



# GALATIANS

## Free Indeed | 1:1-5

### Freedom is necessary...because death is normal

We said last week that the letter to the faith families of Galatia was a response not merely to a particular issue within a particular community of Jesus followers, but a response first and foremost to the gospel, to the good news which Jesus preached and which Jesus made experiential through his death and resurrection. Paul took this gospel as foundational for life in general and faith specifically. He believed—and let this belief shape the way he lived his life—that if we “Walk with Jesus and work with Jesus...Keep company with Jesus; we’ll learn to **live freely and lightly**” (Matt. 11:29-30), since through Jesus, we are “free indeed” (John 8:36).

The reason that this message of Jesus—brought to life that first Easter morning and made contagious at Pentecost—was and continues to be so good is that freedom is essential to our humanity though it is neither inevitable nor undemanding.

What is natural in our human experience is death. Our lives end, but more than that, the stories of our scripture (and the wise throughout history) tell us that dying is not an at-the-end event, but rather a condition of our humanity. From the moment death was chosen over life in the garden of Eden, what is natural for humankind is a subjection to the inevitability of death—physically—as well as little deaths—emotionally, psychologically, relationally, spiritually—over time.

We can all attest to the truth of death, to its encompassing victory. We feel it, don’t we? Desiring, like my daughter, to be a free adult, but discovering in adulthood that we are still at the whim of people and forces outside of our control, addicted to a variety of distractions and pleasures, fearful of disapproval and missing out, anxious in the midst of a continually moving and changing and dangerous world, self-absorbed and alone. When we experience moments of freedom from the internal and external pressures, its not an arrival into a wholly different story, but rather “a paragraph in a history of conflict comprising alienation and reconciliation, advance and retreat, war and peace.”<sup>1</sup> Think for a moment. Is this not true of your experience of death and freedom? Oscillation of the stings of death and momentary experiences of freedom.

And so, when Paul, in a sperate letter, to a different faith family, expresses his affiliation with the saints throughout all the ages by crying out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:4), as one pastor notes, he “cannot be accused of hysterical melodrama—his anguish is common to all who have honestly confronted the human condition.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Traveling Light*, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

## Everywhere...Resurrection

While the certainty of death in its daily and someday manifestations is deflating to our ego and ambitions, and straining on our nervous and circulatory systems, it is not the whole story. As Eugene Peterson says, “The Bible is not a script for a funeral service, but the record of the proclaimed and witnessed God bringing new life to the dead. **Everywhere it is a story of resurrection—life where we expect death.** *Because of God’s word and act, and only because of God’s word and act, persons are free to live.*”<sup>3</sup> And this is where Paul begins his letter of freedom, with God’s Word and Act from within the human condition. Read Paul’s introduction in verses 1 to 5 take notice of the verbs:

Paul, [*made*] an apostle—not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who *raised* him from the dead—and all the brothers and sisters who are with me.

To the churches of Galatia:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who *gave* himself for our sins to *deliver* (*rescue*) us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

What are the verbs, the actions? Made, raised, gave, and deliver. Who does the acting? Jesus Christ and God the Father. For whom are the activities done? Paul, his brothers and sisters (i.e., his immediate community of faith), and the churches of Galatia—those a distance relationally and physically.

In these five verses that we so quickly pass over as fillers, customary introductions, a common courtesy, we find the fundamental viewpoint form which Paul will make his appeal to the Galatians and confrontation with his opposition. We discover in these verses that Paul understands himself and those with whom he shares life, **as ones acted on by God.** He is “made” an apostle, not from popular vote or appointment by a human institution, but by invitation of Christ Jesus. His words, his actions, his purposes were derivative; not made up of or on his own, not dependent on his personal opinion of himself, not formed for him by his ancestors, his family history, his education, his culture—neither nature or nurture define him—but Jesus Christ and God the Father who has and is redeeming, remaking him; “raising” Paul into a wholly new life with Christ, free from the inevitability of death—which is now victory-less and without its instrument of harm, sin (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

“Paul’s self-understanding is accurate and profound: we get to the essentials of freedom, not in terms of psychology or culture, but in terms of sin and grace, creation and salvation, judgment and redemption as these are revealed fully in Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

One acted on by God; this is who Paul is in a community of others who similarly know themselves. Their freedom draws them together, and in their life together do they experience freedom in its most mature, complete, and fortified (secure) expression.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 26.

## The Great Awakening

Galatians has been a powerful and influential book throughout the history of the church. Some credit the work of the Spirit through Galatians as a spark of the Great Awakening, one of the most prolific “movements” in church history where hundreds of thousands of people met Christ, were converted, came into churches, and started new churches all across North America and parts of Europe.

The story goes that back in the late 1730s, there was a little group of believers searching for God. They were seekers. They were trying to find God. They were trying to have an experience of his reality. They were trying to connect with him, get in on his kingdom. One night, a man named William Holland, who was a part of the group, got ahold of Martin Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians* in which there’s a preface distilling the basic argument of Paul to the Galatians. So William Holland brought it to another member of the group, Charles Wesley, and he said, “Let’s read it to each other.” So the two of them and a few other people got together, and they began to read the preface to each other.

