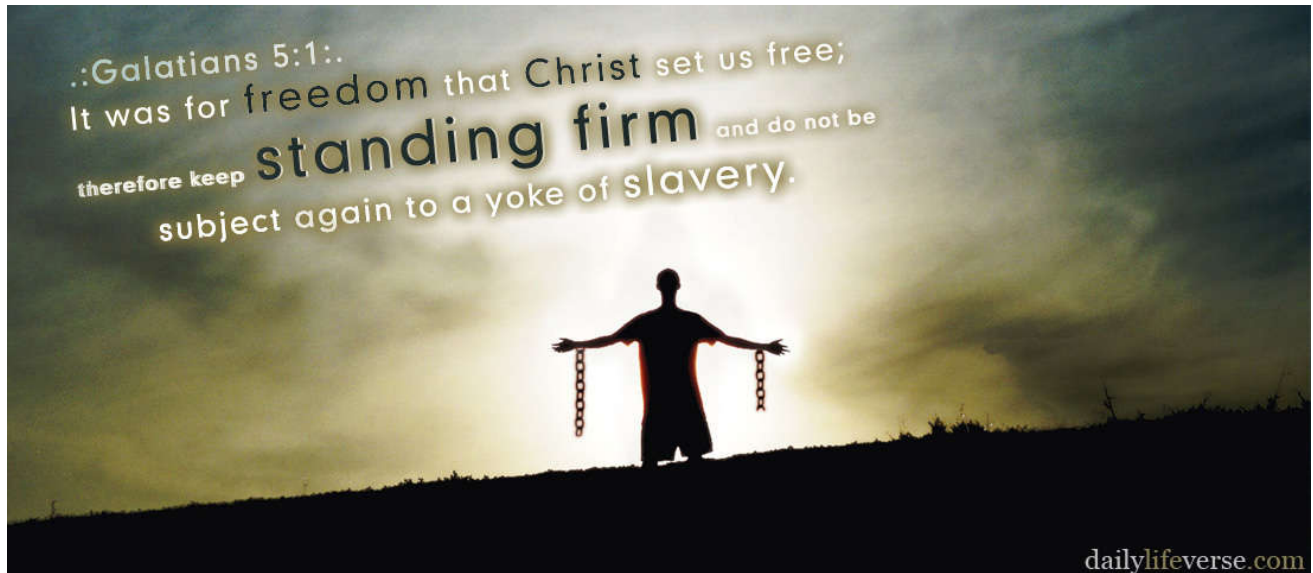


9. Christian Liberty



Gal 5:1-11

- (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.

Galatians 5:1



[Gal 5:1-26](#). *Peroration. Exhortation to stand fast in the Gospel liberty, just set forth, and not to be led by Judaizers into circumcision, or Law justification: Yet though free, to serve one another by love: To walk in the Spirit, bearing the fruit thereof, not in the works of the flesh.*

The oldest manuscripts read, “in liberty (so Alford, Moberley, Humphry, and Ellicott. But as there is no *Greek* for ‘in,’ as there is in translating in [1Co 16:13](#); [Phi 1:27](#); [Phi 4:1](#), I prefer ‘It is FOR freedom that’) Christ hath made us free (not *in*, or *for*, a state of bondage). Stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage” (namely, the law, [Gal 4:24](#); [Act 15:10](#)). On “again,” see on [Gal 4:9](#).

Galatians 5:2

Behold — that is, Mark what I say.

I Paul — Though you now think less of my authority, I nevertheless give my name and personal authority as enough by itself to refute all opposition of adversaries.

if ye be circumcised — not as Alford, “If you will *go on being* circumcised.” Rather, “If ye suffer yourselves to be circumcised,” namely, under the notion of its being necessary to *justification* ([Gal 5:4](#); [Act 15:1](#)). Circumcision here is not regarded simply by itself (for, viewed as a mere *national* rite, it was practiced for conciliation’s sake by Paul himself, [Act 16:3](#)), but as the symbol of *Judaism* and *legalism in general*. If this be necessary, then the Gospel of grace is at an end. If the latter be the way of justification, then Judaism is in no way so.

Christ ... profit ... nothing — ([Gal 2:21](#)). For righteousness of works and justification by faith cannot co-exist. “He who is circumcised [for justification] is so as fearing the law, and he who fears, disbelieves the power of grace, and he who disbelieves can profit nothing by that grace which he disbelieves [Chrysostom].

