

When men and women get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others, either putting or keeping them “in their place.” The history of such religious manipulation and coercion is long and tedious. It is little wonder that people who have only known religion on such terms experience release or escape from it as freedom. The problem is that the freedom turns out to be short-lived.

Paul of Tarsus was doing his diligent best to add yet another chapter to this dreary history when he was converted by Jesus to something radically and entirely different – a free life in God. Through Jesus, Paul learned that God was not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in certain prescribed ways, but a personal Savior who set us free to live a free life. God did not coerce us from without, but set us free from within.

It was a glorious experience, and Paul set off telling others, introducing and inviting everyone he met into this free life. In his early travels he founded a series of churches in the Roman province of Galatia. A few years later Paul learned that religious leaders of the old school had come into those churches, called his views and authority into question, and were reintroducing the old ways, herding all these freedom-loving Christians back into the corral of religious rules and regulations.

Paul was, of course, furious. He was furious with the old guard for coming in with their strong-arm religious tactics and intimidating the Christians into giving up their free life in Jesus. But he was also furious with the Christians for caving in to the intimidation.

His letter to the Galatian churches helps them, and us, to recover the original freedom. It also gives direction in the nature of God’s gift of freedom – most necessary guidance, for freedom is a delicate and subtle gift, easily perverted and often squandered.”

For more introductory material on Galatians, visit <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-galatians/>

Read Galatians 5

Opening

- How do you feel and react when others cut in on you while driving, shopping, speaking, etc?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, how many “wild oats” did you sow in your youth?

Digging in — Discovering the Word

- When you first moved away from home, what did “freedom” mean to you? Free to do what? Free from what?
- What does it mean to be “free” in Christ (v.1)?
- Why does Paul make such a big deal about circumcision? Since our own efforts and achievements aren’t the way to God, what is?
- Although we have been liberated from spiritual slavery, what kind of servants do we become (vv.13-15)? How can you incorporate this servanthood more into your own life?
- What motivates you to live a good life?
- What two things are in conflict with each other (v.17)? If we are made alive by the Spirit, why do we struggle with sin?
- Can a person who loves according to the “acts of sinful nature” in verses 19-21 be a true Christian?
- How can you and God’s Spirit weed out the sinful nature and grow the fruit of the Spirit?

Connecting the Dots — Applying the Word

- How have you seen Christian freedom abused? How do verses 6 and 13 address those who think their freedom in Christ allows them to do anything they want? How do they challenge you?
- When have you gotten off the track in the “good race” of the Christian life? Who or what cut in on you and sidetracked you?
- Which spiritual fruits in verses 22-23 are blossoming in your life? Which are still in the bud?
- What is the biggest change that being a Christian has made in your life? How do you sense God calling you to change your lifestyle?

(adapted from the Serendipity Bible and The Invitation by Eugene Peterson)