choice before him. And then Luther delivered a speech on the 18th of April in 1521, refusing to recant and stating what he stood for and why.

And then the closing words of his speech are recorded as this. There's some doubt about them, but this is what we have. Unless I'm convinced by the scriptures and plain reason, my conscience is captive to the word of God.

I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here's the words.

[ 2 : 4 6 ] Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God. Amen. See, Christ had set him free. Free from the burdens of the laws and regulations that the church of the day would lay upon him.

And he wouldn't be yoked again to the burden of slavery hadn't come out of that. I wonder if you've been in an awkward situation where you know what you think is actually going to be quite different to what's acceptable to someone around about you.

It might be work. It might be in the coffee shop or it might be at the school gate. And you know what you believe cuts against, cuts right across the world view of those that you're with.

It's not politics, left or right or centre or independent or green. It's actually the Bible. What God says about marriage and sexuality and resurrection and justice and judgment and forgiveness and Jesus and judgment and salvation and joy and...

People might not want to hear what we believe. And we might be cut off or cancelled for articulating what it is we do believe. There's a great need for us to stand firm in what we believe and to live by our convictions.

[ 4 : 20 ] And for many, this will probably and most likely come at a cost. Our Christian convictions will lead us to offend some people.

In fact, if they don't, well, there's something wrong with our Christian convictions. Not because we delight in being offensive, that's far from the truth, but because we can't help but offend by having a different view.

If you're a Christian, then at times you will need to be willing to offend others at times. Sometimes, more often than you'd like.

I've offended people in my neighbourhood because they hold a different position to me about Jesus. In our conversation about what we believe, I explained that I believe that Jesus was a real person, that he died and he rose again and he'll return to judge one day.

And as I simply said this to a friend in the park, they visibly backed away from me and said, that's totally offensive and I don't hold to that.

[ 5 : 40 ] I've necessarily offended people who have been at church with us, possibly you at times, hopefully not by my manner, but by my conviction to the things of Scripture. It's always a choice, always a choice.

If this is what the Bible says, I will align my life with it or will I shy away from it and try and please people because I'm ashamed or not quite convinced about it myself.

And today we come to a potentially very offensive part of God's Word in Galatians chapter 5, 1 to 2. So let's plunge in. We see that there are some Christian convictions here.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Being a Christian requires a degree of stubbornness, of conviction.

Not pig-headedness but righteous stubbornness. Here I stand, I will not move. Right? An unwillingness to be moved from the foundations of our faith for our eternal destiny depends upon it.

[ 7 : 02 ] And you only have that stubbornness if you really believe what we say we believe. The Lord Jesus Christ has set the Galatians free and all who trust in Him are free.

But free from what? What are they free from? Well we're free from a yoke of slavery. Now a yoke is a bit of wood that's put between two animals, beasts of bird and oxen or something like that to enable them to pull together on a load when they're working in pairs.

Some yokes are just on an individual beast fitted on an individual so you can pull a cart along or you can pull a plough along and move through a field. That's the idea of a yoke.

The idea of a yoke is that of a burden. That's what a yoke is. It's a burden. 1 Kings chapter 12 speaks about it. And so what kind of burden, what kind of yoke is Paul speaking about?

What kind of slavery is Paul speaking about when he's being put under again? Well, have a look at chapter 4 verse 3. Have a look at chapter 4 verse 3.

[ 8 : 10 ] In the same way, we were also when we were children were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. To idolatry, to the gods of the world, to the age, the gods of power and wealth and pleasure and might and sex and all that kind of stuff.

Wealth. Or, chapter 4 verse 8, formerly when you did not know God, you were enslaved by those who by nature are not gods, but now you've come to know God or rather be known by God.

How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I'm afraid I may have laboured over you in vain.

Slavery to being right with God by religious law keeping, by works, being under the law, trying to attain righteousness by ritual. For before faith, the Jews were held captive by the law.

In chapter 3 verse 23, you can see it. But Christ has set us free from slavery that we might be free, free from the slavery to sin, free from the slavery to Jewish religious law keeping.

[ 9 : 18 ] He has not set us free to go back to slavery, to sin, to law. The Galatians are being told to stand firm and not be enslaved again.

And the danger for them, and Paul regularly sees this in the people of the circumcision, persuading them for the need to be circumcised, to be saved, and so letting go of the gospel.

That's what's going on here. That's the danger that Paul particularly sees here. See, the gospel is the good news that Jesus is Lord and Saviour, and that by faith in Him alone, you are made right with God.

And being right with God is by the promises of God. And faith is our only hope, and we need to stubbornly stand on faith. That's what we need to stand on.

Look what he says in verse 2 of chapter 5. I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

[ 10 : 24 ] It's the cross or nothing. Or, verse 11, coming down to verse 11. But I, brother, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?

In that case, the offence of the cross has been removed. It's the cross or nothing. So let's look at some Christian clarity here. It's Christ or nothing and it's the cross or nothing. That's what verses 2 to 6 are talking about.

It's Christ or nothing. First, let me be clear, salvation is a matter of Christ and Christ alone. You can't have it both ways, right? Trusting in Jesus and adding law, keeping.

