

Galatians 5:1 “Living in Freedom”

GAL 5:1 “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.”

In our study last week Paul made the comparison between the slave woman and the free woman; Hagar, who bore Ishmael, and Sarah, who bore Isaac. And he made the connection that each woman represented a covenant which God made with mankind.

Hagar represented the covenant which was associated with Mount Sinai where the law was delivered, whereas Sarah represented the covenant of grace where the promises of God given to Abraham were received by faith alone.

One covenant led to slavery, while the other covenant led to freedom. Now this is obviously an overstatement by Paul because he understood that grace was involved in both covenants, but he simply makes the point here that the law ended up being abused by Israel in such a way that they used it as a means of salvation when in fact it was never meant to be used in such a way. In this way it led to slavery.

But the promise which Abraham received by faith resulted in his spiritual freedom where he could enjoy fellowship with the Lord and the hope of a future home with God forever.

It is this freedom Paul is driving home for these Galatians who have voluntarily put themselves in a position of being enslaved all over again. He reminds them that once they have been given freedom, why in the world would they place themselves back in jail?

They don't belong to the jailer anymore, and this is the point Paul raised in verse 31 of chapter four.

GAL 4:31 “Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”

Now, if we're not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman, how should that effect our lives? How should this freedom be viewed by God's people? And this of course leads to the issue which Paul raises in our text.

GAL 5:1 "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."

This is exactly what Jesus told the Jews of His day who were bound by the law in such a way that when their freedom stood before them they chose the slavery of the law.

JOH 8:31-32 "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Free from what? The deception that Israel's leaders had taught them all their lives, that if they will be zealous for the law they will be viewed by God as righteous and attain their salvation.

Jesus is clearly saying that they need to be freed from that lie and embrace the truth which will set them free. And of course that freedom was found in Himself; He who is the way, the truth and the life.

Now we don't want to lose sight of the problem Paul is addressing here. This is not simply some legalistic approach to their walk with Christ. This is not the equivalent of what we see in the church-at-large today, where some Christians put restrictions on our freedoms like what kind of clothes we can wear, or what types of foods we can eat.

What Paul is addressing here with the Galatians is exactly what Peter had to contend with, and in fact addresses at the Council at Jerusalem where they put a halt to this idea that the law could somehow save someone.

ACT 15:1 "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

There is no confusion here. Likewise, these Judaizers in Galatia were teaching that one could not be saved unless they subscribed to circumcision which was the icon for all of the Law of Moses.

In other words, Jesus Christ and His atonement on the cross was not sufficient for our salvation. And by the way, there are religious groups today who name the name of Christ who teach this.

There are groups like the Roman Catholics, which is my background, along with the denomination, Church of Christ, who teach that unless you are watered baptized you cannot be saved.

This is a slap in the face to the all-sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead for our salvation. It teaches that we have to do some human work which will secure our eternal future. But what do the Scriptures teach?

EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast."

The Judaizers wanted to boast in the flesh of the Galatians. They wanted to boast that their means of salvation was going to take precedence in the lives of those Christians in Galatia. And Paul simply reminds them that the Judaizers are not giving them freedom, they are giving them slavery.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." The Jews of Paul's day and of Christ's day had been burdened with the law for years as they were taught it was their salvation. This is why Jesus spoke the way He did to the Jews.

MAT 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

There was no rest in the law. The law only made a person restless because there was always the possibility that you would not keep the law perfectly. Jesus was saying that He was the hope the law could not give. He is the one who encouraged every Jew to come to Himself because He would take that burden of guilt and debt and pay it Himself, thus relieving them of the burden.

This in turn produced freedom. But if we're free we need to understand what we're free from and what we are free unto. Now, obviously we are free from the penalty and power of our sin. We are no longer considered guilty because Jesus Christ has satisfied our debt to the Father. Jesus has put His righteousness to our account.

But we are also free unto being able to please the Lord. Some have mistakenly thought that once we are free in Christ that our freedom allows us to pursue any path we want with impunity. This simply isn't true. We have not been set free from sin so we can go back and wallow in sin. Paul points this out to the Romans.

ROM 6:15-18 "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

Peter makes essentially the same point.

1PE 2:16 “Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.”

What Peter is saying here is that to live as a servant of God in Christ is the equivalent of living as free men. Why is this? Well, quite simply when we were outside of Christ it was impossible to be a servant of God who could please Him. And the reason for this is that when we were outside of Christ we were enemies of God.

ROM 5:10 “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

God’s enemies cannot please Him. God’s enemies are bound to their guilt and are therefore deserving His wrath.

ROM 1:18-19 “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known.”

On the other hand, we who have trusted Christ have been set free from God’s wrath and have entered into a peace relationship with our heavenly Father, where we are no longer considered condemned and are rather declared to be justified by Christ’s blood.

And it is only in this relationship where we are seen as free. In fact, for the first time in our lives we are actually able to please God; we are actually able to do something for God whereby He takes delight in us as a father takes delight in his child who, for the first time, calls him daddy.

There is a love there from God and an ability on our part because of the Holy Spirit who has now taken up residence in our hearts so that we can do works for God that are seen as good. Prior to that all of our good works were viewed by God as filthy rags. Now, in Christ, they are prized possessions as we give them to our God by faith.

And this is Paul’s point to the Galatians and all Christians: “if you now have the ability to please God as His children, why would you revert back to behavior and a belief system which is destined to be destroyed?”

It doesn’t make any sense, any more than once we’ve been cleaned up we would go back and wallow in the mud. Paul wants these

people to practice who they are. They are people who are alive and free to serve the living God.

And as Peter said by implication if we are not serving God then, in one sense, we are not free. Why? Well, because if we are not serving God we are serving self. We are considering ourselves as more important than others, and in practice we are considering ourselves as more important than God.

This is why Paul spends as much time as he does in the books of Ephesians, Romans and 1Corinthians, discussing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He is teaching us that if we are in Christ then by definition we have the Spirit who gives each of us gifts to be used for each other in the body of Christ.

In other words, we have been given gifts by God to be servants for God and each other. If we are not using our gifts in that capacity then we are not living in the type of freedom we were designed to live. It doesn't mean we aren't saved, it simply means we are not using the potential to glorify God with our lives.

And that's why we were saved in the first place. Jesus makes this clear.

JOH 15:8 "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

It is when we bear the fruit of the Spirit as we use the gifts of the Spirit that we bring glory to God. In fact, we know that we are to be imitators of Christ. And it was always Christ's delight to do the work of the Father so as to bring glory to His name.

JOH 17:4 "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."

Just as the Father has given a work to His Son which He completed, we too, as believers in Christ, have been given work to do which is designed to bring glory to our heavenly Father.

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

If we think being a Christian is simply being able to hang out in this world waiting for our Lord to come back then we've missed what it means to be a free Christian. Because what it means to be a Christian is to be an imitator and follower of Christ with the

express purpose of being used by our heavenly Father to advance His kingdom to His glory.

Again, it's all about Him. And yet, unfortunately, you would think it's all about us when you look at some of the attitudes many Christians take today as they think that Christ came to make us wealthy, or that He came to make our lives trouble free.

If this is the case then the apostle Paul was a failure as a Christian. His life was anything but trouble free. His life was not one of wealth in the human sense. He spent much of his Christian life as a tent maker just to be able to cover the costs of living as well as to use whatever he could to help others.

We can get so focused on ourselves in this life that we often view God and Christ as some sort of Santa Claus who is obligated to make sure we have every creature comfort we think we deserve.

As I've always said, there is nothing wrong with creature comforts and we should praise God for whatever we have, but with Paul we should be able to say that we have learned to be content with whatever circumstance we find ourselves. Not content in a fatalistic way, but content to know that God is always with us and will never forsake us, and that He will give us the strength we need to go forward so we can glorify Him with our lives as did Paul.

This is what it means to be free. In other words, we are not going to be negatively influenced by the trials of this world because we know who our God is and what His promises are regarding our eternal destiny.

Now, of course this is the ideal. The reality is that our flesh is weak and prone to wander. But unless we pursue our freedom in Christ we will always allow the flesh to take precedence. We will always think that we are the center of our universe instead of realizing that Christ is to be the center of our lives.

If we are free to live as freemen in Christ then it would make all the sense in the world to pursue the means of our freedom. And of course the means of our freedom is always found in a person, not simply in a set of truths, as important as that is.

What I mean by this is that if we relegate our Christian walk with only following a set of rules then we've taken the personal aspect of our relationship with God out of the picture.

I've often used the analogy of a marriage relationship. None of us who are married, or who have been married wake up next to our mates and go down a list of things we should or shouldn't do that day for them.

