

Galatians Chapter 5

John Karmelich

This will seem strange to many of you but there's a classic debate among Christian scholars about if we are "free" or "slaves"? I'd argue both. Christians are free from the "bondage" of sin. That just means we can't earn salvation by being good enough for God. Does that mean we're free to say steal all we want? Of course not! As I've joked my Christian life, I'm free to smoke and drink all I want. The question for believers is to ask, how much should we? What about slavery? It's true that to be a Christian in effect, does means we are His slaves. That simply means we desire to do what He wants us to do! Do we still sin, of course! The issue in this part of Galatians is to realize we are definitely free to do what we want, but the question remains what do we desire? God's moral laws (sexual misconduct, murder stealing) I'd argue are things Christians should avoid. It doesn't mean we'll lose our salvation if we do those things, it's just that we're then a bad witness for God when we violate those laws and suffer the consequences!

Let me back up and talk about slavery itself. If you didn't know slavery has nothing to do with race. It has existed since the early days of mankind. It was Christians in England who brought it to an end even before the American civil war. During the Roman Empire when Paul wrote Galatians, it was common. It is estimated about a quarter of the population of that empire were slaves. Paul used the illustration of freedom and slavery since it was common then! A reason Paul wrote Galatians is to remind Christians they can't be "more saved", or just "saved" by keeping the Jewish laws. Paul even quotes Moses to say in effect, unless you keep every law you can't be saved. If you think "I'm not Jewish and I have no idea how to keep kosher" you missed the point! A constant danger for any Christians is to think, "God must really love me now, because I'm doing this or that for Him". The other danger is to think, "I've messed up and lost my salvation!" It's also dangerous to think I'm saved so I can live however I want now! That is why it's necessary to understand both the freedom and slavery aspects of our salvation! What I want to accomplish in this lesson isn't only to discuss the aspects of Chapter 5 that cover that issue, but also to help us understand how both aspects apply to our lives! OK then, enough of my rambling!

I can just hear a lot of you thinking, "You don't know me. I mess up easily, and I don't have the ability to do any better!" Chapter 5 gets into that. One of the reasons God gives each believer the Holy Spirit is to give us the ability to live as He desires! Bottom line none of us are perfect, but God gives each of us the ability and the power (thank You Holy Spirit) to live as God desires and live a far more fulfilled life than anything we could possibly do in this life without Him! With that said, time for the verse-by-verse discussion to explain this a bit better!

The opening of Chapter 5 is a bit tough to understand at first. Realize Paul is using "practical" ways to explain why we don't have to obey God's laws to be saved. Obviously, Paul doesn't want us to say steal or murder. Paul's saying to be saved, we don't have to keep the Jewish ceremonial laws. He wants us to grasp for example, we don't get "more saved" by being obedient to any rituals or observing holidays on the Jewish calendar. Even if you don't care about that stuff, the danger is we can easily think, "God has to be really impressed by this good deed " or to think "I'm in big trouble with God as I sinned too much and I blew my salvation!" A key reason to understand salvation by faith alone is to realize God knows us faults and all! He desires we live as He desires and turn from all sin! Yes, we mess up, but living as a Christians means we know sin is wrong and we desire through His power to turn from sin!

Let me pause for a moment to discuss circumcision. I'm doing this as Paul brings it up early in Chapter Five. When he uses that term, he's referring to a person who thinks to be saved, one must accept every

aspect of Judaism. I have nothing against circumcision as an act. I believe there's health benefits to do it but again, it has nothing to do with salvation, and that's Paul's point when he brings it up!

Then Paul gets to what I consider the key point: The fact that rituals are irrelevant for salvation and the only thing that matters is faith in God expressed in our love for Him and others. The great command is for us to love each other. That is about letting the power of God work through us so we can put other's needs before our own. That's the type of "giving attitude" He desires we each have!

From Verses 7-12 Paul returns to dealing with people who insist one must keep every Jewish law to be saved! Of course, God's laws are good things, and it teaches us how He desires we live. The issue isn't about perfect obedience, it's about trusting Him to guide our lives. Then Paul says "If I'm arguing what these other Jewish religious people are arguing, why are they persecuting me (Paul)?"

Then in effect Paul jumps back from Christian freedom to what I call "volunteer slavery". All I mean is Paul is saying don't use one's freedom in Jesus to then "sin all we want". Paul gets back to the idea that we trust the Holy Spirit to guide us to live as He desires. If you're not sure what that entails, the rest of the chapter focuses on that subject.

In effect Verses 16-26 teach us what living by the Spirit is and is not all about! If we're guilty of any of any of the following things at this moment, that's evidence we're not living as God's Spirit desires. That includes any form of sexual immorality, idolatry (worshiping things that are not God), sorcery: (that is the idea of looking to magic to get more spiritual). Paul also includes anger, division, getting drunk. It goes on from there, but you get the idea. In short, we can't lose our salvation if we believe Jesus did die for all our sins if we have a bad day, week etc. I find that God loves us way too much to let us wallow in a particular sin and does what He can to draw us close to Him. That's not an excuse to continue in a sin, but the list gives us things to recognize that if we're going down that path at that particular moment it's obvious, we're not pleasing to God with that lifestyle choice. When we recognize a mistake, we are to confess it and ask God to guide us to live as He desires and by His power turn from it.

The good news is this list is not all bad news! The way we can tell when we are living as He desires is we are filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (That's Verses 22-23). Bottom line, when we're living as He wants it becomes obvious we have a far more joy filled life than any and all things we could possibly do with no guidance from Him. To put it another way, would you rather have a life known by the things listed in these verses (22-23) or the things I listed in the last paragraph? Do we mess up? Of course. When we realize it, we confess it and ask God to guide us as He desires we live. That's what Chapter 5 is all about, how to live as God desires and what's the evidence for that.