

# The Difference Freedom Makes

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] verse 12. Beginning of verse 12. I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. And even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.

Where then is your blessing of me now? I can testify, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us so that you may have zeal for them. It's fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you.

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you.

Thanks, Martin. Somewhere, somehow, David Irvine is getting like eight texts being like, mate, you've just been called out. We're in Galatians. We're continuing in Galatians.

If you've not been with us before on a Sunday evening, this is your first time, maybe you've not been in a few weeks, don't worry, I'm going to set the scene briefly. If you have been here, Galatians is a really hard letter. There's a lot going on, and it's this really long, complicated, theological argument that Paul is making for the gospel. And it's Paul at his most intellectual, his most theological, and he kind of goes point after point. And when you read it, it can be hard to understand and follow the flow. But there is a flow, and that's really important.

[ 2 : 2 4 ] I'll try and summarize it before we get to this section. But as we've just read, all of a sudden, Paul has gone from being the theological heavyweight, the man with the argument and the rhetoric, to the personal pastoral Paul, the Paul who cares deeply about the people in Galatia.

And it's a bit of a twist. It's a bit of a shift in our letter. So the question we have to ask is, why does that happen? What does it show us that Paul is being so personal? Well, let me summarize the letter. We'll dig into it. We'll try and figure out what that means for us, that Paul is making this argument out of his friendship, out of his love for the Galatians.

So, summarizing so far, the apostle Paul, who is writing this letter, is writing to a church with a group of people he knows quite well. The church in Galatia, hence the name Galatians, is being, they're being convinced by some false teachers that Paul, when he went there, only gave them half the story about how to become a Christian. Paul gave them the Jesus bit, and that's quite important. But these Galatians, they're missing out on the Jewish bit. These false teachers are saying, you need to become Jewish as well as a Christian in order to be made right with God. What that means is they need to follow the law, which is all of the rules in the Old Testament. They need to eat the right thing. They need to be circumcised, follow the right calendar. All these big laws that Paul argues that the Galatians were freed from, these false teachers are saying, you need these things. If you do all those things, then God's going to love you more than he loves Paul and all those people. So, Paul wants to correct that. So, he writes a letter, and that is the letter that we've been reading and working through. As I've said, it's a long, detailed argument, but it's filled with theological gold that we want to really dig into, and we have been. Paul starts by establishing his own authority as an apostle, as one of the chosen men by Jesus to teach, and then he establishes the authority of his own message. And then he makes clear what his message is. Christ died to make the Galatians right with the one true God. When they believe in that one true God, and when they believe in Jesus, they are made sons of God. They're set free from slavery to the law. They no longer have to fulfill it in order to be saved. There is nothing the Galatians can do to make themselves right with

God. They only need to believe in Jesus. And that's at the end of that very, very short summary of the first four chapters. We get to verse 12 of chapter 4. We go from the theological, logical Paul to the personal, pastoral Paul. So, he uses this argument. He starts to make an argument out of the friendship and the relationship he once had with the Galatians. What he's doing is, he's using their personal history to highlight what happens when freedom by the gospel is smothered by slavery to the law.

[ 5 : 19 ] So, we're going to do two things. We're going to start off by comparing Paul's relationship with the Galatians when he first met them to how it's going now, as Paul writes. And then we're going to compare the false teacher's ministry with Paul's ministry. And we're going to see how all of those things are affected by the message Paul has laid out so far. This freedom that the Galatians have been given in the gospel really makes a difference to relationships and to ministry. This logical argument that we've read for four chapters makes a real impact to these people. So, let's dig into it, first of all, with the difference freedom makes to Paul's relationships. When Paul first arrived in Galatia, the Galatian church welcomed him and loved him very well. When Paul came to Galatia, he lived among them. He became like them, is what it says in verse 12. He began to live like the Galatians. The Galatians were pagans. They worshipped Roman gods. They were Gentiles, which means they didn't follow any Jewish rules. And Paul became like them. He lived like a Gentile in order to be able to preach to them and teach them in a way they would understand. He let go of the traditions that he didn't need, the traditions that were just traditions at that point. They didn't do anything for him. And he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news that Jesus died for the Galatians. He died to make the relationship right with the one true God and not the false Roman gods that they'd been worshipping all their lives. And the thing it was, the Galatians received this message as true and as good for them.

