

Christ Our Liberator Galatians 5:1-15

How many of you enjoy running? How many of you need to after this week? I've been running for the past two years, but before this I had really no desire to run. It was punishment when I was playing baseball in college. I loathed spring conditioning. In baseball, you run 90 ft and stop! So, I've only been in two races in the last 10 years. One, in NOLA, a Lady pushing a stroller passed me up! Another, I finished in third place... in 1 K... with 1st graders. One thing that was amusing about the 1st graders was how they all sprinted from the starting line, but a few hundred yards later, they tanked.

These kids were sort of like the Galatians. Paul illustrates their failure to keep running till the end by saying:

You were running well. What hindered you from obeying the truth?

Galatians 5:7

The Galatians started out terrific, but tanked...

- The author of Hebrews says that weight and sin can hinder us.
- But something else can as well: false teaching. Such is the case of the Galatians.

They failed to understand how you live the Christian life, once you get in the race. Particularly, they failed to understand Christian freedom.

Let's look at this freedom that Jesus has brought us. Notice 3 instructions for running/living in the freedom of Christ:

1. Christ has set us free – Live free! (5:1)

5:1. “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit to the yoke of slavery.”

“If Galatians is the Magna Carta of Christian liberty, then Gal 5:1 has reason to be considered one of the key verses of the epistle” (George). Indeed, this is one of the key verses.

Live free. “**For freedom**” he has done this! He has not set you free “for slavery” to your old idols!

This sentence functions as a **transition verse** between the last section and what follows. Paul just discussed freedom (chs 3-4,

esp., 4:7). Instead of living as "sons" they were reverting to slavery to idols, the law, and elementary principles. Paul illustrates with Isaac and Ishmael to teach that they are children of the free, of promise, "walking miracles," "born of the spirit."

In light of all this, Paul says: don't submit to slavery!

What is to follow is more on freedom. Notice the end of this section in 5:13 – "you were called to freedom, brothers."

5:1a. "Christ has set us free." Christ is our liberator! We should adore our Liberator! This should make us celebrate (cf, Ps. 105:43).

- The Exodus is a beautiful picture of how Christ has delivered us. Jesus liberated us, not from Egypt, but from sin's awful slavery, and has brought us into his kingdom. "If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed." (John 8:36).

Many of you know this, but if you are not adoring him, then it begs the question, why not?

One of the answers is that you have forgotten how terrible slavery was. The gospel is not awesome unless you see the awfulness of your previous condition.

Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet. (T. Watson)

We need to understand what Christ has done in order to adore him and not return to slavery. To understand freedom, think about it like this. As believers, we are freed objectively (technically, legally) from the guilt of sin, but we struggle to be free subjectively (experientially, daily) from the grip of sin.

- Objectively, "There is therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." You are free from the penalty of sin ("justification"). We don't have to live with the sense that we aren't acceptable to God. Rejoice!
- Subjectively (or Experientially) - We need to learn how to live free from the power/grip of sin (we often call this sanctification). "the art of getting used to your justification"

- **Ultimately, we will be free from the presence of sin (glorification).**

The struggle is: Do you believe that you are free objectively, and are overcoming the power of sin subjectively?

Objectively, the Galatians were not walking in this truth. They believed that they needed to contribute to their final salvation. They were basically practicing self-atonement by believing that the gospel was “Jesus + something else.”

- You stand accepted today in Christ. Nothing we can do will make us more or less accepted by him.

Once you see that your greatest need is met, then your other problems of your life are flea bites.

Subjectively, some of you may be failing to rely on God's power to overcome the grip of sin. This idea is taught in places like Romans. Paul says, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies. “Do not let sin reign” implies it doesn't have to reign! **Gal.5:16-25** ... more on this.

1:3-4. “gave himself to deliver us from the present evil age” – *the grip of this age* – Flesh, Elemental Spirits, idolatry, Devil.

Israel got out of Egypt objectively, but slavishness was still in their heart.

Lloyd-Jones on Rom 6: Imagine you were a slave in the Southern US before the Emancipation Proclamation. You can't vote. You don't have rights. Someone could beat you, probably kill you. You don't have rights. Therefore, when you were in town, and a white person said do this or that, you would get frightened and do what they said.... Now, it's ten years later, Emancipation Proclamation is over. You have rights. You walk into town, a white person yells at you. Even though you know in your head that you have rights, you still get scared. You are still acting like a slave. He says, "That is the condition of every Christian." You know in your head you are free. But your heart is still prone to slavery, to idols. You know, "There is no condemnation," but you if still let other people's opinion of you rule, or success or failure to lead to

pride or despair, lust to control, greed to dominate, etc, then functionally you are still living like a slave.

