

Gospel Freedom Breaking Down Walls

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[0 : 00] We're going to look at Galatians chapter 2, 1 to 10 in just a few minutes. But in his book *Unlimited Grace*, Brian Chappell, he retells an ancient parable about a king! And this story tells of a king who looked out from his palace window and saw one of his young children collecting wildflowers from a distant field. The child wrapped the flowers with a royal ribbon intending to present this gift to the king. But because he was a child, he didn't realize that he had gathered a handful of weeds and thistles and broken stems along with the wildflowers.

And seeing this unfold, the king spoke to his oldest son who sat at his right hand. And he told his oldest son to go down to the royal gardens and pick a bouquet of the most beautiful and perfect flowers that were growing there. And when the younger child finally arrived at the throne room to see the king, the older brother gently pulled him aside. And the older brother took the child's bouquet and he completely replaced all the weeds and the thistles and the broken stems with the flawless, perfect flowers from the king's own garden. And then the child confidently walked up to the throne and presented his gift. He said, look, father, here's a beautiful bouquet I have prepared for you.

You know, only later would the child understand that his gift was made perfectly acceptable, not by his own careful gathering, but by the glorious provision of his father and his older brother. And the child was free to joyfully approach the king without fear of being rejected. And we're back in Galatians today and we're looking at chapter 2, 1 to 10. And in this passage, we see this joyful freedom that we have in Christ. It's being threatened by some false brothers.

They presented themselves as brothers in Christ, but they proved themselves to be false. You know, the word, the city Philadelphia gets its name from a Greek compound word that puts love and brotherly love.

[2 : 23] And the Greek word, it's a compound word. It puts love, brothers and love together. So it's the city of brotherly love, right?

And the Greek word for false brothers in verse 4 puts pseudo and brothers together. So these are pseudo brothers or false brothers. They claim to be part of the family, but they were actually acting as spies.

And their goal was to rob the believers of their freedom in Christ and to drag them back into slavery of religious performance. So they were demanding strict adherence to the mosaic law, to ceremonial parts of the law, particularly circumcision and the dietary rules.

And Paul was really angry with this add-on to the gospel in chapter 1. He says a couple times, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you receive, let him be accursed.

And we face the same exact temptation today from what could be called plus factors to the gospel.

[3 : 33] You know, the air we breathe in our culture tells us that we have to earn our standing. You know, if we want approval, we have to perform for it.

So we naturally, you know, we default to thinking that we have to pull our own weeds. We have to grow our own perfect flowers to present to God.

But the gospel offers this radically different reality. Rather than anxiously striving to earn your standing, you know, what if you could live in the joy and freedom of knowing that your desire to honor the Father is fully accepted?

You know, because his son has already provided this perfect gift. That's the opportunity before us today as we open God's word.

We look together at how the Apostle Paul, he fiercely defended this truth. And so we want to depend on the Holy Spirit just to awaken our hearts to this breathtaking freedom that belongs to us in Christ.

[4 : 39] So you can stand with me again if you're able, and we'll read these verses from chapter 2. And Paul writes at the end of chapter 1 that the churches in Judea were hearing that he who had persecuted the church was now preaching the gospel that he had once tried to destroy.

And he says, they glorified God because of me. And we pick up in chapter 2 where he says, Then after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

I 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.

But even Titus who was with me was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 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.

To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who seemed to be influential, what they were makes no difference to me.

[6 : 00] God shows no partiality. Those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me.

For mine to the Gentiles. And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. Amen. This is the word of the Lord this morning. Amen. You can be seated.

So a wonderful foundational truth that we see in these first 10 verses in Galatians chapter 2 is this. The gospel of our justification by faith in Christ brings complete freedom from the works of the law. Where do we see this principle in the text? You know, Paul is continuing a defense that he started in chapter 1, proving that his message of grace didn't come from a human source.

[7 : 27] You know, he didn't learn this gospel that he was preaching to the Gentiles in rabbinical school. In verse 2, he says, he went up to Jerusalem because of a revelation.

And the Greek word literally means an unveiling. So God himself pulled back the curtain to show Paul that the gospel is entirely an act of divine grace.