And the second half of verse 14, look down with me if you've still got your Bibles open. It says, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. That's a phenomenal welcome. That's not just a handshake at the door, here's your notice sheet, come on in. That is a full-on welcome with love. And what makes it even more amazing is that Paul preached them because of this illness that he had. It was maybe an illness or a disability, we don't really know, but it stopped him traveling, it kept him in Galatia, and it was because of that he preached to the Galatians. It was such a bad illness that it was a trial to the Galatians, not just to Paul who was ill, whether it was because they had to look after him in a different way than they might have needed to, or maybe it was they had to deal with the shame of being associated with a sick man or someone had a visible illness. Yet despite these things, they received him like Christ, as if Jesus himself had walked into the center of Galatia. They loved him so much that they'd have given him their eyes had he needed it. It's a turn of phrase, you know, I'd give my right hand for that. They'd have given him his eyes. That's how much they cared for him and wanted him to be well. Their love for him was real and deep. When they accepted the freedom that came through Paul's apostolic gospel, that is the message Paul teaches as an apostle, they're enabled to love Paul with a friendship that is free from any worldly judgments. They accept Paul's message, and because he preaches with the authority of Jesus, as he proved in chapter one, they accept him like he is Christ. His message comes directly from him, and so the worth of Christ, the worth of Christ and that message they've received make them eager to welcome him as if he is Jesus himself. Despite his infirmities, despite his weaknesses, and despite his otherness, this is a Jewish man, not from here, they still welcome him. To accept Jesus and the message Paul brings is to be free to welcome and love the others around us. They welcomed him and cared for him like he was one of their own. The freedom the gospel brings changes attitudes and lives. So what's changed? Paul in verse 13 asks, have I become your enemy? The love has cooled. What that is, is a visible effect of forgetting the true gospel.

What's happened is the Galatians have allowed that message of freedom to be overwhelmed by the weeds of legalism. The need for laws from the false teachers slowly choking out that freedom they once received.

The Galatians are turning back to their former slavery is what chapter four verse nine says. And with it, as they turn away from the true gospel towards that slavery, they're losing that deep relationship they once had. The false teachers have sown seeds of discord among this fruitful loving relationship that was there. In accepting this false teaching, the Galatians are beginning to accept it.

They're rejecting the freedom Christ won for them. And that rejection is visible to Paul in the way they treat him. They once received the message of Christ and so accepted Paul like Christ.

[10:22] Now to get to this point in the argument, it took three and a half chapters of logical step-by-step argument. Why is that? Why did Paul not open with this? Paul could have like opened being like, hi, it's Paul. Why are you doing this to me? What's going on here?

The reason he doesn't open with this is because what Paul doesn't care about is how they're treating him. This is an egocentric letter. This is not because Paul is like, I'm sad you're being mean to me. What this is, is Paul is upset they're forgetting the true gospel. Their treatment of him isn't the issue. It's a symptom of the deeper problem. The solution to this letter, if they were to listen to what Paul is saying, is not we'll just be nice to Paul. The solution is let go of the chains of legalism. This little section is a diagnosis of the Galatians' faith. Paul highlights the change from love to rejection to show them what the real fruit of that false teaching is.

Our freedom to love one another flows entirely out of the freedom Christ has won for us. Paul is free to live like a Galatian when he preaches to them. He doesn't need to be restrained to one type of preaching. He can be like the people he is talking to. The Galatians were free to love Paul deeply despite what the world may have thought. That first picture we have of the Galatians welcoming this sick man like an angel, it's beautiful. It's something we should strive for as a community. When freed from worldly expectation by the gospel, we can live and love freely. It's a great test of how we understand the good news of Jesus to look at how we treat one another, how we welcome and love people.

The challenge in this passage, well it's seen when we get pulled apart. When something gets between us as brothers and sisters, as people of Jesus, when something comes between us and tries to separate us, it's then we see the real freedom we have in Christ. It's then we see how deeply we understand that freedom. Maybe someone we know from church has done something they shouldn't have.

