

## ***The Gospel in Galatians***

### ***Freedom in Christ***

Lesson #11 for December 10, 2011

Scriptures: Galatians 5:1-15; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Romans 8:1; Hebrews 2:14,15; Romans 8:4; 13:8.

1. This lesson is all about the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus. We will attempt to describe what that freedom involves and how it contrasts with the slavery of legalism and licentiousness.
2. What is Christian freedom? What does *freedom* mean to you? Is it more important to be free *from* something or free *to do* something? Freedom to choose? Is Satan free?
3. Don't we often describe freedom as the opportunity or ability to do whatever we want?
4. Read Galatians 5:1-15. There are several obvious points in this section. First of all, Paul felt very strongly about this issue. In the ditch on one side of the road, there is legalism—people who believe they are bound to obey all the law as a way to earn salvation. In the ditch on the other side of the road are those who think they are free to do whatever they feel like doing. They believe that no matter how sinful it may be, either they do not care about the consequences, or they believe Christ will take care of it. But, where is the truth? Why were the Jews so opposed to Paul's teachings? Christianity does not do away with the Law. Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery, "Go, and sin no more." (John 8:11; compare 5:14; 1 John 3:4) People have tried all sorts of things to avoid sin and earn their own salvation: pole-sitting (Saint Simeon), monasteries, being a hermit, etc. Although we could be saved by keeping the law if we could do that, the truth is that we cannot. You cannot get out of this world without dying. You either die to self, or you will die in your sins.
5. In Hebrews 2:14,15, Paul talked about those who are slaves because of their fear of death. Christ has come to destroy Satan and death. After describing his personal struggles in Romans 7, in Romans 8:1, Paul pointed out that there is no condemnation in Christ. We have been bought for a price. (1 Corinthians 6:20) By sending His Own Son to deal with sin, God has met the demands of the law on our behalf. (Romans 8:3,4)
6. But, this is not freedom to do whatever our selfish souls choose! To love is to obey the law. (Romans 13:8) So, in Galatians 5:13, Paul concluded that real freedom in Christ means serving others with love.
7. To selfish human beings, this does not sound like freedom at all. How can service to others be considered freedom?
8. It is only by doing away with our selfish human tendencies and adopting the Christian ideal of love for others that we can gradually become more like Jesus. By looking at His example and by following—as far as possible—His example, we can eventually learn that serving others brings the greatest happiness. In fact, serving others is the right thing to do. Thus, it will be possible for God to turn loose a group of former sinners into the new earth with no jails, no police, and no restrictions because they are completely free; that is, they never want to do anything that is wrong. So, they will only do what is right.
9. Read Galatians 3:13. What does it mean to say that Christ became a curse for us? We understand that Deuteronomy 21:22,23 spells out that anyone who hangs on a tree brings a curse on the whole land.

10. But, what does that do for us? Christians have often said that Jesus paid the price for our sins. What is the price for our sins? (Romans 6:23) Who demands that a price be paid? Is it the Law? To whom is it paid? How can we tell if it has been paid? Sin separates us from God. (Isaiah 59:2) What does it take to fix that?
11. In this lesson there is considerable effort to spell out the difference between “doing the law” as some kind of means to earn our own salvation, as opposed to “fulfilling the law”—meaning that having received salvation by faith, we learn to serve others; thus, obeying the law. Paul suggested that salvation sets us free from bondage to sin, death, and the Devil. How does that actually work? What is the relationship between the joy of salvation and faith?
12. If you told a thoroughly selfish person of the world that you were going to set him free to serve others, would he be attracted by that idea? Of course not! So, how do Christians get weaned away from selfishness and learn to be truly loving? Is it really possible for a former sinner, a selfish descendent of Adam and Eve, to learn to love others as we love ourselves? How do we do that? (GC 555; 2 Corinthians 3:18)
13. How did Christ set us free? Did He do that by paying our debts? Or, by demonstrating the truth about God and what it means to live a sinless life?
14. Read 1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:13,14; and Colossians 2:6. Paul made it very clear that given certain facts—which he stated—we are then responsible to do certain things. God gives us strength. He gives us life; but, not so we can waste it. We are set free to use our bodies to bring glory to God.
15. Obviously, freedom was a major issue for Paul. Why do you think that was? He wrote about freedom 28 times in his letters. By contrast, the other New Testament writers mentioned it only 13 times. Clearly, Paul was not talking about economic or political freedom. He was talking about freedom from the tyranny of sin. Paul had been a Pharisee. Was that a factor?
16. Jesus Himself stated that as human beings, we will serve one of two masters. (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13) Does that mean that no matter what we do, we will always be slaves? To whom are we slaves? Do we have to serve one or the other master? The answer is, “Yes!” Basically, our motives will either be selfish or loving. So, what motivates us?
17. From what are we set free? Jonathan Edwards of early American fame served an angry God. He said:

So that, thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell, and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment; the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain lay hold on them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out: and they have no interest in any Mediator, there are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of; all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God.—Jonathan

Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Enfield, Connecticut, July 8, 1741. [see <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/sinners.htm>]

