

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

WHEN FAITH GETS LOST
THE SEDUCTIVE SIDE OF FREEDOM
JANUARY 10-16, 2016



SERMON OUTLINE

When Faith Gets Lost: The Seductive Side of Freedom Judges 21:25

1. Freedom is a _____ from _____.

Luke 4:18
Romans 8:1
Romans 6:7
Romans 8:2
1 Peter 1:3-4

2. Freedom is _____.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2a
Galatians 5:13

We live under obligation.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20
2 Corinthians 5:14
Philippians 1:21
Galatians 2:20

What do I need to do with what I have heard today?

MAIN POINT

The freedom Christ gives us from sin and the law ought to lead us to humbly engage with others in love.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. As you begin your new year and a new semester of growth group studies, share with the group some of the things you have been thankful for and some of the ways you have cultivated gratitude over the last few weeks.

SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

Leader: Encouraging one another to cultivate hearts of gratitude is an important part of the spiritual life. Two weeks ago Pastor George challenged us to grow our gratitude by increasing our awareness of God. He challenged us to thank God with 'benedictions' by saying 'blessed are You, oh Lord, who has given me....'. For the next few weeks, consider taking a couple of minutes as your group gathers to share the things people have been thanking God for.

2. In the sermon this weekend, we were challenged to remember the importance of using our freedom in Christ to submit to God's leading rather than our own personal desires. What sticks out to you as you consider your freedom in Christ? What about your freedom in Christ are you most thankful for?

Leader: This past Sunday we looked at what happened in the book of Judges when freedom was used for whatever people wanted, and were reminded that we have a responsibility to steward the freedom we have in Christ.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:1-12

3. Paul wrote this letter as a caution or rebuke to the Galatian church—they were in danger of falling into a trap if they accepted the teaching that Gentiles must be circumcised to receive salvation. In this passage, what are the consequences of falling into this trap (v. 1-4)?

Leader: Paul has some harsh words for the Galatian church about the implications of accepting this teaching. He warns them that accepting this teaching would cause them to have a 'yoke of slavery' (v.1), 'Christ would be of no value to them' (v.2), they 'would be obligated to obey the whole law' (v.3) and 'have fallen away from grace' (v.4). This really is a warning that accepting anything other than the grace of Jesus as necessary for salvation is moving away from the freedom we have in Christ.

4. In verse 4, Paul says 'You have fallen away from grace'. He is concerned about the acceptance of this teaching that you can add something to Christ's sacrifice. What are some ways this can happen in our lives? How can you identify or become aware of this when it happens?

Leader: *Our struggles with legalism can be difficult to identify, as they are often subtle. The teaching that you needed to be circumcised to receive salvation is more obvious than some of the messages we hear in our church culture today. It is easy for us to impose rules on ourselves or on others, even if we wouldn't say them out loud. The amount of time spent in daily devotions, types of worship music, drinking wine, dancing, certain Bible translations, a specific amount of good deeds or minutes spent in prayer can all be subversive ways of imposing 'law' that doesn't come from God. These ideas are often good things...they just aren't additions to the salvation plan, which is that God's grace through Jesus' sacrifice is the only thing that gives us freedom.*

5. Re-read verses 5 and 6. What does it look like to 'eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope'? As you think about 'faith expressing itself through love', what seems easier: to take the time, energy and resources required to love someone as Christ would, or to follow a set of subjective rules and regulations?

Leader: *Paul's call to 'eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope' is a call to remember that we don't work for our salvation. He speaks of a righteousness the believer grows into as God transforms him or her to be more like Him. Pastor George shared on Sunday that legalism happens when we take the directives that God has given to us and impose them on others. Paul's instructions to the Galatian church help us to avoid this by reminding us that nothing counts for anything except 'faith expressing itself through love' as we wait for the hope of righteousness through the Spirit. For many of us, it seems easier to follow a checklist or a set of rules and regulations. It's generally less messy and requires less effort and sacrifice. The obligation of our freedom is to use it as Christ would on the 'only thing that counts': faith expressing itself through love.*

6. Look at verses 7-12. Where did the teaching that kept them 'from obeying the truth' come from (v. 8)? Why does Paul use such harsh language? Why is understanding the nature of our freedom and using it properly so vital for our lives?

