

Galatians 5 Study Guide

Review Questions:

1. How would you characterize the prevailing conflict in the church Paul is writing to in his letter to the Galatians? Is this primarily a conflict between two groups, or a conflict arising from outsider teaching? What in Paul's letter so far might you sight as evidence for your opinion?
2. What might you say is most at stake for Paul? What is he most afraid the community will lose?

Study Questions:

1. There are two ways of defining freedom: negative freedom, what we are free from; and positive freedom, what we are freed for. What does Paul see Christ freeing his audience (and us) from? What does Christ free us for?
2. The tendency of modern liberalism to be over-preoccupied with codes and rules is sometimes referred to as "liberal proceduralism." This preoccupation rests on an often unexamined conviction that if we can simply make the right laws we can rescue society from the perduring power of those areas of our human life over which we don't have as much control as we think we should, like our propensity toward violence, or our wilder sexual urges. In some cases liberal proceduralism has much to recommend it; bureaucracies like the DMV help secure equality of access by making everyone go through the same process to get what is desirable. However, the tentative store of confidence such bureaucracies may rightfully deserve can tip into a kind of obsession, a kind of misplaced utopian trust in the power of rules to cure society of its ills, what some critics have called "nomolatry," the worship of laws. What might Paul have to say about our propensity to turn to law as our savior in the face of the very real turbulence of our experience as human-bodied subjects attempting to survive, if not prosper, in a world of ever-increasing unpredictability and complexity?
3. What good news might Paul have to offer us, and our wider world, in the face of such turbulence?
4. In verse 13 Paul admonishes the Galatians not to "use your freedom to indulge the flesh (*sarx*), but rather, serve one another humbly in love." More often than not Paul distinguishes between flesh (*sarx*) and body (*soma*). The former has a negative connotation, the latter a positive one. Assuming that the intimate, positive connection that Paul draws in other letters between the body (*soma*) and the spirit (*pneuma*), let's brainstorm together what Christian freedom in the body (*soma*) might look like concretely, as opposed to indulging in the flesh (*sarx*). We can look to his lists of the acts of the flesh in 19-20, and to his list of the fruit of the Spirit in 22-23 for inspiration.
5. In verse 14 Paul says, "For the entire Law is fulfilled in keeping this one command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." What is the difference between loving our neighbor as ourselves, and being nice to our neighbor?
6. In verse 24-26 Paul says: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." The cross is a repellant symbol. It's an instrument of torture, a hieroglyphic of violent death. Why not get rid of the cross, and pursue a Christianity that focusses not on Christ's violent death, but upon his life and teachings?