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FREEDOM IN CHRIST

Galatians Series
Galatians 2:1-5

I'm going to pray right now, but I want to prepare you for the prayer that I prepared to pray for you. I want you to think of a baby that's born. When a baby's born, the child starts to bond with the parent, the mother and the father, and in the first minutes, hours, days, weeks that bonding process is very important. In some situations a child is adopted. That means that process is interrupted and now that child is being adopted into a new family and that bonding process also takes place. We adopted girls into our family and Megan and Elizabeth are here with us today and we're grateful that they're here. That bonding process takes time, which takes work, and it's the intentional strengthening of the relationship that builds trust.

Now I want you to think about your relationship with your heavenly Father as I lead us in prayer, okay?

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we know that you use that same analogy of new birth to describe the relationship that you have with us, that we're born again. You also adopt us into your family and it means this bonding process takes a little bit of time for us to learn to trust, learn to rely on you. So we're grateful, Lord, that you're there to respond to us every time we cry out to you. You're there to comfort us every time that we experience problems in our lives. We're grateful that you don't give us everything we ask for, but you give us what we need. You care for us, you strengthen us.

So I ask, Lord, that you would enlarge our understanding of you, that you would give us a bigger picture of who you are so we can trust you with more of our lives so we'll feel comfortable with that. Lord, we ask that you would show us how big your love for us is, how much you care for us in personal ways. We ask that you would demonstrate your control, your sovereignty in our lives in ways that makes sense to us so we can see who you are. We ask that you would help us feel the presence that you are around us and enjoy the benefits of that. In all of this, Lord, we ask that you would reveal your power. As you reveal your power in our lives every day, we ask that you would grow us more in our ability to trust you. In those things that we hold on to, that are difficult for us to trust in, those things we want to do ourselves, we want to find solutions in other ways, we ask that you would give us the wisdom and give us the ability to bond with you and to trust you in personal ways.

Lord, I pray for those who are not yet believers who are here this morning in this worship service, that you would help them see the power that comes by knowing you as their personal Lord and Savior and you would do that work this morning. We're asking you to work in our

hearts in these next few minutes as we look at your word. Teach us from this. In Jesus' name, amen.

Open your Bibles with me please to Galatians 2. We will look at Galatians 5 today, but let's start with Galatians 2. You have a handout and you might want to follow along with this handout. I suspect this is one of those handouts you'll either keep in your Bible or file somewhere that you'll use over time.

What I'm going to do today is I'm going to take a study of freedom in Christ. This idea of freedom, the freedom that we have in Christ that's talked about in the book of Galatians is strategic. But what I've done now in our study for today is I've gone through the whole Bible, not just in Galatians, but I've gone through several passages of scripture and tried to understand what this freedom in Christ is. It's a very significant theological issue you need to understand. As Christians we must grab this and it will help resolve some of the problems that you experience or the challenges that you face sometimes in your life.

I'm going to talk about freedom. That is the freedom to live our lives and that Christ does in our lives. We want to live that freedom.

As we do that I'm going to take us to New Testament times where there are two main issues. One was the idea of eating meat sacrificed to idols. I just want to explain it to you before we see scriptures about it.

In the New Testament there was meat that you could buy on sale. If you were good at bargains then you would want to buy the on sale meat, but the reason it was on sale was because it was offered to idols from another religion. But you're a Christian in those days, you know that those idols are worthless. They're nothing. So who cares if the meat was offered to idols? That's nothing anyway. So maybe you wanted to get a sale on the meat and you would buy meat offered to idols.

Some people would say, "Wow, you saved a lot of money! What a great idea!" And other people would say, "You can't do that because that meat was offered to idols." Do you see the challenge there? The passages we're looking at today are going to talk about that.

Another one had to do with circumcision. Circumcision was one of those things that came from the Jewish faith that God designed as a very important covenant relationship with them. Now you have people becoming Christians – Jews becoming Christians (of course they're already circumcised), but then you had Gentiles being Christians. Some of the Jews were saying if you really want to know God personally, if you're really in with God you need to be circumcised. So there was this back and forth about how valuable the circumcision is now in the covenant relationship with God.

I want to look at those kinds of passages in the New Testament, see what they talk about regarding freedom and the rights we have as Christians, and give you six principles that will help govern your life as to what you're going to do.

Here's the kind of things that are disputable matters. Now we're not talking about things that the Bible says are explicitly wrong, I'm not talking about those. I'm talking about disputable matters. These are things that are gray areas.