God has freed you from things that you are still enslaved to.
You have to work the gospel down deep.

1b: “Stand Firm!” Standing firm in their freedom will safeguard them against submission to legal bondage; in **v 13** it will safeguard them against danger from the opposite direction: abuse of freedom, indulging the flesh. He is saying "Keep it between the guard rails."

1c: “Don’t submit again to the **yoke of slavery**.” He says, do not put on this yoke. This “yoke” probably refers to false teaching that is saying they are not free, and that they need to keep the law.

- To submit to circumcision and adopt the OT law as a means of salvation is slavery.

They effectively put themselves in
Ishamael’s family instead of Isaacs'.

Notice this argument in Acts: **Acts 13:37-39; 15:7-11**. The Gospel frees us from the law; don’t put a yoke on their necks.

- A real test on if a person/parent is gospel-centered teacher or not is does he/she do as the Pharisees and tie up “heavy burdens” with his list of rules, putting a "yoke" on their neck; or does *he take you to Christ as your final resting place*. Mom, are you taking your kid to Mt Sinai and leaving him there? Or, are you taking him from there and going to Mt. Calvary?
- The default mode of the heart is **self-justification**. Legalism. Every child is a Pharisee in the making. We must teach the gospel which is counter-intuitive. Say, "You can't, but Jesus did!" Give them grace. Give them Galatians. It is a lion that eats up legalists.

Do you love Christ, your liberator? “Christ has set us free!” Some think that if you teach freedom in Christ, no one will want to serve him. It’s actually the opposite. When you love Christ the liberator, it is a pleasure to serve him.

Tullian offers a great illustration:

I close my book *Surprised by Grace*: with a story (not sure if this really happened or is simply parabolic) from Civil War days before America's slaves were freed, about a northerner who went to a slave auction and purchased a young slave girl. As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, "You're free."

With amazement she responded, "You mean, I'm free to do whatever I want?"

"Yes," he said.

"And to say whatever I want to say?"

"Yes, anything."

"And to be whatever I want to be?"

"Yep."

"And even go wherever I want to go?"

"Yes" he answered with a smile. "You're free to go wherever you'd like."

She looked at him intently & said, "Then I will go with you."

Tullian says: "Some fear that grace-delivered, blood-bought, radical freedom will result in loveless license. But as the above story illustrates, redeeming unconditional love alone (not fear, not guilt, not shame) carries the power to compel heart-felt loyalty to the One who bought us." Yes, **heart-felt loyalty to the One who bought us – liberated us.**

"He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." (2 Corinthians 5:14).

David Brained, missionary to Indians in the 1700's, died of TB at age 29. He said, "I never got away from Jesus and him crucified. When my people were gripped by Christ and him crucified, I had no need to give them instructions about morality." Be gripped by Christ, and him crucified - your liberator - who paid it all to free you! Live free from condemnation, and you will grow in sanctification.

1. Christ has set us free – Live in the truth! (5:2-12)

The Galatians were not running in the truth. They were listening to the message of bondage.

In verses 2-12, Paul confronts false teachers. He sustains his argument until **verse 12**, where he ends with a bang! Again, a big problem is the belief in circumcision and keeping the law.

For Paul, circumcision symbolized the religion of **human achievement**, instead of **divine grace**. *It was slavery.*

We can note **5** results of their false message; and **5** characteristics of false messengers.

5 Disastrous Results of Listening to the Message of Bondage:

i. **Christ is viewed as insufficient** (2)

Salvation by human achievement sees Christ as insufficient. Calvin, “**Whoever wants half of Christ loses the whole.**”

Jesus work is perfect! You can’t add to it or improve on it!

i. **You have to obey all of the law** (3)

The ritual of circumcision carried a further all-encompassing obligation: observing the law in its every precept. There was a policy of *gradualism*, you start with this and you then would do more observance or the ceremonial law.

Paul has already said in **3:10** – that **no one can keep it**.

iii. **You fall away from the doctrine of grace** (4)

Many have used this as a proof text that you can lose your salvation, but that’s not what Paul is saying. We know this based on his other texts, and more precisely based on the context here. Paul is talking about **the doctrine of grace**. If you believe salvation is by the law, you have abandoned the belief that salvation is by grace.

