



THE SIMPLE GOSPEL

GALATIANS: YOU ARE FREE

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Scripture Reference: Galatians 5:1-15

The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ, while incredible is not incredibly complicated. Even though the implications are far reaching, the good news itself is actually quite simple. Often believed to be best for those starting their journey with Christ, the gospel informs and shapes everything in the Christian life from brand new believer to seasoned disciple. The gospel is how we are transformed and how we play a role in the transformation of those around us. Join us for a nine-week study, walking verse by verse through Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. Go to doxa-church.com to learn more about Doxa, find service times or support the making of disciples in the everyday stuff of life.

Good morning, Doxa. Today we'll be reading out of Galatians chapter 5, verses 1 through 15.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. You were running well. 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, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettled you would emasculate themselves! For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Well, good morning everyone.

Morning.

Hey, if you weren't with us the last couple weeks, I've been out. So it's good to see you guys again. Quick heads up. We do have kids ministry rocking and rolling up there. And so we're gonna be talking about some more cultural moments and some of the things that are going on culturally, and so just your heads up, we've got kids ministry. So if you want to check your kid in, you can still do that. This is not a rated R movie, this is a sermon, so you don't have anything to worry about, but I just wanted to make sure everyone knows parent-wise. We are in our series in Galatians and we have just three weeks left. It's going fast. It's going really fast. We're talking about freedom today. There's a lot going on around freedom in our culture, and so I'm going to pray for us. We need protection today. We're gonna pray for our friends in our second gathering as well, that they'd have that same protection. So let's do that together.

Well, Lord Jesus, I do pray again for that protection. For me, Lord, I pray for calm, courage, clarity; that I'd be able to communicate your word with that level of confidence, Lord, and I pray for my friends here. They all come in different seasons and different thought processes, and everyone's in a different mindset, Lord God. And so wherever they are, I pray that you meet them there as we talk about what it means to be free in a culture that promotes freedom, that we literally have a Declaration of Independence and a Bill of Rights that talks about life, liberty, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness, Lord. We want to know what you have to say about freedom, Lord, so we pray for that. I pray against the enemy, his allies and works in effects, Lord God, that he would be at bay, and that this room, this church building, our second gathering, that you would be here, Lord, in all of those elements, would they yield to the presence and power of the white throne of Jesus. We say these things in his good name, his amazing name. Amen.

All right, well for those of you who are new, my name's Eddie. I'm the lead pastor here. Glad you guys could all be joining us. And this Sunday marks the last Sunday here in June, and June, as we talk about freedom today, I'd be remiss if I did not mention a sort of cultural moment of freedom we live in today. Now June has become an important cultural month in the United States, as I know all of you are aware, and it's widely known as something called Pride Month. Now, Pride Month was made official.

If you want to know some of the history, I'll give you a little tidbit. Pride Month was made official as a gay and lesbian pride month in 1999 by President Clinton, but became LGBT pride month under President Obama 10 years later. All I have to say; Pride Month doesn't have its roots in the nineties. It actually has its roots far back in 1969. That year, uh, the Stonewall Riots, maybe you've heard of those, launched what many call the Gay Liberation Movement. The Stonewall Riots were essentially a six-day riotous reaction to the Stonewall Inn, a hotel, and its bar, being raided by police.

Now, these riots have sort of been framed up as the turning point for the LGBT Rights movement and really the first large-scale movement against oppression towards that community. At the time there were sort of outdated cross-dressing laws in New York and many police really took advantage of such laws to persecute such people. And that was really a fact of the situation, and can't really be denied. It has to be acknowledged.

But what's lesser known about Stonewall, this movement here was that the Inn, was started by a Mob family a few years earlier and it really became home not only for the LGBT community, but also for prostitution, for homelessness, for underage drinking, and even underage, uh, encounters with adults. It violated health and safety ordinances around cleanliness and had outbreaks of disease all across the bar. Now, the residents, or the place, rather, the Inn, it was able to stay open because the crime family, as

crime families typically do, they bribe police. And they were paying upwards of \$1,200 a month, which will basically pay 10% of your rent here today in Redmond, but was a lot of money back then.

