



GALATIANS: WEEK 3

Writer: Mike Sheley
Project Supervisor: Nick Diliberto & Becky Forkel
Artwork: Ever Graphics
Editor: Angela Ivey

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GALATIANS

WEEK 3: WE WERE CHOSEN TO BE FREE

Bible: So, Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. **Galatians 5:1 (NLT)**

Bottom Line: Freedom is found in surrender, not self-dependence.

WEEKS 1 & 2 SUMMARY

Two weeks ago, we started this series looking at a letter the Apostle Paul wrote in 49 A.D to Christians in Galatia (what is now modern-day Turkey).

He wrote to challenge and correct false teaching that was being introduced by Jewish-Christians who had traveled from Jerusalem with their devotion to rules and regulations.

His goal was to help the Galatians see the foolishness of such teaching and draw them back to what he had taught them—the true Good News or Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Last week, we did a lot of talking about the Old Testament from God's eternal promise to Abraham to how it was fulfilled in Jesus and how it passes down to us today.

We recognized that God's plan all along was not one race of people who inherited the faith of their ancestors but a multi-ethnic family of people who received the gifts of mercy and grace from a loving and generous God through Jesus.

Paul used emphasis and repetition to call Galatians out of the foolishness of going back to obedience to the law and to return to Paul's original teaching on this wonderful, freedom we have in Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What is question or a point of confusion for you after these first two weeks of the series?
2. Does it seem to you like the Galatians are missing something obvious here or is this a situation you could see yourself getting into?
3. How do social media and online access to anyone's thoughts about anything pose a potential risk like that of the Jewish Christians for the Galatians?

In a counter-thought, how do social media and access to all these thoughts online pose a possible resource that is helpful like Paul's letter to the Galatians?

LESSON

Read Galatians 3:23-29 - We are all one in Christ.

23 Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. 25 And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

26 For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. 28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Verses 23-24 have a "policing" kind of language to it that doesn't sound too good to us.

However, the people at BibleProject.com describe Paul here as being like a strict schoolteacher who is keeping the students in line.

That characterization of the law means that Paul is showing us how the law had a temporary function to guide people into a right way of living until the Rescuer came along.

Jesus fulfilled the law by loving God and other people the way God had always intended us to and then He took the curse of sin into Himself when He died on the cross.

Now we have an amazing unity in Jesus!

When we are baptized, Paul points out in verse 27, we get this connection or unity with Jesus that also connects us with other people of all different distinctions.

His "putting on new clothes" language is like someone putting on a uniform.

Whether it is a soldier, police officer, or even a fast-food worker, it doesn't matter who is wearing the uniform, where he is from, what gender he is, or what his socio-economic status has been.

Once that uniform is on, that person is identified and unified with others who wear the same uniform.

It's the same with us when we are baptized and become followers of Jesus.

Paul isn't saying that all these distinctions are not important.

He is saying they should not divide us.

We should be like a mosaic or bouquet; our differences are to be celebrated as a beautiful part of the unity we have with our diversity.

His words ring just as true today as they did when they were originally written.

And he reconnects all this to the eternal promise we talked about in week two since being baptized into Christ also makes us adopted heirs into God's family, linked now to Abraham.

Discussion Questions

1. Teachers are supposed to help you learn information and skills that will help you when you become an adult.

How did the law guide, and sometimes protect, God's people until Jesus arrived?

2. If someone is adopted, he or she takes on the family name.

If someone puts on a uniform, he or she becomes an official part of that organization.

In what ways do we take on the family name/identity and become an official part of God's family when we are baptized, according to Paul?

3. Obviously, trying to be unified in the church with all our diversity has been a challenge for a long time.

What challenges do you see today with the church being unified?

In what ways does our diversity point back to our amazing Heavenly Father?

Read Galatians 4:1-7 - Recognize what God has done and realize we are now His sons and daughters.

1 Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. 2 They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. 3 And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.

4 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. 5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law so that he could adopt us as his very own children. 6 And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." 7 Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Some of this language is very foreign to us today.

Let's focus on what connects in our world today since we have to keep in mind that Paul was writing this original letter to a specific group of people at a specific point in history with cultural and political situations that were different from ours today.

Paul's point in these verses is that, once we are baptized and become followers of Jesus, we are adopted and made official children of God.

Everyone is made in God's image.

Everyone has characteristics that resemble the personality of God. This has been true since He made Adam and Eve in the beginning.

However, only those who are adopted into the family can call themselves children of God.

So, remember that. This is crazy unique and so different from how so many people throughout history have thought about gods and even God.

He doesn't look at us like slaves to serve His needs.

He sees us as people He wants to adopt into His family, which He makes possible because He took care of our greatest need through His son Jesus!

Read Galatians 4:8-31 - Paul's concern for the Galatians

8 Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. 9 So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? 10 You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years. 11 I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing. 12 Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles—free from those laws.

