

Claim Your Freedom  
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## Galatians 5:1-15 (New International Version)

### Galatians 5

#### Freedom in Christ

<sup>1</sup>*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

<sup>2</sup>*Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup>Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup>You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup>But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

<sup>7</sup>*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup>That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. <sup>9</sup>"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." <sup>10</sup>I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. <sup>11</sup>Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. <sup>12</sup>As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*

<sup>13</sup>*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature<sup>[a]</sup>; rather, serve one another in love. <sup>14</sup>The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>15</sup>If you keep on biting and ---- devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

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When you were in school did you ever use Cliff's Notes? For years I thought the classics of literature were all bound in yellow covers with black stripes on them! If ever there was a Cliffs Notes version of this section of scripture we find it in verses 1 and 13:

<sup>1</sup>*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

And

<sup>13</sup>*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature<sup>[a]</sup>; rather, serve one another in love.*

Jerry Bridges writes powerfully about this in his book “Transforming Grace”. In fact, I’m borrowing liberally from that book in some of this morning’s points. He says...

*“There are five words beginning with the letter “L” that we need to keep in right relationship to one another. They are LAW, LIBERTY, LOVE, LICENSE, and LEGALISM.”*

This morning we’re going to study what Paul covers in the beginning of this chapter on these points:

- 1. Christ saved us FOR FREEDOM (from sin and from the law)**
- 2. We must STAND FIRM in that FREEDOM and not slip into LEGALISM**
- 3. FREEDOM should be used to LOVE GOD and LOVE OTHERS not as a license to SIN**

**David Self asks:** *If Christ promises freedom, why do so many Christians live in bondage?*

*In John Bunyan's classic allegory, Pilgrim's Progress, the giant "Despair" locked Christian and his traveling companion, Hopeful, in the dungeon of Doubting Castle. Finally, after many days of bondage and abuse we read:*

*“Well on Saturday about midnight they began to pray, and continued in Prayer till almost break of day.*

*Now a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half amazed, brake out in passionate speech: What a fool, quoth he, am I, thus to lie in a stinking Dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty. I have a Key in my bosom called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any Lock in Doubting Castle. Then said Hopeful, That's good news; good Brother pluck it out of thy bosom and try.*

*Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the Dungeon door, whose bolt (as he turned the Key) gave back, and the door flew open with ease, and Christian and Hopeful both came out.*

They didn’t have to stay locked in the “Doubting Castle!” Christian had a KEY called PROMISE. And so do we.

## **John 8:31-34 (New International Version)**

### **The Children of Abraham**

<sup>31</sup>*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup>Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

<sup>33</sup>They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants<sup>[a]</sup> and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

<sup>34</sup>Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup>Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup>So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

We've been made FREE INDEED by the Son! Jesus told us if we HOLD TO HIS TEACHING that TRUTH will make us free. Praise God!

But what happens when we stop focusing on WHAT HE SAYS (the TRUTH in His WORD) and begin to focus on WHAT WE DO?

What is LEGALISM? (Discussion)

Rick Warren says this about legalism:

*Legalism happens when we substitute our rules and rituals for our relationship with Christ. It's a subtle trap that takes the focus off of what God has done for you and slowly turns it to what you have done for God.*

*The antidote to legalism is grace. Grace means we don't have to earn God's love, and we don't have to earn his smile. God is always smiling at us. Because I deserve it? Not a chance. Because I keep certain rules and regulations? Not a chance. It's because I'm covered with the blood of Jesus Christ.*

The Bible Application Handbook puts it like this:

*Bible Application*

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**Legalism kills joy.** Have you lost your **joy**? Paul sensed that the Galatians had lost the **joy** of their salvation because of **legalism**. **Legalism** can take away **joy** because (1) it makes people feel guilty rather than loved; (2) it produces self-hatred rather than humility; (3) it stresses performance over relationship; and (4) it points out how far short we fall rather than how far we've come because of what Christ did for us. If you feel guilty and inadequate, check your focus. Are you living by faith in Christ or by trying to live up to the demands and expectations of others?