Now, of course, without police interference, the crime family, it cut costs, because there was no police to regulate anything. And so there were no fire escapes in the building, and eventually there was no running water in the Stonewall Inn, which is pretty, pretty crazy. So the conditions, because of the lack of police oversight, bred disease. Seedy conditions attracted people from all across those people outcast by society, some for good reasons and some for not so good reasons. Eventually the bar began to get raided rather frequently because of the condition it was in. But on the night of the riots, the Stonewall Riots that are the most famous, patrons and bartenders actually fought back. And this started a six-day riot and ensued, essentially, and ended up with the police being trapped in the Inn and hundreds outside throwing rocks and bricks.

Now, the riots--why am I saying all this? Well, the riots have been used as a launching point for the gay movement, uh, which has led President Barack Obama to declare the Stonewall Inn a national monument, of which there are only 131 in the United States. The Stonewall Inn sits alongside the Statue of Liberty and the Washington Monument as culturally and country recognized icons. This also led President Obama to name Stonewall alongside cities like Seneca Falls and Selma, which if you know those names, those are two major locations for movements for black rights and for women's rights in the United States.

Now, all that is to say these are pretty conflicting ideas. You're going like, well that's kind of a lot of information. I'm hearing that this is a nationally recognized monument, but I'm also hearing about some of the seedy behavior going on.

The history of Stonewall is not exactly moral or righteous, and yet it represents so much to the United States in our cultural moment. For whatever we think about this, and all this content, maybe you're like super excited about that; maybe this makes you frustrated, or whatever it does; Stonewall is without a doubt the mother or father of Pride Month, and today we all experience Pride Month. The LGBTQ community, it dominates June, as you know.

Listen, I'm not giving you any information that you don't already know, okay? I'm just telling you what you say. If you, if you put your kid in school, they're hearing about this. So maybe you're teaching them about it. I don't know what your situation is, but I'm just telling you, I'm not stating anything that's not known to anybody culturally in this moment. Okay? So, the LGBTQ community, it dominates June, there's signage everywhere, there's flags, there's slogans, there's corporate logo changes in order to demonstrate essentially, what started as the gay liberation movement, we want that sort of freedom and equity.

Now, I just want to say in the fall, we are going to plan to walk through the Song of Songs in the Old Testament and we're going to talk about all things sex and marriage and love and gender. Okay? But for now, it's worth pointing out that this movement has been labeled the LGBT Liberation Movement. And today we are talking about freedom in Galatians chapter 5. Those two things have to be said in the same sentence as we address what means to be in freedom. And I think there is a big question that looms for all of us as we study this passage and as we just sort of live Christian or not today on the east side of Seattle, the question is: is Pride Month, the culture's modern representation of liberation, an accurate representation of what it means to be free?

Is this what it means to be free? Does being free mean that I should be able to be sexually free or politically free or free to choose my identity? Does it mean that I should be able to come and go as I please saying or doing whatever I want? Is that what freedom is? Or does freedom mean that I should essentially, like many Christians love to do, use the Bible to enforce and impose what I deem as freedom on other people?

Most importantly though, what does God say about freedom? What does he say? In Galatians 5, the Apostle Paul is going to answer two questions for us as we wrestle through what freedom is. And there are two very basic questions. First, what is freedom? And then second, what do we do with that freedom if we get it?

First, what is freedom, exactly? Okay, let's open up to verse 1 and read it. And I think this is really one of the most quintessential passages for freedom in all of scripture. Paul says, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." So Paul, he kicks off the chapter with a choice of essentially two paths for the Galatians, and really for us as we sort of look at and choose freedom or choose slavery.

Now, as a refresher, Paul has written a fervent letter to the church at Galatia. If you haven't been with us at all, you don't know any of the situation, what's going on here, in the church at Galatia. There are many people who have decided to essentially reinstate the law of Moses, especially circumcision, which is odd maybe if you've ever heard anything about the book of Galatians, as a requirement for earning salvation from God.

Now I want you to know that the Bible doesn't teach that we should earn our salvation from God, rather that he grants it by grace. And so this is an issue for Paul. He, he's mad as you'll see later, he's actually going to use some rather harsh language to get his point across. The point is, though, that Jesus came and lived perfectly on earth and offered himself up as a sacrifice on the cross so that the sins that you and I commit could be atoned for, they could be paid for, and that we could be free from the penalty of said sin. Okay? So there are two options that you and I have as people. Two options, that's it, around this issue, and that's that Jesus either counts as the sacrifice for our sin and we can be free from sin's consequences, or you and I, we can elect to pay for our own sins and be enslaved to those consequences. Those are the options.

The issue in Galatia that Paul's addressing here is that people were taking the second option, and that's why he's so mad. By adding circumcision and other rules back in as a way to earn your salvation, instead of merely receiving Jesus' wonderful, gracious payment for that sin, they have decided to try and pay the penalty for the sin that they commit with their own good behavior, essentially. And that's the issue. Because if you and I, we decide to earn God's salvation with obedience, here's the, here's the spoiler, you're gonna fail. In fact, you already have failed. You already have, no one is perfect, right? Look at verse 2.

Paul says, "Look", I mean he says it just like how I would say it. "Look", I feel like me and Paul are, like, just like the same. <Laughter>. Look man, if you had said bro or something, maybe. "Look: I, Paul, say to you..." Maybe not, this is a little fancy. "I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision", insert the law of Moses there, or any law, "that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace."

Translation: you want to include circumcision or any law as a requirement for people getting saved, well, then you better follow the whole thing. You better follow the entire thing. We cannot decide what Jesus dies for in the Bible and what we'd rather earn for ourselves. Like, he can die for everything else, but when it comes against circumcised, I gotta make sure I do that or else hellfire for me. That's not how it works. You either follow the whole thing or he dies for the whole thing.

Look, like I said, perfection is what's required to stand before a holy God, nothing less. That's a high bar. And they, the Galatians, and us by the way, we can't be perfect. That's why God sends Jesus. You see, we talked about it already, but if you and I could already earn our salvation through our obedience, then Jesus died for nothing, or Jesus died as some version of an example, to which do we even aspire to. But either way, that's a heck of a payment for a maybe that you might be able to be a good enough follower

of that in order to save yourself. That's not what happened. This is why adding to our salvation with rules, meaning if I follow certain portions of the law and Jesus dies for the others--that's why it's slavery, because you and I cannot free ourselves from the burden of sin. It's impossible.

Now many of us, and I think much of our culture would say, aha, that's what I've been saying. Religion doesn't work. It doesn't work. Telling people to follow rules doesn't work. This is why we need freedom. This is why we need to be able to do whatever we need to do so long as we believe in Jesus or not, we should be fine. I told you, religion following rules doesn't work. All it does is make people angry. And that's, that's honestly kind of true. But I think there's an important question buried in here. And the question is this: is what you and I, is what we mean by freedom today, say in 2023 in the western world, is that the same kind of freedom Paul's talking about? Are we using the same definition for this word "free"?

So, I thought about it and I give you a really, I want to give you a super, really intelligent, thought out, amazing definition for modern freedom. And here it is. Freedom's the ability to say, think and do whatever you want, however you want and whenever you want. It's actually the same definition my six-year-old daughter has for what she wants to do and her definition of freedom, which if you look at society makes a lot of sense. A lot of people acting like children. And this is a definition of freedom that we all have. And I want to say during our cultural moment, whether it's Pride Month or not, this is the sort of freedom that is channeled. I want to be able to say, do and be whatever I want. That's the American ethos.

What's curious about that is if you bring that ethos to another eastern country, they look at you like you're crazy because they don't believe that's the human experience that you should be able to say, do and be whatever you want. But we do in America and we fall victim to what we've talked about, CS Lewis calls chronological snobbery, that because we're born in 2023 and everyone else behind us is dead, that somehow we're more correct than anyone else. And anyone else who's born after us will either learn from us or they'll be wrong too and it's funny because no matter what time you were born, you think that exact same thing. It's curious, right?

One thinker, as we talk about freedom, one thinker and theologian, he talks about freedom and how it should include three specific kinds of freedom. But I also want to add my own observational, fourth type of modern freedom so that we can really get a holistic picture of what it really means, what the culture rather, and what we believe internally, what it really means to be free.

So, here are four pillars of modern freedom. The first one is desire. And I don't think any of these are gonna shock you, okay? If I want to be free, I gotta desire it. If I want to do something, if I'm free to do a thing, I want to be able to have the freedom to desire to do it, right? If I want to do it, I should be able to do it. Desire. Pretty simple.

Next one, ability. Not only should I have the desire to do it, I should also have the ability to do it. I should have the means to do it. Whether that's assistance from the government or my parents or myself. I should have the health, the wealth to be able to do things. I should have the desire, the ability.

I should also have then the opportunity, meaning that there better be a spot for me in society and culture to be able to do what I want, say what I want and be what I want. So, I need the ability, I need the desire and I need the opportunity for all of those things.

