

Galatians

Lesson 11

Christ Has Set Us Free

Galatians 5: 1-18

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

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

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

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

8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you.

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

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

In our last lesson we saw that both Ismael and Isaac were offspring of Abraham, yet each represents a totally different approach to God.

Ismael, the child of the flesh, represents the works of the flesh.

Isaac, the child of promise, represents the grace of God.

The two lived for a time in the same household, growing together in their father's home.

There came a time when the child of flesh was cast out to give way for the child of promise.

These two brothers painted a clear picture for us of the Law verses the Abrahamic Covenant.

Just as Isaac was promised to Abraham and Sarah before the birth of Ismael by the flesh, so the Covenant God made with Abraham was given before the Law came onto the scene.

After the birth of Ismael, the promise of the son was fulfilled; Isaac was born.

For a time, the two existed together, but the child of the flesh never had a part in the inheritance of the child of promise.

That's why eventually the illegitimate son had to go to give place to the true son of Abraham, the one who came not by natural means, but by the promise and power of God.

Paul was trying to teach the Galatians that like us, they were not the offspring of Ismael, but that of Isaac.

As such, like us, they had no part in the Law, and the Law had no part in them.

In Christ Jesus they had been set free from the Law of sin and death that they might freely live unto righteousness and peace.

Let's start by considering **Verse 1a** *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore,*

The expression, "**stand firm**," is a military term meaning to, "**hold ones ground.**"

This means that once Christians have gained ground in their spiritual life, they are to hold fast to it and not allow the enemy to take it from them.

As we know to be true, liberty is freedom, but freedom is not free.

It doesn't come easy.

Nor does a person remain free without effort.

In other words, Paul was warning against religion for religions sake, man made rules and regulations that provides the appearance of godliness and devotion by its imposed restraints but which has no real power to bless, heal and set free.

Verse 1b, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Paul urges the Galatians withstand anyone that would attempt to convince them that they needed to be in bondage to the Law.

He wants the Galatians to be free, totally free.

Freedom from religion as much as sin.

Churches that preach a constant message of Do's and Don'ts, rules and regulations, eventually dry up and die because God wants us to focus on the fact that He is so much more a Liberator than a Dictator.

Verses 2-6 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

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

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

The big issue in Galatia currently was circumcision, which was part of the Mosaic Law, part of the Old Covenant.

Even in the day that it was instituted by God, it was never meant to provide salvation, because the Law not given to provide salvation.

Once again, it was provided to reveal to mankind of its need for a savior.

Circumcision was outward physical sign of the Covenant between God and Abraham.

Circumcision didn't save Abraham; it was just supposed to symbolize outwardly what had happened to him inwardly.

Verse 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

So, once again, circumcision has natural or medical benefits, but no spiritual benefits.

So, if a Galatian man chose to be circumcised so that he would achieve salvation, then Christ would be of no value to him.

This reminds me of why we celebrate our Christianity by following Christ's example of water baptism.

Water baptism does not save us; however, it is an outward sign of what God has done for us in our spirit.

Now, Paul is writing to the Galatians to inform them that by depending on a physical symbol of the Old Covenant relationship, they were depriving themselves of the spiritual reality which the symbol represented.

Verse 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

Pay close attention, in verse 2, Paul was referring to circumcision as means of obtaining salvation.

In verse 3, he is speaking to the issue of attempting to achieve spiritual maturity through circumcision.

Once again, the fallacy of this concept is made clear in ***James 2: 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.***

Verse 4 *You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.*

When Paul speaks here of being, **“justified,”** he is referring to the New Birth experience.

He is saying that anyone who is trying to be born again by keeping the Law is destined to failure.

I am reminded of what it says in **John 14: 6** *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Therefore, Paul refers to people working to achieve salvation, that they have fallen from grace in verse 4.

Final warning, anyone insisting on winning their salvation by their own efforts will never have it.

Verse 5 *For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.*

Remember that one of the fruits of the Spirit is patience.

Patience always looks forward to the hope of righteousness that lies ahead of us.

Sometimes, we get tired of waiting on God, so we jump up and take Hagar by the hand, which always has, and always will be a mistake that ends up costing more than if we had simply exercised faith a little while longer.

Verse 6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

It is faith that pleases God, not an outward work of circumcision.

So, whether a person is circumcised or not, is of no significance to God today!

Verse 7 *You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*

The first part of this verse says, **7a** *You were running well.*

Here Paul compares our faith life with a race, in which many runners compete.

He says that the Galatians had been running the race well.

When was that?

The first time Paul came to Galatia.

Remember when we took the time to look closely at **Acts 14**, where we have a detailed record of how that visit went.

The Galatians received Paul graciously, they listened to him intently, they were quickly born again, filled with the Spirit, set free from idolatry, liberated from bondage, became new creations in Christ Jesus.

Verse 7b, Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

The Greek word translated, "***hindered***," is taken from the ancient Greek foot races.

It refers to the action of one runner cuts across the path of another knocking him off his stride and slowing him down, maybe even causing him to fall.

Paul is saying to these people: You began your race so well, who has cut in front of you to trip you up.

Verses 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you.

In other words, it is not God that is cutting you off and making you trip and fall by following the Law.

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Here Paul refers to the Law as leaven.

In the bible, leaven is never used to symbolize anything good.

For example, look at **Mark 8: 15** ***And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."***

A little bit of Law will obligate them to keep it all.

What is the answer to this problem?

The solution is to purge all the leaven out of the lump.

This is how it is with our lives today.

The Spirit of God does not cohabit with sin.

That's why we have to take heed to beware of the leaven.

