

FREEDOM IN CHRIST--USING IT OR LOSING IT
Gal. 5:1-15

Intro: The first verse of chapter 5 reads as follows in the ASV and is much closer to a literal rendering of the Greek NT: "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage."

Christ has set us free from the hopeless task of salvation by Law.

He has set us free from the equally hopeless task of conquering sin by ourselves. He has set us free from the tyranny of sin, but He has not set us free to sin. There is a great difference.

IT IS THIS FREEDOM WHICH THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW DESPISE. Cf. Gal. 2:4. Thus, we have come in the latter part of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 to the major practical importance of what Paul is concerned about.

As we consider this this morning, let us be perfectly clear in our thinking:

- (1) Let me remember that I can never lose my salvation. Most of us here this morning have assurance on this point--not the assurance of feeling, but the assurance based on the teaching of the Word of God.
- (2) I can lose my liberty in the Lord because this enters into my practical experience. This is what made the situation in Galatia so very serious. To lose our liberty means (a) the loss of assurance, (b) the loss of joy in the Lord, (c) the loss of fellowship with other believers, (d) the loss of deliverance from sin, and many other things.

Vv. 1 and 13 are the two verses which we must not particularly because they point out the practical truths I must know. I CAN LOSE MY LIBERTY BY FAILING TO USE IT, OR BY MISUSING IT.

How do I fail to use it? By failing to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (v. 1).

How do I misuse it? By misinterpreting liberty to mean that I can do anything that I want to do. This opens the door for for me to be dominated by the sins of the flesh.

So I must avoid the two extremes.

The person who teaches that I am under the Law either for salvation or for Christian living where the burden for either or both rests upon me is a legalist.

The person who says that I as a Christian am free to do any-

thing that I want to do is antinomian--against any restrictions whatsoever.

Either position is contrary to the Word of God.

Paul's exhortation is to "stand fast." By this he means to take a stand and then to keep it without wavering. It is only as we know the Word of God "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).

What are the danger signs which will indicate my need to "stand fast"? Paul gives us several in this passage which I want to call your attention to.

I. BEWARE WHEN CEREMONY, OR RITUAL, BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT THAN JESUS CHRIST (vv. 2-4).

Paul puts all of his authority behind what he has to say here: "I Paul."

The legalists were always talking about circumcision, and the thing which seemed to give strength to their arguments was that circumcision was a Biblical truth.

This brings me to see an important principle: IT NOT ONLY IMPORTANT THAT A TRUTH BE FOUND IN THE SCRIPTURES, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT THAT EVERY TRUTH BE KEPT IN ITS PROPER PLACE. ANY TRUTH REMOVED FROM ITS PLACE CAN BECOME HERESY.

Does the OT teach circumcision? Yes, for the people of Israel, and it became mandatory under the Law.

Does the OT teach circumcision for salvation? The answer: ABSOLUTELY NOT! Cf. Gen. 15 and 17.

What the legalists said about circumcision so completely overshadowed anything that they might have said about Jesus Christ that Jesus Christ became a non-essential in salvation!

And so note what Paul says in vv. 2, 4, 6.

Jesus Christ is not ever to be placed second. The person who calls Jesus Christ in to help only in the tough spots is the person who derives no help at all from Christ. He does not help them who help themselves, but He helps those who depend entirely upon Him!!!

This is the first thing to look out for.

- II. BEWARE WHEN WHAT YOU DO BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DOES (v. 5).

This is the only time Paul uses the word "hope" in the entire epistle to the Galatians.

What does he mean by "hope"? Thayer (p. 205) translates it expectation. It has to do with the goal, the purpose of salvation.

What is the goal? Heaven? That is only a part, a small part. THE GOAL OF SALVATION IS OUR CONFORMITY TO CHRIST.

A question: Would you as a Christian dare to assume the task of making yourself like the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you remember Paul's question in Gal. 3:3?

A legalist is so busy telling you what you have to do that he has no time to teach you anything about the Holy Spirit.

WHENEVER WHAT WE DO BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DOES, WE ARE NO LONGER STANDING FAST IN THE LIBERTY WE HAVE IN CHRIST. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE BECOMES ONE OF HOPELESS BONDAGE BECAUSE WE HAVE TAKEN OVER THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

God forbid! Read v. 6, faith energized by love (lit.).

- III. BEWARE WHEN ANYONE HINDERS YOU IN YOUR OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD (v. 7).

This word "hinder" is an interesting word. It means cutting into someone who is seeking to run a race, trying to hinder them.

This is what Satan did to Eve in the Garden of Eden. He employed delaying tactics.

Now read v. 8. ANY ARGUMENT THAT DRAWS YOU AWAY FROM OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD CANNOT BE OF GOD! When God speaks, do not even stop to discuss other possibilities.

Beware of men who trouble you (v. 10), that is, who shake your allegiance in God and in His Word.

~~Finally~~

- IV. BEWARE WHEN ANYONE MINIMIZES THE CROSS OF CHRIST (v. 11).

"The offence" is the stumbling-block. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:23. This has always been where the Jew has had trouble. It

means that any teaching about the Cross is revolting to him, it arouses his opposition, it stirs his anger, it draws forth his disapproval.

Paul once felt like this, but notice his words in Gal. 6:14, 15 and 2:20 and 3:13, 14.

Paul wrote to the intellectuals of Corinth, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:17, 18).

*Comment
on trouble
in v. 12 -
the revolutionaries!
those who
claim to
have what
no one else
has ever had.*

Why does man hate the Cross? BECAUSE IT CONDEMNS ALL THAT HE IS AND ALL THAT HE CAN DO. IT DECLARES HIM HELPLESS AND HOPELESS IN WINNING HIS OWN SALVATION. IT MAKES HIM ABSOLUTELY DEPENDENT UPON GOD.

And we do not like to be put in that place. But to turn to any other way is to turn from the only way.

Finally

V. BEWARE OF ANY DOCTRINE WHICH HINDERS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP vv. 14, 15).

Do you remember how it affected Peter, according to ch. 2?

Do you remember how it had affected Paul's relationship with the Galatians (4:15, 16)?

Now read 5:14, 15. If they could have their own way, they would have destroyed each other--those who had become legalists against others who were legalists.

John gives us the only ground for fellowship in 1 John 1:6, 7, "If we say that we have fellowship . . ."

Concl: Would you enjoy the liberty, the joy, the assurance, the blessing that is rightfully yours in Christ?

Then watch for these danger signs. Christ set you free for freedom--not bondage. And our greatest fellowship with each other and our greatest witness to the world will be found as we take our stand in this liberty, and refuse to be moved to any other ground.