

6. Free For What?

Galatians 5-6

With all Paul's talk of "freedom from the law," we've already asked the question, "if we're not under law, how do we know how to live." It's in the closing chapters of Galatians that Paul gives the answers. We must not move from freedom back to slavery - but on the other hand, our freedom must not be used as an excuse for sin. As Paul puts it, the Christian life is all about living by the Spirit... free at last... free to serve God.

Read Galatians 5:1-15.

1. As it has been through the rest of the letter, what is Paul's concern for the Galatians in verse 1?
2. Why is circumcision an "all or nothing proposition" for those who give in to the demands that Gentile believers must go through this ritual?
3. What is the result of turning back to law-keeping?
4. According to verse 5, what - as opposed to the law - are the true keys to righteousness? Fill in the gaps:

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

This is a stunning statement. Rather than struggling to keep laws, Paul says we should simply struggle to keep trusting Jesus, while the Holy Spirit produces the righteousness we long for! Compare this with 2:20-21, and Paul's prayer for the Galatians in 4:19. Trusting and following Jesus is the source and motivation for our righteousness - not keeping rules and laws. To do this is to fall away from grace!

5. According to verse 6, what is the only thing that counts?

How much does this recipe "count" in your daily life?

6. Rather than using our freedom for self-indulgence, what should we be doing? (v13)

In what ways have you "served others" lately? Or been served? Did you realise this was the outworking of faith?

7. How does the one statement in verse 14 sum up all the Old Testament laws? (Think through the ten commandments as an example.)

Natural Conflicts

Read Galatians 5:16-26



a. Many Christians today speak about dramatic evidences of the Holy Spirit at work in their churches or their lives. According to verse 16, what will the MOST dramatic evidence of the Holy Spirit be?

b. Should you be surprised as a Christian if you find yourself losing your temper or being jealous? What perspective does verse 17 give on this? What is the way forward?

c. Verses 19 to 21 give a list of the natural acts of our sinful nature. Verses 22 and 23 give a contrasting list, showing what living by the Spirit will look like. Look carefully at the list of the “sins of the flesh”. They’re not all “R-rated”! What does the future hold for people who want to continue down this path?

d. Write down the list of the fruits of the Spirit. How does living by the Spirit do away with the need for law? (v18, 23b)

e. From verse 15 and verse 26, what seem to be the biggest struggles for the Galatians? What are the biggest struggles for you?

f. The work of the Spirit is God’s work IN US. But that doesn’t mean we are passive. Read through verses 16 to 26 again, and find out what we as Christians are TO DO as people who have been given the Spirit.

So what about sin?

What will living by the Spirit actually look like? Different, perhaps, to what many Christians seem to expect. For starters, it won’t necessarily have all the exotic and exciting features you’ll supposedly find in some churches. It’s much more down to earth. Living by the Spirit is really a war zone, as the desires of the flesh battle it out with the desires of the Spirit. We should be realistic about sin - but hopeful about the work of the Spirit!

Read Galatians 6:1-10.

a. Because our own sinful nature is still always ready to oppose the urgings of God's Spirit, we should always be humble in our dealings with the sins of another. "Watch yourself," says Paul, "or you may also be tempted." What other key problem areas does Paul foresee in verses 3 and 4? Look back at 3:15 and 26.

b. Have you seen first hand the effects these things can have on a church? How can we work to avoid them? Are there things the Spirit is moving you to confess and repent of in these areas?

c. How important does Paul consider the teaching of God's Word? How does he say those being taught should respond? How does the teaching of the Word work alongside the work of the Spirit?



d. Some people sow (that is, invest their time, energy and resources) to please the sinful nature. What will they reap?

e. What will be involved in sowing to please the Spirit?

Why is this tiring?

How can we encourage each other "not to give up?" (Heb 10:24-25 may give some ideas)



f. How does verse 10 help us prioritise our efforts to "do good?" How is your group progressing in planning your service activity for next week?

Read Paul's closing comments in Galatians 6:11-18.

a) How do these verses summarise the issues we've seen running all the way through the letter?

b) Remember, those opposed to Paul's gospel are "christians" who want to take on the Jewish law as well. Why does their position "avoid persecution"?

c) What matters to the false teachers, and what matters to Paul?

d) How has studying Galatians changed your perspective on "what counts"?