

GALATIANS

Lesson 1 – 1:1-5 - Freedom In Christ

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FREEDOM: (Merriam/Webster dictionary) “The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint”. Free translation: “To do whatever I want.”

But is this really true “freedom?”

“Free as a bird” is a popular way to describe freedom, emphasizing the soaring, unrestricted joy of freedom to explore and achieve. **(VISUAL)**

We might visualize the dog with its face outside of the car window relishing the wind in its face and every smell on it – enjoying freedom. **(VISUAL)**

Most of you know that my wife, Joanne, is a dog groomer - who sometimes has to chase dogs who get through an enclosed gate. A favorite picture of hers is of a dog running gleefully through an open gate with all four feet in full gallop and ears pushed back by the wind, and the caption reads: **“run like the gate was left open.” (VISUAL)**

Many try to find freedom in hiking in remote nature, or soaring in bi-planes, hang gliders or on zip lines. We seek freedom in leaving undesirable jobs or dissolving sour marriages, or in paying off credit cards or mortgages. There can be freedom in graduations, promotions or relocations. Many find freedom in “new love.”

As our American Declaration of Independence states, freedom is the God-given **“inalienable right”** of all human beings. Yet not all enjoy that right.

The award-winning television miniseries **“ROOTS”** reminded America of the tragedy and non-freedom of slavery, **(VISUAL)** and films such as the Academy award-winning **“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?”** and the more recent film based on the best-selling book **“The Help”** **(VISUAL)** reminds us of a legacy of slavery turned into long-term racism. For many, freedom has been very hard to come by. And the lack of freedom for many goes on and on around our world even today.

True freedom must never be at the expense of someone else’s.

Though most of us have never been **incarcerated in prison**, we can nonetheless imagine the overwhelming awe of an inmate set free in society after a long prison term. **(VISUAL)** **There is no freedom so dear as that which is given to one who has long been starved for it.**

Here are some of my favorite quotes about “freedom.” And see if you can see the common thread that draws me to these particular quotes.

“Freedom is not worth having, if it doesn’t include the freedom to make mistakes.”
Matatma Gandhi (1930’s)

“It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them unbridled.” *Mark Twain (1897)*

“A man’s worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes.”
Thomas Huxley (1876)

“None can love freedom heartily but good men; the rest love not freedom, but license.”
John Milton (17th Century)

“Love God and do whatever you please.” *St. Augustine of Hippo (3rd Century)*

And, of course the ultimate, going back even further into history:

“The truth shall set you free.” And “I am the truth.” *Jesus*

One reason I like each of the foregoing quotations, is that each teaches that because of the reality of man’s sin nature, true freedom is not freedom FROM LAW, or we would live in chaos, but freedom IN LAW, that we might be protected. Those laws of protection might be those of government, parental control, conscience or Biblical law.

FREEDOM IS NOT FREEDOM FROM RESTRICTION (VISUAL)

A wise person knows that freedom with no rules or restrictions results in chaos – both personally and nationally.

True freedom must always have boundaries to protect us – usually from ourselves.

Imagine a children’s playground on the roof of a multi-story building.

Though the playground brings freedom of play to the children, what a tragedy awaits if there are no barriers of restriction to bring true freedom.

FREEDOM IS NOT FREE is oft-quoted, and so true (VISUAL)

This is especially true when it comes to securing individual and national liberty, to which the national cemetery will attest. There has been a huge cost to our national freedom – the ultimate sacrifice of thousands of our fellow countrymen.

SO WHY ALL THIS CONTEMPLATION ABOUT FREEDOM, you ask?

Well, today we begin our sermon series on the book of Galatians – which is all about FREEDOM, especially true spiritual freedom found in Jesus Christ.

✓ **Galatians is Paul's treatise on FREEDOM IN CHRIST** – which has also been Oaks Bible Church's theme for 2013, so this book study is an appropriate conclusion to our year's emphasis.

✓ **Galatians is the Christian "Declaration of Independence"** and our motto is "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17).

✓ **The keynote to Galatians is 5:1:**

***Galatians 5:1** It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*

Yet lest any should wrongly think that spiritual freedom has no restrictions, Paul also writes 5:13:

***Galatians 5:13** For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

You see, Paul knew that our spiritual **FREEDOM IS NOT FREEDOM FROM RESTRICTION** and that we need protections.

And Paul also knew that **FREEDOM IS NOT FREE**. Our Lord Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice – death yes, but death that included taking upon Himself the sins of the entire world that through His becoming SIN for us, we might be made righteous and set free from slavery to sin. Wow.

***2 Corinthians 5:17** He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

This ultimate sacrifice by Jesus for us is THE GOSPEL – the good news that through His sacrifice we can be free –

✓ free from condemnation (Rom. 8:1)

✓ free from slavery to sin (Rom. 6:18)

✓ and free to enjoy eternal life with God forever (Rom. 6:23).

And just as FREEDOM is a key concept in Galatians, so the GOSPEL is a key theme.

Let me turn to some excellent quotes from contemporary pastor and author, Timothy Keller, senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York city, quoted from his recent commentary on the book of Galatians.

"The gospel is the message that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope."

“The gospel is not just the ABC of Christianity, but the A to Z. Christians need the gospel as much as non-Christians. The gospel is not only the way to enter the kingdom; it is the way to live in the kingdom.”

Timothy Keller

Whereas the gospel message in the book of Romans is aimed at non-believers that they might come to faith; **the gospel message in Galatians is aimed at Christians** that they might live out their faith in freedom from self.

Dr. Sidlow Baxter, in helping explain the difference between the book of Romans, the Corinthians letters and Galatians – all which focus on the gospel of Christ’s sacrifice – gives us this helpful aid:

Read ROMANS to be GROUNDED in the gospel of faith

Read the CORINTHIANS to be GUIDED in the gospel of faith

Read GALATIANS to be GUARDED in the gospel of faith

You see, Galatians teaches that the GOSPEL empowers Christians to live out their faith in FREEDOM to sin by the power of the indwelling HOLY SPIRIT.

This is the 3-fold message of Galatians:

So, we finally come to our Galatians text of the morning. The opening five verses are a traditional greeting by Paul, but without praise or prayer for the readers. Paul is very concerned about the spiritual health of the Galatian churches. They had been hearing from deceivers that Paul was simply empowered by men, and not by God. In this short opening to his letter he lays out the power of the gospel for Christians in rescuing them from this evil age.

Galatians 1:1-5 *Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.*

In the weeks ahead, from the book of Galatians, we will learn how the power of the gospel can rescue each of us from the evil within and around us, by setting us free by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

We have a wonderful cruise ahead of us! Join us each Sunday and through the week in one of our Connection Groups as we explore this amazing “Declaration of Christian Independence.”