

Galatians

Chapter Five

Introduction

The Book of Galatians calls you to liberty in your walk with Jesus Christ. There are two persistent enemies to Christian liberty: One is *legalism*, the other is *license*.

Legalism is your flesh working through the law. License is your flesh walking in its lusts. They are extremes to be avoided if you are to experience liberty in your Christian walk.

Concerning legalism, Paul's exhortation is,

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.

Concerning license, Paul's exhortation is,

Galatians 5:13 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.

As the Apostle Paul develops his thoughts here in chapter five, we'll see that faith overcomes your flesh, and that love controls your liberty so that you avoid legalism and license.

#1 Faith Working Through Love Keeps You From Legalism (v1-12)

Legalism is your flesh working through the law. Look at the example of the Galatians: Having been saved by grace through faith apart from keeping any law, they were now willingly submitting themselves to portions of the Jewish law: They were being circumcised, and they were observing days and months and seasons and years. Having begun by faith, they were seeking to go on in the flesh. It was legalism - your flesh working through the law.

Paul's answer to their legalism is in verses one through twelve.

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.

A yoke is an implement by which two oxen are paired together in order to plow a field. The Jewish law was, and is, a burdensome yoke, with its many rules, rites, rituals, and regulations. Living by external laws is always a burdensome yoke. In His love, Jesus calls upon you to be yoked with Him instead, promising that His yoke is easy and His burden light. **You have a choice of yokes!** One, the law, is a hopeless life of effort in your flesh; the other, the love of Jesus, is a life of hope empowered by faith.

Galatians 5:2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

The Judaizers heavily pushed circumcision on the Galatians. The Judaizers taught that the promised blessings of God came to you on the basis of the works of your flesh; Paul taught that the promised blessings of God came to you on the basis of the working of faith. When you choose flesh over faith, "Christ will profit you nothing" because His promised blessings are *received* by faith, not *achieved* by the flesh.

Galatians 5:3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

This is vitally important to realize and to remember: You cannot pick and choose from God's law those things you feel are most important. If you choose to live under the law, then you must perfectly keep every jot and tittle of the law. All the days; all the diets; all the dress; all the disciplines. You can't become selective.

Since no one could possibly keep the law this way, Paul is correct in saying,

Galatians 5:4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

This verse in the KJV reads, "Christ has become of no effect unto you." It's not that you lose or forfeit your salvation; that is not what Paul is saying. You are saved - but you cannot receive the

spiritual blessings of grace that can only come to you by faith. While you are seeking to achieve God's grace in the flesh you cannot receive God's grace by faith. It's still available to you - but you have cut yourself off from it.

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

"The hope of righteousness" is the certainty that you will one day see Jesus and be changed. In the mean time you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you, changing you moment-by-moment and day-by-day to be more and more like Jesus. This process is your daily sanctification and it is accomplished "by faith."

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

If you are already circumcised, it doesn't help you to receive grace; if you are not already circumcised, it doesn't hinder you from receiving God's grace. Your flesh working through law is not how you enter or experience the Christian life. Faith working through love is God's plan for your life:

Your salvation is the response of faith working through love. The love of God for you in Jesus Christ elicits the response of faith...

Your sanctification is the response of faith working through love. The love of God is shed abroad in your heart by the indwelling Holy Spirit to elicit the response of faith. God's commands are God's enablements. By faith you believe God and are empowered to obey Him.

Galatians 5:7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Paul loved the illustration of the race. The Galatians are pictured as Olympic runners, maintaining their lanes as they sprinted toward the finish - only to have someone cut-in on them and stumble them.

By the way, the race illustration is never about maintaining your salvation. You had to already be a citizen before you could even

enter the race. It's about how well you run, and about the reward you will receive at the end.

Galatians 5:8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.
Galatians 5:9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

"Leaven" is the corrupting agent that causes bread to rise. In Scripture it is a symbol of the effects of sin. Sin spreads rapidly and corrupts all that it comes into contact with. The false teaching of the Judaizers was not from God; it was a corrupt and corrupting influence.

Galatians 5:10 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.

Galatians 5:11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

The Judaizers said that Paul still preached the necessity of circumcision; but, if that were true, why did they also persecute him? He preached the Cross; he preached the absolute necessity of faith apart from any works - which is always an offense to those who want to work through the flesh to please God.

Galatians 5:12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Strong words! Paul could wish that the Judaizers who preached circumcision would castrate themselves. He could wish that they were spiritually impotent and unable to gain converts to their false teaching.

Legalism is your flesh working through the law. Any law. In our studies we have suggested contemporary forms of legalism:

Among Roman Catholics - sacramentalism...

Among Protestants - many add works to the gospel, e.g., sabbath keeping... baptism... speaking in tongues...

Promise Keepers is believed by many to promote legalism...

Anytime your flesh is working through some law in order to produce godliness, it is legalism. You are instead told to stand fast in your liberty. The love of God, shed abroad in your heart by the indwelling Spirit, inspires the response of faith in the promises of God

and you are empowered to bring forth works that are pleasing to God. That is liberty.

#2 Faith Walking In Love
Keeps You From License
(v13-26)

License is your flesh walking in its lusts. Whenever you preach on the grace of God and the liberty of believers there comes the accusation that it will lead to sinful living.

Not so!

Galatians 5:13 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.

God's love shed abroad in your heart by God's Spirit prompts you away from self to serve others.

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

If you love others with God's love, you will find yourself fulfilling every point of the law. Think of it: If you love someone, you won't steal from him or her; you won't covet their possessions; you won't commit sexual sin with them... *It goes on and on!* Love is the only principle you need. You will treat others as you treat yourself and as you would want to be treated.

You are enabled to love others by the indwelling Spirit; and this love keeps you from license - it keeps you from walking in your lusts.

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

All was not well in the churches of Galatia. There was backbiting, gossip, slander, and the like. Paul compared them to wild beasts seeking to devour one another. In verse twenty-six he says,

Galatians 5:26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

If the love of God was shed abroad in their hearts, how could this be?

Galatians 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Galatians 5:17 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.

You still have a sinful human nature within you. Your flesh still seeks to walk in its lusts. But you can choose instead to walk in the Spirit.

Let's get right to the secret of how you walk in the Spirit! It's found in verses twenty-four through twenty-six:

Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Sin is present in you and with you; but its power over you is broken. Jesus' death on the Cross is said to exert power over your sinful flesh. Your sin nature was crucified with Jesus at Calvary. You are to consider your sin nature, with its lusts, passions, and desires, as being dead. If it is dead you need not yield to it.

How do you do this? ***You do it by faith!*** Look back at verse eighteen:

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Victory over sin cannot be *achieved* by being under some law. It is *received* as a benefit of the crucifixion of Jesus. Think of it this way: Victory over sin comes from crucifixion; *crucifixion is a form of death you cannot inflict upon yourself!* You don't achieve crucifixion by keeping laws; you receive its benefits by faith. You simply believe God's Word that your sin nature has no power over you because it has been crucified on the Cross of Jesus. You simply believe that you can choose to say "No" to sin and "Yes" to the Spirit.

If you have crucified your flesh and received its benefits by faith, you won't walk in the lusts of your flesh. Paul describes the lusts of the flesh:

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

Galatians 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

Galatians 5:21 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.

Do Christians do these things? Yes, they do. But they don't "practice" such things; they don't continually, habitually practice these things. If you do, you are not a Christian.

The point Paul is making is that a Christian who experiences liberty from the law will not live according to the lusts of his or her flesh. They will still sin occasionally; but they cannot sin habitually since the Spirit lives within them.

Liberty doesn't lead to license; it leads to *love*:

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Galatians 5:23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

"Fruit" is singular. There is only one fruit of the Spirit - Love. The other things listed are the characteristics that describe love.

God's supernatural "love" shed abroad in my heart produces "joy" and "peace." No matter your circumstances, you know God loves you and you can walk in joy and in peace.

"Longsuffering" is tolerance that endures the suffering inflicted on you by others. Someone told me this week that the Chinese character that represents longsuffering is a heart with a knife through it. "Kindness" is having a tender concern for the well-being of others. "Goodness" is acting in the best interests of others; it is kindness in action.

"Faithfulness" has to do with loyalty, dependability, and trustworthiness. "Gentleness" marks a person who is submissive to

God's Word and who is considerate of others when they fail. "Self-control" is the willing restraint of sinful passions.

License is your flesh walking in its lusts. Liberty does not lead to license. The Holy Spirit living in you leads you in the way of love. Faith in the crucifixion of Jesus gives you victory over your lusts and frees you to walk in love toward others.

Conclusion

When there is no law, you normally think there will be license. Those are the two extremes Christians fall into. They fall into legalism - the flesh working through some law; or they fall into license - the flesh walking in its lusts.

At the end of verse twenty-three Paul says, "Against such there is no law." You do not live by law; you walk in liberty. And liberty will not lead to license if you are led by the Spirit.

The love of God shed abroad in your heart by the indwelling Holy Spirit fulfills all the law and it forbids any license. That is true Christian liberty - you are set free to love God and to love others as yourself.