



## Part 15 – Living in Gospel Freedom

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### Galatians 5:7-15

In chapter five of Galatians Paul begins to broaden his perspective from a sole focus on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He does not leave this doctrine behind, but rather helps us to see some of the implications of being united to Christ by faith. Lest his readers misunderstand the message of free grace Paul now begins to emphasize the life changing power of the gospel wrought by the Spirit of God in the hearts of believers.

### 1. The Call to Gospel Freedom

Vv. 7-11

- Paul has spent the majority of his time thus far building the case for the sinner's justification before God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The message of the Judaizers undermined this message by adding works of the law to the equation of justifying faith. Paul demonstrates that this addition serves to obliterate the gospel itself and transforms the good news into a message of damnation. This explains Paul's passion and vexation in the letter. God has called his people to freedom not bondage. Jesus Christ sets believers free from the power and guilt of sin. The law of God condemns the unrepentant precisely because they remain in their sin which deserves the curse of the law. But every sinner who repents and turns in faith to Jesus Christ inherits the blessings and benefits of his perfect obedience and sacrificial death. In a word, they are free.

#### A) A call to resilience

Vs. 7 – "You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?"

- Just when we may be tempted to think that it does not matter how we live, Paul begins to paint a fuller picture of that faith which justifies. The faith which justifies possesses the qualities of life. It is not a dead faith which may assent to certain facts but lacks devotion. The faith which God grants, the faith which properly responds to grace is a living faith. Here Paul employs the familiar metaphor of running to illustrate the need for resilience.

#### B) A call to discernment

Vv. 7b-8 – "Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you."

- The letter to the Galatian churches is a lesson in discernment. It is about recognizing what is true and what is error. It is about recognizing the gospel of Jesus from those false gospels of human merit. Here Paul calls upon them to discern that the message which they were accepting – the message hindering them – did not come from God but from false brothers.
- Notice Paul's prescription for those who have troubled the Galatian churches: "I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!" (vs. 12). Certainly this is a window into Paul's righteous indignation directed toward a false gospel and those who promote it. But it is likely far more than a crass insult. Paul was well aware of the Deuteronomic code which forbid those who emasculated themselves from entering the assembly of the Lord. Paul is using a shocking image to point out that these men, by their promotion of a false gospel, have excluded themselves from fellowship with God and his people.
- The call to gospel freedom is not a call to passivity. It means that there is a great goal to reach. There are enemies to confront and error to refute. There is a race to run.

#### C) A call to suffer

- Vs. 11
- The gospel makes us different in ways that will put us at odds with the world. What Christians recognize as freedom, the world interprets as hatred, ignorance, or bondage. It seems that the false brothers were asserting that they and Paul were preaching the same message. This is often a refuge for false teachers.

They claim to be faithful to Scripture and well within the stream of historic Christian orthodoxy. Paul is having none of it. Clear evidence that Paul preached an entirely different message was found in the fact that he – not the false brothers – was persecuted. As a Christian, if he had preached the “Judaistic” Christianity preached by the false brothers in Galatia he would have avoided the persecution he currently suffered both from Rome and Jews. Rome typically allowed the peoples they conquered to continue to practice their native religions so long as such practices did not threaten the authority of the state. Christianity, however, was seen by many in Rome as seditious. Indeed, many Jewish religious leaders used this charge against Christians who confessed “Jesus is Lord” rather than “Caesar as Lord.” Both Jew and Gentile rejected the Christians because they preached Christ crucified “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Christians could have easily avoided persecution from Rome if they had continued to practice the Jewish religious ceremonies. Such a practice would have rendered them – in the eyes of Rome – indistinguishable from the Jews whose religious practices they tolerated.

- The message of the gospel is an “offense” or “stumbling block” (σκανδαλον). In 1 Corinthians Paul offers instruction on this very point. Jews demanded miraculous signs and Greeks demanded impressive orations of wisdom. But the gospel does not indulge these demands. Rather it offers a crucified Savior – God incarnate who took on human flesh, identifying with sinners in their weakness and suffering. This message was rejected by both Jew and Gentile whose religious and aesthetic sensibilities were offended by such a message. The gospel draws attention to our sin. It draws attention to our neediness. And the gospel makes clear our absolute dependence upon God’s grace for salvation.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:21-24)

## 2. The Obligation of Gospel Freedom

Vv. 12-15

- The gospel does not free us from obligation but, rather, liberates us to fulfill the proper obligations of loving God and neighbor. Gospel freedom is not the freedom of self-indulgence (which is actually bondage). It is the growing freedom the believer experiences from the bonds of sin. It is the freedom to do that which glorifies God and blesses our neighbor. To express it in theological terms: Justification leads inevitably to sanctification.

### A) Gospel freedom is not a license to sin.

Vs. 13 – “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

- Life under the law’s power to condemn is bondage. But Paul reminds us here that the freedom of the gospel is not a license to return to the bondage of sin. Gospel freedom is not the freedom of sinful indulgence but the freedom to love and serve.

### B) Gospel freedom obligates us to love one another.

Vs. 14 – “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

- The gospel of Jesus Christ does not call us to a thin or sentimental love. The love prescribed by God’s law is a love which finds expression in humble service toward one another.

Vs. 15 – “But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

- Paul employs graphic imagery to depict the antithesis of loving service. Love is life-giving. But hate, jealousy, quarrelling, etc. are only ever destructive. Don’t miss the connection to Paul’s broader message. Meritorious religion leads to comparison and competition and fruitless quarrels. As we strive by our own might to be justified before God we will inevitably find ourselves comparing the conduct of our brothers and sisters to our own, seeking some advantage. Such competition is necessarily tied to legalism and ends in mutual devouring.
- Truly believing that our standing before God is guaranteed by grace through faith alone is liberating. It liberates us from the damning condemnation of sin. But it also liberates us to love our neighbor freely without fear that we are losing something in the process.