We have to be on guard against the leaven of the Law which brought sin.

To live a life truly pleasing to God, we must avoid, "works of the Law," as carefully as we avoid, "works of iniquity."

One gets us out of God's grace, one gets us out of God's will.

And neither gets us any closer to righteousness.

Verse 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

Paul is making a positive faith statement here in this passage that he is confident that they will repent of this misinformation and that whoever is responsible will be dealt with by God.

Verse 11a, But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?

I can only surmise from this passage of scripture that whoever it was that was leading the Galatian church down this path, were also telling them that Paul is a Messianic Jew.

And furthermore, that he believes and practices everything you are being taught about living by the Law.

If the great Apostle Paul believed in and practiced circumcision, then who were they to refuse to adhere to the practice.

What Paul was pointing out here is that if he were an advocate of the falsehoods that the Galatian Church was being taught, then why were these Judaizers continuing to fight and resist him, if he were truly one of them.

Verse 11b, In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

Paul points out that if he were trusting in the Law for his salvation, then the cross of Jesus Christ would have no significance.

The “offence” of the cross referred to here is its simplicity: simplicity of salvation, simplicity of spirituality.

Once you grasp the truth that the cross paid fully for all our sin, God can now forgive all those sins, clothe us in righteousness.

Verse 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

You know, in the KJV, this verse of scripture is much kinder in its expression.

Not here in the ESV.

What I am about to translate for you is a little delicate, so skip this part if you are skittish.

Loosely translated, what Paul is saying is, “If those Jewish troublemakers think cutting off a little piece of flesh pleases God, then in order to really please Him, they ought to go further and cut off the whole thing.”

Although this statement may seem rather crude and extreme to us in our modern and refined thinking, the Galatians understood Paul’s meaning perfectly.

So did the religious Jews at whom the statement was aimed.

Paul had warned against the heathenistic practice of self-mutilation because it was an abomination before the Lord.

That makes his reference in **verse 12**, all the more extreme.



www.lifespringak.com
info@lifespringak.com
(907)222-0850

Verse 13a, For you were called to freedom, brothers.

There will always be people who fear teaching liberty in Christ, because of concerns that it will lead people to live self-indulgent and sinful lives.

That may happen to some degree.

I am convinced that human nature alone, will cause some to convince themselves that kind of living will work for them and still allow them to enter heaven.

Still, I would rather preach the message of love and liberty to live a sinless life before God in Christ.

Verse 13b, Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,

Paul brings out this same idea in ***Romans 6: 1-2 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?***

2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Even though we are not under the Law but under grace, that does not mean we are free to indulge ourselves.

We may have the freedom to sin, we are not free from the consequences.

Verse 13c, but through love serve one another.

The flesh always calls attention to itself.

But love, it draws attention to others.

Use your liberty in Christ to choose love, not the desires of the flesh.

Selfishness demands that its own desires are fulfilled; love seeks to fulfill the desires of others before your own.

Even scientists tell us that the drive for self-preservation is one of the strongest of all in-born human traits.



www.lifespringak.com
info@lifespringak.com
(907)222-0850

It goes against the grain of our human nature, our flesh, to put others first, especially if it means suffering loss.

That's why our human nature will never be able to please God.

It's too self-centered.

That's why we have to receive a new nature, a new Spirit that is not self-centered.

That Spirit will lead a person in the paths of righteousness, truth, and blessing.

The Spirit of God is the nature of God.

And what is God's nature?

Look at **1 John 4: 16**, *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*

We call this the Law of love.

This is the subject of the rest of the letter to the Galatians.

Verse 14, *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

It is only fitting that Paul would end this part of the letter with these remarks.

He is concentrating on love because love is the fulfillment of the Law.

If we walk in love, we will fulfill the Law.

Verse 15, *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

What does a person bite with?

Your first thought might go straight to teeth.



www.lifespringak.com
info@lifespringak.com
(907)222-0850

More accurately here, what Paul is referring to is our mouth.

What Paul is referring to here is sins of the tongue such as gossiping and maligning.

It's not necessary to be around other people to bite and devour them.

All it takes is malicious talk.

Paul taught us in Galatians that faith works by love.

If we Christians bite and devour one another, we will never be great men and women of faith.

Look at **1 Corinthians 13: 1-3** *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

2 *And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

3 *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

Remember, love edifies, but hate demolishes.

Love encourages, helps, builds up, but sins of the tongue discourage, hinder, and destroys.

Verse 16, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

What does it mean to, "**walk by the Spirit?**"

It means to be led of the Spirit of God Who witnesses to our reborn human spirit.

The Holy Spirit in our spirit will always lead us in the will of God.

And, if we are led of the Spirit of God, we will always walk in love.



www.lifespringak.com
info@lifespringak.com
(907)222-0850

If you are wondering if you are hearing from God about your life or just confused by your own desires, the true test is always the same.

Does the leading your wanting to follow line up with the written word of God.

Verse 17, For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

We have no real evidence that Abraham had no serious problems in his home, until he took up with Hagar.

The moment she rose in importance in Abraham's life when she became equal with Sarah, things began to go wrong.

So it is with us.

Your flesh is fine if you keep it on the level of a slave.

To be led by the Spirit means keeping the flesh in its place.

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

Remember that your flesh is synonymous with the flesh.

If you allow yourself to become subject to the Law, your flesh, then you begin to reap the harvest of the flesh.

But if you subject yourself to the Spirit, then you walk in the blessing of Abraham.

If you are led of the Spirit of God, you are not under the Law.



www.lifespringak.com
info@lifespringak.com
(907)222-0850



www.lifespringak.com
info@lifespringak.com
(907)222-0850