

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

GALATIANS 5:1-15, FREEDOM FROM THE LAW AND FROM LICENSE

A. Freedom in Christ without the Law (1-12)

1. Paul reminded the Galatians that Christ sets people free from slavery to works (1), *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*
 - a. The reason Christ sets one free is so he will live free.
 - 1) Paul is highlighting the previous chapters by declaring freedom in Christ is freedom from works.
 - 2) Charles Spurgeon, *God grant us grace to keep to grace! God grant us faith enough to live by faith, even to the end, as the freeborn children of God, for His name's sake!*
 - b. The responsibility of a Christian is to stand firm in what set him free.
 - 1) Paul refers to the law as *a yoke of slavery* which is taking on the law as a means of justification and as a principle of life (sanctification).
 - a) Acts 15:10, *Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?*
 - b) Romans 8:2, *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*
 - 2) A Christian has a new yoke from Christ.
 - a) Matthew 11:29-30, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*
 - b) A Christian is called to be other-centered instead of self-centered.
 - 1] Galatians 6:2, *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*
 - 2] James 2:8, *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.*
 - c. *again*
 - 1) Paul looks back to the time they were controlled by *elementary principles*.
 - 2) Galatians 4:9, *But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?*
2. Paul addressed the Judaizers' teaching about circumcision (2a), *Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision,*
 - a. He attacked the Galatians' new focus on circumcision.
 - 1) It was the central feature of the false Gospel promoted by the Judaizers.
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *It was the practice around which the whole controversy swirled.*
 - 3) The problem was not with the act of circumcision but the reason for circumcision.
 - a) Judaizers were declaring that circumcision was necessary for salvation.
 - b) *Accepting circumcision* meant adding work to the Gospel - faith in Christ plus circumcision.
 - b. He made a strong appeal.
 - 1) It was based on his apostolic authority, *I, Paul.*
 - 2) It was based on their friendship, Galatians 4:15, *What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.*
3. Paul listed six consequences of living under law
 - a. The law invalidates the work of Christ (2b), *Christ will be of no advantage to you.*
 - 1) *advantage*
 - a) It means *to provide assistance with emphasis upon the resulting benefit.*
 - b) Hebrews 13:9, *Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefitted those devoted to them.*

- 2) The Galatians were at the crossroads of works and grace.
 - a) John Stott, *As the false teachers were pressing it, circumcision was neither a physical operation, nor a ceremonial rite, but a theological symbol. It stood for a particular type of religion, namely salvation by good works in obedience to the law.*
 - b) The Judaizers position was made clear in Acts 15:1, *But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*
 - c) Adding circumcision to faith does not strengthen grace but invalidates it.
 - d) Faith in Christ alone opens wide the work of Christ in one's life but faith in Christ plus works shuts the door.
 - 1] Grant Osborne, *Christians could be circumcised if they were doing so for the sake of ministry, as Paul did with Timothy (Acts 16:3), but they are not to put their hope for salvation in circumcision, as was the case with the Judaizers.*
 - 2] Robert Wilkin, *Circumcision for legalistic reasons is harmful to one's spiritual life. The moment a person adopts legalism, he ceases to benefit spiritually. Only by walking by faith can a Christian find profit in his Christian life.*

- b. The law must be obeyed fully (3), ***I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.***
 - 1) For a second time, Paul declared that what he said came on his authority as an apostle, *I testify again.*
 - 2) When a person accepts circumcision as a requirement for salvation, that person is obligated to keep the entire Law.
 - a) Galatians 3:10, *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."*
 - b) James 2:10, *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.*
 - c) Grant Osborne, *Like many today, the Galatians assumed that if they put forth a great deal of effort and were generally faithful, that would be enough to keep them in right standing with God. Paul wants to make certain they recognize the true implications of the kind of salvation they are buying in to.*
 - 3) It is good to remember that the purpose of the Law was to condemn not to justify.
 - a) The Judaizers were not keeping the entire Law, Acts 15:10, *Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?*
 - b) Only Jesus kept the entire Law in order to justify believers through faith in Him alone.
 - c) J. B. Lightfoot, *Circumcision is the seal of the law. He who willingly and deliberately undergoes circumcision, enters upon a compact to fulfil the law. To fulfil it therefore he is bound, and he cannot plead the grace of Christ; for he has entered on another mode of justification.*