And specifically, Paul says, adding circumcision. That's a sign of being a Jew. Alright? Those who are Gentiles, they don't circumcise their boys on the eighth day.

That's just the nature of it. To become a Jew, a male would need to undergo circumcision, removal of the foreskin from the penis. But, if you submit to that teaching and that requirement that you have to be circumcised, to be saved, become a Jew to be saved, well, you're not relying on Jesus, you're relying on works of the law.

[ 11 : 35 ] Then, the requirement is that you keep the law perfectly, see verse 3, you have to keep it perfectly. I testify again that any man who accepts circumcision, that he's obliged to keep the whole law, not just a part of it, but the whole law and all of it to be made right to God, but you can't, so you're under a curse.

If you try and be right with God by the law, verse 4, if that's where your confidence lies for relationship with God, then you're denied the way, the only way to be right with God.

Grace is the undeserved kindness of God. You are severed from Christ. Interesting, the word cut off again, isn't it? You who will be justified by the law.

You have fallen away from grace. Grace is the undeserved kindness of God. That's what grace is. And it's only by grace that someone's saved, not by works.

It's the gift of God so there's nothing we can boast in, nothing we've done, no good thing we can add. And so verse 5, for through the Spirit, by faith, we can ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

[ 12 : 53 ] That is, it's Jesus who makes us right, not our religious observance. This hope is not a wishful thinking, it's a confident hope, that's the hope we have.

As the hymn says, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. It doesn't matter whether someone's circumcised or not, that doesn't affect our status with God in and of itself.

What matters is faith, which expresses itself in love. That will be the obvious outworking of this stubborn standing, right? Love for those who are unlovely.

Love for those who are in the family of faith. Love for the lost. Love for the unpopular. Love for the neighbour. Love which is costly sacrifice.

Just like the love of Jesus that took him to the cross. For we're convinced, in the next section here, that it's the cross or nothing. See verses 7 to 12. You're running well.

[ 13 : 55 ] Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty for whoever he is.

But if I brother still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the offence of the cross has been removed. The Galatians have started well.

They started off with Jesus rightly. But someone's got in their way of obeying the truth. I want to point out something to you though, clearly, just have a look at it. You see the word obey? That's the important word to pick up.

Our response to the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is the Lord, the one who comes from the Father, the response to Jesus being the Christ is one of obeying that truth.

Yes, you believe it, but you've got to obey it. I will obey the gospel command to repent and believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, or I will disobey the gospel command.

[ 15 : 11 ] We obey the gospel, to believe is to obey, to reject is to disobey. 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 8 speaks about it again, God will inflict vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

It doesn't matter if you don't obey it, it doesn't matter if you like it, it's good to believe, the gospel is something to be obeyed. Now, the one who's persuading them to be circumcised is not the one who calls them, the one who calls them to faith in Jesus is God the Father, God the Father calls them to believe, right?

Galatians chapter 1 verse 6, I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turned to a different gospel. The one who's calling them to the law is not God, no, it's the messenger from another origin, the one who's calling them to go back to the law.

And the danger is that if you let this teacher continue to teach in your midst, that teaching will permeate through the whole gathering, the whole church and destroy it. That's what will happen.

Now, the person who brings this teaching is going to meet God and knows what's going to happen to him, knows what's going to happen to him, face the penalty. It doesn't matter who he is, how big or small he is, whether he's a great one or whether you know him or not, he will face the consequences, he will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

[ 16 : 50 ] Because Paul himself, he doesn't preach circumcision, verse 11. If I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I being persecuted? Paul has been hunted down by the Jewish leaders.

they stoned him in Galatia, they followed him around the place and pursued him wherever he goes. In Acts chapter 14, verse 19, the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 25, three times I was beaten with rods once I was stoned. He isn't persecuted because he preached a circumcision, no, far from it.

That would make him a friend with the Jews. No, the offence is the offence of the cross and Paul's not ashamed to expose how offensive it is.

Listen to what Paul says here in verse 12. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves.

[ 18 : 00 ] literally castrate themselves. Make themselves eunuchs is what he's saying.

Not only take off the foreskin but the rest of the genitalia as well. That's what he's saying. That's how serious it is.

That's how bad it is for people would be teaching false doctrines and to take anyone back to a different gospel. Paul can't be much clearer than what he is.

He couldn't have been much more offensive in his words to the false teachers. You can feel his passion for the truth and his love for the church bursting through because the cross is actually a scandal.

Verse 11 If I brothers still preach circumcision why must we be persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been removed.

[ 19 : 12 ] The word is scandal is behind this word of the cross has been removed. Why is the cross a scandal?

Well when I'm told what I can't do I get offended. I'm sure you do as well.

When you get told you can't do something every fiber of your bone backs up against that sort of thing being told. When I was a child and a child was told they can't do something they will protest they will be offended.

When an adult is told that they are wrong they may well take offence. When I'm told that I can't get in my way I will take offence. When I'm told that I can't please God in my own strength that it comes across as an offence to our world as well.

What do you mean? I'm not good enough? I'm better than those people over there aren't I? I'm good enough God should be happy with me. At the opposite end of the extreme my grandmother's dead bless her heart but I offended my grandmother when I told her that I was certain of going to heaven.

[ 20 : 34 ] She heard me say I was perfect which is the absolute opposite of what I was trying to say but that's how people read it when you say I'm confident of going to glory.

I was saying that Jesus has promised me that by his death that was sufficient for all my imperfections for all my sin and so his death had qualified me from heaven not my goodness and to believe otherwise was to make God out to be a liar.

The cross is truly offensive. Let me highlight a few ways. It's offensive because it's the power and wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.

But to those who have been called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. The Greek is the Gentile than not Jew.

The one who pride themselves in logic and philosophy and government. It doesn't make sense does it? That the creator of the world would die on a Roman cross and by that death, by that weakness, by that foolishness make people right with God.

[ 22 : 01 ] The Jew is one who has the traditions of the faith, the genealogy going back to Abraham, the ones longing for a king who will set up a new Israel, the rule and conquer and be the kind of time of Solomon and glory again days.

You don't have a king who defeats the enemies who dies a shameful death on a Roman cross, do you? That's a scandal to the Jew. That is weakness and foolishness.

The cross of Jesus does away with the very logic of mankind. Dead people stay dead but the cross of Jesus declares that dead people rise from the dead and will face judgment and justice on the last day and that Jesus now reigns as Lord and will return to judge the living and the dead.

The scandal of the cross is revealed both the power of God and the wisdom of God for salvation. The scandal of the cross is forgiveness. Let me tell you, forgiveness is a scandal.

The cross of Jesus promotes and parades the very fact that guilty people can go free. Now that is a scandal if ever I heard it.

[ 23 : 17 ] You can't earn or deserve your freedom. Not by works of the law, we stand condemned under the curse of the law because we could never obey it perfectly and yet by the cross comes forgiveness.

Not by the sacrifice of bulls and goats but by the sacrifice of no one less than God the Son. Galatians chapter 1 verse 4 Jesus gave himself for our sins to deliver us from a present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.

To let someone go free after they've been condemned as guilty is a scandal in the world's eyes. And for you and I, we are walking, talking scandals.

Because we can go free from the punishment we deserve and forgiven. The scandal of the cross is a great exchange. 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 18.

You know what it's like to hear of a scandal. It's something that just should not have happened but it does. a person who is guilty of a great crime is given a sentence that is very, very lenient.

[ 24 : 30 ] That's what we received. A person guilty of murder of someone has that punishment taken away and put on somebody else.

Now that is a scandal. In 1 Peter chapter 3 18, Christ Jesus died for sins. Listen to this great exchange. the righteous one for the unrighteous ones to bring us to God.

Now that has got to be the greatest scandal that ever there was. A perfect one dies for the imperfect ones, me, that we can be right with God.

That's a scandal. And grace is a scandal as well. Galatians chapter 2 verse 21 and chapter 3 verse 28 The scandal of the cross is that one way for salvation comes by creating one new nation in Jesus, tearing down the division between Jew and Gentile and in Galatians 2 21, I do not nullify the grace of God for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The cross of Jesus brings about an end to any pretension that we could be good enough to please God in our own strength. Now that's highly offensive to say that my estimation of my abilities cannot contribute to my standing with God.

[ 26 : 12 ] God's grace is not about nationality Jew or Greek there's neither slave nor free there's neither male nor female for all are one in Christ Jesus.

Being right with God is not about nationality or gender or social status. Being right with God is all about the crucified Jew who dies in our place to bear the wrath of God that I deserve rose again triumphantly as Lord and will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Now if Paul is preaching Judaism and the need to be circumcised well the cross would no longer be offensive but he's not and he will not now that he's been set free by Christ Jesus there's a scandal of the cross the offense of the cross God's power and wisdom God's forgiveness God's great exchange God's generosity brings true freedom that the scandal of the cross is Jesus Lord and I'm not that Jesus is Saviour I can't save myself that Jesus is judge I have to give an account of myself Jesus is gracious he gives me what they cannot deserve he's not fair now if we're convinced of these truths we'll stand firm in the faith and will not submit to anything else being added to make us right with God the cross and faith in the cross of

Christ brings us into freedom and here we stand well the Christian in the cross everything we do everything we have hangs on the cross our current standing with God and our future standing with God hangs on the cross the danger we face is being ashamed of it and feeling the scandal of it our natural tendency is to want to contribute to our standing with God to add something to the gospel of our we just naturally bent that way but rest assured there is nothing zero zilch that we can add to what's been accomplished for us at the cross and to do so in the end would actually sever us from grace and the all sufficient work of

Jesus at the cross here we stand we can do no other so help us God Amen let's pray now Father in heaven we pray in your mercy that you help us to stand firm in the freedom we have in Christ Jesus that we not be lured left or right or backwards or forwards away from the things of Jesus and what he's achieved for us at the cross help us not be ashamed of the scandal the things that have been promised thank you for your great grace towards us in Jesus and we pray you help us to be living ambassadors of him in this world and have the courage of our convictions as we live and work and grow in our society we pray in Jesus name Amen