

## Freedom!

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Galatians: Free At Last Series

Galatians 5:1-12

Following WWII, freedom has been the battle cry of virtually every progressive group around the world. In the 1950's and 60's it was under the banner of freedom that countries in Africa and Asia liberated themselves from colonial rule. I still remember maps in grade school that had the Belgian Congo and Rhodesia and French Guyana. One by one, as people around the world, fought for national self-determination and liberation from foreign powers the names of the countries began to change.

Freedom was also the driving passion of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's as millions of people around America declared, "We will no longer have our futures determined by the color of our skin or where we happen to have been born." Freedom was so much of the heart of the Civil Rights Movement that Martin Luther King Jr.'s gravestone is engraved with the famous saying, "Free at last, free at last – thank God Almighty, I am free at last!"

Freedom was the battle cry of women's liberation in the 1960's and 70's. Many women rebelled against societally appointed roles that denied women options and choice for their lives. Millions of women asked, "What if I want to do something in addition to, or other than stay at home and be a mom or a wife? And if I go to work will I have the freedom to advance according to my ability, or will there be an artificial ceiling designed to keep women in their proper place? Is every occupation going to be open to me, or will I be foreclosed from serving in the Armed Forces or the police department or as a firefighter or as a pastor?"

Part of freedom for women involved being free from sexual harassment in the workplace and being subjected to lewd remarks and unwanted advances from the opposite sex.

Of course, freedom in the 1960's also involved sexual freedom. Many people asked, "Why do we have to wait until marriage to have sex? Why can't there be sexual freedom to have sex whenever and with whomever you want so long as it is consensual? Why can't we just live together before we're married and try things out?"

"And why is expression of sexual feelings confined to the opposite gender? What about same sex attraction?" And so in the beginning of the 1970's we had the Gay Liberation Movement and the first Gay Rights Parade.

And, of course, the term freedom has been applied to reproductive freedom – the freedom to abort unwanted or unplanned children.

Most recently, conservatives have gathered under the banner of freedom in the Tea Party Movement saying that the federal government is trampling on our freedom.

Biblical Christians, thoughtful Christians, have found ourselves saying “Yes” to some of these movements. Some of these things have expressed the heart of God and God’s commitment to justice and his passion for human liberation. And Biblical and thoughtful Christians have said no and have found themselves in opposition to other expression of liberation and freedom. Many of us have said that some of these things are destructive to the human condition and actually bring about increased bondage and slavery.

Because Christians have sometimes said “No” to certain expressions of freedom, many people in America would be surprised to discover that freedom is one of the major themes of the Bible. Christians are hardly “Johnny-Come-Lately’s” jumping on a band wagon when we talk about liberation and freedom. Rather, we followers of Christ would say that it is the larger culture that in some cases knowingly, but in most cases unknowingly have built upon our great biblical heritage which calls people to freedom. I’ve titled today’s message, “Freedom!” Let’s pray.

### **Galatians 5:1-12**

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. 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. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. 7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” 10 I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will have to pay the penalty, whoever that may be. 11 Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. 12 As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

As I said, freedom is one of the major themes in the Bible – both Old Testament and New Testament. Freedom is a great biblical word; it is a great Christian word. In fact, John Stott, who along with Dr. Billy Graham was probably the leading evangelical of the last 60 years, said that freedom could easily be used as a substitute for the word salvation.

The meaning and goal of salvation: freedom

If you want to understand what is meant when you see the phrase “Jesus saves” painted from highway overpasses and scrolled on restroom walls and painted on subways, what does it mean that “Jesus saves,” you could easily translate the phrase into “Jesus sets us free.” Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament salvation is all about freedom.

Think with me about this for a moment. In the Old Testament, what is the overriding picture of God’s saving people? The answer, of course, is the Exodus. God came and liberated his slave-people Israel from bondage in Egypt. And in the New Testament, what did Jesus say he came to do? Listen to Jesus’ words in Luke 4. Here is what we might call Jesus’ Inaugural Address in his home town of Nazareth. Here is where Jesus lays out what his administration is going to accomplish. Here is what I plan to do.