- c. The law removes people from grace but faith alone in Christ supplies grace (4-6)
 - 1) The acceptance of works is the absence of grace (4), ***You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.***
 - a) Those who accept circumcision as a requirement for salvation *are severed* from Christ.
 - 1] *severed* means *released from an association with someone.*
 - 2] Note Romans 7:2, *For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.*
 - 3] A person can't be related to Christ by faith alone and by faith in works.
 - b) A move toward law is a move away from grace.
 - 1] Donald Campbell, *Anyone seeking justification by Law. . . would not be living in a sphere where Christ was operative.*
 - 2] Paul spoke of the Galatians as Christians but now he speaks of falling away from grace.
 - a] They were starting to reap the rewards of works instead of the rewards of grace.
 - b] Paul was not speaking of loss of salvation but loss of blessing by turning away from grace
 - c] Robert Wilkin, *The believer who adopts legalism has fallen from grace. His fall is from the experience (not position) of grace.*

- 2) Faith in Christ alone supplies the grace required for righteousness (5-6), ***For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.***
 - a) A Christian is to wait by faith for the completion of his salvation through the Spirit
 - 1] Paul is looking forward to the time when our position in Christ (justification) is identical to our practice of conformity to His image (glorification).
 - 2] John Stott, *For this future salvation we wait. We do not work for it; we wait for it by faith. We do not strive anxiously to secure it, or imagine that we have to earn it by good works. Final glorification in heaven is as free a gift as our initial justification.*
 - 3] Grant Osborne, *The Spirit is the One who guides and empowers us so that we can live in the present in light of the future. Our part is to allow God's salvation to take root in us and the Spirit to work in us "by faith."*
 - b) Circumcision is one way the legalists hoped to work toward that end.
 - 1] *For through the Spirit* is in contrast to the Judaizers' *through the flesh*, Galatians 3:3, *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*
 - 2] *By faith* is in contrast to the Judaizers' *by the law*, note verse 4.
 - 3] The legalists' emphasis on circumcision does not ensure righteousness, Galatians 6:15, *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*
 - c) That which leads to righteousness is *faith working through love*.
 - 1] Grant Osborne, *Love is the outworking of faith.*
 - 2] Donald Campbell, *Though salvation is by faith apart from works, faith that is genuine does work itself out "through love."*
 - a] Galatians 5:13, *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*
 - b] Ephesians 2:10, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*
 - d. The law hinders spiritual growth because it is not God's means for spiritual growth (7-10)
 - 1) Paul asked them who turned them away from the truth (7), ***You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?***
 - a) Paul employed a metaphor to describe the Galatians' Christian experience as a race.
 - 1] He declared that they *were running well*.
 - 2] They had started the race by placing their faith in Christ alone and were trusting Him as they ran forward.
 - b) Paul asked them who blocked their progress by disobeying the truth.
 - 1] The truth is faith in Christ alone.
 - 2] He wanted to know why they were attempting to run the race by faith in Christ plus the law.
 - 3] It appears Paul wanted to know the name of the one who had *hindered* them.
 - a] *Hindered* means to *cut in on*, as in a race where another causes a runner to break stride and stumble.
 - b] It was obviously the Judaizers but Paul may be asking them to name of the leader.
 - c] Paul was probably hoping the Galatians would see that this new group of teachers were the ones misleading them.
 - 2) He encouraged them to realize they were headed the wrong way by those who will be judged (8-10), ***This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.***
 - a) Paul responded to his own question by declaring that the one who called them was not the one who persuaded them to change from faith to works.
 - 1] *persuade* means to *convince*.
 - 2] God was not the One directing the Judaizers to convince the Galatians to change their course.
 - 3] Grant Osborne, *Their (the Judaizers) teaching was not bringing people to God; it was keeping them away from him!*

