



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

LIVING IN FREEDOM • FREE IN CHRIST • GALATIANS 5:1-15 •

MAIN POINT

The gospel brings true freedom—freedom from sin and freedom to serve others in love.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What did freedom mean to you when you were 18 years old? When you had young children? What does it mean to you today?

Recall a time when you felt “imprisoned” by an unfulfilling job, a bad habit, illness, or financial debt. How did you become free from that situation? How would you describe the sense of freedom you experienced at that time?

Some people mistakenly believe Christians are free to do whatever they want to do—and only what they want to do. They need to understand Christian freedom is the freedom to obey Christ and reflect His character. Others assume they must perform good works to solidify their relationship with God. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul emphasized that God had called them to freedom, not to legalism. Yet they were not free to be selfish. Rather, they were free to follow the Holy Spirit’s leadership.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:1-6

**What contrast did Paul draw in this verse? How did he describe slavery?
What do you think “the yoke of bondage” symbolized?**

What did Paul instruct his readers to do? What danger did he warn them about?

Paul commanded the Galatian Christians to stand firm in their freedom in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul admonished his readers to keep standing firm in the face of pressure from those who would lead them to live as if they no longer were free. Christ had set them free from the spiritual slavery of paganism. Would they choose to exchange the freedom they had in Christ for slavery to religious legalism (yoke of slavery)?

What false teaching were the Galatian believers being exposed to? How did that false teaching undermine the message of grace?

Why would those who accepted circumcision be submitting to a yoke of slavery?

Paul argued that by submitting to circumcision, the Gentile believers would endorse the false teaching that salvation requires faith plus keeping some law, thus denying that salvation is by grace through faith alone.

In what ways might believers today be persuaded to abandon grace as the basis of our relationship with God? What legalistic rules do some say we must keep if we wish to get to heaven?

What dire consequences to this legalism did Paul outline in verses 2-4?

What is our hope of righteousness (v. 5)? On what does this hope rest?

Paul said circumcision really didn't matter one way or the other. What did he say was the only thing that mattered as we "eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (vv. 5-6)?

When a person lives by faith in Christ and His grace, then whether someone is circumcised doesn't matter. If someone is circumcised, that is fine. If someone is not circumcised, that is fine. In other words, the matter of justification before God is not impacted in any way. Rather, what is important is faith or trust in Christ, the One who has made salvation available.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:7-15.

What two images did Paul use to warn against false teachings? (Runners in a race, yeast in a batch of dough.) What does each symbolize?

Here and elsewhere (Phil. 2:16) Paul depicted the Christian life as a race. Like runners on a racetrack, the Galatian believers were running well. But someone (the Judaizers) had cut in on them. These false teachers had appeared on the track, trying to cause the Galatians to trip or turn back.

How does abusing freedom lead to less freedom?

How does neglecting Christian freedom lead us into slavery to false beliefs?

Bottom line—the Judaizers were willing to accept the cross with circumcision but not the cross without circumcision. Thus, the offense of the cross to these Judaizers was its message: “The law is not a means of being justified before God.”

What dangerous opportunities does freedom provide (vv. 13-15)? What was Paul afraid that freedom would give the Galatians an opportunity to do?

What does the abuse of freedom commonly look like in our community?

Why do you think Paul emphasized service to one another through love?

How does service protect from the dangers of freedom?

Up to this point in his Letter to the Galatians, Paul had referred to the Mosaic law in negative terms. In this verse, however, he referred to it positively. Even the Mosaic law encouraged the Galatians to serve others rather than to serve themselves. Its true spirit was summarized in the single command that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are the false teachings about freedom that you run into the most in everyday life?

What rules and laws do you unnecessarily enforce on yourself in an attempt to earn God’s approval? What rules are you most likely to ignore in an abuse of your freedom? How can the Holy Spirit lead you away from these tendencies this week?

How might considering the freedom you have in Christ motivate you to serve others in love? What are some practical ways you could do so this week?

PRAYER

Praise God for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that brings you freedom. Pray for our church, that believers would grow into the freedom provided by Jesus.

COMMENTARY

| GALATIANS 5:1-15

5:1. Christ died to set us free from slavery to the law. Our responsibility is to stand firm and not to fall back into law and sin.