Right? It doesn't come horizontally. It comes vertically. It is not at all dependent on our human effort. And to prove the point, Paul and Barnabas, they bring Titus along with them.

So Titus was sort of a test case. And Paul mentions that Titus is a Greek. Titus is an uncircumcised Gentile.

And he is breathing, walking proof of this grace and freedom. And when Paul meets with Peter, James, and John, the inner circle of the original apostles, you know, those who had been with Christ, they fully embrace Titus.

[8 : 34] They don't require Titus to be circumcised or to follow these dietary restrictions of the Mosaic law. They recognize the grace that was given to Paul, and they add absolutely nothing to the gospel that he's preaching.

And we can also see this principle of our freedom in Christ in the way Paul speaks about Peter, James, and John. Three times in verse 2, 6, and 9.

He refers to them as those who seemed influential or seem to be pillars. You know, why does Paul emphasize this three times? That they seemed to be influential.

He's not being disrespectful to his fellow apostles. Rather, he's making a profound theological point. He's reminding us that human status, spiritual pedigree, and religious effort don't add anything to our justification.

Because God shows no partiality. You know, your standing before a holy God is not based on your influence or your background or your ability to follow the rules.

[9 : 47] Your standing is based entirely on the finished work of Jesus Christ. So it's his influence with the Father that matters. It's his ability to keep the perfect law of God.

It's his background, his reputation, his sacrifice that counts. You know, it's Jesus replacing our weeds and broken stems with his perfect flowers.

The practical implications of this truth are staggering. It's stunning. It's a stunning reality that this gospel of grace, it completely dismantles the spiritual meritocracy that we are so naturally trying to build in our own lives.

You know, by nature, we sinners often operate like orphans trying to keep ourselves in the Father's house. My dad and his brothers were orphaned during the Great Depression in Ontario, Canada. And they were put in an orphanage. My dad wasn't sure of all of the details of why, but he never knew his father. And his mother, when he was maybe five years old, he was taken out of the home and put in an orphanage.

[11 : 08] And he would tell us stories of wanting a family to adopt him. And adults would come from time to time to meet the children at the orphanage. And he would say they would march them out, you know, in the common area.

And little Jack would try to look his best and be on his best behavior. You know, so he could hopefully be accepted by a family. And in his child's mind, he thought that adoption depended on something that he could do.

You know, his looks, his behavior, how he carried himself. The concept of being fully loved and accepted just based on being a son was a foreign concept to him in his child's mind.

And the idea of being fully loved and accepted based on the character of another person was not something that Jack McKillop would understand until later.

Until he gave his life to Christ, put his trust and faith in Christ as his Savior. And this passage invites you into the breathtaking freedom of knowing that you are a beloved son or a daughter.

[12 : 15] That you're safe. You're in a family. You're not an orphan. You know, when we get the gospel, our approval rests entirely on our relationship with God through Christ.

And not on our own resume. It changes us. It changes everything. It changes how we interact with the world around us. For example, you know, when we're secure in this freedom in Christ, we no longer need to measure our righteousness based on the righteousness of someone else.

Right? Around us. Another person. We don't measure our kids' righteousness based on other people's kids. Right? The worst thing we can say to our kids is, I wish you would just be like maybe the pastor's kids.

Right? And that's not something you want to wish for. For your kids. But, you know, the gospel empowers parents to give their children grace rather than handing them the heavy weight of the law.

You know, for some practical help with that, parents, there's a wonderful book that Elise Fitzpatrick has written with her daughter, Jessica. Give them grace.

[13 : 29] Give them grace. Dazzling your kids with the love of Jesus. And she talks about raising her kids. How she went wrong sometimes in giving them the law, not giving them grace.

And how she was, as a grandmother, she was determined to give grace to her grandkids. You know, the gospel of grace empowers us to extend grace because we remember our own desperate need for the Father's grace.

Another way we see the freedom that we enjoy in Christ, how it changes us, is how we respond to conflict and how we respond to differences of opinion.

Right? We're free to lay down the weapons of self-righteousness when it comes to political differences or social debates or cultural divides.

You know, we know that the world has a way of elevating these differences into weapons. And sometimes they become weapons of mass destruction. You know?

[14 : 36] But because gospel people are now elevated by God to a position in his son Jesus, we no longer need to elevate ourselves.