Legalism flows in three directions:

1. Treating OURSELVES legalistically
2. Allowing OTHERS to influence us by THEIR LEGALISM
3. Treating OTHERS legalistically

Let me share with you some of the points from Jerry Bridges' book Transforming Grace that I mentioned earlier.

Bridges writes about legalism:

*"It is conformity to how other people think we should live instead of how the Bible tells us to live. More often than not, these rules have no valid biblical basis. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' time, we have tried to 'help' God by adding our manmade rules to his commands."*

**Mark 7:6-8 (New International Version) (Jesus to the Pharisees)**

*6He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:  
" 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.  
7They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' [a] 8You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."*

Jerry Bridges goes on to say:

*"There is very little emphasis in Christian circles today on the importance of Christian freedom. Instead of promoting freedom, we stress our rules of conformity. Instead of preaching living by grace, we preach living by performance."*

In his book "The Pharisees Guide to Total Holiness" William Coleman said:

*"The Pharisees were desperately determined to not break the laws of God. They contrived a 'fence' of Pharisaic rules that...would guarantee a safe distance between [man] and the laws of God..."*

Now fences are good. There are good reasons to have fences. But Jerry Bridges says:  
*"Soon these fences – instead of the sins they were designed to guard against --- become the issue. We elevate our rules to the level of God's commandments."*

There's a reason I don't know how to play poker. My parents built a fence around that because most people play poker for money and generally the kind of people who hung out in a poker game were not the kind of people they wanted me hanging out with.

Nowhere in scripture (that I can find) does it say "Thou shalt not play poker."

If my parents had not explained WHY they built that fence I would have grown up thinking it is a sin to play poker.

Here's an old favorite: "It's a sin to dance!" Steve Brown tells the story of an old saint who came up to a young woman who was a new Christian and asking her: "Young lady can you picture Jesus dancing?" To which she replied: "Well, I guess not. But I can't picture him wearing a suit and tie or playing an organ either."

There are several areas in which we BEAT OURSELVES UP or allow OTHERS to beat us up with legalism.

1. Spiritual Disciplines

- a. Private devotions; Bible Study; memorizing scripture; meeting with a group Bible study; faithfully attending a weekly prayer meeting.
- b. All these things are GOOD and GOOD FOR US!
- c. But they are for our GOOD and not our BONDAGE
- d. Privileges to be ENJOYED not DUTIES to be PERFORMED
- e. They can become a performance measurement by which we gauge whether to expect God's blessing or not.

2. What Others Think

- a. Paul said in Galatians 1:10: "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."
- b. That is not to say that we should use our freedom in Christ to offend other believers in the body
- c. Sometimes we conform on certain points in the interest of harmony and brotherly (and sisterly) love
- d. We just have to MAKE SURE we remember we are ultimately responsible to God and not men

3. Controllers

- a. People who are not content to let you live your life as Christ leads you but want to tell you how you should live it
- b. They are usually very "black and white" in their beliefs and attitudes
- c. Their primary weapons are "guilt trips", rejection, or gossip

Chuck Swindoll has some strong words about legalism and legalistic people:

*Where do you draw the line between legalism, which is restrictive and counter to grace, and the fact that God's Word does give us clear standards and calls us to live sanctified, set-apart lives? Well, the place to begin is to affirm that anything that is set forth in the Scriptures as a directive is a directive, period. It's not legalism. The problem comes when we get into areas that are not set forth in Scripture, either in precept or even in principle. I think legalism begins when you do or refrain from doing what I want you to do or not do because it's on my list and it's something that I am uncomfortable with.*

*The problem with legalists is that not enough people have confronted them and told them to get lost. Those are strong words, but I don't mess with legalism anymore. I'm 72 years old; what have I got to lose? Seriously, I used to kowtow to legalists, but they're dangerous. They are grace-killers. They'll drive off every new Christian you bring to church. They are enemies of the faith. Other than that, I don't have any opinion!.*

But WAIT! If we teach this idea of Christian FREEDOM and LIBERTY through Grace won't people take advantage of it and just SIN, SIN, SIN?