We don't wake up and say, my list tells me that today I'm not going to commit adultery. Or today, I'm going to say to my mate I love you 10 times and give my mate three kisses and four hugs. And if I fail to do these things then I will mark off what I've done or didn't do and attempt to make it up the next day.

That's not a healthy relationship. That's a job. And that's sometimes where our relationship with God ends up. We feel as though unless we have a list of do's and don'ts we really aren't being faithful to God. That's not freedom, that's bondage. And that is not why we've been called to be part of God's family.

Now, this doesn't mean we don't obey God, and it doesn't mean we don't have the law written on our hearts, but this is all done out of a love for our Lord, not because we are under compulsion. And what the Judaizers were doing in Galatia was relegating the Christians there to a life of compulsion.

They were forcing the Christians to view their righteousness as dependent on their ability to perform according to the law instead of understanding that their lives are to be lived according to the Spirit.

And what that means is to live according to the will of the Spirit of God. And we know what that is. Sometimes we get the idea that living according to the Spirit is some mystical, ethereal feeling we get when we're close to the Lord and moving in the power of the Spirit.

The fact is that to live in the Spirit is to live by the means the Spirit has provided. What are they? Well, the first thing is that the Spirit has given us the word of God. In other words, the Spirit of God has revealed God to us through the written word so that we can know the mind and will of God.

2TI 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

2PE 1:20-21 "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For

prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

ACT 1:16 "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus -

It is the Spirit of God who has inspired the word of God. But to live according to the Spirit of God also involves taking the word of God and being doers of it as we seek the strength which the Lord supplies and this is where faith and trust come in.

As we obey our Lord, because of a love for Him, the Spirit will use us and reveal to us what His desires for us are according to His word. And as we are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit according to His word the Spirit will illumine our hearts and minds and lead us into all truth.

It doesn't mean that there isn't a mystical aspect to the work of the Spirit in our lives, after all He is God and Spirit and He does touch our spirits, but there needs to be that balance whereby we don't go to one extreme or the other.

Some Christians go in the direction of truth without the seeking of the supernatural involvement of the Spirit of God in their lives, whereas other Christians go so far towards the supernatural that they in practice exclude the written word and depend only on feelings or promptings they think they're getting from God.

The danger there is that often they don't test the spirits as they depend only on those feelings instead of comparing their feelings with the written word of God which the Spirit gave us.

In either case, if we are not worshiping and serving the Lord in Spirit and in truth we have a tendency to hamstring our walk with Christ and we short circuit the freedom we are to have in Christ and we relegate our experience on something other than that which is according to the will of God thus taking us from freedom to a sort of bondage.

And this is why Paul points out that it was for freedom that Christ set us free. To introduce any of the world's approach to walking with Christ, or to introduce the law as a means of salvation or even sanctification is to exclude the will of God.

And therefore Paul adds in verse one: “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

In the Galatians’ case this has to do with standing firm by faith on the promises of God found in Christ who is our only way of salvation. To do anything less is to add a burden which is not light nor easy. It detracts from the freedom Christ gave us and it actually gets in the way of our ability to grow in Christ.

The law is a yoke of slavery whereas Christ is a yoke who sets us free. If we don’t stand firm on Christ and His word, if we become wishy washy in our approach to God then we will be blown here and there by every wind of doctrine and instead of being on a firm foundation we will be on sinking sand.

It’s not easy standing firm today. It’s not easy taking a no-compromise attitude when the world and even segments of the church-at-large want us to be more concerned with outward appearances rather than substance.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free, but the last thing we want is to make freedom in Christ some sort of cheap grace where we go through the motions and call that being free. Freedom in Christ is being enslaved to the Lord of glory to such an extent that our commitment to Him is unquestioned; our dependence upon Him is total subjection in love.

Being free in Christ is being free to serve and love Him with our lives in the power of the Spirit. We are free to say no to sin and yes to righteousness. Why? Because we have been given a new nature in Christ; a nature which is the result of life, Christ’s life who has made us alive.

The law cannot give life, nor can it contribute anything to our sanctification, or to our ability to become more like Christ.

ROM 1:17 “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Whether it’s our eternal destiny or our daily walk we must live by faith in the God who has given us life in Christ. And as we consider the life we have we always ought to seek to flee from the death we came out of.

ROM 6:11-14 “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your

mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”