#### **Luke 4:18-19**

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus is saying that his activity in the world was designed to be liberating activity, releasing activity, the activity in which people were set free. And Jesus understood that it was only by coming to him that people could experience the freedom that we all long for. In John 8:34 Jesus said:

#### **John 8:34**

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

F.F. Bruce, who was a great biblical scholar in the same generation as Billy Graham and John Stott, spent half a century writing biblical scholarship mainly about the life and letters of the Apostle Paul. And towards the end of F.F. Bruce’s life, he wrote a wonderful book on the Apostle Paul’s life. He chose this lovely title for his book, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. And F.F. Bruce opens his book asking this question, “What was the Apostle Paul’s great contribution to the world? What did the Apostle Paul give us through his letters and ministry?” Bruce said this:

Paul’s pre-eminent contribution to the world was his presentation of the good news of free grace... free in the sense that it is sovereign and unfettered, free in the sense that it is held forth to men and women for their acceptance by faith alone, and free in the sense that it is the source and principle of their liberation from all kinds of inward and spiritual bondage, including the bondage of legalism and the bondage of moral anarchy.

In other words, Paul preached free grace. That was his message. We receive salvation freely; we don’t earn it. And salvation produces freedom. It releases us from every kind of slavery. Salvation means freedom.

What are we set free from? According to the New Testament, human beings are not free. We are not Born Free; the song should be “Born Slaves.” We are in bondage to guilt before God; to accusation from the enemy. We aim to conformity to the world. We are enslaved to habitual, repeated, compulsions that destroy our lives and hurt other people. According to the New Testament, human beings are enslaved – spiritually, socially, psychologically, and emotionally. And the reason Jesus came into the world was to set us free.

This could easily be an entire sermon. But let me mention just a few things quickly. First, freedom from bondage to two days every week that create guilt and fear and anxiety.

Jesus told us that there are two days out of every week that I’ve come to set you free from. Two days every week that I want to liberate you from. Jesus said I want to liberate you from yesterday and I want to liberate you from tomorrow.

Because of Jesus’ full and final payment on the cross, you and I can be set free from yesterday – from all of the mistakes we made, from all of the ways we blew it, from all of the attitudes and faults and omissions and commissions. Every one of your yesterdays can be brought to the cross. God says, “I will liberate you from your yesterdays.”

And Jesus not only came to liberate us from the yesterdays of our own mistakes and misdeeds, but the yesterdays of hurt at the hands of others. We don’t have to be bitter about what other people have done to us, or angry about the hand that life has dealt us, or regret our missed opportunities and what we might have done, could have done, and should have done. Jesus liberates us from yesterday!

And Jesus sets us free from tomorrow.

Think about just one of Jesus’ statements. In Matthew 6.34 Jesus said:

**Matthew 6:34**

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Jesus sets us free from tomorrow. So many folks live in dread and anxiety regarding what tomorrow will bring. I’m facing trouble ahead; I don’t know if I will be able to handle tomorrow’s problems. I don’t know if I can keep this faith going tomorrow. But Jesus said, “I’m setting you free to live in this moment. Just experience me today. I will provide for you tomorrow the day’s portion that you will need tomorrow. Today live near to me.”

Today you can forgive. Today you can believe in Christ. Today, just for today, you can hang in your marriage. Today, just for today, you can choose sexual purity. Today, just for today, you can choose sobriety.

And in the words of John Stott, Jesus sets us free from bondage to our puny little self. Sin is primarily self-centeredness; it is life curved in on itself. Instead of God first, our neighbor second, and ourselves third, we reverse the order. We're first; if there is anything left over maybe our neighbor will get something; and, God is lurking somewhere in the background in the recesses of our minds. Freedom from our puny little self. Freedom from self-absorption and self-pity and self-indulgence and self-aggrandizement and self-gratification and self-glorification and self-importance and self-interest – freedom from our puny little selves.

So Paul writes in Galatians 5.1 that Christ came to set us free.

