



FREE TO RUN **Galatians 5:1-15**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Galatians 5. We find ourselves in Galatians 5 this morning; I find myself one week out from a marathon. It is appropriate that the text that we're looking at this morning actually talks about running a race.

So, we come to this text in Galatians 5 where Paul's talking about running a race, and it's a very important part in the whole book of Galatians. We've already seen up to this point, Galatians is kind of divided in a sense into two chapter blocks. Galatians 1 and 2 went together to really show us how we're saved by grace alone through faith alone. Then, Galatians 3 and 4 go together to show us how it's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He's supreme, and it's by Christ that we are delivered from slavery into sonship. We're not slaves, we're sons in a relationship with God.

So, we've seen that to this point. It's been pretty deeply theological, and what we have in Galatians 5...not that Paul hasn't given us anything practical to this point; he has, but there is a decided shift from gospel theology to gospel practice; gospel theology to gospel living. That's what we're going to see in Galatians 5, and he's going to talk about running a race and how the Galatians have been running a race and now they're off track.

This is imagery that's familiar to Paul. Oftentimes, he uses athletic imagery or imagery like that; talks about how we're running a race, or we're in a battle or in a war or in a fight. Now, what's important...this is really important to note...whenever Paul uses imagery like this, he never uses this imagery to talk about what it means to come to faith in Christ. What it means to be justified to use the language he's used at this point and shown us a picture up to this point.

Instead, he always uses athletic imagery...running a race, fighting a battle, even...to describe our life in Christ. That's important, because I think in our day today a lot of us have this idea that, "Well, come to Christ, you pray this prayer, and you're in, and now it's just smooth sailing. The Christian life is rolling down a hill with the wind breezing through our hair, and everything is set. We believe in Christ; we're going to heaven. It's sealed. Let me move on with my life."

That is not the way the New Testament describes the Christian life. The New Testament describes the Christian life as a battle, as a war, as a race, as a marathon. Not even just a sprint or 50-yard dash; it's a race that we're running in, struggling through, and fighting through. That's the way Paul describes the Christian life.

Now, how do you struggle and fight and run but not be legalistic in the process, thinking you're trying to earn your way to God? That's where Galatians 5 and 6 is going to help us, and why Galatians 5 and 6 is so extremely important for us to understand today.

So, what I want to do is I want to read the first half of Galatians 5, and then I want us to talk about what it means to be free in Christ. Galatians 5:1. Paul writes,

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. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

You were running a good race. [Here's the imagery there.] Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves.

[We'll talk about that later.] *You, my brothers...* [You didn't know how exciting our time was going to be in the Word this morning.] *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

Galatians 5:1 is one of the most important, if not the most important, verses in this book because it really encapsulates the whole picture. If you don't have it underlined, I would encourage you to underline it. What Paul does in this first verse and fifth chapter, he says...he sums up everything he said at this point: "It's for freedom that Christ has set us free. Set us free. As a result of freedom, stand firm, then, and don't be yoked again in slavery. Run in freedom."

Two Enemies of Christian Freedom ...

So, what Paul does is he starts talking about Christian freedom. I'm convinced that this word, "freedom," is one of the most abused and misunderstood words in the entire Christian vocabulary. All kinds of people claim freedom in Christ to indulge in all kinds of things that have nothing to do with Christ. So, we need to see a biblical picture of what it means to be free in Christ. So, what Paul does is he starts by talking about two enemies of Christian freedom, and you see those kind of permeating throughout this passage we just read, and then, we see Christian freedom described.

Legalism

So, that's how I want us to take it. First, two enemies of Christian freedom. Number one is legalism. It's one we've already seen a lot to this point. Legalism: it's that first blank there. Christian freedom...enemy to Christian freedom is legalism. Working to earn the favor of

God. Whether according to our own rules or according to God's rules, even, it's working to earn the favor of God. That's legalism.

Now, what Paul is saying here in Galatians 5 is he's addressing the picture of legalism that is being promoted by the Judaizers in the churches in Galatia. The example of legalism...the example that he's used is circumcision. Now, it's something he has talked about a good bit up to this point, but specifically, he addresses it in the verses we just read. The Judaizers were saying, "You need to be circumcised in order to be saved. You need to be circumcised in order to be made right before God. You need to do this."