We no longer self-righteously assume the worst in others in Christ. We're free from prejudice toward others. We're free from partiality.

And we can more easily give the benefit of doubt, benefit of the doubt to those we disagree with. We can more easily try to walk in their shoes because of the gospel.

Because God's grace is completely unearned, you know, we get to step off this exhausting treadmill of performance. We're invited to simply receive this beautiful reality that we are fully known, fully loved, fully accepted, fully approved by God.

Because of the cross. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus. He is fully approved, fully accepted by the Father. And he sees us through the lens, through the Jesus lens.

[15 : 49] What's the crux of the problem, really, in Galatia? When we look closely at Galatians 2, we see this fierce battle going on.

The Apostle Paul is fighting tooth and nail against these false brothers. And they couldn't stomach the idea of grace alone. You know, they demanded human merit. And the tragic result was, Paul says, the Galatian believers were quickly deserting the God who had called them in the grace of Christ.

So it was a dangerous thing for what they were doing in teaching this add-on to the gospel. And really, at the heart of the false brothers, their merit-based mindset was just a fear of losing control. You know, God's free grace based on the merit of Christ alone, it's really terrifying to the flesh. Because it can't be controlled by outward means.

Think about the elder brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. You know, like him, these false brothers, they simply couldn't imagine a father being so gracious as to not require some form of personal payment.

[17 : 04] You know, if it was us and we were the gracious father in the parable, we'd probably want to give that young man a good whipping when he came home.

But it's completely how Jesus tells this parable, beautiful parable, that is a picture of the gospel and the grace of the father accepting the son.

And even reaching out to the older brother who couldn't accept the grace of the father. See, the concept of a debt being fully paid was completely foreign to these false brothers.

The sad truth is we are not so different from these false brothers. You know, as we've acknowledged the world and our flesh and the devil operate on the basis of merit.

And we're affected by that. So we naturally resist the freedom that comes from grace. Instead, we try to earn our standing. You know, we may not be demanding circumcision today, but this spiritual meritocracy, it shows up in our lives in subtle and pervasive ways.

[18 : 14] We quite often resist the father's perfect provision and we exhaust ourselves trying to gather a bouquet of our own weeds and thistles.

And we can often display attitudes and behaviors that show we're desperately hoping that our meager efforts will be enough to secure the father's love. But the good news, the good news of the gospel offers us an effective antidote to this plus factor poison.

When Paul stood his ground in Jerusalem refusing to yield to the false brothers, he says, even for a moment. He wasn't just being stubborn.

He was protecting a precious reality. He knew that if we add one human requirement to the cross, then we poison the entire gospel.

When you try to add something to the gospel, you lose the gospel. And Jesus once told his followers that unless their righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees, they couldn't enter the kingdom of God.

[19 : 22] And this is a terrifying standard. If the burden rests on our shoulders, we need to keep the law perfectly. We know we're incapable, completely incapable of doing so in our flesh.

So we need a substitute. We need someone else to do that on our behalf. And this is the glorious good news of the cross. In the gospel, God graciously provides exactly what he requires in the law.

In the gospel, God provides what he requires in the law. Jesus stepped in to be our substitute. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law that you could never keep.

And he took the penalty that you deserved. So as your substitute, Jesus earned the perfect standing that guarantees your freedom. It's about Christ.

He is the one who earned for you this perfect standing that guarantees your freedom. Jesus lived the flawless life that you owed.

[20 : 31] And he met every ceremonial and every moral expectation or requirement. Jesus went to the cross to absorb the full penalty. For every time you have failed in your life and every time you will fail in the future, Jesus absorbed the full penalty for your sin.

And this truth, it changes everything, absolutely everything about how you relate to God. It changes your view of God. Because of Jesus, this exhausting life, living like an orphan child, is over.

You don't have to perform. You don't have to sew together some religious fig leaves to try to cover up your fallen condition. You don't have to earn your place in the Father's house.

Because of Christ alone and his sacrifice for you, you're fully accepted as a son or daughter of the King. And when you truly believe this, something happens in our hearts, the more and more we

believe the gospel, the chemistry of your heart begins to change.

