

“Freedom to Steward”

SUNDAY, JULY 5, 2026 - MICHAEL BOWERS



Summary - “Freedom to Steward”

This Fourth of July weekend, freedom was on everyone’s mind – fireworks, cookouts, and the celebration of a nation built on the idea of independence. But Paul’s letter to the Galatians pushes past celebration into a deeper question: what do we do with freedom once we have it? In Galatians 5:1-15, Paul isn’t writing to people who lack freedom in Christ – he’s writing to people who have it and are in danger of walking away from it. False teachers had convinced the Galatian church that faith in Jesus needed something added to it, starting with circumcision. Paul’s response is urgent: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” The sermon frames spiritual freedom not as a possession to celebrate once and forget, but as a gift entrusted to us – something to steward, protect, and grow. Our culture defines freedom as doing whatever we want. Paul defines it as becoming who Christ saved us to be. That means freedom is never the finish line; it’s the starting line for holiness, obedience, and love. Paul’s closing argument in verses 13-15 makes the target unmistakable: freedom was never given so we could serve ourselves – it was given so we could serve each other. “The whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The invitation this week isn’t just to feel grateful for freedom in Christ. It’s to actively steward it – through holiness, discernment, and sacrificial love for the people around us.

Scripture - Galatians 5:1-15

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. 7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. 11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Daily Reflection Questions (Use T.R.U.T.H. below)

DAY 1 | GALATIANS 5:13 | MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK – CALLED TO SERVE. Paul says freedom is not “an opportunity for the flesh” but a doorway to serve one another in love (v. 13). What’s one freedom you have leaned on this week to please yourself instead of serving someone else – a spouse, a family member, a friend, a coworker?

DAY 2 | HEBREWS 12:1-3 – RUN WITHOUT ENTANGLEMENT. Paul told the Galatians, “you were running well,” before something entangled them (5:7). Hebrews 12 pictures the same race – a great cloud of witnesses, weights and sins to lay aside, eyes fixed on Jesus. It names what can slow a runner down and what keeps a runner going. What specifically is weighing you down in your walk with Christ right now, even if it isn’t technically a sin?

DAY 3 | EXODUS 20:1-3 – REMEMBER WHO SET YOU FREE. Before God gives Israel a single command, He reminds them who freed them from slavery in Egypt. God begins with, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,” before giving a single rule. Every command that follows rests on that rescue. Paul makes the same move in Galatians 5 – freedom comes first, then the call to live in light of it. Before you look at what God asks of you this week, have you actually paused to remember what He has already saved you from?

DAY 4 | COLOSSIANS 2:6-8 – DON'T BE TAKEN CAPTIVE. Paul warns the Colossians almost the same way he warns the Galatians – watch out for teaching that looks wise but pulls you away from Christ. Paul warns against being taken captive “through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition.” What is one voice or influence in your life right now that sounds convincing but is quietly pulling you away from Christ?

DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 5:21 – SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER. This kind of submission is voluntary, not forced – a fruit of freedom, not a demand of law. What would it look like to offer this to a family member this week, not because you have to, but because you’re free to?

Daily Real Time with God (T.R.U.T.H)

T TALK TO GOD IN PRAYER- Start by asking God to help you understand the text and prepare your heart.

R READ THE BIBLICAL TEXT- Read the initial text, then read it again to look for key words and context clarity.

U UNDERSTAND THE TEXT - Explore who wrote the book and their audience, examine verses around the text, or look up key words to better understand their meaning. Ask questions like: Is there a sin to avoid? A promise to claim? A command to obey? What does it teach about God?

T THINK ABOUT AND APPLY THE TEXT- How does this verse change the way you live? Is there an application or choice you need to make to live or think differently?

H HONOR GOD IN PRAYER- Pray through God's Honor/Adoration, God's Kingdom/Surrender, God's Provision/Gratitude, God's Forgiveness/Confession, and God's Power/Protection (see Matthew 6:5-15).

Tools for Further Study

- <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>
- <https://www.bibleref.com/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/>
- <https://answersingenesis.org/answers/>
- <https://gospelcoach.ai/>
- <https://carm.org/>

Key Thoughts

Freedom Is a Gift to Steward, Not Just Celebrate - On the heels of our own Independence Day, in which we celebrate American freedom, Paul pushes past a national holiday and helps us see an even greater freedom that we have in Christ. Galatians 5 makes the case that freedom in Christ was never meant to be admired from a distance – it was meant to be managed.

To steward something is to be entrusted with its handling, protection, and distribution. Paul writes to a church being told that faith in Jesus needed something added to it, starting with circumcision, and his answer is direct: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1).

