

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Passage: Galatians 5:1-15; Romans 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 7:3-5 | Speaker: Steve Grothoff | Date: 261025

SUMMARY

Paul tells the Galatians they were called to freedom, and Steve asks what that freedom looks like in practice. Believers start in different places and carry different struggles, but all are headed to the same destination. Salvation requires repentance and faith, and obedience flows from love, not from fear that works will earn it. Works are the proof of our faith, not the price of it. Romans 14 turns this into practice: do not quarrel over personal convictions, do not flaunt freedom in front of someone who is struggling, deal with your own plank first, and build one another up in love.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Freedom in Christ is freedom from sin and the law, not freedom to sin. We are called to love and serve one another.
- Salvation requires only repentance and faith. Obedience flows from love as the get-to of a child, not the got-to of a babysitter.
- A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Small compromises lead to deeper sin, and leading another believer astray is serious.
- Basic doctrine and clear sins are non-negotiable, but gray areas are personal convictions. Do not judge others over them, and do not cause a struggling brother to stumble.
- Deal with your own sin first, build one another up in love, pray for those who struggle, and be ready to share your own testimony.

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Introduction

The deep application side of things, so if you guys would like to stand with me, I am going to read for us.

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:1-15

We are going to be Galatians 5, verses 1 through 15. Verse 1 starts out, You who would be justified by the law, you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and that the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I being persecuted? In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves, 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. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Opening Prayer

Father, we come to you this morning in a place where we all come from somewhere different. We all have different circumstances. And Father, like we were talking about with the kids this morning, we all have a walk that looks just a little bit differently. But Father, the goal, the end of the mission, the destination should be the same for each and every one of us. So Father, help us to just remember that. And as we go through our Christian walk, as we go through our Christian life, just to remember that the walk for each one of us is going to look different. So Father, we thank you for your word. Father, we thank you for the edification that it is. And Father, sometimes just for the conviction that it can be for each of us.

Lord, we love you. Lord, we love your word. Lord, we want to just follow your word.

And we ask all of these things in your son's name. Amen.

All right.

Where We Left Off

So last week, we talked about how we are children of promise, that we're free from the law and the curse of sin. And he talked about the two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. And then this week, we're going to talk about what that freedom looks like. As children of Isaac, as his allegory that he used last week, as children of Isaac, he says that we were born free. So what does free mean? Does free mean there are no rules? Does free mean we don't have any, we can do whatever we want because we're saved? Well, Paul tells us in Romans, does that freedom mean that we can just go on sinning? He says, absolutely not. What we're looking at here is when he talks about free, this is free from a standpoint of free from the law, but at the same time, free to make the decisions for ourselves, but with a clear, very clear idea in mind that we're all pointed in the same direction, that we all have the same focus in mind. His talk here when he says this is, you guys know the gospel. I have told you the gospel. We've talked about that numerous times here in Galatians. You know what the gospel is. Why are you turning away from it? You know what it is. Stay focused on that. And as we stay focused on that, it's a lot easier to realize that we all come from different places. We all start in different places. We don't all, we're all in different places converging to the same point, converging to the same place. And if we look around, we all look different. Not one of us looks the same, but there are some pretty rudimentary standard things. We all, for the most part, have 10 fingers, 10 toes, two arms, two legs, and a head with two eyes, two ears, a nose, and a mouth. Pretty standard. Pretty, you can ask any kid growing up, they will know these things. These are basic foundational things, but do any of us look exactly alike? No, we all look different. We all look different. Some of us have freckles. Some of us don't. Some of us have hair. Some of us don't.

We all look a little bit different. And sometimes, as we find out, when we get older, our various members work a little bit differently than they used to when we were younger. My knees don't work as well as some of these other younger guys' knees. My back doesn't feel as good as some of us do. Like, we all have varying degrees of things in our lives that trouble us. Varying degrees of things in our lives that we have that somebody else doesn't.

Non-Negotiables and Gray Areas

And this is it. This is what Paul is getting at. He's like, I don't care where you're coming from. I care where you're going. The same goes for our Christian walk here as he's going through. Our basic doctrines should all look the same. We should all believe that there is one true God. We should all believe in the deity of Christ. We should all believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. We should all believe in His life as atonement for our sins. We should all believe that we are justified through faith, not our works. foundational things, the same as two arms, two legs, attached to one torso. That is basic doctrine.

And he says that there, well, he doesn't say here, but he says in others of his letters that there are some pretty non-negotiable sins. There are some things that absolutely do not do. Three of those are murder, sexual immorality, and idolatry. Those are three of the big ones. Those kind of cover pretty well a lot of the things that we can all pretty well agree on are not okay. They're all things that we can all pretty well agree on are non-negotiable things that we just don't do.

What he's talking about here, this freedom in Christ, is he's talking more about some of these gray areas. There's not so much black and white in all of this. For some of us, when is anger sin and when is anger righteous?

That's varying degrees for each one of us. It depends on who you are. It depends on how angry you can get. For me, I can get angry sometimes still. That's drifting in a better direction. I'm trending for the better, but it still happens. When is drinking considered drunkenness? When is smoking, or is smoking considered a wrong thing to do? Are tattoos bad? I don't think so, but there are people that probably do, and I'm okay with that.

When does your dislike of somebody become considered hatred? These are the things, these are the kinds of things that he's covering. These are the varying degrees of things that are personal convictions for each and every one of us. We all have a different breaking point for certain things, and we all have things that, like we said, they're just non-negotiable. You don't kill people. Sexual immorality is bad.

Keep God as the center of your life. Don't idolize something else.

Stand Firm in Your Freedom

He says there in verse 1, he says, For freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. He says, don't look back. Look forward. Look at where you're going now. Don't look back at what you used to do and think, Oh, well, you know, I used to do this, and it did good for me. No. Stay focused on the course that you're on. Stay focused in that direction. In verses 2 through 4, he says, Look, I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. Christ will be of no advantage to you if you stay focused on, Well, I have to do these things because if I don't, I won't be saved. Or I have to do these things because it's not the got-to's that we need to focus on. It's the get-to's. I want to think of that. It's not I have to do this. I've got to do this. No. It's I get to do this. It's the beauty of we get to choose. We get to do things. And he says there a little bit farther on that we should do these things in love. That this whole, the whole point of all of this is love. He goes on there in verse 14. I'm skipping down just a little bit just to make this point that he says, The whole law is fulfilled into one thing. Love your neighbor.

Love the people that you come in contact with. Be a light to people.

Saved by Repentance and Faith

Two weeks ago, we talked about how Paul was talking about them celebrating different feast days to their old gods or obeying Jewish customary celebrations. This week, he's hitting on circumcision.

He's hitting into things that are odd to talk about. They're weird to talk about sometimes. But he's saying, do not do something thinking that that's going to be what's going to save you. Don't do something for the fact that you think that that is what's going to save you. That's not what he's getting at. What he's saying is you're saved. You don't have to do anything else because of it.

Obedience is on us. But salvation requires two things. Repentance and faith. That's it. That's all that is required for salvation. I do not. I choose not to do the things that I used to do. I repent of the way that the things that I've done in my life.

And faith. I put my faith in the fact that Jesus saved me, that the work is finished. He has done the work. I don't have to. But from that comes obedience. We choose. We decide that it is a good idea. It is because we love Jesus, we love other people. Because I love Jesus, I am going to do these things or I'm not going to do these things. Trying to achieve salvation through our own works and deeds is what he's saying here. He says, Christ is of no advantage to you. You've been severed from Christ. He's using some pretty scary phrases here. Those are things that I wouldn't want somebody to tell me. Well, Christ is of no advantage to you. You've been cut off from what Christ has done for you. That's scary to talk. That's a little bit, that's kind of daunting to hear. That's not what we want to hear. We want to hear that we're doing well. And he says there, you have fallen away from grace. Again, I don't know that any of us wants to hear that from somebody. If I walked up to you and said, well, hey, you know, I'm really worried about you. It looks to me like Jesus is of no advantage to you and you've fallen away from grace. Like, huh?

That's not something that anybody wants to hear.

Faith Working Through Love

Verses 5 and 6, he says, through the Spirit, by faith, for Christ, but only faith working through love. Skipped a little round a little bit there. But he's establishing your faith in Christ working through love. That is what drives you to do or not do everything that you do in your Christian life.

Our righteousness comes from Christ.

Our faith in Christ is our hope. Like I was telling the kids earlier, our joy comes from the destination we're headed to, not where we're at right now. Same thing. Same concept. Our hope is not in where we're at right now. Our hope is in our future. He bought our salvation.

Our works count for nothing. But our works, there he says, through love, are also proof of our faith.

It's two different things. We don't do them because we have to. We do them because we want to. We do them because it is an outflowing of Christ working in our lives that we outflow that to other people. That is the love that he's talking about there at the end of verse 6. Had to find the number.