He says: you can’t have it both ways: either salvation is by divine accomplishment (Christ died for our sins), or it is by human achievement (your good works).

iv. **You lose the hope of our future salvation** (5)

Righteousness is ours now, but we await our glorification w/ Christ. We are declared righteous, but our righteousness is hidden from the world. It will be unveiled on the last day. On that day it will be undeniable.

*How did we get this hope? By grace through **faith in Christ alone**.*

“My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness.” This keeps us running! **“Crown of righteousness”** (2 Tim. 4).

“If Christ is the end of your journey, there is no fear. You are going to a friend. You may look death in the face with joy.” (S. Rutherford)

But you lose that hope if you become a legalist.

This “waiting” is expressed in **Romans 8:18-19, 23, 25**. 80 years of pain will be as nothing that glory will be so awesome.

Faulty views of heaven include:

- **“Fat Angel on the clouds playing a harp”**
- **“An unending sing along”**
- **“A country club**
- **“A desert island”**
- **“Unending boredom”** --more Greek, pagan philosophy

The glory that will be revealed in the new earth will be an all-satisfying joy.

5:5 – See the contrast to bondage: Live by the Spirit & faith. Until that day, we live *by the Spirit through faith*. This goes back to **3:2-5**. The opposite of this life is one lived by the flesh.

v. **Their Teaching is Irrelevant (6)**

“It doesn’t count for anything.” Note **Gal. 6:15**, new creation!

What does count? **“Faith working through love.”** Not faith + love, but *real faith will be demonstrated with love*.

Love is the fruit of faith. Paul expands on this concept more in verses 13-15, 22.

Those who do not manifest love show that they have never become a new creation.

False teachers were all about this external ritual; Paul says the Christian life is about faith that is demonstrated through love.

5 Characteristics of False Messengers of this Bondage:

- i. They hinder obedience to the truth (7)
- ii. They are not of God (8)

We know they are not sent by God because they are teaching salvation by Jesus + the law, and circumcision.

- I don't care if they tell you they are sent by God, if what they're teaching isn't consistent with the Word of God, Paul says let them be eternally condemned! (Gal. 1:7-9)

- iii. They contaminate others (9)

False teachers are like leaven (yeast) that permeates the whole lump of dough and makes it rise. In the NT, leaven is a symbol of permeating sin and false doctrine. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matt. 16:6)

2 Tim. 2:17, "spread like gangrene" What they were teaching (18)? That the resurrection had already taken place.

Hey, new idea, "we are already resurrected"... well, where's Jesus? I thought he was supposed to be in heaven. It's like going to a party, and the guy with the birthday isn't there." How many of you are disappointed if this is the resurrected body? Streets of gold? Nope, streets of cement, raise taxes to pay for it – that's not heavenly. Sounds crazy, but it spreads. But it spreads.

- iv. They will be judged (10)

10a: Paul knew that if the Galatians were really of Christ, Satan couldn't ultimately prevail.

10b: As for the false teacher, he will face judgment.

- v. They persecute true teachers (11)

Paul is being persecuted because he is preaching the gospel.

You would think that to preach something that is available to all and is totally free would be accepted by people, but it is not.

Why then? Paul was being persecuted for one simple reason: The cross offends people. People would rather you make much of them, and preach a salvation by works, then to stand up and brag on Jesus and the cross and point people to him, as the only way.

I have a friend who was under a death threat for the Gospel. I have another that said some indicated that “they would not be back to the church because they were deeply offended by the exclusive claims of the Gospel.”

The cross: It is either a stumbling block, or it is the power of God (1 Cor.). You either boast in it, or mock it and reject its power.

Why does it offend? Easy. Pride. The cross crushes human pride. It obliterates the religion of human achievement. For this crowd, it wiped out the idea that you were saved by keeping the Mosaic law.

V. 12: Paul says, if they think you are holy by circumcision, I wish they would go all the way! He goes **Bob Barker on them!** I’ve said some hard things, but I’ve not used this one!

The Gospel meant everything to Paul. *If we really cared about the Gospel and people’s souls, we too would want false teachers to cease from existence.*

This argument is summarized simply in this: Trust in the cross alone for salvation. Look to Christ and Christ alone. Find your righteousness in him, not from the law. Embrace him by faith.

3. Christ has set us free – Live to love and serve others! (5:13-15)

There are two things Paul wants us to avoid about Christian freedom: Legalism (which I’ve talked about – trying to earn acceptance before God) and License – thinking freedom means, “live however we want apart from a moral compass.”

