

# THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE OF LIBERTY

BY DR. JERRY VINES

*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series  
from Jerry Vines Ministries  
2295 Towne Lake Parkway  
Suite 116 #249  
Woodstock, GA 30189

## Let's Begin

*Chapter 5 is the pinnacle of the book of Galatians. Paul writes passionately and purposefully. Freedom was the key. However, freedom is skewed without moral responsibility. When this happens, freedom reduces to license. Against this moral license Paul waged a continued war.*

*However, Paul waged battle on another front—legalism. Moral legalism is the coffin of both disciples of Jesus Christ as well as the church which bears His name. Legalists in Galatia were wrecking God's people, leading them to depend upon human accomplishments rather than God's grace. On this front Paul waged another war—the believer's liberty in Jesus Christ.*

*Perhaps the greatest text on Christian liberty is Galatians 5. In Paul's exposition of liberty in the believer's life, he answers a series of 3 questions.*

*As we begin our study of Galatians 5, let's follow the outline below:*

- I. Do We Love Freedom?  
(vv. 1-6)**
- II. Do We Live Freedom?  
(vv. 7-15)**
- III. Can We Lose Freedom?  
(vv. 16-26)**

## I. Do We Love Freedom? (vv. 1-6)

In the earlier chapters, Paul argued tirelessly for justification by faith alone. No man, he insists, can be saved by the works of the law (2:16-17). In addition, sanctification is not a process through which those who are justified remain justified. Indeed once one has been pronounced righteous in God's sight (which is what justification means), one may never be *more* justified than he or she already is. The contrary is also true: once one has been pronounced righteous in God's sight (i.e. justified), one may never be *less* justified than he or she is. How can this be? Because being justified is not a process we perform but a pronouncement God makes.

In the same sense a court judge is endowed with the human authority to pronounce the accused "not guilty," God's judgment also says to the accused sinner, "not guilty." Again, how can this be? It is all by His amazing grace! Jesus Christ took the pronouncement of guilt upon Himself through His death on the cross. Hence, it is only through our faith in Him that we can become "not guilty" before God.

As one can see, Paul's Gospel is loud and clear in Galatians. Unfortunately, some false teachers threatened the Gospel Paul preached, adding to it the practice of circumcision in order to be saved. Paul's response is to offer an elaborate exposition of Christian liberty in Christ Jesus.

First, Paul *defines* Christian liberty. He writes, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (v. 1). For Paul, the life of liberty is a *received* life. Indeed, the only way a person may possess the life of liberty is to receive it. We were all in bondage to sin (John 8:32-36). Being in bondage means being enslaved. While bondage may start "small" it eventually takes over the entire life (cp. Rom. 7:21-22).

Sin puts chains on us emotionally, mentally, and volitionally. Therefore, when temptation comes—and it will come—resistance becomes impossible. Sin ultimately leads to death (Rom. 6:23).

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On the other hand, Christ sets us free (cp. Rom. 6:22). The power of sin is cancelled, and we are loosed from its bonds (Rom. 8:2).

Additionally, not only is the life of liberty a *received* life, the life of liberty is an *achieved* life. Even though we are careful to define exactly what we mean when we say it, just as the *received* life is the “Lord’s part,” the *achieved* life is “our part.” By “our part” we do not mean to suggest “by our own merited effort.” We receive no part of salvation because we merit salvation. Instead, since we are saved by the merits of Jesus’ death for us, we serve because we *are* saved, not *in order to* be saved.

With that in mind, Paul asserts “stand fast.” This is “our part.” We are to cling to the freedom Christ gave us. Freedom must be maintained. Christians must never again be “entangled” in a yoke of bondage. We cannot allow Satan to lock the chains around our ankles. The devil lost our soul when we said, yes, to the cross. His only possible option is to destroy our life’s witness. One way he attempts to destroy our witness is to lead us back into bondage.

*We receive no part of salvation because we merit salvation.*

Christ did not get us out of prison to slap more chains on us! However, we must cling to the freedom He provides each day. Luke’s recording of Jesus’ words speaks volumes, “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow me” (Luke 9:23, emphasis added). Our walk in freedom is a daily journey.

Second, Paul *defends* Christian liberty. He writes, “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (vv. 2-4). The Judaizers taught the Galatians they must be circumcised to be saved. It is not that they outright denied the necessity of Christ’s death. Instead they added to Christ’s death by making human works necessary as well.

However, Paul’s point continued to be that salvation was an either/or affair. Either one was saved entirely by grace, or one was saved entirely by works. A combination approach was not an option for the simple reason that if works were necessary, salvation could not be based upon grace! To add circumcision was to destroy the apostolic Gospel.

Often times persons add to the Word of God in subtle ways. While they may not view it as adding to the Gospel, nonetheless any addition whatsoever destroys its pure message from God.

Part of Paul’s defense contained warnings to the Galatians. Three warnings stand out. First, Paul warns, if the Galatians accepted legalism (circumcision), it would *isolate* them. In that case, “Christ would profit you nothing.” What advantage would Christ be if, in the end, circumcision was necessary? Wouldn’t



that make circumcision what ultimately positioned sinners in a right relationship with God? Interestingly, while some groups today say faith is necessary in order to be saved, they nonetheless add that baptism is also necessary. But if baptism is necessary to be saved, how is that different from saying, as did the Judaizers, that circumcision is necessary to be saved?