Galatians 5:3

For — *Greek*, “Yea, more”; “Moreover.”

I testify ... to every man — as well as “unto you” ([Gal 5:2](#)).

that is circumcised — that submits to be circumcised. Such a one became a “proselyte of righteousness.”

the whole law — impossible for man to keep even in part, much less *wholly* ([Jam 2:10](#)); yet none can be justified by the law, unless he keep it *wholly* ([Gal 3:10](#)).

Galatians 5:4

Literally, “Ye have become void from Christ,” that is, your connection with Christ has become void ([Gal 5:2](#)). [Rom 7:2](#), “Loosed from the law,” where the same *Greek* occurs as here.

whosoever of you are justified — “are being justified,” that is, are *endeavoring* to be justified.

by the law — *Greek*, “IN the law,” as the element *in* which justification is to take place.

fallen from grace — Ye no longer “*stand*” in grace ([Rom 5:2](#)). Grace and legal righteousness cannot co-exist ([Rom 4:4](#), [Rom 4:5](#); [Rom 11:6](#)). Christ, by circumcision ([Luk 2:21](#)), undertook to obey all the law, and fulfil all righteousness for us: any, therefore, that now seeks to fulfil the law for himself in any degree for justifying righteousness, severs himself from the grace which flows from Christ’s fulfillment of it, and becomes “a debtor to do the whole law” ([Gal 5:3](#)). The decree of the Jerusalem council had said nothing so strong as this; it had merely decided that Gentile Christians were not bound to legal observances. But the Galatians, while not pretending to be so *bound*, imagined there was an efficacy in them to merit a higher degree of *perfection* ([Gal 3:3](#)). This accounts for Paul not referring to the decree at all. He took much higher ground. See Paley’s *Horae Paulinae*. The natural mind loves outward fetters, and is apt to forge them for itself, to stand in lieu of holiness of heart.

Galatians 5:5

For — proof of the assertion, “fallen from grace,” by contrasting with the case of *legalists*, the “hope” of *Christians*.

through the Spirit — *Greek*, rather, “by the Spirit”: in opposition to *by the flesh* ([Gal 4:29](#)), or fleshly ways of justification, as circumcision and legal ordinances. “We” is emphatical, and contrasted with “whosoever of you would be justified by the law” ([Gal 5:4](#)).

the hope of righteousness — “We wait for the (realization of the) hope (which is the fruit) of the righteousness (that is, justification which comes) by (literally, ‘*from - out of*’) faith,” [Rom 5:1](#), [Rom 5:4](#), [Rom 5:5](#); [Rom 8:24](#), [Rom 8:25](#), “*Hope ... we with patience wait for it.*” This is a farther step than being “justified”; not only are we this, but “wait for the hope” which is connected with it, and is its full consummation. “Righteousness,” in the sense of justification, is by the believer once for all already attained: but the consummation of it in future perfection above is the object of *hope* to be *waited for*: “the crown of righteousness laid up” ([2Ti 4:8](#)): “the hope laid up for you in heaven” ([Col 1:5](#); [1Pe 1:3](#)).

Galatians 5:6

For — confirming the truth that it is “by faith” ([Gal 5:5](#)).

in Jesus Christ — *Greek*, “in Christ Jesus.” In union with *Christ* (the ANOINTED Savior), that is, *Jesus* of Nazareth.

nor uncircumcision — This is leveled against those who, being not legalists, or Judaizers, think themselves Christians on this ground alone.

faith which worketh by love — *Greek*, “working by love.” This corresponds to “a new creature” ([Gal 6:15](#)), as its definition. Thus in [Gal 5:5](#), [Gal 5:6](#), we have the three, “faith,” “hope,” and “love.” The *Greek* expresses, “Which effectually worketh”; which exhibits its *energy* by love (so [1Th 2:13](#)). *Love* is not joined with *faith* in justifying, but is the principle of the works which follow after justification by faith. Let not legalists, upholding circumcision, think that the essence of the law is set at naught by the doctrine of justification by faith only. Nay, “all the law is fulfilled in one word - love,” which is the principle on which “faith worketh” ([Gal 5:14](#)). Let them, therefore, seek this “faith,” which will enable them truly to fulfil the law. Again, let not those who pride themselves on uncircumcision think that, because the law does not justify, they are free to walk after “the flesh” ([Gal 5:13](#)). Let them, then, seek that “love” which is inseparable from true faith ([Jam 2:8](#), [Jam 2:12-22](#)). Love is utterly opposed to the enmities which prevailed among the Galatians ([Gal 5:15](#), [Gal 5:20](#)). The Spirit ([Gal 5:5](#)) is a Spirit of “faith” and “love” (compare [Rom 14:17](#); [1Co 7:19](#)).

