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SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

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TITLE: Being Free or Living Free?

Elephants are incredibly large and strong animals, and yet trainers can condition them to believe that they are weak. In captivity, when elephants are young, they are tied up, or chained to a large tree or a pole. This is unfortunate, because elephants were made to roam, and so they try to leave their area, but when they're small, they are chained or roped to the tree. When they're young, no amount of pulling will break their chains. But what the captors have found out is, as they grow up, no matter how big they are, they no longer resist their captivity. No longer do they tie them up with ropes or chains – they can be held in place by a simple string attached to their leg. They have the power to wander away - to be free - yet they remain in captivity. They're slaves.

I think many Christians today operate like elephants in captivity. Jesus Christ has freed us from our sins. He has freed us from being slaves to sin, and yet we don't live free. Instead, we act like we are chained to our sin.

Here we are, working our way through the book of Galatians, in our series called “We are Free”. Because of what Christ has done, we are truly free from being slaves to sin, and slaves to ourselves. But there's a difference between *being* free and *living* free. Many of us act like the elephants. God has called us to a life of purpose and freedom and power. But we continually put ourselves back in our captivity, even though the lock has been broken, and the chains have been shattered.

Today we're picking up in Galatians Chapter 2, and Paul's going to develop this idea of *living as free*. Paul was writing the Galatian church, because of false teaching that had infiltrated the churches. The message of the Gospel is that Salvation comes freely by grace through faith. There's nothing we can do to *earn* Salvation; there's nothing we could do to *buy* Salvation – we can't even buy a lottery ticket to *win* Salvation. It is *freely given* as a gift from God.

For Christians today, even though there is freedom in Christ, we know that freedom comes with an obligation. There are implications to receiving the Gospel. Salvation is a free gift, and yet it's the most expensive gift you could ever receive, because it changes everything about how you live and think. It frees us to live on purpose for God. That is at a cost.

The false teachers were teaching the Galatian churches that Salvation was free, but there were things you had to do as well. Yes, the Gospel message is true. Jesus Christ did come to save us from our sins, but according to the legalists - the false teachers – if you wanted it to stick, you

had better follow the Jewish ceremonies and traditions. They began to elevate tradition and human authority above God's plan and work.

In Chapter One, Paul has been defending his Apostleship. The Judaizers were saying that Paul was just another man who had developed his own man-made gospel. But Paul said, "No way! The Gospel I received was from Jesus Christ Himself. I saw the risen Christ, and was commissioned by Him. Therefore, I am a true Apostle." Paul went on, saying, "There is a false gospel that the Judaizers are teaching, and because it is a false gospel, it is *no gospel at all*." Their gospel is not good news. It is confusion, and therefore bad news, because it couldn't save their souls. You see, when we take away from the Gospel, or add to the Gospel, it ceases being real. It becomes religion, or it becomes a game. In the remainder of Chapter One, Paul is laying out his case for his Apostleship and the authenticity of the Gospel he preached. He says, "As soon as I received the Gospel, I was off running. I didn't learn to walk. I ran to preach the Gospel, and I did so for three years, until I went to Jerusalem, where I finally received Peter's story, and James' story as well. And then I preached some more." And that's where we pick it up, in Galatians Chapter 2, verse one:

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. (Gal.2:1-2, ESV)

Paul says, after 14 years, he goes back to Jerusalem. Some people wonder whether this is 14 years after his time in Jerusalem, or whether this is 14 years after his conversion. I'm inclined to think this is after his conversion, seeing that this is likely written to the South Galatian churches, but frankly, it really doesn't matter – that's not the point. Paul brought along with him Barnabas and Titus.

Barnabas played an important role in the early church. He was described in Acts 4:36 as the *Son of Encouragement*. Also, according to Acts 4, he sold a field, and had given generously to the church. He played a central role in encouraging Paul in his ministry, because according to Acts 9, he convinced the other Apostles of Paul's authority. We know that Paul and Barnabas traveled together during Paul's first missionary journey. Barnabas helped defend the true Gospel at the Jerusalem Council, in Acts Chapter 15. Paul also brought Titus along. Titus was one of Paul's coworkers, and he played a major role in Corinth. Paul would write a letter to him.

