

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2017: *The Gospel in Galatians*

Lesson 11 “Freedom in Christ”

Read for this week’s study

Galatians 5:1–15; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Romans 8:1; Hebrews 2:14, 15; Romans 8:4; 13:8.

Memory Text

“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” (Galatians 5:13, ESV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Christ Has Set Us Free
- III. The Nature of Christian Freedom
- IV. The Dangerous Consequences of Legalism (*Gal. 5:2–12*)
- V. Liberty Not Licentiousness (*Gal. 5:13*)
- VI. Fulfilling the Whole Law (*Gal. 5:13–15*)
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “In Galatians 2:4, Paul briefly referred to the importance of protecting the ‘freedom’ that we have in Christ Jesus. But what does Paul mean when he speaks about ‘freedom,’ which he does so often? What does this freedom include? How far does this freedom go? Does it have any limits? And what connection does freedom in Christ have to the law?” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Both verses 1 & 13 at the beginning and end of our passage, deal with the fact that we are called to be free. Why is freedom such a precious commodity?
3. More than 16 million people lived in East Germany. Between 1950-1988, a little over 4 million people migrated to the West. The vast majority did this before 1961 when the Berlin Wall was erected, and they did it by simply walking to the West. However, 616,066 people left the GDR between 1961-1988; 1100 people died trying to cross the border; only 4.6% (one in twenty) succeeded. Why would people risk their lives in this way?
4. “Paul’s words, ‘for freedom Christ has set us free’ (Galatians 5: 1, ESV), may suggest that he has another metaphor in mind here. The wording of this phrase is similar to

the formula used in the freeing of slaves. [...] That formula shares a basic similarity with Paul's terminology, but there is a fundamental difference. In Paul's metaphor, no fiction is involved." (Sunday's lesson)

5. How do you understand that in setting people free by Christ, there is no fiction involved? Why would Christianity throughout the centuries come up with models to explain salvation which are based on fiction or metaphors?
6. Paul shows that if you still cling to the law (and circumcision), you are declaring that you do not want to belong to Messiah's people (5:2-4). The alternative sums up what Christianity is all about: "we are waiting eagerly by the Spirit for the hope of righteousness" (5:5). Why will God declare publicly that those who are in Christ are really his people? When will this vindication by God of all his faithful people be manifest (6:15)? What is the role of the Spirit in this – versus the marks of circumcision on the human body? Why is it that what matters is "faith working through love" (5:6)?
7. What is legalism and why is it so dangerous? Most things in life do improve if you concentrate your effort on them, but Paul talks about the risk of using the method of performance, obeying the rules, to become a more spiritual person. Have you ever been caught in, or observed, that vicious cycle? The focus ends up on oneself and progress, followed by judging others to try and determine how much progress they have achieved. God becomes incidental to the whole process! The old nature is not changed. The rebellion is not healed, but ready to erupt at any time. And human relationships are damaged.
8. On the contrary, because you have been set free by Christ (5:1-12), you no longer want to stay in any type of bondage. To escape, you need someone to transform your life from within. That Someone is the Holy Spirit (5:13-26). Through the Spirit's love you have a desire to live for others, instead of for self (6:1-10). You want to live your life of liberty for the glory of God, who made it possible (6:11-18). Thus you are in the process of inner healing (transformation), depending on grace, yielding to the Spirit, living for others and seeking to glorify God. That's what the rest of Galatians is all about!
9. Freedom *from* restraint, if it is to be of any use, must be matched by a sense of freedom *for* a particular purpose. Paul shows that if you participate in the new Exodus that God accomplished in Jesus, the Messiah, you experience double freedom: freedom *for* love. Legalism made the Galatians 'bite' and 'devour' each other. When one emphasizes who they are 'according to the flesh', flesh is the result! However, if God's Spirit is allowed to direct your life, you will experience freedom *from* these works of flesh.
10. This is not material versus non-material. It is where your true identity lies, where your deepest motivation comes from and where the power that rules your life is found. If your identity is that of a child of God, indwelt by the Spirit, you do not need the circumcision as a badge of membership. You are free *for* God and free to love one's neighbor. And the next lesson (passage) will show us what that looks like.

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Recommended Listening: The entire series by Graham Maxwell on the book of Galatians is available at <http://pkp.cc/MMGALATIANS66>

Lou: Trust might sound like something we *have* to do. But doesn't God do it all? Isn't faith itself the gift of God?