7 through 10. You were running well.

A Little Leaven

You were doing so good, guys. What happened? He said this numerous times throughout Galatians. He's appalled at where they were and what they turned back to.

It's easy sometimes to get sidetracked. I get that. It happens to me.

The world's full of distractions and ways to lead us away from Christ and into sin. The world's full of it. It happens. It's not okay, though. What he's saying there is, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Even the slightest, seemingly harmless thing, just that little bit, can lead us to fall into an even deeper, more harmful sin. Jesus uses the leaven leavens the whole lump in the gospel in a good way, saying, you know, your Christianity, your faith will spread and your faith will be better for, your faith will grow and spread to other people. Paul's using it in the opposite direction. He says sin in your life will do the exact same thing. Sin in your life will lead you to more and more and more sin in your life. Verse 8, this persuasion is not from him who calls you.

The things, when you get distracted, that's not God.

The things that cause us to stumble or lead us into sin is not from God. In fact, 1 Corinthians, he tells us the opposite. 1 Corinthians 10, 13, he tells us that we'll all be tempted. There are going to be things that are going to tempt us.

There's nothing that will tempt us that's not common to everybody else. But God, in his faithfulness, will provide a way out for that. Paraphrasing it, but God will always provide us with a means to not be tempted. God will always provide us with an out to be able to escape those things.

Beginning of verse 10 there, he says, I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view. I have confidence. I have faith in you guys that me talking to you guys, me bringing this up to you, will straighten you back out. And me saying this, bringing this to your attention, because I know that the gospel meant something to you when I first brought it to you, because I know that that changed your life, I know that me talking to you about this is going to do some work in you. I know that me talking to you about this is going to bring you back on the right track. And then he says, the second part of that verse, And the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

Leading Others Astray

God knows that when we lead, God knows when we lead others astray. God knows when that happens. It happens. It happens to us. We get led astray by somebody else. We get led astray because somebody says something that sounds convincing, but it's not what God wants.

And he says there, he will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

We will all one day answer for those times that that happened. God, we are going as Christians, as adopted children of God, we are going to still stand before God and be judged one day, each and every one of us.

Now, for the most part, we are going to be told, these are the things that you've done for my kingdom. But I don't know necessarily that God's going to excuse when we have led one of his other children astray as one of his children. I don't know that that's, I don't know that that's going to be the case.

Because it is our job to guide and direct God's children. It is our job to be the light, the ones that guide.

You guys that were at the picnic last night, you guys met my younger sister, well, one of my younger sisters, those of you that did. If I got in trouble and she got in trouble together, if we both were doing something that we weren't supposed to be doing, guess who bore the most of the punishment and the most of the guilt? The older one. The one who probably was leading the charge. That, I just, I, again, I don't know that there's going to be, that we're just going to get off the hook for leading somebody else astray. I just don't think that that's going to be the case.

As we go through there, 11 and 12, he says, If I still preach circumcision, then why am I being persecuted? If I am bringing to you guys this message, such a good message that these people are bringing, how come they're talking bad about me? How come what I'm saying, and it isn't aligning with what they're saying, they're the ones persecuting me? Why? Why is that?

If I still preach the law, why am I being persecuted by those that are still trying to uphold the law? Why is this? And then the second part of that verse, he says, If this was the case, then Jesus wouldn't have had to come and die on the cross. If that was, if the law, if they were right, if the law was still to be, then Jesus came for nothing.

He tells them there that you're only making that first step in their book. They're going to keep asking more and more and more and more and more of you. They're going to keep, sin keeps adding to, and keeps taking us farther than we wanted to go, faster than we wanted to go, and in a way that is harder and harder for us to get back from. Because first he told them, you know, well, you've got to become a Jew and you've got to follow the law.

Okay, now that you've done that, now you need to get circumcised. Okay, now that you've done that, now you need to do this. Now that you've done that, now you need to do this. They just kept moving what they needed to do, kept adding to the things that were required of them. He doesn't do that. God doesn't do that. God saved us.

And if God didn't save us and say, well, that's done, then that would make God a liar, and that's not the case. Then we see here in verse 12, a little bit of biblical sarcasm, as I like to call it.

He says, I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves. He says, why stop the circumcision? Just cut the whole thing off.

In other versions, that's pretty much exactly what he says. He says, why stop there? Just keep going. Just take the whole thing.

Kind of graphic verse, but, I mean, Paul is pushing past that limit to say, guys, do you realize just how dumb this sounds? Do you realize how, like, that's exactly what he's trying to get at there.

Then he transitions back in, and he says, for you were called to freedom, brothers.

Called to Freedom, Not License

You were called to be free. You are free in Christ.

You are free from sin. You're not free to sin. There's a freedom from sin, not a freedom to do it.

Illustration: A Mother and a Babysitter

Again, this is that difference between get to and got to. I'll give you an illustration here. Newborn baby. Newborn baby.

And you think of it in two different ways. You think of the mother who takes care of the baby because she gets to. It is her child. She wants to do it. She cares for that kid. She does everything, pours out everything for that kid because she wants to. And then you've got a babysitter on the other side of that that watches the kid.

She does it because she has to. It's what she's getting paid to do. A mother loves her child for the sake of love.

A babysitter cares for a child because that's their job. That's what they're supposed to do. That's, that's, well, here's, here are the, here's the rules that I have for you. When I give you my kid to watch for a couple of hours, here are the rules that I have for you.

A mother doesn't need a list of rules. A mother cares for her child and does it because she cares for her child, because she wants to care for her child, because she does, she doesn't do it because she has to. What he's saying here is because you love God, you love to glorify God. Because you want to glorify God and you love God, you do that by serving others. That's what he's telling them.

And then he gets into it there at the end and he says, but if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. Don't judge and compare yourselves to others. Otherwise, all you will do is constantly fight.

Application: Romans 14

That gets us into the deep application of this week.

And I want you guys, if you would, with turnover with me into Romans chapter 14. And Paul expounds on this a good little bit.

We're going to jump in here, jump around just a little bit.

But we'll get here in the first four verses. This is where we get into our application. What does this mean for us today? What does this mean for us as Christians nowadays?

Verse 14, verses 1 through 4, he says, Beginning of verse 4 says, It is not up to us to decide what is and isn't okay as Christians for one another.

Do Not Quarrel Over Opinions

The Bible is very clear what is non-negotiable. The Bible is very clear on what is absolutely necessary for our Christianity, for our walk with Christ. What that does not mean is that we judge one another and we take somebody who, as he says, is weak in the faith. We welcome them. We don't quarrel over opinions.

I'm so glad when my buddy Andrew came, he was wearing a hat when he came in here. I know he wore his hat the whole service, and none of you said anything to him, and I'm glad because I have been to churches where I wore a hat, and as soon as I walked in the door, they were like, Hey, you can't wear that in here. Take that off.

It doesn't say that in here. That's something that we do. That's something that we have chosen. Yes, it's a respect thing. Yes, I understand that. But it's not absolutely required for our spiritual walk.

The way that we dress, the things that we say, the way that we look.

Again, we all come from different backgrounds, and therefore, we all struggle with different things. We're all different. We're all from different places, and we're all at different places in our sanctification. Every one of us is at a different place. What may not be okay for you may be perfectly okay to somebody else because maybe the Holy Spirit hasn't convicted them of it yet. Or maybe it's not a conviction to them at all. There are things that that is the freedom in Christ that he is talking about. We don't have a ton of rules to follow. We don't need to tell someone not to do something just because it's a personal conviction that we hold.

And I think we do an okay job of that here. I really do. I'm not, this isn't a, this isn't trying to land blast anyone or anything. I think we do a very good job here of being accepting of all sorts of people. And I know that that was one thing that got said that wasn't, that somebody else said wasn't the case here. And I don't see that. So I really, as I tell you guys this, I don't want you to think that this is me, but I do want it to convict you if you do feel like it's something that bothers you or that you are guilty of. But I think as a church, we do a pretty darn good job of being welcoming to people.

And I commend you guys on that.

Do Not Cause Others to Stumble

Let's jump over to verse 13 through 23. I'm going to skip around in it a little bit. But verse 13, he starts out, he says, If you know that somebody else doesn't, do something and it's a conviction of theirs in their life,

then don't do it in front of them. I'm going to put it in this, in this perspective. When, when I was trying to quit smoking, the worst thing to do is be standing next to somebody that lights up a cigarette right next to you and they just do it. And they're just like, talk it to you like normal. And you're sitting there trying not to do what you've told yourself. I'm not going to do this anymore. And, and that temptation is right there staring you in the face. So what he's saying here too is, is don't, if, if you know that somebody is convicted of not doing or not doing something and you do the opposite in front of them, you're both. And, and you cause them to stumble. Guess what? You're both in sin. They're in sin for doing something that they were convicted of. And you are in sin for bringing them to that point.