Now, it's important that we realize that Paul was not against circumcision in and of itself. Earlier in the book, he talked about how he didn't want Titus to be circumcised and he encouraged Titus not to be circumcised, because in doing so, Titus would be showing that, apparently, you need to do this in order to be saved. At the same time, in another point of the New Testament, Paul actually encourages Timothy to be circumcised. This is why later in this passage you see Paul talk about how some are accusing him of preaching circumcision, because he told Timothy, "You need to be circumcised." The reason was, first of all, Timothy's mom was a Jew; but then more importantly, Paul and Timothy were working among Jews, and this was a barrier, so to speak, to the Jews receiving the gospel and hearing the gospel from them.

So, what they did is they said, "It'd be better for the advance of the gospel if you were like them." Kind of what Paul talks about... "Become like you in order to lead you to Christ." So, Paul's not against circumcision; he was circumcised. The difference is, Paul is adamantly against circumcision and/or anything else that we put as a regulation or a rule to follow in order to achieve salvation, in order to be made right before God or earn favor before God. He's against Sabbaths; he's against feasts; he's against anything no matter how small or how big, that we put on the table to think, "When I do this, I'm going to earn favor before God."

Now, circumcision is the deal here in Galatians, but there are innumerable examples of legalism like this around us today. There are many people who believe, "Well, if I do work for the church or do work in the church, then I'm earning favor before God." Many people base their status before God on the frequency of their personal devotions, and if time and prayer into the Word is going well, then I'm right before God. If it's not going well, well, then, I don't want to be around God. I'm not right before God, I don't have favor before God. A lot of people base their favor before God based on an aisle they walked or a prayer they prayed or a hand they raised. Well, that was it.

Here's the deal: No matter how small or big, if we put anything that we do, anything that we do as the means by which favor before God is earned, then we're undercutting the gospel. It's legalism, no matter how small or big, we're undercutting.

The example here is circumcision. The effect of legalism is contamination. Paul says in verse 9, "*A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.*" What Paul is saying is, "Legalism spreads." Just a little bit spreads and spreads violently. It's like Paul's saying one drop of poison...just one small drop...can destroy the whole body.

This is the picture in the church. It's why he's so vehement here about addressing circumcision, because of the contamination that was running throughout the church. That's why in the church today we have a responsibility. Us, in this room, The Church at Brook Hills, we have a responsibility to vehemently oppose anything...any teaching in any small group, any large group gathering, that is not gospel-centered, gospel-saturated. Any

teaching that's not gospel needs to be weeded out completely, because it contaminates the whole church. Things that we may not even think are that big a deal.

People say, "Well, justified by faith or justified by faith alone? Is there really that big a difference?" Yes, there's a radically big difference, and we've got to differentiate between the two. "Well, Jesus is a way to God and Jesus is the way to God. Is it really that big a difference? Can't you believe one and the other?" No, absolutely not. These are huge.

We've got to be careful to guard the gospel in the church. That's what Paul is saying. Because the effect is contamination, and the end of it, the result of legalism, is condemnation. This is when Paul gets really serious. He says in verse 10, "*I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one...*" listen to this, "*The one who has thrown you into confusion...*" who's promoting legalism, "*...will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.*" You promote legalism in the church, you will pay a price, Paul says.

Then, he gets down to verse 12. "*As for those agitators, I wish they could go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*" Paul is basically saying that he wishes these Judaizers who were talking about circumcision would, basically, just finish the job. This is not Bob Barker talking about having your pet spayed or neutered. This is Paul saying, one translation says, "Tell those who are disturbing you I would like to see the knife slip."

You know, I've prayed about how to even address this verse right here. How do you even begin to describe...I've said some...I think I've said some hard things from the pulpit here in Brook Hills. I have never said this right here, though. Why does Paul say this? Is he just being crude? No, Paul is showing us that anything that undercuts the gospel should be met with great force. Luther...I love the way Luther put it. He said, talking about Galatians 1 and this passage, he says,

Here the question arises whether Christians are permitted to curse. Yes, they are permitted to do so, but not always and not just for any reason. But when things come to the point where the Word is about to be cursed or its teaching, and as a consequence God himself blasphemed, then you must invert your sentence and say, "Blessed be the Word of God, and cursed be anything apart from the Word and apart from God, whether it be an apostle or an angel from heaven."

I love the way John Stott put it. He said, "If we were as concerned for God's church and God's Word as Paul was, we too would wish that false teachers might cease from the land." "Be passionate about protecting gospel truth in the church," Paul says, "because any small bit of legalism contaminates the whole church and ultimately brings condemnation." So, this is the first enemy of Christian freedom: legalism.