- b) Paul quoted a proverb warning the Galatians of the dangers of false teaching.
- 1] It might have been a proverb of that day
 - a] 1 Corinthians 5:6b, *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*
 - b] It may have been taken from a parable from what is now in the New Testament, Luke 13:21, *It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.*
 - 2] Paul is equating false teaching with yeast which permeates an entire lump of dough.
 - a] Paul may have been speaking of circumcision which may seem like one small deviation from truth could destroy the entire system of grace.
 - b] Donald Campbell, *Its converts may have been few but the believers must be on guard lest the error affect the entire church.*
 - c] E. D. Burton, *The doctrine of the necessity of circumcision, insidiously presented by a few, is permeating and threatening to pervert the whole religious life of the Galatian churches.*
- c) Paul was optimistic that the Galatian believers would adhere to the truth and that the one troubling them with false doctrine would be judged.
- 1] Paul's confidence that the Galatians would do what's right was not based on his confidence in his teaching or his great influence but in the Lord Who is the Head of the church.
 - 2] It is probable that Paul knew who the leader of the sect was but he did not want to make the conflict a struggle between two teachers but between works and grace.
- e. The law removes the offense of the cross (11), ***But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.***
- 1) Paul declared that the Judaizers persecution proved he did not preach circumcision as required for salvation.
 - a] *still*, does not mean that Paul had once preached circumcision since he became a Christian but that he preached it as a Jew before he came to faith.
 - b] He clearly taught that salvation is through faith in Christ alone, 1 Corinthians 7:18, *Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.*
 - c] He did believe it wise for some to undergo circumcision, like Timothy, for the sake of effective ministry, Acts 16:3, *Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*
 - d] He was being persecuted because he did not preach the necessity of circumcision for salvation.
 - 2) The cross of Jesus Christ is offensive to those motivated by works..
 - a) The centrality of the cross of Christ denies the need to add to what Jesus accomplished at Calvary.
 - 1] Tom Constable, *If people need circumcision, they do not need the cross of Christ. The legalists opposed Paul's preaching of the Cross because it implied that people are unable to please God themselves.*
 - 2] The great scandal of the cross is that it leaves no room for human work in salvation.
 - b) Paul listed other reasons in 1 Corinthians 1:23, *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,*
 - 1] For Jews, it was unthinkable to have a Messiah who was hung on a tree.
 - a] Paul quoted Deuteronomy 21:23 in Galatians 3:13, *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—*
 - b] John Stott, *The fact that Jesus died hanging on a tree remained for Jews an insurmountable obstacle to faith, until they saw that the curse He bore was for them. He did not die for His own sins; He became a curse 'for us.'*
 - 2] For Gentiles, it was folly to think that salvation could come from one who couldn't save himself.
- f. The law engenders anger (12), ***I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!***
- 1) Paul was angry that the Judaizers were adding human effort to the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.
 - a] Too often, we don't get angry when we should.
 - b] Paul spoke of anger in Ephesians 4:26, *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,*

- c) Jesus Who never sinned got angry, Matthew 21:12, *And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."*
 - d) The Old Testament addressed righteous anger, Psalm 97:10, *O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.*
- 2) He said that if a little cut was so important why not go all the way.
- a) Priests of the Cybele cult in nearby Phrygia practiced castration and Paul regarded Judaizers as no better than pagan priests.
 - b) Robert Wilkin, *Paul's point is probably something like this: I wish these people would become unable to reproduce themselves spiritually. Paul wants their heretical teaching to go no further.*
 - c) In the Old Testament, an emasculated person was forbidden from entering the assembly of the Lord, note Deuteronomy 23:1.
 - d) Paul hoped those who tried to add circumcision as a requirement for salvation would go all the way and thereby remove themselves from the assembly of believers.

B. Freedom in Christ without license (13-15)

1. Introductory notes

- a. Paul transitions from doctrine to application.
- b. He began the new section by addressing an important question, If a Christian is free from the law , won't that lead to license?
 - 1) The problem
 - a) John Stott, *What are the implications of Christian freedom? Does it include freedom from every kind of restraint and restriction? Is Christian liberty another word for anarchy?*
 - b) Paul was being accused of teaching license.
 - 2) The solution
 - a) Charles H. Spurgeon, *Remember that liberty from sin is not liberty to sin.*
 - b) Warren Wiersbe, *The legalists thought they had the answer to the problem in laws and threats, but Paul has explained that no amount of legislation can change man's basic sinful nature. It is not law on the outside, but love on the inside that makes the difference. We need another power within, and that power comes from the Holy Spirit of God.*

