



Living in Freedom 2

Galatians 5:1-10

Characteristics of maturity

What isn't maturity?

Today we have been examining what it means to be free as a Christian and I would suggest that our freedom means that we are free to be citizens of heaven – to know God more profoundly, to walk with Him more closely and to start to take on the solid food of faith so that we grow into mature men and women in Christ rather than just get old in Him. But what does that freedom involve. Galatians 5 gives us some pointers Paul gives from an issue that the churches in Galatia experienced.

So God has made us free but free from what; and we see here that it is from those things which bring death; for the Galatians, that was the law – the Jewish religious law. To the unseasoned Christian reader, that may come as a surprise? Surely the Law was given by God so it represents something that is perfect, and wise, and righteous because it comes from God. That's right; it shows us the standards of God and as Paul points out in passage such as Romans 7 that the perfection of God's law only illustrates our inability to keep it. As a result it is a law of sin and death because it demonstrates our sinfulness and the fact that under it we are dead in our trespasses and sins.

But praise God - we are no longer in the slavery of the law. Let me give you a bit of *Gal 4: 4-7* *But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, "Abba! Father!"*

We are free from the bondage of that which brings sin and death – the world the flesh and the devil and free to be the children of God; to grow and mature in Him. So why were these people ending up in bondage again – because they were being encouraged to take on Judaism by a groups of Jews, often termed Judiasers by NT scholars. They said that now people had found Christ they needed to keep the requirements of the Law to live a holy life. Like the Pharisees, their holiness would be gauged by how well they kept the law. Paul said no – how could they keep that which brought death – they were enslaving themselves again.

The Judaisers may be gone, but the tradition they started has lived on down the ages. We call it legalism. It's where we measure spirituality by our own achievements – or the way it would be put is that now we are Christians we must honour God by keeping religious rules and regulations. These are inevitably got from the interpretation – or misinterpretation of the Bible. Look at Christian groups and you'll find them still - Catholicism, Brethrenism, Pentecostalism, Baptists!!

It all hangs around the basic notion of the world that the only way we can be acceptable to God is by doing certain things. Yes, we may be accepted but we must become and remain holy. And how do we do that, by going backwards and keeping law.

But if keeping of the law only showed our imperfection and our sinfulness when without Christ, what does it do if we try it now. The same. It will show that we are never good enough and we'll beat ourselves up – or beat others up. Some of the worst divisions that have occurred over the ages have been because of differences in practice rather than doctrine and believers have judged others as less than perfect than themselves.

But of course, we're Evangelical Christians. We know that in Christ God has already made us fit for His presence because of the huge price He paid in Christ to purchase us on Calvary. However John Piper points out that it is easy to take up what he calls the Gratitude ethic.

There is a very common view of Christian behaviour which this verse contradicts. It is called the "Gratitude Ethic." It says that God has done so much for me that I will devote my life to paying back my debt, even though I know I will never be able to completely . And even though most Christians who work out of this gratitude ethic would say that they are not trying to earn their salvation, nevertheless, when they start working for God because he has given them so much, it is very easy to begin to think of God's free gift as a loan to be repaid or as advance wages to be earned. So the gratitude ethic tends to put you in the position of a debtor instead of a son. And that is slavery.

And what's more it's pretty insulting. For those of you who did Gossiping the Gospel, here's one of the illustrations that illustrates the futility of trying to pay for what God has purchased us by grace.

A friend's gift. *Suppose your best friend were to surprise you with a beautiful gift and you respond by digging into your purse or wallet for a couple of pounds - what an insult that would be! Whether you offer more or less the giver would still be offended because a gift is a gift and should be accepted as such. It is the same with God's gift of eternal life. It is a gift and we must not think that we can pay anything toward it.*

We are not debtors – our debt has been paid we're free of it. Thank you to God is saying "Thank you" and having a gratitude of heart that expresses itself as love and devotion. If our desire to holiness doesn't come from "I love You" then it's as flawed and as sinful as our life before Christ.

What these Christians in Galatia were being encouraged to do was to be "holy" - to live a life honouring to God. To try to please Him. What's wrong with that? It was the way in which they were enslaving themselves with their own version of the gratitude ethic – by enslaving themselves to religious practice. Look at ***vv 2 and 3 2 Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, it means that Christ is of no use to you at all. 3 Once more I warn any man who allows himself to be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the whole Law.*** For a Gentile to be circumcised meant that he was placing himself under the authority of the Law. We are not under that law any more – our mark of who we follow is by "a circumcision not made with hands". To be in Christ and to come under the law was a nonsense. Here's Piper again: ***This verse teaches that the mindset of slavery is the mindset of a debtor—one who is under pressure to pay back what he has borrowed or needs to borrow . All the works of the law (including circumcision) are the currency with which the Judaizers aim to satisfy their debts to God. And the surprising point of the verse for us is that God does not want to deal with us as debtors in this way .***

Obedying Law means we try to do that in our own strength, by our own actions to trying to give God something He doesn't want. In our own strength nothing we do is ever going to meet God's exacting standards and He doesn't therefore want us to try because it does the reverse of what He has made us in Christ. That's why Paul says ***4 Those of you who try to be put right with God by obeying the Law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You are outside God's grace.***

It's only by grace that we are made pleasing to God. Only grace. And how does that happen? Through Jesus.

We are so linked into the world's thinking that many Christians find this really difficult. Does that mean that we abandon law. Does this mean we should be antinomian? No. ***5 As for us, our hope is that God will put us right with him; and this is what we wait for by the power of God's Spirit working through our faith. 6 For when we are in union with Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor the lack of it makes any difference at all; what matters is faith that works through love.***

Grace means that we are made righteous and holy before God in Christ. The only true human response to understanding grace is love. It isn't something that's forced – it comes from realising the extent of God's grace and just what the consequences are. As the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to that, love will be the only response. And that is where real Christian maturity starts to grow from.

Love places the needs of others and the worship and obedience to God before our ourselves. Rather than us trying to be religious to try to please God, we just love Him and we become more like Jesus.

How does that happen

- ◆ **SPEND TIME WITH GOD** – the Christian faith is a relationship not an idea or a discipline. How do you mature in any relationship – by spending time. This applies in marriage. It applies in friendship. It applies in family. We develop mature relationships by spending time. It's something we should enjoy doing rather than finding it difficult or a bore. As I said earlier, freedom means we take responsibility for ourselves and our actions and that freedom allows us to spend time with God and

with His word. Boring? Why? God is the creator of the universe and knows everything – now I'd say that makes Him pretty interesting!! Out of that always comes a growing in faith and trust in God on a day to day basis . Others – sense of His power.

- ◆ GROW WITH GOD'S PEOPLE. As God's people we don't just enter into a relationship with God but with people. There is no such thing as a "personal" Christian or an "isolated" Christian. We grow and mature by being part of a body and growing together with God. How engaged are we with other believers. Study together, worship together, serve together, witness together.
- ◆ ALLOW THE SPIRIT TO FREE US I've emphasised that Living in Freedom is about living. The Bible wasn't written to

Only by grace can we enter, not by our human endeavour, but by the blood of the lamb

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