Graham: It's so described in the Bible. "Faith is a gift of God." This is so important that it is much of the subject next week: "God's Way of Restoring Trust." Well, he gives everything except one thing, I believe. He gives us life. He gives us minds to weigh the evidence. He gives us the evidence. He gives us the freedom. He gives us everything except *he does not cast the vote*. If in this great controversy, in this war, God were also to manipulate us so we would vote the way he wanted, you know who would cry foul. So God does not win this great controversy by stuffing his own ballot box, by also putting the faith within us. Then you have the question, "Why does he put faith in some and not others?" And then there's no responsibility. You say, "I don't have faith. You know why? God didn't give me any." And you know what that has led to in theological history.

God gives us everything, but *he doesn't cast the vote*. That's up to us. That is what freedom is. That's where responsibility is. And I like it this way. It's a little scary, but would you want it any other way? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #3 with Lou Venden, "All God Asks is Trust" recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/3MMCAG>

It is significant to note that in the New Testament, James called the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue) the "royal law of liberty." Not the "royal law of subjugation, surrender, and bondage," but the "royal law of freedom." . . .

As Paul explains, God's laws were not given to be a burden or to restrict us. They were given to help us, to protect us in the days of our ignorance and immaturity and lead us back to trust and on to freedom. God values nothing higher than our freedom. When you go all through the sixty-six books and you come to the last one, the book of Revelation, you note that God is still asking us to remember Him, especially as our Creator. You remember in Revelation 14 the three messages of the three angels. In Revelation 14:7 the first angel says: "Honor God and give him glory, for his time has come to sit in judgment. Worship the Creator of heaven and earth. The Creator of the sea and the springs." (NAB) {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #10, "The Reminder of The Evidence" recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/10MMCAG>

But God's extensive use of law surely seems opposed to freedom. It has indeed been seriously misunderstood. Consider, for example, Jesus' words on this subject to His disciples in the very first passage on the Bible Reference Sheet. In John 14:15 and John 15:14 Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And He added, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." (RSV)

What kind of friendship is it that demands obedience? How do you fit "Keep my commandments," with "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free?" Sometimes this is explained to mean that we are free so long as we do exactly what we are told. Have you parents ever tried that with your children?

"Now children, we want freedom in our home. We can have freedom so long as you do exactly what you are told. Do I make myself clear?" If your children are afraid of you enough, they will say, "You have made yourself clear." But inside they may have serious reservations. It seems such a contradiction. Of course, everything depends upon how we understand what it is that God has asked us to do and how we understand the reason why He even had to ask us in the first place.

I believe, as I am sure many of you do, that all of God's laws, particularly the Ten Commandments, were given for our best good. They were given especially to preserve freedom—not to infringe upon it. But law, the use of law, has been seriously misunderstood throughout the great controversy.

The most notable example of misunderstanding occurred about 1400 years after Sinai, when the Son of God came himself to live among a people who had been especially entrusted with this revelation of God's will formulated in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments.

Of all people, they should have understood it was an emergency measure—with Moses there to explain that there was no need to be afraid. But when Jesus came, he found a group of people who were totally preoccupied with God's laws and with obedience to their every detail. He never had to tell them not to make a graven image. They had learned their lesson in the discipline of Babylonian captivity, and they never sank into ordinary idolatry again. He never had to tell them which day was the Sabbath. They regarded it as their highest duty to obey all ten of the Ten Commandments. He never had to urge them to pay tithe. Matthew records they used to tithe even the tiniest things: the seeds of the mint, anise, and cumin. Nor did Jesus have to tell them they should obey the laws of hygiene. He commented on the fact that they would even strain gnats out of their goat's milk lest they should eat a forbidden insect. Nor did he ever have to tell them to search the Scriptures. He said they did it all the time—though they did it for the wrong reason. (John 5:39) Nor did he ever have to tell them to be careful in their association with unbelievers. In fact, when they came in from the market place, they used to wash themselves in certain special, ceremonial ways, lest they be contaminated by association

with the Gentiles. You see, they all could say, like the rich young ruler, “All these things we have obeyed from our youth up.”