18. If you felt that it was your responsibility to appease the anger or wrath of such a God, how would you do it? Some have sacrificed their children! Would you feel free in any sense of the word?
19. Are you among the millions who have recognized the freeing actions of Jesus Christ? Can you see the changes that have resulted from your relationship with Jesus Christ? Our lives should be continually growing more like Jesus. Remember that if you are still worshiping exactly the same God that you worshiped one year ago, you are worshiping a graven image. In our lives, do we sometimes go two steps forward and then one step back.
20. Freedom must be measured by outcomes. How do you exercise your freedom? What does it mean to you? Are you sure that you are free from the bondage of legalism as well as the bondage of licentiousness? Often, what happens is the sequence that follows. A person becomes a Christian. He/she is very excited but fairly soon discovers that he/she cannot manage to avoid sin. So, he/she starts looking around at other church members. He/she then sees that others are not doing any better than he/she is. At that point, he/she either drops out or starts to think that God grades on the curve. So, he/she begins comparing himself/herself with other church members. It is very difficult to tell what motives are behind a person's actions. Who is the Judge?
21. What are the dangers of legalism? Paul reminded his hearers that if one is circumcised, that is, if one is trying to please God by something that he does himself, he is required to keep the whole law. What are the implications of this? If you try to please God by things that you do, you are no longer accepting the righteousness by faith that God has offered you free of charge.
22. If you accept the righteousness by faith that God offers, you recognize that you cannot do it for yourself. And, you cannot at the same time be doing things to try to earn salvation. Trying to earn your way to heaven by whatever works, what you might come up with is like throwing an anchor out behind you while you are trying to run a race. Paul reminded his listeners that if he still advocated the keeping of all those superficial, Pharisaical requirements, the Jews would not find his gospel offensive at all.
23. But, just to show how offended Paul felt by this form of legalism, he said that he hoped the promoters of circumcision would go all the way and castrate themselves! (Galatians 5:12)
24. Citizenship always involves responsibilities. What are the responsibilities of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven? Do we have to give up our legalistic, fear-driven religion?
25. If you are trying to earn your salvation by a lot of things that you do to prove to God that you are savable, what does that imply about God? Is He a hard taskmaster requiring a long list of do's and don'ts?
26. On the other hand, if you see the life and death of Jesus and recognize what God has done for you and freely admit that you cannot do it for yourself and then accept the freely offered righteousness, it will be a transforming experience for your life. Love will become the predominant motivator instead of selfishness. This, of course, seems completely impossible to inherently selfish beings. But, it is possible! This is a metamorphosis. Are we motivated by love? Or, by selfishness?
27. Do not be fooled! The freedom that we have in Christ is not permission to self-indulgence.

Read Galatians 5:22,23. The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control. It not only includes self-control but also death to self. This is not easy for human beings. Our natural tendencies are described in Galatians 5:19-21.

28. Wouldn't you love to live in a community where everyone loved everyone else, and everyone was looking out for everyone else? Where people are always helpful, always kind, always courteous, and always happy? Of course, if you would like to belong to a community like that, you must be that kind of person yourself—willing to serve the needs of others. But, God is inviting us to live in just such a community for the rest of eternity.
29. This requires the practice of true *agape* love while we are here on this earth. This is a kind of love which is based on principle and not emotion. It requires doing things for others long enough until we recognize that it is the greatest way to freedom and happiness. When we realize that and begin to act out that kind of behavior consistently with the help of the Holy Spirit, then we are on track to become like Jesus.
30. We have been talking about the grand ideas of freedom and slavery, love and selfishness. But, what happens when you boil that down to talk about the minutia—the daily, individual, tiny acts of life? The ancient Jews believed that they needed to please God. And they recognized that in Jewish history when their nation stopped pleasing God, they got into all kinds of trouble. So, they decided to create for themselves a lot of rules to make sure that they pleased God. Now, that is fine so long as you are applying those rules only to yourself. But, they were never happy with that. They created many rules which they then wanted to apply to everyone around them. There were rules for dress, for diet, for leisure, for every aspect of living, and especially for how one was to observe the Sabbath. Their rules became a burden that was impossible to bear.
31. So, how do we fulfill the whole law? (Galatians 5:13-15) If we could keep all the laws that God has given us, we could live by doing so. But, we cannot. However, if we learn to truly love, Paul said repeatedly that love is the fulfilling of all law. (Romans 13:8; Galatians 5:14)
32. Many ancient rulers made rules for their people. Many of those law codes included expressions that represent what every mother has said at one time or another to her children: If you do not want your sibling to do that to you, do not do it to him/her. But, Jesus took that ancient adage and turned it into something completely different and incredibly more powerful: “Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12, *GNB*)
33. Compare Christ's statement with the previous statement. How different are they? Does Jesus' statement tell us that the law and love are not incompatible? Where in the Old Testament did Jesus get that? Is it an expansion on Leviticus 19:18? Is it easier to love others? Or, to keep the commandments? How often do we as church members get all disturbed by what really is minutia? How much time do we spend talking and studying about the real core issues in the gospel? Do we understand the gospel so well that not even the Devil could confuse us over it?
34. We were not set free to serve our own selfish interests but to serve others. Could we really do that?

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Last Modified: October 30, 2011

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