



Sermon Growth Guide

September 25, 2022

One in Christ



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Freedom - One in Christ

Galatians 3:23-4:7

Key Verse: Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Big Idea: True freedom requires true identity.

Foundations

We're square in the middle of our sermon series on **Freedom**, looking deep into the book of Galatians. What exactly is freedom and how do we get it in Jesus? Is Christianity a straitjacket or a liberation of the soul?

Today, we're looking at how true freedom requires true identity. Unless you know the standards, the identity of something or someone, you'll miss the joy of true freedom that exists when you know what's really at play. Freedom and identity are inextricably linked. Once you know who you are and to whom you belong, you can walk toward the full freedom of heaven.

Our key verse today is verse 28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Culture, class and gender. Three primary categories whereby humans have looked for their primary identity throughout the generations, all falling crushingly short of your true identity. How do you understand yourself, first and foremost? Verse 26 offers us a clear statement of our true identity: "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

Open your time together in prayer. Thank God that He has brought us out of darkness and into the Kingdom of the beloved Son, making us children of God, co-heirs with Christ.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read Galatians 3:23-4:7.

How is the law described in the first three verses of our passage?

What metaphor does Paul employ in verse 27?

Who does God "send" in verses 4 and 6? What reason is given for each sending?

Applying God's Word

True freedom requires true identity.

What aspects of who you are need "gospel reordering" so that you more properly understand who you really are? How does the gospel reorder your life in regard to who you are culturally, economically and biologically?

Witnessing God's Word

The core of who you are is a child of God. How might this reality lead you to greater participation in God's mission to "seek and save the lost"?

Identify one yet-believer for whom you desire the Spirit to reach through your witness. Pray and plan together how you can extend the love of Christ out into Colorado Springs and beyond.

We're square in the middle of our sermon series on **Freedom**, looking deep into the book of Galatians. What exactly is Freedom and how do we get it in Jesus? Is Christianity a straitjacket or a liberation of the soul?

Freedom detached from agreed upon standards leads to chaos. Freedom must have standards. Your freedom on I-25 is confined to 75 miles per hour. Your freedom down Bijou Street is confined to 30. Stay within the limits and you're free. Go outside the limits and reality is waiting for you. Or the fish illustration. We've had these out in the Plaza throughout our **Freedom** series. If you're a fish, your freedom is in the water, not out of the water. Today, we're looking at how true freedom requires true identity. Unless you know the standards, the identity of something or someone, you'll miss the joy of true freedom that exists when you know what's really at play. [If you're a fish, you need to you're a fish and that you belong in the water.] Freedom and identity are inextricably linked. Once you know who you are and to whom you belong, you can walk toward the full freedom of heaven.

Our key verse today is verse 28: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Culture (Jew and Gentile), class (Slave and Free), and gender (Male and Female). Three primary categories whereby humans have looked for their primary identity throughout the generations, all falling crushingly sort of your true identity. Culture, class and gender.

Cassie and I were at a rock concert earlier this month (which, by the way, is something I've always wanted to say to launch a sermon!) and, unexpectedly to us, the opening musician plays a video to promote the ideology that a person should be able to rule himself or herself and define healthy sexual ethics according to cultures and one's own opinion, a risky business since people and culture have a stunning track record at changing opinion. Follow me closely here because true freedom requires true identity. The protagonist in a video clip being played behind the band were the score of couples visually happy and in love: men and men, men and women, women and women. I've heard this drumbeat for years now. What's changed in my own heart is that I've come to be filled with quite heavy compassion for people trying to sort out the world apart from Christ and His bride and His Word—tremendous compassion now overtakes me where once stood confusion and, yes, a judging spirit. My example and exemplar for this compassion is Christ Himself in Matthew 9:35-38: "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without

a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

At the rock concert, the protagonist in the video clip didn't surprise me, couples in states of happy bliss, but the antagonist did surprise me. Among the clips of contrast was footage of a small, rural church with a tag over its doors "First Presbyterian Church" with the congregants walking out of a Lord's Day Sunday service, much in the same way we do today. The video's message was crystal clear: old so-called "religion" oppresses; modern man must liberate itself into a new freedom. Freedom. What is freedom? Remember, true freedom requires true identity. Following the song and accompanying video, the lead musician had everyone lift their arms up and pledge together to unite in this new, worthy, freeing cause. Cassie and I were holding each other confused and sad, filled with Spirit-birtherd compassion for people wandering like sheep without a shepherd. The heartbreak climaxed when I saw the kids—8, 9, 10 year-olds receiving a message as gospel that, instead of having God at the foundation, has the cultural, relative, ever-changing self.