Maybe our friends are gossiping about them. Did you hear what that person did? Can you believe it? Awful of them. Tragic. They've fallen away like that. What do we do? Do we jump on that train of gossip?

[12:43] Do we join in? I can't believe it. Or do we actually love the person who's struggling? Because the freedom Christ has won us means we don't need to gossip and reject them like everyone else might. It means we can love them as if Jesus is loving them himself, because he is.

The gospel gives us the freedom to reach out to a person who's been stigmatized and rejected. We can love them in a way others won't, because we are freed to. We have no restraints on us. Freedom in Christ changes everything we do. Not only are we freed from the legalistic checkboxes to be Christians, we don't need to do these things in order to be saved, but we are then free to treat people with love and care, to show friendship based on something deeper than anyone else in this world.

Paul's given us a diagnosis for someone's spiritual life, for our spiritual life. How do we love people? If there's something getting in the way of us loving someone else, we need to turn back to the gospel. We need to look at Jesus and see what he's freed us from and what he's freed us to. We need the message of the cross to shape how we love and live.

So that's our first comparison of how we see freedom changes our relationships. Let's look to the second half of this passage, and we're going to look at the difference freedom makes to Paul's ministry. The gospel doesn't only make a difference to his relationships.

[14:14] Freedom that comes from the gospel changes how Paul conducts himself in his ministry. So in that first section, we've seen Paul appeals to the Galatians' former love for him to remind them of what once was. Now in the second section, he brings to light the kind of snaky manner the false teachers are working in, and he shows the Galatians how much they mean to him.

These false teachers are looking to steal the Galatians away from Paul. What they're doing is working against everything Paul has taught the Galatians about freedom and righteousness, but the problem with them is that their goal is not an honest one.

The NIV verse 17, look it down with me, says, Those people, meaning the false teachers, they're zealous to win you over. The goal of these false teachers is to win the Galatians, to get the Galatians on their side.

They fuss over the Galatians. They probably tell the Galatians what they want to hear. If you do these things we're telling you, you're definitely going to be God's favorite. If you do these things and

tick the boxes, it's all going to be okay for you. They're pressing constantly against what Paul taught them originally. They're convincing these young believers that if they follow the Jewish law, then they'll be real Christians. They'll really be saved. They'll be the real people of God.

You can just hear them, can you? What do you mean Paul says all you have to do is believe? But look at all these laws in the Old Testament that our God has given us. Paul's talking nonsense.

[ 15 : 42 ] We need to follow these as well. So why are these teachers so jealous? Why are they so adamant with these lines and the false teaching they're giving? Well, the second half of verse 17 tells us, so look with me. Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no goods.

What they want is to alienate you from us so that you may have zeal for them. This is a bad type of zeal. It's totally directed wrongly. What these teachers want most is to split the Galatians from Paul and the apostles. They want to separate the Galatians from the apostolic message of gospel freedom so that these Christians will have zeal for the teachers.

Everything these false teachers are doing is driven by selfish desire. What they want is to be the top dogs in Galatia. They want the Galatians to fawn over them, to treat them like celebrities. They want to feel important and right. The false teachers' work with the Galatians is entirely selfish.

They do what they can to retain power, to stay important. They use flattery to get the Galatians on side. The rules they set are so strict that it means they can be the ones to say, well, yes, you're in, no, you're out. Yes, you're in, yes, you're in, no, you're out. They get to control the ins and out of their false religion. The restraints that come with their message give these men this place of power. And they love that. They love the feeling of being in charge. Paul, in his letter, is trying to show the Galatians that these false teachers are not who they say they are. And at its root, their message is only about these false teachers. Paul's message, however, is all about Jesus.

Everything Paul does is for the benefit of the Galatians and seeing them grow in maturity in Christ. Look at verse 19. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

[ 17 : 53 ] The reason Paul continues to reach out to the Galatians is for the Galatians and for Christ. There's no selfish part of Paul that's driving him to do this. As I said earlier, Paul is not writing this letter just so they, you know, are nice to him again and they treat him as the head of the church.