#### **Galatians 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.

But there is always lurking in the shadows one great alternative to Jesus Christ. When a person discovers that they are, in fact, enslaved and you have that shocking realization, “I’m an addict; I live under so many compulsions where I cannot not do something” when a person looks at their lives and recognizes that “I just live under so much guilt about yesterday, so much fear and anxiety about tomorrow for myself or a loved one.” When you recognize, “Yes, it is true; my life is curved in on itself. I’m enslaved to my puny little self, in Pastor John Stott’s words.” The great alternative to turning to Christ for freedom is self help, turning to a set of rules or principles or religious practices that promise freedom.

The letter to the Galatians is Paul’s warning to the Galatians and to us that the great alternative to looking to Christ to set us free is looking to law, rule keeping, to set us free.

#### **Galatians 5:4**

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

There is a seductiveness, an attractiveness to legalism.

The attractiveness of legalism

The Galatians were tempted, they were being seduced away from Christ, back to the performance of certain Old Testament laws – circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, the laws of kashrut. Repeatedly in this book, Paul warns the people about the attractiveness of legalism.

#### **Galatians 4:21**

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

Why do we human beings prefer rules and standards and steps to a relationship with the Savior Jesus Christ? Why are we so drawn to religion with 5 supreme duties, or 8-fold paths, lists of dos and don'ts? The Galatians wanted to be under the Old Testament law more than they wanted Paul's message of free grace. Why?

Let me suggest a few reasons. I think that many of us are afraid of freedom especially if we've lived a wild life before. I've seen many new Christians seduced by legalism, especially if they were alcoholics, drug abusers, sexually promiscuous. Having a structure of laws not only for ourselves, but for others seems safer.

Of course, there is wisdom in certain limits. Alcoholics shouldn't spend their time hanging out in bars. And if you've been addicted to pornography, you can't spend all day online. You recognize that you have a weakness in this particular area. If I'm going online at home it will be in the center of the house with my spouse present.

But I think that many folks are afraid of freedom. They don't know that Jesus Christ is big enough to protect us from blowing ourselves up through this gift of freedom. So we say, "Thank you Jesus, but I will say no to freedom. It will be safer for me to put myself and others in a straight-jacket, living in a padded room."

I read a story a few years ago about some animal rights activists who were upset because a whale was being held in an aquarium in a huge tank. They broke into the aquarium and set the whale free to swim out into the ocean. What happened next was remarkable. The whale swam out for a little while and then decided the aquarium was a pretty good place to live. And so he returned voluntarily to the aquarium. I guess he decided that it was better to be fed fish and live in captivity than handle all the dangers of the wild.

That's what I think we're like. You see it with the children of Israel in the Old Testament. They are set free from slavery, but they don't like fending for themselves in the wilderness, having to gather food, facing the Canaanites in the Promised Land. They begin to say, "We were much better off being slaves."

Legalism is attractive.

I think there are two other things that make legalism attractive. One is that rules are simply easier. We like dos and don'ts and rules because they are basically outward behavior, that is easier to change. Many of us could choose not to drink, not to smoke, not to go to movies. Changing our hearts – that's something else altogether.

You know, every summer I get a couple of emails from people in the congregation asking me to tell the women in the church how to dress. Women are coming to church with spaghetti strap tops or dresses, or short shorts or skirts. Tell the women in the church how to dress. And virtually every election I will get appeals from people in the church begging me to tell people in the church how to vote.

See, rule-oriented religion is a lot easier than heart transformation. What we're trying to do here at Vineyard is to form in people a Christian mind to develop the inclinations of the heart so that people will think about voting or their perspective on dress from a thoughtful biblical viewpoint.

But we're afraid of freedom. Legalism is easier. And legalism appeals to pride. Legalism says progress in the Christian life is essentially like climbing a ladder or conquering another mountain: "Well, I've dealt with this problem; now, I'm going on to deal with the next problem. That's how I measure progress." Then legalism gives you a standard by which to measure your progress in holiness: "Here's the ruler. You used to be at one; now you are at 5." It is an appeal to pride.

And it is especially so, if I can look at my progress: "I don't drink hard liquor. I don't smoke. I don't cheat on my marriage vows. You do! therefore, I am holier than you are. It is an appeal to pride. The Christian life is so different. It is not a matter of conquering another mountain, climbing a ladder. Holiness in the Christian life is all about an intimate relationship of love with Christ and loving other people.

How do you measure love for Christ and love for others? I can check boxes on my behavior. But a friendship with Christ? That's not something that I can feel really proud about, or gives me a rough and ready standard by which I can lift myself up above you.

Well, what are the problems with legalism?

The problems with legalism

Paul says this in verse 1:

**Galatians 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.

Confusion about the goal of Christianity

Many people think that the goal of Christianity is to make people more moral. You know, Christians take people who used to be sexually loose and licentious, sleeping around, irresponsible folks who can't keep a job. And Christianity slaps them into shape. What this person needs is some good old fashioned religion. A lot of folks think about Christianity like joining the military. You know, you get your butt kicked for a while; you get whipped into shape. You come in as a whiny irresponsible teenager and we make you into men or we make you into mature women. A lot of folks think about Christianity that way. That it is really the job of Christianity to whip you into moral shape.

Paul has a completely different view of the reason why Christ came into the world. See, these Galatians were in the past what you might call immoral pagans. They were

sleeping around with each other. They were enslaved to every appetite. If you read about pagan society in the Roman world, it was incredibly lewd. People were literally having sex out in the street. There were drunken orgies and promiscuity of all kinds including sex with children.

And the position of the Galatians before Paul preached the gospel to them could be described as pagan or liberal slavery. They were enslaved to all these different appetites.

These Jewish Christian missionaries come in with the law and they say, “You pagans, you need to do this and this and this in order to be a full member of the body of Christ. And we ask, “Shouldn’t Paul be happy with this?” I mean these missionaries are coming in and whipping a bunch of addicted, out of control, liberal slaves into shape. But instead he says that their efforts are imposing another yoke of slavery. Look at this with me in verse 1:

**Galatians 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.

Paul says that the Galatians are in danger of moving from an ultra-liberal libertine version of slavery into an ultra-conservative legalistic form of slavery. But either way, you are still a slave. See, the goal of Christ’s coming into the world is not to whip us into moral shape. A Christian will become more moral. The goal, however, is freedom. Paul says it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. So what Paul is getting at is that the goal is so much more than conformity to a set of moral principles. Paul is the apostle of the heart set free. The goal of Christ is to transform your heart. To set your heart free from bondage to your puny little self; to liberate your heart so that you are free to become the person that God intended you to be and fulfill the purpose for which God created you.

The picture that Paul is using is that these Galatians were like oxen with their heads bowed down under a heavy yoke. Christ comes and breaks that off of them and now they’re resubmitting to another heavy yoke and having their heads bowed down. Paul doesn’t care what kind of slavery we’re in – moral slavery or immoral slavery – it is still slavery.

Legalism is confused about when to be flexible or inflexible.

Confusion about when to be flexible or inflexible

Listen to Paul’s words in verse 2:

**Galatians 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.

And verses 4 and 6:

**Galatians 5:4, 6**

4 You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Now the mark of grace-based living, in fact the art of wise living in general, is drawing the line in the right place about things we need to be flexible about and things we need to be inflexible about. The art of parenting is largely about this. Should I make a federal case out of something; when might I bite my tongue and let it go? Should you make a federal case because your 6-year old likes reading the Berenstain Bears and the father in the Berenstain Bears acts like fathers in almost all other media? He is a bumbling stumbling moron? Do I make a federal case out of this? Or your middle schooler wants to color her hair with henna to make it a nice shade of fire truck red. What about having your kids go trick-or-treating or reading Harry Potter? At what age is it appropriate for kids to date?