2. Christian freedom is not for license (13a), ***For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,***

- a. Paul transitions from discussing the Judaizers to addressing Galatian Christians.
 - 1) He spent much time on the problem of false doctrine.
 - 2) Now, he focuses on application of the true doctrine.
- b. He reminded them that Christians are called to freedom.
 - 1) John Stott, *Christian freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin.*
 - 2) The treadmill of works has been replaced with the assurance of grace through faith in Christ alone.
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe on Christian freedom, *The Christian is a free man. He is free from the guilt of sin because he has experienced God's forgiveness. He is free from the penalty of sin because Christ died for him on the cross. And he is, through the Spirit, free from the power of sin in his daily life. He is also free from the Law with its demands and threats.*
- c. He warned them to avoid the abuse of freedom.
 - 1) A Christian is not to cater to the flesh.
 - a) This is the sinful human nature that all Christians still possesses.
 - b) Grant Osborne, *The flesh must be under control before the Christian can experience true freedom.*
 - 2) The threat of license is real.
 - a) Jude 4, *For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*
 - b) 1 Peter 2:16, *Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.*

- 3) Freedom from the law is not life without controls, Dwight Pentecost, *For the Christian the Mosaic Law has revelatory value (2 Tim. 3:16–17) even though it does not have regulatory value, controlling our behavior.*
 - 4) In the following verses, Paul focuses on how to avoid license, as noted by Grant Osborne, *The answer to the flesh is the vertical centrality of the Spirit and the horizontal centrality of love operating at the center of the church.*
3. Christian freedom is for service (13b-14), **but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**
- a. Freedom in Christ is demonstrated by lovingly serving others.
 - 1) The means by which a Christian serves is love.
 - a) A Christian is to serve others lovingly and not by compulsion.
 - b) Note Galatians 5:6, *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*
 - c) It is interesting that Paul states that freedom from the law brings slavery to serve others.
 - 2) John Stott on Christian freedom, *It is freedom to approach God without fear, not freedom to exploit my neighbour without love.*
 - b. Paul declares that loving others fulfills the whole law.
 - 1) He quoted Leviticus 19:18, *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*
 - 2) The word that fulfills the law is love.
 - a) Matthew 7:12, *So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*
 - b) John 13:34, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*
 - c) Galatians 6:2, *Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*
 - d) Romans 13:8, *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*
 - e) Thomas Constable, *If his readers insisted on living in slavery, Paul wished they would enslave themselves to love of one another. If they wanted to live under law, let it be the law of Christ (6:2) impelled by the indwelling Spirit rather than by an external code.*
 - 3) The capability to love others is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.
 - a) Romans 8:4, . . . *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*
 - b) Ronald Fung, . . . *the believer who is free from the law is at the same time one who fulfills the law; only the way he fulfills the law is not by punctiliously observing the rules and regulations of an external code, but by the new way of love, which is generated within the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. . .*
4. The danger of law without love (15), **But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.**
- a. Conflicting doctrines without love lead to strife and destruction.
 - 1) Brothers and sisters in Christ may differ in minor doctrinal issues (preferences) but that should not remove love for one another.
 - 2) Major doctrinal issues (principles) that impact salvation must be addressed as Paul noted in verses 9-10, *A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.*
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *The believer who spends time daily in the Word and prayer, and who yields to the Spirit’s working, is going to enjoy liberty and will help build up the church.*
 - b. Freedom without love is deadly.
 - 1) *Biting and devouring one another* is the opposite of *through love serving one another* (13).
 - a) John Stott, *For biting and devouring are destructive, ‘conduct more fitting to wild animals than to brothers in Christ’, while love is constructive; it serves.*
 - b) Love for one another builds up but lack of love consumes (*destroys*).
 - 2) Warren Wiersbe, *Unless the Holy Spirit of God is permitted to fill hearts with His love, selfishness and competition will reign. Both extremes in the Galatian churches—the legalists and the libertines—were actually destroying the fellowship.*

5. A summary of verses 13-15 by John Stott, *It is freedom not to indulge the flesh, but to control the flesh; freedom not to exploit our neighbour, but to serve our neighbour; freedom not to disregard the law, but to fulfil the law. Everyone who has been truly set free by Jesus Christ expresses his liberty in these three ways, first in self-control, next in loving service of his neighbour, and thirdly in obedience to the law of his God.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Jesus has set us free so don't turn back to slavery.
- B. If you add anything to the work of Christ then you must obey the whole law.
- C. Works cancel grace.
- D. The cross of Christ offends those who think they can gain favor with God on their own.
- E. Christians are called to freedom from works and to grace lived out in love for others.
- F. Love builds up but lack of love tears down.