

GALATIANS 8

Christ is All or Nothing at All

"The indicative of their Christ won freedom secures the imperative of their Spirit-led obedience and victory. In the words of Herman Ridderbos, "Indicative and imperative are both the object of faith, on the one hand in its receptivity, on the other hand in its activity."...The imperative, "stand firm," not only does not contradict the indicative, "Christ has set us free," but in fact results from it. Because of who God is and what he has done for believers in Jesus Christ, Christians are commanded to "become what they are," that is, to make visible in the earthly realm of their human existence what God has already declared and sealed in the divine verdict of justification." ¹

Pre-Article Questions:

1. When you did your prayer partner assignment this past week, how did God encourage and speak to your hearts?
2. How would you describe Christian freedom? How do you see it different from the way the "world" views freedom?

Our next portion of Galatians, chapter five verses 1-14, begins and ends with a bang! "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." This sentence finalizes and ferments the Hagar/Sarah allegory while also setting the stage for the proceeding discourse that closes out the letter. The Spirit of Christ has broken the yoke of slavery and has awakened us to a new life and liberty in Him. This liberty we are to "stand firm" in is not the freedom to think as we wish or do as we please, it is the freedom to be children of God, heirs of the promise, and co-heirs with Christ. Freedom is not included in the fruit of the Spirit because the Spirit Himself is freedom.² To have the indwelling Spirit, is to be free. If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.³

In verses 2-4, Paul again reminds Galatia of the severity and implications of their decision to be circumcised, should they choose. In keeping with Torah, you must keep it all, not part, and that is impossible. We have learned through our study of Galatians the purpose of the law to lead us to Christ, but never to substitute the righteousness of which Christ alone can provide. It is not circumcision in itself that will seal their fate, "for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value,"⁴ but simply what the act of circumcision on their behalf represents and displays about their faith or lack thereof. You cannot have Christ and merits. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."⁵

John Calvin put it well, "Whoever wants to have a half-Christ loses the whole."⁶ You must have all of Christ or none of Him! With every breath we cling to the cross as our one and only hope for salvation. How clearly we now see that the letter of Galatians trumpets loudly what a perversion, what a falsity, and what detriment to our life on earth and eternity it is to cling to anything but the cross for salvation. You cannot save yourself! Luther used a powerful illustration to bring understanding to this verse, "For just as someone on a ship is drowned regardless

1. George, 353.

2. 2 Corinthians 3:17, NIV

3. John 8:36, NIV

4. Galatians 5:6, NIV

5. Acts 4:12.

6. George, 359.

of the part of the ship from which he falls into the sea, so someone who falls away from grace cannot help perishing. The desire to be justified by the law, therefore, is shipwreck; it is exposure to the surest peril of eternal death. What can be more insane and wicked than to want to lose the grace and favor of God and to retain the law of Moses, whose retention makes it necessary for you to accumulate wrath and every other evil for yourself?"⁷ It is imperative that we do not walk away from this letter without this truth cemented in our minds and hearts. For the freedom, grace, and life we have through the cross of Jesus Christ is so great for many reasons, especially because the alternative is so grave!

In verse 5-6, we are reminded the Christian life is a life of faith and a life in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit who dwells in us produces works of love. "It is not that works of love are added to faith as a second and subsidiary ground of our acceptance with God, but that the faith which saves is a faith which works, a faith which issues in love."⁸ Fee states "Thus what 'counts' is 'faith that works itself out in love.' Moreover, there is very likely a touch of irony in Paul's use of the verb 'to work' in this clause after the steady diet of pejorative uses of this noun earlier in the letter. 'Work' there is to be done, to be sure, but it is the 'work of God,' not the 'work of law.'"⁹

By the power of the Spirit in us, our faith is expressed and manifested through works in love. And there is so much great work to be done for the kingdom of God for those who are in Him! Our last section of scriptures is very similar to that of Galatians 4:12-20 in Paul's personal appeal to the Galatian churches, it is a, "rambling collection of pointed remarks, rhetorical questions, proverbial expressions, threats, irony, and climaxing it all, a joke of sarcasm."¹⁰ Paul makes sure the Galatians know he is not preaching circumcision (as some accused him of doing) and again pointed to the Judaizers' negative impact and threat to the Galatia race of faith. Of course, it was no understatement to say this section of scripture ended with a blast. The frustrated, passionate, and zealous tender Paul writes this letter with is held true and brought to its climax through his jocularly in verse 12!

Article Question:

1. Has there ever been a time in your life that you felt you could earn your salvation? In what ways did this result in a "shipwreck" for you?

Galatians 5:1-12, NIV

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. ⁷ You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." ¹⁰ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. ¹¹ Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹² As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

7. LW 27.18, George, 359.

8. Stott, 134.

9. Fee, 191.

10. Betz, Galatians, 264. George, 363.

Study Questions:

1. How have you been “standing firm” in the freedom Christ paid for on the cross for you this semester? How has the indwelling Spirit (The Holy Spirit) brought greater freedom in loving God and others this semester?
2. In verses 2-4 what will be the results of consenting with circumcision for the churches in Galatia?
3. How has God used these past five chapters of Galatians to blow out the idea of adding to the finished work of the cross for salvation? What key verses or scriptures have stuck with you so far in refuting this central argument of the book?
4. Paul is not condemning our various religious observances, he is simply saying they cannot substitute for salvation. What religious practices or observances have you found valuable to expressing your faith and why? When did you realize these works could not “save you” but hopefully add to your fervor for Christ?
5. In verse 6, what does Paul say counts? Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, how does this verse compare with Galatians 5:6? In what ways are these scriptures being played out in your life this semester?
6. In verses 7-9, Paul compares Galatians to runners in a race and a batch of dough. How do these two illustrations display the nature of the Christian life?
7. Read Hebrews 12:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, how do these verses challenge you in the way you are running the race? In what ways has the Chi Alpha community spurred you on in your race?
8. Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-8, in what ways does this passage challenge you in the way that you live your life personally and within the community that you find yourself in.
9. In verses 10-12 Paul makes some severe statements about those who are troubling the Galatians. Why was he so upset? What have you learned from studying Galatians about the severity of false teaching? Use scriptures from Galatians as examples.

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meet with your prayer partner this week to read and discuss:

Read Romans 7:1-6 and answer the following questions:

1. What scripture verses stand out to you initially and why?
2. How do these scriptures compare with what we have been learning in the letter to Galatians? Use specific verses to compare.
3. Re-read Romans 7:6, what is the difference of serving in the new way of the Spirit instead of the old way of the written code? How is that made possible? Have you noticed a difference in your “service” since giving your life to Christ?
4. What have been two to three big “takeaways” for you so far in this study of Galatians? How can you apply those things to this week?

Scripture Memory:

Galatians 5:1

Galatians 5:6