



## Freedom to Serve Christ

### Galatians 1: 10-24

- Starting a new study through the book of Galatians.
- Lots of themes that Paul addresses in this book. Standing firm in doctrine, walking in Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit.
- One theme throughout this letter – Freedom we have in Christ.
- The context was in the middle of a conflict concerning what was required for Gentile believers to become a part of the church.
- There was a major divide between those raised in Judaism and those that were Gentiles.
- This reached the threshold of crisis in the church. You can hear that in Paul's tone in the first chapter.
- Paul's emphasis is on the salvation by grace alone.

- When we talk about freedom in our context – it usually has something to do with our freedom as Americans. Especially as we celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our nation this Summer.
- We have the freedom to – protest the government, start a business idea, own a bunch of guns, and eat as much bacon as we want.
- That’s all well and good. It is a reason to give God thanks for the freedom we have as Americans.
- But the freedom we have in Christ is the freedom to serve Christ.

**Main Point: When we are saved by God, we are free from our former life.**

#### **I. Freedom from pleasing man**

- a. **Passage Analysis:** In Galatians 1:10, Paul frames the issue as a stark binary: pleasing man or pleasing God. These two cannot coexist. The Greek word translated “servant” is *doulos* — a bond-slave who owes complete allegiance to one master alone. Paul’s use of “still” signals a radical before-and-after contrast: before his conversion, he had lived entirely for the commendation of the Jewish religious establishment, advancing “beyond many of my own age” in Judaism (v.14). That entire approval system became irrelevant the moment he met the risen Christ on the Damascus road.

- b. **Illustration:** In 1521, Martin Luther stood before the Holy Roman Emperor and the most powerful men in Christendom, ordered to recant his writings. His reply has echoed through history: **“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I**

cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; I can do no other.”

- c. Luther’s refusal to bow to popes and councils was not mere stubbornness — it was the natural overflow of a conscience reoriented entirely toward God. This is exactly what Paul describes: freedom from the approval of men is not reckless independence. It is total dependence on Christ alone.
- d. **Application:** Man-pleasing does not always look like cowardice. Often it disguises itself as sensitivity, as not wanting to cause unnecessary division, as keeping the peace. But when sensitivity to others’ approval leads us to soften or silence the clear teaching of Scripture, we have crossed a line Paul marks plainly. *Ask yourself honestly: Am I shaping my words, my lifestyle, or my convictions around winning acceptance?* The good news is that salvation itself breaks this power. We are free — free to tell the truth in love, free to stand firm under pressure, free to serve God rather than manage our reputation among men.
- e. **Quote — Charles Spurgeon:** “The man who seeks to please everybody will end by pleasing nobody. Be decided, be thorough, be straightforward.”

## II. Called into service

- a. **Passage Analysis:** Verses 15-16 contain one of the most striking descriptions of divine calling in all of Paul’s letters. The word translated “set apart” — *aphorisas* in Greek — shares its root with the very word “Pharisee,” meaning one who is separated.
- b. Paul had imagined himself separated for the law; God had, from before his birth, separated him for the gospel. The phrase “called me by his grace” places the

entire initiative squarely on God's side. Paul did not volunteer; he was conscripted by grace. This is the nature of Christian calling: it does not begin with us, does not depend on us, and cannot be revoked by us.

- c. **Illustration:** The contrast between Paul's self-directed zeal and God's redirecting grace is staggering. Paul was not searching for Christ — he was actively destroying Christ's church (v.13) when God interrupted his plans on the Damascus road. No human mentor sent him. No church council voted to commission him. When the calling came, he did not even travel to Jerusalem to verify it with the apostles (v.16-17). The revelation was direct, the commission was divine, and the redirection was total. This is how God tends to work throughout Scripture: he finds his servants while they are doing something else entirely and turns their lives toward purposes they would never have chosen on their own.
- d. **Application:** Not every believer is called to apostolic ministry, but every believer is called. The language Paul uses — "set apart before I was born, called by his grace" — is not reserved for a spiritual elite; it describes the structure of every redeemed life. God has a purposeful, outward-facing design for each person he saves. We are not rescued simply to be safe — we are saved to serve.
- e. **Saul and Paul** – probably used both names throughout his life.
- f. If you have been withholding your time, your gifts, or your voice from the purposes of God, this text is a word directly to you. The same grace that called Paul has called you. The question is whether you are answering.

### III. Change only God can do

- a. **Passage Analysis:** The passage reaches its climax in verses 22-24: “The one who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” The Greek word translated “destroy” — *eporthei* — is a military term meaning to lay waste, to plunder a city. Paul had not merely disagreed with Christianity; he had waged systematic war against it. Yet the churches of Judea, who had never even met Paul, responded with a single sentence: “They glorified God because of me” (v.24). The transformation was so complete, so contrary to everything Paul had been, that the story did not point to Paul at all — it pointed straight past him to God. That is the mark of true conversion.
- b. **Illustration:** John Newton spent the first half of his life as a sailor and then a slave ship captain — a man who later described himself as having fallen to the lowest degree of moral degradation. When God transformed him through the gospel, the change was so thorough that Newton spent the second half of his life preaching the grace that had saved him, writing “Amazing Grace,” and ultimately testifying before Parliament against the very slave trade from which he had once profited. Newton refused to take any credit: “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, but by the grace of God I am not what I once was.” No human effort produced that transformation. It was God, and everyone who knew him knew it.
- c. **Application:** This truth cuts two ways. On one side, it strips away any confidence we might place in self-improvement. *The change God requires goes to the root — not behavioral adjustment but heart transformation* — and that is beyond the reach of human willpower.

- d. On the other side, it is an immense comfort to anyone who doubts whether God can truly change them. If God could transform the man who was systematically destroying the church into the man who would write most of the New Testament, then no life is too far gone, no sin too entrenched, no past too dark for his redemptive power. The gospel does not merely adjust people; it makes them new. And the change God produces always points people back to him — not to us.
- e. **Quote — J.C. Ryle:** *“Conversion is a thorough change — a thorough change of the whole man. It is not a change of name or of church, or of opinions, or of feelings only. It is a change that goes to the very root of all — a change of the heart, of the will, of the ruling principle, of the affections, and of the life. A converted man is a new creature.”* (Holiness)