No. Paul doesn't want to be the best guy. He doesn't want to be the head of the table. He doesn't want to be the top teacher. Paul's not in this for the popularity. In fact, we've already seen that twice in Galatians. In chapter 2, he stands up to other false teachers who are preaching this legalism, this law-based righteousness. That's in verses 4 to 5. And it says, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. That is why Paul stands up. Not because he wants to be popular and look cool. So that the truth of the gospel might be preserved.

It's easy to stand up to false teachers, but he doesn't just do that. As we saw in verse 11 to 14, Paul stands up to the apostle Peter, the rock of the church, the one who followed Jesus everywhere.

Paul stands up because Peter was not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. That's how verse 14 describes it. Paul's driving force is not popularity. It's not selfish. It is the truth of the gospel and the freedom it brings to those who believe. That's why he says, am I now your enemy for teaching you the truth? It's that same truth that he stood up for, for the other false teachers and to Peter.

It is the same truth that is freedom in Christ Jesus. Paul longs for Christ to be formed within the believer. He wants to see growth, but that is no easy business. For Paul to encourage growth in these Christians, it's not painless and it's not easy. He likens himself to a mother in childbirth as he longs for the growth of the Galatians. Verse 19, he's in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed.

[ 19 : 52 ] Isn't that the total opposite of what he's revealed about these false teachers? Paul is in pain. He's in anguish. Think of that image of childbearing. I might not be an expert, but I don't think any mum decides to have a child so that the child will, you know, treat them like they're popular, you know, so that the kids will fawn over the mum. If you want someone to make a fuss over you, childbirth is not the way to do it.

Paul's not selfishly waging an argument for his pride. He's waging war against the false teachers for new life. He wants desperately for these Galatians to embrace the freedom they have.

In verse 12, Paul says, become like me, for I became like you. As I said earlier, Paul arrived, let go of the Jewish tradition, lived like a free man because of Jesus, so he could preach to the Galatians. He lived, worked, and preached as a man free from the law and slavery. He lived as a man united to Jesus, and that is what he wants for the Galatians. He wants them to live the free lives that Jesus

has died to give them. That's what it looks like to see Christ Jesus formed in these people. They've already had faith in Jesus. They've believed the gospel. They are Christians. They're struggling and leaning and being tempted away, but they have that faith in Jesus, so they are united to Christ. They are justified by Christ, but he's not yet fully formed in them because that process is long, arduous, and painful. That's where the childbirth metaphor comes into play. We become Christians in a moment through the Spirit, but it takes forever for Christ to be fully formed in us. And all the time as we go, as we look to grow, we need faithful guidance from the apostolic message.

[ 21 : 50 ] Paul didn't have to stick around for the Galatians. He didn't have to write this letter. He could have written them off as a loss because it wouldn't have changed him. It just would have been for their detriment. Instead, out of his love for the Galatians, based on the freedom he has and wants them to have, he writes the letter. He stays in contact. He keeps pressing on so that the Christ will be formed in them. He sees they need that help, and so he stays. Just like how once upon a time, the Galatians saw his need for help and welcomed him and looked after him.

That is our desire for one another today, to see Christ formed in each and every member of our church and people who walk in our doors. But that is not easy. The false teachers didn't want difficult.

They wanted success and fame. They wanted praise. Now, I'm only guessing here, but I think if the Galatian church read this letter from Paul, realized what went wrong and what they were doing and how wrong it was, and turned around to these false teachers and said, no, you're wrong, you're perverting the gospel. Leave us alone. We are standing firm on Christ. I don't think these teachers would have put up a fight. I don't think they'd have had long arguments. I don't think they would have made any effort. I think they'd have been like, cool, we're going to write you off, and we'll go to the next town, tell the next people, and see if they'll give us the praise we want.

They don't want hard. They want success. But Paul, he wants Jesus. Paul will face the difficulty. He'll embrace that hardship. For Christ to be formed in the people around us, it will take pain and anguish like it did Paul. It's no easy thing. What might it cost for us to see, to embrace this vision Paul sets out for growth in Jesus in one another? It's going to cost us time.

