

TRUE FREEDOM**Galatians 5:1-15****(Read Galatians 5:1-15)**

Intro: After a couple months of learning from Paul's letter to the Galatians, I think you're probably getting the idea that he was very concerned that this group of Christ Followers not fall back into old habits or learn new and bad ones. He begins the text we just heard with a transition sentence that says, essentially, Christ has set us free for freedom and not for sliding back into bondage. Paul also points out that slipping back just a little can have a great and deleterious effect – when you surrender just a little of the freedom Christ won on the Cross you are giving all of it up. It is very true that if you give an inch and it WILL take a mile.

For three quarters of this letter, Paul has been providing his reasoning, now he lays it out practically. As usual he shows that . . .

Theology is of no use until it's lived out

- The Judiazers who had come to Galatia with a works religion were concerned about following a man-centered system that only caused frustration. It was all about what I can do rather than relying on what Christ had already done.
- He has said some tough things, and he certainly does so here in our passage today. But in the end, all that mattered to Paul was faith which works through love. That is just another way of saying that the essence of Christianity is not rules laid out by human beings, which is religion, but a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. In Barclay's words, *"The Christian's faith is founded not on a book but on a person; its dynamic is not obedience to any law but love to Jesus Christ."* Its like this . . .

We have been called to freedom in Christ

- Paul has made the point over and over again – the Christian life is a life of liberty. Jesus came to set the captives free, not to keep them in bondage or put them in bondage all over again.
- How do people see us? Do they see us as people of freedom and liberty? I've heard it said of Christians that we are uptight. And too often that's true especially if we are focusing on doing rather than being. This was Paul's frustration with the people of the Law and those who would put more stock in the physical act of circumcision rather than the transforming love of Christ. Archibald Hunter says *"In any proper Christ-Centered Christianity the thing that matters is not any external rite—or the absence of it—but trust in Christ as Savior, outflowing in a life of love."*
- For Paul it was Law vs. Christ. Law stood for Self. Christ stood for faith. Faith in what he had done on the cross. You can have the Law or you could have Christ. But you can't have both. The legalists among the Galatians wanted them to think that they could have *both* Jesus and a law-relationship with God. Paul tells them that this is not an option open to them – the system of grace and the system of law are incompatible. It's to that end that John Calvin wrote *"Whoever wants to have a half-Christ loses the whole."*
- Paul is saying, "If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. You see, when we embrace the law as our rule of walking with God, we must let go of Jesus. He is no longer our righteousness; we attempt to earn it ourselves. For the Galatians in this passage, to receive circumcision – which was the Jewish ritual that testified that a Gentile was coming under the law – meant that he no longer trusted in Jesus as His righteousness, but trusted in himself instead. As a result, Paul could say *"Christ will be of no value to you at all."* Galatians 5:2b. If circumcision then why the Cross?
- Instead choose freedom! Paul's word to the Galatians to stand firm in verse one means that it takes effort to stay in this place of liberty. The Galatians have proved that someone who is legally made free in Jesus can still live in bondage because they can be deceived into placing themselves back into slavery. Why go back? Don't go back!
- Paul is saying here that freedom is of the essence of being Christian; it is the fundamental basis of all Christian living." (Morris) True Christianity is a life that is Free and Holy and Loving. In fact, we go . . .

From legalism to the law of love

- Samuel Mikolaski says that it is the freedom of faith. *"For Paul, the controlling principle of life is faith expressed in love as in the life of Christ."* and he goes on to say, *"The essence of Christianity is not legalism*

but a personal relationship to Jesus Christ which is characterized by faith and love.” Faith animates love. In other words, faith makes our love of Christ and others come alive.

- It’s not a works love or a grudging “Well, I guess I gotta love you!” but an instinctual love that comes from having been with Jesus. And that will bring out my last point, one that Paul is careful to accentuate in verses 13 and 14. Let me read them again, *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”* This clearly points out that . . .

Freedom doesn’t mean sin – it means service

- Liberty doesn’t mean “*If it feels good do it.*” About sixty years ago Barclay wrote, “*Today, people live in the headlong pursuit of “freedom,” which they think of as doing whatever they want to do, and never denying any desire. This is a kind of liberty, a false liberty; but it is not **the** liberty.*” Today it is only worse. Barclay goes on to point out that “**The** liberty is our freedom from the tyranny of having to earn our own way to God, the freedom from sin and guilt and condemnation, freedom from the penalty and the power and eventually freedom from the presence of sin.” Liberty is not freedom to sin, it is the freedom from earning our way to salvation. That’s already been taken care of.
- But the great fear of the legalist is that liberty will be used as an opportunity for indulging the flesh and that is why they have all the dos and don’ts that make up the law Paul was coming against. It becomes, dress this way, drink only that, associate only with them, and you’ll be safe. So Paul warns against going from the bondage of the law right to the bondage of sin. The idea is that people who embrace freedom will just go out and sin as they please, then say to God, “I’m sorry, please forgive me,” and then go on doing whatever they want again. Paul recognized the danger of this attitude, so he warned against it here. The use of freedom must be moral. He makes this point frequently in his letters. In fact in Romans 6:15 he asks *Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?* And he immediately and forcefully answers it with *By no means!*
- Instead, be free and SERVE! Serve one another in love. Freedom is for service to others and not an opportunity for fleshly desires. Freedom to love is Christian bondage. However free believers may be they are not their own – the goal of their freedom is service through love. (Ronald Fung)
- Paul uses the teaching Jesus used himself by urging the Galatians to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And what does that mean other than to love others with the same spontaneity and readiness as we do ourselves.

Conclusion: Let me wrap this up. Paul has said some tough things all through this letter. He is baffled by the fact that the Galatians would throw away their freedom. He wants the best for them and he wants them to experience joy and liberty. He want true freedom for them.

Next week we’ll look at the fruitful harvest of such freedom. Amen.