License

Second enemy of Christian freedom is license. License. Now, license is the opposite of legalism. Legalism says, "Obey the law and earn favor before God." License says, "Forget about the law altogether." This is what Paul's opponents, so to speak, would say to him. They would say, "If we're saved by faith alone, we don't have to do anything. Well, then, people are just going to live licentious lives. They're just going to indulge in themselves all the time."

Paul knows that that's a possibility, a possible perversion of the gospel. So, he addresses it here in Galatians 5, which we're going to see in a minute, and it's so important. So many supposed Christians who say, "Well, I'm free in Christ. That means I can live however I

want. It means I can do whatever I want. Freedom in Christ...this is what I have in Christ." Freedom in Christ, all of a sudden, becomes a basis for all kinds of loose living, licentious actions, and this is not the gospel. People say, "Well, I believed in Christ. I prayed the prayer, and I believed in Christ, and now I know I'm going to heaven, doesn't matter what I do."

Paul says, "Gospel truth is never intended only to be believed. Gospel truth is always intended to be obeyed." Gospel truth is never, never, never intended only to be believed. It is always intended to be obeyed. This is the language Paul uses when he brings in this imagery in verse 7. He says, "*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?*"

Now, he's not talking about obedience here as a means to earn favor before God. That's legalism. Obedience as a means to earn favor before God; that's legalism. However, that doesn't mean obedience is just thrown out of the picture. Obedience is still a fundamental part of the Christian life, but it's no longer a means of earning favor before God; it's something very different, which Paul's going to show us what it is. However, it's not just thrown out the window.

People say, "Well, I accepted Jesus, so it doesn't matter what I do. I'm going to heaven when I die because I accepted Jesus." Gospel truth is never intended to be accepted in our heads. It's always intended to be applied in our lives. Never intended only to be accepted in our heads; gospel truth always intended to be applied in our lives.

Four Essentials of Christian Freedom ...

So, how is the gospel applied in our lives? That's what leads us to Paul's description of Christian freedom. You've got legalism over here, license over here, and then you've got liberty; you have Christian freedom. So, how do you avoid legalism and license? You bring them together in liberty...Christian freedom, and Paul gives us a description of what that is, and it is a beautiful description. I hope that this will connect a lot of the dots that we have been talking about, not just here in the series on Galatians but in the last year. Put some of these things together. Four essentials of Christian freedom.

What we're going to do is we're going to look at these essentials based on verses 5 and 6. We talked about verse one being a very important verse in the whole book. In this passage we just read, central verses, verses 5 and 6, you might underline these in your Bible. "*By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.*" That is a loaded verse. He says, "*In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*"

We live by faith.

So, what I want us to do is I want us to take those two verses, and I want us to see what Christian freedom is all about. Essential number one...Christian freedom: We live by faith. We live by faith. That's what he starts verse 5 with: "*By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit, the righteousness for which we hope.*"

Now, this is not a new thing for us in Galatians. We see this all over Galatians, right? Paul's always talking about faith. What he's doing is he's reminding us, "Okay, we're taking gospel theology, applying it to gospel living. We are not...we are not working for God." Christian life is not an employee/employer relationship with God. That's not Christianity. That's how

we often think about Christianity. We might not put it that way, but oftentimes, we see ourselves as employees of God, and God has enlisted us for His services. We do these things, and when we do these things, we're earning favor before God.

Paul addresses this, in Romans 4:4-5, he says, *"When a man works..."* he's an employee. *"When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation."* In other words, any employer in this room knows that you pay employees, not as much as a gift to them, as an obligation to them. You're obligated to give them money in return for their services.

Then, Paul says, *"However, to the man who does not work but who trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."* So, righteousness is not an obligation. Favor before God, even, is not an obligation that God gives to us because of what we do. Instead, it's something we're given by faith. We're not working for God.

Now, what Paul does is he hits this from three different angles in verse 2, 3, and 4, and I want to show them to you. Verse 2, *"Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised..."* If you try to work for God, he says, "First, Christ will be of no value to you." So, if we try to work for God, if that's what Christianity is about...us figuring out how to work better for God this week, and us coming together every week, being a people who are trying to work for God...if that's the case, then number one, we will lose the benefits of Christ. We will lose the benefits of Christ. "Christ will have no value to you at all," Paul says. Paul says, "You depend on your work, then you don't need Christ's work anymore. Apparently, you can do what it takes to earn favor before God, and therefore, the work of Christ is not necessary for you anymore. Either you need Christ for everything, or you will have Christ for nothing." You lose the benefits of Christ whenever you add the smallest work. No matter how small you might think it might be, whenever you or I add the smallest work, we're saying, "Well, I need to do something here," and you're undercutting the whole value of Christ. We lose the benefits of Christ.

