

Galatians Chapter 5

Galatians 5:1 "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

“Free”: Deliverance from the curse that the law pronounces on the sinner who has been striving unsuccessfully to achieve his own righteousness (3:13, 22-26; 4:1-7), but who has now embraced Christ and the salvation granted to him by grace (see notes on 2:4; 4:26; Rom. 7:3; 8:2).

“Stand fast therefore”: Stay where you are, Paul asserts, because of the benefit of being free from the law and the flesh as a way of salvation and the fullness of blessing by grace.

The verse could be rendered: “For freedom Christ freed us. Therefore, stand fast and do not again be subject to a yoke of bondage.” The “freedom” in view is freedom from the law, here called “a yoke of bondage.” Paul wants the Galatians to “stand fast,” that is, retain their spiritual freedom.

“Yoke of bondage”: “Yoke” refers to the apparatus used to control a domesticated animal. The Jews thought of the “yoke of the law” as a good thing, the essence of true religion. Paul argued that for those who pursued it as a way of salvation, the law was a yoke of slavery (see note on Matt. 11:28-30).

We are to stand up for God and continually stand in the salvation the Lord provided for us. We are no longer under the bondage of the law; we are free to serve the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle."

A person who had just been set free, would never choose to go back into bondage, if they were thinking clearly.

Galatians 5:2 "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."

“If ye be circumcised”: Circumcision was the external ritual symbolizing acceptance of the law (verse 3). In such a case, one depended on legal works rather than on God’s grace as the means of salvation. “Christ,” then, “shall profit you nothing.”

Paul had no objection to circumcision itself (Acts 16:1-3; Phil. 3:5). But he objected to the notion that it had some spiritual benefit or merit with God and was a prerequisite or necessary component of salvation.

Circumcision had meaning in Israel when it was a physical symbol of a cleansed heart (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:24-26), and served as a reminder of God’s covenant of salvation promise (Gen. 17:9-10).

“Christ shall profit you nothing”: The atoning sacrifice of Christ cannot benefit anyone who trusts in law and ceremony for salvation.

It appears that these Galatians believed if they were circumcised, that would somehow put them in better standing with the Lord. It is as if they believe this to be like baptism. Circumcision and sacrifices are almost as if they are saying that the shed blood of Jesus is not enough.

Hebrews 9:12-14 "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [for us]." "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:" "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

You can see that there was nothing left for us to do, Jesus did it all for us.

Galatians 5:3 "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

“He is a debtor to do the whole law”: God’s standard is perfect righteousness, thus a failure to keep only one part of the law falls short of the standard (see note on 3:10).

Circumcising is a recognition of the law. To recognize the law in this manner would be to deny the power of grace in Jesus Christ. If you go back to the law to make you perfect in the sight of the law, then you are under the covenant of the law, and not under the covenant of grace.

Galatians 5:4 "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

“Christ is become no effect ... fallen from grace”: The Greek word for “severed” (no effect), means “to be separated”, or “to be estranged.” The word for “fallen” means “to lose one’s grasp on something.” Paul’s clear meaning is that any attempt to be justified by the law is to reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Those once exposed to the gracious truth of the gospel, who then turn their backs on Christ (Heb. 6:4-6) and seek to be justified by the law are separated from Christ and lose all prospects of God’s gracious salvation. Their desertion of Christ and the gospel only proves that their faith was never genuine (Luke 8:13-14; 1 John 2:19).

“Justified” (see notes on 2:16; Rom. 3:24).

This verse could be translated: “You will be severed from Christ, if you try to be justified by law; you will forfeit the favor in God’s eyes which Christ won for you.” This does not teach the loss of salvation which one earlier possessed.

Rather it means that if the readers truly renounce grace through faith alone as the way of salvation, if they depend on legalism to secure divine favor, then they show that they never really knew God's grace in the first place.

You have decided to look for salvation in another, if you go back to the law. Grace is a freeing of yourself, but a freeing from the law, as well. Wherever you put your trust, is what you are depending on to save you. This would be turning away from Christ as your Justifier, and looking to the law for justification.

Galatians 5:5 "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."

"Though the Spirit ... hope of righteousness": means that by the Holy Spirit's help, which is obtained "by faith," believers "wait for the hope of righteousness," that is, live the Christian life awaiting the consummation of their salvation.