I'm going to give you a list of some disputable matters. Whether or not you can purchase luxuries, like a boat or jewelry or a beach house or drive a fancy car. Whether you can work on a Sunday instead of attending church. Whether you can attend a yoga class. Whether you can drink alcohol. Whether you can use credit cards. Whether you can watch an R-rated or violent movie. Whether you can wear a bikini down to the beach. Whether or not you should homeschool your children. Whether or not you should get a tattoo or body piercing. Whether you can eat junk food.

Now in all of those things I just mentioned the Bible does not make a black and white statement about those. There are some principles and some would argue there's principles about those things and yes there are. But we choose then what principles we're going to take in order to defend our particular position.

For example, when it comes to alcohol we see the Bible says drunkenness is wrong, it's sin. But what about taking a drink, for example. One might suggest that you shouldn't do that at all because 1 Thessalonians 5:22 says that you should *avoid any kind of evil* and alcohol is often associated with bad things, and so that person is right. Someone else might look at the gospels and say Jesus *ate and drank with publicans and sinners*. And He did. He probably wasn't drinking water when He was with them. And He did change water into wine. All that's true.

Now people will emphasize different parts of the scripture or valuable principles to document what they believe is best for them and sometimes what they think is best for their family or for others.

I want you to understand we're dealing with an area of controversial issues or disputable matters. We're not talking about things the Bible says are sin. That's not what we're talking about. You have to remember that we're in that particular area.

So if you look at Galatians 2:1-5 we're going to see a predicament Paul had and that's going to lead us into the dialogue. In Galatians 2 we're told about Titus and whether Titus should be circumcised or not because they're in ministry. Now they're in ministry. This is a higher form of a leadership. You would expect a greater calling for them and so here's what we have.

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

So the choice that Paul made is we're not going to circumcise Titus in this situation. The target is the Christians leaders in Jerusalem. There's some false believers that are making accusations, so in this case they decided that circumcision would not be a good thing to do because it would be giving in and it would be compromising the freedom that they have in Christ.

But look at Acts 16:1-3. In another passage Paul has a similar situation and he does something completely different. Look at this. In Acts 16:1-3, *Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*

Interesting. Titus' parents were Greek. But in this case they circumcised Timothy. So you have to ask the question why? Why would he circumcise in this case and believe it's the right thing to do and here not circumcise because it's the right thing to do? He had to make a choice of what to do in those situations and it's more than just a black and white issue. It was a decision made based on principle.

I want to share with you the six principles that will govern your ability to make decisions in disputable matters. I'm going to share all six and you need to know all six at the same time. You can't just take one because if you take one and run with it then you're going to be saying in your mind, "Yes, but..." because you have to have them all. All six of them need to be there.

Freedom principle number one: I have the freedom and right to do whatever is not forbidden explicitly in scripture. I have the responsibility to take a stand for the freedom I have in Christ. My choice is between God and me.

Here are some verses that illustrate this. This first one comes from Galatians 5:1-2. *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

We have a freedom in Christ and that freedom is very important as we're going to see moving forward here in our dialogue because it does something to us inside. Our faith is not about rules, it's about a freedom we have inside and then we're internally motivated. More about that in a moment, but I want you to see Galatians 5 is saying we have this freedom.

The next verse I want to show you is in Romans 14:23. It says, *But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Whoa. What that's saying is if you have doubts about a certain thing then you don't want to participate in it even though somebody else you know might not have doubts and they can participate in that. Very interesting that freedom may have some limitations here even though in Romans 14 it says that *anything that does not come from faith is sin*. So if there are doubts in your heart about whether this is right or wrong, you probably shouldn't do it.

Colossians 2:16 says this: *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.*

Don't let anybody judge you about those things. Why? Because your freedom is in Christ. That's the whole point.

So I want to ask a very important question. According to these verses, who decides what's right and wrong regarding gray areas in your life? Who decides that? It is between you and God.

That is going to be a very important principle and I want you to understand why. The reason it's important is because God wants people to be internally motivated and He's placed the Holy Spirit in our hearts along with a conscience to help guide us spiritually in these matters.

If we were to create a list of dos and don'ts, as happens in some denominations or religious groups (do this in order to be spiritual and don't do these things if you want to be spiritual), if you have that list out there then you start looking to that list as if that list is going to save you, you're externally motivated. But God wants us to be internally motivated and that's why He's placed a conscience and a Holy Spirit inside of us to guide us to those decisions that need to be made. We'll see the word 'conscience' mentioned several times as we go through the passages I'm going to show you today.