Second, we gain...we lose the benefits of Christ, and we gain the burden of the law. Paul says in verse 3, *"I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law."* Paul says, "You pick up this one small part of the law, you're picking up the whole deal with it. As soon as you say, 'I'm going to do this in order to earn favor before God,' then you've got to do everything to earn favor before God. You've taken the law, and you've put that burden on your shoulders. You didn't intend to, but when you try to obey the law in this area to try to earn favor before God, then you've got to do it in every single area."

So, we lose the benefits of Christ, we gain the burden of the law, and ultimately, we miss the grace of God. He says in verse 4, *"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; and you have fallen away from grace."* Now, this verse causes a bit of confusion. A lot of people read this verse, and they start thinking, "Well, does this mean you can...when it says 'fall from grace' does it mean you can lose your salvation?" Obviously, we have seen, as we've studied God's Word, that Scripture nowhere teaches that we can lose our salvation. Paul doesn't teach that here in Galatians.

All throughout this book, he's referring to the Galatian Christians as "brothers," over and over and over again, and not one time does he talk about being unjustified. It's not a term in Paul's vocabulary; it's not a picture that he ever gives us. He's not talking about being unjustified. In fact, we see a strong confidence that the Spirit of Christ in these believers will bring them out of this.

However, what Paul is saying, the word he uses there to "fall from," literally, in the original language, the New Testament means to lose grasp of. To lose your hold on. The picture he's saying to them, "You're saved by grace. You clung to it, but now...now, you're letting go of the very grace for which you've been saved, and you're beginning to live like you weren't saved by grace. It's not adding up. So, hold on to grace. Don't let go of grace. Hold on to grace." Luther said, "What can be more insane and wicked than to want to lose the grace and favor of God and to retain the law of Moses, whose retention makes it necessary for you to accumulate wrath and every other evil for yourself?" Don't work for God. Don't try to work for God.

We are not working for God. Well, then, what are we doing? What is Christianity about? We're not working for God; we are trusting in God. We are not working for God because, ladies and gentlemen, God is working for us. Now again, not as an employee/employer relationship, and now, "We're the employer, and God's the employee." No. We talked about this: God's pleasure in us is not based on our performance for Him. Instead, God's pleasure in us is based on whose performance? Christ's. Christ's performance for us. Everything we do that we would label working for God...praying, studying the Word, working in the church, doing all of these things...even those things are God working in us for us. There's nothing we can do for God that He is not doing for us, in us.

The work we work in Galatians 1 is the work that Christ so powerfully, the strength which Christ provides in us. Even our gifts to God are gifts from God. Even our gifts to God are gifts from God. He is doing it all in us because He gets the glory for everything that's going on in us. That's the picture.

So, we're not working for God; we're trusting in God. We live by faith. He gets to the end of that back to back to back in verses 2, 3, and 4, and he says, "By faith, by faith, by faith...we live by faith." So, a life of freedom is a life of faith. All revolves around faith in Christ, and that's the first essential.

We live through the Spirit.

Second, we live...Christian freedom...we live by faith, and we live through the Spirit. We live through the Spirit. Verse 5, "*By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit...*" Christian freedom happens through the Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit is all over the book of Galatians, and especially here in Galatians 5 and 6. Galatians 5 and 6, and we'll see this even more in the last half of this chapter.

Galatians 5 and 6 are just a portrait of the Spirit-filled life and the role of the Holy Spirit, the transformation the Holy Spirit brings in our lives. So, Christian freedom is dependent on living through the Spirit. So, what does the Spirit do in us? Well, first of all, the Spirit enables us to experience the presence of Christ. We've seen this already in Galatians 2:20, 3:5. "*I've been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*"

Now, how does that happen? Christ lives in you or Christ lives in me? How does Christ live in you? How does Christ live in me? Through who? The Spirit. The Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God is the one who dwells in us and enables us to experience the presence of Christ in us. The Spirit is the one who unites our lives with Christ. If the Spirit's not there, then Christ is still out here, and we're here. However, because of the Spirit, Christ is in us.