But there's also one other kind of freedom I just talked about. I mentioned that we're going to add and it's the freedom of outcome. Now this is a new one because not only do I, should I have the desire to say, be, and do whatever I want. Not only should I have the ability to do it, not only should I have the opportunity created by you or someone else, I also need to guarantee the outcome that whatever I want out of that freedom comes to pass.

Now, is that possible? Perhaps society or maybe even some of us, maybe if you're here and you're not a Christian, I totally get it. Maybe you're here and you're thinking, I've seen where religious legalism and rules lead, it's stuffy, it's mean, it's judgmental. Who would want to be a part of that? And I would say that's probably true. After all, it's religious rules and legalism that leads to slavery. Paul talks about here and some will even say though, so why not just live however I need to live in order to feel good and live good. That's authentic freedom. I should have the desire, the ability, the opportunity and the outcome to get exactly what I want out of the world. That should be true for me.

But as you look across the landscape of the world, is that true for everybody? Obviously not, yet this is how things from Stonewall Inn to Pride Month have continued to evolve. As we're seeing, though, the trouble with modern freedom is that following the sentiment that I should be able to say do and be whatever I want to, to its logical conclusion is quite traumatic and puzzling for people. It's hard. It doesn't make a lot of sense. Because, think about it, we're beginning to see each individual's form of their own freedom begin to bump into one another. And I guess the question is, if I'm free to live, say and do whatever I want, and that's my chief ethic on the world, what if my form of freedom imposes on someone else's form of freedom? Like, what if we both want to do something and they're incongruent with one another, and the results?

Whose form of freedom should win? Should yours win or should mine win? Two things can't be true at the same time. If they're directly opposite of one another, how is that possible? If this pulpit's black and you say it's white, which color is it? Right? Someone's gotta be right. Whose form of freedom should win? Let's sort of answer this with a little bit of a, of a pathway and example.

So, looking at this idea of Pride Month and this idea of this ethic, the goal was initially, as it was on its way towards freedom, the goal was initially equality. No one would doubt that, right? When you look at some of the movements that began in 60s, 70s, and 80s, this was all about equality. It was all about providing an opportunity. Some of it was laws, some of it was opportunity with healthcare, some of it was patronage, being able to walk into restaurants or some of it was just freedom of expression, it was about opportunity. But something happened in the 90s where it began to shift and it was no longer just about equality and opportunity. It became about tolerance. You know what I'm talking about? This movement became about tolerance. And essentially it said that not only should I have opportunity, I should also be tolerated by you in my behavior, right?

And by the way, I don't want to say, I think tolerating people is a Christian ethic. I think we should tolerate people. I think the Bible teaches we should tolerate one another. I think the Bible talks about equality. We just read Galatians 3. There's neither male nor female nor slave nor free. All if they're in Christ are saved. That's an equality ethic, that's a beautiful ethic. So, we move from opportunity to tolerance. But now if you've noticed in the late, I guess, what would you call that? Late 2010s or so, the late teens, would you call it? I don't know what you would call that. We're starting to see another word come in called acceptance, right? So not only should I have the opportunity and should I be tolerated, but now you have to accept everything I do.

You should accept it, full stop. So, however I present myself to you, it was one thing to tolerate it, but now you must accept it, full stop, however I present myself. But we didn't stop there. Now, today's movement not only should be equal, you should tolerate, you should accept, not only must you do those things, you must now do the fourth thing, which is conform. You see where this is going. So now people, corporations initially that wanted to support the LGBTQ rights now are expected to support them, not just asked. They must, really, or else they face public ostracism or scrutiny. Businesses will be boycotted and picketed if they don't conform.

And it's not just businesses, it's individuals, it's media people, it's movie stars, it's reality TV show writers, your B-level sitcom actors, it's everybody included in this. Athletes, CEOs, directors of

marketing, seamstresses, strength coaches. It's everybody. You must absolutely conform to this ideology or else. And if we continue to follow this ethic of modern freedom to its conclusion, what we're starting to see is forced conformity imposed, now, get this, on freedoms of other people. What a movement that began with freedom has now begun to take away the freedom of other people.

And now you've got a conundrum on your hands. If our ethic is to say, be and do whatever I want, well, what if that doesn't--what if our things are against one another? How do we live that out? And this is what's happening. You see it in a school system. You see it living in, you see it in sports and athletics, you see it in the corporate workplace. But now we're seeing things play themselves out where there are lots of contradictions in society. Tolerate, accept, and now conform or else there'll be consequences, politically, vocationally, family, and the like.

