

## Stop trying So Hard: Find Peace, Purpose, and Rest in Jesus

### Part 3: The Freedom of Love

#### Galatians 5:1-23

**Summary:** Freedom doesn't come from rules or doing whatever we want. True freedom comes from love.

#### Main Ideas:

We are constantly being pulled to choose between one of two extremes.

Following Jesus often feels like a tug of war between legalism and license.

To rise above the extremes of legalism or license we need to embrace the freedom of love.

If following Jesus doesn't make you feel free, something is wrong.

Jesus frees us from having to try to outweigh our bad with our good.

Legalism is like trying to pay off a debt that's already been paid.

What God cares about is how our love for him translates into our love for others.

The Jesus way isn't about obeying rules— it's about asking, "What does love look like?"

Real freedom isn't doing less. It's loving more.

We find the path to true freedom by following the Holy Spirit.

We can stop trying so hard when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us.

#### Invitation:

Pray: "Holy Spirit, guide me today to love like Jesus."

Ask: "What does Jesus' love look like?"

Actively look for a way to show love to someone

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever felt stuck between two extremes in an area of your life? (e.g., health, work, parenting, faith?) What was that like?
2. In Galatians 5:1, Paul says that "Christ has truly set us free." What do you think it means to live in Jesus' freedom?
3. Read Galatians 5:16. How does letting the Holy Spirit guide us differ from trying really hard to be a "good Christian"?
4. What are some practical ways you can be more intentional about following the Holy Spirit's guidance in your daily life?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

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#### Transcript:

**ME:** One thing that sucks about getting older... my metabolism doesn't keep up as well as it used to

My choices seem to be to go on a strict diet or just give up and eat whatever I want.

- Both sound terrible

I want to be healthy and in good shape, wear whatever I want, have energy, and live longer (maybe)

- But then I have to work out every day, give up all alcohol, and eat really boring stuff every meal.
- And then feel guilty if I slack off at all.

But if I relax and do and eat whatever it might be enjoyable at first

- But in the long run... I'll feel worse, lack energy, not sleep well, and never get to wear tight t-shirts.

I feel I'm stuck between these two extremes.

Anyone else feel this tension?

**WE:** And it's not just food... We are constantly being pulled to choose between one of two extremes.

Politics: both extreme sides are screaming that the other is evil and the end of democracy.

Parenting: Are we too strict or too permissive?

Work: Workaholic or just doing the bare minimum?

Students: Stressed perfectionist or carefree procrastinator?

Now the same is true when it comes to following Jesus...

We often are pulled between two extremes of legalism and license.

Some people think Following Jesus means strict rule-keeping... what's called legalism...

- They are focused on rules and performance.
- Never experience truly enjoying God... always feel burdened.
- Creates guilt and self-righteousness.

Then you have license: God just wants me to be happy and doesn't really care what I do as long as I'm nice and not purposely hurting anyone.

- And it creates a lot of regrets and broken relationships

Following Jesus often feels like a tug of war between legalism and license.

And trying to find a balance between these two doesn't work.

- We just end up with the worst parts of both.
- A fun cocktail of guilt, self-righteousness, emptiness, and regret.

But what if both are completely missing the point?

- What if it's not one side vs. the other?
- What if it's not even about finding a balance between the two?

Around 40-50 AD, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to JF's in Galatia (Turkey), explaining a better way...

In this letter, he challenges them/us to move beyond the trap of legalism and the emptiness of license.

And explains to rise above the extremes of legalism or license we need to embrace the freedom of love.

Let me show you what he says...

And before we do let me say... What we are going to talk about might be why you/someone you love left Xianity.

- If that's the case I hope you'll see that you/they had good reason to leave
- B/c what you experienced most likely wasn't what it means to follow Jesus
- I want to invite you to discover what the Jesus Way really is.

So first, Paul addresses those that fall into the legalism side of things...

**GOD: 5:1** *So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.*

Something we say a lot here... If following Jesus doesn't make you feel free, something is wrong.

But so often it feels like a burden... Trying to check off everything we think we have to do to be good Xians.

As we saw last week, this is a problem Paul had to deal with over and over.

He would go to different cities, tell people about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Tell them God loves them and wants them to know and enjoy him. People would accept, become JFs, and start a community.

But after a while, people would come into the community saying, "Hey, Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. And if you really want to follow him then you have to follow the Jewish religious laws.

- You have to observe the sabbath, eat kosher, and guys have to get circumcised.

Paul tells the Galatians, "If you're trying to earn God's favor by following these rules... you've missed the entire point of Jesus."

Jesus frees us from having to try to outweigh our bad with our good.

Forgiveness, acceptance, a new life is a gift he gives us through his life, death, and resurrection. We simply have to trust this gift and accept it.

Imagine if I won the lottery and told you, "I'm going to pay off all of your debts."

- You're released from a lifetime of payments

But instead of celebrating and enjoying your new life... you keep sending checks to the bank b/c you feel guilty.

- That's legalism.
- Legalism is like trying to pay off a debt that's already been paid.

And Paul says it makes Jesus' gift pointless...

- You can't enjoy it b/c you're working so hard to earn it.

Paul gets so angry explaining this idea that further down in the letter he says he wishes these "false teachers" pushing circumcision would just go all the way and cut everything off...

- It's in the Bible. You should read it.

Ok, so if we don't have to follow rules what do we do instead?

**V.6 For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.**

When we are living in the freedom of Jesus we don't have to try to earn God's favor... we already have it.

Rules aren't what matters. What truly matters, Paul says, is faith expressing itself through love.

