

Freedom



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Hi, my name is Joey Dodson. I'm an associate professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary. To tell you about myself, I probably should tell you about my family. I first met my wife, to whom I've been married for twenty-five years, in first grade. I was in the cafeteria eating tater tots and drinking chocolate milk when she walked into the room for the first time. And when I saw her, something about her first-grade beauty just compelled me to stand on my chair and say, "Who's that pretty girl?" And we've basically been together ever since I was sixteen, going on seventeen. She led me to the Lord, and Christ has been the center of our relationship since then. Not only do I have an amazing, glorious wife, but I have five beautiful children. That's right. Five. My oldest is my only daughter. She's twenty-one at the moment. We go all the way down for the rest, of just boys, . . . to ten. And my children are walking with the Lord, which is such a blessing in my life to see.

I did my PhD at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. After Scotland, I moved to Germany to work on postdoc stuff. After Germany I moved to Greece, then from Greece I moved back to the States, living in Houston for a while. And then I went to Washington Baptist University in Arkansas. And I was there for over a decade. And now God has led me to the promised land, Denver Seminary. For many of those years—over a decade—I served as a youth pastor.

You're probably going to see that, as you begin to hear me teach in the forthcoming sessions, you . . . can take the boy out of youth ministry, but you can't take youth ministry out of the boy. To be honest with you, there are times where I feel like I'm more of a youth pastor dressed up as a professor. But one thing that I would do when I would talk to youth to get them to break the ice is to ask them silly questions. And one of the questions that I asked when I was a youth pastor in Houston was, "Hey, what's your favorite cereal?" Just to kind of get . . . the pump primed. And the students,

of course, began to list off favorites: Froot Loops, Frosted Flakes, Fruity Pebbles, Wheaties. And then all of a sudden, this one kid in the front row screamed out really loudly, Fruit and Fiber. All the other kids just stopped and looked at this kid, like, who likes fruit and fiber?

They're like, man, this kid's not right. I'm not saying he wasn't regular. I'm just saying he's not right. You know, often when it comes to teaching of God's Word, we kind of get fruity pebbles. We give frosted flakes rather than the fruit and fiber of God's Word that makes us healthy. And so, what I want to do in these next sessions is I'm going to entitle them spiritual fruits, playing off the fruit of the Spirit, and gospel fiber. Uh, what does it look like to be healthy so that we produce the fruit of the Spirit, both individually and in the community? I'm really looking forward to the session. I'm praying that God would open our eyes, that we'd see great and searchable things in His Word that we haven't seen before.

Now, the focus of this path of this session is the fruit of the Spirit, but most of you know the fruit of the Spirit. And so, to give us a different perspective or vantage point, we want to look at the context of this passage so that we can see things that we haven't seen before. And so, in our first session, we are going to look at the thesis of Galatians. We're going to talk about the freedom that we have in Christ. This is going to be the umbrella which the rest of the letter is going to fall under. And in the second session, we're going to look at the power. Though Christ gives us a freedom, so that we can produce the fruit of the Spirit, that only comes by the power of the Holy Spirit. And so, we'll look at the context, not overall, but specifically what leads up to the passage that deals with the fruit of the Spirit.

In the third session, we will look at war. Even though we have freedom in Christ, even though it's by the power of the Holy spirit, there's still a war going on. And so, we'll look at that war and what that actually means. In the fourth session, we'll be reminded that we have this fruit of the Spirit and what that looks like. And the fruit of the Spirit is not just individual but community. And so, the fourth session we're just going to title "Fruit." And then, finally, the culmination is the last session where we'll talk about community—that the fruit of the Spirit is manifest most in the unity of the church. And by doing that, we've fulfilled the law of Jesus Christ. I hope you're looking forward to it. Thanks again for allowing me to be a part of what God wants to teach you.

In the introduction I mentioned that I have five children; and having five children gives me a host of sermon illustrations. And my kids were, in a sense, the exception to the rule in that most of them liked me using them in sermon illustrations to the point that they would even give me some illustrations. And so, one day I was coming home from the university that I was working at. And my oldest son, Kinnon, whom we call Kinobi, met me at the front door and he said, “Dad, I have a sermon illustration for you.” “Okay. Lay it on me, buddy.” And he said, “God is like a page protector.” That took me aback. And I said, “Okay, can you unpack that for me?” He said, “Well, God’s like a page protector. And we’re like a sheet of paper. And as long as we’re in God’s will, we don’t get marks on us. We’re like in the page protector. But when we get out of God’s will, that’s when we get marks on us.” I was like, “Hey, that’s a pretty good illustration.” I had to give him a break. He was a homeschooled kid. But his younger brother, Aidan, whom we call Cheeto, overheard this and overheard me giving his brother praise. And so, in that silver-ring rivalry, you could tell that he wanted to come up with a sermon illustration.