My story is I have a few, I have several family members that are LGBT very close to me, that are in my family. And so I'm not, I ran this by one of them to make sure that I was honoring of what, of what I was producing. We disagree obviously on this issue very heavily. And yet we still love one another. We tolerate and accept one another and we're okay with that.

But I still have to say that tolerate, accept and conform has consequences and leads somewhere, friends, it leads somewhere interesting. It leads to cold godless religion. When you talk about presenting an idea and then telling people to conform to it, that's cold, godless religion. That's legalism.

Funny enough, that's exactly what the movement began to rebel against in the first place. Paul is butting heads with the religious legalists in the region, and as a result, people got really upset and said, that's not right. And all of a sudden became a global empire, and began to accidentally become an institution of religion, a godless religion, and is now imposing its morality and ethics on the world. It actually became, fell on its own sword. It was a total mistake.

What does Paul say religious legalism is? Does he say it's freedom? No, he calls it slavery. And this movement, along with the movement as we're going to talk about in the church of religious legalism, are both slavery. They're both slavery, even if you call it liberation or not. Friends. We believe as a church, again, that sex outside of heterosexual monogamous marriage is sin. And you ask why? Because the Bible teaches it, something we'll get into in the fall, but also because it does not lead to the flourishing of God's people, does not lead to freedom, it leads to slavery. Paul calls practicing legalism a sin. And he calls it slavery, by the way, whether it's in a religious context or not.

I'll bake this out a little bit more. Friends, I spent a week, a couple weeks on vacation and I flew there. Here's a little bit of an analogy for you. We flew there on a plane because mostly there was a lot of water in between us. Okay? Can't walk. Okay? So, I was free to sort of decide, okay, that I wanted to go. That's called the freedom of desire. I had the freedom of desire. I wanted to go, I was free to pay the plane ticket and healthy enough to go. I had the freedom of ability. I wanted to take a week away, I had the opportunity, I had the freedom to take a week away. And I was free to choose from where to stay and where to eat. I had the freedom of opportunity. I had the freedom of desire, the freedom of ability, and the freedom of opportunity.

But what if the plane malfunctioned? I mean there's been plane crashes. I mean a submarine just collapsed in on itself. There's a lot of that going on. What if the plane malfunctioned? What if the plane didn't have enough gas? Or what if several engines went out or what if a wing decided to just pop off that? Now that'd be terrifying, but what if it did? I exercised all the freedom I had to get on that plane and it's going down. I desired to be on it. I had the ability to do it and I had the opportunity to do it. Am I free? No, I'm dead. I'm dead. I'm dead. Because you know why? Because I didn't have the freedom of outcome. I didn't have the freedom of outcome in order for me to be free in that scenario, I had to have a working plane and I didn't, in order for me to free, I had a working plane. So real freedom, then, isn't having freedom to desire what I want to do, or whatever I want, or having the opportunity to do it all, is

it? It can't be. Real freedom is having your outcome secure. Real freedom is having a working plane. Real freedom is having a savior.

The pride movement, and maybe even the movement of your own choosing in your own life, circumcision, religious legalism or whatever, all of that is phantom freedom. It's the illusion that you're free. It's a chocolate-covered hand grenade. It's bait on a hook. It makes you feel like, oh, this is liberating and free and oh my gosh, here we go. Boom, explosion right in your face. It's not freedom, it's slavery.

And you know what? That's exactly what the devil wants. We were talking about it out there, we usually do this rally at nine o'clock. And there's one thing aside from the crucifixion, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that the devil does not want you to want, to know and understand. And it's that you are free from sin. He would love it if you believed in the resurrection of Jesus and sat right at the bottom of that slave ship with unshackled shackles, just hanging out. You know why? Because the boat's still going to the same place. You didn't get off it. And we got a lot of Christians hanging out at the bottom of slave ships, unshackled by the good news of Jesus and just riding themselves off into oblivion. And that's what legalism does and that's what licentiousness does. And that's what we'll end up doing today in society.

Guys, freedom to sin is not freedom. It's slavery. Freedom to sin is not freedom. It's slavery. Jesus says in John 8, whoever practices sin is what? A slave to it. That's Jesus's words. We are not free from the consequences of our cultural freedom. So, whether in our cold religion we reject God's grace or in our desire to live without God, we reject God's grace. We still succumb to sin and reject God's grace.

