



# Sermon Growth Guide

**August 21, 2022**

**Liberated**



# Sermon Growth Guide

**August 21, 2022**

**Freedom - Liberated**

**Galatians 1:1-10**

**Key Verse:** Galatians 1:3a

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.”

**Big Idea:** Jesus won a better freedom than the freedoms of this world.

## Foundations

This week we begin our series in Galatians on **Freedom**.

We sing about it in the national anthem. We see it inscribed on buildings, monuments and symbolized in our flag. We rally for it at the polls, or in protests, and we celebrate it on holidays like Martin Luther King Jr. Day or the Fourth of July.

Galatians is all about freedom. But, 1,725 years before the birth of America, Paul was singing about a very special kind of freedom. It was a freedom he had seen while on the road to Damascus, so bright that it blinded him for three days (Acts 9:8). But so compelling he would give his whole life to share about it (Gal. 6:17).

This is freedom in Christ, who “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). It is a freedom now from the domination of sin, which holds humanity condemned, separate from God. Christ our savior has given Himself on our behalf, so that we who are in Christ are no longer condemned, but free, no longer in bondage to the powers of the present evil age.

And this free gift is not given to us because of who we are, or what we’ve done to earn it, but because of the grace of God in Christ. A gift so valuable, Paul would pour out his heart by pen, so that the Galatians might not give it up.

## Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Galatians 1:1-5. What elements of the gospel message do you see in Paul’s introductory statements?

Reviewing verses 6-9, what, according to Paul, has gone awry in these congregations? Take note of the energy, emotion, and rhetorical devices Paul uses. How do these help you understand the problem Paul has with this false gospel?

## Applying God’s Word

Being that the gospel is a free gift, protecting its integrity is essential. If we distort the gospel, we begin to distort how we live, think and act towards God and others. And a vicious cycle is born. We might not even know we are doing it! Theologians call this our “functional theology,” not what we say we believe, but what we actually think and do.

How does your functional theology diverge from what you know to be true about the gospel? What spiritual practices and relationships might help you align your functional and confessed theologies?

## Witnessing God’s Word

The world is full of false gospels that, promising freedom, place us in bondage to a set of rules, or particular image or identity, and cause us to embrace a spiritual or cultural caste system that denigrates the dignity of others and dishonors God.

If you asked me what makes an American an American, I would probably say it has to do with liberty. We are a people that values freedom. I was at Scheels, a very American store, and a guy was wearing a t-shirt with the dictionary definition of the word reading “Freedom: The state of being free or at liberty rather than in confinement or under physical restraint; exemption from external control; the power to determine action without restraint of any kind.” Liberty is something Americans are willing to fight for. The Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” That document was a war declaration. We will fight to establish and defend life, liberty and a pursuit of happiness. The National Anthem ends with, “and the land of the free and the home of the brave.” Some say, the land of the free because of the brave. Liberty is really important to us. Really important. We’ll fight for it. But do we truly understand it?

This fall we are going to study Galatians all the way through. Some call Galatians the Magna Carta of Christian Liberty. It’s the Freedom Letter, and it’s got a little heat in it. There’s a little fight in this letter, for sure. But here is the thesis, here is what I’m going to argue, every Sunday from here until the end of October you are going to hear this argument in one way or another: Jesus won a better freedom. Jesus won, and offers you, an even better freedom than the freedoms offered in this world.

I mean, we get this. We understand this. Even us frontier-land Coloradoans. Freedom is more than limitless self-determination, action without restraint. That might define the word, but that definition isn’t going to get us very far in life. The man who thinks he can eat anything he wants whenever he wants...how does that turn out? Soon he is not free. He is bound by health issues, weight, gout or whatever else. The woman who thinks she is free to buy whatever feels right at 2:00

a.m. on Amazon, is she free? Not for long. That little click feels free! Until she finds herself bound to crippling debt, a bad credit score, and all the accompanying emotional anxiety. A man who considers himself free to sleep with any willing partner at any given time soon finds himself trapped in a life of loneliness, emotional detachment and physical disease. True freedom is found within proper bounds. People think Christianity is a straitjacket. It is a common complaint and reason to resist faith, to turn away from conversations about Jesus. “I don’t want to be bound by all that. I don’t want to be bogged down by all those rules. Not me. I want to be free.” Jesus offers a freedom like you have never known and will never know apart from him. Jesus won a better freedom.

The letter to the Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul sometime around 50 AD, very early. Not too long after Jesus died and rose from the grave. Paul had traveled through what is now central Turkey telling people about the gospel, the gospel news. But what prompted the letter is that these young Christian churches, these burgeoning gospel communities, were being hit with a load of religious garbage by some other teachers who came along behind Paul, and they were buying it. The gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul said, was meant to make you free. These people are using religion, as people often do, to manipulate and control you and subject you again to spiritual and religious slavery. And you are buying it! That’s what prompted Paul to write this letter. Galatians, the freedom letter.

“Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” (Galatians 1:1) Letters begin with “from me, to you” salutations. Paul identifies himself as an apostle. “Apostle,” originally meaning a ship captain or navigator, came to mean someone carrying a message, sharing news or an announcement from the person they represented. Paul is an Apostle. Like the other apostles in the New Testament, he carries a message, news. The news he carries is the gospel



news. He is not sent by a man or by a government or group of people. He carries a message, he says, from God, from Jesus and God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Right there is the message. The gospel. God has intervened in this world. God the Father sent His Son Jesus. Jesus died for us and for our sins according to the scriptures. Jesus rose again from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures. And this, this, is the message.

From me, to you. "To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:2b-3) Paul planted these churches during his missionary travels. He blesses them with grace and with peace. Here's a bit of Christian creativity; the Jewish Christians were used to saying "shalom," "peace," which in Greek is "eirene." Greek speakers were used to greeting one another with the word "chairein," or "good tidings." Paul greets with "grace and peace," "charis kai ereine." Jew and Greek. Grace and peace. Peace and grace. Good stuff. Why do we have peace with grace? Paul goes on, it is "...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." (Galatians 1:3-4)

You see, right here we have the whole gospel. God the Father sent Jesus Christ the Son. Jesus came into the world on purpose, for a purpose. But God the Father, our Father, is also the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does that make us by the divine decree and sovereignty? It makes us brothers and sisters with Jesus. But the Son who was sent, although one with us, is also "Lord." Lord Jesus Christ. Lord is a word reserved for Yahweh, for Adonai, for God! Now, we are going to get pretty deep into this one verse. Ready? Get your pencils out. This Lord Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins." The preposition "for" here is the word "huper" which means "on behalf of; in place of." Do you get that? He pushed Himself into that place where our sins were causing us consequences. He gave Himself in place of, in our place, in the place of His brothers and sisters so

named by grace who were subject to death because of their sins. He pushed Himself into that place and gave Himself over in their place. He "gave Himself for our sins."

Why? "...to rescue us from the present evil age." This is a rescue plan. This is a redemption plan. Keep your pencils out and underline "rescue." This word does not mean to carry away, like a Special Forces team dropping in to extract a hostage; they gather you up and whisk you out of there. It means to eliminate or collapse the power over the person. What Jesus did was to rescue us from the power of the present evil age. Our life changes in place. Imagine you are living in the Old West and you owe a lot of money to the evil cattle-rancher, Black Bart, and he keeps harassing you and threatening you and sending his henchmen to frighten your children. Then in rides, you know, Cowboy Joe, Shane, Pale Rider, any Clint Eastwood character. He does what needs to be done, tips his hat and says, "He won't be troubling you any longer, ma'am." That's the idea. Jesus doesn't pull us out of this world, but He pulls this world out of us. He grants us freedom right where we sit. He empties the evil forces of their power to define and delimit our lives. But it isn't the product of luck, or chance, or the quickdraw talents of Cowboy Joe. Our freedom is on a firmer foundation. It happens "according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Galatians 1:4b-5)

That, church, is the gospel. That's the news. We were trapped in our sin, under the heavy power of evil, stuck in the narrow places we had gotten ourselves, subject to the foolish and painful consequences of our selfish choices, which we thought would make us free but left us in chains, and, worse than that, we were headed for death, eternal separation from God! But God the Father sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world, and He gave Himself over for our sins. He gave Himself. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up

again. This command I received from my Father.” (John 10:11,18) Jesus wasn’t a good teacher who accidentally died under Roman violence. Jesus laid down His life for us, to rescue us, to pay a debt and clear the weight of authority over us, the evil power that had claim on us, He eliminated it, he paid it, he removed it—we are free! He did it according to the will of the Father to save. And by the will of the Father, He rose again from the dead and opened up eternal life for all who follow Him. This is the gospel. This is the news. Nothing else, nothing other, nothing alongside.

Usually, in an ancient letter, the next word would be “Thanks.” I give thanks, I thank God. You see it in other letters. But what does Paul say here? “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.” (Galatians 1:6-7) It is astonishing how quickly we abandon the gospel. We just don’t believe it. It can’t be a free gift. It can’t be peace based on grace alone. There must be something we are supposed to do, some obligation we are meant to keep, some payment we are meant to offer, something! Paul’s opponents were saying, “Yes the gospel, but also this.” You can’t add anything to the gospel and have it still be the gospel. Gospel plus anything is no longer the gospel. Paul says, let these people be accursed. Don’t listen to them. One of the most important decisions we make in our lives is who we listen to.

You must understand the gospel. You must grasp this, and you must be diligent in defending it from every accretion and addition and perversion. The gospel is the news about what Jesus has done, it is His glory, He is the rescuer, He is the one who won the battle, He is the Savior, He is the Lord. What Jesus has done to pay the penalty and debt of our sin and set us free. It is a better freedom. If you had to fight for your own freedom, you would never be able to do it. If you had to shoot it out

with Black Bart, you would always know the next Black Bart is around the corner. If you had to work to establish your own freedom, you would never be certain that the job was done, never be sure. If you had to free yourself from your sins and habits, and make up for all the wrong you have done, you could never accomplish it, you could never fix it all. Jesus has won a better freedom. The gospel is the good news, it is news of an event, it is the good news that when we were lost and dead in our sins, trapped, enslaved by our own devices, God did something. God sent Jesus. Jesus set us free. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36) That’s a better freedom. And you don’t earn it, you receive it by grace. And no matter your situation in life; in Jesus Christ you are liberated.

