

## “Live Free”

**Galatians 1:11-24** Dear brothers and sister, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. 12 I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

13 You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted God’s church. I did my best to destroy it. 14 I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors.

15 But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by His marvelous grace. Then it pleased Him 16 to reveal His Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. 17 Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus.

18 Then three years later I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. 19 The only other apostle I met at that time was James, the Lord’s brother. 20 I declare before God that what I am writing to you is not a lie. 21 After that visit I went north into the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And still the churches in Christ that are in Judea didn’t know me personally. 23 All they knew was that people were saying, “the one who used to persecute us is now preaching the very faith he tried to destroy!” 24 And they praised God because of me.

The fourth Die Hard movie came out almost 20 years ago. In 2007 Live Free: Or Die Hard came out. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5 Die Hard movies and the one that was rated PG-13 for pervasive violence and strong language. Die Hard 1, 2, 3, and 5 are rated R for constant violence and strong language. So I am not recommending that kids under 13 watch it. In fact I am not recommending the movie, but I saw it and for those of you who saw it this first part will make a lot of sense. But if you haven’t seen it and hate violent action movies, please be patient with me, the point will be clear. But the title is sorta what Paul says to the Galatians in our passage for today. *Live Free. Or Die Hard.* That’s the name of the Bruce Willis movie that came out in 2007.

Bruce Willis now 70 and fighting dementia plays a wisecracking police officer John McLane in the fourth *Die Hard* movie, a franchise that was launched in 1988 and made more than \$700 million before sequels 4 and 5 even came out. People were saying that Willis was past his prime in the action hero department at age 51 but Sylvester Stallone has played Rocky Balboa and Rambo successfully way past that and Harrison Ford played Indiana Jones again past his early 50’s as well.

In this new movie, Willis attempts to stop a techno-terrorist who is determined to shut down the nation’s computer systems on the Fourth of July. The threat is much bigger than anything seen in the earlier movies — back then, Willis fought heavily armed thieves in a Los Angeles skyscraper, battled terrorists in a snowed-in airport, and

faced a mad bomber in New York City. This time, a criminal plot is put in place to take down the entire computer structure that supports the economy of the United States — and the world. The villain is high-tech in this *Die Hard* flick, but Willis will offer a low-tech response. In other words, he uses his fists. The Bruce Willis character “will be doing what he does best,” said the director of the movie — “being a huge pain” to the bad guys.

You might think of the apostle Paul as the Bruce Willis of the New Testament; minus the fists and swearing. Paul follows a “die hard” approach to life, and takes his knocks as a lone hero standing up to the forces of evil. He gets beat up and bloodied, flogged and imprisoned — but he never gives up. In his own words, “Three times I was beaten with rods,” he tells the Corinthians. “Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. ... [I faced] danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters” (2 Corinthians 11:25-26). But Paul was determined to live free. Or die hard.

Like the Bruce Willis action hero, the apostle Paul has some skeletons in his closet. The first *Die Hard* movie begins with Willis fighting with his estranged wife over the details of their separation. In a similar way, today’s passage from Galatians starts with Paul admitting that his own personal past is anything but perfect. “I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it,” he admits, as he looks back in verse 13. “I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors” (Verse 14). In his zeal, Paul breathed threats and murder against the members of the Christian church, and set off for the city of Damascus to capture any Christians who might be there.

But on that trip, God reveals his Son Jesus to Paul, and calls him to proclaim Christ among the non-Jews of the world, the Gentiles (v. 16). This conversion launches Paul’s career as a Christian action hero, and he spreads the gospel on a number of missionary adventures. “I did not confer with any human being,” he tells the Galatians, “nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus” (vv. 16-17). **[NOTE 1]**

Paul seems determined to play the Bruce Willis role: one man against the world. But he makes it clear that he follows the Holy Spirit. He is never alone because God is with him. After three years, he goes to Jerusalem to visit Peter and James, the brother of Jesus. But then he ventures into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, where he is unknown except by his reputation. The Christians there heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they glorified God because of him (vv. 18-24). Notice they didn’t praise Paul and say how great he was? They glorified God!

A mission team of students experienced the life-changing power of the gospel firsthand while working in a village in Ghana. They were trying to hold a Sunday morning service, but it was too light to show the *Jesus* film, and no one on the team spoke the local dialect. As the villagers gathered, the students searched for a translator

and found a young man who spoke English. He agreed to translate, and as a member of the student team shared the message of freedom in Christ, a large crowd began to form.

What the team didn't know was that their translator was a local gangster! The villagers were coming to find out why this hoodlum was talking about God. When the student speaker ended the message with an invitation, the translator added a challenge of his own. "I want all of you to know that I have decided to ask Jesus Christ into my life," he announced. "I am going to come forward, and I *recommend* that you do the same."

Seeing God's power to change even a notorious gangster prompted many people to accept Christ that morning. The unlikely evangelist served as translator for the rest of the team's trip and became a member of a nearby church. [wycliffe.org/media/SelectWords/home.asp](http://wycliffe.org/media/SelectWords/home.asp)  
Retrieved November 22, 2006.

Paul is always a bit of a mystery man, just like Bruce Willis in the *Die Hard* movies. "Who are you?" asks the villain in the first installment. "Just another American who saw too many movies as a child? Another orphan of a bankrupt culture who thinks he's John Wayne? Rambo? Marshall Dillon?" "Was always kinda' partial to Roy Rogers actually," replies Bruce Willis. "I really dig those sequined shirts." "Do you really think you have a chance against us, Mister Cowboy?" asks the villain. "Yippee-ki-yay," Willis says, in a mocking response.

