

The Book of Galatians

Lesson 10: Freedom in Christ; Do Not Submit to the Yoke -- Galatians 5:1–

12

There is a moment in every prison-break movie when the door finally swings open and the prisoner steps out into the sunlight, blinking, free at last. But imagine the strangest ending you could write: the freed prisoner pauses at the gate, looks back at the cell, and walks back in, pulling the door shut behind him. You would want to shout at the screen. That is very nearly what Paul sees the Galatians doing, and he will not let it pass without a fight.

He opens this chapter with a banner held high over the whole letter: “For freedom Christ has set us free.” Not partial freedom, not freedom on a trial basis, but real, costly freedom, purchased by the blood of the Son of God. And then comes the command that follows from it: stand firm, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Freedom, it turns out, is not only a gift to be received but a treasure to be guarded.

Paul speaks here with unusual intensity, because the danger is so great. He warns that if the Galatians take on circumcision as a way to be justified, they are not adding a little extra insurance to their faith; they are cutting themselves off from Christ entirely. You cannot mix a little law with a little grace and come out ahead. To go back under law as the basis of your standing is to let go of Christ, to fall away from the very grace that saves.

Yet even here Paul is not merely scolding. He reminds them that what counts in Christ is “faith working through love,” a living faith that takes hold of grace and pours itself out in love. He remembers how well they were running and aches to see them finish. As we read, hear both the warning and the tenderness. Freedom is worth standing firm for, and the One who set us free is worth holding on to with everything we have.

Group Discussion: Paul says, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore” (5:1). Why does real freedom require us to stand firm and stay alert, and what are the pressures today that tempt believers to quietly take the yoke of slavery back on?

Personal Reflection: Paul says what counts is “faith working through love” (5:6). If someone watched your week, would they see a faith that is actively expressing itself through love, and where is that most and least true of you right now?

Read Galatians 5:1–12

Study Questions

1. Paul proclaims, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). What is the freedom that Christ won for us, and why must such freedom be actively guarded rather than passively assumed?
2. Paul warns against putting the yoke of slavery back on. Where in your own walk are you most tempted to take up a yoke again, whether rule-keeping, performance, or someone else's expectations, in place of resting in Christ?
3. Paul warns that whoever accepts circumcision to be justified "is obligated to keep the whole law" and that "Christ will be of no advantage" to him (5:2-3). Why is it all or nothing, so that a person cannot simply add a little law to a little Christ as the ground of their standing with God?
4. Paul asks, "You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (5:7). Have you ever been running well spiritually and then been knocked off course? What, or who, hindered you, and how did it happen?
5. Paul warns that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (5:9). How does a small compromise in doctrine or in life tend to spread, and why does Paul treat a seemingly minor concession as so dangerous?
6. Paul is concerned about small beginnings that grow. What small compromises have you been tempted to treat as harmless, and where might a little leaven already be working in your own life?
7. Paul says that in Christ what counts is "faith working through love" (5:6), not circumcision or uncircumcision. What does this phrase teach about the nature of true saving faith, and why does it rule out both empty ritual and a bare faith only that never works through love?
8. Paul calls for a faith that actively works through love. In what specific relationships or situations is God calling your faith to express itself in concrete acts of love this week?
9. Paul issues a sobering warning to those seeking justification by law: "You are severed from Christ ... you have fallen away from grace" (5:4). What does this teach about whether a Christian can fall away and be lost, and how do we take this warning with full seriousness while still resting in the assurance God gives to those who remain faithful in Christ?
10. Look back across the whole passage. Paul urges the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom Christ won and to keep running well. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, this week, to stand firm in your freedom and guard it rather than let it slip.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 8:31-36, the truth that makes us truly free; Hebrews 10:26-31, the danger of deliberately turning from the truth once known; 2 Peter 1:10-11, making our calling and election sure; James 2:14-26, a faith that works and is completed by deeds; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, cleansing out the old leaven.