

Galatians 5:1-15 – It Was For Freedom That You Were Saved
Community Group Galatians Lesson 10

I. Review Galatians 1-4

- A. 1:1-10 – God sent me to correct you from distorting the gospel by adding to it.
- B. 1:11-2:10 – My gospel came from Christ Himself and has been authenticated by the apostles.
- C. 2:11-21 – Even Peter had to be reminded that we are saved by faith alone.
- D. 3:1-14 – The gospel justifies everyone by faith in the promise, just like Abraham was.
- E. 3:15-29 – The law’s primary role was to tutor us to faith in Christ.
- F. 4:1-18 – You are His child and heir and no longer under regulations of external control.
- G. 4:19-31 – If you adopt the law, you’ll be a slave again, but you were saved to be free!

J. Vernon McGee says about this section, we will see “the Christian life as a do-it-yourself or as a Someone else will have to do it through you” kind of thing.

II. Do not submit yourselves to the yoke of slavery 5:1-6

- A. *Stand firm and do not be subject to a yoke of slavery since Christ set us free!* 5:1
Because we are set free as children of the promise, we must not willingly put ourselves under regulations of a law with power to neither justify nor sanctify. This fact he drilled home in chapters 1-4 regarding justification now is to be applied to sanctification.
- B. *Accepting the law cuts you off from grace* 5:2-4
If you get circumcised (so others see you as aligned with the externals of the law), you better keep the whole law. When you count on your obedience as the basis for your acceptance by God, Christ is of no use to you (meaning of ‘severed’) and you are fallen from grace. If you again pursue circumcision and steps of conformity with the Law so as to be acceptable to certain people, you will have to do all the law since it is your hope.
- C. *Those who hope for righteousness by faith find circumcision of no benefit* 5:5-6
We await the fullness of our righteousness which comes through faith, by the Holy Spirit. Those who hope in Christ are not accepted or rejected by circumcision. Faith working through love (v. 13) is everything for us.

III. Who led you astray? 5:7-12

- A. *You were running well with Christ* 5:7a
Here Paul reminds them of their early days, something he also did in 3:5 (“He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles”) and 4:12-16 when he remembered how willingly they accepted him, and would have given their own eyes. By the picture of “running well” with Christ, he affirms that what they were doing by faith when the Judaizers got hold of them was exactly what God wanted for them.
- B. *Who disturbed you?* 5:7b-10
 - 1. *Who hindered your obedience?* 5:7b
Paul picks up the theme from 1:7 (“some are disturbing you”) and 1:9 (“if any man preaches a gospel contrary to what we preached, he is to be accursed”). He echoed this in 4:17 when he said that some “eagerly seek you, but not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so you will seek them.” He wants them to recognize that the message they have been following of late is from a man who pressured them away from faith in Christ as their sufficiency.

2. It didn't come from Christ 5:8
In contrast to the gospel he preached which came from Christ (1:6), as does this present rebuke (1:1), the message they received from a Judaizer is not Christ's.
3. A little leaven affects the whole lump of dough 5:9
This idea is a carryover from the Exodus. The Jews were told to bake bread without leaven for the Passover to symbolize how quickly they needed to leave. At the same time, leaven became a symbol of sin. Bread without leaven was like saying Jews were to "clean out" (repent of) their own sin in anticipation of depending on God to carry a holy people to a special place. The tradition continues to this present day with Bedikat Shametz, a tradition at Passover in observant Jewish homes, where the parents will place a small bit of leaven in a hiding place within the home and the children must find it before they can celebrate Passover, to picture the removal of fleshly things. Paul here and in 1 Cor. 5:6 ("a little leaven leavens the whole batch") reminds his readers that a little error spreads to everyone in the body. That is, holding to *Jesus + obedience to the law* as the Judaizers teach, will spread throughout the Body to the point that Jesus will no longer be enough. And that false teaching in their sanctification will eventually misshape their evangelism.
4. I trust you will come back and the one who misled you will be judged 5:10
Here Paul intones again the fact that the false teachers will be judged (see 1:9) and he invites them to return to that which they knew at the start.

C. *The cross remains a stumbling block for those who preach circumcision* 5:11
Paul reminds his readers and us that the cross is a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23). People are offended by the idea of faith alone in Christ alone as the only way to heaven and the only way to be on right footing with God. He reminds them that he is being persecuted because he preaches only Christ and does not preach circumcision. The circumcision Judaizers preached was no longer the circumcision that once was a sign of faith and inclusion in the covenant for the OT Jews (similar to baptism for believers in Christ). This circumcision is a circumcision for man to acknowledge the one so marked as obedient to the law on the outside, and therefore acceptable to God and man. Such a circumcision obviates faith since it is for the favor of men (1:10 and 2:4 and 2:12-13, 2:16, 2:21, 3:11).