Christians already possess the imputed righteousness of Christ, but they still await the completed and perfected righteousness that is yet to come at glorification (Rom. 8:18, 21).

Christians are not like the rest of the world who have no hope. We have hope of the resurrection. Our hope is in Christ Jesus. He is our blessed Hope. Our righteousness is His righteousness that He clothed us in.

Colossians 1:27 "To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"

Galatians 5:6 "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."

"For" justifies the importance given faith in verse 5. In Christianity one does not profit spiritually either by being circumcised or uncircumcised. "Faith which worketh by love" means "faith that is produced by love." Faith is a man's response to God who loves him, and this divine love that produces faith results in his justification.

"Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision" (6:15). Nothing done or not done in the flesh, even religious ceremony, makes any difference in one's relationship to God. What is external is immaterial and worthless, unless it reflects genuine internal righteousness (Rom. 2:25-29).

Circumcision is of the flesh. This then, makes no difference either way, because Christianity is of the spirit. Christianity is a personal relationship with Christ.

"Faith which worketh by love": Saving faith proves its genuine character by works of love. The person who lives by faith is internally motivated by love for God and Christ (Matt. 22:37-40), which supernaturally issues forth in reverent worship, genuine obedience, and self-sacrificing love for others.

Romans 2:28-29 "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither [is that] circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:" "But he [is] a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision [is that] of the heart, in the spirit, [and] not in the letter; whose praise [is] not of men, but of God."

We see in all this that Christianity has very little to do with the flesh. The only thing it does have to do with it is that we must cut away the flesh that the spirit might live. For us to be in a position that we desire to be with Christ, we must crucify our flesh and live in the spirit.

Galatians 5:7 "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"

"Ye did run well" shows that the Galatians were making good progress spiritually. But the Judaizers "did hinder" them with a false gospel, so that now the readers do "not obey the truth."

Paul compares the Galatians' life of faith with a race, a figure he used frequently (2:2; Rom. 9:16; 1 Cor. 9:24). They had a good beginning, they had received the gospel message by faith and had begun to live their Christian lives by faith as well.

"Obey the truth" (see note on 1 Pet. 1:22). A reference to believers' true way of living, including both their response to the true gospel in salvation (Acts 6:7; Rom. 2:8; 6:17; 2 Thess. 1:8), and their consequent response to obey the Word of God in sanctification.

Paul wrote more about salvation and sanctification being a matter of obedience (in Rom. 1:5; 6:16-17; 16:26). The legalistic influence of the Judaizers prevented the unsaved from responding in faith to the gospel of grace and true believers from living by faith.

Paul is telling them that they started out correctly. They were running the race of life well. Now they have listened to those who would come in and destroy. We must apply the blood of Jesus to our ear, so only things of God will be heard in our inner mind. We should not listen to others, and let them sway us. We should be thoroughly convinced, and never waver in our belief.

Galatians 5:8 "This persuasion [cometh] not of him that calleth you."

"This persuasion": Salvation by works. God does not promote legalism. Any doctrine that claims His gracious work is insufficient to save is false (see notes on 1:6-7). This refers to the pressure tactics the heretics used to persuade the Galatians to embrace legalism.

They have listened to another doctrine other than what Paul had brought. The Lord God of heaven called you, stay with Him. God did not send the message to get back under the bondage of the law.

Galatians 5:9 "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

"A little leaven" (false doctrine), "leaveneth" (permeates, corrupts), "the whole lump" (church). A common axiomatic saying (1 Cor. 5:6), regarding the influence of yeast in dough. Leaven is often used in Scripture to denote sin (Matt. 16:6, 12).

This is the same thing as saying; one rotten apple will ruin the whole barrel, if it is not removed. Leaven is sin. It is a sin to doubt the message of grace. Anything that displeases God is sin. Faith is the only thing that pleases God. It seems that some of these people in the church were listening to the Judaizers.

Galatians 5:10 "I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be."

“Confidence in you”: Paul expresses encouraging assurance that the Lord will be faithful to keep His own from falling into gross heresy (see John 6:39-40; 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39; Phil. 1:6-7). They will persevere and be preserved (Jude 24).

“Judgment”: All false teachers will incur strict and devastating eternal condemnation (see notes on 2 Pet. 2:2-3, 9).

Paul believes that the Galatians will retain the true gospel and not be completely persuaded by the heretics.

