



Time to Reflect

- What do you think it means to have freedom in Christ? How does this impact our everyday lives?
- How can we live in faith and love, responding to God's amazing grace each and every day?

Last week we reflected on the very nature of God's grace and how it stands in contrast to legalism and works. Ultimately, we were challenged to trust God and depend entirely on Him. In this week's passage we see how Paul reminded the Galatians of the freedom that the gospel brought them, and that this freedom is to be embraced and enjoyed. He wanted to challenge and encourage the Galatians. In many ways these are the opening words of Paul's closing statement to the Galatians.

"Paul turned now from argument to application, from the doctrinal to the practical. The Christian who lives by faith is not going to become a rebel. Quite the contrary, he is going to experience the inner discipline of God that is far better than the outer discipline of man-made rules."

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians*, p115)

Specifics

- Paul reminded the Galatians that Christ set them free (v1) and he encouraged them to stand firm. This opening verse is, essentially, a summary of Galatians 3 and 4. The verb that is translated 'has set us free' refers to a single and past action that is complete.
- In other words, the freedom that Christ offers does not need to be added to or amended in any way. It is totally sufficient for every person in every possible way.
- Timothy Keller offers a concise analysis as he writes, **"Everything about the Christian gospel is freedom. Jesus' whole mission was an operation of liberation."**¹
- (v1b) is a stark reminder that we can regress in our Christian faith, allowing the freedom that Christ offers us to drift away. This is what it means to **"...be burdened again by a yolk of slavery."**
- Paul suggested that the Galatians needed to stand firm. We can easily picture this as the kind of order given by a military general. It's a call to keep alert, be strong, resist attack, be vigilant and stick together. This is still an important teaching for Christians in our twenty-first century world.
- This is not always easy and the alternative appears to be much more straightforward. Religious rule-keeping and conforming to the apparent status quo can be more comfortable, in a human sense. But does this actually lead to spiritual growth?
- Paul contended that it doesn't. In fact, he referred to this as being burdened and enslaved. Where Christ offers freedom, legalism brings constraint. This is the issue that Paul presented to the Galatians.
- Keller observes, **"Ultimately, the Galatians face an either-or decision. Will they make Christ their treasure, in whom they find their forgiveness and fulfilment; or will they look to law-keeping..."**²

¹ Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), p131.

² Ibid, p133.

- In (v2-6) we see how Paul warned the Galatians about losing the wonder and joy that they received when they first turned to Christ. There are three key phrases used in this section of our passage.
 1. In (v2) he argued that “...Christ will be of no value to you at all.”
 2. In (v3) he suggested that legalism can lead people to be “...obligated to obey the whole law.”
 3. In (v4) he contended that “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ.”
- This is a tremendously sad and challenging situation and Paul reached a stark conclusion. In (v4) he told the Galatians, “...you have fallen away from grace.”
- It is important that we fully understand what is being said by Paul in this passage. Keller offers us some help as he reflects, “In short, despite the fact that we already have been saved by Christ, we must be continually diligent to remember, preserve, rejoice in and live in accord with our salvation. We cannot lose our salvation, but we can lose our freedom from enslavement to fear.³”
- As Christians, we are to follow Jesus faithfully each and every day of our lives. We are to strive forward in holy confidence because of what Jesus has done for us. We shouldn’t look backwards or seek to negotiate the terms of our commitment.
- The Galatians had fallen out of the sphere of God’s grace and this robbed them of enjoying the fullness of life that God longed for them to have. They were to live in faith and love, responding to the incredible grace that God had extended to them (v6).
- Paul reminded the Galatians that they had started off well (v7). He used a sporting metaphor, as he did in some of his other letters. It is interesting to note how Paul used athletic illustrations.
- Wiersbe highlights that “...Paul never uses the image of the race to tell people how to be saved. He is always talking to Christians about how to live the Christian life. A contestant in the Greek games had to be a citizen before he could compete. We become citizens of heaven through faith in Christ; then the Lord puts us on our course, and we run to win the prize.⁴”
- In (v7) Paul asked a question of the Galatians and it continued the sporting theme. The Judaizers had cut in on the Galatians and led them off the course that they were on.
- Note how Paul referred to this behaviour as not being from God (v8) and how it was an act of confusion with severe consequences (v10). He also warned the Galatians that such action is akin to leaven (v9).
- Wiersbe offers us a helpful insight. He writes, “The spirit of legalism does not suddenly overpower a church. Like leaven, it is introduced secretly, it grows, and before long, it poisons the whole assembly. In most cases, the motives that encourage legalism are good (‘We want to have a more spiritual church’), but the methods are not scriptural.⁵”
- The strong and rather graphic language that is used by Paul in (v12) is an expression of his wish that the Judaizers could not produce any further ‘children of slavery.’
- As we approach the end of our passage, we see how Paul reminded the Galatians that they were called to be free. Yet this freedom brings with it some challenges in relation to Christian living.
- These challenges are outlined in (v13-15) and can only really be truly achieved through the grace of God. One commentator referred to these verses as the law of love and concluded that the Holy Spirit enables us, as Christians, to fulfil the law of love.

³ Keller, *Galatians For You*, p132.

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (David C Cook, 2009), p121.

⁵ Ibid, p122.