Leader: *It is important to understand that this teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation was not from God, but from men. Paul makes it clear that it does not come from 'the one who calls you' (God). Since we know that our freedom was bought by Jesus' blood on the cross and his sacrifice alone, we cannot follow any teaching from man that adds to that sacrifice. Teaching that adds anything to what Christ did for us on*

SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

the cross and detracts from our ability to love others as we love ourselves is false. As we live in relationship with Jesus, it is important for us to recognize the obligation of our freedom.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:13-22

7. Verse 13 is the heart of Paul's message. What is Paul telling us we ought to do with our freedom? What might that look like? What does this kind of freedom tell us about who God is and what kind of relationship he wants with us?

***Leader:** Paul's language seems harsh because he wanted the church to understand the heart of God in the freedom that He has given us through Jesus. Paul wanted to convey that this is not a minor issue—the heart of the gospel is at stake (or 'the offense of the cross has been abolished' v.11). Too often we focus on our right behavior, our church attendance roster or the good deeds we do instead of understanding that we are loved by God simply because we are His. Paul offers us an alternative to living for good deeds or church attendance—to use our freedom to serve one another humbly. Understanding the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice and his deep love for us apart from our works should stir in us humility and a great love that desires to serve others. This sort of freedom reminds us that God didn't sacrifice his Son for us because of what we could do or earn for Him. Rather, he sacrificed His Son because of his deep love for us.*

8. What do these verses tell us about how to live into this freedom that we have been called to? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we embrace and live in freedom?

***Leader:** The rest of chapter 5 talks about living through the Spirit of God, which is the only way to embrace the freedom we have in Christ without falling into a trap of adding more requirements to our salvation. When we walk in the Spirit, we won't 'gratify the desires of the flesh' (v.16). The qualities that are described in the rest of the passage (fruit of the Spirit) allow us to cultivate a life that understands that the freedom we have in Christ comes through the Spirit, and not through our own work or our own self-imposed laws. The 'fruit' described in verses 22-23 are all relational—they aren't to do lists or check-lists, but rather ways of engaging with others. They help us live into the 'fulfillment of the law'—to love God and to love others (see Matthew 22:37-40).*

9. What impact does 'living by the Spirit' have for our families? For our work relationships? For our growth group? For our private lives?

SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

Leader: *There are several relational thoughts in this part of Galatians 5. Verse 13 tells us to 'serve one another humbly in love', verse 15 warns us about 'biting and devouring one another', and verse 26 warns us not to 'become conceited, provoking and envying each other'. Understanding that our freedom is not through our works ought to give us a deep sense of humility that works itself out in fruitful ways in our relationships. It might mean that you may need to gently rebuke or restore a member of your group who is living in sin. It might mean walking with those who are in a difficult season or encouraging and celebrating those who are in a good season.*

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. Think of the circumstances of your life. What makes it challenging to love people?

11. What are some obstacles you face as you seek to use your freedom to engage with others and walk by the Spirit? What are three practical ways your group encourage and support one another to use their freedom this way (5:13)?

