

Anglican Church Noosa
GALATIANS LAW | LIFE | FREEDOM
Galatians 5:1-15
Rev'd Chris Johnson

Freedom! Everybody wants to be free!

For some it's riding your Harley Davidson down a beautiful country road on a Sunday afternoon.
For others it is winning the Grand Final,
or reaching retirement,
or going on a dream cruise,
or hitching a caravan to the four-wheel drive and touring Australia.

Everybody wants to be free! But what does freedom mean for the Christian?

This morning we come to Galatians Ch5 where Paul begins by saying, "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.*" This is a recurring theme throughout the book isn't it. Slavery or freedom. Being slaves to the law or being set free to live for Christ.

Let's look at how Paul addresses this theme in Galatians Ch 5. I think what Paul is at pains to point out here is that this is an either/or proposition not a both/and. The Judaizers were saying it was both/and. - both believing in Christ and keeping the Jewish law, especially circumcision. This was the way to be saved. Paul is saying you can't have both. If salvation is through keeping the law then Christ is superfluous.

-In v2 he says if you want to be circumcised then Christ will be of no value to you at all.

-In v4 he says if you want to be justified by the law you will be alienated from Christ.

-Also in v4 he says that to try and be justified by the law means falling away from grace.

So it is either/or, one or the other. If you want to start trusting the law even in one point, then you have negated the work of Christ.

Why can't we be justified by the law? Paul's argument in v3 is that if you let yourself be circumcised then you're obliged to obey the whole law.

Why is that? Because God's standard is 100%. Which may make God sound like a very hard schoolmaster! But think of it like this – in practical terms living a life by God's 100% standard, looks like the life of Jesus Christ.

- Jesus was perfectly loving but never weak on wrongdoing.
- Jesus stood up for justice calling out bullies who were trampling on the little guy.
- Jesus was the consummate teacher telling stories full of wisdom and eternal truth.
- Jesus was the servant who spent long days ministering to human need, and he washed his disciple's feet.
- Jesus was absolutely committed to truth even when it would cost him his life and the horrendous suffering of the cross. There is no other human life that even comes close.

You might be able to point to some other great saints in history but the first thing they would tell you is they are sinners in need of grace. Jesus actually challenged his opponents by saying, "Which of you can convict me of sin?" And what happened? They couldn't point to anything. And I bet they would have if they could have found anything. They simply had to walk away.

If you want to see what human life is meant to look like - look at the life of Jesus.
That's the standard!

This is what it means to keep the law perfectly. So if you're going to make a boast about keeping one part of the law, you really have to keep all of it if you want to be justified in that way.

Paul describes this approach as a yoke of slavery. A yoke is what an animal wears around their neck to pull a heavy load. And Paul is saying this is what the Law is like. Once you realise how high the standard is and that you have to keep all of it, you start to feel just how heavy the yolk is. This is the point at which you realise you need Christ. You need a Saviour.

- This is when you throw yourself on grace.
- This is when the Holy Spirit starts speaking deeply into your life.
- This is when Jesus' death on the cross will mean everything to you.

I want you to imagine for a moment you're sailing across the Pacific Ocean in your personal yacht when you hit a gigantic storm and lose control of the boat. You find yourself shipwrecked on Palmyra Atoll. This is a small outcrop in the middle of the Pacific some 5,300 Km from Brisbane. [Photo] It looks idyllic doesn't it, and you can visit if you get a permit. On the Internet there were a number of reviews from people who had visited, all describing how gorgeous it is. But one wrote this, *"They said in Honolulu it was just a three hour cruise. That was three years ago and we're still shipwrecked on this island. SOS."* So imagine you're stuck there on this Atoll, with a boat that's beyond repair. You're sitting in paradise, but the situation is anything but idyllic.

If you want to be rescued, you have two options.

-One is you could try swimming to Brisbane. 5,300 kilometres, Good Luck!

-Or you could trust that when your family didn't get your check-in call, they would have alerted the authorities and a search and rescue mission would be underway.

The first option requires you to save yourself through your own effort.

The second option you have to admit you're totally helpless, totally dependent on someone else to come and save you.

My friends, the gap between us and the standard God expects is every bit as vast as the distance between Brisbane and Palmyra Atoll.

To trust in the law is like trying to swim from the Atoll back to Australia.

To trust in Jesus Christ is to believe there is someone stronger who can save you.

And these two options are quite distinct, quite separate. You can't choose a little bit of each.

