



Free in Christ • free to run • galatians 5:1-12 • 07/08/2018

## Main Point

As a result of our freedom in Christ, we should run in freedom through the Spirit and not be yoked again in slavery to legalism.

## Introduction

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

**What are some of the ways you have used the word “love” today? What were the objects of that love?**

**Do you think, given how much we use the word, that we define “love” the way God does?**

**If not, what do you think we mean when we use the word? How can that definition of love be destructive in our relationship with God?**

We love movies, food, relatives, pets, and celebrities. In short, we are a culture in love with being in love. But the fact that we use the same word to describe how we feel about pizza as we do about God’s love reveals we have bought into lies regarding the nature of love. When we use the word “love,” we typically refer to a feeling that ebbs and flows based on circumstances. But God’s love is radically different than that. Rather than being based on the desirability of the object being loved, God’s love is based in Himself. This is why the love of God does not change based on our performance. Although this truth is wonderful, sometimes we try to earn God’s love through performing, by keeping His law. But in Christ, we are free from the slavery of legalism.

# 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? About what danger did he warn them?**

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)?

**To what false teaching were the Galatian believers being exposed? How did that false teaching undermine the message of grace?**

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 their 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 or not doesn't matter. If someone is circumcised, that is fine. If someone is not circumcised, that is also 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? What did 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 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.”

## 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?**

## Pray

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 5:1-12

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.

## Next Week's Reading

Galatians 5:13-26