Parents differ on this. I'm not going to substitute my judgment for yours. But what I see in the Apostle Paul and in fact all people who have a mature grasp on the gospel, the gospel message being that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, is that folks who have a mature grasp on the gospel don't sweat the details. They major on the majors. They keep the main thing the main thing.

Notice on the one hand the Apostle Paul is incredibly inflexible when it comes to the gospel. He says, "Either you rely entirely on Christ, or you rely on your obedience to law. Either one or the other." Verse 2 and verse 4

**Galatians 5:2-4**

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

Either you rest on Christ's performance or you rest on your own performance. They're two mutually exclusive alternatives. Either it is Christ's work as the full and final payment for your sins to which we add nothing, or it's your work, either salvation a 100% proposition. It's all Christ. Or salvation is really a 50-50 proposition. Yes, Christ died for your sins, but in addition you need to be a decent person otherwise you aren't going to be saved. These are two mutually exclusive alternatives in the mind of Paul. Either salvation is a gift from beginning to end in which God says it is all done, or salvation is a matter of self-help and God says to you, "Here's the things you must do."

Paul is absolutely inflexible when it comes to the gospel. He'll confront anybody. He said even if an angel from heaven preaches a different message; you're in your room

and an angel sits down with you and fills the room with light and you fall to the floor under the glory; and the angel says, “I’m here to give you a revelation. Salvation is not entirely a gift. It is not 100% Jesus, 0% you. It’s not already accomplished! Done, done, done! Instead there are some things human beings must do. Paul says you look that angel in the eye and say, “Get away from me! You are accursed and God has reserved the lowest level of hell for you.”

Utterly inflexible when it comes to the gospel.

But Paul is utterly flexible when it comes to most everything else. Look at verse 6:

**Galatians 5:6**

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

He says the stuff that people fight about most in religion; I mean, for Jews in Paul’s day, whether you were circumcised or uncircumcised that was enormous. That was a dividing line. Paul says whether circumcised or uncircumcised doesn’t matter to me. You can imagine the Apostle Paul rolling his eyes about most contemporary church controversies. Should we have a rock band on stage, or a gospel choir singing traditional hymns? I think the Apostle Paul would say it doesn’t matter to me as long as you are worshipping Jesus. Should you wear jeans to church or a 3-piece suit, or a beautiful dress or a t-shirt; I think the Apostle Paul would say I don’t care so long as you are worshipping Jesus.

Folks who do not grasp the centrality of the gospel make everything the main thing. Their opinions are the only ones. They can’t imagine how a Christian could vote differently than they do. Their approach to the larger culture is the only approach. Anyone who disagrees is a worldly Christian. Their approach to church is the only approach. Their approach to secondary issues of doctrine is the only approach to those issues of doctrine.

I remember one church that I visited had an 18-page statement of faith with literally over 100 doctrinal statements each of which a member of the church was required to sign off on in order to join the church.

Legalism confuses the line between inflexibility and flexibility. What do we have to hold on to with a death grip and what do we have to hold with an open hand?

Again, friends, I believe the art of wise living is all about keeping the main thing the main thing and not sweating the details.

But the ultimate problem, Paul says with legalism is that it is confused about the depth of the problem.

Confusion about the depth of the problem

### **Galatians 5:5**

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

The problem is we lack righteousness. Tim Keller, in one of his books, quotes from a woman named Beatrice Webb who many consider to be the architect of Britain's modern welfare state. Beatrice Webb wrote this:

Somewhere in my diary – 1890? – I wrote, “I have staked all on the essential goodness of human nature...” [Now thirty-five years later I realize] how permanent are the evil impulses and instincts in man – how little you can count on changing some of these – for instance the appeal of wealth and power – by any change in the [social] machinery...no amount of knowledge or science will be of any avail unless we can curb the bad impulses in human beings.

See legalism, just restructuring things on the outside of us, is confused about the depth of the problem that we human beings face.

In 1920 in his book, *Outline of History*, H.G. Wells praised his belief in human progress. In 1933 in the *Shape of Things to Come*, Wells said he was appalled by the selfishness and violence of European nations and he believed that the only hope was for intellectuals to seize control and run a compulsory educational program stressing peace and justice and equality. But in 1945 Wells wrote this in his book titled, *A Mind at the End of Its Tether*:

Homo Sapiens, as he has been pleased to call himself, is “played out.” I have no hope in man.