This is huge for Christian freedom, because we are not free from Christ. Instead, we are free to Christ. Now, when I say we're not free from Christ, we're free to Christ, that seems obvious, and it is obvious. However, so many people think that Christian freedom means, "I

live however I want. I do whatever I want. I make my own decisions. I live according to a lifestyle I choose. I do what I want."

What we've got to realize is that whenever we say that...whenever we say, "Well, because I'm free, I live however I want," the reality is what we're admitting when we say that is we are living in slavery, and we're not free at all. Think about it. "I live however I want." Even in that picture, we see that we're living as slaves to ourselves and our desires, and what we want. Sinful nature desires these things... "I'm free to live for those." No, you're slaves to yourselves. You have been delivered from that. You're free from yourselves and free from your sin. You're free to who? To Christ. Now, you're free to live however Christ wants. You weren't before, but by the grace of God in your life, through faith in Christ, now you're free to live the way you were created to live, in Christ.

You're free to experience the beauty and the glory and the joy of the presence of Christ in your life. That's what you're free to. Not free from Christ to yourselves to do whatever you want. You're free from yourselves to Christ to do whatever He wants, and the beauty of it is, now, He begins to transform your wants and begins to transform your desires, so that what you want is what Christ wants, and not what the world wants. Not what the self, the sinful nature, wants.

That's what we'll see in the next verses that come in Galatians 5, but the picture is the Spirit enables us to experience the presence of Christ. We're free to Christ, and not just the presence of Christ, but the Spirit enables us to enjoy the commands of Christ. Now, here's where it gets really exciting. We're going to talk more a little bit later about the law and the law's relationship to us once in the Spirit, but the picture here is Christ, by His Spirit, when Christ is living in us, that doesn't mean we're free from the words of Christ, the commands of Christ that He's given us. Remember, we're free to Christ, free to His Word, free to His commands.

So, when we come to the New Testament, we don't say, "Well, I'm free, so I'm just going to leave that behind and live however I want." No, now we're free to obey the law of Christ and the commands of Christ and the words of Christ. This is exactly what Jesus says, John 15, remember? *"If you love me, you will obey my..."* what? "Commands. You'll obey my commands if you love me. I say this so that you'll remain in my love and my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete."

So, not only will you obey them, but you'll enjoy them. "You'll want them; you'll desire them, because you're in a love relationship with me." This is why you get to 1 John 5:3, and John says, "This is love for God: to obey His commands." Now, think about that. How do we look at 1 John 5:3 and not say legalism? "Obey His commands, do this, and you'll earn love for God." That's not what it's saying. That's not what Scripture is teaching. What Scripture is saying is obedience, love toward God, go together, and their fruits are the Spirit of Christ in us.

Which is why, right after that in 1 John 5:3 the Bible says, "His commands are not burdensome." Before, when we were slaves to the law, the law was a burden that we were trying to carry. Now, the words of Christ are a delight because He is living in us through His Spirit, and by faith, through the Spirit, we are walking in His commands. We are enjoying His commands, and the New Testament is alive for us. His words, we delight in His law; we love His words, because Christ in us loves His words, and He's transforming who we are. This is what happens by faith through the Spirit.

As a result, we're not free to sin; we are free from sin. We're not free to indulge in sin, as Paul talks about later in verse 13. We're not free to sin; we're free from sin. We don't say, "Well, I've been saved and now I can sin all I want; I'm going to heaven." That makes no sense. Misses the whole point of the gospel. You're not free to sin; you're free from sin. So, walk in freedom, by faith, through the Spirit.

You see how Paul is addressing legalism and license. Legalism: live by faith, not working for God, trusting in God. License: No. You have the Spirit of Christ in you, then, you're indulging in the things of this world and calling it freedom? No, the Spirit of Christ in you is enabling you to obey the Word of Christ day in and day out, and you're trusting Him to do it by faith through the Spirit. Freedom is a good thing, and it's biblical. Really good...by faith, through the Spirit.

We live in hope.

Next, it gets even better. Not that it hasn't been good to this point, but it gets even better. We live by faith, through the Spirit, in hope. Third essential to Christian freedom: We live in hope. Verse 5: "*By faith we eagerly await...*" not work; we wait, "*...through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.*"

So, Paul here describes the Christian life as waiting. Even when he's talking about running here, he said we're waiting. How do you run and wait at the same time? How do you live a Christian life where you're not working for God but you're waiting, in a sense. What is he talking about here?

