

Galatians

Gospel freedom

Study 10 | Galatians 5:1-15

In 5:1, Paul re-introduces the idea of Christian freedom that he mentioned in Gal. 2:4. The concept of Christian “freedom” is easy to misunderstand. Paul says we are free from the “supervision” of the law (3:25) and we are no longer “under” the law (5:18). But does that mean we are free to disobey or disregard it? And if not, of what does this freedom consist? Paul answers this indirectly in 5:2-6, and directly in 5:13-15.

Read Galatians 5:1-15

- 1. The thesis of Paul’s last chapters is stated in 5:1. What does Paul teach in these two sentences?**
- 2. What is Paul warning the Galatians against in verses 2-4? Is Paul saying here that the Galatians who are real Christians are going to lose their salvation (v.4)? How does v.10 shed light on v.4?**
- 3. Why do you think would Paul say we hope for righteousness (v.5) when in 3:6 and elsewhere he says we have righteousness? How can we ‘wait’ for it practically?**
- 4. What does it mean that the gospel makes both “circumcision and uncircumcision” (religion and irreligion) both equally valueless? (vv.5-6)?**

EXERCISE

Read and mark “!” for something that helped you, and “?” for something that raised a question

Son or slave?

THE “DYNAMIC” OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

There is a two-part dynamic to Christian growth. (It is, in a sense, a “combustion cycle”. If it is ignited and going in the heart it results in dynamic character growth.) The two parts are a negative and a positive. We see them mentioned in many places:

Colossians 3:

v.1- Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated... who is your life...

v.5 x- Put to death what belongs to your earthly nature... which is idolatry...

Hebrews 12:

v.2- Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith... sat down at the right hand of God...

v.1- Let us throw off every-thing that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...

Romans 8:

v.5- their minds set on what the Spirit desires...
(v.14) those led of the Spirit are sons of God...

v.13 - by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live...

Galatians 5:

v.25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit

v.24 - Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

The “negative” side is **repentance**, discovering the particular idolatries of the heart (Col.3:5), our besetting sins (Heb.12:1), and uprooting them at the motivational level (Rom.8:13). The “positive” side is **faith**, to see ourselves as perfect in Christ (Col.3:1), who has done from first to last all that was required for my acceptance (Heb.12:2), so that we could be adopted as children of God (Rom.8:14). This is the dynamic: we uproot the idols of the heart; and we live out of our identity as children of God.

These two elements really are flip sides of each other. As we begin with one, we find that we always pass over into doing the other as well. Each stimulates the other; if either one is de-emphasized it robs the other also of any power. How? On the one hand, without a knowledge of our extreme sin and idolatry, the payment of Christ on the cross seems trivial, and the message of it does not electrify or transform. On the other hand, without a knowledge of our complete acceptance and adoption through Christ, the message of our sin would so crush us that we would deny or repress it. But the more you know of his infallible fatherly love, the more you are able to realistically face yourself, your flaws and faults. The more you see your sin, the more precious and valuable you find his saving love and grace.

In this exercise we will look at how to live as a child of God.

Son or slave?

Galatians 4:5-9 tells us:

1) When we became Christians, we *“receive[d] the adoption [lit. the sonship].”* Galatians 4:4-5. We became sons of God.

2) Before, we were “slaves”, but that is true no longer. *“So you are no longer a slave, but a son”* Galatians 4:7

3) Nevertheless, it is possible, even if you are a Christian, to return to some degree into a state of slavery, and to lose our “sonship consciousness”. *“Formerly... you were slaves... do you wish to be enslaved... all over again?”* Galatians 4:8,9 (cf. Romans 8:15 – *“you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.”* It is possible to fall back into fear/slavery though we are in fact children of God.

Therefore, the two fundamentally different ways to live are *not* as religious or as irreligious, but **as a slave, full of fear, or as a child of God, full of faith working through love.**

SON AND SLAVE COMPARED

Both Galatians 4:1-7 and Romans 8:15-16 contrast slavery with sonship.

Two different understandings – False vs. true definitions

Slave: “Grace” is God’s supplemental help as you try hard to live a good life (see “faith”).

Child: Grace is God's unmerited work in your life to renew you into the likeness of Christ.

Slave: “Faith” is an effort to believe without doubting and love God so he will accept you.

Child: Faith is a discipline of remembering and living as an accepted child of God.

Slave: “Obedience” is avoiding major sin and following rules of ethical behavior.

Child: Obedience is primarily growth in the fruit of the Spirit and Christ-like character.

Two different life patterns – Fear-based life vs. faith working through love

Slave: Compulsive obedience. Obeys God and moral codes out of fear of rejection — a compulsive, driven moralism. “Driveness” in work. Unrealistic goals. Lot of self-criticism.

Child: Obeys out of joy in your Father and out of gratitude for the certainty of his love. “How can I live so ungratefully to one who will never reject me?”

Slave: Hiding. Lots of strategies to hide our inner and outer failings from ourselves and one another. Lots of gossip, blame-shifting, anger at other races/classes, defensiveness.

Child: Open and transparent. Freedom from having to put up a front. Able to appreciate people who are different and hurting. Repentance to others is more natural, done with joy.

Slave: Isolation. Feeling that no one understands, that no one cares. An unwillingness to trust *or* intense, idolatrous trust of someone who inevitably disappoints and lets you down.

Child: Because of openness and transparency and a lack of self-absorbed self-pity, a growing circle of friends with whom you are neither too independent or over dependent.

Slave: Controlled by people’s opinion. Expectations and approval of others become the real moral standard. When we get away from other Christians, we lapse.

Child: Integrity and courage regardless of who is watching. “The only person whose opinion counts is my Father’s! Who cares what the rest think?”

Slave: Despair in troubles. Sees troubles as “paybacks” from God. A ‘slave’ in trouble either is filled with: *Guilt* (because you feel you deserve it) or *bitterness* (because you feel you don’t!).

Child: Sees trouble as the wisdom of Father. You know God won’t give you what you deserve (so you aren’t guilty) but you deserve far worse than you will ever get (so you aren’t bitter).

Slave: Begrudging repentance. Admitting failure is destructive of one’s very self-image (one based on a sense of moral adequacy). So repentance to God is galling, a last resort.

Child: Admitting failure strengthens one’s very self-image (reminding you that you are forgiven and loved despite your flaws.) Repentance is now based not on fear of being rejected, but on grief that you have dishonored/grieved the one who spent so much so you would *never* be rejected. The grief that comes from wronging an unconditionally loving parent is sharper yet much more filled with hope than the fear that comes from wronging a God you are simply afraid of. Repentance of a slave is rare, forced, traumatic, and produces little long-term change. Repentance of a child is regular, willing, with much sweetness mixed with the grief, and leads to permanent change.