Leader: *Though each person in your group will have slightly different life circumstances that make it challenging to love people, there will likely be common themes that come up—feeling inconvenienced, selfishness, time commitment, etc. The root of many of these things is pride, which is why Paul reminds us to serve one another 'humbly'. As your group shares, encourage one another to think of some specific ways that they can use their freedom to love and serve others during the week ahead.*

PRAYER

Spend time in prayer as a group, asking God to help you understand and rejoice in the freedom you have in Christ. Spend time praying for God to help you identify and let go of any areas where you have embraced rules or regulations instead of using your freedom to serve. Ask God to help you use your freedom to humbly love and serve others as you walk by his Spirit.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - What does using my freedom to serve others look like at work, in my family, in my relationships this week?
 - What is one way you can fight against the trap of adding requirements or rules to your salvation this week?
 - What will it take to overcome some of the obstacles in your life that keep you from serving others?
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- Follow up or encouragement for anyone who mentioned specific ways they were going to love and serve those around them.
- The challenge to memorize Galatians 5:13.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

GALATIANS 5

5:1–12 Judgment for Those Who Turn from the Gospel. Those who turn to the law for salvation will cut themselves off from salvation. Hence Paul warns and encourages his readers not to defect.

5:1 Christ has set us free from Jewish ceremonial laws and regulations (see note on 2:11–12) but not from obedience to God's moral standards (5:14-6:1).

5:2 The Galatians may have thought that requiring circumcision would not make much difference, but Paul knows that if they require obedience to any one part of the Mosaic law for justification, then they are committed to obeying all of it perfectly for their justification (v. 3), something none of them can do (cf. 3:10–11, 21). Therefore he says, if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

5:4 severed from Christ . . . fallen away from grace. Paul is not discussing here the question of whether a genuine believer can lose his or her salvation. He is only saying that people who may once have made a profession of faith, if they now are truly seeking to be justified by the law, must not really have a relationship with Christ and have fallen away from the grace that was offered and available to them.

5:5 We . . . wait for the hope of righteousness means that Christians do not attempt to produce perfect righteousness in their lives by their own efforts (as Paul's opponents were futilely trying to do), for their hope is not in themselves; instead, they wait for God to complete righteousness in them—either when they die and are with the Lord (Heb. 12:23) or at Christ's return (1 Cor. 15:49; cf. Rev. 21:27). An alternative explanation is that “the hope of righteousness” refers to the believer's hope and expectation that God will declare that the believer is in fact going to be judged righteous at the final judgment.

5:6 Paul is not opposed to circumcision in and of itself but only if it is required for salvation. True faith is a living and active thing and produces love.

5:11 If Paul was still preaching that people had to be circumcised, then the offense of the cross would be removed because human pride in human effort would return. In other words, there would be no “offense” to humble us by declaring that no work of ours can make us righteous before God.

5:13-6:10 Life in the Spirit and Love. Freedom from the law does not lead to libertinism, for believers by the power of the Spirit live a new life characterized by love.

5:13–15 The Law of Love. Serving one another in love fulfills the law.

5:13–14 Far from the Christian life being enslaving, it is the only way to resist the various slaveries offered by the world. But this does not mean that Christians can do whatever they feel like doing (which itself is just another form of slavery). Rather, serving and loving others is the route to escaping bondage and fulfilling the ultimate content of the law.

5:13 freedom. From Mosaic laws, as represented by circumcision. Opportunity for the flesh means “opportunity to follow your fallen, sinful desires and act contrary to God's moral laws.”

5:14 When Paul says the whole law is fulfilled in the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,” and when he uses that command as the reason why the Galatians are to “serve one another” (v. 13), he implies that Christians still have a moral obligation to follow the moral standards found in God's “law” in Scripture. Obedience is not a means of justification, but it is a crucial component of the Christian life.

5:16–26 The Desires of the Flesh vs. the Fruit of the Spirit. Life under the law expresses itself in the works of the flesh, but those who live by the Spirit bear fruit pleasing to God.

SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

5:16 Having contrasted the flesh with love (vv. 13–14), Paul now sets it against the Spirit. The only way to conquer the flesh is to yield to the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit implies both direction and empowerment; that is, making decisions and choices according to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and acting with the spiritual power that the Spirit supplies. To "walk" in Scripture regularly represents the pattern of conduct of all of one's life. The desires of the flesh would mean not just bodily cravings but all of the ordinary desires of fallen human nature (see examples in vv. 19–21).