Paul addresses the temptation to license here now, and talks about the moral law in a positive sense.

Paul shows that freedom from the law does not do away with the obligations of moral conduct. Rather, justified people are now free to do what Christ wants!

He says that part of being free from sin's slavery, is that we are free to love! We are free to serve! This freedom represents the fulfillment of the OT law of love.

This subject of love continues – **5:22, 6:1-4**

Here we see the call to love one another, and our neighbor.

A. Don't live to gratify the desires of the flesh (13)

The flesh doesn't refer to that which clothes our bony skeleton, but our fallen human nature. We are prone to wander because of our flesh.

Christian freedom is not a "freedom to sin" but a
"freedom from sin"

Christian freedom is a freedom to enjoy serving others.

B. Love and serve one another (13b, 15)

"through love serve one another"

"Serve" (13) is actually the word for "slave" – "don't be a slave," now, "be a slave" – "free to be slave." It's a paradox.

"It is as though he said, 'If you must live in slavery, here is the form of slavery in which you may safely indulge—the slavery of practical love for one another.' One could similarly envisage him as saying, 'If you must live under the law, live under the law of love—that is, the law of Christ' (cf. 6:2). This slavery, this law, are impelled by the Spirit within, not imposed by an external authority.... The call to freedom, then, is a call to oneness in Christ and to loving service within the believing community. The liberty of the gospel is not to be exercised in isolated independence." (F.F. Bruce).

- A lot of Christians follow the American way of life more than the Bible. Americans love individuality and autonomy and anonymity in church. But Christianity is about living in community. Look at this verse!
- Christ saved you, liberated you so that you could be so committed to others that it looks like slavery! Do not think you are growing if you aren't in community. Don't be a Christian ninja!
- The Lord saved Israel to serve him. He saved us to love and serve others.
- We are free from using people.
- We are free from seeking approval from people.
- We are free from self, “he died that we may no longer live for ourselves” (2 Cor. 5:15).
- We are free to serve people.
- “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve” – Why? He wanted to.

“Let us do good... especially to the household of faith”

“do not bite and devour one another” (15)

These words refer to animal like behavior.

If we go around taking chunks out of one another we will consume one another like sharks or hyenas.

Paul is probably speaking of malicious talk and gossip. That’s the opposite of the fruits of the Spirit: kindness, gentleness, goodness.

C. Love your neighbor (14)

This might some confusing after all the talk about how we can’t keep the law, for Paul to now say that we should love our neighbor because it is a fulfillment of the law! But it’s not.

One the one hand, keeping the entire law for your justification is unattainable. We are not under the Mosaic Law. But

Jesus fulfilled it for us. Now, as a result of our faith in Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are free to live out the moral

teaching of the law. The Spirit changes us, and empowers us to obey God.

It is surprising that Paul does not say, “love God and neighbor,” like Jesus. Perhaps this is shorthand, or maybe he has the Galatian setting in mind and just wants to mention love for people because of the context. But more likely, he has in mind the idea that love for God manifests itself in love for neighbors. The two are inseparable.

The various commands of the law, in so far as they relate to other people, are summarized in this command. “Do not steal,” “do not commit adultery,” etc., are ways to say “love your neighbor.”

Those who are freed from the law are empowered to by the Holy Spirit to live this new life of love.

Who is my neighbor? Jesus says that you should love anyone in need. These are your neighbors. (Luke 10:29-35)

- **Go and Do Likewise** Do Something.
 - Single Mother
 - Widows
 - International Students
 - Orphans
 - Abused kids
 - Grieving
 - Far from God
 - Hungry
 - Dying
 - Enslaved
 - Diseased
 - Imprisoned
 - Hospitalized
 - Tutor a struggling student
 - Support a student
 - Serve with the children
 - Go on a medical mission trip

Chariots of Fire, Eric Liddell is running, and says, “When I run, I feel his pleasure.” Let’s feel his pleasure as we run in the freedom that is ours.

- **The pleasure of not being guilty,**
- **in overcoming the grip of sin**
- **in the pleasure of not being enslaved to legalism**
- **in the pleasure of living by the Spirit**
- **In the pleasure of having access to God**
- **In the pleasure of being accepted by God**
- **In the pleasure of knowing the security of our future with God**
- **In the pleasure of loving and serving one another and our neighbor as ourselves.**

You are free to run. Now run.