Paul says that the reason he went back to Jerusalem, was because he received a revelation from God. Now there is some debate whether or not this is his visit recorded in Acts 11 or Acts 15. Many scholars believe that this is the Acts 15 trip, where they would go and have the Jerusalem Council. I would agree. According to Acts 15, professing Jewish Christians went to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas were carrying on ministry. The Jewish Christians began teaching that unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved. Well Paul and Barnabas disagreed and debated them, so Acts 15 records the Council's actions to decide the matter.

DISCUSSION:

N: So we've just covered a bit of important history here. Let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney and break this down a bit more. What does Paul's trip to Jerusalem tell us about how pervasive legalism can be?

C: Well, I think we can all easily make that error - of expecting adherence to our own Biblical interpretations, or our own traditions. So maybe we aren't arguing over circumcision anymore, but we're arguing over whether or not Christians should use tobacco, alcohol, dance, watch R-rated movies, or whatever. So, but you know, the truth is that avoiding these things, there's no guarantee of spirituality.

N: That's a very good perspective right there. What do you think Arnie?

A: I remember in my probably late teens, we would argue theology, being raised in a very strict Christian home, and legalism and all of that stuff. I remember the people that argued the most, now - all these years later - turned out the very, very worst. They would much rather argue theology and what's right, and what's wrong, than to practice it in their own lives. And I mean, they would argue passionately for hours and hours. And part of it, I guess, is being young and stupid. But the other part is, it's such a tremendous way to get sidetracked, arguing over the things of God. And I think that's what Paul saw.

N: Hmm. Yeah. I think that we need to be real careful whether it's legalism or license - we can drift so quickly and so easily either way, either way. And we see it all the time, and that's why we need to be on guard - constantly on guard to contend for the true faith. And, you know, Paul, he goes back to Jerusalem, and what does he do? He goes to the leaders and says, "Hey, I just want to make sure that you guys are still sticking to the original script. Are you?" Yes, that's so important because he knew how pervasive, how tempting it could be to go back to their old religious ways. Or even, we might say today, to adding one more thing to the Gospel. And so we need to be like Paul, continually looking at ourselves, asking ourselves, "Are we sticking to the true Gospel? Are we sticking to what God has said?" And then following through with it, and Paul was good at this. We need to be better at it as well. And because we are friends, because we care about each other as the body of Christ, we will check in with each other from time to time. Not out of, to be judgmental, not trying to be critical, but because we really care. When we do this, we will glorify God, and we will preserve the true Gospel.

So Paul is back in Jerusalem 14 years after his conversion. He's already preached for three years running with the Gospel. Three years after his conversion, and preaching the Gospel, he goes to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and James to hear their story. No doubt they talked about the Gospel. Then 11 years later - or 14 years after his conversion - he is back in Jerusalem again.

Again, Paul says in Chapter 2, Verse 2 (ESV), [I went up because of a revelation and set before them \(though privately before those who seemed influential\)...](#) Who are these influential people? Well, it's Peter, it's James and John - and then he continues, by saying he put before them, or

submitted to them, [the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.](#)

If you read that quickly, you might think, “Oh Paul is saying I want to make sure I got this Gospel message right, because if I had it wrong this whole time, I would have run in vain.” But that is not at all what Paul is saying. Because if that is what he is saying, it would have contradicted his authority - and the Gospel message he had received from Christ – and had been preaching. So he's not saying, “Is this Gospel the real Gospel?” What he was referring to, was the concern that the Judaizers had influenced the Apostles. So before this Council, he wants to have – we call it - a meeting before the meeting. He wants to make sure that they're all on the same page, and to make sure that the Apostles have not been persuaded to this false gospel.