Christ has freed believers from the law. Yet these Galatians were returning to a yoke of slavery. Depending on the law for life and salvation makes a work animal out of you. Someone else controls and steers your life by means of an instrument connected around your neck. You become a slave, obedient to every direction. Any system—pagan idolatry or moral legalism—with dos and don'ts can make slaves of its followers. It seems the false teachers were trying to get the Galatians to take up the yoke of the law. Paul countered, "Take the Spirit's gift of grace. Become what God wants to make you, not what you can make yourself. Be free from anyone's yoke. If you want to be a slave, let Christ be your master."

5:2. Those who return to the law face six negative consequences. First, it invalidates Christ's work on the cross, for Christ will be no value to you. By submitting to circumcision, a person demonstrated that he was not fully trusting in Christ. Instead he added his own works to what Christ had done, thus invalidating the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

5:3. The second negative consequence of returning to the law is obligation. Once a person submits to one part of the law (circumcision), he is obligated to obey the whole law.

The word "obligated" actually is a noun. The verb from which the noun comes means "to be indebted, "to be bound (by duty or necessity) to do something." The noun means "debtor" or "a person bound by duty." A literal translation of verse 3b is: "He is a debtor to do the entire ('whole') law." The Galatians had no idea what they faced if they fell victim to the false teachers. Receiving circumcision merely would be the first obligation to be met. Soon they would find they owed a debt they could not pay, for doing all the law demanded was a heavy burden too hard to bear (see Matt. 23:4). Paul wanted the Galatians to know what was in store for them if they became duty-bound to the law.

5:4-6. The third negative consequence of returning to the law is that it removes a person from the sphere of grace. While the legalist is insecure because he cannot know if he has done enough to merit salvation, the believer is secure because he has placed his faith in Christ and will eagerly await righteousness.

When Paul says we “eagerly await ... the righteousness for which we hope,” he is referring to one of two possibilities. On the one hand he may be referring to the righteousness that grows in us slowly, day by day, as we live by faith in Him. On the other hand, he may be referring to the day when our righteousness will suddenly be complete, the day when Jesus returns (Rom. 8:8-25; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:8). Both ideas are true and are taught elsewhere in Scripture. Our salvation is past, present, and future. We have been saved by Jesus’ work on the cross in the past; we are saved day by day as the Spirit works within us to bring about daily righteousness, and we will be saved when we see Jesus and receive our glorified body, freed from sin to serve Him in unsullied righteousness. What truly matters is the fruit of grace which is faith expressing itself through love (Eph. 2:10; Jas. 2:14-18). To fall from grace is to fall from love.

5:7-10. The fourth negative consequence of returning to the law is that it hinders spiritual growth and development. Using the metaphor of a race, Paul states that the legalists had cut in on the Galatians’ spiritual race and caused them to stumble spiritually. As a result, the Galatians were no longer obeying the truth. Turning to a yeast metaphor, Paul illustrates how quickly a little bit of legalism can contaminate a believer and, indeed, a whole church. Paul, however, expressed his confidence that the Galatians would not depart from the truth. He warned that those who are confusing them will experience God’s judgment.

5:11. A fifth consequence when one retreats to legalism is the removal of the offense of the cross. Before Paul was converted, as a Pharisee, he preached circumcision. Now he is being accused of still preaching circumcision. Paul denies this accusation by pointing to the offense or stumbling block of his gospel. He omitted circumcision, and this omission was an offense to the legalists who attacked him.

5:12. The sixth and final consequence of turning to the law is anger. Paul is so angry, he wishes the legalists would go the whole way and castrate themselves as did the pagan priests of the cult of Cybele in Asia Minor. This desire is not a pretty picture, but Paul is completely exasperated by these people who are preaching circumcision and sabotaging the Galatians’ faith.

5:13-14. In verse 1, Paul states that Christian freedom is the right and privilege of every believer. Then he points out six negative consequences of falling back into slavery. Now he warns them not to use this freedom as a license to sin. Rather than liberty being used for selfishness, the true objective of their newfound freedom is love. Quoting Leviticus 19:18, Paul summarizes the law as "love your neighbor as yourself." Always remember that we are slaves commissioned to love one another (Matt. 22:39).

5:15. As a result of the legalists, this church was divided. They were biting and devouring each other. Their church and community of faith were on the verge of destruction. Legalism treats people harshly and often leads to divisions.