There is a popular theology out there that thinks, Christ has done his bit, now I do my bit. Faith in Christ plus my effort in doing good works is the basis on which God accepts me, that I'm justified. Paul in Galatians is saying no! As soon as you introduce good works, law keeping, your effort, you diminish the work of Christ, you nullify the gospel.

Now I should add, there is a runway on the Palmyra Atoll which was built in World War 2. It is paved with crushed, compressed coral. So imagine a rescue plane spots you and lands and brings you back to Brisbane.

You wouldn't say to the pilot, *"Fly low over Morton Bay because I want to jump out and swim the last 100 metres myself. You've done your bit now I want to do my bit to complete the rescue."* No you wouldn't do that! It is totally the work of the pilot and the rescue team.

So also our salvation. It is totally the work of Christ, with, of course, his rescue team the Father and the Spirit who play their role in our rescue as well.

All praise, thanks and glory go to God, and what we have to do is simply receive it as a beautiful gift. And we do that by faith.

So what about the Christian life. Does this mean good works don't matter? Some people think justification by faith diminishes good works; but in actual fact it should enhance our good works. The motivation should be so much stronger given our realisation of all that Christ has done for us.

So let's talk about the Christian life as Paul sets it out here.

The phrases that Paul uses to describe the Christian life are

V5 -Living through the Holy Spirit

-Living by faith

-Eagerly awaiting the righteousness
which is still to come

-Having hope

V6 -The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

V13 -Is a calling to be free

-Serving one another humbly in love

V14 -Loving your neighbour as yourself

What a rich way to describe life in Christ. So much more interesting than self-effort, self-improvement, keeping laws.

The message of justification by faith does not mean that good works don't matter. Paul says in v13 do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, and remember the word flesh simply means self focus. In Paul's thinking the new life in the Holy Spirit is a life of denying self and doing good works. It is a life of loving your neighbour.

- Of not coveting your neighbour's house or wife or ox or donkey.
The 10th commandment.
- Of not giving false testimony against your neighbour.
- Of not stealing.
- Of not committing adultery.
- Of not murdering.
- Of honouring your father and your mother.

And Jesus had some very specific teaching on these things.

- Watching out for anger in your heart that leads to murder,
- Watching out for adultery in your heart that leads to the act,
- Watching out for religious rules that can be used as an excuse for not honouring your father and mother.

Jesus takes 'love your neighbour' to a whole new level.

And this is life in the Holy Spirit.

So can you see why Paul is so strong in his language against the Judaizers. They are perverting this beautiful gospel. In the paragraph verses 7 to 12 he launches into them once more. You can see he's upset because it's very staccato, very jerky. Each sentence has its own thought.

V7 He is using an athletic metaphor. They were running a good race but it's like someone from the lane next to them has cut in on them thrown them off course.

V9 *"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough"* points to the fact that this false teaching is spreading through the whole church.

V11 -The message of circumcision is about a works-based salvation, and there is nothing offensive about that.

-The message of the cross is offensive because it tackles human pride and tells people they need someone else to save them.

It seems these Judaizers were claiming that Paul was agreeing with them about the need for circumcision. But Paul here is saying if I'm still preaching circumcision why am I still being persecuted. It's because of the cross I'm being persecuted.
These Judaizers are misrepresenting him.

I hope you can understand why Paul is so cross with them. I hope you've picked that up. Specifically, he says three things against them.

V8 Their arguments or attempts to persuade, do not come from Christ.

V10 They will have to pay the penalty for their error.

V12 He wishes they would go in and emasculate themselves. The NEB makes this very clear translating it, he wishes *'they would become eunuchs'*.

Paul is very upset with them and it's because they're denying the gospel.

There is a heresy out there that says, "It doesn't really matter what you believe so long as you are sincere."

Well, if you really understand the Gospel, it certainly does matter.

If you have clarity about the Gospel as Paul did, it does matter.

So let me pull this together. Freedom is the great mantra of our society. People loudly proclaim their freedom, when they are actually just slaves to their own appetites. Next week we'll look at that more fully at v19 where Paul lists the works of the flesh.

Paul's answer is that freedom is found through faith in Jesus Christ and the new life in the Holy Spirit. Next week we'll also look at life in the Spirit more fully and especially the fruit of the Spirit in v22. So plenty to look forward to next week.

But here Paul paints the options starkly.

- Life in the flesh or life in the Spirit
- Justification through the law or by faith
- Circumcision or faith expressing itself through love
- Slavery or Freedom

And you can't mix the two. It's like oil and water. It's one or the other.

So don't be in a haze about this. Don't sit on the fence.

Throw your lot in with Christ, and Christ alone.