

Galatians

Lesson 9

Chapter 5:1-15

Leader Guide

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Lesson 9

Freedom in Christ

Galatians 5:1-15

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. *Galatians 5:6*

Prayers

Introduction

Paul delivers the central message of Christianity to believers in Galatians 5:6; the only thing that matters is faith and love. All of our actions flow from these two qualities, faith and love. God gives us both these gifts! He gives us faith to believe in Jesus as God's Son and our Savior. He gives his Spirit so that we love him and others. Paul used slightly different language in his letter to the Corinthian church, "if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" 1 Corinthians 13:2.

Read Galatians 5:1-15

Gal 5:1 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.

Gal 5:2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Gal 5:3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.

Gal 5:4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Gal 5:5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Gal 5:7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

Gal 5:8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.

Gal 5:9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

Gal 5:10 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.

Gal 5:11 Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.

Gal 5:12 As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Gal 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Gal 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Gal 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Discuss

1. In chapter 5, Paul begins contrasting slavery with freedom. In the previous chapters, Paul writes about being slaves with no spiritual inheritance, slaves to Jewish laws and sacrifices, slavery to false teachers, and slavery to sin. Now Paul declares believers have freedom! What is the freedom he is referring to?

The alternative to slavery under the law is freedom in Christ. Paul writes in verse 5:6 our freedom is about faith and love; all our actions flow from these two qualities in our lives. In Christ, we are led by the Holy Spirit to acts of love and are free from sin. Every Christian still sins, but the Spirit will not let us make peace with sin. You might think your struggle with sin is just too great. Friend, the Holy Spirit is not finished with his work yet. Continue to ask daily for his transformation in your life. Pray the prayer Jesus taught us, Father lead me not into temptation. We repent and have the assurance our sins are forgiven, and we are no longer under sin's condemnation.

2. What are the Gentile Galatians thinking of doing that indicates they think they need to be Jewish as well as Christian?

The central issue was circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses, but the real problem was the belief that faith in Christ was not enough for their salvation and righteousness.

3. How did this indicate a lack of faith?

We are prone to make our faith about us rather than what Christ has done for us. We feel good about our faith when we are obedient, don't sin, or do something good for someone else. But we carry a burden of guilt when we sin. Our focus is very much on our behavior rather than God's grace. The promises we receive through grace and faith in Christ Jesus are sufficient. We are loved unconditionally, our sins are atoned for, our sins are forgiven and forgotten, we are not under condemnation for our sins, and we share in Christ's holiness and righteousness so that we cannot be anymore in God's eyes. We can let go of guilt and focus on ourselves to love God and others.

4. What did Paul say was the consequence of being circumcised (Galatians 5:3-4)?

Without faith in Christ, they were not under grace. Christ was useless to them; if they wanted to justify themselves by the law, they needed to keep the entire law.

5. We do not struggle with the issue of circumcision or living by Jewish ceremonial laws, but legalism still subtly permeates our thinking. Discuss how living in God's grace with faith and love is different from a legalistic view of the following topics:
 - a. Viewing prayer, bible study, or church attendance as something you should do rather than as something you enjoy doing.

There is probably some benefit in prayer or reading the Bible as a discipline, but if the motivation for the discipline is not love for God, no discipline is sustainable.

- b. Doing good works to be loved by God.

Paul writes that we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Love and compassion for others call us to action, so good works are part of our spiritual DNA. If we feel we need to do good works for God to love us, that reveals a lack of security in God's unconditional love. God loved us since before creation; we cannot add to love. God has raised and lowered empires to bring you to Christ, and nothing can separate you from his love (Romans 8:39).

- c. Striving to give 10% to church because you should rather than giving because you enjoy seeing your gifts used to help others.

People have many motivations for giving: a desire for recognition, influence, tax incentives, or a genuine desire to be obedient. Without love, our gifts are meaningless. A tithe cannot measure love for God or others.

- d. Dwelling on your own sin rather than dwelling on God's forgiveness.

Many believers struggle with sin, and their sins weigh them down with guilt, stealing the joy they should have in Christ. Even in our struggles, God gives us complete assurance of our faith in Christ - forgiveness, no condemnation, unconditional love, and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives.

- e. Always feeling the need to do better and more rather than feeling God's peace and joy.

Many mature believers become overextended in their commitments and activities in the church. This can become a joy-sapping, overwhelming pattern of stress. This is not the love God calls you to. God condescends to us to advance his kingdom through us so that our lives are enriched and our faith strengthened by seeing his work. If you feel you do not have enough time to do all you are called to, perhaps God is not calling you to do all you do!

- f. Feeling God loves you because you have faith in Jesus rather than feeling God loves you for you.

At the core of this thought is a belief that you are not worthy of God's love. God made plans for you to be with him as his child from before creation. He sent Christ to die for sins so that you can be united with him. God revealed his plan of salvation and redemption through his Son to you, and he gave you the faith to believe in Christ, and he gave you his Spirit so that you can never be separated from him. Dwell on God's wonderful unconditional love for you, and rest securely in him as his beloved child.

6. Does freedom from the law mean that Christians are free to indulge their sinful natures (verse 13)?

Our freedom from the law does not give us a license to sin. We receive God's Spirit to guide us, and his Spirit will not lead us to anything contrary to his will. When Paul wrote in verse 5:6, the only thing that matters is faith and love, he meant that we would not sin when we are led by love because "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).

7. Paul crystalizes Christian doctrine in a single sentence in verse 5:6, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love," and repeats the same point in verse 5:14; the entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Read Christ's address to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7 and discuss why the only thing that counts is faith and love.

Rev 2:1 **"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:**

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:

Rev 2:2 **I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.**

Rev 2:3 **You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.**

Rev 2:4 **Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.**

Rev 2:5 **Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.**

Rev 2:6 **But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans [sexual immorality], which I also hate.**

Rev 2:7 **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**

- a. What things did the Ephesus church do that were commendable?
- a. Verse 2 **good deeds, hard work, perseverance, intolerance of wickedness, and discernment of false teachings**
 - b. Verse 3 **persevered hardship in Jesus' name**
 - c. Verse 6 **(the Nicolaitans practiced sexual immorality)**
- b. With all the good things the church of Ephesus had done, why was Christ displeased with them?

In all their busyness, they lost their love for Christ.

- c. Do you think it is possible to serve Christ without loving him?

Burnout happens all the time. People become overcommitted to activities ending in spiritual and emotional exhaustion.

d. What three things did Jesus say to do to rekindle a love for him, verse 5?

Jesus' advice to the Ephesians to renew their relationship with him is practical advice for any relationship.

- 1. Remember**
- 2. Repent; remember these words: I am sorry, I was wrong, please forgive me.**
- 3. Do the things you did at first when your love was strong.**

Closing Prayer

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul