

Freedom in Christ

Galatians 5:1

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There are two religions in the world. There seem to be many, but there are only two. One says I can be made right with God by who I am and what I have done. The other says that we can only be made right with God because of who He is and what He has done. In the first category we find Islam, Buddhism, Mormonism, and others. Christianity stands alone in the second category. We all have sinned. We all are hopelessly separated from God. When there was no way that we could reach out to God, He, through Jesus Christ reached out to us.

In Galatians the early Christians were facing a legalistic Judaism. Like other false religions it claimed that we could be made right with God if we could just be good enough. The apostle Paul then clearly refuted this false teaching, declaring first of all our utter sinfulness. Secondly declaring God's glorious grace that was now available through Jesus Christ.

Previously the Galatians had been captives to sin and to the demands of the false gods which they had worshipped. Through faith in Christ they had been freed. Now they found themselves being drawn into another type of slavery. This new slavery was to fear and guilt. This was due to the false teaching that said that the only way to be made right with God was to obey the laws of God plus all of the man-made Jewish laws that had been added. This thinking was impossible, because no one has ever been able to perfectly obey the laws of God.

The Galatians had been freed from their past. Freed from guilt and shame. Freed from the penalty and power of sin. Freed from Satan's power. Freed from fear of death. Freed from a conscience that condemned. Freed from an uncertain future. Freed from the need to gain the approval of others. Freed

from trying to meet their own needs. Freed from God's wrath. But now they were giving up this freedom and replacing it with legalism.

The freedom that the gospel brought was not only freedom from the bad. It was also a freedom to the good. With the Holy Spirit dwelling in them they were enabled to live lives of holiness like never before. They were free to forgive as they had been forgiven. They were free to love, because God first loved them. They were freed to pray to God and find a peace that passed all understanding. They were able to be content in the sufficiency of Christ and no longer covet the things of the world. They were free to worship in spirit and truth. They were free to serve God with full assurance of faith.

Because of this Paul gave them this instruction, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery"*** (Galatians 5:1).

The Galatians had been misled to believe that God's favor depended on their perfect obedience to God's Law. This way of viewing God and Christianity produced a constant sense of pressure and judgment. God's law was the "slavemaster" that supposedly kept people holy. In reality the law does not have this power. If anything, the law gives our sinful natures more cause to rebel. The law makes us aware of our sin and drives us to Christ for forgiveness and freedom from sin and judgment.

The good news is that you don't have to be a "slave to sin" anymore, because Jesus has paid the price for your sin and has put away the law that held you captive. You are now free to serve God without fear. You now are a recipient of the permanent, unconditional love of God and this ***"perfect love casts out fear"*** (1 John 4:18). In Christ Jesus, there is true freedom from everything and anything that enslaves. When you wholeheartedly believe the Son of God has borne your sins and died in your place, granting you forgiveness before God for all your sins, and also reckoning his perfect righteousness to you so you might be eternally acceptable to God, your heart will rejoice and you will live and serve God willingly by the free Spirit he has given you.

In the apostle Paul's words in Galatians 5:1 it says, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."*** Rest in the love of Christ. Yes, we were sinners, but we have now been forgiven and made new. Do not return to this attitude of trying to please God out of fear and guilt. Rejoice in the forgiveness and freedom that we have found in Christ and ***"let Christ's love compel us to no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and was raised again"*** (2 Corinthians 5:14). Christ is the ***"Way and the Truth and the Life"*** (John 6:14). We were slaves to sin, but Christ has declared ***"that if we abide in Him, we know the Truth, the Truth will set us free"***(John 8:31-31).

We are not only free from, we are free to. We are not only free from fear, guilt, and sin. We are now free to produce "the fruit of the Spirit." We are free to "Do the will of God with joy." We are free to "Fulfil the law of Christ." Walking in obedience to Christ is now possible. We are free from the sin that enslaves, and are now free to serve Christ Jesus our Lord, wholeheartedly, with joy.