We shouldn't judge others for what they are and aren't convicted of. But if we know it is a conviction of theirs, we should avoid doing it when we're around them. If that's the case. Again, if it's not explicitly described in here as sin, but somebody else says, Hey, you know, I don't, I don't do that because, and you do it right there in front of them, you're guilty of sin.

Verse 17, for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So that then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

The worst thing that we can do when somebody is new, is a new Christian or is dealing with something is condemn them for something that we as more mature Christians are, are like, well, you shouldn't be doing that.

Remove the Plank First

Well, right. You're probably right, but it's not up to us to tell somebody this is, or isn't okay. The Bible does say very clearly in Matthew seven, which we did talk about judgment, but the Bible, when he's, when he's talking about remove the plank from your own eye or remove the plank from your own eye before you try to take the speck out of your brothers. If, if you are just, we all have sin in our own lives. We all have sin. If it's something that you haven't quite worked out and something that you haven't quite worked on in your own life, and you've got your own things that you just unrepentant of and not dealing with, don't talk to somebody else about what kind of sin they have in their life.

There are times that I feel absolutely just not in a place where I should be up here talking to you guys about things. Cause there are things in my life that I'm still working on. There are parts of my life that that I'm still figuring out. There are things that I know are not what God wants me to do. And I'm working on those things. But what we all need to be doing is remembering that we're all on a walk.

We're all going through sanctification. We're all dealing with things. And each and every one of us has something, if not one, multiple things in our lives that we're working on. The last thing that we need to be doing is tearing each other down. That's why he says, build each other up.

Build One Another Up

Mutual upbuilding.

Peace.

Joy. Righteousness in the Holy Spirit. We need to be building each other up. We need to be encouraging one another. If somebody is dealing with something, approach them with love, like he says.

And then there in verse 22.

The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. Keep our own convictions about things.

That's fine. But to try and push them off on other people, to try and tell somebody else, well, I don't do this, so you shouldn't either.

That's not okay. That's not all right. Again, we talked about this a couple weeks ago during, or about a month ago, during when we were talking about contentment. The best thing you can do for that person,

mention it to them in love.

Hey, I realize that this is part of your life, and I just think that you would have a better walk with Christ if this was not part of your life. And then pray for them. Tell them you're going to pray for them. Tell them you're going to do it, and then do it.

My favorite thing is when I say, well, I'm going to pray for you. I've only had one person tell me no.

No, I don't do that. You know what I did? Prayed for them anyways.

What are they going to do? Stop me? No, they're not. I'm going to do it. So that's just, that's what we need to be doing. We need to take that into consideration as we're doing these things, and that's, that's part of being doing things in love. That's part of being a Christian is doing things in love. Jesus didn't immediately condemn the people that were really trying to get closer to him.

He condemned the people that were trying to pull people away, called them all kinds of names. But again, application for this week, guys, let's just,

honestly, like I said, keep, keep up the good work because we have, we, we have a very, very loving and very accepting church.

Keep Loving and Know Your Testimony

and as we continue to just show people love, that's going to be the thing that's going to bring people here. That's going to be the thing that's going to help us disciple other people. That's going to be the thing that's going to help us evangelize other people. The one thing that we should have in our back pocket at all times is our own testimony and a good idea of how to share that with somebody else pretty concisely and pretty short. I'm pretty bad at that because my life is all sorts of things all the time. And it's hard to share concisely where I sit on things, but have a good idea of this is where I was, this is what God did for me, this is where I am now because of it. Because you sharing your testimony with somebody is the only, one of the best ways to share Christ with somebody and it's the only one that nobody can refute. Somebody can tell you that that's not how you lived your life. I don't believe that that's your life. Well, it was.

So, stay loving people. Don't judge somebody else based on something that is conviction to you that isn't a conviction to everybody else.

But, again, I think you guys do a pretty good job of that anyways.

Closing Prayer

So, alright, let's pray. that maybe they're not ready for. Maybe they're a new Christian, maybe they're not in a place where that is something that bothers them and Father, just change us, change our hearts. Give us hearts that love the people that need you deeply. and Father, give us the love to be able to share with them, to be able to talk to somebody that we don't necessarily have a lot in common with, to be able to do exactly what you asked us to do and go out and make disciples of all nations because, Father, all nations means all different kinds of people.

Thank you, Father.

Thank you for the gift of your Son and thank you for the freedom that we have in that. We ask all these things in your name.

Amen.