

# I AM THANKFUL...

That I am free, *Galatians 5:1, 13*

The beginning of November usually fills me with excitement because it moves us close to Thanksgiving, my favorite time of year. I prefer Thanksgiving above all other holidays because of its emphasis upon thankfulness and family, but this year those focuses sit uneasily in front of the problems troubling our nation – the pandemic, economic hardships, apocalyptic-like wildfires, nation-wide protests, and racial and political violence.

It can be hard to feel thankful in such a season of suffering.

While our situation might seem unusual and worrisome to us, other people in other times have endured equally – if not more difficult – situations. More importantly, the Bible offers a different picture of life that gives us reason to be thankful regardless of our circumstances. So, this month, we will consider some of the reasons that motivate our thankfulness even in our challenging times. This lesson begins the series by offering the first reason for our thankfulness:

## We are thankful because Jesus frees us.

### "Christ has set us free"<sup>1</sup>

- Paul's letter to the churches in the Roman district of Galatia addressed teachers trying to proselytize Gentile Christians to a Judaized version of the Christian faith (*Galatians 1:6-9; 2:11-14*).
- A little background helps us appreciate the seriousness of the situation he addressed:
  - Jews enjoyed a 'special' exemption from Rome – Rome did not require them to participate in the many, regular Roman civic/religious ceremonies that it required of all other peoples. The Jews were not required to pray 'to' Rome but could instead pray 'for' Rome.
  - Like the Jewish people, Christians did not join in the Roman religious institutions, but Christians did not follow Jewish laws or customs even though their beliefs had Jewish roots.
  - Christians' behavior created potential problems between Rome and the Jewish people because it appeared that they were taking advantage of the Jews' legal exemption while not meeting its requirements.
  - Part of the teachers' motive troubling the Galatian Christians may have been an attempt to convince the Christians to act more like Jews to avoid Roman scrutiny.

---

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:1. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Paul introduced his message by reminding his readers that the good news about Jesus deserved their complete attention and that they should not be concerned about the messages or the approval of anyone who taught anything different (*Galatians 1:6-10*).
- Jesus' good news included giving the Galatians new identities and, Paul wrote, seeking identity in any other way devalued Jesus' love-motivated sacrifice (*Galatians 2:15-21*)
- Even though Christians' Jesus-given identities make them "sons of Abraham" and heirs to the promise God made to him (*Galatians 3:1-9, 26-29*), it does not subject them to the demands of the Law of Moses – Jesus sets people free from the Law (*Galatians 3:10-4:7*).
- That freedom, Paul wrote, lies at the center of Jesus' mission – **"for freedom Christ has set us free"** (*Galatians 5:1*). He sets people free from:
  - False religious demands (*Galatians 1:11-14; 2:1-5, 11-14; 5:1-12*).
  - The curse of the law (*Galatians 3:13; 4:4-5; cf. Deuteronomy 28:15-68*).
  - Hostile, yet impotent, non-gods (*Galatians 4:1-9*).
- But Jesus' freedom is not a freedom to do whatever one wants; it **frees us so that we can "through love serve one another"** (*Galatians 5:13-14*).
  - Understanding the focus on service that characterizes Jesus' freedom begins by recognizing that the freedom he offers centers on identity – Jesus frees us to take on his identity (*Galatians 3:27-28*).
  - Jesus' identity centers on his mission - he "came not to be served but to serve" (*Matthew 20:20-28*).
  - Because our Jesus-shaped freedom involves service, it expects changes in character that support its service agenda (*Galatians 5:13-6:5*).

## Applications

- We must guard against anyone who tells us we need anything other than Jesus.
- Our identities and senses of self-worth depend on no one, not even ourselves; they depend entirely on Jesus.
- Our freedom is not based on laws, on our country, or on any politician; our freedom is tied to Jesus' sovereign identity.
- Our obedience to Jesus means that our relationships are no longer driven by conflict to secure our wants and needs because we entrust our lives and wellbeing to him.
- Because we locate our freedom in Jesus, we are free to serve without fear.

We ought to be thankful people because of the freedom that Jesus grants to us. Let's make sure that we demonstrate our thankfulness by submitting ourselves to the expectations that attend his freedom; let's commit ourselves to the freedom Jesus offers us by using it to serve one another in love.

