

GALATIANS 5

WEEK 7



Context & Historical Background

Paul has completed his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Sometime between Acts 14 and Acts 15, Paul is on the move and word reaches him about a group of men urging the Gentile members of the Galatian churches to be circumcised and to celebrate Jewish feasts in order to be saved. Paul defends with every ounce of apostolic authority that the gospel is solely based on the work of Christ for us and our faith in him. While this seems basic to us, this is a crucial problem. In short, the “Judaizers,” as they were called, were saying salvation is found by calling Jesus Christ Lord *AND* by adhering to the Old Testament Law. Paul writes to them furiously: There is no salvation outside of Jesus, and Jesus alone.



Related Passages

Romans 14-15:13 — Strong and weak faith
Romans 6:15-23 — Slaves to righteousness
Genesis 17 — God’s covenant with Abraham
Romans 4 — Justification by faith, not circumcision



Key Terms

Circumcision: This was the Jewish practice going back to Abraham’s covenant with God in Genesis 17. Interestingly Abraham himself was not circumcised, a point Paul uses in Romans 4 to illustrate the true criteria of justification—faith. This physical sign marked entrance into the Jewish community and signaled submission to the Law of Moses. Gentiles were not circumcised, and it was hotly debated whether they needed to be once they became Christian. Flesh: see last week.

Legalism: This word doesn’t appear in the text, but it captures one of the errors Paul is addressing. Legalism is simply the emphasis on any kind of behavior or act as the basis for a right relationship with God.

Antinomianism: This word also doesn’t appear in the text, but it represents the opposite error of Legalism. Antinomians see the freedom of the Christian as license to behave however they want, good or bad.

Faith: Translated from *πιστις* and its derivatives, this family of words is translated as faith, faith-

fulness, belief, trust, all over the New Testament. *Pistis* can mean mere cognitive activity like “belief,” or it can mean a kind of living akin to “faithfulness.” Ignoring either misses the fullness of the concept. Faith is how we are made right with God. This was (and is) scandalous to the Jews. They thought obedience to the Mosaic law was the path toward justification.



Key Themes

Freedom & Slavery: For moderns like us, freedom merely is the availability of choice. If I’m constrained to behave a certain way, I’m not free. The ancients—including the Biblical authors—had an altogether *different* notion of freedom. Freedom for them was not mere choice, but how *unconstrained they were to live well*. Their notion of freedom assumed two things that we don’t: First, that everything had a proper way of living and purpose for living. Humans are meant to live a life of virtue and pursue God. Second, things *within us* can enslave us, not just outside things. Desires, passions, vices—all can be chains which bind us to slavery. For Paul, Christ has made you free. Before Christ you couldn’t flourish as human beings because you were enslaved to the flesh, in bondage to sin, satan, and death. Ironically, you were “free to live how you wanted” (what looks like freedom to us), but you weren’t able to be good; you couldn’t pursue God. The pharisaic laws could also function this way, as Jesus shows in Matthew 12. For the Jewish Christians he’s addressing, circumcision and the law have become impediments to their pursuit of Christ (5:4-6)

Paul does not, however, mean “You’re free so you don’t have to do anything good!” He outright rejects this in Galatians 5:16-18. When you pursue Christ—when you are free—you *will* do good! The person who is free won’t get to choose what his life looks like. It will look like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. Mysteriously, when the law no longer serves as an impediment to Christ, Christ removes the impediments to fulfilling the law. Freedom, then, means we can’t add to Christ. There isn’t any “Christ + _____” as a means to God. The “_____” will always end up alienating Christ. However, every Christian is expected to carry out the fullness of the law: To love God and neighbor. That’s neither legalistic nor antinomian.

Unity: Despite what it may sound like on the first reading, Paul is concerned about the unity of the Galatian church. The false teachers he condemns here are causing dissension, rending the body of Christ in Galatia. The Judaizers want to impose the Mosaic law on the Gentiles. The Jews had trouble giving up the law as the means to justification before God. This made for really rough relations when Gentiles, who knew nothing of the law, came to Christianity. Paul’s concern is to *unite* the church behind true doctrine. True unity only comes through Christ. This is the meaning of Galatians 3:28. Equally, Paul finishes the first major section of chapter 5 with this exhortation: “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR as yourself! If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed.” Unity without Christ is impossible and historically horrific—Naziism (*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* - “One People, One Empire, One Leader”), Maoist China where everyone dressed and looked the same. When Christ transfigures—not destroys—cultural differences, then they no longer become impediments to peace. Jewish

Christian and Gentile Christian can live together in unity.