Christ has set us free not to live for ourselves, but to live for Him and for others.

Don't Go Back to the Crib - Paul's warning is that the Galatians are tempted to trade their freedom for a system of works – circumcision, law-keeping, performance. It's the spiritual version of an adult climbing back into a crib.

A crib is perfect for an infant and absurd for anyone who has grown past it. Once you've stretched out in a real bed, you don't volunteer to be confined again – yet that is exactly what legalism asks a believer to do.

- Don't return to guilt.
- Don't return to legalism.
- Don't return to sin.

We rarely get forced back into that crib. Most of the time, we climb back in voluntarily – one compromise, one performance-based habit, one forgotten Gospel at a time.

Freedom Pursues Holiness - Freedom in Christ was never a license to do whatever we want – it's the power to become who Christ saved us to be. That shows up in ordinary places: refraining from anger toward a spouse or a coworker instead of venting it (Psalm 37:8), letting God deal with jealousy instead of letting it curdle into resentment (Proverbs 6:34), or asking what's best for your spouse first instead of what's best for you.

Freedom is never an end in itself. It is always given so God's purposes can flourish. Our culture defines freedom as doing whatever we want. Paul defines freedom as becoming who Christ saved us to be.

We steward the freedom we have in Christ when we pursue holiness. Holiness isn't the price of our freedom—it is the fruit of our freedom.

Key Thoughts

Guard Against What Hinders the Truth - Paul asks the Galatians a piercing question: "You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (5:7). It's a rhetorical question – Paul already knows the answer is false teaching, misplaced trust, and slow drift. A little leaven, he says, leavens the whole lump; one uncorrected compromise doesn't stay small – it spreads.

Jesus did not save us to enslave us; He saved us to set us free.

The application question worth sitting with: what people, teachings, or distractions are you currently placing in front of yourself that are quietly hindering you from obeying the truth?

Freedom Turns Outward: Serve Instead of Self - Verses 13-15 land the plane. "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (5:13).

Freedom was never given so we could finally live for ourselves – it was given so we could finally live for others.

"The whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14).

Left unchecked, self-focused freedom doesn't stay neutral – Paul warns it curdles into believers who "bite and devour one another" (5:15).

Picture being handed the keys to someone else's estate – the keys, a line of credit, full run of the property. "The keys don't give permission to damage the property. They're an invitation to care for it faithfully."

That's freedom in Christ: not permission to do damage, but an invitation to steward well what we've been given until the Owner returns.

This Week: Don't simply celebrate freedom. Steward it.

- Stand firm in the gospel. (5:1)
- Reject the desires of the flesh. (5:2-6)
- Protect the truth and hope of the gospel. (5:7-12)
- Love and serve others. (5:13-15)
- Walk daily by the Spirit of God. (5:25)

G.R.A.C.E Questions

ICE BREAKER: What's one rule you've broken (or bent) recently that you're pretty sure nobody enforces anyway? (Jaywalking, the neighborhood fireworks law, going eight over on the highway, the "no lifeguard on duty" sign – go.)

G – GIVE YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST - Surrender, both initially and daily.

- Paul says anyone who tries to be justified by keeping the law "has fallen away from grace." Is there an area where you're quietly trying to earn what Christ already gave you for free?
- When was the last time you actually stopped to thank Christ for the freedom he purchased, instead of just assuming it's owed to you?

R – REAL TIME WITH GOD - Bible reading, prayer, scripture memory, journaling

- Paul asks, "who hindered you from obeying the truth?" What has been hindering your time in Scripture and prayer this week – be specific?
- If a friend or small group member looked at your last seven days, would they say you're running well or drifting off course?

A – ACT IN OBEDIENCE - Following through on what God is teaching

- The sermon named anger, jealousy, and selfishness in marriage as places freedom gets traded for bondage. Which of those three is most true of you right now, and what's one specific step of obedience you need to take?
- What would change in how you treat a coworker or family member this week if you actually believed obedience produces freedom, not restriction?

C – COMMIT TO COMMUNITY - Accountability, discipleship, doing life together

- Is there someone in your small group or family you have been quietly biting at – through criticism, comparison, or distance – instead of serving in love?
- Who is someone who could ask you the hard question Paul asks in verse 7 – "who is hindering you?" – and actually expect an honest answer?

E – ENGAGE YOUR WORLD - Stewardship of your life, influence, and mission

- Who is a neighbor or coworker this week who would notice if you served them instead of just tolerating them?
- The sermon compared freedom to being handed the keys to someone else's estate. What's one part of your life – time, home, money – you've been sitting on instead of using to bless someone else?

"Don't simply celebrate your freedom. Steward it."