

Free to Love and Serve!
Galatians 5:1-6:10

“But the one who peers into the perfect law of liberty and fixes his attention there and does not become a forgetful listener but one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does.”

(James 1:25, NET Bible)

The gospel is for Christians.

This mini-series is about the Christian’s ongoing need for the gospel. Not just as the message that delivers us from the penalty of sin when we believed what it says about Christ’s sufficiency to save us, but also as the truth of Christ’s sufficiency to empower us to live for Him. ***It must not only be believed for salvation, but also applied for life.***

Many sincere believers have a skewed view of the gospel, not in its content but in its scope. If you think I’m overstating this gospel for life thing, look with me at Paul’s introduction to his letter to the first Christians who were discouraged by the nonsensical religious teaching that believers in Christ should strive to be a ‘good Christian’—the Galatians.

“I am shocked that you are turning away (*deserting*, NASB) so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News ⁷ but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ.

⁸ Let God’s curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. ⁹ I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.

¹⁰ Obviously, I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.” (Galatians 1:6-10)

False teachers had infiltrated the fledgling church in Galatia. “Now that you Galatians have heard, believed, and responded to the gospel and become Christians,” they were telling these new believers, “it’s time to start doing what ‘good Christians’ do.” Speaking from their Jewish religious preferences rather than from the perspective of Christ and the Apostles, they defined ‘good Christians’ in the same way they defined good Jews—people who submit to circumcision and obey the law.

Knowing the danger of this teaching that denied the cross by turning Christianity into another sect of Judaism, Paul angrily refuted the lie. “No, No, No,” Paul would shout with his pen. “Don’t listen to them. They’re turncoats who deserve God’s curse, leading you toward spiritual desertion. It’s not about keeping rules,” he would argue for six chapters, “it’s about being transformed.”

Any teaching that encourages those who have been saved by the grace of God to try to seek merit with God by living according to religious performance distorts the Good News and incites spiritual AWOL. It’s an affront to the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

Salvation and Christian living are by grace through faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone. Period. No footnotes, no small print.

This and only this is the Good News. This and only this is the solid foundation of our Christian life. It is not good news to say that once you have been saved you now need to start working hard to perform well. That’s slavery that always leads to pride and shame. Daily applying the Gospel to ***ourselves, and others*** is our only hope for emancipation from the toxic competition that is tearing our spiritual lives and our faith communities apart.

In the first section of the epistle proper, 1:11-2:21, Paul defended his apostleship. In 3:1-4:31 the Apostle clarifies the implications of justification and sanctification by faith and why it’s true. **His final section demonstrates how this grace works in life. Grace works through liberty.** Christ set us free to demonstrate His righteousness in ways that transcend any enslaving set of rules or moral codes (5:1-12). This liberty isn’t so that we can indulge the self-centered desires of our flesh as we did before we trusted in Christ. Using our freedom in that way will cause us to lose our inheritance in the coming kingdom (5:13-21).

We've been set free to walk in the Spirit (5:16-18) so that we can display Christ's righteousness through the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-25). But even this transformation isn't about us; it's about Christ and others. What we've really been set free to do is to love and serve others (6:1-10).

The big picture of Paul's glorious presentation of Christian liberty contrasts two systems of righteousness: works-righteousness – which always enslaves, and grace-righteousness – which always liberates. It also forces us to see that true liberty is always about Christ and others:

Free to be righteous: Walk in the Spirit and you will express your faith through love!

I. Paul explains how to live the liberated Christian life: Stand fast in your freedom as the Spirit now leads you to express your faith through love (5:1-6:10).

A. Stand fast in your freedom rather than being enslaved by the law so that you can pursue righteousness by faith that is expressed through love (5:1-6).

B. Don't let false teachers of works-righteousness sidetrack you from the freedom you have been called to – a freedom to love and serve others (5:7-15).

C. Walk in the Spirit to defeat the flesh and you will display the very character of Christ demonstrated in radically selfless relationships (5:16-26).

D. Fulfill the transcendent law of Christ by loving one another well in community (6:1-10).

II. Christ set us free to love and serve others!

A. Your Christian freedom is not about you; it's about Christ and others. (From Bill Thrall):

As we move toward maturity, there are three broad categories of maturing in the Christian life:

1. "Me" centered—healing the needy new believer.

2. "Others" centered—maturing the healing believer.

3. "Christ" centered—releasing the mature believers.

B. "One of the greatest gifts you can give to a young believer is to provide a safe place (opportunity) where they can disclose what is true about the sin that is in them and where they can disclose what is true about the sin that has been done against them to provide a safe place where they do not have to hide anything." (Trueface)

C. Maturing is a process. When growing yourself or nurturing others, make sure you do not push maturity beyond the pace it takes for Christ in us (Christian character) to mature. Right answers do not equate to right choices.

D. Christians who are living by the "law of liberty" are doing the works you would expect from a follower of Christ. The Spirit is compelling and empowering them to bridle their tongue, care for the powerless (specifically widows and orphans), and not allow this self-centered world to stain their lives.

The Good News About Spiritual Maturity

You will get everything you want from your own Christian life and from the ones you love and nourish if you will trust grace (the original gospel), because grace changes everything and grace takes the long view.