Circumcision: For Jews, circumcision wasn't just the sign of their culture. It was also a sign of the right way to "get to" God, the means of justification. Paul is not at all concerned about people's pants. That would be weird. He is concerned about what they use the sign as a proxy for. Circumcision is an symbol of a kind of religion: by doing it, you declare a path to God. Paul's words in 5:2-4 seem so harsh because he's addressing this (and later he tells the Judaizers to just go the whole way and cut all of "it" off, in 5:12). What does it mean that Paul says you must obey ALL of the law if you get circumcised? Basically he's saying (with heavy sarcasm), "If the law is how you think you get to God, great. Live a perfect life according to the law and never sin. If you can do it on your own, you don't need Christ. Good luck." Circumcision indicates a choice of path, even if they had the same goal ("to be justified"). Verse 3 is interpreted by verse 4: If you take the path of the law to get to God, you've rejected the Christ who said "I am the way."

📖 Quotes & Illustrations

"Grace was given that the law may be fulfilled."

ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

"Freedom. What freedom? Not the freedom given us by the emperor, but that with which Christ has made us free."

MARTIN LUTHER

"Christ has made us free, not civilly, not physically, but divinely; that is to say, we are made free in such a way that our conscience is free and quiet, not fearing God's future wrath. This is true an inestimable freedom, and if we compare its majesty with the other sorts, those others are like one drop of water compared with the whole sea."

MARTIN LUTHER

"You can't add to Christ without subtracting Christ."

TIM KELLER

! Three Main Points

1. The freedom of Christ produces the fruit of the Spirit, not license to do what you want.
2. Christ plus anything isn't Christianity. Find what you're adding to Christ.
3. Christ transfigures cultural differences. He doesn't elevate them. He doesn't eliminate them. He unites them around the throne of God.



Discussion Questions

- What does this passage tell us about God? What does it tell us about people?
- What is freedom as Paul describes it here? How do we generally think of freedom as modern Americans?
- How should a free Christian's life look? Who are some examples of Christians you think live out what we see here?
- What are college students enslaved to? What are CSF students enslaved to? What are you enslaved to? (Think practically here about the CSF and personal ones: being seen a certain way, dating the right people, using certain words, being the guy who plays guitar on stage, being the person who everyone thinks says the best prayers, etc.)
- Who is a Christian you look up to? How would you describe that person?
- What are Christians allowed to do if we're really free? What are we prohibited from doing?
- Where are places that you've seen Christ added to in the church?
- Where are you adding to Christ? Where do you see your friends or community adding to Christ?
- When is unity a good thing in the church? When is it a bad thing?
- When is diversity a good thing in the church? When is it a bad thing?
- Where is CSF or your local church lacking in unity or diversity? How can you specifically—YOU SPECIFICALLY—work to change that?
- How are you loving your neighbor? What fruit are you seeing in your life? Be specific.
- How do you think someone would describe you right now? Write out 5-10 words that you think someone would honestly say about you in your journal.
- How would you WANT to be described in terms of character? Write down 5-10 words (don't just copy the fruit of the Spirit!) in your journal. How can you take steps to become that person?
- Is God free? Can God sin? How can God be free if he can't sin?
- Which fruit of the Spirit do you see strongest in your life? Which do you see the least of? What are some practical ways (and I mean really practical—specific acts) you can cultivate that fruit in your life?



Application & Practice

Freedom for: Memorize the fruit of the spirit.

Fruit of the Spirit: Write 5-10 words which describe the kind of person you want to be on a notecard. Tape that to your mirror, or take a picture of it and make it your iPhone lock screen. Put it in a visible place where you can regularly be reminded of it. Next week share whether you saw these increase in your life.

My Freedom: Reflect for 15 minutes at the end of 2 days this week and think back on every choice (within reason) you made that day: hitting the snooze button, having or skipping a quiet time, where you ate for lunch, what you wore to class, who you chose to talk to and who you

ignored, what websites you went to on your computer, etc. After 2 days of this, write a short paragraph reflecting on how you used your freedom this week.

Unity: Find two campus ministries or two friends that are involved in other campus ministries on campus and write a letter to them (not a text or email). Encourage them, tell them you're praying for them (and do it), and offer yourself to help them with something. Open doors across campus to other Christian communities.

Read: John Donne's "Holy Sonnet 14" twice this week. Spend time with it until you understand what it says, then ask yourself, "Do I approach life with God like this? Is this the correct way to desire God?"

*Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.*



Going Deeper

Andy Stanley on Galatians 5 and what we do with our freedom
<http://northpoint.org/messages/youunited-states/>

Tim Keller on the Fruits of the Spirit
http://www.learnoutloud.com/podcaststream/listen.php?url=https://ginl-podcast.s3.amazonaws.com/How_to_Change.mp3&all=0&title=How%20to%20Change&productid=47658

John Piper on the struggle between Spirit and flesh
<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-war-within-flesh-vs-spirit>