

Galatians 5

THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE OF LIBERTY

Student Guide

Daily Bible Reading

Day 1	Galatians 5: 1-6
Day 2	Galatians 5: 7-15
Day 3	Galatians 5: 16-26
Day 4	Galatians 5: 1-26
Day 5	Galatians 5: 1-26
Day 6	Galatians 5: 1-26
Day 7	Galatians 5: 1-26

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 the 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.

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

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 (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). 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." 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.

Second, Paul *defends* Christian liberty (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. 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? 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." 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" which is a reference to returning to the Old Testament law of circumcision, not failing to live Christian principles.

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.

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

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 into bondage and ultimately would kill the church. Legalism prevents growth. 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 (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 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.

Finally, the third option is the life of love (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.

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

The Galatians had freedom, but the freedom they experienced was under severe threat. 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 (vv. 17-18). The term "contrary" means "to oppose" or "to stand against." Hence, Paul refers to an unrelenting warfare, 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).

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.

On the other side stands 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*, *The Manward Cluster*, and *The Selfward Cluster*.

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.

Finally, Paul observes the *conquest* we obtain (vv. 23b-26). 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. Those who walk in the Spirit of Christ thrive in the freedom from Christ.

Wrap Up

Christians should love the freedom we have because we are living in Christ. Unfortunately, the Galatians had been duped into believing that 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 it 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).