5:17 to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Paul acknowledges that the Christian life is a struggle—a war between the flesh and the Spirit (see also Eph. 6:10–18).

5:18 led by the Spirit. The verb (Gk. *agō*) implies an active, personal involvement by the Holy Spirit in guiding Christians, and the present tense ("if you are being led . . .") indicates his ongoing activity. you are not under the law. The Spirit's active presence in believers' lives shows that they are no longer under the pre-Christian system (cf. 3:2, 5, 14; 4:6).

5:19 Works of the flesh means actions flowing out of fallen human nature and its desires. Apart from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, these are the actions toward which sinful humans instinctively gravitate.

5:20 idolatry, sorcery. These are evidences of a desire to be in touch with the spiritual realm through humanly invented means: they supposedly have God as their ultimate object, but they reject the revealed way in which he should be worshiped. Because Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), all other ways to God are false. enmity, strife, etc. When people reject God, they turn in on themselves, and so relationships between human beings are destroyed as well.

5:21 Envy comes about when people are not content with what God has given them, longing instead for what he has given others. Drunkenness and orgies are examples of how people misuse God's good gifts in destructive and sinful ways, in rebellion against God as the gracious giver of all good things. In the OT, wine was associated with joy and celebration (e.g., Neh. 8:10; Ps. 104:15; see note on John 2:3) but when abused was seen as being highly destructive (Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:29–35), and drunkenness is consistently condemned throughout Scripture (e.g., Eph.5:18). Sex is a precious gift for husband and wife, but when abused it also has highly destructive consequences for all involved (1 Cor. 6:18). those who do such things. The present participle (Gk. *prassontes*, translated here as "do") refers to those who "make a practice of doing" such things, as a pattern of life. Their outward conduct indicates their inward spiritual status: that they are not born of God, do not have the Holy Spirit within, and are not God's true children.

5:22–23 The Spirit fights against sin not merely in defense but also in attack by producing in Christians the positive attributes of godly character, all of which are evident in Jesus in the Gospels. Love appears first because it is the greatest quality (1 Cor. 13:1–13; 2 Pet. 1:5–7) in that it most clearly reflects the character of God. Joy comes in at a close second, for in rejoicing in God's salvation Christians show that their affections are rightly placed in God's will and his purpose (see John 15:11; 16:24; Rom. 15:13; 1 Pet. 1:8; Jude 24; etc.). Peace is the product of God having reconciled sinners to himself, so that they are no longer his enemies, which should result in confidence and freedom in approaching God (Rom. 5:1–2; Heb. 4:16). Patience shows that Christians are following God's plan and timetable rather than their own and that they have abandoned their own ideas about how the world should work. Kindness means showing goodness, generosity, and sympathy toward others, which likewise is an attribute of God (Rom. 2:4). Goodness means working for the benefit of others, not oneself; Paul mentions it again in Gal.6:10. Faithfulness is another divine characteristic; it means consistently doing what one says one will do. Gentleness is a quality Jesus attributes to himself in Matt. 11:29; it enables people to find rest in him and to encourage and strengthen others. Self-control is the discipline given by the Holy Spirit that allows Christians to resist the power of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:17). Against such things there is no law, and therefore those who manifest them are fulfilling the law—more than those who insist on Jewish ceremonies, and likewise more than those who follow the works of the flesh surveyed in vv. 19–21.

5:24 Again, Christ and the Spirit (v. 25) come together as the source of the believer's life. Christians have crucified the flesh, or died with Christ to sin (see 6:14; Rom. 6:4–6). Now that the old order of things has passed away for believers, their old sinful selves that belonged to that order have crumbled

SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

as well—so they should pay no attention to them. “Flesh” here should not be understood to mean physical bodies but rather fallen, sinful human nature with all its desires.

5:25 walk by the Spirit. A different verb than in v. 16, meaning “walk in line behind a leader” (Gk. *stoicheō*).¹

¹ From the ESV Study Bible, Crossway Publishing.