As we are ushered into grace through faith we are now able to apply all the different aspects of the gospel to every segment of our lives. In this we find freedom. We find freedom from our past sin that has now been replaced by the righteousness of Christ. We find freedom from our bitterness as we are

empowered to forgive as we have been forgiven. We find freedom from the pursuit of people's approval, because we are now unconditionally loved by the King of kings and Lord of lords. We find freedom from worry about our needs, knowing that our needs will be met in Christ Jesus. We find freedom from worry as we make our requests known to God and He grants peace. We find freedom from fear of death, because we now belong to the One who insures our eternal life in heaven with God.

In Luke 23:39-43 we see freedom from one's past in the story of the "Thief on the Cross." When Jesus was crucified there were two others crucified alongside him. On one side hung a thief that mocked Jesus. On the other side hung a thief who defended Jesus. He expressed his belief and Jesus declared, ***"Today you will be with me in paradise."***

This thief had a sinful past and had no future to offer to the service of God's kingdom. He was about to die. He had nothing to offer Christ, yet Christ offered him the full gift of salvation. This is a picture of amazing grace. This thief was truly given freedom from the fear of sin and death and would now enter heaven to spend eternity with Christ.

In Matthew 9 we see Jesus tell Matthew, a tax collector, ***"Follow me."*** Matthew was hated by his own people as a traitor and a thief. He was a man of wealth and power. Through Jesus, Matthew was given the freedom from the sins of greed and selfishness. Matthew walked away from being a tax collector and all the earthly benefits that it offered. In Christ he found the freedom to defeat sin and to be made righteous.

In John 8 Jesus was teaching a crowd. The religious leaders came and threw a woman at his feet. She had been caught in the act of adultery. The religious leaders tested Jesus with this question. ***"In the law Moses commands us to stone such women, but what do you say?"*** Jesus responded, ***"Those without sin may throw the first stone."*** One by one the accusers walked away until there were none left. Jesus then looked at the woman and said, ***"Has no one condemned you?"*** She replied, ***"No one."*** Then Jesus said, ***"Then neither do I. Go and sin no more."***

Jesus gave her freedom. Freedom from sin. Freedom from judgment. Freedom from the opinions of others. Freedom to start a new life. Christ is freedom. He is the Truth that sets us free.

Think of the price that was paid to reconcile us to God. God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). What sense does it make to receive this freedom of Christ and then return to slavery yet again? We as Christians must ask the same question. When we evaluate our Christianity, are we continuing to walk in the freedom that we first found in Christ, or have we returned to some sort of legalism that falsely enslaves us?

Why do so many Christians not know the freedom found in Christ? For some it is due to ignorance and unbelief. It takes us back to the story of the elephant at the circus who continues to be in bondage to a small chain and a stake in the ground even though he is strong enough to walk free. He is in bondage because he does not know the freedom that is his. When he was a baby elephant his trainer drove a strong iron bar deep into the ground. The baby elephant was chained to it and could not pull loose. Finally he quit trying. It has now been like that for years. The elephant is now full grown and could easily pull loose, but he is so convinced of his bondage that he remains in bondage and does not even try to

get loose. Some believers live as slaves because they are not familiar with the freedom that the Bible proclaims over us. We need to open our Bible and learn about the freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Others have heard the scripture's claims to freedom, but have yet to believe that they are true. They miss out on God's provision, doubting that the claims of freedom could truly work in their lives. Remember that a false teacher is only effective when his students are vulnerable to deception. Ignorance and unbelief often leave us susceptible to false teaching.

We also miss out on the full benefits of freedom in Christ because we are "kicking against the goads." This was spoken by the apostle Paul when he recounted his conversion experience and the words of Christ: *"I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads'"* (Acts 26:14).

Goads were the sharp sticks that were connected to the front of the plow, right behind the oxen. They discouraged the oxen from kicking back and not continuing ahead as instructed. God, somehow, had been prodding Paul in the right direction, but Paul had been rebelling. The same can be said for us at times. We experience unnecessary suffering because we are not walking in obedience with God. As believers His freedom is available to us, but are we walking in a manner that takes advantage of this freedom.

We begin to experience His freedom by reading God's Word, praying, and relating deeply to other Christians. Our freedom is something that we realize as we walk intimately with God. Today draw near to Him. Pray for His freedom to set you free from bondage. In His presence freedom is available.

Read through these following verses and pray to God to grant you freedom in Christ:

Romans 8:1-4 – *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*

Acts 13:38-39 – *"Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses."*