

Called to Freedom

Galatians 5:1-6,13-14
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Introduction

News article on December 31: "Choose flourish as your word for 2017." Good counsel. I say choose Freedom as your word for 2017.

Scripture Reading

Sermon Outline

- I. **We're called to *fight for freedom from working for righteousness*.**
 - a. Freedom is the theme of this passage.
 - i. It is central to what Christ has done for us.
 1. Read verse 1a
 2. Read verse 13a
 - ii. It takes focused effort for us to live in freedom.
 1. We must stand firm.
 2. We must not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
 - a. "Again" = we all started off in slavery; it's our natural condition
 - b. "Yoke of Slavery" = a yoke is a farm tool to guide oxen; working for righteousness is the yoke of slavery
 - b. Righteousness means having an acceptable standing before God.
 - c. Three questions that enslave us when we're working for righteousness.
 - i. **Will God let me into heaven when I die?**
 1. Many of us are really concerned about our standing before God, and rightly so. We know we can't be perfect so we create lesser standards of righteousness and hope they will be acceptable to God (i.e. more good than bad, or nothing really bad, or being sincere).
 2. The backdrop for this passage is the pressure this group of Christians is getting to seek righteousness through keeping the law, rather than trusting in Christ. He recalls a situation in the OT to show that the slaves are always harassing the free, trying to pull them away from freedom and back to bondage. SEE ISHMAEL V. ISAAC IN CH. 4. This is what the missionary Paul is telling the Christians to resist in 5:2-4.

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3. We have to fight to be free. It takes effort and a resistance to spiritual pressure to keep the law (or someone's version of the "law"). I believe our current experience of this dynamic sometimes comes through spiritual bullies in the church who pressure others to affirm the same views on secondary matters as they do. **But mostly I think it comes from our inner desire to be in control--to determine what we think should be acceptable to God and do that.**
4. Working for righteousness in order to get into heaven may feel like freedom because we're making our own rules, but it's a false freedom because we can never rest, and we will ultimately fail to gain an acceptable standing before God.
5. The freedom the Bible talks about can put our minds to rest. For followers of Jesus, this passage says Christ has set us free from the "slavery" of always worrying about whether we're righteous enough to get into heaven. Wouldn't you like that freedom?

ii. Will God be proud of what I've done with my life?

1. The NT missionary Paul is writing to people who have been set free by Jesus (i.e. they have realized there is nothing they can do to be righteous before God, so they have asked him to forgive their sins and have become followers of Jesus. They have received God's promise that for all who believe in Jesus and follow his teaching and example, his perfect standing before God will make them acceptable.).
2. But these people, while free, haven't stopped fussing over whether they are righteous before God. They are being pressured to "accept circumcision" by those who have not been set free by Jesus. To accept circumcision is the sign of working for righteousness through keeping every detail of the law God gave in the OT. In other words, they call themselves followers of Jesus, but in actuality they have stopped following his way to gain an acceptable standing before God. He warns that if they continue this path, they will be cut off from Christ, fall away from grace.
3. This is the question that held me hostage for a long time.
 - a. **ILLUSTRATION 1. For many years I leaned on my doctrine as my righteousness.** If I held to biblically-rooted, theologically-hefty beliefs about God and salvation, then I would enjoy an acceptable, even praiseworthy standing before God. It didn't matter so much if I cultivated a personal relationship with God through prayer or if I personally took opportunities to love and serve those in need, because I believed in God's power to accomplish his will without my prayers and to meet every need without my action.
 - b. The appeal of trusting in doctrine for my standing before God is that I could achieve righteousness quickly and in a way that appealed to me. I love ideas. I like academics. I'm all about theology. I felt spiritually free, but it was a false freedom because any time I bumped into someone who could defend their doctrine better than I could defend mine, I didn't feel so righteous. But much worse than that, over the years I began to sense a lack of spiritual fire, of closeness to God, of connection to the movement

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of the Holy Spirit. I had willingly become a slave to my own "law" that said biblically-precise, theologically-rich beliefs make me righteous before God. I was wrong. I was stuck. And I didn't know what to do about it.