The fact is, baptism is necessary; but not necessary to be saved. Instead baptism is necessary to not only join the church but also to participate in the Lord's Supper. However, a person is saved upon expressing genuine repentant faith in the Lord Jesus (Rom. 10:9-13). Nothing can be added to this, including baptism. It is either all Jesus or no Jesus. The Gospel forbids "some" Jesus.

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Not only will the Galatians be *isolated* if they return to the law, the Galatians will also be *obligated*. Paul warns they will obligate themselves as debtors, "to do the whole law." Similarly to accepting all of Jesus or no Jesus, if the Galatians insisted on going back to the law, it would not be some law and some other. Instead, it wed them to the entire law given in the Old Testament. Again, it is an either/or proposition. Law cannot be viewed as a cafeteria line where one picks and chooses what suits him or her. If one accepts one part, he or she is placed under its total control.

### Reflection Connection

*How does grace sustain your life each day? Give an example to share with the entire group.*

The final warning Paul issues to those who wanted to be circumcised is this: returning to the law will *devastate* you (v. 4). Not only will it *isolate* and *obligate*, circumcision *devastates* the effect of the Gospel in one's life. Christ becomes inoperative. To adopt legalism is to repudiate Christ. In Paul's words, it is "falling from grace."

We must be careful with Paul's meaning in these verses. Unfortunately, some conclude "falling from grace" concerns losing one's salvation. The context, however, precludes such a meaning. First, the term "falling from" literally means "falling down" or "going down." Hence, it is going down to a lower level of living, living based specifically on the Old Testament law.

Second, Paul is speaking about returning to the law, not becoming careless in one's morals. Inevitably those who argue Christians may lose their salvation interpret Paul's words "falling from grace" as if he was warning Christians to "live right" or face the danger of losing their salvation. Nothing could be further from Paul's mind! While Paul certainly has much to say about Christians living lawless, immoral lives, "falling from grace" is about returning to the Old Testament law of circumcision, not failing to live Christian principles. Perhaps a modern version of "falling from grace" may be seen in the example we noted above: those who insist baptism is necessary for salvation are those who "fall from grace."

In the end, Paul instructs the Galatians to stop trying to operate on principles that never could save a sinner and never will sanctify a saint. To "fall from grace" means one has lost the hold on grace for sanctification. It does not mean grace has lost its hold on us for salvation. In justification, grace holds us; in sanctification, we hold grace.



## II. Do We Live Freedom? (vv. 7-15)

The Galatians were in danger of losing the freedom Christ purchased for them. False teachers—Judaizers—contradicted the Gospel of grace Paul preached by leading the church back to bondage. As Paul fights the battle for the church's soul, he presents three possible options Christians pursue in living out the Christian life.

*The first option is the life of legalism (vv. 7-9).* Being Paul's primary concern, legalism was leading the Galatians back to bondage and ultimately would kill the church. If this idea caught fire, all future disciples would not be won to the Lord Jesus but to a legalistic religion no more able to save them than Judaism could save the Israelites! The church would be no more than a modern day cult.

Legalism *prevents* growth. It hinders progress in the believer's life. Paul put it in terms of a race, questioning the Galatians who was, "hindering them," since they were, "running," so well? The term translated "hinder" means, "to cut into." In other words, someone cut them off from their lane in the race they ran. In addition, legalism not only *prevents* growth, it also *pollutes* truth. By being cut off from the proper way, they could not obey the pure truth of God.

When rules become evidence of spirituality, rules are reduced as an excuse for pride. Legalism turns the Christian life into miserable bondage, making the legalist hard, unloving, and critical. Love dries up in the legalist's heart. In the words of Jesus, love becomes cold (Matt. 24:12).

*The second option is the life of license.* Paul writes, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (v. 13). License is the polar opposite of legalism. Indeed, license is in many ways a reaction to legalism. Many young Christians raised in a legalistic environment in certain churches often grow up to despise any rules whatsoever. Hence, they tragically become moral libertarians who depend more on what gives them pleasure than what pleases God.

A life of license *perverts* our calling as disciples. We are free from the guilt of sin, but such freedom does not reduce to rejection of holiness. Holy living is living like Christ. A life of license even *promotes* our sinning. As Paul clearly states, however, such liberty never becomes an, "occasion to the flesh." When it does, the Christian life has morphed into mockery. We have been placed under bondage again.

*Finally, the third option is the life of love.* Paul continues, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (v. 14). Liberty is intended to be lived as an expression of love. Our freedom in Christ promotes "serving one another" (v. 13b). Indeed the law is, "fulfilled", by the loving service we offer in our life of freedom. That is, the law is, "summed up", by our lives when we love one another.

## III. Can We Lose Freedom? (vv. 16-26)

Paul has already addressed two of the three questions we asked of this text. Do we love the freedom we have in Jesus Christ? Even more practically speaking, do we live the life of freedom we have in Jesus Christ? The Galatians had freedom but the freedom they experienced was under severe threat.

### Reflection Connection

*Do you know of someone who was raised in a legalistic environment? How has the legalistic environment affected their lives as adults? If you are the one raised in such an environment, be prepared to share with the entire study group. If you are not the one, please observe personal confidences.*



Paul now engages and definitively answers the possible threat the Galatians faced: is it possible to lose the freedom we have?

To answer the question, Paul first notes the *conflict* we face. Writing to them, he says, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (vv. 17-18). The term "contrary" means, "to oppose," "to stand against." Hence, Paul refers to an unrelenting warfare going on, a warfare which calls for the Galatians to dig their heels in and make a stand. Often believers are required to "stand strong" in the power of God's might, for the war wages all around (cp. Eph. 6:10 ff).

Also, the "spirit" is against the "flesh", indicative of two natures battling it out on the turf of our inner lives. Our new nature in Christ desires those things which our old nature opposes. What is the solution? For Paul, the only solution is to submit to the leadership of the Spirit of God. Indeed those led by the Spirit will not be "under the law." Bondage will flee; we remain free in Christ as we live according to the Spirit.

Second, Paul notes the *contrast* we observe (vv. 19-23). On one side stand the "works of the flesh" (v. 19a). We may dub these the *vices of the flesh*. Paul catalogs what one may expect if the flesh controls one's life (vv. 19b-21a). Being controlled by the flesh produces *sensual* sins, *spiritual* sins, and *social* sins.

*Sensual* sins are sins after which the flesh lusts, sins such as:

- ✦ "adultery"—extra-marital sex
- ✦ "fornication"—illicit sex before marriage
- ✦ "uncleanness"—general moral impurity
- ✦ "lasciviousness"—shameless and without restraint

Paul also listed *spiritual* sins:

- ✦ "idolatry"—worship of false gods; refusing Christ's Lordship
- ✦ "witchcraft"—worship of foreign spirits; including drug use (Rev. 9:21; 18:23)

*Social* sins were the most numerous, Paul listing more than twice the other two categories combined:

- ✦ "hatred"—hostility to others
- ✦ "variance"—strife, quarreling
- ✦ "emulation"—jealously
- ✦ "wrath"—heated anger
- ✦ "strife"—a self-seeking spirit
- ✦ "seditions"—flying apart; divisive
- ✦ "heresies"—picking and choosing doctrines
- ✦ "envyings"—grief at another's good
- ✦ "murders"—taking of innocent human life
- ✦ "drunkenness"—under the influence of intoxicants
- ✦ "revellings"—wild, party-driven orgies



### Reflection Connection

*Think about the fruit of the Spirit Paul lists. How is the fruit of the Spirit different from the gifts of the Spirit? Explain.*

What was Paul's verdict for those who entertained the "works of the flesh"? He clearly says those who, "do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 21b). Those who follow the vices follow the road to bondage.

On the other side stand the *virtues of the Spirit*. Paul calls them "fruit" and lists them (vv. 22-23a) into three clusters of the Christian life:

#### The Godward Cluster:

- \* "love"—love comes through the Holy Spirit (cp. Rom. 5:5)
- \* "joy"—happiness depends on circumstances, joy depends on Christ
- \* "peace"—peace of God guards one's heart (cp. Phil. 4:4)

#### The Manward Cluster:

- \* "longsuffering"—being patient with people
- \* "gentleness"—moral integrity; kindness
- \* "goodness"—uprightness of heart; love in action

#### The Selfward Cluster:

- \* "faith"—trustworthiness
- \* "Meekness"—power under control
- \* "temperance"—self-control; self-mastery

Concerning the virtues of the Holy Spirit, note the singular aspect Paul uses. It is not "fruits" of the Spirit. Instead, Paul refers to them as "fruit." The purpose is to demonstrate the *wholeness* of the Christian's life as lived in the power of God's Spirit. Furthermore, these graces or virtues of the Spirit are not what we do; instead the virtues represent who we are, our character.

Finally, Paul observes the *conquest* we obtain (vv. 23b-26). He writes, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (v. 24). The war's outcome is both *announced* and *achieved*. Those who "live" in the Spirit are those who "walk" in the Spirit. Our living in the Spirit is our salvation and our walking in the Spirit is our sanctification. And, those who walk in the Spirit of Christ thrive in the freedom from Christ.

### Golden Greek Nugget

Paul insists the Galatians must "stand fast" in the liberty Christ procured for them on the cross (5:1). The Greek word translated "stand fast" is *stēkō*, which means "to be stationary," "to persevere." Often it was used to mean "to stand", no matter the level of difficulty or force which comes against it. Christians must make themselves stationary in the liberty Christ bought for them.

### Wrap Up

*Christians should love the freedom we have because we are living in Christ. Unfortunately, the Galatians had been duped into believing going back to the Old Testament law was required in order for our freedom in Christ to stand. Paul demonstrated such an idea was birthed in hell and destroyed the Gospel of grace. Christians, therefore, must continue to stand in the liberty which Christ gave us through His death on the cross (5:1).*

