Series: General

Message: We are Free

Text: Galatians 5:1-14

Theme: Independence Day

Date: July 3, 2016

Location: Christ Community EFC

[Video: We are Free: journeyboxmedia.com/product/we-are-free/]

**If you would please turn in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 5.**

As we ready prepare to celebrate the freedoms we enjoy as a nation this 4th of July weekend with cookouts and fireworks, I thought it would be good for us to consider the true freedom, we as Christians, enjoy.

The apostle Paul has much to say about this true freedom found in Christ in his letter to the churches in the region of Galatia, a region in Asia Minor

Paul and Barnabas had visited this region on their first missionary journey.

When they finished their mission trip Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where they got word that Judaizers had gone into the region of Galatia preaching a false gospel.

Paul had preached the gospel of grace, we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus alone.

The Judaizers were preaching that salvation was not that simple, you had to add works—you had to become a Jew and keep the Jewish laws first and then you could be saved through faith in Christ.

So in his letter to the Galatians Paul explains the gospel of grace. Defends it against the addition of works.

And then, starting here in chapter 5 through chapter 6 Paul makes it clear that though we are saved by grace and not by works, saving faith does work.

Christian liberty does not mean we have license to live as we please.

We live in a time where it idea of freedom means that I can do anything I want, without restrain or reprove, except maybe dare to say something someone else is doing is wrong.

This is kind of freedom is not the freedom we have in Christ.

The great reformer of the 15th century, Martin Luther once wrote an essay called “On the Freedom of a Christian.”

In this essay, he says this:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant, subject to all.

He spends the rest of the treatise defending these two seemingly contradictory statements.

Basically what he says, and this is very basic, is that Jesus Christ frees us from the slavery of good works.

We are not justified by works, but we are justified only by faith in Jesus Christ.

Because of that, we are completely free people, not under any sort of law that we must keep in order to earn salvation.

Luther says that we are freed from the belief in good works, justification through works. And in this way we are freed from the law.

But we are not set free from doing good works.

In fact Luther would say that good works are imperative, vital, for the Christian.

We do good works not to earn salvation but because we are saved.

Good works

List to Paul in Galatians 5:1; “**For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery**.”

There are two parts to what Paul says here. One is that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are free.

You’re free from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, from the law as a system of salvation.

You’re free form superstition and from all that enslaves you.

As I have said, true freedom is not the freedom to do whatever we want.

Paul says we’re free, and he says this emphatically. He literally says that it’s for freedom that Christ has freed us.

Freedom is both the verb and the noun.

Jesus’ whole mission was to free us. Paul tells us in the clearest terms that in Jesus Christ we have been freed.

But then he says, “**Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery**.”

This is one of the most important tasks that we have as followers of Jesus Christ. To simply stand firm.

One of the biggest tasks in the Christian life is to guard against wandering off from the freedom that has been won for us through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

You’re free, emphatically free. Now stand firm in that.

Paul mentions a specific way that we can tend to wander off. He says at the end of verse 1, “**Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery**.”

What’s he talking about?

In those days, slavery was a very real thing. It’s not the same type of slavery as we think of from North American history, but it was still bad.

If you were a slave and then became a free person, you could buy property. You could schedule your own activities. You could earn and spend and live however you wished.

It would be unthinkable to return once again to slavery.

Yet Paul says that’s exactly what happens when we depart from the freedom we have in Christ.

When Paul talks about the yoke of slavery, he’s talking about the Old Testament law. Paul gets very clear in this passage that the issue the Galatians were facing is circumcision.

Some people were teaching that it wasn’t enough to have faith in Christ’s saving work. You also need to keep some of the Old Testament law.

In other words, you’re saved by trusting Jesus plus by keeping God’s law.

Think about this for a minute. This doesn’t sound so bad at first. It actually sounds very reasonable when you think about it.

In fact, it’s hardwired in our nature. How do you become a Christian?

We can all agree that it begins by realizing that you have sinned against God and violated his standards.

