

Freedom

Set Free - Stay Free

Lesson 18 Galatians 5.1-6

091320

- 1 As we have previously learned Galatians is divided into three parts.
 - a In chapters 1 and 2 Paul shares his spiritual autobiography to show that he was a genuine apostle who proclaimed the genuine gospel.
 - b In chapters 3 and 4 he explains the central message of the gospel, justification by faith (i.e. that we are made right with God solely on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection).
 - c This morning we begin chapters 5-6 where Paul demonstrates how justification by faith fundamentally *sets us free* in the way that we relate God, obey God and love to one another.
- 2 The goal of the entire book of Galatians and theme of this passage is freedom in Christ ... 1) What it is, 2) Why it needs to be preserved and 3) How to preserve it.

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Galatians 5:1–6

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened *again* by a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1).

- 1 In the original text it reads, “for freedom Christ once and for all freed us.”
 - a What that means is that through Christ's death and resurrection he has legally once and for all freed us so that we could, in an ever-increasing measure, experientially/practically live in that freedom.
 - b In other words, we have been made free, we just need to learn to live in our freedom.

- 2 Jesus' whole mission was an mission of liberation (Is 61:1/Luke 4:18). Jesus not only proclaimed freedom he purchased freedom. Through his death and resurrection Jesus has freed us from enslavement to sin, death and Satan.
- 3 But the freedom Paul is talking about in this verse the freedom from the enslavement of trying to earn salvation, acceptance or favor from God by keeping God's law. We call that legalism.
 - a Legalism is using law-obedience to be accepted by God rather than trusting in Christ to be accepted by God.
 - b We are called to obey God's law/commands but not to gain acceptance with God but rather because we have been accepted by God through faith in Christ.
- 4 We all struggle with legalism to one degree or another. Theologically we know that the gospel is ... believe, be accepted and obey. But functionally we often live as if it is believe, obey and be accepted. In other words, our acceptance is based upon how well we obey God's law.
- 5 But the good news of the gospel is that acceptance is based upon Christ's obedience not our obedience.
 - a Therefore the gospel not only frees us from the guilt of imperfect obedience (sin), it frees us from the sinful compulsion to try and earn our acceptance through our obedience (legalism).
 - b The gospel frees us from the penalty of sin and the proclivity to try and save ourselves through obedience. This is the freedom with which Christ has set us free. The freedom from trying to earn anything from God.
- 6 But this freedom is fragile and easily slips from our grasp and therefore must be diligently protected. So, Paul says to the Galatians ...

Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened *again* by a yoke of slavery (5:1b).

- 1 The startling word in this last half of verse 1 is the word "again" which of course implies that the Galatians had been previously enslaved.
 - a Before they received the gospel the Galatians were enslaved by paganism and all of its immorality, idolatry and depravity. Then they were liberated by believing the gospel.
 - b So when Paul says don't go back to slavery again you might assume that he is talking about the slavery of paganism.

- He is not because that was not the Galatians problem.
 - Their problem was enslavement to legalism because they were abandoning the gospel of grace for the false teaching of the Judaizers who taught you had to obey God's laws in order to be saved.
- c Therefore when Paul says don't go back to slavery it implies that both pagan idolatry (which make people more immoral) and legalism (which makes people more moral) are both forms of spiritual slavery.
- 2 The Pharisee was just as enslaved as the tax collector. In terms of the parable of the Prodigal elder son was just as enslaved as the younger son; the younger to paganism the elder to legalism.
- a Both were alienated from the Father's heart. In fact the older son was probably more enslaved because he thought his outward goodness meant he was free whereas the younger son knew his inward badness meant he was bound and needed to be freed.
- b That means that the guy who woke up this morning in a gutter after spending the night getting drunk, trying to pick up every woman, ending up in a fistfight in the parking lot is no more enslaved than the religious guy who trusts in his own morality who last night prayed the Lord's prayer before going to bed and was one of the first people in church his morning. One guy is a bad guy the other guy is a good guy but they are both spiritual slaves who need to be freed by Jesus.
- 3 So Paul says ... do not let yourselves be burdened *again* by a yoke of slavery (5:1b).
- a In other words Jesus came to bring freedom not only for the guy in the gutter who knows he's unrighteous but also the guy in the pew who trusts in his own righteousness.
- b Jesus came for the unrighteous and the self-righteous. Both are sinners and both need his righteousness and only his righteousness.
God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21
- c Righteousness before God comes only through faith in Christ and not by self-effort, law-keeping or obedience to God's commands. Obedience is not the means of gaining righteousness, it is the outflow of being made righteous by grace.
- d So for a believer in Christ no amount of obedience could ever make us more accepted before God. Likewise, no amount of disobedience could ever make us less accepted by God. It will make us more disciplined by

- God because God disciplines who he loves. But nothing we can do will ever make us more or less accepted by God or more or less righteous before God.
- 4 Some people think that if you teach this pure freedom in Christ no one will want to serve him. They think it will encourage disobedience and unfaithfulness. Actually, the opposite is true.
 - a When you recognize what your sin deserved and what Christ has done for you, that he has done it all you, when you realize the price he paid for you and the love of God poured out on you ... it will only lead to adoration.
 - b And a heart that adores Christ leads not to a more sinful life but a more holy life. That's freedom.
 - 5 True freedom not only liberates *from* the penalty and power of sin, it liberates you *to* want righteousness, to want what God wants, to delight in what God delights in.
 - a It's the want-to's. When the want-to's diminish, spiritual slavery is starting to creep in. That's why Paul says, Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened *again* by a yoke of slavery (5:1b).
 - b Don't be burdened by the yoke of have-to's. I have to do this in order to be accepted and loved by God rather than I delight to do this because I have been totally accepted and loved by God.
 - 6 Now this slavery to legalism among the first century Galatians was represented by submitting to Jewish circumcision. The Judaizers taught that in order for the Gentile Galatians to find full acceptance from God they needed to become Jews which according to the Mosaic Law required circumcision for men. To understand this we need a little back story on circumcision.
 - a In the ancient world covenants between parties were often symbolized by a cut on the hand or arm. So, when God established his covenant with Abraham, he instituted the cut of circumcision as a symbol.
 - b Later it became a part of the Mosaic Law and the mark of being a Jew. However, by Paul's day circumcision became more than a symbol of covenant, it became a requirement for salvation. According to Acts 15 the Judaizers said, *Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (Acts 15:1).*
 - 7 So circumcision, in Paul's day, was synonymous with self-salvation.

- a Getting circumcised was a way of saying that sinners had to do something to be made right with God. Worse than that, it was saying what Jesus Christ did not do enough to save the Galatians, that they needed something more.
- b So, when the Galatians were thinking about getting circumcised, they were really thinking about being made right with God.
- c Paul said if that is the case four things become true for them
 - Christ will be of no value to them (v2).
 - They will be obligated to obey the whole law (v3).
 - They will alienate themselves from Christ and will have fallen away from grace (v4)
- d It's a sobering assessment. Let's take a look at each one of those.

² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

- 1 Now there was nothing wrong with circumcision in and of itself (v6). What was wrong was viewing circumcision as something that was necessary to be saved and be accepted by God.
- 2 Therefore, in the book of Galatians, circumcision represents anything we add to faith in Christ to save us, make us right with God or accepted by God. It is the religion of faith plus something for salvation.
 - a Faith plus ceremony ... baptism, communion, confirmation.
 - b Faith plus doing ... raising my hand, walking and aisle or praying a prayer.
 - c Faith plus abstaining ... fasting, sacrificing or resolutions.
 - d Faith plus goodness ... serving, helping others. (This is the person who when things go south in their life say but God what about all these good things I have done for you?)
 - e Faith plus piety ... morality, prayer, good Christian.
- 3 Paul said if there is any "plus" then Christ will be of no value to you at all. Why is that?
 - a Well the whole reason for faith in Christ is because there was nothing you could do to save yourself. When you add something to faith you are in essence saying, "Ah but there is something I can do to save myself or assist Jesus in saving me.
 - b And when you do that Christ will be of no value to you at all because Jesus cannot be a half-savior.

- Jesus is either completely our Savior or he is no savior at all.
 - He is either all your value or he is of no value to you at all.
 - We are either justified by faith alone or by works.
- 4 Now in the physical church gatherings in the region of Galatia there were both believers and unbelievers.
- a So to those Galatians who were a part of the church but not saved Paul is saying if you are trusting in circumcision, Christ will be of no value to you. You will find no *salvation*.
 - b To those Galatians who were a part of the church that were genuinely saved but deceived, Paul is saying if your trusting in circumcision Christ will be of no value to you. You will find no *freedom*.

³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.

- 1 When the commands/law of God becomes more than a guide to holiness but rather a system of salvation it will only save if it is kept perfectly and entirely. For the law to save it must be kept without flaw. James says ... *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. James 2:10*
- 2 This is why in Galatians 3 Paul says, *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Galatians 3:10*
- 3 We cannot be justified by keeping the law. We can't even keep the first commandment ... you shall have no other gods before me (Exodus 20:3). In other words, don't put anything before me. Don't make anything more important than me. Don't love anything more than me.
- 4 Like I said, we can't even keep the first commandment. And that's because the commandments were not designed to justify. They were designed to reveal God's glory and to show us we fall short of it and therefore need a Savior.
- 5 In other words, it was the grace of God that gave us the law of God to reveal our need for the grace of God.

⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

- 1 For a believer this falling away is not falling away from salvation or the loss of salvation but rather falling away from the biblical teaching that salvation is by grace.
 - a If you believe that salvation is by law, circumcision, faith plus anything... then you have fallen away from the belief that salvation is by grace.
 - b If you try add law-keeping to grace you have fallen away from the belief that you can only be justified by grace.
- 2 You cannot have it both ways; either salvation is by divine accomplishment (Christ died for our sins) or salvation is by human effort, (we keep the law). I'll chose door number 1.
- 3 Now up to this point we have looked at what freedom in Christ is and the implications of not standing firm in it. Now Paul turns to how we can stand firm in our freedom.

⁵ But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. (How does that help us stand firm in our freedom?)

- 1 There are two kinds of righteousness from God revealed in Galatians.
 - a There is a righteousness from God that we have now by faith (Gal 3-4) **and** a righteousness that we await for by faith (Gal 5:5).
 - b A righteousness we have now and a righteousness that we will have in the future.
- 2 The righteousness we have now by faith is the righteousness of Christ. When we believe, Christ's righteousness legally becomes ours. Elsewhere this is called the gift of righteousness. Christ's standing before the Father becomes ours.
 - a That means that God sees us like he does his own Son. Therefore, in Christ, we have the full acceptance, complete approval and total access to the Father.
 - b Furthermore, since our righteousness is based upon Christ our standing with God never changes with an increase or decrease in obedience.
 - c In other words, our righteousness is not based upon the level of our obedience; it's based on Christ's perfect obedience.
 - Therefore, when we experience success in our walk with God, we need to remember that success does increase God's love for us. In fact, it is only because of his love for us that we have any success.

- Likewise, when we experience failure, we need to remember that if we had *not* failed, we would be no more loved and accepted by God.
- d Our performance is irrelevant to our right-standing. Even in failure God is working for our good to show us just how much we need him and how much he loves us. This is the righteousness *we have* and it is incredibly liberating.
- 3 But verse 5 says there is also a righteousness for which *we hope*.
 - a It is unfortunate that the English word hope does not convey the meaning of the Greek word for hope. In the English hope means hope so. I hope it stops raining tomorrow. Maybe it will maybe it won't.
 - b That is not what the word hope means in the New Testament. The Greek word is from elpis (el'-pus) and means confident expectation. It is the assurance of something that will certainly happen. Total assurance.
 - c So hope in the English means uncertainty. But hope in the Bible means absolute certainty. That is why Paul says we eagerly await a future righteousness.
 - d In other words, we don't strive for it. We can eagerly await because we are confident it will be ours rather than anxiously await because we're not really sure it will be ours.
 - 4 So what is this future righteousness we eagerly await for with total assurance? It is our future glorification. Righteousness not only means goodness but also the righting of all things that were made wrong because sin entered the world.
 - a That process of righting all things began in the garden after the fall when God promised the seed of the women would crush the head of the serpent.
 - b The righting all things continued when God promised Abraham that a Son would come from him through whom all nations would be blessed.
 - c That son is Jesus Christ and he is the apex of God's plan to right all things. And on the cross, he did just that.
 - d One day he will return and complete the righting of all things with the new heavens and new earth. The Garden of God completely restored.
 - e All that was made wrong through sin will be righted. Righteousness will have prevailed. The glory of the Lord will cover the earth. That is the ultimate outcome of the gospel. Future glory.

5 Now Paul says the way to stand firm in your freedom in Christ now is to keep your mind and heart set on that future glory or the **outcome** of the gospel.

a Because of the gospel we now share in Christ's righteousness (that's the righteousness we have). But one day, we will share in his glory (the righteousness to come). Paul says in Romans 8

¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:17-18).

- Not around us but in us. Not from us but from Christ through us.
- We have a down payment of that now in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But one day we will have the fulness of glory.

b This is so certain that it is already done in the mind of God.

²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:29a–30).

6 Ephesians 5 tells us this is why God saved us. To make a glorious, radiant church.

*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a **radiant** church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25b–27).*

a If you could see right now what you will be one day when everything has finally been made right you might bow down and start worshipping yourself. Radiant, glorious, perfected sons of God in Christ Jesus the Ultimate Son of God.

b But even then, in all of Christ's perfections imparted to you by grace, you will not be loved more than you are right now. You will not be more accepted than you are right now.

7 As we remind ourselves, set our hearts on this righteousness to come, this expectation of future glory and ultimate freedom, it empowers us in the present to stand firm in the freedom of our right-standing in Christ. (5:21)

Discussion Questions

- 1 In the context of Galatians 5.1-6 what has Christ freed us from and why is it so important to preserve that freedom in our individual lives and in our church?
- 2 How easy is it for you to face up to difficult or unflattering truths about yourself? How does understanding the gospel and that fact that you have been made righteous before God help ease that pain?
- 3 Do you feel more confident before God when you have had a good week spiritually? Why?
- 4 How does freedom in Christ free you to love?