What he's saying when he says, "We live in hope," that word "waiting" implies that there's something out there in the future that we're looking forward to, that we're wanting or waiting for. So, what are we waiting for? What are we wanting that's out there in the future? What he says is, "We long for, we want, we desire, we look forward to, we're waiting for the guarantee of His righteousness. The guarantee of His righteousness. Paul says, "*We eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.*"

Now, even by the way I word that, I don't want to, in any way, imply that our salvation is not guaranteed, that the guarantee of our salvation is based on our works. That's not what Paul's teaching and not, in any way, what I want to say here. However, the picture that Paul's giving us here when he says, "We wait through the Spirit...await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope", what he's saying is that he knows there's coming a day, we know there's coming a day when we will stand before God. Now, we are already counted righteous in Christ. We have been justified through faith; we have peace with God through Christ; we've been reconciled to Him; we've been clothed in His righteousness. All these things are realities now, but we know that there is coming a day in the future when we will stand before God, and we will experience the fullness...the full manifestation of, the full realization of our righteousness in Christ.

Paul says, "We long for that day; we look forward to that day." I love this. This is Paul saying, "I can't wait for the Day of Judgment. I cannot wait to stand before God and to experience the fullness of the righteousness of Christ applied to my life." What a great picture!

Let me ask you a question. Do you long with eager anticipation for the day when you'll stand before God, that Day of Judgment? This is not how we think about the Day of Judgment. Most people don't think, "I look forward to what happens when I die and I stand before God to give an account for my life." As long as we're living in legalism, then we should not look forward to that day, because there's more work to do; there's more boxes

to check off. "Just got to do a few more things to make sure we're going to make the cut." If we're living in license, then we're not looking forward to the day. We show it by the way we're living. We're enjoying today. All the stuff that this world has to offer us. Our thoughts are not on that world.

However, freedom is living with eager anticipation for the day when the full realization of the righteousness of Christ is applied in our lives and our salvation is complete, but we're not there yet. We're not there yet, so we long for the guarantee of His righteousness, and we live to grow into His righteousness. We're not there yet. We're not there yet. We have a righteous standing before God. We're counted righteous in Christ because of faith in Christ. We know that we're going to heaven based on the righteousness of Christ that is there, but we still sin, don't we? We struggle with sin. We battle, and we war with sin, just like Paul talks about. We want to experience the fullness of His righteousness, but we have sin that we struggle with here, and this is...this just transforms the Christian life.

This is freedom. You can tell...you can tell the Christian...you can tell the person who's been saved by faith, walking through the Spirit in hope, because when our eyes are set on the righteousness of Christ in heaven, and we're living for the day when we will experience the fullness of His righteousness, then when we sin here, when we fall, that moment in the day that we fall, we think, "No. No, I don't want that. I'm free from that. Not free to do that; I don't want that. I want the fullness of His righteousness. Now, I'm not working to earn righteousness; my righteousness is heaven, and I cannot wait for the day when I'll experience the fullness of it, and I want to live in it now; I want to live in it more and more and more every day, by faith, through the Spirit, living to grow into His righteousness."

The free life is good. It's really good. It's not easy; it's a race; it's a marathon. It's 26 miles, and you're at mile two. You've got 24 to go, but you know that mile 26 is coming. You know that you're going to cross that finish line. You know that victory's going to be yours. I don't necessarily know that for sure next week, but you know that in the Christian life. You know the day is coming when you're going to cross the line, and God's going to say, "Right in Christ." So, you're running, and you're living to experience that fullness. This changes the way you run. You don't run like you don't have hope; you don't run like you're defeated; you don't run like you're always getting distracted. No, you run because you want to get to the finish line. This is the picture of the Christian life. Freedom is good.

It's what Paul talks about. Oh, Romans 8:24, 25, 26...somewhere in there...when he says, "We know the whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves...we ourselves, who have the Spirit in us groan inwardly as we wait...we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

He's talking about going through suffering. He says, "It's going to end one day, and I'm groaning, and I'm waiting eagerly for that day. For in this hope, we were saved," he says, "but hope that is seen is no hope at all. We hope for what we do not yet have, and we wait for it patiently."

Talked with one brother after the gathering, earlier gathering this morning, and back in June, he and his wife lost a child...young child, infant...and in the process discovered there was a problem with his wife. She had cancer, and just a couple of weeks ago, she passed away. This brother has been through so much in the last six months. He says, "I'm waiting. I'm waiting for full redemption, the completion of salvation. For this to one day be declared over and to experience the fullness of righteousness."