Paul says in verse 6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love." It doesn't matter if you are a religious legalist and they gotta be circumcised or you say, legalism, no one should be circumcised. Neither of that matters. The only thing that matters is that you place your faith in Christ. It doesn't matter about your behavior regardless of if you are on the other side of the coin or not.

Real freedom is knowing that while the world cruises towards its destruction, I have a God big enough to save me from it. Now how do you get this sort of freedom then? You know, I'll tell you what, it's not uncovering your ideological identity or your sexual identity, your political identity. It is placing your faith in Jesus Christ who unlocks your freedom of outcome. That's it then. And only then will you live with peace and joy now on your plane knowing it's going to land. And then, you can live free once you get off the plane in glory with Christ.

So, I'm going to make a big assumption here for this next section. Let's just assume that you want that sort of freedom, for now. And for my Christian friends, this is what the gospel teaches. It's offering you freedom from the object that you would have to pay the penalty for your own sin and that you could live burden free for your life with the flourishing of God's people, here, even though it's not yet perfect. And then you await a greater glory when God comes when the plane lands. Let's just assume you want that for a second. But if you get that by faith, the question is then what do you do with it? And here's the bigger issue.

See, this one is one of the bigger issues in Galatia and Paul really devotes the rest of the book of Galatians to this exact question, and we're going to be talking about it over the next three weeks, but what do we do with this newfound freedom? What do they do with it? And what we find, as we've talked about this entire series, is that there are really only two options that you can do, what you can do with the freedom.

The first option is you can use your freedom as an excuse for sin. You can say I'm free in Christ what God says, free is free indeed. I'm gonna go do a bunch of stuff. I don't know what it's, I'm just gonna do

whatever I want. Right? And you can say that. And you know what? There are people that are doing that. Maybe that's you, maybe you're in that spot, maybe you're going, no, I'm free, man, yeah, I know I did this and I did that. I shouldn't have done this. I know the Bible's taught some things that actually lead to not my flourishing that lead to my destruction, and that maybe say I would be enslaved to them, but I'm free. I'll go with the old repent on my deathbed trick, right? It's an old Bart Simpson quote. So, you get a lot of Simpson's quotes from me here. Repent on my deathbed. By the way, not a good strategy, right? Like you just really don't know when you're gonna go out, okay?

And so a lot of people just want to sin, guys, some people just want to sin. Maybe that's you. You just want slavery. It's like a spiritual Stockholm syndrome where we fall in love with our captor and the warmth of the prison bed and the cooling weight of the shackles become comforting to us in our slavery. Again, freedom to sin is not freedom, it's slavery. And so, yeah, you can do that. Some people can use their freedom as an excuse for sin.

And the other option is that people fell into backbiting and self-promotion and cold-hearted religion, many things that the church is prone to, and many reasons why people rebel against it. Look at verse 10. Paul says, "I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and that the one who is troubling you"--these are people that are trying to stir them up, to get them to convince them that they need to be circumcised--"will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!"

That escalated quickly for Paul <laugh>. Paul's essentially saying <laugh> case, you want a translation, okay? Uh, "Eddy Standard Version", I guess the ESV: well, you were choosing to be circumcised to be saved and telling others to do it? Well, why not just go the distance and finish the job? Like that's essentially what he's telling them to do. Now this is harsh language, it's obvious, obviously harsh. Actually, one commentator I read called it disgusting. And it is, but remember what was on the line for a second. It's not a stretch to say that the entire gospel itself was in the balance. One small give to some sort of legalism added to the gospel and the gospel's no longer true. The gospel of grace is gone. You and I are dead in our sins unless we work our way out of it. And guess what? Everything you did before counts. So even if you started down we're perfect, perfect from now 'til glory, you're already lost. It's a losing battle, right? So, Paul knows that this is a really big deal and he knows it had to be said. A lesser rebuke would've signaled compromise to the gospel itself.

Now, I just want to say there are times where you and I, we need to speak plainly about that which compromises the gospel. We have to speak plainly at times, and I want to be careful because I'm not Paul and neither of you. So, it's important we don't just start cursing at people willy-nilly, okay? But this is why we spend time dissecting things like religious legalism and things like Pride Month. These are two very serious and very compelling reasons to give up God's grace in your life. And we easily succumb to them, often. Religious legalism is incredibly insidious because people sit in church and believe that they love Jesus or are saved by grace and are not living a life of grace at all. And Pride Month is dangerous because it rejects what God says about his flourishing of humanity and asks you to live another way, something that the serpent did in Genesis chapter three to Adam and Eve. These two things are dangerous because they tell you that freedom's over here, not where God says. Chocolate-covered hand grenade. Bait on a hook. Bite this, this will taste delicious. And when you get pulled away, freedom is not what you find.