There's no quick fix to seeing Christ grow in ourselves or the people around us. It is slow and gradual. It might cost us pride as we look to encourage others around us and to be part of a church-wide ministry of growth. Well, we may have to do things we don't want to do. We will have to admit things we don't want to admit about ourselves. It might cost us pride. It might cost us relationships or our place and status in the world around us. To have Christ formed in us is to stand in direct opposition to the values of the world around us. To stick out like a sore thumb, the more like Jesus we become. And the more like Jesus we become, the more light other people will see in our lives.

[ 24 : 31 ] But the more light we show, the more darkness around us will hate it. And the more the darkness will reject it. And who knows, striving for this vision of growth might also cost us financially.

If we want to see this growth growing more and more and more in Glasgow, in our church, in the world around us, well, we might have to give to support training so the world can have more people teaching the gospel. So more people are enabled to serve in that way. Or it might look like giving up a really well-paying job where you'd get all the success and money you'd want in order to serve Christ in ministry, abroad as a missionary, in any myriad of ways. Or even if it's just keeping a lower job so that you have time to be a growth group leader, a roots leader.

It might cost us time, it might cost us pride, it might cost us relationships, it might cost us financially. Christ-forming work is not easy. It does not come naturally, and it does not come without a cost.

Paul was the man who was in the pains of childbirth for the Galatians.

He bared with their faults and flaws, pressing on in the hope that Christ will be formed in them. It's worth pausing here for just a moment to think about the people who've done that for us.

Paul is the picture of pastoral ministry, and his method is painful and long, and for Paul it can be heartbreaking. If you're a leader, it's much easier to be in it for yourself, to work selfishly, to do things so you look good. Thankfully for us, we don't have leaders like that. Whether it's Martin, James, and Amy, whether it's growth group roots leaders, anyone in a position of leadership we have, we're thankful that they look to emulate Paul's picture of pastoral ministry.

[ 26 : 20 ] Our leadership team lead out of an earnest desire to see Christ grow in us. They choose to put themselves, to put the people of the church and Jesus Christ above themselves in almost every way because the cross has freed them to do so. We cannot take that for granted.

So let's give thanks to God for Paul's example of ministry and for the people who still embrace that today. It is the cross and Jesus' example of putting himself as a servant for others that Paul does his entire life. It is the freedom he gains in unity with Christ that allows him. Gospel freedom changes everything for all of us who believe in Jesus. It's not a theoretical thing we think about as we follow a long argument. It impacts us all personally as we look at how we relate to one another, how we relate to our leaders, how we relate as people preaching to one another.

Living out gospel freedom looks like loving one another wholeheartedly, openly, and deeply. It looks like ignoring the desires of the world, the desires of others, and showing the gospel in our relationships. Putting other people before ourselves, putting their care and welfare above our own. Gospel freedom changes ministry and it is selfless, painful, and completely other-centric.

As a church, we need to pay the cost to see Christ formed in ourselves, in one another, and the world around us. We need to encourage and love our leaders because we know how painful it can be.

And most importantly, as one church, we need to strive to live out the freedom we've been given in Christ. It does change everything, all for the better. Let me pray that we would strive for that freedom in Christ. Father God, we thank you for your son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for the letter to the Galatians and how Paul shows us the freedom we have got through him. Lord, help us to rely on that freedom. Help us to grow in that freedom and help us to see Christ formed in one another. Help us to love one another when it's hard. Help us to stand up for one another and to step out of our way. Lord, we ask that you take away any selfish urges, any desire for success or pride or place of importance.

[ 28 : 56 ] And Lord, we ask that you place us in positions where we can love one another well. We can push one another on to see Christ formed in us. Lord, thank you so much for our leaders. Thank you for Martin and James and Amy in the vestry. Thank you that they put us as a church first so that they might see Christ formed in us. Lord, I ask for help that we might encourage them, that we might love them so that they can continue to love and encourage and support us and teach us.

Lord, as we go out this week, help us to remember the gospel of Jesus Christ. Help us to remember the freedom he has won for us. Let that play a part in every decision we make. Let that freedom guide us and give us the wisdom to act as light in your world. And Lord, we just pray as we come to communion that you would use that physical sign as a reminder of the cross, as a reminder of the freedom Jesus earned as he died and shed his blood. We pray these things, Lord, in your son's precious name. Amen.