This is the picture; this is where we live; this is the free way to live...with hope, not with fear of death. If you fear death this morning, I urge you at this moment right now, trust in the righteousness of Christ for you. Trust in the righteousness of Christ for you. Don't keep trying to figure out what you can do later today to make sure you're going to be okay and get rid of this fear. No, trust in the righteousness of Christ for you right now, at this moment. Say, "Yes, I believe you have died on a cross for my sins, and you've risen from the grave, and your righteousness is mine, free. Free, not as an obligation, but as a gift, and I trust in you. Change me. I live by faith in your Spirit, and I want the hope...I want the hope that you give." He gives it. He gives it. Do it now, trust in Him right now. Eternity is based on this. Be free to live by faith through the Spirit in hope.

We live with love.

The last component of Christian freedom...told you it was getting good...by faith, through the Spirit, in hope with love. We live with love. Verse 6: *"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."* That is such a monumental phrase: *"Faith expressing itself through love."* This is not Paul saying, "We are justified by faith and love." He's not adding love to the equation. Justified by faith alone, but it's a faith that expresses itself through love.

Now, this is how we can look in books like the book of James, 1 John, and we can see James talking about, "Well, if there are no works from your faith, then your faith is dead." 1 John saying, "The love of God is not in you, then you're not a child of God." Because faith...faith alone: the means by which we're justified. We see that over and over and over again, but it's expressed through love. What Paul is saying is that love is essential to salvation. Not as a means of salvation; loving others, means of salvation? No, that's legalism, but love is an essential expression of faith. Faith expressing itself through love. "You'll know my disciples by their..." what? "Love. By their love." It'll be evident.

This is why...connect the dots here. "Radical" in the Fall, what we talked about there, 30,000 children today dying of either starvation or preventable diseases. If we indulge in our luxuries here and turn a deaf ear to the poor there, then that is not faith expressing itself through love. Now, does it mean, "Well, go out and try to love? Try to do for them so that you can earn salvation?" No, it means there's a problem with our faith, because it's not being expressed through love.

So, go back to your faith. Is Christ in you, number one? Then, number two, if Christ is in you, then ask Him to produce this kind of love through you. Trust Him to do it. Say to Him, "I need you to do this." This is the picture. Faith expressed...it's what Paul says in verse 13: *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge a sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."*

Now, this is where it gets really interesting. Paul has just spent five-plus chapters telling us that we're free and we're no longer slaves. Then, he gets to verse 13, and the second half of this verse, he says, *"Do not use your freedom to indulge a sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."* The word for "serve" there is literally the New Testament word for "slave." That's weird. You are free; you're not a slave anymore, and you're free to be slaves; now be a slave. Let's just close the book. "We just don't get it, Paul. That's...that's...what do you mean, we're free to be slaves?"

Here's what Paul's saying. We are free from slavery to the law. He has said this. You've got to be careful here. This doesn't mean the law is bad, and we just leave it behind, especially New Testament law, law of Christ. In fact, we'll see later in Galatians 6:2 when we carry each other's burdens, when we love one another, we fulfill the law. The law is apparently

good. Words of Christ are good, commands of Christ are good. Not Mosaic law...new covenant, new picture. A whole other story.

However, the picture here is where slavery to the law as a burden that we're trying to carry in order to earn favor before God...we're free from slavery to the law, but we are free to the slavery of love. We are free to be slaves to one another in love. Don't miss the difference: slavery to the law, involuntary, burden walking under it, trying to earn favor before God. Slavery to love is joyfully living for the sake of other people out of love for them. The slavery of love.

I was trying to think of a good analogy, illustration, relationship that could help us picture this, and I think the closest thing is marriage. However, even then, though it's designed...Ephesians 5 is a picture of this...it's still insufficient. When you picture the slavery of love, just picture Christ. Picture Mark 10:45: *"The Son of Man did not come to be..."* what? *"...to be served, but to serve."* He came to serve. Why? Because He was obligated to? Because He had to? He was burdened to? No, because He desired to.

He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. When you think of the slavery of love, think of the passion, the death of Christ. The cross...think of the cross when you think of the slavery of love, and here's the reality: When the Christ who came not to be served but to serve and to sacrifice His life for us, when that Christ is living in you, that radically changes the way you live in relationship to the people around you, doesn't it? Doesn't that make sense? How can you live for yourself when Christ is in you? It's not possible. You live for other people; you live to serve. You're a slave to other people. You sacrifice yourself for other people. That's the picture. It's the New Testament community, it's the New Testament church. We're free to the slavery of love.