Galatians 5:7

Translate, “Ye were running well” in the Gospel race ([1Co 9:24-26](#); [Phi 3:13](#), [Phi 3:14](#)).
who, etc. — none whom you ought to have listened to [Bengel]: alluding to the Judaizers (compare [Gal 3:1](#)).

hinder — The *Greek* means, literally, “hinder by breaking up a road.”

not obey the truth — not submit yourselves to the true Gospel way of justification.

Galatians 5:8

This persuasion — *Greek*, “*The persuasion*,” namely, to which you are yielding. There is a play on words in the original, the *Greek* for *persuasion* being akin to “*obey*” ([Gal 5:7](#)). This persuasion which ye have *obeyed*.

cometh not of — that is “from.” Does not emanate from Him, but from an enemy.

that calleth you — ([Gal 5:13](#); [Gal 1:6](#); [Phi 3:14](#); [1Th 5:24](#)). The calling is the rule of the whole race [Bengel].

Galatians 5:9

A little leaven — the *false teaching* of the Judaizers. A small portion of legalism, if it be mixed with the Gospel, corrupts its purity. To add legal ordinances and works in the least degree to justification by faith, is to undermine “the whole.” So “leaven” is used of *false doctrine* ([Mat 16:12](#) : compare [Mat 13:33](#)). In [1Co 5:6](#) it means the corrupting influence of one bad *person*; so Bengel understands it here to refer to the person ([Gal 5:7](#), [Gal 5:8](#), [Gal 5:10](#)) who misled them. [Ecc 9:18](#), “One sinner destroyeth much good” ([1Co 15:33](#)). I prefer to refer it to false *doctrine*, answering to “persuasion” ([Gal 5:8](#)).

Galatians 5:10

Greek, “I (emphatical: *I on my part*) have confidence in the Lord *with regard to you* ([2Th 3:4](#)), that ye will be none otherwise minded” (than what by this Epistle I desire you to be, [Phi 3:15](#)).

but he that troubleth you — ([Gal 1:7](#); [Act 15:24](#); [Jos 7:25](#); [1Ki 18:17](#), [1Ki 18:18](#)). Some one, probably, was prominent among the seducers, though the denunciation applies to them all ([Gal 1:7](#); [Gal 4:17](#)).

shall bear — as a heavy burden.

his — *his due and inevitable* judgment from God. Paul distinguishes the case of the seduced, who were misled through thoughtlessness, and who, now that they are set right by him, he confidently hopes, in God’s goodness, will return to the right way, from that of the seducer who is doomed to judgment.

whosoever he be — whether great ([Gal 1:8](#)) or small.

Galatians 5:11

Translate, “If I am still preaching (as I did before conversion) circumcision, why am I still persecuted?” The Judaizing troubler of the Galatians had said, “Paul himself preaches circumcision,” as is shown by his having circumcised Timothy ([Act 16:3](#); compare also [Act 20:6](#); [Act 21:24](#)). Paul replies by anticipation of their objection, As regards myself, the fact that I am still persecuted by the Jews shows plainly that I do *not* preach circumcision; for it is

just because I preach Christ crucified, and not the Mosaic law, as the sole ground of justification, that they persecute me. If for conciliation he lived as a Jew among the Jews, it was in accordance with his principle enunciated ([1Co 7:18](#), [1Co 7:20](#); [1Co 9:20](#)). Circumcision, or uncircumcision, are things indifferent in themselves: their lawfulness or unlawfulness depends on the *animus* of him who uses them. The Gentile Galatians' animus in circumcision could only be their supposition that it influenced favorably their standing before God. Paul's living as a Gentile among Gentiles, plainly showed that, if he lived as a Jew among Jews, it was not that he thought it meritorious before God, but as a matter indifferent, wherein he might lawfully conform as a *Jew by birth* to those with whom he was, in order to put no needless stumbling-block to the Gospel in the way of his countrymen.

