

Freedom to Love
Galatians 5:13-15

Introduction: Up to this point in Galatians Paul has been addressing the danger of legalism. Under legalism one lives in a rules based approach to God and thinks that he/she can merit God's favor by doing good works. In our passage today, Paul begins to address the issue of license. His opponents in Galatia claimed if you don't have the Law you won't have any restraints and you'll end up indulging the flesh and living a very sinful life. But Paul's argument is that freedom from the Law doesn't mean freedom to sin; it means that we're free to love. As we consider this passage today, may God give us a renewed perspective on the freedom that we've been given.

Opening Discussion: When do you feel truly free?

Read Galatians 5:13-15

1. What does Paul mean when he says we've been "called to freedom" (v. 13)?

2. What does Paul mean when he says that we must not turn our freedom into "an opportunity for the flesh" (v. 13)?

3. What is "the flesh"?

4. How do some Christians abuse their freedom in Christ?

Steve said:

Paul is saying something very important and very profound here. He is saying that our freedom from the Law actually allows us to **fulfill** the Law; through the Spirit we can actually live out the intent of the Law, which is summed up in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

5. How is it that freedom from the Law actually allows us to fulfill the Law?

Steve said:

This passage suggests at least a couple of applications. The first involves **a healthy fear of “the flesh.”** Remember that Paul’s foundational warning in this passage was that if they weren’t careful, their flesh would gain a base of operations in their lives. For the Galatians, Paul was especially concerned about the flesh destroying their relationships within the church. Paul wanted the Galatians to have a healthy fear of the flesh so that they wouldn’t be caught unawares when the flesh tried to dominate their lives and their fellowship. In the same way you and I need to have a healthy fear of the tendencies of **our** flesh. This will vary from person to person depending on your history and your personality and other factors. The point is that you need to understand and have a healthy fear of the tendencies of **your** flesh - how your flesh tends to manifest itself. I’m not talking about a paralyzing, obsessive fear of the flesh. We shouldn’t fix our eyes on the flesh out of fear that it will attack us and dominate our lives. No, we’re supposed to fix our eyes on Jesus, knowing that His Spirit within us is stronger than the flesh. But we should still be mindful that if we give the flesh an inch, it will take a mile. That’s why I say that we should have a **healthy** fear of the flesh.

6. What might it look like for you to have a healthy fear of the flesh?

7. What are some tendencies of your flesh that you need to be aware?

Steve said:

The second application involves **embracing the reality that freedom has a purpose (and therefore restrictions).** It strikes me that Paul describes freedom in a way that may not be very intuitive for us. We tend to think of freedom **from** constraints and freedom to do whatever we want. But in Galatians 5 Paul emphasized that we’ve been given freedom **so that** we can willingly become servants to other people. Unless you’ve experienced the satisfaction and the exhilaration of serving others from the heart, hearing this might be a disappointment to you. You might think, “What kind of freedom is **that**?”

8. How does it strike you that our freedom has the purpose of serving others? Does that feel like freedom to you? Why or why not?

9. You will never be more free than when you are loving other people. Agree or disagree? Why?