So, we no longer indulge ourselves in selfish sin. That's verse 13: *"Do not use your freedom to indulge a sinful nature..."* Now, this is so huge when we talk about freedom. We're Americans, and we talk about freedom all the time. We protect our freedoms; we fight for our freedoms; we cling to our freedoms, debate our freedoms...all of these things. Freedom, freedom, freedom. What do we mean when we say "freedom?"

At the core, don't we mean, "I'm free to do whatever I want?" You think about it, even the current debates, moral debates that are going on in our country today. "I'm free to believe whatever I want; I'm free to marry whoever I want; I'm free to live according to however I want; I'm free to do however I want." I read one sociologist. I think he was spot on. He said, "Freedom is perhaps the most resonant, deeply held American value, yet freedom in America means being left alone by others. Not having other people's values, ideas, or styles of life forced upon you. Being free of arbitrary authority in work, family, and political life." Free to do whatever you want, believe whatever you want, think however you want, live however you want...it's autonomy, freedom.

Now, I want you to think about how we take that...that, I would say, misunderstood concept of freedom...and we bring it into the church and we say,

I'm going to follow Christ, but I'm going to live however I want. I'm going to follow Christ, but I'm going to follow Him on my terms, so that when He says, "Give up everything you have to be my disciple," I'm going to take that verse and put it over here in my mind. Doesn't apply to me. When He says, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor," I'm going to take that verse and put it over here, because that doesn't apply to me. I'm going to pick and choose

areas of life that fit best with me according to Scripture, and that's what I'm going to live according to.

That is not New Testament Christianity. It's slavery to ourselves, and it's what we've been freed from. It's slavery to our stuff, and it's what we've been free from. The picture is, we are free not to indulge ourselves in selfish sin. Not to indulge ourselves in all this stuff we want. We are free now to serve each other with selfless love. He says, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself."

Don't you love this? This is Paul saying, "You know that natural inclination you have in you that exalts yourself? Well, use that to change the way you look at others practically." The Bible says, "You know that zeal you have when you feel hungry to get some food? You know how you take care of that and you provide for that? Take 30,000 children that are dying today of starvation, preventable diseases, and you live with that kind of zeal to get them food. You know how thankful you are inside that someone introduced you to Christ? Live with that kind of zeal for a billion people in the world who haven't even heard of Christ. You know that passion you have to get all the details in your life right, care about all those details? Live with that kind of passion for the details in the life of the brother or sister that is sitting right next to you."

This is an unnatural way to live, and it's exactly what Paul's saying. You can't manufacture this kind of love. That's the point. How does it come? How do you have that kind of love? By faith through the Spirit. It's faith expressing itself through love. We need Christ to give us this kind of love. It's the fruit of the Spirit, right?

Later on...we haven't even looked at the verse; you know. The fruit of the Spirit is what? Love. That's where it starts...love. Spirit produces this kind of love, and so we need to go to Christ and to say, "I need you, I need..." It's a lack of faith is what it is. Brothers and sisters, it's a lack of faith that keeps us clinging to our stuff and our indulging in luxuries, and ignoring the poor. It's a lack of faith because we need to trust God, that He's better than all of those things; that Christ is sufficient and satisfying more than all those things, and we need to ask Christ to give us freedom from those things, to begin to love like He loves in us, how are we going to let go of our stuff and give ourselves to the poor in the nations? We're going to do that when Christ takes over our hearts. We need Him to take over our hearts by faith, through the Spirit. We need Him to do this in us.

That's the only way we're going to lay down our lives and sacrifice everything for the sake of the glory in Christ in all nations, when Christ has radically taken hold of our hearts. It's a faith that expresses itself through love. This is the only way that you're going to begin to share the gospel with that person in your workplace that's sitting right next to you that you know you want to share the gospel with. You know they need to hear the gospel, but you've got this insecurity, this timidity. Well, you need Christ in you.

So What Does It Mean To Be Free?

You need Christ to give you the strength and the love to overcome that insecurity and say, "Yes, I want to share the gospel with you." Christ changes everything. It's the life of freedom by faith through the Spirit in hope with love. Free to serve each other with selfless love. You see how we have so misunderstood and abused this concept. Christian freedom, living by faith, through the Spirit in hope with love.

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