It moves you out of this religion of fear and into a relationship of rest. It makes you want to love him more and more, simply want to be in his presence, want to be nurtured by his grace, so that times of prayer and hearing from God through his word, they change from a discipline that you're trying to master to just a delightful exercise, that you can't wait to be with the Lord, because the chemistry of your heart has changed as you embrace and believe the gospel.

[22 : 19] When you know that you're fully loved in a family, when you understand that perfect love drives out fear, then your focus is no longer on always trying to measure up.

Instead, you realize that you're intimately connected to someone who measured up for you, and you can rest entirely in his finished work.

You know, that should make us want to sing the Hallelujah Chorus. You know, just jump up and down. You know, where's the praise team when we need them? You know, knowing and embracing these beautiful gospel truths that you've heard over and over again.

You know this, but why does Scripture tell us to believe, that we should believe these things, because it's kind of like it leaks out. You know, the gospel leaks out of us.

Somebody said that their brain is kind of like a non-stick pan, you know, that stuff just kind of hits and slides off.

[23 : 29] We need to believe over and over again. We need to apply the gospel to our hearts in an ongoing way, knowing and embracing these beautiful gospel truths.

What should be our response? Because Jesus has secured our perfect standing. Our hearts get filled up with love from him and for him, and your believing these truths gives you the motivation and the spirit-empowered ability to walk in true freedom every day.

So in an ongoing way, as you believe these truths of the gospel, you're motivated more, you're empowered more by the Holy Spirit to walk in that true freedom every day.

The more we believe the good news, the less we find ourselves falling into this old way of living, the old way of the flesh, the way of the false brothers who were trying to bring the Galatian believers back into slavery.

A life that's overly concerned with how others perceive us, it's really an exhausting way to live. It's an exhausting treadmill of being quick to defend our record.

[24 : 39] It's where we easily fall into a critical spirit in judgment toward others. We tend to walk with blinders on, or we're unable or unwilling to acknowledge our own self-righteous striving.

We may tend to see ourselves only as saints. So we may think, well, I'm not perfect, but I'm no sinner, right? Well, what if you could live differently?

What if you could quickly recognize in your own heart and mind those self-righteous attitudes that lurk there, and you could just quickly repent of them before they become evident to everybody else? Somebody said that self-righteousness is like a severe case of bad breath. Everyone knows about it except the person struggling with it.

But repenting of self-righteousness is like taking a spiritual breath mint. It not only refreshes you, but all those who interact with you. Because repentance really brings greater freedom.

[25 : 49] And so that's why we need to live that lifestyle of repentance, to recognize there are things every day, every hour, that we could repent of.

If the Holy Spirit would only show us how we could be more humble and not prideful, depend more on the righteousness of Christ than our own efforts and our own righteousness.

You know, rather than anxiously striving to earn our standing, what if we could live with the joy and freedom of knowing that our desire to honor the Father is fully accepted because of His Son.

He's provided the perfect gift. And that's the new way of freedom in Christ. That's what Paul is arguing here in Galatians chapter 2. When we rest in the completed work of Christ, it leads to this beautiful, spirit-empowered self-forgetfulness.

You know, we're free to stop obsessing over our own performance and we can focus on the needs of others. You know, the freedom, it leads to greater humility. A person who gets the gospel should have a palpable humility.

[27 : 02] So when you're with that person, you just, you recognize, this is a humble person. You know, freedom in Christ leads us to become more open and vulnerable with others and even those who may bring criticism because sometimes God uses the criticism to humble you, to humble us, to bring out the areas in our own heart where there is pride.

Because our identity, it isn't tied to being perfect. It's tied to the one who is. Here's a little test to see how we're doing at believing the truth about our freedom in Christ.

So imagine you're inviting a family member or a friend from church over for dinner and as you're sharing a meal together, somehow political differences or cultural disagreements come up in conversation.

So in that moment, if you find yourself getting really angry or defensive or falling into prideful judgmentalism, that's kind of like one of those flashing lights on the dashboard.

You know, it's a warning light. It tells you that you're being tempted by this old merit-based mindset of fear and control. Or here's another scenario.