It is a very dangerous thing to teach anything but the pure gospel message. Paul says; I know you will consider this and make the right decision. He knows, if they have time to consider what he is telling them, they will not accept going back into the law. Grace is too good to trade it for law.

Galatians 5:11 "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased."

“If I yet preach circumcision”: Apparently the Judaizers had falsely claimed that Paul agreed with their teaching. But he makes the point that if he was preaching circumcision as necessary for salvation, why were the Judaizers persecuting him instead of supporting him?

Paul is evidently refuting the accusation that he “yet” (still), preaches a gospel of circumcision, as formerly in Judaism. But, he counters, the very fact that I do “yet suffer persecution” proves that is not the case. For Judaizers would commend, not persecute, him for preaching their gospel.

“Offence” (stumbling block). The Greek word for “stumbling block” can mean “trap”, “snare,” or “offense.” Any offer of salvation that strips man of the opportunity to earn it by his own merit breeds opposition (Rom. 9:33).

One of the reasons they had difficulty with what Paul was saying, is the fact that he circumcised Timothy to appease the Jews. Paul had not circumcised Timothy, so that Timothy would be in better standing with God. He had done it, because the group of people Timothy would be ministering to were Jews, and they would not have let Timothy preach.

Acts 16:3 "Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek."

Paul did not believe in circumcising Christians. Paul's major persecution had come from the Jews. They even followed Paul from town to town and caused people to rise up against him, because he taught that Jesus Christ was the Jewish Messiah.

Paul suffered with Christ. Paul counted it as gain to be persecuted bringing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The teaching of the cross was an offense to the Jews.

Galatians 5:12 "I would they were even cut off which trouble you."

The Greek word used here is "Mutilate", and was often used of castration, such as in the cult of Cybele, whose priests were self-made eunuchs. Paul's ironic point is that since the Judaizers were so insistent on circumcision as a means of pleasing God, they should go to the extreme of religious devotion and mutilate themselves.

The verse may mean, "I wish those troubling you would have themselves castrated."

Paul was aware that those who were trying to put them back under the law, were there to destroy their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The best thing would be for these Judaizers to get out of the church, but it was highly unlikely that would happen.

Galatians 5:13 "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only [use] not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

"Liberty" (see note on 2:4).

"For an occasion to the flesh": The Greek word for "occasion" (or opportunity), was often used to refer to a central base of military operations (Rom. 7:8). In the context, "flesh" refers to the sinful inclinations of fallen man (see note on Rom 7:5). The freedom Christians have is not a base from which they can sin freely and without consequence.

"Serve one another": Christian freedom is not for selfish fulfillment, but for serving others (Rom. 14:1-15).

Having shown freedom from the law to be proper protection against legalism (verses 1-12), Paul now demonstrates it to be a proper antidote against unrestrained license to sin (verses 13-26).

Believers are not to abuse their "liberty" from the law "for an occasion" (opportunity), "to the flesh" (sinful nature). That is, don't think freedom from the law means you can indulge in sin; it means instead that you are free to serve God by serving "one another."

Our salvation is a free gift from God. He washed our sins away. When we become a Christian, we no longer serve sin.

Romans 6:18 "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

What this is really saying is that our flesh controlled our will until we became Christians. Now our spirit (filled with Jesus), controls our will. If we are true Christians, it is Jesus in us who controls our will. We are no longer flesh, we are spirit. Just because we are forgiven, does not give us a license to sin.

Romans 6:19-22 "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things [is] death." "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

You see, we have been set free to live in Christ Jesus.

Galatians Chapter 5 Questions

1. What are Christians to stand fast in?
2. We are not to be entangled with the yoke of _____.
3. What would a person, who had been set free, never choose to do?
4. What did these Galatians believe about circumcising?
5. What does the shed blood of Christ do for the Christian's conscience?
6. What would make a Christian debtor to the whole law?
7. Circumcising is recognition of what?
8. For we through the _____ wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.
9. What is the hope of the Christian?
10. Circumcision is of the _____.
11. Christianity is of the _____.
12. What question did Paul ask them in verse 7?
13. A little leaven _____ the whole loaf.
14. What does leaven symbolize?
15. What is sin?

16. What did Paul have confidence they would do?
17. What was one of the reasons they thought Paul believed in circumcision?
18. Why had Paul done this?
19. Paul's major persecution came from where?
20. What did they not like about Paul?
21. They were not to use their liberty for what?
22. What have we been set free to do?