Holland tells the story of what happened from there, he said, “... Mr. Charles Wesley [read] the Preface aloud.’ At a certain point, he says, ‘... there came such a power over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. I almost thought I saw our Savior! My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterward went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon.”

After this night, Holland began to take the preface each evening to somebody’s house, and would sit down with them, saying, ‘Let me read this to you.’ He went around to men and women, people he knew, and some he didn’t. One of those people was John Wesley—the founder of the Methodist Church- who later recounted when listening to William Holland read Luther’s preface to the Galatians, ‘... my heart [was] strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ ...’

Why were Luther’s comments on Galatians, so life-giving? Why were they used to propel people into the freedom that sparked one of the most prolific evangelistic movements in Christian history? Timothy George comments,

“...on the crucial matter of justification by faith alone [the fundamental truth that we are ones acted upon by God], Luther was a careful and faithful interpreter of Paul. The words he wrote in the preface to his 1535 commentary still ring true today:

‘This doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough. If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time. But if it flourishes, everything good flourishes—religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions. There is clear and present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions. It is very necessary, therefore, that this doctrine of faith be continually read and heard in public.’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, 69-70.

## A Little Bomb

And this the “secret” of Galatians, it’s message a “little bomb; it has dynamite in it,”<sup>6</sup> one that when it works its way deep down into our conscious and subconsciousness, explodes both our understanding and experience of life. And it all starts here in the first five verses. Tim Keller<sup>7</sup> comments that Paul outlines in these introductory verses the very gospel upon which our daily lives are built by addressing:

**Who we are:** Self or culturally defined, sinners, rebelling against God’s ways whether out of ignorance or arrogance, living in a world in rebellion and thus in need of rescue (v. 1,4).

**What Jesus did:** He gave his life to deliver us (v. 2) from sin and evil by his death (v. 4) and give us new life through his resurrection (v. 1).

**What the Father did:** He sent the Son to do what we could not do for ourselves, and overcame death with resurrected life (v. 1, 4).

**Why God did it:** God did it because he wanted to do so (his will), out of grace and not our merit (v. 3), which is why it is to the Father’s glory (v. 5).

Everything that follows in Paul’s letter, the confrontations, the wisdom, the encouragement, the rebukes, the explanations, and the warnings; flow from this assumption: **that fundamentally we are acted on by God and that God’s action is deliverance (rescue & freedom) from sin and evil. Because God *has* acted, we *are* free indeed.**

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Keller in a sermon titled “The Rescue”.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Keller, *Galatians For You*, 15-17.

## REFLECTION |

**“Freedom, if we get it, is a deliverance.”**<sup>8</sup> *Freedom is necessary, but it is not inevitable nor is it experienced without demand.* Freedom is won for us, gifted to us. To be free is to be rescued. Remember what Jesus said in John 8,

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free...Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”  
(31-32, 34-36)

“God in His grace planned what we didn’t realize we needed, and Christ by His grace came to achieve the rescue we could never achieve ourselves.”<sup>9</sup> No religious behaviors, no historical heritage, no morality could achieve what only God achieved through Christ—though most of us are convinced otherwise!

“This is the humbling truth that lies at the heart of Christianity. We love to be our own saviors. Our hearts love to manufacture glory for themselves. So we find messages of self-salvation extremely attractive, whether they are religious (*Keep these rules and you earn eternal blessing*) or secular (*Grab hold of these things and you’ll experience blessing now*). The gospel comes and turns them upside down. It says: *You are in such a hopeless position that you need a rescue that has nothing to do with you at all.* And then it says: *God in Jesus provides a rescue which gives you far more than any false salvation your heart may love to chase.*”<sup>10</sup>

Fundamentally, you are one acted upon by God, and God’s action is deliverance, rescue, freedom. Because God *has* acted, you are free indeed. *But do you believe it, as Paul believed it, like he wanted his Galatian sisters and brothers to believe and live it?*

For the next few minutes, consider what we believe, and how our living coincides with our belief.

- Do you understand yourself to be fundamentally free—not inevitably so? Describe why you think this.
- What are the “self-salvations” that are most attractive to you, that your “heart may love to chase,”?

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<sup>8</sup> Peterson, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Keller, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 17.

## Our Shared Prayer

We prayed this prayer<sup>11</sup> last week in *expectation* of what the broken body and shed blood of Christ make possible for us. Today, we join together in the prayer as *a confession* of our individual and collective need for deliverance, to live free indeed.

We join our prayers today in intercession for the men and women in our faith family, in our daily lives, and in our city who are trapped:

those who are trapped in poverty and debt with no sign of relief;  
those who are trapped in jobs and stages of life that engage but a fraction of their powers;  
those who are trapped in families and relationships where love has ebbed away;  
those who are trapped in unwanted alliances out of which they cannot break;  
those who are trapped by the fear of discovery, or by dependency on others, or by the need for drugs, or by an addiction to any other distraction;  
those who are trapped by sin, their own, and others.

O Father, whose will it is that we be free, and who did give Your Son that we might be delivered from all coercive powers;

make us examples of Your freedom,  
proclaimers of Your freedom, and  
instruments of Your freedom;

snap our chains that we may loose the chains of others.

Then shall the joy of the liberated rise from the earth like a mighty hymn of praise,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> Ernest T. Campbell, *Where Cross the Crowded Ways*, 44.