Culture is wrestling hard right now regarding identity. In this moment, though, good questions are being asked: What is identity? Who defines it? Can it change? What's most important in who you are as a person? In other words, "Who am I?" A worthy question. Who are you? What defines you? Before anything else in all the world, who are you? Are you a mere by-product of a godless hypothesis of a time, chance, matter meaninglessness? Or are you a child of the Most High God, filled with the eternal purpose of bringing glory to God forever, by enjoying Him forever? Asking about identity is a noble question, but it is also a high stakes question. Miss your identity, miss your calling, live in bondage. Catch your identity, catch your calling, live in true freedom. Remember, true freedom requires true identity. Allow me a few more minutes to even more draw out the tension of today's text. What I'm going to do now is reach my hand into the bag of our national headlines and pull out a few cultural pieces in order to have the Scripture today shape us even more within this American space, our mission field.

Our key verse this morning identifies three categories often looked to in the here and now to understand one's identity: culture, class and gender. *Is this where Christians look for their true freedom?* Is the best we have is to look at our culture (the color of our skin, our traditions, our heritage), or our material wealth, or our gender, to shape our identity and therein our freedom? From a macro level, what was wrestled with in the 1st century Mediterranean context, Galatians, continues to confront us today. *Who am I?*



Recall verse 28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Does our society wrestle with culture? Culture and race have both clear distinctions, but also places of clear overlap, so let me ask it this way: racially, does our society wrestle? Racial tension still feels harmfully high. For good and ill, just this year we’ve seen a significant swing toward American society celebrating racially-steered hiring practices that seem to directly undermine equal employment opportunity laws. I state this to make this point: society is as fixated as ever on the color of one’s skin. And too, our society seems as convinced as ever that focusing first on culture and race will heal divisions in our nation. We ought to recognize this first as a humanistic tendency and second as very poor anthropology by dangerously presuming that humanity, under the fall, can “fix” the ill in our hearts. I declare to you today we cannot. We need a Savior to enter in and give us true unity, true freedom, true salvation. We need a stronger remedy than ourselves.

Does our society wrestle with class? Do we think differently about someone if we know what kind of house they live in or if they’ve ever had to work for a living or if they’re living paycheck to paycheck?

Does our society wrestle with gender? Are there inequalities around gender? And then there’s how culture views gender and gender identity. Just this summer, California passed SB107, making the state a safe haven for our young children, middle school and high school students, seeking gender-altering medicine and procedures. Meanwhile, Alabama passes a bill in essentially the opposite direction. Is there confusion about our gender as it pertains to our identity in the public sphere of America today? In what ways do we truly find freedom in our bodies? Culture, class and gender, all mentioned in Galatians 3:28 and all still relevant ways humanity wrestles with its identity. The tension before us is thick today. *Is it possible for Scripture to reach through the centuries to address the real issues confronting our society today?* Remember: true freedom requires true identity.

Verses 23-27: Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

God gave the law to point us to His righteousness. If we are to be in relationship with a holy God, we must be righteous for it

is a part of God’s nature to abhor evil. Before understanding the grace of God in Christ, the law holds us in custody. The law was our prison; we were “locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed,” (verse 23b). This was a limited freedom. This was a lowercase freedom. But now in Christ something has come to us as a gift, something has been revealed: faith. Faith in what? The work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus, in our place, substituting His righteousness for our unrighteousness, received by the Father as a just and sufficient payment for sin, all the individual does is believe, all the individual does is declare, “I place my faith in that Savior, the one who was foretold through the centuries, the one who lived a blameless life, the one who was nailed to the tree, the one who was killed in my place—the one whose death could not hold down, the one who rose, the one who sits at the right hand of the Father.”

