

Galatians – Chapter 5

“Legalists in our churches today warn that we dare not teach people about the liberty we have in Christ lest it result in religious anarchy. The Christian who lives by faith is not going to become a rebel. Quite the contrary, he is going to experience the inner discipline of God that is far better than the outer discipline of Galatians man-made rules.” (Warren Wiersbe)

Walk by the Spirit

5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Paul continues with his law bashing from chapter 4. This chapter was Paul’s final plea to the Galatians that they are not under the law. Verse 1 tells us that we are that God does not want a relationship with us built out of legalism but He wants a relationship built out of love. Paul tells them what Jesus told the people in John 8:36, *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”* Nothing that we do will make us free, only Christ can make us free. Paul does not want them to fall into the trap of following the law.

At the time of the Reformation, theologians held to the Five Solae. (Solae translates as ‘alone’. They are:

Solae scriptura	scriptures alone
Solae Christus	Christ alone
Solae gratia	grace alone
Solae fide	faith alone
Soli Deo Gloria	Glory to God alone

“Freedom in Christ does not give us the right to do as we please, but the liberty to do as we ought.” (Max Anders)

5:2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

In these verses, Paul is saying that we have two choices, Follow the whole law and try to get close to God on your own or accept the righteousness imputed or given to us by what Jesus did on the cross.

“The legalists among the Galatians wanted them to think that they could have *both* Jesus and a law-relationship with God. Paul tells them that this is not an option open to them – the system of grace and the system of law are incompatible. “Whoever wants to have a half-Christ loses the whole.” (Calvin)

Paul says that don’t expect circumcision to save you. If you head down the road of the Law, you must keep the whole law. In verse 4, to me, it appears that Paul is making light of the Galatians choosing circumcision. He says that if they attempt to be justified by the Law then we are ‘*katērgēthēte*’ (Greek) or severed (NASB) or cut off (NLT) from Christ.

5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

Paul reinforces that if we are under grace then we are looking for the righteousness that is promised by God. There are two ways to think of obtaining this righteousness. Either little by little as we grow in faith or all at once when Jesus returns and takes us to heaven. He says that if we have grace through faith then we do NOT need circumcision or works. He says that the most important thing is that we express our faith through love. This sentiment was also stated in 1 John 4:19 which says, “We love, because He first loved us.” If we carry this a little further, out of God’s love for us he gave us grace so we should reflect God’s love to others because we have His grace. (JRG paraphrase)

5:7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. 10 I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Paul says that they were doing so well. He asks a question about what is holding them back from the truth. Paul changes Jesus’ parable of the leaven or yeast to show that not only can good (the Kingdom of Heaven) spread throughout the world but so can false teachings. Paul says that he will put his trust in Jesus to keep the Galatians on the right path. He gives a warning to those that were trying to lead them astray.

5:11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. 12 I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

“Legalism can’t handle the offense of the cross. The whole point of Jesus dying on the cross was to say, “You can’t save yourself. I must die in your place or you have absolutely no hope at all.” When we trust in legalism, we believe that we can, at least in part, save ourselves. This takes away the offense of the cross, which should *always* offend the nature of fallen man. In this sense, the offense of the cross is really the *glory of the cross*, and legalism takes this glory away. (Guzik)

Paul does not sugar coat that it is Jesus’ work on the cross that saves us when he said in verse 12 that he wishes those unbelievers would just mutilate themselves. Instead of using the example of circumcision throughout this verse, he could have used the example of baptism for Baptists. He is saying that any act or work cannot save you.

5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

We have discussed what Paul is saying in this section before. He is saying don’t let your freedom give you an excuse to sin. If I sin, all I have to do is confess and then I am sinless so I will sin as much as I want. Because we love one another then we are to serve one another. Paul quotes Jesus’ second greatest commandment from Matthew 22:36-40, that is “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” He says if we act like wild animals we should watch out because we may just consume or devour one another.

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

“We can tell if someone walks in the Spirit because they will look a lot like Jesus. Jesus told us that the mission of the Holy Spirit would be to promote and speak of Him (John 14:16-17, 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-15). When someone walks in the Spirit, they listen to what the Holy Spirit says as He guides us in the path and nature of Jesus.” (Guzik)

If we walk in the spirit then we are focused on God (Trinity) but if we are focused on the flesh, we are focused on our own human desires. As human beings, we are born with a sin or sinful nature. If our human side wins we do evil but if our spiritual side wins we obey God. God gave us the law to show us when we are being human and NOT spiritual. Paul gives us a long list of things that will keep us out of the kingdom of Heaven. Then he gives us the good list that are the fruits of the spirit.

“The acts of the flesh symbolize spiritual death, but the fruit of the Spirit is evidence of spiritual life.” (Max Anders.)

“Against such there is no law: Paul wrote with both irony and understatement. There is certainly no law against love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But more so, if a person has this fruit of the Spirit, he doesn’t need the Law. He already fulfills it.” (Guzik)

5:24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Paul tells us what we are to do with our “passions and desires”, we are to nail them to the cross. 1 John 1:9 tells us that we are to confess our sins and that includes our “passions and desires”.

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit: We can better understand what Paul wrote here if we understand that the ancient Greek words for walk are different in Galatians 5:16 and 5:25. The first (*peripateo*) is the normal word for walking, used there as a picture of the “walk of life.” The second (*stoicheo*) means “to walk in line with” or “to be in line with.” Paul here is saying, “Keep in step with the Spirit.” (Guzik)

Paul closes Chapter 5 with three more big sins, being “conceited, or provoking, or jealous” (NLT) or the NASB says “boastful, challenging, envying” which all are NOT walking in the Spirit.