In other words, What God cares about is how our love for him translates into our love for others.

We don't prove our love for God by checking religious boxes

- We love God by loving his children.

I love my son's basketball coach... not just like him... but love him, am thankful for him.

- It's not b/c he knows and follows all the rules, wins every game, or looks like a coach should look.

I love him b/c he genuinely cares about my kid

- Does everything he can to help him improve/grow.
- Goes out of his way to encourage/teach/congratulate.

And if you love my kid I can't help but love you.

But if you hurt my kid/are unfair/etc.... We have a problem.

You can suck up to me/buy me things/donate to the church/write and/or sing songs about me...

You can have studies talking about how amazing I am.

- Teach classes about my teachings.
- Wear shirts that talk about me...
- Even vote the way you think I'd want you to vote...

But we're still going to have a broken relationship b/c you are hurting my kid.

Legalism says... suck up to God by trying to do all these good things and then he'll like you.

- How you treat people is secondary to what you do for God

But God says... What I want you to do is enjoy my love and use it to love the people around you.

The Jesus way isn't about obeying rules– it's about asking. "What does love look like?"

"But if we don't follow rules...

- Then we all get to decide "What love looks like," right?
- And that just turns into doing whatever we want."

And Paul would say... "Not so fast skippy!"

**V. 13-14** *For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Being free from the rules doesn't mean we just do whatever feels good and makes us happy in the moment...

- That's how we ruin our lives and the lives of people around us.
- Every major regret you have was a choice you made b/c it was something you thought would make you happy in some way. Right?

So freedom from rules isn't saying, "You don't have to worry about rules. So do whatever feels good in the moment"

- No freedom from rules is the freedom to love.

Real freedom isn't doing less. It's loving more.

See, the Jesus way actually demands more than rules– it demands selfless love.

There are no loopholes, no wiggle room...

- It means we go out of our way for the good of others
- It means we are actively looking for ways to truly love people the way Jesus does
- It means loving and forgiving our enemies... People who through their own selfishness have hurt us and the people we love.
- It means bearing each other's burdens
- It means denying ourselves to bring the KoG to earth now.

It's the only path to experiencing the true life Jesus offers.

It's simple but it's not easy...

In fact, let's be honest... Sounds exhausting... hard... how do we actually do this?

**V. 16** *So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.*

Living the Jesus way isn't about balancing legalism and license... it's not about balance it's about being led.

We don't find it by trying really hard or giving up...

- We find it by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our lives.

- Allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us day by day and moment by moment.

The moment someone chooses to trust Jesus as their king- they are reborn by the HS.

The HS part of Trinity God... the personal presence of God living in/transforming/changing us from the inside out.

Paul explains what this looks like...

**V. 22-23** *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things*

If someone has the HS living in them this fruit is the natural result of letting the HS guide their lives.

Picture an apple tree.

- It doesn't have to work hard to produce apples...
- It produces apples b/c that's what it's designed to do.

In the same way, we don't live the Jesus way by trying really hard to be good, and kind, and patient, etc.

- We live it by allowing the HS to lead us, and he naturally brings this fruit out of us.

We can't make it happen... but we can get in the HS's way.

We have control over how much we allow the HS to lead us.

The more we choose to allow the HS to guide our lives the more he changes us into the image of Jesus.

It is an ongoing process of saying yes to the HS... It's following through with what he tells us when ask, "In this situation, What does Jesus' love look like?"

When I want to respond to my kids with anger or annoyance... I can ask, "What does Jesus' love look like?" and allow the HS to shape me into the parent I can be.

If I'm stuck in a long line at the grocery store and the clerk is going slow and talking to everyone about their plan for the day. I can see it as an opportunity for the HS to use the patience in me.

- Instead of huffing and puffing and making everyone's day worse.... I can thank HS for his patience and see how I can show his love in that situation.
- We let him lead us, get out of his way... and let him love through us.

You don't have to check off a list to live this way

You don't have to worry about "is this or is that a sin" if you are allowing the HS to guide your life.

You don't have to worry about just doing whatever you want... b/c you are following the HS not your own wants.

We find the path to true freedom by following the Holy Spirit.

**YOU:** So to practice this week...

1. Each morning when wake up... Pray: "Holy Spirit, guide me today to love like Jesus."
2. Put a reminder on your phone that pops up at noon or whatever time works for you or a note somewhere **Ask:**  
"What does Jesus' love look like?"
3. Then actively look for a way to show love to someone that day.
  - Encouraging text
  - Doing a chore/task that isn't yours
  - Ask, how can I help?

Try these simple things and then tell me if your life is worse or better.

Maybe you're realizing today that you've been caught in these extremes

- Either exhausted by rules
- Or lost in doing whatever feels right/good

Jesus offers something better... true freedom

If never been a moment in time that you made a decision to trust him, today can be the day.

- You don't have to pay your debts... Jesus has paid them you simply have to trust that he has and choose to follow him as your king.
- And when you do the HS spirit will start growing the fruit in you.
- Talk or email

**WE:** So, imagine no more worrying if you're following the right rules or not?

No more getting stuck in cycles of guilt and regret.

Not having to give in to the pull of this extreme or that extreme?

But we knew we could relax and trust the HS to guide us into loving like Jesus?

Imagine if we were a community dedicated not to rules, or selfishness, but to using our freedom to love each other and those around us.

Not only would we change some lives... our lives would be full of peace, purpose, and rest.

This is the life we are invited to D/E/S... together.

We can stop trying so hard when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us.