

Free to Stay

Galatians 5:1

3/ 19/ 06

Intro

Paul is addressing the issue of whether a Christian should live by law. That is the central theme of the book. But as he addresses this issue, we learn some important insights into our faith.

There aren't very many Christians who would actually want to live by the Old Testament Jewish laws of course. But many Christians do believe that the way to relate to God is with rule keeping. We aren't concerned about whether we eat pork or wash our saucers just the right way, but many people think that the way to get God's approval is to go to church, sing a few songs, put some money in the offering, or even to read the bible and pray. Many people do these things as if they were laws.

Paul is addressing the very heart of our relationship to God in this chapter and tells us that it was for freedom that Christ set us free. We don't get God's approval by keeping rules. We get God's approval because we are in Christ and have our heart after God.

These are insights into finding freedom in our relationship to God.

I. Stay Because You Want to

A. Do you 'have to' or 'want to'?

- There's a big difference between 'have to' and 'want to.' That is the essential difference between rule keeping on the outside and having a heart that wants to stay near to God.

- Verse 1, it was for freedom that Christ set us free. That means you're free to stay, you're free to draw near, you're free to love God.

Illus – Valentine's Day; do you get to bring flowers or have to bring flowers? I was at Bi-Mart and saw a small box of chocolates...

- Jesus taught the disciples that the most important law and the law on which were laid all other laws was this one...

Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Illus – Stand firm, stay in your freedom, don't operate by the yoke again... the law is like a yoke, or a chain on a dog to make it stay by it's master.

B. Keeping laws doesn't make your heart right

- You can keep rules on the outside but be breaking them in your heart.
- Verse 3 -- The problem with keeping laws to be right is that you have to keep every last one of them.

Matthew 5:20, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

James 2:10, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all."

- Keeping human laws certainly doesn't make you right because some things are legal but are wrong – such as abortion.

Illus – In the Nuremburg trials after WWII, the judges of Germany were themselves judged. Their defense was that they were only following the law. They were legal, and yet very wrong.

II. Let Your Faith Work through Love (vs 6)

A. The righteous shall live by faith

- The Jews had great pride in being the children of Abraham, but the Lord makes it clear that it is only those who have faith are the children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:9, 11, “So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer... Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’”

- We began our walk with the Lord by the Spirit, are we now going to be perfected by works?

Galatians 3:2-3, “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

- But faith works through love. (verse 6)

Illus – what God wants is a circumcision of the heart.

Deuteronomy 30:6, “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”

B. Attitude is more important than action

- If we have outward behavior only, but our hearts are far from the Lord, is it really worship?

Isaiah 29:13, Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,”

Illus – An obedient dog is not necessarily a nice dog. He could be ‘sitting’ and ‘staying’ only because he has been conditioned by the choke chain.

- In the Old Testament, they would bring sacrifices, but what good would they be without a right heart?

Psalms 50:9-14, “I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains. Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving ...”

Illus – Sacrifice is for my benefit, giving is for my benefit. Will God cancel His nightly display of stars because people don't send in enough money? Operators are standing by...

Psalm 51:16-17, "You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

- God wants us to bring a thank offering...

III. Walk by the Spirit (vs 16)

A. Keeping laws doesn't make you better

- The trouble with keeping rules as a way of being right with God, is a) it doesn't work, and b) it doesn't make you a better person.

Luke 18: 9-14 He told this parable to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous...

- "Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh," Paul wrote. (vs 16)
- This means that you are walking according to a living and active relationship with God where you 'want to' stay. You want to be near the Lord. It is the desire of your heart.

John 14:23, Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

B. Don't stay in the miserable middle

- If anyone lives his Christianity by rule keeping, and not because he has a desire in his heart for the Lord, then he will find he is most miserable.
- That person doesn't do the world because it's wrong, but he won't walk near to the Lord, because his heart isn't the Lord's.

Illus - He doesn't do anything. He doesn't listen to worldly music, because it's worldly, but he won't worship either.

Revelation 3:15-16, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."

- God doesn't want us stuck there in the middle. Some people stay there for years.

Illus – God says he prefers that person to be cold. At least then, when he eats enough pig slop, he will come to the end of himself and truly seek after God.

Conclusion

If your relationship to the Lord consists of rules, would you consider that God wants a change of heart? What God desires is that we would want to stay near Him, that we would want to love Him; that we would want to live right as a way to honor Him.