[28 : 25] You know, if you're a parent or a guardian and your child is just fraying on your last nerve in some disagreement and you find yourself feeling disrespected and you want to say something or do something that you know you'll have to repent of later, that's another warning light.

That's a flashing light. Now, freedom in Christ means that you don't have to win an argument to prove your worth. You don't have to tear another person down in order to elevate yourself.

We no longer have to put someone in their place to keep our place. Our place is secure. And as a parent, you don't have to give your child a loud piece of your mind even if they happen to disrespect you because remember, Jesus was often disrespected.

The good news of the gospel is that we are being transformed day by day by God's Spirit. And as that transformation is taking place, then we get to see our love and understanding grow more and more for that quote-unquote difficult person because we recognize that we're difficult, right?

We're difficult to deal with. Even those times when we find ourselves in fierce disagreement, we can give the other person the benefit of the doubt.

[29 : 49] we can demonstrate gospel patience with other people. And we know that our worldly culture has very different rules for these moments of disagreement.

The world tells us, right, when relationships get difficult or messy, what's the answer? Just set boundaries, you know? Put some, and that sounds good, right?

We should, you know, just care for yourself. Self-care, boundaries, or simply cancel that person. Get them out of your life. You know, that negative person, they're just, you know, making life miserable.

And the world says that self-protection is the highest virtue. You know, I need to be heard. Not the other person. But the gospel way is entirely different.

Because we are so secure in our Christ-earned standing, we get to confidently and lovingly engage people we might otherwise dismiss.

[30 : 51] You know, gospel-centered people are enabled by Christ to winsomely win over people who we might be in disagreement with. You know, the goal is for a gospel-centered person is not to win the argument, but to win the person.

Our Lord Jesus was constantly misunderstood. He was mistreated and rejected, but He never canceled us. He didn't put up boundaries to protect Himself from our mess.

Instead, what did He do? He sacrificed everything to destroy the boundaries, to break down the walls in our relationship with the Father. See, gospel freedom breaks down all kinds of walls.

Because Jesus broke down the wall for us, we now get to live in that same radical wall-breaking love for others. The Spirit-empowered shift that goes from self-protection to self-forgetfulness.

It's not about us so much. It's about loving others. This Spirit-empowered shift is a wonderful thing. We move away from being self-centered to becoming other-centered as we become more and more Christ-centered.

[32 : 02] And that's really the motivation for putting on a block party for the residents of Bayberry, right? It's so we can be others-centered. We can take the gospel of grace in word and in action to people of Bayberry.

So as we wrap this up, you know, think back to the younger child in the story of the King's Gift walking into that royal throne room.

If the child had actually presented the bouquet that they gathered, the handful of weeds and thistles, they would have every reason to tremble, to fear.

They would have reason to wonder if their offering was enough to earn the King's smile. But remember what happened in the story. The true and gracious elder brother, he stepped in.

He took the weeds, he took the thistles and he replaced them with the perfect flawless flowers grown in the King's own garden. And when the child approached the throne, they didn't have to fear, they didn't have to strive, they were completely safe.

[33 : 15] It's a new city. You know, Jesus Christ is our true older brother. He's not a false brother. He's the true brother. And he looked at your inability to keep the law and he looked at your frantic striving for approval and he stepped in.

He took the weeds and the thistles and he took the penalty that we deserved upon himself on the cross and in exchange he gives you the perfect flawless flowers of his own righteous life.

Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law for you and for me that we could never keep and he earned the complete perfect standing to guarantee your freedom.

We know the Christian life is not without effort. It's just without earning. It involves believing effort now not unbelieving effort. So we can drop the scorecard.

You know, we can stop defending our own record. We're free to love others even those who disagree with us. we love with the same self-forgetful grace that has been poured out by the Father on us.

[34 : 24] So let's go and live this radical, joyful freedom of being sons and daughters of the King where your standing is secure. Amen. Amen.

Father, we give you praise and thanks for what you have done for us. We come to you as poor and needy sinners who are weakened by the fall and we pray that you will continue to help us develop greater faith and trust and confidence as your children who have been adopted into your loving family.

We need you this day and every day to believe the gospel and Father, we pray for those who have yet to be made your children through their own repentance and faith and pray that they will run into your arms today and be saved.

And it's through Christ we pray. Amen.