

## Gospel Freedom

In 5:1, Paul reintroduces the idea of Christian freedom, which he mentioned earlier in Galatians 2:4. The concept of Christian “freedom” is easy to misunderstand. Paul says we are free from the “supervision” of the law (3:25) and no longer “under” the law (5:18). But does that mean we are free to disobey or disregard it? If not, of what does this freedom consist? Paul answers this indirectly in 5:2-6 and directly in 5:13-15.

READ GALATIANS 5:1-15

1. The thesis of Paul’s last chapters is stated in 5:1. What does Paul teach in these two sentences?
2. What is Paul warning the Galatians against in verses 5:2-4? Is Paul saying that the Galatians who are real Christians are going to lose their salvation (v. 4)? (How does verse 10 shed light on verse 4?)
3. Why do you think Paul would say we “hope for righteousness” (v. 5) when in 3:6 and elsewhere he says we have righteousness? How can we “wait” for it practically?
4. What does it mean that the gospel makes both “circumcision and uncircumcision” (religion and irreligion) equally valueless (vv. 5-6)?
5. From verses 5:13-15 answer the question, “Why does a Christian obey God?”
6. Compare verse 5:1 and verse 5:13. What two different misuses of gospel freedom does Paul spell out? What errors in thinking are behind each misuse?
7. Summarize: In what ways are Christians “free” from the law and in what ways are they not?
8. Think of one area of your life where you need a lot more love than you have in order to face something or to act rightly. How can Galatians 5:5-6 help you?

## FREEDOM TODAY

For the Galatians, adding 'Jewishness' alongside Jesus was a disaster. It could equally be an idol statue, or taking on Jewish sabbaths and holy days, or allowing themselves to be circumcised 'just to fit in'. There are all kinds of 'basic principles' at work that seem so right - and yet lead us away from grace! "For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope."

Our idols or underlying principles can be hard to identify. New York pastor Tim Keller wrote a whole book about how this works. Check out the sidebar for a snippet.

6. What are you most tempted to devote your life to alongside or above Jesus? Is it your career? A relationship? Your family? Your lifestyle? Something else? What 'basic principles' drive these things - the hidden assumptions that everyone agrees with?

7. How realistic is it to think this other thing will really give you what you hope for from it? What will serving it above all else likely do to your life instead?

8. Paul says above all else you should trust in Jesus, and do everything else only as an expression of that trust in Jesus (5:6). Do you think this really is the path to true freedom? Why?

## STAY STRONG LIVE FREE

"Anything in life can serve as an idol, a God-alternative, a counterfeit god. I recently heard the account of a field army officer who so exorbitantly pursued physical and military discipline with his troops that he broke their morale. That led to a communication breakdown during combat that resulted in fatalities. I knew a woman who had experienced periods of poverty as she grew up. As an adult she was so eager for financial security that she passed over many good prospective relationships in order to marry a wealthy man she did not really love.

This led to an early divorce and to all the economic struggles she feared so much. It appears that some major league baseball players, in a quest to play not just well but at a Hall of Fame level, took steroids and other drugs. As a result, their bodies are more broken and their reputations more sullied than if they had been willing to be good rather than great. The very things upon which these people were building all their happiness turned to dust in their hands because they had built all their happiness upon them.

In each case, a good thing among many was turned into a supreme thing, so that its demands overrode all competing values. But counterfeit gods always disappoint, and often destructively so.

We know a good thing has become a counterfeit god when its demands on you exceed proper boundaries. Making an idol out of work may mean that you work until you ruin your health, or you break the laws in order to get ahead. Making an idol out of love may mean allowing the lover to exploit and abuse you, or it may cause terrible blindness to the pathologies in the relationship. An idolatrous attachment can lead you to break any promise, rationalize any indiscretion, or betray any other allegiance, in order to hold onto it.

It may drive you to violate all good and proper boundaries. To practice idolatry is to be a slave."

**Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods**