



Freedom in Christ

Gal. 5:1-26

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

“Stand fast therefore”, says Paul, “in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” These are wonderful words for Christians to live by. But what is this Liberty that we have in Christ, what is Christian Liberty? I sometimes think that of all the issues on which there is confusion amongst Christians this is the greatest. It seems like in certain Christian circles whenever one begins speaking about righteousness or the Ten Commandments or in some way suggesting that certain things ought not to be done by Christians the word LEGALISM is immediately trotted out as if any attempt to restrict our conduct is a denial of grace. On the other hand there are Christian circles where the faith seems to consist entirely of a endless list of things we mustn't do, and that many of these things we mustn't do seem to be based not on the bible but on culture, tradition, or taste. There you end up wondering if people don't just believe that they are going to go to heaven by following rules here on earth.

Well, brothers and sisters, what the bible teaches us is that Christians haven't been saved in order that they might become lawless or legalists, but that they have been freed by Christ from the curse of the law, and filled with the Spirit, in order to live lives of holiness. That is the short answer, the bones of what I will be getting at, but I fear it is going to take me two sermons to put flesh on those bones. So this sermon will be called Freedom in Christ, and next week's will be called Christian Liberty.

Let's get started by talking about the situation that Paul was dealing with in the Galatian church. Paul had originally gone to Galatia preaching the gospel, he had told them that all men were by nature fallen and sinners and that no man could be saved by trying to keep the law of God. Far from it the law condemned men, because the punishment for sin is death. But the good news of the gospel was that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had become man, had lived a life of perfect righteousness, and had gone to the cross and died for the sins of all who would believe in Him.

In other words he said to them, you are all sinners, and none of you will ever be saved by trying to keep God's commandments, and if you die without salvation, you will be judged and condemned to hell, but if you “confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

When you are united by faith to Christ, He takes your sin, and pays the price for it by dying on the cross, He washes away your sin and gives you His own perfect righteousness, because he kept God's law perfectly on the behalf of his children. So you can stand Justified before God. That is pronounced not guilty, and justified. Or as Paul put it so beautifully:

2 Cor. 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Your sins condemned you, and you were in jail waiting for the sentence of death to be carried out, but Jesus the son of the King came and said I will take His punishment, and He was put to death in your place. The scroll listing your crimes had the words PAID in FULL written on it, and in its place you were given a spotless SCROLL marked THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

The Galatians had believed that Gospel, but then men called Judaizers had come in and taught them errors they taught that while they had started by believing in Christ, that was only the beginning, if

they were going to be saved, then they themselves had to keep the law of God, and if they did not, they could not be saved. So they told them, you must be circumcised, you must observe the dietary restrictions of the law, just as the Pharisees taught, they believed that salvation came through law keeping and observing the traditions of the elders. So they started in gospel and then became entangled in the law. It was as if Christ had never come, and all they had were the shadows and types that had pointed to Him. Christ the Sun had risen, but they were being taught to light candles at midday. The Judaizers saw them freed from the heavy burden of the law and they picked that burden up and put it right back on them.

I wish it was only Christians in the first century who had been misled in this way. But there are entire denominations that teach that your salvation depends not on faith alone but on faith and works. Even in the Reformed faith we have had teachers like Norman Shepherd who have taught that your initial justification is by faith but your final justification will be based on your own obedience to the commands of God.

Well Paul wanted them and you to remember the *freedom* that we have in Christ:

1st that Freedom Consisted in being Forever Free from the Curse of the Law – “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) or Col. 2:13 “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Col. 2:13-14)

As Christ said on the cross “it is finished” the debt is paid in full. You cannot be recused. The debt cannot be unpaid for. The devil has no Repo agency!

2nd that Freedom Consists in being freed from bondage to sin and the devil - They were once slaves of sin and slaves of the devil, their will was in bondage to sin, shackled to it we might say. They were slaves of sin and they could no more escape it than they could escape their own nature. But God changed them forever when he regenerated, when they were born again by His Spirit:

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

3rd that freedom consists of being delivered from the sting of Death, from damnation and from the victory of the Grave – Yes unless they are alive when Christ returns all believers will die, but Christ has taken the sting from death, so that when they die they enter into eternal life. Death for the believer is but a passing through the veil and into the glories of heaven. And while their bodies may rest in the grave for a while, some day even the physical effects of death will be reversed at the resurrection.

This is what Paul celebrates when he says in *1 Corinthians 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

4th it also means that New Testament believers have also been freed from the yoke of the Ceremonial Law: You'll notice that in these verses Paul mentions circumcision, elsewhere in Galatians he talks about the dietary restrictions. All of these things, including the sacrifices of the temple, the feasts of the Old Testament were types and shadows that pointed forward to Christ, who was the reality they prefigured. For instance,. As the author of Hebrews puts it, Hebrews 10:1 For the law, having a **shadow** of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

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Heb. 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

These shadows were given to the church in it's infancy to teach them about the coming Messiah Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb was meant to point forward to the LAMB OF GOD who takes away the sin of the World. So when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said BEHOLD the LAMB OF GOD. People understood what He was talking about. The Law was meant to be a Pedagogue to bring us to Christ. The Pedagogue was a Greek slave who would take the children to the academy and ensure they received the proper instruction. But when Christ the reality came in, to turn back to the shadows was to deny the once for all nature of the sacrifice of Christ.

So whether a man therefore was circumcised or uncircumcised *it had no bearing on his salvation*, which could only come through faith alone in Jesus Christ. In and of itself, circumcision was indifferent. It was just a cutting away of the flesh. These days the majority of male babies are circumcised in the hospital at birth for medical reasons. But if a man were circumcised, because he believed that this act of law keeping was necessary in order to be saved, as the Judaizers taught, then where was his confidence, his hope of salvation? It was in law keeping! It was in HIS WORKS, Not in faith alone in Christ. Similarly what you ate was of no importance, unless you thought that you had to keep Kosher in order to be saved. Then once again your confidence was in law keeping.

Now Next Week We will discuss the role of the moral law in the Christian life, and how the conscience of the Christian is free from being obligated to obey anything *not* commanded by God in His word. We'll also talk about traditions and things that are *indifferent* as well as those difficult areas where Christian disagree over issues of dressing, and drinking and behavior and what we must and must not do.

But for now, some quick applications

- 1) Observance of the ceremonial law is now useless and if observed as a means of being justified it is sinful and will never lead anyone to salvation: I make this point because there are

increasing numbers of Christians who are being led to observe the ceremonies of the law. They keep the Saturday Sabbath they try to follow the OT dietary law, the sort of observe the feast days – I say sort of because the center of those feasts were the sacrifices of the Temple and those have ended forever, sometimes they get circumcised. Now I'm not going to say that a Christian can't observe a Passover meal to see how the elements pointed forward to Christ, but if you start observing the ceremonies of the law as part of your salvation you have become entangled again in a yoke of bondage.

- 2) If you do not have faith in Christ then all the law observance in the world will not save you: There are plenty of people out there who would call themselves Christians, who think that by their being good and moral and trying to "live a good life" they can be saved. This too is legalism, and it will never save anyone.

All have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God. Let me explain the importance of falling short. Men in their works never compare themselves to what God requires for Justification which is perfection, one hundred percent obedience. Instead they compare themselves to other men. Inevitably men who are worse. In Paul's day the Pharisees compared themselves to the tax collectors and said "God, I thank You that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' " Today everyone compares themselves to Hitler or the worst of their neighbors. But closer isn't perfect. Kids if you need to score 70% to pass a test and one student scores 1% and the other scores 10% which one passed? Neither! If two men set out to swim from California to Japan and one man swims 5 miles and the other swims 30 **both lose**. Well that's silly Andy that's impossible, no one can swim from California to Japan. YES you've got it, salvation is like that!

Matthew 19:24 "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Or as Paul said:

Gal. 16 "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

3) Your Salvation does not depend upon your obedience, it depends on Christ's obedience: Now that Christian brothers and Sisters should be a great to you. It means that if I am in Christ I cannot lose my salvation, because it depends on Him, not me, it means I am not on the terrible legal treadmill of salvation by works, wondering if I will have enough on the last day to get me into heaven. It means God knows I am a sinner, I know I'm a sinner, and I don't have to pretend like the hypocrites that I am sinless. It means I am Free in Christ to love him and live for Him.