- c. That wasn't the only chain keeping me from freedom.
 - d. **ILLUSTRATION 2. For many years I also believed that righteousness before God is found in a position of increasing significance and influence.** Along with most of our culture I found myself swept up in the mentality that more and bigger is better, and that somehow I would impress God by standing before him one day as someone who had remarkable influence in the world during my lifetime. Yes, Jesus did much for me by giving his life to save me, but I'm much more concerned with what I can do for him.
 - e. The appeal of trusting in my position of influence was that, again, I could achieve righteousness quickly in a way that appealed to me. I'm energized by communicating ideas, and I tend to find my significance in achievement. I felt spiritually free, but again it was a false freedom because anytime I found myself in a position I didn't perceive to be influential or significant, I felt like a failure.
 - f. I had willingly become a slave to another of my own "laws" that said visible influence for God's Kingdom makes me righteous before God. I was wrong. I was stuck. And I didn't know what to do about it.
 - g. **After enough time went by, I finally recognized that I was trusting in doctrine and influence to gain the kind of praiseworthy acceptance before God I want.** They had become my hope of righteousness. I was trapped in a cycle of always trying to refine my doctrine and increase my influence, but they were not yielding true righteousness and they certainly weren't bringing me freedom.
- 4. The freedom the Bible talks about can put our minds to rest. For followers of Jesus, this passage says Christ has set us free from the "slavery" of always worrying about whether we're righteous enough to make God proud of us. Wouldn't you like that freedom?

iii. Will someone else be impressed with what I've done with my life?

- 1. Others of us are less concerned about our standing before God, either because we take it for granted, or because we're just caught up in our own life, or because we don't really believe in God.
- 2. **ILLUSTRATION. I have a friend who is a musician and worship leader.** He's got skills and heart, and he does a great job, but he has to really work at it. His wife, on the other hand, is exceptionally gifted. She can play several instruments and sight read difficult music. She leads with ease and charisma, and it all comes naturally to her. One day my friend confided in me how much he struggled with a constant desire to win her approval, and he used a phrase that has stuck with me and helped me. He said whenever he finds himself in the trap of winning her approval, he reminds himself, "my wife's approval is not my righteousness."

II. We're called to *surrender* to the *freedom of waiting* for righteousness.

a. Freedom is found in waiting.

i. Read verse 5

b. Three elements are at work when we wait for righteousness.

i. The Spirit

1. We must learn to listen to the Spirit.

a. **ILLUSTRATION 1.** Jesus told a religious leader, Nicodemus, he must be born again to see the Kingdom of God. He couldn't understand what Jesus meant, so Jesus explained that he meant spiritual birth.

i. **1 Corinthians 2:14.** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

ii. **Acts 2:38.** "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

b. **ILLUSTRATION 2.** Elijah and the voice of God on the mountain in 1 Kings 19—not wind, not earthquake, not fire—the voice of God came in a low whisper.

2. To surrender to the freedom of waiting for righteousness means receiving and listening to the Holy Spirit.

a. **Romans 8:1-4.** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2** For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **3** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

b. **FREEDOM RESOLUTION 1. Slow down and learn to listen. Don't be a slave to your schedule, make space to hear what God is saying to you.**

ii. Faith

1. We must believe in the work God is doing in us.

a. **Colossians 1:21-23.** And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you

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continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.

- b. I take this passage to mean that Jesus is at work in every detail of our lives for the purpose of making us righteous.
- c. To surrender to the freedom of waiting for righteousness means having faith that God has you right where you are for a good purpose.
- d. **FREEDOM RESOLUTION 2. Stop asking how can I get out of this situation, and start asking “God, what do you want to teach me in this situation.”**

iii. Love

1. We must focus on serving others rather than improving our standing.
 - a. Read verse 6
 - b. Read verse 13
2. Notice freedom is not from righteousness to live in a selfish way. It is a freedom to love others that comes from confidence that Christ has done everything necessary for us to have an acceptable standing before God.
3. To surrender to the freedom of waiting for righteousness means we don't have to work to get into heaven. We don't have to work to make God proud. We don't have to work to impress others. Jesus Christ loves us enough to give us his righteousness, now we are freed to love others enough to serve them. Verse six says that's all that counts!
4. **FREEDOM RESOLUTION 3. Stop working to improve your standing before God and others, and look for ways to serve the needs of others in your life.**

Conclusion

As we embark on a new year, I say choose “Freedom” as your word for 2017. If you want to follow Jesus Christ, that is what you are called to. You are called to freedom.