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# Session 6: Free!

## Bible Passages

Galatians 5:1-15

## Brief Notes

Freedom. It's what the world longs for, but without understanding where it is to be found. And who would think that Christians are the most truly free people in the world?! - in fact many Christians wouldn't recognise that truth. Paul wants us to understand it, live it out and guard it. There are two commands in the passage – in verse 1 and verse 13 – which mark off the two concerns Paul is unpacking here, as he warns against both legalism and licence.

## Don't Lose Your Freedom! (vv.1-12)

Christ has set us free, but from what? Particularly here he means the tyranny of the Law. Paul has spoken in the previous chapter spoke of our former spiritual slavery (4:3, 8), and made clear that taking on the burden of the Law is a return to that slavery (4:9), giving up the freedom for which Christ has redeemed us. Circumcision might have seemed a relatively small matter, but if they let themselves be circumcised, they would *lose* more than they bargained for (not just a foreskin, but Christ, v.2, and grace, v.4), and they would *gain* more than they bargained for, for they would need to obey the whole Law (v.3). Circumcision symbolised submission to the Law, but Law and grace as a means of justification are mutually exclusive. Seeking justification through the Law means working to establish our own righteousness, relying on what we do, and means as a consequence that we live with the no certainty about judgement on the last day; whereas faith

rests wholly on what Christ has already done, and so waits confidently for the righteousness that will be ours (“hope” here implies certainty). Such faith, while not relying on what we do, does transform what we do, as these final chapters make clear.

In verses 7-12, the false teachers are in view. It is very strong language (see v.12), because Paul is warning about a serious danger. The false teachers would have claimed that they were trying to encourage the Galatians to a fuller obedience, but Paul says they were stopping obedience (v.7). Likening their teaching to yeast, suggests that their seemingly small addition to the Gospel would actually corrupt it entirely. Paul’s message of the cross might be offensive and attract persecution from the world, but their corruption of this Gospel would bring on themselves the punishment of God. The Galatians should have nothing to do with it.

## **Don’t Abuse Your Freedom! (vv.13-15)**

Again Paul reminds them of their freedom, but now his concern is not what they have been freed *from*, but what they have been freed *for*. Freedom is not doing what I want, indulging the flesh and being a slave to my own desires, but being free to do live as I ought. We are freed from the tyranny of the Law as a means of justification, but freed now to keep the Law by serving others in love. Paul’s point is not “You’re free, *nevertheless* be good”, but “You’re free, **so** be good”, because what true freedom looks like. It’s a freedom seen especially in our relationships within the church family as we “serve one another humbly in love” (v.13) and root out the kind of anti-love behaviour described in v.15. Both legalism and licence, therefore, threaten our freedom: we might ponder which is the greater threat to us.

## **Discussion Questions**

- What does the world think freedom consists in?
- Does “freedom” seem an appropriate word to sum up your Christian life? Why, or why not?
- What are we freed from?
- How was the freedom of these Galatian Christians threatened by those urging them to be circumcised?
- How might our freedom be similarly threatened?
- In what ways are we tempted to add to what Christ has done in order to make ourselves more acceptable to God?
- From verses 5 and 6, what are the characteristics of real faith?
- How should our future hope help us to stand firm in our freedom in Christ?
- In the paragraph vv7-12, what are the effects of what the false teachers were teaching?
- What is one of the inevitable consequences of teaching the truth?
- What have we been set free for?
- Paradoxically perhaps, how is serving one another in love a truer expression of freedom than indulging our own desires?
- What is the difference between the wrong attitude to keeping the law seen in the false teachers, and the right attitude to keeping the law urged by Paul?
- In what relationships does Paul imply our freedom as Christians should most clearly be on show?
  - How could it be better seen amongst us?
- Paul shows how both legalism and licence threaten the freedom we have in Christ. Which of those is the greater threat to you?
- How can you guard against that threat?

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