D. *I wish the circumcising Judaizers' knives would slip* 5:12
Paul here adds a little Jewish sarcasm and humor. He is so done with the Judaizers' "troubling" the Galatians through deception and minimization of the cross of Christ and promoting that which had been part of a tutorial system to bring people to faith in Christ, that he mocks them. As he envisions them circumcising themselves and others, he wishes that the "knife would slip" in the sense that a circumcision might become a castration. This is part of his earlier idea of "casting off the bondwoman" – he is done with them, their message, and their influence on believers.

IV. **You have been called to freedom that you might love one another** 5:13-15
At this point, we begin a switch in direction of the book as Paul begins his conclusion. In part 1 (1:1-3:29), he declared and defended the gospel in contradiction to the legalizing message of the Judaizers. In part 2 (4:1-5:12), he showed that the message of the Judaizers did not merely confuse the gospel. It blocks believers from becoming mature (like Christ), because it put them back under the law, which caused them to lose the power of grace.

Instead of motivating them by their new identity and the reward of the inheritance and the freedom that releases them, it restricted them to a life of fear, pressure and conformity to men. Now in part 3 (5:13-6:18), Paul shows the **purpose of their freedom**, the result of understanding the gospel for the ongoing life of the Christian.

- A. *You have been called to a freedom that enables you to serve others* 5:13
Your freedom as **children of God** and **heirs** is not a freedom for living for yourself (“an opportunity for the flesh”). Rather, this is a freedom that enables you to **serve each other through love**. This is the whole point of the gospel having its work in us.

Maturity should be defined as “serving one another through love,” empowered by the gospel. This verse makes it evident that a Christian can turn their freedom into an opportunity for the flesh. (That – license to live the way I want – is the opposite problem from legalism.) Some people make Christian obedience appear to be the only option for a “true Christian.” If it were not possible for a believer to take what Christ has done for them and then to live for themselves selfishly, he would not need to exhort us to move intentionally in the direction of service to others, empowered by love.

But what is the connection? Why is it that the gospel that he has spent most of this book defending is most fulfilled when a person refuses to follow a law, and refuses to turn their freedoms into opportunity for selfish aims, but instead uses it to serve others?

Well, it starts with the reality that all of us are *sinners for whom Jesus died* (1:4). It continues with the fact that *He was raised from the dead* (1:1) *to deliver us from this evil age* (1:4). His goal in doing so was that He might *justify us through faith in Him* (2:16, 3:11, 3:24) so that we might *live to God* (2:19). We *live to God* when we realize that *we were crucified with Christ and that it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me. The life I live (in this fleshly body), I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me* (2:20). When I see myself that way and see Him that way, I realize I have been *set free from the law* (3:13, 4:28, 4:31) so that I might replay what Jesus did for me – that is, loving me and giving Himself up for my sake.

- B. *For the law is fulfilled in loving others the way you love yourself* 5:14
Here is where the doctrine he has been teaching for four chapters on the purity of the gospel and the new identity that is ours in Christ as believers become very practical.

Paul explains that the law (which is a good thing) will actually be fulfilled in and through us when we love others (see also Romans 8:4). Not *to be* accepted by God, but because we are accepted by God because of Christ Jesus. Not because *we are under obligation to pay back lest we suffer punishment* (i.e., the law) since we know we could never adequately do so, but *because we have received mercy*. We have been made children of God not by our obedience, but by our faith in His crucified and risen Son. We can now serve because we **are not now what we once were**; we are now *free to serve*.

- C. *But if you bite and devour each other, you will consume each other* 5:15
Paul reminds them and us that if instead of lovingly serving one another because we are no longer bondslaves of sin, we “bite and devour” one another, ostensibly through sharp-tongued conflict and attempts to control, we will be consumed by each other.

V. Discussion

- A. Galatians 5:5 says, “by faith, we are waiting for the hope of righteousness.” He then contrasts that “hope of righteousness” with circumcision in 5:6. Why are the “hope of righteousness” and circumcision juxtaposed over and against one another? What does it mean that we “hope for righteousness”?
- B. Galatians 5:12 (also 1 Cor. 1:23) refers to the cross as “a stumbling block.” When have you seen it or experienced it as a stumbling block? What is the significance of that idea?
- C. Discuss how something which is spoken of as freedom (5:1) can also be something that results in you “serving one another through love” (5:13)?

VI. Homework

- A. Please read chapters 1-5 in one sitting two separate times (or better, **listen to it** being read by listening to *You Bible* or some app that has the Bible on audio).
- B. Memorize Galatians 5:13