Paul moves into athletic metaphors - he loves them. So Paul says, “I just want to make sure in this meeting, that I had not run in vain.” It's almost like taking those 14 or 17 years, and training to play basketball, but when you show up, you find out you're actually playing hockey. That training would have been in vain for the competition. In other words, the Apostles would have been training for a whole different game. So what Paul is saying is, if the Apostles would have adopted this Gospel, *plus* works, or legalistic mentality, Paul's work to the Gentiles would have been futile. It would have blown their faith apart, because Paul had been preaching the Gospel as Salvation that comes freely by grace from God. This is the message Paul had been telling these churches. For them to find out that that actually isn't how it works would have been shocking - they would have been running in vain. Verse 3:

[But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.](#)

So here Paul is bringing in Titus to Jerusalem, and the Apostles agree that there is no benefit salvifically, for Titus to be circumcised. It doesn't make you more saved. So they are agreeing with the true Gospel, that you don't need to be circumcised to be saved. Well for you and me today - what is the importance of circumcision? Here's the deal: In the Old Testament, those who refused circumcision did not belong to God's covenant people, according to Genesis 17. It was an outward symbol of an inward reality. And apparently, the Judaizers were again adding Old Testament law, works, even tradition, to the Gospel message. Now traditionally, it made sense for Jewish Christians to be circumcised, but Gentiles didn't have any reason religiously or traditionally to be circumcised. Even so, Judaizers were suggesting that Salvation was still contingent upon being identified physically through circumcision. But in this private meeting with the Apostles, they said, “No way. That's not required for Salvation. That doesn't advance the Gospel with Gentiles.”

And then Paul continues in verses 4 & 5:

[⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.](#)

So it tells us that these false teachers were secretly brought in. In other words, they were like spies. It's a military picture. These people may have been thrown into the Galatian churches by

the Pharisees or priests to save traditional Judaism. They were sent in to distort the Gospel of grace. But notice, Paul tell us why. It was so that they might bring us into slavery.

Paul would use this notion of slavery consistently. In Romans 6:20, Paul says, *when we were slaves of sin, we were not slaves to righteousness.*

Paul would go on to say in Galatians 5:1, that *for freedom Christ has set us free, stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.*

You see, the world tells you that Christianity is oppressive, and it holds people down from having their best life. It views freedom as a world with no boundaries. It views freedom as “anything goes”. But that is not freedom – that is real true slavery. Jesus was so clear in John 8:34, that *everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.* Being a slave to sin is truly being in bondage. It's not free.

Jesus didn't come to make us slaves to a dull life. Jesus said, that He came, *so that we might have life and life to the fullest.* But that only happens when we embrace the truth. Jesus said the truth would set us free. The truth is, our sin, and our slavery to sin, holds us down and separates us from God.

If you today are truly free, because of what Jesus Christ has done, then you need to start living free - that doesn't mean freedom to sin; that doesn't mean living for yourself. That means free to live, according to God's standards, because it provides the best life possible, and it brings God glory.

Too many people act like they are slaves to their old lives, when they have been freed forever. It's like being in a jail cell, but suddenly Christ rips open the door and says, “Let's go!” And you walk out, and look around, only to go back into your cell, even though there's no door holding you in. You stay in it voluntarily, when freedom is there for you. But why??

Paul fought hard for these churches to know and hold firmly to the true Gospel. I want the same for you today. **You are free. Begin living as free.**

N: Let's bring in Arnie and Cara to talk more about true freedom. What happens when you live beneath your blessing? In others words, what's the result of living as if you're NOT spiritually free?

C: I think it would be awful to not know if you're saved or not. Plenty of those manmade religions, that will tell their congregation that they're under some sort of investigative judgment, and it's control in lies; it's bondage. And Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. So anything added to that? Well, it cheapens what Christ did for us on the cross. And it says that Jesus alone is not enough.

N: Arnie, any thoughts on that?

A: It's hard for me with legalism, because it's - you can argue both sides of it strongly. And I think the pendulum has swung the other way. And there is - you know, my background's in

psych, so I'm not some kind of Bible police, or legal beagle - but there is something about having standards, and if they're kept within reason, it's freeing. It really can be freeing to live to a standard, not a legalistic standard, but a standard that Christ would have you do, you know, as if He's with you. So we've swung one way. I think the middle of the road is probably the best way to go.

N: Well, it's clear that God's ways are the best ways, and they are the best life that we can live. I mean, Christ said, *I came that you might have life and life to the fullest*. Does that mean that there are certain parameters that are boundaries we live in? Absolutely. You know, we've talked about that illustration of trains on a train track - a train is really freed by the train tracks. It's not restricted, though humanly speaking, we think, well, yeah, it is restricted, because it can't just turn left, and it can't just turn right. But what happens when the train goes off the train tracks? It's stuck. That's exactly true for us as Christians: God has given us a huge sandbox to play in, and yet we always want more. But when we go off the train tracks, we're stuck, and we're derailed, and it damages our reputation. It damages our testimony. So instead, we should be living a life that is free, truly free, but in accordance with God's best for us.

A: I think it's interesting Nat - as you get older - I've talked to several people, so I don't think it's just a one out thing - but good people, who mean well, who've lived their life - pretty legalistically - good people still. [Yup.] But I've had several come to me in old age, and let's say they're in the midst of cancer, or something going on, and they are just baffled. [Hmm.] "I did everything right. I lived - I was good to my - you know..." and they go on, and they list all of their legalisms, if you will. And it's not turning out right. And so legalism is really bondage. [Yes it is.] And it's living a lie that is sad, and just really, really confusing. And I think it trips people up spiritually.

C: Well, you know, there's that sanctification. So now, five years ago, I'd watch something on TV that I would never watch today. You know, I think we have to just look to the Holy Spirit to tell us where we're at in our own personal walks. You get what I'm saying here? [Yeah.] I don't want to look at somebody and say, "Oh, you shouldn't be doing that or that." I just don't think they're in that part in their walk, where the Holy Spirit's going to clean that up yet. You don't come to know Jesus, and then all of a sudden, completely shed everything. I think you realize the magnitude of the gift you've been given, and if you're in the Word every day, you're slowly sloughing off that stuff. Does that make sense?

N: A hundred percent. You know, Matt Chandler's church, I love their motto. It's "Come as you are, but don't stay that way." Right? I mean, that's exactly what Christ is saying. "Hey, come to me as you are - you can't clean yourself up enough to get into Heaven. You can't do enough to have a relationship with God. I will do it for you. But how I find you is not how I'm going to leave you. You're not going to stay that way, because you are called for more than that." I mean, do we really think that Jesus was bummed out, because He wasn't out having sex with women? No, He was perfectly happy by being obedient to the Heavenly Father. He was perfectly free, and obedient, and happy, living a way that was in accordance with His perfect will. The same is true for Peter. The same is true for Paul. The same is true for us. We have such a wonderful life,

by following God's standards. And we become molded and sanctified, as you said, day-by-day, by submitting our will to Him, by daily getting into God's Word. And Arnie, you are an evangelist for this, because you know to be true, if we get into God's Word, we will see life change. Isn't that right?

A: Oh Yeah. Like never before.

N: Right. And so that's why we do what we do here at Back to the Bible. We know that if you can get into God's Word four or more times a week, your life will be different. That's that process of sanctification for the believer. So yes, we are free. Once we are His child, there's nothing we can do that can change that. And yet, we know that there is a way to live - that brings God glory - that is beneficial for ourselves - and a life that's beneficial for the community around us.

A: When we say four times a week, we don't mean legalistically, it's better every day. But what we found as researchers is, four or more times a week, when you read, reflect and respond. So legalistically is like you're in Bible class, and you've got to read chapters one through three. No, we're saying take a piece of Scripture - read, reflect, and respond. And if you can do that, we've seen over time, your life will radically transform.