

The Proper Pattern for Life

Paul has addressed a foundational theological issue related to who has a right relationship with God. Now he will address the conflict and ruined relationships within the church in Galatia. He will focus on how they are to relate to one another. What is the proper pattern for life within the church? **Read Galatians 5:13-15**
Today we will look at what Christian freedom is not, what it is, and what happens when we choose not to follow the proper pattern Paul describes.

1. Christians can live in freedom only to the extent that they understand what Christian freedom is not. 5:13a-b

- While Christians are free, they are not free from all obligations.

Christians are called to be free. 5:13a

- The one who called them was God himself. The freedom to which they had been called was not the result of some natural right or the product of human liberation.
- Christians are free because they have been called by God.
- Problem: freedom can mean different things to different people
- In the context of Galatians, freedom means liberation from the powers of sin, the world, false gods, and especially the law.

The freedom Christians have in Christ is not a license to indulge in sinful, self-centered lifestyles. 5:13b

- Christians are not free to be and do whatever we want.
- Freedom can become an excuse for throwing off all moral restraints and indulging the lusts of the flesh. Enticing.
- As dangerous as the legalism addressed earlier.
- The word translated sinful nature, or “flesh” is a complex term.
- Throughout Gal 5–6 flesh refers to fallen human nature, the center of human pride and self-indulgence and self-assertion.
- It means I trust in myself to know what is right and good for me, and to be able to accomplish what is right and good for me.
- The freedom gained by Christ is not a license to sin.

Have I used my Christian freedom to indulge the worst parts of myself?

2. In Christ, I have the freedom to give myself away in loving servitude to others, to bring about what is best for someone who is not me. 5:13c-14

Freedom in Christ is to be used in loving service to others. 5:13c.

- If there is an opposite to flesh, it is love, a love that looks away from the self and its wishes, even its real needs, to bring about what is best for the neighbor.
- Paul links freedom and love together with the very thing he said earlier we are free from: slavery.
- Through love, Christians become slaves to one another.
- Christ has delivered me from bondage to the law and from captivity to the forces of evil.
- But I am now in bondage to Christ, to live the kind of life that he lived, through the presence and power of his Spirit in me.

God's will for His people is that they work for the long-term best interests of others just as they care and provide for themselves. 5:14

- Paul says that the entire law is summed up in a single commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Lev. 19:18
- No doubt Paul was echoing the words of Jesus, who quoted this same verse in his own summation of the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:43; 22:34–40).
- We act in love, we are motivated by love. Love of Christ.

In what ways am I investing my life in loving service to others?

3. The Christian community will destroy itself when it chooses against following Jesus' pattern of selfless, sacrificial service to others. 5:15

- The church in Galatia was engaged in a fierce, internal struggle, the result of which could have led to their destruction.
- The three verbs Paul used to describe their relationships, biting, devouring, being destroyed, suggest wild animals engaged.
- Why are they destroying each other? The context suggests it is not because they hate each other.
- It is because each person or faction is interested only in their desires and agenda. In order for me to get what I want, someone may have to go without. That's you! Now the fight is on.
- No matter how righteous the cause, this destroys the fellowship and witness of the church. Nobody wins.
- Bringing about what is best for everyone else should be at least as important to me as bringing about what is best for me, if not more.

Am I damaging the fellowship and witness of the church with my self-centered pursuits and my refusal to work for the good of others?

A **convenience store** is a small retail business that stocks a range of everyday items such as coffee, groceries, snack foods, confectionery, soft drinks, tobacco products, over-the-counter drugs, toiletries, newspapers, and magazines. Such stores may also offer money order and wire transfer services, along with the use of a fax machine or photocopier. A convenience store may be part of a gas station, so customers can purchase goods conveniently while filling their vehicle with fuel. Instead driving all over the place so that each family member can get what they want and need, we just stop at one place that is conveniently located on the side of the highway.

- The first chain convenience store in the United States was opened in Dallas, Texas, in 1927 by the Southland Ice Company, became 7-Eleven.
- But the greatest convenience store is Buc-ee's.
- Arch Aplin opened the first Buc-ee's in Lake Jackson, Texas, in 1982.
- In 2003, the chain started transitioning to the massive travel centers for which it is now known.
- Its New Braunfels, Texas, location is said to be the largest convenience store in the world: 68,000 square feet; 120 fueling positions; 80 fountain dispensers; 27 cash registers; and four Icee machines. It also has 33 urinals and 50 toilet stalls. The one in Katy, Texas, holds the Guinness World Record for longest carwash.
- In 2018, Buc-ee's announced a deal with Tooshlights to put special indicator lights in bathrooms to alert customers to which stalls are occupied or not.
- By 2020, much of American society is built around our concept of convenience. Give the people what they want in the easiest and most convenient way possible.
- Churches across America are reporting that the pandemic has exposed strained relationships among church members. In person or online. Masks or no masks. Physical distancing or not. Pandemic or deadly threat.
- But the pandemic only exposed what was already there. Our theology, our schedules, our room, our worship style, our traditions, and so on.

Your church is not Buc-ee's. We are not designed for your convenience. Your church is not here to give you everything you want, exactly what you want, precisely when and how you want it. Your church is not here to facilitate your pleasures with the utmost convenience and efficiency.

Paul says when that is our approach to church, we will destroy one another as each person and class and group works and fights for what it wants and needs. In fact, the NT calls us to the exact opposite. We are called to lay down our desires, rights, and needs for the sake of serving others in love. Requires sacrifice, commitment, a willingness to be inconvenienced. Most of all it requires love for Christ instead of only love for self. And we accept by faith that doing this is really what each one of us needs most.

I invite you to ask God to show you the truth about your life and relationships. Have you been using your Christian freedom to indulge the worst parts of yourself? Are you damaging the fellowship and witness of your church by your self-centeredness?

I invite you to repent and turn to Christ, laying down your rights, preferences, needs, and desires in loving service to others in Jesus' name.