

Bible Survey, part 8 – The New Testament

The Epistles (Galatians, part 2)

“Limiting Our Freedom in Christ”

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Paul wrote Galatians in **48 A.D.** to the churches he had established on his first missionary journey in southeastern Turkey.



Paul's purpose was to deal with a theological heresy that had crept into these churches – led by a group of false teachers called “**Judaizers.**”

Judaizers' plan of salvation = “relying on Jesus' blood + human works.”

In the Book of Galatians, Paul defends God's TRUE plan of salvation as found in the Bible: “**relying on Jesus' blood + no human works of any kind.**”

But these Judaizers were also teaching that human works form the foundation of our relationship with God even **AFTER** we're saved.

“For through faith in Jesus Christ, you are **all sons/daughters** of God.” Galatians 3:26

[Therefore, as an adopted child of God] “... you are no longer under Law [human performance system with God], but under grace.” Romans 6:14

“... nothing in creation [even our bad performance] shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:39

As a follower of Christ, I can do anything I want without it ever endangering the family bond between me and my Heavenly Father.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, stand firm in that freedom and do not let yourself be subjected again to a yoke of bondage [i.e. performance system in relation to God].” Galatians 5:1

Biblical Balance:

While it is true that we have this wonderful freedom in Christ – it is just as true that God asks us to “limit” that freedom at certain times and in certain circumstances.

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh . . .” Galatians 5:13a

There are two different ways that churches try to make sure Christians don’t do this [i.e., “turn their freedom into an opportunity for the flesh”].

Way #1 – by **legislating** a list of “do’s and don’ts” that Christians must adhere to – if they want to be regarded as “good Christians.”

We call this “**legalism**.”

This “**works approach**” to the Christian life **robs people** of their **freedom in Christ**!

It turns the Christian life into a life of **drudgery**.

It gives outsiders a **horribly distorted view** of true biblical Christianity.

The vast majority of churches and Christian organizations in America **use** this method to “keep their sheep in line.”

“There are grace killers on the loose . . . Instead of giving people permission to be absolutely free in Christ, they project this grim-faced list of do’s and don’ts, which results in believers spending their whole life in bondage.” Chuck Swindoll

Way #2 – by **giving believers** God’s principles in the Bible for “limiting” their freedom in Christ

We call this “**Bible teaching**.”

We call this “**discipling people**.”

We call this “**building mature Christians**.”

If a **contemplated action** gets **caught** in one of these six “sieves” – then God is telling me to “**limit**” my freedom here.

“All things may be **lawful** for me, but not all things are **profitable**.” 1 Corinthians 10:23a

Just because I have the freedom in Christ to do anything I want without losing God’s love – **does not mean that I should!**

Sieve #1 – “Is it intrinsically offensive to God [sin]?”

“As obedient children . . . like the Holy One who called you, be holy in all your behavior. For it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” 1 Peter 1:14-16

God calls on us to pursue holy behavior in our lives.

When we don't, God "disciplines" us as His children [Hebrews 12:6].

And sometimes, God allows the bad consequences of our sinful behavior to come upon us [Galatians 6:7].

Sieve #2 – "Will it harm me physically?"

"... your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not your own, you were bought with a price. Therefore, **honor God in your body.**" 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

There are lots of things we have **freedom in Christ** to do – but which will harm our bodies [which are not our property]!

Sieve #3 – "Will it help me spiritually?"

"... let us throw off every weight, and the sin that so easily besets us, so we can run with endurance the race that is set before us." Hebrews 12:1

God tells us not to load our lives up with "extra weight" **spiritually** that turns our "**race for God**" into a "**crawl for God.**"

"Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person does is **outside** their body; but the person who commits sexual immorality **sins** against their **own body.**" 1 Corinthians 6:18

Sexual sin **wounds** both people involved in a **special way.**

Sieve #4 – "Will it **identify me** with unrighteous things even though I may not actually be doing anything wrong?"

"... avoid all appearance of evil." 1 Thessalonians 5:22

"Do not let your good be evil spoken of." Romans 14:16

Many times we can exercise some **freedom in Christ** with a pure heart, but the question is – "Are we giving off the **appearance** of evil?"

Sieve #5 – "Will it hurt a fellow believer's Christian walk?"

"It is not good to eat meat or drink wine or do **anything** that causes your brother [sister] to stumble." Romans 14:21

The mark of a **mature follower of Christ** is the attitude that says: "I care so much about my **fellow Christian's walk**, that I will **set aside any freedom I have to** – in order not to hurt their walk."

Sieve #6 – "Will it hurt my platform for evangelism with non-believers?"

"Walk in wisdom when it comes to those who are outsiders..." Colossians 4:5

"But I have used **none** of these rights, lest I hinder the Gospel of Christ." 1 Corinthians 9:12b

Once we "**go public for Jesus Christ**" – people start **watching us like a hawk.**

They have certain **expectations** as to how a Christian should act – and if we **violate them** – it will destroy our evangelistic platform with them.

Question:

“Why should I let some non-believer put their limits on my freedom in Christ?”

Answer:

“Because - hopefully, like the Apostle Paul – we believe that people's souls are more important than exercising our Christian liberties!

#1 – “Will it offend the holiness of God – is it sin?”

#2 – “Will it harm me physically?”

#3 – “Will it help me spiritually?”

#4 – “Will it cause people to think I’m doing something wrong even if I’m not?”

#5 – “Will it hurt the spiritual walk of another brother/sister in Christ?”

#6 – “Will it compromise my evangelistic platform with non-believers?”

God measures **spiritual maturity** – **not** by how much of my **freedom in Christ I insist on exercising**, **but** by how much of it I am willing to **defer** when God asks me to!

So What?

It’s incumbent on every true believer here – to go back and do the “**6 Sieves Test**” on the things in our lives.