See, the way we human beings normally divide up folks is that we think some people are moral and some people are immoral. The immoral people may need Christianity; they may need God; they may need religion to straighten them out. The moral people? Not so much; they're doing fine on their own.

Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a woman named Lady Huntingdon, who was a wealthy English countess. She came to Christ through the preaching of the famous evangelist George Whitefield. She opened her home to George Whitefield and invited all of her noble friends to come and hear the gospel as George preached to them. Many of London's upper classes heard the gospel through Whitefield. But not all appreciated his message. The Duchess of Buckingham was shocked that the nobility would listen to these humiliating truths. She wrote a letter to Lady Huntingdon saying:

Whitefield's doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tainted with impertinence and disrespect towards his superiors. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly

offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder whether your Ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.

In other words, maybe the commoners, maybe the immoral, maybe the drug addicts, maybe they need Christianity, but not me. I'm a good person. You see, we don't understand the depth of the problem. We think that the issue is about morals rather than heart transformation.

After the terrible high school shooting down in Jonesboro, Arkansas, there was a NY Times editorial asking the question, "Why are kids shooting other kids?" This massacre at Jonesboro followed on a similar high school shooting in Kentucky and another one a few months earlier in Mississippi, and then there was the terrible tragedy at Columbine. And so experts were assembled to talk about why kids were shooting other kids.

They talked about the increasing availability of guns in our society. Whereas kids might have in the past punched one another, now they have access to hand guns and rifles. They talked about violent video games and the culture of violence in the media. They talked about the alienation of kids from adults. They talked about the problem of broken families. I think all of these things need to be paid attention to.

But what no body talked about in this *New York Times* piece with all of these assembled experts, is the fact that kids have always killed other kids; there are stories about this throughout history. And it took someone like a Dostoevsky, the great Russian novelist, to trace the problem back to the human heart. See, all of these moral solutions out there and educational solutions and restructuring of society have a place. But the difficulty is that the analysis of the problem is not deep enough; it is not searching enough.

Let me approach this from a different angle. You are familiar with the term "dry drunk." AA talks about dry drunks. Are you familiar with this term? Do you know what it means? It means that unless a person is inwardly transformed, unless a person is changed at the level of their hearts, the same issue that drove a person to drink will after they stop drinking drive them to some other addiction – explosive anger, extreme criticalness towards others, smoking, eating – unless you are changed at the heart level, just cleaning up your life won't free you from the compulsions that drove you to the addiction in the first place.

Paul says, "You who are attracted to the law and rules and dos and don'ts as the solution to the human dilemma do not understand the depth of the problem. And the only way you are ever really going to understand the depth of the problem afflicting men and women is to come face to face with the cross of Jesus Christ."

### **Galatians 5:11**

Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.

Paul talks about the “offense of the cross.” Why is the cross so offensive? Why does the cross offend?

Because the cross says that nothing short of the tearing apart of the body of the Son of God would ever save someone like you or someone like me. It took nails being driven through the Son of God and a sword going through his side to save you. The cross is an offense because it says that you and I are hopeless and that there is absolutely nothing we can do to help ourselves. The cross, when you look at it, tells us that the problem with humanity is too deep for our ordinary methods. That the problem of changing the heart is not going to be solved by the normal “lift yourself up by your own bootstraps.” Changing the heart is different than getting an A in a class, or getting a degree from a college or getting a promotion at a job.

See, in virtually every other area of life hard work will generally produce the results that you seek. It will produce good grades and good performance reviews and degrees. But hard work will not change you or me from being proud, self-centered slaves to our puny little selves and transform us into humble, kind, joyful, grateful human beings. Hard work may produce wealth, but it won’t change your heart from being filled with lust or bitterness or self pity or violence or anxiety or fear or feelings of being aggrieved. Christianity does not transform human beings from the outside – it transforms from the inside out. It is not here is a set of rules – do this and you will be changed. It is have a liberated heart and you will want to do God’s rules.

So, how do you get a liberated heart? What are the means of freedom?

The means of freedom.

### **Galatians 5:5-6**

But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Paul talks about a trinity of virtues – faith, hope and love. We’ll talk more about this next week. But I want to finish by talking about how faith transforms the heart and how love transforms the heart.

The way of faith

We need a power to expel from our hearts lust. We need a power to expel from our hearts pride and vengeance, and greed, and self-pity. What is the engine? What is the power that transforms the heart?

Paul says it is faith. Verse 6:

### **Galatians 5:6**

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

How does faith transform the heart? Let me suggest a few things. Faith looks first of all at the cross. If you allow the eyes of your heart to stare at the cross and you see on the cross the perfect holy Son of God hanging there bleeding and dead because of your sins, your pride will be destroyed. Stare at the wounds in the body of Christ and lay hold of those wounds by faith, and you will have the engine, the power, to transform your heart from being proud to being humble. Stare at the wounds in the body of Christ and you will not be tempted to lift yourself up above your fellow man. You will say, “Christ, you had to die for me. Who am I to judge this other person?”

Our faith humbles us. Our faith secures us. As I look at the cross in faith I believe that because Christ died for me and for my sins God couldn’t love me any more no matter what I do. And because Christ died for me God could not love me any less no matter what I do. God loves me and gave himself for me at the cross. It secures me so I don’t have to anxiously seek validation from everyone around me. I don’t need a woman or a man or an award or a promotion to say I’m okay. I am loved by God. I’m right in God’s sight.

Faith is the engine that transforms the heart. It is by faith that the eyes of my heart look at Jesus. And I can satisfy myself with him. So much so that some of the things that had such a powerful grip on me shrink and fade.

And hope is an engine.

The way of hope

I’ll close with this. Faith causes me to look back at the cross. Hope pulls me forward to the second coming of Jesus. Hope enables me to believe for my own transformation.

Here’s the deal. We spend years of our lives pounding certain attitudes into our souls. We’ll spend decades pounding certain behaviors into our lives. And then we’ll come forward in response to a call for prayer, or we’ll open up ourselves and we’ll ask Christ into our lives. And those 20-30 years of pounding certain attitudes into our souls are not instantly changed. So we say, “I guess Christianity really doesn’t provide the engine for heart transformation.”

Paul mentions in verse 5:

**Galatians 5:5**

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

Hope enables us to not get impatient with God’s timing on transforming our hearts. Hope enables me to not give up on God and not give up on myself. Hope says, “Rich, you spent 25 or 35 or 55 years practicing sin. Righteousness is coming to you.

Transformation is coming. Just wait. You are going to be different. You are going to be better than you are. You are going to be kinder than you. You are going to be more humble than you are.”

Let me close with this picture. This is the picture of New Testament hope. It is Christmas morning. All the kids are up early. Mom has put the turkey in the oven and the aroma of the turkey and the apple pies baking fills the home. The kids are saying, Mom, Dad, let us open the presents. But Mom and Dad say, “Wait! Wait for your grandparents to come, and your cousins to come. Wait!” So we stand on tippy toes at the window waiting.

We’re so near. We’re looking out the window waiting for the second coming of Christ. We can smell the righteousness, the heart transformation that’s coming our way.

Paul says, “Wait in hope.” Here’s the engine to change the heart: Faith looking back at the cross; hope looking forward to his coming. Let’s pray.

## Freedom!

Rich Nathan

April 18, 2010

Galatians: Free At Last Series

Galatians 5:1-12

### I. The meaning and goal of salvation: freedom

A. Freedom: A biblical word

B. Freedom: From what?

### II. The attractiveness of legalism

### III. The problems of legalism

A. Confusion about the goal of Christianity

B. Confusion about flexible or inflexible

C. Confusion about the depth of the problem

### IV. The means of freedom

A. The way of faith

B. The way of hope