You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you. 13 Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News. 14 But even though my condition tempted you to reject me, you did not despise me or turn me away. No, you took me in and cared for me as though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself.

15 Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then? I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible. **16** Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?

17 Those false teachers are so eager to win your favor, but their intentions are not good. They are trying to shut you off from me so that you will pay attention only to them. **18** If someone is eager to do good things for you, that's all right; but let them do it all the time, not just when I'm with you.

19 Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives. **20** I wish I were with you right now so I could change my tone. But at this distance, I don't know how else to help you.

21 Tell me, you who want to live under the law, do you know what the law actually says? **22** The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave wife and one from his freeborn wife. **23** The son of the slave wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. But the son of the freeborn wife was born as God's own fulfillment of his promise.

24 These two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants. The first woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai where people received the law that enslaved them. **25** And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia because she and her children live in slavery to the law. **26** But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the free woman, and she is our mother. **27** As Isaiah said,

"Rejoice, O childless woman,
you who have never given birth!
Break into a joyful shout,
you who have never been in labor!
For the desolate woman now has more children
than the woman who lives with her husband!"

28 And you, dear brothers and sisters, are children of the promise, just like Isaac. **29** But you are now being persecuted by those who want you to keep the law, just as Ishmael, the child born by human effort, persecuted Isaac, the child born by the power of the Spirit.

30 But what do the Scriptures say about that? "Get rid of the slave and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the inheritance with the free woman's son." **31** So, dear brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman; we are children of the free woman.

Paul opens this session with more slave language.

He says that in trying to please God by obeying these old rules and regulations, they are acting more like slaves than adopted children.

Paul even points out that he lives more like Gentiles than Jews now as he is experiencing the freedom that comes from living for Jesus instead of these old rules.

He reflects on how well they received and treated him when he first arrived and shared with them the Good News about Jesus.

And he questions why their attitude has changed so significantly towards him when these strangers have come and are asking them to live more like slaves than free citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Paul uses the language of both fathers and mothers as he tries to express how painful it is for him to try to help them mature through this and to correct them via a letter instead of in person.

He brings up a story from the Old Testament to illustrate the futile effort of trying to do things the human way versus trusting in God, no matter how crazy or hard that kind of faith might seem.

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout history and even in the world today, people wanted to move from being slaves to being free, from being foreigners to being citizens.

In what ways would we be doing the opposite and acting like the Galatians if we tried to please God with our obedience rather than our faith?

2. If you were to live in a different part of this country or in a different country in the world, try to think of a few different things that are "normal" to your way of life now that you might change or totally give up in order to help show others the Good News of Jesus and the freedom in that life.
3. When it comes to prayer and faith today, give an example of how you have tried to take care of something on your own when you should have at least asked someone for help, or at most, trusted in God to take care of the problem.

Read Galatians 5:1-15 - Serve one another in love.

1 So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.

2 Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 I'll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey every regulation in the whole law

of Moses. **4** For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace.

5 But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us. **6** For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.

7 You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? **8** It certainly isn't God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. **9** This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough! **10** I am trusting the Lord to keep you from believing false teachings. God will judge that person, whoever he is, who has been confusing you.

11 Dear brothers and sisters, if I were still preaching that you must be circumcised—as some say I do—why am I still being persecuted? If I were no longer preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, no one would be offended. **12** I just wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would mutilate themselves.

13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. **14** For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." **15** But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

Paul again talks about the freedom we have with Jesus.

Circumcision was a ritual that the Jewish people used to physically mark males as being part of God's family.

But this act was another step of obedience that didn't change their hearts and didn't bring about the kind of freedom we have in Jesus.

He spends a lot of time telling them not to get caught up—or literally tied up—in this concept that leads to a life of slavery instead of the freedom we can have in our life with Christ.

The key for us is to look at verses 13-15.

(If you have time, read Philippians 2 here for comparison.)

Paul points out that the freedom we are called to live in, that he started out with in verse 1, is not a selfish freedom.

This is not "I have a right to do whatever I want."

Or maybe you've heard someone say, "I have rights as an American citizen."

But the freedoms we have—no matter where we live—does not give us total freedom to do whatever we want whenever we want.

We have laws that limit our freedoms so that we don't hurt other people.

Paul is saying that, as responsible members of God's family, we must remember that Jesus said the most important thing for us to do had two parts: loving God AND loving other people.

If we truly love God, we'll honor the freedom we have by serving one another in love.

Discussion Questions

1. What endless and/or pointless arguments do you catch yourself getting into in-person, online, or on social media?
2. In what ways is it better for people, in general, to limit their personal freedom out of respect for other people?
3. Give an example of a way you can use your freedom in Christ to love and serve others: at school, at home, in your community.