Look back at Galatians 5:13

<sup>13</sup>*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature<sup>[a]</sup>; rather, serve one another in love.*

Paul thought of that! In Romans chapter six he covers this very argument.

## **Romans 6:1-2 (New International Version)**

### **Romans 6**

<sup>1</sup>*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup>By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*

We could do a complete study just on that chapter and that question but there is not time this morning.

Here's the simple answer to the question of "Won't an emphasis on FREEDOM lead to a casual life of sin?":

## **John 14:15 (New International Version) [Jesus said...]**

<sup>15</sup>"If you love me, you will obey what I command.

There's another "L" word. LOVE.

Here's yet another "L" word. LICENSE.

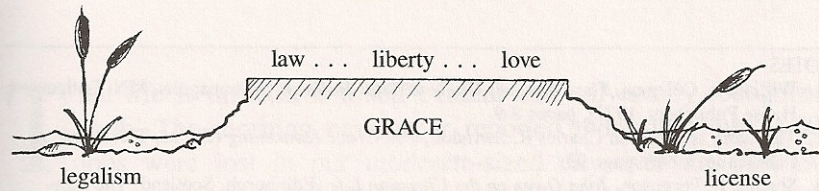
What does the word LICENSE mean? (Discussion)

Christ's LOVE gave us LIBERTY from the bondage of LAW and His LOVE should keep us from feeling we have a LICENSE to SIN!

We should be obeying the commandments of Christ NOT TO WIN HIS FAVOR but out of GRATITUDE and LOVE for who He is and what He has done for us!

Here's a great illustration from Jerry Bridges. He paints the picture of a narrow paved road with no guard rails on either side. And it is surrounded by swamp land. If you get off the road on either side you are in BIG TROUBLE.

As shown in the following illustration, the built-up roadbed represents grace that allows you to drive safely through the swampland of legalism and license.



When you focus on grace in the fullness of its meaning, you will keep the law, liberty, and love in their proper relationship to one another. But if you focus on any one of them instead of on grace, you will invariably end up in the swamp of legalism or license.

Here are some ideas I have on how you can make sure something isn't based on legalism:

1. Is it in scripture?
2. Is it a command?
3. Is the interpretation "sound"? (study multiple sources/commentaries)
4. Have you asked God about it?

Quoting Jerry Bridges one last time:

*"Living by grace instead of by works means you are free from the performance treadmill. It means God has already given you an "A" when you deserved an "F," He has already given you a full day's pay even though you may have worked only one hour. It means you don't have to perform certain spiritual disciplines to earn God's approval. Jesus Christ has already done that for you.*

We Americans VALUE FREEDOM...we're known for it around the world. On January 11, 1989 Ronald Reagan gave his Farewell Address to the Nation from the Oval Office. In it he recounted a story

*"a small story about a big ship, and a refugee and a sailor. It was back in the early '80s, at the height of the boat people. And the sailor was hard at work on the carrier Midway, which was patrolling the South China Sea. The sailor, like most American servicemen, was young, smart, and fiercely observant. The crew spied on the horizon a leaky little boat. And crammed inside were refugees from Indochina hoping to get to America. The Midway sent a small launch to bring them to the ship and safety. As the refugees made their way through the choppy seas, one spied the sailor on deck and stood up and called out to him. He yelled, "Hello, American sailor. Hello, freedom man."*

We read it earlier in John 8:36

<sup>36</sup>*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Jesus is OUR "Freedom Man". Why would we ever go back to the yoke of slavery of thinking we have to do something; be something; or live UP TO something to have Salvation.

But how do we keep from abusing that FREEDOM and using it as a LICENSE to sin?  
That's what we'll talk about NEXT WEEK as we continue in chapter 5 of Galatians as  
we learn to FOLLOW THE SPIRIT!