And so, the next day I came home, and he had finally come up with one. He says, “Dad, Dad, I got a sermon illustration for you.” I’m like, “Okay, buddy, lay it on me.” He said, “God is like a chicken.” I said, “Okay, can you explain that to me a little bit?” He says, “Yeah, God is like a chicken. And we’re like the chicks, and God loves us and He protects us and He brings us close to Him like a mama chicken does the chicks.” I was like, “Yeah, that’s good.” I didn’t have the heart to tell him that Jesus had kind of already used that illustration, but I praised him and encouraged him.

Well, his younger brother, Ian, whom we call Kong, who was born in Scotland, overheard this; and his little mind at that time couldn’t understand that Aidan Cheeto was comparing God with the nurture and love of a chicken. He thought that Aidan was calling God a chicken. And so in his confusion, in his deep voice that he had— that was just really odd for a child of that age—says, “God is not a chicken.” And so, I tried to explain to him, “No, no, no, no, Aidan is not calling God a chick. And he’s not saying that God’s a chicken, but he was just comparing God to a chicken.”

But the metaphor of the comparison was lost. Well, we moved on to the table. We’re eating, and you can imagine how loud it is with five children. And as we’re talking about all these different things, apparently Ian had not gone beyond the “God is a chicken.” And so, as we’re talking, all of a sudden, we hear slam, and we look to

see that little Ian had slammed his head down on the table. Now he had our attention. We all fixed our eyes on him. And he comes up off of the table with this huge red mark on his forehead and tears flowing from his arm. And he yelled, “God is not a chicken!” And then wiping the tears from his eyes, he says, “But God likes chickens.”

Well, if it’s true that God likes chickens, which I think He does, how much more true is it that God loves His children. He loves you and me and all of those He’s made in His image. But one thing we see is God is not just a chicken, but a God who loves His people. And He loves us just the way that we are. But as you know, God loves us so much that He’s not content for us to remain the same that we are. What God wants in our life is spiritual fruit and gospel fiber. God wants us to be filled with the fruit of His Spirit. And so, as we go to Galatians in this series, I’m going to invite you to get your Bible and open it up as we walk through Galatians bit by bit and verse by verse. Now, when we talk about the fruit of the Spirit in this series, we want to look at context.

When I taught in university, one of the mantras that I would teach our students is context, context, context. A verse can never mean what it never meant. And so I know most of you are familiar with the fruit of the Spirit, but what we want to do is look at the fruit of the Spirit in light of the context of the entire letter that will give us a new perspective, a new vantage point possibly to see things in the fruit of the Spirit that we’ve never seen before. And so, in Galatians 5, as you know, Paul tells us that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against these things there is no law.” And so rather than just jumping right into that verse, we want to back it up a wee bit and look at what leads to this.

And so we—rather than going straight to Galatians 5, let’s go to Galatians 1—where Paul is going to give us the thesis of his gospel. And what we’re going to see is that God loves us just the way that we are. He loves us just the way that we are, and He forgives us of our sins. But forgiving us of our sins is not the stopping point of that. He forgives us of our sins so that we may have freedom—freedom from the pattern of this world, freedom from legalism, freedom from living according to our flesh. But freedom doesn’t just have a from aspect, it also has a to. Christ came to forgive us of our sins so that we can be free from our sins but also free to live according to His Spirit, free to be imitators of God the Father, free to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, freedom to walk

according to His Spirit.

And what does that look like? It looks like the fruit of the Spirit, and that fruit of the Spirit is not just individual, but it's going to be in a community. And so, we're going to have five sessions here. Now we're going to look at the first one, the idea of freedom. So, if you have your Bible, get them and turn to Galatians 1. Let's start at the beginning. Okay. And in this beginning, we see that Galatians is likely arguably Paul's very first letter. And as you know, Paul's letters actually were written before the gospel. And so, at the very beginning of this, Paul is going to give us—he's going to spell out the gospel of Jesus Christ and what that looks like. And so, this is the very first extant of writing that we have that articulates the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1

Author's Translation

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴the one who gave himself for our sins in order to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of God our Father, ⁵to the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 1

Author's Translation

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴the one who gave

δίδωμι – didōmi

To give over, deliver

And so, we'll look at verse 3. Start there, where Paul says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." So this is his standard introductory introduction, but now he goes to unpack who is this person of Jesus Christ? And he says, Jesus Christ is the one "who gave himself for our sins in order to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of God our Father to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen." And God's people said, "Hey, man, this is the word of the Lord." And we pray that it will be impressed upon our minds and planted in our hearts and ever upon our lips. Here, Paul comes and says, "Let me tell you about this good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who gave Himself. He gave Himself for our forgiveness and gave Himself for our freedom."

He gave Himself. So that freedom allows us to walk according to the fruit of the Spirit. So this is where we're going, but he uses this word. It's a funny word. I like to say it in Greek. Didomi. We see this word didomi often used in the gospel, sometimes of people who hand Jesus over. We see Pilate, he didomis Jesus. He hands Him over out of fear of the Jews, the Jewish religious leaders. We see the Jewish religious leaders. They hand Jesus over. They didomi Him out of their own jealousy. We have Judas who didomis Jesus, if you will, out of his greed. But here Paul uses it not of the enemies of Jesus Christ, not of Pilate, not of the religious leaders, but instead of Jesus giving Himself, not out of greed, not out of fear, not out of jealousy, but Jesus gave Himself out of love.