And we can agree that it involves trusting in what Jesus Christ has done for us: that he lived a perfect life, and that he bore the punishment for our sins at the cross. He took our sins and gave us his righteousness.

So far, so good.

But it would also seem reasonable to say that on top of trusting Christ, you also have to contribute something to your salvation.

That sounds reasonable, doesn’t it? But do you see what Paul says here?

When we do this, we’re departing from the freedom that Christ has won for us. In fact, we’re allowing ourselves to become enslaved to a yoke of slavery.

It’s deadly, and Paul says we can’t let it happen.it has been said; “It’s not that Christians seek to blatantly replace the gospel. What we try to do is simply add to it.” And this is fatal.

Don’t get me wrong. Paul isn’t saying that it’s wrong to obey Christ.

We’re going to see that obeying Christ is essential.

What he’s warning us against is thinking that we contribute to our salvation through our obedience.

“The most dangerous thing that you can happen to you is that you become proud of your obedience.”

Think about that. The most dangerous thing that can happen to you is that you trust in your own obedience rather than in the perfect work of Jesus Christ.

This is so important. Stand firm in your freedom, Paul says. Don’t budge from the freedom you have in Christ.

That’s all fine, and I hope you agree.

But Paul doesn’t just leave it there.

In the rest of this passage he gives us two ways that we can stand firm in the freedom we have in Christ.

Let me give you the two ways, and then let’s look at each of them. Stand firm in your freedom by realizing what’s at stake, and by rejecting those who want to enslave you.

FIRST: STAND FIRM IN YOUR FREEDOM BY REALIZING WHAT’S AT STAKE.

In this passage, Paul wants us to realize what’s at stake when we take a “Jesus + something else = acceptance with God” understanding of the gospel.

What’s at stake? Three things:

1. Christ and his work will be of no value to us.

Read verse 2: “**Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you**.”

This is shocking. If we trust in Christ plus our own obedience, we lose all the benefits of trusting in Christ.

This is not a minor issue.

The story that helps me understand this is that of a man who got a baseball autographed by Babe Ruth.

The man realized that the signed baseball might be valuable, so he decided to sell it.

But he was worried because he could see that the signature on the baseball was faded. He decided to try to make that autograph clearer, so he took out that baseball and carefully traced over the letters with a marking pen: “BABE RUTH.”

By trying to add to what Babe Ruth had done, he destroyed what Babe Ruth had done.

By the time he had finished, he’d taken something priceless and turned it into something worthless.”

That’s exactly what we do to Jesus’ work when we try to add to it.

“His finished work cannot be refinished; it can only be destroyed” (Phil Ryken).

As the Puritan William Perkins said, “He must be a perfect Savior, or he is no Savior.”

It’s either Jesus Christ in his perfection or our own works. There is no middle ground.

If we trust in our own obedience, we deface the work of Christ. Jesus and his gospel will be of no value to us.

We become debtors to God’s entire law.

Verse 3 says, “**I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law**.”

Let me try to explain what he’s saying here. A friend of mine has a thing for mustard. I don’t understand it but that his thing.

He particularly loves the hot and sweet mustard that comes with Hickory Farm gift boxes.

The problem is that you can’t buy that mustard unless you buy a gift box. You can buy the mustard, but you can’t buy it by itself. It’s a package deal.

That’s what Paul is saying here. You can’t pick and choose from the law and add a bit of obedience. It’s a package deal.

Once you try to pick up a bit of the law, you have to pick up the whole thing. You can’t pick and choose.

The problem is that if you pick up God’s law, you become a debtor.

Gamaliel II was an old Jewish rabbi who lived around the time Galatians was written.

One day he was reading Ezekiel, which talks about a man who “**is righteous and does what is just and right**” (Ezekiel 18:5).

When he finished reading, he began to cry, saying, “Only he who keeps all these requirements will live, not he who keeps only one of them.”

He realized that he could never meet the perfect standard of obedience required in God’s law.

The minute you begin to rely on your obedience, you become obligated to keep the entirety of God’s law and nobody, except for Jesus Christ, can keep God’s law.

So we become hopeless. We become debtors to God’s law with no hope of repayment.