Kind of like getting involved in the Mob. Yeah, do this, this will be great. You get it, you start doing it. All of a sudden, wow, you never end. You can't get out. Embracing Pride Month full stop, and its ideologies, and embracing religious legalism are equally as damnable. And you may say, well that's not fair. I mean religious legalism, at least they're in church. Okay, well, I mean, who killed Jesus? Was it the LGBT

movement or was it the religious legalists? Okay, one of 'em decided to kill God. The other one rebelled against him. These are damnable things. So, before we start like throwing rocks at an entire movement of people, I just will say that Jesus has removed the log out of your eye before you take the speck out of your neighbors. Now, please help them get the speck out, but you got a log in your eye, okay?

This is very important, verse 13: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Now some will say, loving your neighbor means to accept and do whatever they say. That's not love. Love is pointing somebody to the author of love. It's telling them who Jesus is and what he's done. That's the most pure form of love. And it's to do it in a way that's sensitive and kind and gracious. But that's still love. Love is not allowing people to do whatever I want. I am not a loving father by letting my wife or my kids do whatever the heck they want. Oh, I just love 'em. He's got paint thinner. Ah, it's fine. I love him.

No, they're going to die. People are going to die if they don't hear the good news of Jesus that you are free from your sin, not a slave to it. This is a big deal. Paul starts by saying in this passage, but you, especially in the NIV he says, but you, brothers, for you brothers were called for freedom. They/them verse 12, they can emasculate themselves, but you brothers, you're called for freedom. They want to follow that. Let them emasculate themselves. But you, you're free. Remember that. Let's admit it guys. We spend a lot of time looking horizontally. We see the religious legalists and we go, man, they look so good. They're, they're perfect. Or maybe we go, oh, they're not so perfect, I hate them. Or you see the social media lone ranger Christian who's objected to church and objected against any sort of church religion, any pastors, and go, I just, I found God on my own. You go, man, that would be kind of nice not to have any accountability.

And we see Pride Month in the ads and the marketing, and we start wondering, man, maybe that's a better life. Maybe that freedom is the way we should live. Maybe that's the way I should go. Maybe I should just be able to give into the carnal desires that I have in my heart. Maybe I should do that. And Paul says, Hey, hey, don't worry about them. They/them, they're slaves. They're slaves of their sin. You are called for freedom. You need to remember that. That is slavery. It's bait on a hook. It is a chocolate-covered hand grenade that the moment you bite into it sends you to Sheol. God is saying no, you're called for freedom. Remember that. Sin and death have no power over you. The peace and joy you can actually experience in this life is actually possible here today, a deep contentment.

And so many of us, even on a sunny day like this, and I experienced it myself, can go outside and we can't even enjoy the sun because we have a dark cloud over our heads that has held us there from the slavery to the sin that we've reengaged ourselves in. And God has freed us from that. And yet we're just going, we're rocking around going, I can't find help. I can't find help, but I'm depressed and I'm anxious, I'm stressed out, because I know I'm living and doing things I'm not supposed to, and they're not living. And if this was so good, which is what everyone is telling me, why do I feel so horrible all the time? And you can't even enjoy the sun or the son of God, because you got a dark cloud over your head, because he's just luring you with this bait on the hook. The devil rather, is luring you.

Oh, while we await ultimate glory and ultimate freedom, though we're already free, and I think I've said it, on the plane to ultimate peace, there are going to be enemies, I'll just speak plainly, of this world trying to get you to submit again to the yoke of slavery, verse 1, false gods that promise freedom, desiring you to submit to sin, including that of religious legalism. These are the gods of religious legalism or the lone ranger reject-the-church-ism or the gods of Pride Month. They long for your soul and their desire is to devour you, but you, friends--them, they are slaves, but you, you serve the God of grace and he's for you.

So. In the meantime, what do we do? How do I, how do I stay free? Well, in verse 7, Paul talks about running, running the race, continuing to run. And he often likens the life to running or like a marathon. And so, if we're going to run the race, we've gotta keep training, we've gotta keep training. The way you keep training is by doing a few things. You've gotta read scripture. Guys, there is cultural formation and there is spiritual formation. Cultural formation: anytime your face is not in a Bible and it is in a public place of work, or it's on your phone looking at something, you're being culturally formed. The question is, will you allow the Bible to spiritually form you instead.