And so when Jesus went to the cross, He didn't go kicking and screaming. They didn't have to drag Him up. But instead it was out of His love for you and me that He gave Himself. And He not

only didomed Himself, if you will, but He gave Himself for our sins. Paul later will write in a letter that “he that knew no sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.” And so Jesus Christ didn’t just die, but He died for our sins that we could be forgiven because He loves us just the way that we are. And He wanted to forgive us of our sins, but because of the act of Jesus Christ it doesn’t stop there. How He gave Himself out of love. He gave Himself for our sins, but what is the result?

Is it just for forgiveness? Paul says, no. The very first articulation, the very time he spells out the gospel, he doesn’t stop with forgiveness, but instead it leads to this next point. He forgave us of our sins. He gave Himself for our sins in order to rescue us, in order to free us, in order to snatch us out of the grasp of something. And so Paul’s very first declaration of the gospel is that Christ died for our freedom, for our liberty. As Paul’s going to say a little bit later, “Hey, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” And again, as I mentioned in the introduction of this session: Christ came to free us from sin, to free us from flesh, to free us from the power of Satan, to free us from the law. But it’s not just a freedom from, which is sometimes where we just stop.

It is also a freedom to. He set us free so that we could walk according to the Spirit of God that is inside of us, and by which we cry, “Abba, Father.” He set us free so that we could produce the spiritual fruit and the gospel fiber that keeps us regular as we keep in step with Jesus Christ and His Spirit. So He gave Himself in order to set us free, to set us free from what—and if you’re following along—to set us free from this present evil age. The present evil age was that which was marked by the power of Satan. One of Paul’s contemporaries was the Qumran communities. They said that this present evil age was ruled by Belial, another name for Satan. And so Christ came to set us free from the power of Satan.

And if you remember in Hebrews, the author there is going to say the same thing: that Christ came to set us free from the fear of Satan and the power of death. And so Christ came to set us free from these things. But what we’re going to see in Galatians is that Paul’s going to unpack: What does this present evil age look like? Similar to what we see in Romans 12, where he says “no longer be conformed to the pattern of the world.” What is this pattern of the world? And the pattern of the world, this present evil age, is marked either by legalism (living in bondage according to the law), which some of these Galatians are trying to go back to—if you’ve ever read this letter—or living from freedom from sin. But

Galatians 1

Author's Translation

³Grace to you and peace from
God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ, ⁴the one who gave
out of love the forgiveness of
himself ⁵for our sins in order to
set us free
rescue us from this present evil

- Freedom **from**
- Freedom **to**

and ever. Amen.

Galatians 1

Author's Translation

The pattern of this world:

- Living according to the law (legalism)
- Living according to our sinful desires

→ *set us free*
rescue us from this present evil
age, according to the will of God

there are some that are, “No, no, no, once we become a believer, then we have to live according to the law.” And Paul says, “No, no, no, that’s the present evil age.” There are some, they’re saying, “Hey, now that I’ve been forgiven of my sins, I can continue to live in my sin.” And Paul says, “I don’t think so. Nope. What are you talking about?” No, no, no, it is freedom from our sinful desires as well. And so now we’ve been set free. So Christ came not just to forgive us, but also to set us free from having to live according to the legalism and free from having to live according to our sinful desires. In the old age, in the present evil age, sin is irresistible. We can’t say no to it. But now we live in the new age, and Christ has come to set us free—the overlap of that, and so, we’ll unpack that as we get to the fruit of the Spirit. Now we have the power, the ability to produce the fruit of the Spirit through Jesus Christ, His life.

And so we’re going to see in Galatians, three provisions that help us live according to the fruit of the Spirit. The first is the life of Jesus Christ. He gave Himself so that we could be free. So we could produce the fruit. Second is going to be the Spirit, which is what we’ll talk about in the second session. And the third is going to be the community of God.

And in college, I also majored in psychology and I learned about this theme called learned helplessness. One way that they used to test learned helplessness is they would get a dog. And they would put a dog in the shock box; and they would shock this dog again and again and again. And the dog tried to get out, would go against the cage, but he couldn’t get out. And eventually the dog just sits in the back of the cage and would absorb the shocks to the point that you could come and open the door where the dog could finally be free, but the dog would just stay in the back of the cage because it had learned helplessness. I think often we have learned helplessness because we haven’t preached the full-orb gospel. We preach forgiveness, but we haven’t preached the freedom of that gospel, then. Now we have the freedom through Jesus Christ. He has opened the door so that we no longer have to be slaves of the law, no longer slaves of fear, no longer slaves of the flesh. But now we can be free to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Thank you so much for letting me share with you in this session.

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