You would think that in the face of such rigorous obedience and willingness to do precisely what they were told—you would think Jesus would be pleased, and they would recognize and welcome him when he came. But all heaven watched the incredible scene of those who claimed to love God’s law, denouncing the Lawgiver as a lawbreaker. It must have puzzled the angels a great deal. So Jesus ventured to suggest that while they were working so hard to obey, that actually they were obeying for the wrong reason. And because they were obeying for the wrong reason, they really were not obeying at all. You can imagine how offensive this was to them. In fact, he went further and suggested that if only they knew the God who had given the law, they would keep the law for an entirely different reason: a reason that would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #12, “God’s Law is No Threat to Our Freedom” recorded April, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>*

You remember Jesus’ words in John 8:32: “You will know the truth [and with Jesus, it is always the truth about his Father], and the truth will set you free” (Williams). You see if God were the kind of person Satan has made him out to be, there would be no freedom. There would only be the bondage of fear. But Paul had learned the truth and now he took it everywhere he could. He took it to the Galatians. And when he took the truth, he took freedom to them. He noticed they loved it at first. Then they turned away from it. “Oh,” he says, “stand fast in this freedom.” Look at Galatians 5:1: “This is the freedom with which Christ has made us free. So keep on standing in it, and stop letting your necks be fastened in the yoke of slavery again” (Williams).

Now there had been a day when Paul himself was satisfied with the obedience that resulted from law and fear. He thought it was the right thing to do. That was what the sovereign God preferred. But now Paul knows the good news. He knows the truth, and he realizes that God does not want the obedience that springs from law and fear. He wants the obedience of faith; the obedience that comes from free people who agree with God that this is the right thing to do. They agree so fully, they don’t even need to be told to do so. They do what is right because they agree it is right. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #16, “God’s last pleading with His Children” recorded May, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/16MMCAG>*

When the reader reached this little section that we're reading now, only a few minutes before, they had heard Paul's opening to this letter, that he'd brought this great good news to them about the kind of person God is, that he'd described in Romans 1. And he warned them that there were people who were twisting and perverting and suppressing this good news, this truth about God that could heal us and set us free. So wouldn't they equate this little section with the other? And Paul has explained in these two letters that while it's true that God indeed has used many, many laws, that to really keep the law is to love. And to love is to be grown up. And to be grown up is to be free, and to have one's faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil, and to recognize one's privilege of making one's own decisions and rejoicing in the responsibility. That to really keep God's law is to be a grown up, loving, trustworthy citizen who can be entrusted with freedom and all the privileges of free life throughout eternity. God's laws are not opposed to freedom. Paul has explained that; it's part of the good news. But to go back to these elemental spirits is to go back to blind, mechanical bondage and subservience to rules and regulations—like reading the Bible as a code book of things to be believed, deeds to be done, and sins to be shunned. But to read the Bible as a revelation about God is to learn about all that other good news about the kind of people God wants us to be in his heavenly society. So who would want to go back to the other, is his point. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Galatians, #5, recorded March, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*

<http://pkp.cc/5MMGALATIANS66>

I believe that the essence of legalism is preoccupation with our legal standing with a legal, legalistic God. And so many Christians are preoccupied with their legal standing, because they don't really know God. They don't realize that he is a gracious God who is not preoccupied with our legal standing. Like the father of the prodigal son, he's very preoccupied with our welfare and whether or not we will come home. Unfortunately, the word "legalism" is often misused. So I will repeat it: *The essence of legalism is preoccupation with one's legal standing with God.*

Lou: Could a person believe and accept, for instance, Christ's sacrifice in his or her place —could he or she think of that in such a way that they would in effect be a legalist?

Graham: Yes, this is something to say very carefully. But I really believe that's true. If you believe Jesus died primarily to adjust our legal standing with a God who is preoccupied with our legal standing, you are a legalist. And this means that you no longer take the blood of bulls and goats to God to adjust your legal standing—and I'd want to say this very reverently—you now take him the blood of his son and say, "Will this adjust my legal standing?" He would say, "That's good; now, you've brought me the right blood." This is legalism.

Lou: So you're saying that if the purpose of our idea or our experience of salvation is meeting a legal requirement or it satisfies a legal requirement, it becomes a matter of legalism.