That is the war you will fight and continue to fight today. Keep training and pray. Communicate with God. Tell him you're frustrated. Tell him you don't think he's right. Our God is big enough to handle those things. Ask him for his own victory, for your victory in this life. Ask him for the victory of your church. Ask him for the victory of your region. Meditate to God. Listen for what he has to say to you. Sit in quiet and silence and ask, Lord, what is there for me here? Explore other spiritual formation practices like fasting and solitude and others, and most importantly, well, maybe not most importantly, but alongside and most important with all of these, be in a community with people that are actually trying to do it together. All this means is that you take your walk with Jesus seriously. It means getting close to God and that it matters to you. Okay.

I'll finish with a quick story. I went to a camp; I was helping out a sports camp. And one of the things that's interesting watching kids as they grow up is they had, if they were good at their sport, they have success at early ages sometimes and they get really confident and almost a little bit cocky. And then the next year they move up to next year. And what they didn't realize was that, oh, everyone's still growing, and kids grow and they get faster and their hamstrings get more powerful and they maybe played a little bit and so they're better. And what they see is, what they assume is that they're gonna be just as effective the next year at the camp. But as the kids get older, everyone's a better athlete. And so now they get flustered because they're like, well, I just did this eight months ago and I was killing it, and you mean to tell me I'm the worst one here now?

And they didn't train or they didn't practice, they didn't do any of that stuff. Too often we have initial successes in our Christianity. You know, we believe we no longer need to train. And the issue is as we get more mature in our Christianity, the enemies don't stay the same. They get stronger and more cunning and more complex. Don't get caught out of shape because of the freedom you initially experienced in Jesus. It was awesome. But God gives you a game plan to continue to fight for your faith, your salvation. Paul says, do not submit again to the yoke of slavery and continue to run. Perhaps the biggest problem in American Christianity today is that we are out of shape and we are ill-equipped to fight the battles, which is why we lose them so often, believing we are just fine after finding Jesus initially at some youth camp or something.

We believe we are fine. So, we stop training, we stop studying scripture, and we stop getting in community. And then, what's worst of all is we go to church and pastors and preachers feed us candy and donuts instead of nourishment from the Word. And not only that, we're out of shape; now our diet is garbage. And when the real enemy shows up, we're ill-equipped to fight him because we're too busy worrying about other things. We've got our coffee and our leather jackets and our hats and whatever we've got, and we're ill-equipped to fight 'em because we know nothing of God. We don't pray to him, no prayer to draw from, no scripture to draw from. And we expect we're just gonna somehow white-knuckle through a cultural moment like we live in. Not possible. No Bible in sight. Many of us were exposed to the enemy and easily turned to legalism or licentiousness in order to meet the need. Those people though, they, they're enslaved. Maybe that's you.

But what God is saying to you right now in this moment is, but you brother and sister, remember you're free. You don't have to submit to that yoke of slavery. You don't have to. You do not have to go in that

direction any longer. And if you are free, you get to love one another as Christ loved the church, oh my goodness. You're free to love and care for people in a way that is amazing. More than anywhere else, the freedom that results in the freedom of love is exemplified in the passion and death of Jesus. When you love out of your freedom, you are like Jesus. He was equal with the Father from all eternity, yet freely chose to humble himself. He became a slave to his humiliation and death on the cross. But Paul says, true freedom and true theology were centered on the crucified Jesus. That's where you get your freedom. As we're going to see in the coming weeks, living out of your freedom will unlock a love so powerful, well, then you might, you might want to die for said love like Jesus did. Don't you see? He loves you so much that out of that freedom he went to the cross for you so that you can be free. For freedom, live free. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you for an opportunity to preach your word. Thank you for my friends. I know they had to sit through a long sermon, but I also pray that whatever you had seeded in their heads, Lord God, that it would stay, it would stick; and that anything that was from me, would that just be discarded, Lord. I pray for protection as we go out this week. Will we be emboldened in our freedom? Will we no longer sit on the bottom of slave ships unshackled as we're already free? And for my friends here that already that do feel like maybe they are in a prison cell, well, you've got supernatural keys to that thing. You can let them go right now. They don't have to worry about anything, they can be free, and who the Son sets free is free indeed. That is good news, Lord. So I pray for that supernatural power this morning. We love you. We praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.