And then something extraordinary. You know, too often Christianity is seen in the negative. Saved from hell. No longer under the curse. No longer in darkness. No longer cut off from God. But if we are to be biblical about what has taken place, we must understand that there is a far greater reality: “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ,” (verses 26 and 27). In Christ, by faith, you’re a child of God! “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” You’ve put on Christ as your outer garment. Your clothes identify you, you know that. What you choose to wear, consciously or unconsciously identifies you with a culture, class and gender. But here, you’re called to have a greater and truer outer garment on the outside of your physical clothes, Jesus Christ Himself ought to be the first thing someone sees when they look at you. This is the first clear piece of application for us today. *When people see you, do they first see Jesus?* How do you get something outside of your very clothes? You sweat it out. Sweat builds up and oozes out and drips off. What do you sweat out, spiritually, that others see? Are you feasting on your relationship with the triune God to the extent that you sweat the Kingdom of God? Does your name register with people as synonymous with someone who loves Jesus and reveals Jesus in a true way? Have you crucified your flesh so that your outer garment can be Jesus? You are a child of God.

Verses 28 and 29: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Why does culture, class and gender now take a backseat in Christ? I thought the color of my skin, the inflections of my speech, the car I drive, the way I identify, were the foundation of my



identity? But now, in Christ, before anything else in the universe, you're a child of God.

True freedom requires true identity. In many translations, "child of God" in verse 26 is the exact phrase you read. Perhaps our translation of choice, the NIV, might have done better by translating verse 26 more literally in the Greek, "sons of God." We're all children, but, here, more straightforwardly, more what Paul wants us to understand, we're all sons. And here's why I love this.

To quote Tim Keller, "If we are too quick to correct the biblical language, we miss the revolutionary (and radically egalitarian) nature of what Paul is saying," ("Galatians For You", p. 90). You see, in Paul's context, a woman was legally *forbidden* from the family inheritance, legally *forbidden* from being called an heir. But in Christ, all of us are *sons of God*. So, men and women, in Christ you have a legal standing of *sonship*, you have a legal inheritance of Kingdom life because you are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Nothing can ever or will ever change this legal standing. If you are in Christ, you are *eternally* in Christ. Where once stood the wall of "forbidden" now stands the eternal declaration of *sonship*.

Chapter 4 Verses 1-3: What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

We were in slavery. We were bound to the law. We were underage. But now we find ourselves living in the *true freedom of sonship*. You're a co-heir with Christ. You "own" the full estate. The freedom that is yours in Christ is dangerously expansive. Grace is scandalous because grace in Christ Jesus is true freedom and true freedom in the now-but-not-yet state we find ourselves in is a wild state, indeed. How many of us have, in error, used our freedom to sin? You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. (Galatians 5:13). Your freedom in Christ includes the ability to "indulge the flesh." Like handing a 16 year-old their driver's license, high stakes freedom. To put it another way, I declare to you today that to have sonship is to have a call to nobility beyond telling. The legal status of sonship is bestowed upon you this day. But legal status without felt experience would be a cold reality indeed. God doesn't just save you; God fills you.

And finally verses 4-7: But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who

calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Notice and let it settle in your heart this double sending of the Father. Verse 4: But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son. God sent his Son to rescue, giving you a new legal status. You are legally a son of the Most High. *Sonship*. Then in verse 6: Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit. God saves you by giving you a new legal status, but God wants more for you. God isn't satisfied in saving you. God wants children; God wants the experience of true freedom for you. Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." Do you know that as a child of God you're saved? But do you know that as a child of God you're given the Spirit as *the gift of experience*. Are you walking in the true freedom of the gospel whereby you are daily *experiencing* the crying out in your heart of, "Abba, Father," daddy. There's an unmeasurable distance of difference between knowing with your head that you are a child of God and knowing with your heart that your heavenly Father is with you and for you and is experientially relating to you through the Spirit.

Dear ones, *true freedom requires true identity*. If you don't remember anything else today, remember this: Before anything else in the world, you're a child of God. The world tells all of us that before anything else we belong to a culture, a class, and a gender. God says no. God says, "Before anything else in the whole world, you're my child." Don't look at your culture or your income or your biology first. First, look at Christ on the cross, who loved you and gave Himself up for you. Look to your heavenly Father who says, "You're my child, legally and experientially." God sent His Son to legally free you. God sent His Spirit to experientially free you. Are you living as a child of God who understands that you have full legal and experiential access to the Father, by the work of the Son, through the power of the Spirit?

You are called to witness to your sonship. What would you be unwilling to give up to witness to the world the true unity of the bride of Christ? Are you striving to be a solution to the visible and clear unity of the bride of Christ? Are we, the First Pres worshipping community, shaping our worship to demonstrate that before anything else, we are children of the living God?

True freedom requires true identity. Do you want to live in real freedom? Then before anything else in the world, remember that you are a child of God.