then — Presuming that I did so, “then,” in that case, “the offense of (stumbling-block, [1Co 1:23](#) occasioned to the Jews by) the cross has become done away.” Thus the Jews' accusation against Stephen was not that he preached Christ crucified, but that “he spake blasphemous words against this holy place and *the law*.” They would, in some measure, have borne the former, if he had mixed with it justification in part by circumcision and the law, and if he had, through the medium of Christianity, brought converts to Judaism. But if justification in any degree depended on legal ordinances, Christ's crucifixion in that degree was unnecessary, and could profit nothing ([Gal 5:2](#), [Gal 5:4](#)). Worldly Wiseman, of the town of Carnal Policy, turns Christian out of the narrow way of the Cross, to the house of Legality. But the way to it was up a mountain, which, as Christian advanced, threatened to fall on him and crush him, amidst flashes of lightning from the mountain [Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*] ([Heb 12:18-21](#)).

Galatians 5:12

they ... which trouble you — Translate, as the *Greek* is different from [Gal 5:10](#), “they who are *unsettling* you.”

were even cut off — even as they desire your foreskin to be *cut off* and cast away by circumcision, so would that *they were even cut off* from your communion, being worthless as a castaway foreskin ([Gal 1:7](#), [Gal 1:8](#); compare [Phi 3:2](#)). The fathers, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and Chrysostom, explain it, “Would that they would even cut themselves off,” that is, cut off not merely the foreskin, but the whole member: if *circumcision* be not enough for them, then let them have *excision* also; an outburst hardly suitable to the gravity of an apostle. But [Gal 5:9](#), [Gal 5:10](#) plainly point to *excommunication* as the judgment threatened against the troublers: and danger of the bad “leaven” spreading, as the reason for it.

Galatians 5:13

The “ye” is emphatical, from its position in the *Greek*, “Ye brethren”; as opposed to those legalists “who trouble you.”

unto liberty — The *Greek* expresses, “on a footing of liberty.” The *state* or *condition* in which ye have been called to salvation, is one of liberty. Gospel liberty consists in three things, freedom from the Mosaic yoke, from sin, and from slavish fear.

only, etc. — Translate, “Only turn not *your* liberty into an occasion for the flesh.” Do not give the flesh the handle or pretext ([Rom 7:8](#), “occasion”) for its indulgence which it eagerly seeks for; do not let it make Christian “liberty” its pretext for indulgence ([Gal 5:16](#), [Gal 5:17](#); [1Pe 2:16](#); [2Pe 2:19](#); [Jud 1:4](#)).

but by love serve one another — *Greek*, “Be servants (be in bondage) to one another.” If ye must be *servants*, then *be servants to one another in love*. While free as to legalism, be *bound* by Love (the article in the *Greek* personifies love in the abstract) to serve one another

([1Co 9:19](#)). Here he hints at their unloving strifes springing out of lust of power. “For the lust of power is the mother of heresies” [Chrysostom].

Galatians 5:14

all the law — *Greek*, “the whole law,” namely, the Mosaic law. *Love to God* is presupposed as the root from which *love to our neighbor* springs; and it is in this tense the latter *precept* (so “word” means here) is said to be the fulfilling of “*all the law*” ([Lev 19:18](#)). Love is “the law of Christ” ([Gal 6:2](#); [Mat 7:12](#); [Mat 22:39](#), [Mat 22:40](#); [Rom 13:9](#), [Rom 13:10](#)).

is fulfilled — Not as received text “is being fulfilled,” but as the oldest manuscripts read, “has been fulfilled”; and so “receives its full perfection,” as rudimentary teachings are fulfilled by the more perfect doctrine. The law only united Israelites together: the Gospel unites all men, and that in relation to God [Grotius].

Galatians 5:15

bite — *backbite* the character.

devour — the substance by injuring, extortion, etc. ([Hab 1:13](#); [Mat 23:14](#); [2Co 11:20](#)).

consumed, etc. — Strength of soul, health of body, character, and resources, are all consumed by broils [Bengel].