We're cut off from the grace of Christ.

Verse 4 says, “**You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace**.”

If you try to justify yourself before God based on your own obedience, then you cut yourself off from God’s grace.

Why is this? Because grace and self-justification are mutually exclusive.

You have to choose. The minute you try to accomplish your own salvation, you’re removing yourself from the grace and mercy of Christ.

What’s the alternative? Galatians 5:5-6 says:

“**For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love**.”

This is what it means to follow Christ.

Instead of relying on our own obedience, we wait for God to give us righteousness by faith.

It means looking to Christ instead of to ourselves.

We’re waiting for God’s final verdict of righteousness on the last day.

One day God will appear and declare us righteous based on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

That is a whole lot better than relying on our own righteousness!

This is really what matters. The issue isn’t circumcision or keeping the law; the issue is whether our faith is in Jesus Christ rather than in ourselves.

This is how you stand firm in your freedom: you realize what’s at stake.

When you take a step away from the freedom that’s yours in Christ, you’re taking a step that could be spiritually fatal.

When you say that it’s Jesus plus something, then Christ is of no value, you become a debtor to the entire law, and you’re cut off from the grace of Christ.

One of the ways that we stand firm in our freedom is to realize what’s at stake if we don’t.

So get clear on this. Realize that this is not a minor issue. Stand firm in your freedom because you realize what’s at stake if you don’t.

SECOND: STAND FIRM IN YOUR FREEDOM BY REJECTING THOSE WHO WANT TO ENSLAVE YOU.

Read verses 7 to 12 with me:

“**You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.**

**I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.**

**But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves**!”

Paul doesn’t mince words here.

He speaks very clearly of the danger that comes from people who teach what God doesn’t.

This teaching doesn’t come from God, Paul says. “**This persuasion is not from him who calls you**.” And it’s dangerous.

There are four problems with these people:

1. They’re meddlers - Paul uses the image of someone who cuts you off in a race. The Galatians were running well; these false teachers have cut in and tripped them up, and now they’re in danger of being disqualified.

2. They’re not God’s messengers - They’re not teaching what’s true. They’re teaching false doctrine.

3. They contaminate the gospel - Paul uses the example of leaven. Bread doesn’t rise unless it has yeast. It only takes a little yeast to do the job.

Paul here is saying that it only takes a pinch of law to thoroughly contaminate the gospel. This is why doctrine is so important. It only takes a little bit of heresy to do a lot of damage.

4. They misrepresent Paul - They seem to be misrepresenting Paul, saying that he teaches circumcision as well. Paul challenges this and says that nothing could be further from the truth.

The good news is that Paul says they won’t succeed. “**I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view**,” he says.

But in the meantime, these people are causing all kinds of problems.

There is great danger in believing what is not true about God and his gospel.

A lot of difficulties in the Christian life come from not believing what’s true about God and his gospel.

Paul is clear that we will continue to face false teachers. We have to take this seriously. One of the ways that we can stand firm in the faith is to reject anyone who tries to pull us away from the truth of the gospel.

Someone once said, “The great mistake made by people is hoping to discover in themselves what is to be found in Christ alone.”

Don’t ever let anyone lead you to look away from Christ to look at yourself. Look at what he has done. He is our only hope for freedom.

In the last days of the Civil War, the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia, fell to the Union army.

Abraham Lincoln insisted on visiting the city. Even though no one knew he was coming, slaves recognized him immediately and thronged around him.

He had liberated them by the Emancipation Proclamation, and now Lincoln’s army had set them free.

According to Admiral David Porter, an eyewitness, Lincoln spoke to the throng around him:

“My poor friends, you are free—free as air. You can cast off the name of slave and trample upon it …. Liberty is your birthright.”

In a similar way, Paul says, “**For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery**.”

Stand firm in your freedom by realizing what’s at stake, and by rejecting those who want to enslave you.

FINALLY: STAND FIRM IN YOUR FREEDOM AND LOVE.

Galatians 5:13-14 “**For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself**.”

**Benediction**

**“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**