But before you stop reading and run off to take advantage of your freedom in Christ, it's important to read the other five principles because each one of those puts limits on freedom principle number one. You are still making the choices, not someone else, but you'll need to consider a few other factors before you make your decision and just go out and display your freedom that you have in Christ.

Freedom principle number two is this: I have a responsibility to limit my freedom in Christ for the sake of other believers who may be caused to stumble.

Now in order to understand this passage we go to 1 Corinthians 8. I want to be pretty clear about this because I think some people misunderstand this idea of the weaker brother. In 1 Corinthians 8 I'm going to start at verse 9 and then I'll bounce around a little bit. But here's where we start. *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.*

You have a weaker brother. Let's define who the weaker brother is for a moment here. It's very important because the weaker brother isn't just someone who disagrees with you. It's someone who might stumble in their faith because of the activity that you've chosen to do.

So if you've got a Christian friend who's strong in their faith and they strongly disagree with what you're doing, that's not the weaker brother we're talking about. If a husband and wife disagree about something, that's not necessarily the weaker brother unless that one of them just came to know the Lord and then this one starts to do something.

Let's say the husband wants to go watch a violent movie, but the wife is just coming into her understanding about the Lord and somehow she's been rescued out of some of the worldliness. Now her husband goes and watches a violent movie. She says to herself, "Well if he can do that, I guess it's okay for me to go back to watching some of those romantic movies that I like to watch," and it starts to suck her back into the world system. That's what we're talking about a weaker brother. Someone who is caused to stumble in their faith. Not just because someone disagrees with you.

I would suggest that in the passage that we're looking at here when we're talking about Titus that there were some people who were probably offended by the fact that Titus wasn't circumcised. But Paul says no I'm sorry we're not going to circumcise him because we're going to demonstrate the freedom that we have in Christ.

Who decides? It's important to know that we decide that before God, but sometimes we sacrifice our freedom because we want to protect the faith of someone else. Our freedom isn't the most important thing. Sometimes we sacrifice that because there's someone else who's weaker in their faith.

Sometimes those weaker faith people are children. My brother Mark is a pastor now and he's been a pastor for quite some time. I remember in his earlier years he felt very comfortable having beer in the refrigerator until his children got a little bit older. As his children were growing up, he decided I'm not going to do that anymore. That was his decision. Why? Because he didn't want to stumble them in regards to their faith and their understanding of things. Now someone else might do it completely differently. I'm not saying that's what everybody needs to do. That's what he did in his particular family.

Also in 1 Corinthians 8:1 and then following verses 7-8 it says this, *Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge."* When you had food sacrificed to idols you could say, "Idols are nothing. I don't have to worry about that." *"We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.*

I have knowledge that this isn't going to bother anybody. It's not wrong according to scripture; therefore I'm going to do it, whatever that one thing is. That's *knowledge puffs up*. Love says, "You know, I better not do this even though I have the right to do it because it may hinder another believer in a particular way." Particularly a weaker believer in this passage.

Verses 7-8 says, *But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.*

The point here is that sometimes the activity is associated with worldliness for that person who's coming out of worldliness, so we say no to it for their sake and we try to move forward. That's principle number two.

One more in 1 Corinthians 8:13. *Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.* Limits our freedom for the sake of a weaker brother.

Now let's go to principle number three. I have a responsibility to limit my freedom for the sake of non-believers because winning them to Christ is the most important thing.

Now to understand that we're going to go to 1 Corinthians 10 where God gives us some specific teaching about this. Again we're going to see this quote that's been used. *"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.*

Now if you take this in the context of the passage you will see right afterwards it's talking about an unbeliever. *If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.*

Don't say, "Hey, before I eat this meat, was this offered to idols or not?" You don't need to know. You're a Christian. It's not that important. The most important thing is this person come to know Christ. So don't turn something into an issue. They're not making an issue of it; don't you make an issue of it either. Just eat it. That's what he's saying.

But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience.

So now if he says, "You know, this was sacrificed with an idol. You going to eat this?" You say, "Oh it was? Well you know what, I'm not going to eat it then." And you're doing that why? Because you are making a statement that the most important thing is Jesus. The most important thing is your relationship with the Lord. We're trying to illustrate that to people even in the way that we live and behave.

Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Sometimes you may choose to limit your Christian freedom for the sake of winning someone to Christ because the most important issue is what you want to keep the most important issue. You know what the most important issue is, right? They come to know Jesus Christ. That's the most important issue.

Okay let's go to freedom principle number four: I must limit my freedom when it indulges my sinful nature.

Look at the passage in 1 Corinthians 6:12. *"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.*

This is a very important question. You have to ask this personally about yourself. If you want to know you can do this or that or the other thing then you're going to have to ask the question is it mastering you.

Someone might say, "I don't invest in the stock market because it masters me." Someone might say that. Another person might feel free to invest in the stock market. Someone else might say, "I don't use credit cards at all." That's a wise person who knows their limitations and says, "I'm not going to use credit cards at all," because what they're saying is "I don't want to be mastered by anything." So those are two things in the financial area.

When it comes to food I think of that commercial, I don't know if it's still on today, but there's a commercial about Lay's potato chips – "I bet you can't eat just one." That's how I feel sometimes. There are some foods that I eat them and I have a hard time eating just one. So it's probably best for me at least to be on guard in that particular area of my life. Food is another area.

Another one is our entertainment or choices of what we're going to do with our time. Is it acceptable to play video games? Some people say, "Yeah, I can play video games. It's not a problem." Another person says, "When I play video games, especially a violent video game, then it just starts to change the way I think about solving problems in life. Blowing people up and conquering them when I should really be more loving, and so it's mastering me." So some people will say, "I'm not going to play those kind of video games." They make that choice to limit the freedom. What is causing them to limit their freedom? It's this idea of mastering.

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.

It could be anything. It could be work. It could be your family. If you're spending so much time with family that you're losing your relationship with the Lord then it's going too far. You're being mastered by your family. Good things can get us into trouble.

We have freedom in Christ to do a lot, but sometimes we limit that freedom because remember Proverbs 4:23 says, *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.* Just because you have freedom in Christ to do something doesn't mean you do it. Sometimes you don't do it for you. Other people may, and you have to be able to say that. Other people may, but I may not. Because God has me on this path and the path I'm on I will easily get distracted if I partake in that thing that other people are doing. That's an individual decision that you make before the Lord.

Freedom principle number five: I need to be careful about imposing my personal convictions on someone else. That's erring by judging others.

Now if someone's living in sin – you know two people are living together and sleeping together and they're not married – then you can say that's sin. That's the wrong thing to do. That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about disputable matters, things that are gray issues where the Bible has varying principles that apply certainly, but it doesn't come out clearly and

say this is wrong. It may say this is dangerous, but it doesn't say this is wrong. And so we need to be careful about judging other people in what they do.

There are some people who homeschool their kids and they kind of feel like they're more spiritual than other people because they are homeschooling their kids. If you're not homeschooling your kids then you're probably not as spiritual as me. And then there's other people who send their kids to public school and they say, "Man, I'm glad I don't homeschool my kids. I don't have to put them in a cocoon and protect them. I let my kids experience the world and I teach them that." There's nothing wrong with either of those. The problem is when you start judging someone else because they're not doing it the way you do.

God has you on a track and He gives you the freedom to live a particular way. If you start judging other people about certain things that they do, you can get yourself into trouble.

Some person might have the freedom to stop at McDonald's and have a Big Mac, fries, and a shake. They have the freedom to do that in Christ. You can't judge a person for that. They have the freedom to make those decisions or eat junk food. They have the freedom in Christ to do that. I don't have the freedom in Christ to do that because it does things to my body that I don't like. Other people have that freedom and we can't judge that other person for what they do.

The passage we go to is Romans 14, which really talks about this part of the freedom of Christ. I want you to see these as we bring those into our principles. In Romans 14:2-3 it says this: *One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.*

One person eats meat and vegetables, the other person eats vegetables and that's okay. You don't judge the person because they only eat vegetables and they're not as spiritually knowledgeable as you are because you know that idols are nothing and you can eat meat. So we have to be very careful about judging people because God has accepted them.

In verse 1 of chapter 14 it says this: *Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.* If we jump to verse 10 in that same passage it says this: *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.* We have to give people freedom to live their lives a particular way.

Let's just bring this down to a real personal way. Let's say a husband and wife relationship. Husbands always do it differently than wives, right? Guys, we always do it differently than our wives do. And that's okay. There are some differences that are okay that we need to learn how to accept. That's the word that's used in this passage. Accept those who do it differently in areas that are disputable.