Graham: That's the devil's sad perversion. He has actually taken the death of Christ, which is a monument to freedom and suggests that God is not preoccupied with our legal standing; the devil has turned that into just another ceremony to adjust legal standing. In other words, those who misunderstood the ceremonies in Old Testament times but then became Christians, applied the same misunderstanding to the cross and to the blood of Christ. It's just that now they have better blood and more persuasiveness with the Father to adjust their legal standing. It sounds terrible to say that.

Lou: It seems to me that you have opened the idea of the meaning and the problem of legalism to a much broader perspective, a very important perspective. You give us something to think about.

Graham: It supports the devil's charges that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. See, all legalism is based on the conception that God has to execute those who disobey him. Therefore, it follows that forgiveness will take care of it. That's what produces legalism. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God, #12 with Lou Venden, "God's Law is No Threat to Our Freedom"* recorded April, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>

Further Study with Ellen White

The means by which we can overcome the wicked one is that by which Christ overcame,—the power of the word. God does not control our minds without our consent; but if we desire to know and to do His will, His promises are ours: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching." John 8:32; 7:17, R. V. Through faith in these promises, every man may be delivered from the snares of error and the control of sin. {DA 258.5}

Every man is free to choose what power he will have to rule over him. None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they can find deliverance in Christ. The demoniac, in place of prayer, could utter only the words of Satan; yet the heart's unspoken appeal was heard. No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who will consent to enter into covenant relation with the God of heaven are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature. They are invited by the Saviour, "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5. The spirits of darkness will battle for the soul once under their dominion, but angels of God will contend for that soul with prevailing power. The Lord says, "Shall the prey be taken from the

mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? . . . Thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.” Isaiah 49:24, 25. {DA 258.6}

When we speak of faith, there is a distinction that should be borne in mind. There is a kind of belief that is wholly distinct from faith. The existence and power of God, the truth of His word, are facts that even Satan and his hosts cannot at heart deny. The Bible says that “the devils also believe, and tremble;” but this is not faith. James 2:19. Where there is not only a belief in God’s word, but a submission of the will to Him; where the heart is yielded to Him, the affections fixed upon Him, there is faith—faith that works by love and purifies the soul. Through this faith the heart is renewed in the image of God. {SC 63.2}

While it is true that our busy activities will not in themselves ensure salvation, it is also true that faith which unites us to Christ will stir the soul to activity (MS 16, 1890). {6BC 1111.6}

When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man’s best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit. {FW 50.1}

The work of Christ in the heart does not destroy man’s powers. Christ directs, strengthens, ennobles, and sanctifies the faculties of the soul. It is through personal acquaintance with Him that we become qualified to represent His character to the world. John says, “As many as receive him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). And again, “Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (verse 16). {TDG 219.3}

Love, the basis of creation and of redemption, is the basis of true education. This is made plain in the law that God has given as the guide of life. The first and great commandment is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Mark 12:30. To love Him, the Infinite, the Omniscient One, with the whole strength and mind and heart, means the highest development of every power. It means that in the whole being—the body, the mind, as well as the soul—the image of God is to be restored. {CT 32.1}

Like the first is the second commandment—“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Matthew 22:39. The law of love calls for the devotion of body, mind, and soul to the service of God and our fellow men. And this service, while making us a blessing to others, brings the greatest blessing to ourselves. Unselfishness underlies all true development. Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty. More and more fully do we become partakers of the divine nature. We are fitted for heaven, for we receive heaven into our hearts. {Ed 16.2}

The deeds of kindness may have been done in secret, but the result upon the character of the doer cannot be hidden. If we work with wholehearted interest as a follower of Christ, the heart

will be in close sympathy with God, and the Spirit of God, moving upon our spirit, will call forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch. {MB 83.1}

God's law is the law of love. He has surrounded you with beauty to teach you that you are not placed on earth merely to delve for self, to dig and build, to toil and spin, but to make life bright and joyous and beautiful with the love of Christ—like the flowers, to gladden other lives by the ministry of love. {MB 97.3}

Those who are truly Christians are bound with the chain of love which links earth to heaven, which binds finite man to the infinite God. The light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ shines in the hearts of His followers, to the glory of God. {RC 104.4}

In calling them to His service, God offers them freedom. Obedience to God is liberty from the thralldom of sin, deliverance from human passion and impulse. {TM 247.1}

Recommended Reading: *Education* Chapter 8 – “The Teacher Sent From God”

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