Paul delivers a message that is as surprising and unorthodox as anything in a *Die Hard* movie. Paul says that he cannot be made right with God through works of the law — only faith in Christ will do that. This is remarkable because Paul was a Pharisee! Paul spent a large part of his life studying and memorizing the LAW! He says that he is now dead to the law, and alive to God through his relationship with Jesus. "I have been crucified with Christ," he writes to the Galatians; "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:19-20). [NOTE 2]

Paul is insisting that he has already died — he has been crucified with Christ. But after losing his old life, he has been given a new one. Christ now lives in him, and Paul finds himself living by faith in the Son of God, the one who loved him and gave himself for him. Paul has died hard — and now he lives free.

--Dead to the law.

--Crucified with Christ.

--Living by faith.

--Alive to God.

--A whole new life.      Yippee-ki-yay!

But what does it mean for us to live a dead-to-the-law, alive-to-God, crucified-with-Christ, living-by-faith kind of Christian life today? It might feel like a stretch for us to do this, because most of us are more comfortable with clear rules and regulations, guidebooks and checklists. But Paul is challenging us to join him on the unpredictable adventure of Christian living, one in which we put faith in Christ above any works of the law. You've been crucified with Christ, insists Paul, and Christ is living in you.

So live! Live free! [NOTE 3]

To live a life of Christian freedom is to discover that Jesus Christ is at work inside you. There is a fascinating footnote to Paul's conversion story that is often missed when we read the first chapter of Galatians. According to our English translation of the Bible, Paul says in verse 16 that God was pleased "to reveal his Son to me," a line that makes us think of Paul's encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus. But that's not really what he says. In the original Greek of the letter, Paul says that God was pleased "to reveal his Son *in* me." Not *to* me ... *in* me. Oooh. That's interesting.

Paul is saying that God was pleased to reveal his Son in and through Paul himself. God has decided to use the apostle Paul to present the risen Christ to the world. Now this might sound like a bold and audacious claim — "Step aside, God is using me to carry Christ to the world!" — but it certainly fits with the overall thrust of Paul's mission. A chapter later, he says, "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (2:20). He urges the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). And he talks about all of us "being transformed into the same image" — the image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). [NOTE 4]

Don't think of Christian life as adherence to a bunch of rules and regulations, says Paul. Think of it as a life of presenting Christ to the world. Within that life of carrying Jesus to others, there is tremendous freedom.

To be free in Christ is like a kite soaring in the sky. The string that ties it to the ground is the very thing that enables it to fly. Were it not for the string, the kite would fall. It can fly because it is bound to the earth. We only accomplish anything for the kingdom, if bound by the Holy Spirit to Jesus.

For some of you, presenting Christ will mean telling a friend about where you see Jesus at work. --For others, it will mean leading a praise song in a service of worship.

--For others, mentoring a young person in the Confirmation process.

--For others, counseling a battered wife at a community shelter.

--For others, joining a short-term mission trip to a developing country.

--For others, participating in a spiritual growth group.

--For others, welcoming a new family into our congregation.

The list goes on and on, because there are countless ways to carry Jesus to others. It pleases God to reveal his Son in you, so now you can live free — and present Jesus to others in a wide, wild and wonderful variety of ways! [NOTE 5]

When we move into this life of freedom, we realize that we are no longer in charge. We discover that our choices are now shaped by the presence of Christ, and we are being guided by Jesus into new forms of service by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian freedom is not permission to do anything we want — instead, it is freedom to do what *Jesus* wants. We have been freed from captivity to sin and senseless living so that we can be free to serve the Lord who loves us and gave his life for us.

But make no mistake, this is not a call to comfort! **According to tradition, many of the apostles suffered martyrdom:**

• Matthew was killed by a sword at a distant city in Ethiopia.

• Mark died at Alexandria, after being cruelly dragged through the streets of that city.

- Luke was hanged upon an olive tree in Greece.
  - John was put in a caldron of boiling oil, but escaped and was afterward banished to Patmos.
  - Peter was crucified at Rome upside down.
  - James, the Greater, was beheaded at Jerusalem.
  - James, the Less, was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death.
  - Bartholomew was flayed alive.
  - Andrew was bound to a cross, whence he preached to his persecutors until he died.
  - Thomas was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies.
  - Jude was shot to death with arrows.
  - Matthias was first stoned and then beheaded.
  - Barnabas was stoned to death at Salonica.
  - Paul, after various tortures and persecutions, was at length beheaded at Rome by the Emperor Nero.
- Source unknown.

Here in the United States of America we deal with very little persecution so even getting uncomfortable enough to invite friends, acquaintances, relatives, or neighbors to church events is difficult. Choose this day whom you will serve! Is Jesus your Lord and Savior? What are you going to do about it? Please write something down! Jesus died hard, so that we can live free. Yippee-ki-yay! Let's pray ... AMEN

### **Sermon Notes for "Live Free" based on Galatians 1: 11-24**

#### **Given at Doster Community Church April 19, 2026**

- I. Paul's life could have been titled live free or die hard. But he was never alone. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit, walking with God, did he accomplish anything.
- II. We cannot be made right with God through works of the law—only by faith in Christ. Living Free equals Dead to the law, crucified with Christ, living by faith, alive to God, a new creation. Yippee-ki-yay!
- III. You have been crucified with Christ, and Christ is living in you. Jesus is risen. Live free! Let Jesus Christ work inside you. Let Christ be revealed in you!
- IV. Are you ready to being transformed into the image of God? Are you willing to present Christ to the world? What does that look like for you?
- V. When we move into this life of freedom, we realize that we are no longer in charge. Is Jesus Lord of your life? He died hard so we could live free. What are you going to do about it? \_\_\_\_\_

To summarize: The theology of the cross is a theology of faith (not sight); a theology of hope (not consummation); and a theology of love (not power). —Douglas John Hall, *Seminary Ridge Review* 16.