My wife and I were driving home from the Sneed's house, and my wife says, "Go this way." So I'm driving and I say, "Okay we'll go this way." So I'm going this way and I'm thinking, "I don't know why I'm going this way. This is not the best way to go." See, I know what the best

way is in my mind. So I just say, “Can I ask you a question? Why are you suggesting that we drive this way to our home from the Sneed’s house? Why are you comfortable with this?” Because in my mind I’m saying this is like traffic lights, we’re just all up in these traffic lights. Her response is, “It’s easier. You just get on this road and it takes you home.” I’m thinking, “Easier is not a priority for me. Fast is a priority for me!” And I can get there a lot faster going a different way.

Now my wife and I could have an argument about this if we’re not careful. She has the freedom in Christ to drive wherever she wants, however she wants. That’s her freedom in Christ. And I give her the freedom in Christ to tell me how to drive too, so we work together in the midst of that. We accept each other.

I’m just trying to bring this home. We take Jesus home. Are you getting this? This is not just something about eating meat sacrificed to idols. This is relevant for our lives right now. If we start judging each other we become critical people and if we start in disputable matters we get ourselves into trouble. Let’s let each other be each other and let’s be okay with that. God’s doing something different than they’re doing in my life.

But we have to look at freedom principle number six. This is for you young people in particular because I can imagine you saying, “Oh good! I’ve got something on my parents now. Now I’ve got this is a disputable thing whether I go to this party on Friday night or not, so I have the freedom in Christ to do this on my own.”

Well let’s look at principle number six. This is a very important one for all of us, not just young people. Freedom principle number six is this: I must submit myself to those whom God has placed as authorities in my life, recognizing that leaders (and this a very important concept we all need to understand – God has placed leaders in our lives for a reason), whether those are parents (those are family leaders), pastors (those are spiritual leaders), or government (those are civic leaders). They have an obligation to encourage people to live godly lives, warn them about the dangers of life choices and impose limitations when necessary. God has designed leaders for a very important purpose and we must be sensitive to that area.

Romans 13:5 uses the word ‘conscience.’ *Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.*

We need to understand what biblical freedom is. Are you free in Christ? Yes, you are free. Live and enjoy that freedom. But you also want to be able to balance that freedom and understand the other principles involved here because if you don’t then you can miss the truth.

Now we’re talking about freedom. Freedom is a very important question we need to ask, but remember we are also talking about the idea of wisdom. Because you might be free to do something that isn’t wise. Being able to discuss wisdom, we learn some things about that from the book of Proverbs. What’s wise and what’s not wise.

So someone comes to me in counseling and says, “I’m really having trouble in such and such and this and that.” I say, “Well let’s look at your life. Tell me a little bit more about what’s going on

here and here.” They tell me some things and I say, “You know, you might want to change this.” I’m not saying it’s sinful what you’re doing. Sometimes I do. “You know, that’s sin. You should change that.” But there’s other times that you know it’s not sinful what you’re doing, but the way you’re organizing your life, you have freedom in Christ to do that, but it’s messing with your head, it’s messing with your relationships, it’s messing with who you are. So maybe you want to adjust yourself. That’s wisdom.

You have to understand that just because you’re free to do something doesn’t mean that it’s the best thing to do or the wisest thing.

Putting all this together takes the Holy Spirit in your life to guide you. That’s why God doesn’t have us following a list of rules. He places the Holy Spirit in each one of our lives to speak to us, to convict us, to train us, to help us to understand how to follow His lead, and to move forward. And that Holy Spirit comes into your life when you accept Jesus Christ into your heart. It’s beautiful.

Do you understand what this means? Now we have spiritual guidance inside of our hearts and lives. I’m telling you, we live in a crazy world. You need all the guidance you can get and Jesus Christ provides that through that personal relationship through Him.

So if you haven’t accepted Jesus Christ today, I want to encourage you to do that. Ask Him to come into your life, if He’ll do that and He’ll provide that guidance inside of you that will move you forward in the way that He wants you to move.

Let’s stand and let’s pray together before we sing.

[PRAYER] Lord, we want to honor you in everything that we do. We want you to be the most important thing in everything. We want to give ourselves to you. As we make daily decisions about what we’re going to do, we ask that you would help us to enjoy that freedom that we have in you, help us to know when to be careful about our judgmental hearts, help us to know when we’re indulging in the sinful nature and it’s creating a problem. Lord, I pray that your Holy Spirit would speak to us and make us sensitive because it is our goal to honor you in our lives. In Jesus’ name, amen.