

LESSON NINE

(5:1-15)

Set Free To Be Free (5:1-6)

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

2 Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound 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 wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.

The evidence has been offered; the arguments have been made. Now Paul is ready for his great conclusion: We are free because Christ has set us free! As free men, we owe nothing to the bondage of legalism. And if we should ever go back and yield to this yoke of bondage, we would cease to be free, and we would cease to be in Christ.

V. 1 For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free - This is the good news of Galatians. This is the conclusion to which all the arguments of Chapters 3 and 4 were leading. Christ set us free to live the life of freedom.

Stand Fast Therefore - The Galatian Christians were facing both persecution and perverted teaching. As liberated slaves, they must cherish and defend their freedom. (A more complete translation of the Greek verb would be “take your stand and keep on standing.”)

Do Not Submit Again To A Yoke Of Slavery - This is a highly derogatory way to refer to keeping the law of Moses. Hebrews 6:4-6 pronounces a terrible verdict on those who forsake freedom in Christ and return to lawkeeping. In a similar vein, II Pet. 2:21 says it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back.

V. 2 Now I, Paul, Say To You - On the basis of his apostolic authority, proved in Chapters 1 and 2, Paul speaks the final word on this subject.

If You Receive Circumcision - The reference is not to past action, but to the future. “Now that you have the whole picture, what are you going to do? If you go ahead and choose circumcision anyway, Christ can do you no good.”

Christ Will Be Of No Advantage To You - Christ cannot profit the legalist anything. The reason is that the legalist lacks faith - which is necessary to salvation. Concluding that Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient, he desperately tries to save himself. He is like the drowning man who tries to “help” the lifeguard save him by struggling to climb up out of the water. We can be saved only when we surrender. If Jesus is to save us, we must yield to His Authority and trust Him. We must quit fighting to save ourselves and do whatever He tells us.

V. 3 I Testify Again - There is an air of solemn finality about what Paul says. Compare this repetition of vital truth (verses 2 and 3) with Chapter one, verses 8 and 9.

To Every Man Who Receives Circumcision - This has no application to modern circumcision practiced for reasons of hygiene. It applies to the man who chooses to wear the badge of law-keeping because he doubts the sufficiency of what Jesus did at Calvary.

That He Is Bound To Keep The Whole Law - Circumcision was not merely an isolated commandment in the Old Testament. It signified entrance into the covenant relationship. It was the physical symbol of the whole law. If any man expects to earn God's favor through the law, he had better plan to be very busy, for there is an enormous task awaiting him.

V. 4 You Are Severed From Christ - Those who pledge allegiance to the law, through circumcision, cut themselves off from Christ. The word “severed” means having nothing more to

do with, or being abolished from. It is the same word used in Rom. 7:2, where a married woman is discharged from" the law binding her to her husband when the husband dies. Legalists are thus discharged from Christ and His atoning sacrifice when they try to defend upon the law.

You Who Would Be Justified By The Law - This could also be translated "you who are trying to justify yourselves by law." One can trust in Jesus or in law, but not both.

You Have Fallen Away From Grace - To rely upon works is to reject grace. This verse teaches us two most important facts: (1) It is indeed possible to fall from grace and sever yourself from Christ. (2) In this context, at least, the way to fall from grace is to fall back on to works of law, rather than trusting God's promise.

The word for "fall away" was used of ships that had gone off course and were no longer heading for the intended destination. The word in this verse is not so strong as the word used in Heb 6:6. That word was used of ships that were not only off course, but completely lost. Here in Galatians the possibility of return is in mind.

V. 5 For Through The Spirit, By Faith - We who sadly admit our inability to save ourselves can only cast ourselves upon God's mercy and grace. We look ahead to Judgment Day, where we will take our stand not upon works of law, but upon faith, through God's own Spirit.

We Wait For The Hope Of Righteousness - The verdict of innocence is eagerly awaited by those who trust in Jesus. We will not get what we deserve, but what He deserved! Just as our father Abraham, we do not stand in line to be paid for our services, but humbly await the gift of God's grace. (See Rom. 4:1-5)

V. 6 For In Christ Jesus - We have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27) where the old divisions between male and female, free and slave, Jew and Greek are erased. God does not care whether a man has been circumcised or not. What does matter is whether that man is in Christ.

Neither Circumcision Nor Uncircumcision Is Of Any Avail - Paul is taking neither a pro-circumcision nor an anti-circumcision stand. It is neither the keeping nor the breaking of the old law that matters, since the law itself has been canceled.

But Faith Working Through Love - What counts with God is faith - active, working faith. This phrase strikes the perfect balance between the two extremes of "faith only" vs. "working my way to Heaven." Faith which is inactive and unproductive is dead and worthless (James 2:14-26). Likewise, all efforts toward earning our own righteousness through good works are doomed to failure.

Does God expect good works or not? Are good works a necessary part of salvation, or are they not? Perhaps it can be explained in this way: God does not want works of law; He wants works of love. God does not want works produced by fear, attempting to earn salvation; He wants works produced by faith, responding in love because salvation has already been given.

A Little Bad Leaven (5:7-15)

7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who called you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is troubling you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. 11 But if I, brethren, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? In that case the stumbling block of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would mutilate themselves!

13 For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of 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 take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

V. 7 You Were Running Well - The Christian life is often described as a race (Heb. 12:1; II Tim. 4:7). In this race the Galatians got off to a good start by the preaching of Paul.

Who Hindered You From Obeying The Truth? - The word "hindered" alludes to the ancient military practice of cutting trenches across the road to stop an advancing army. The false

teachers had put this kind of spiritual impediment in the way of the Galatians, when they persuaded them to turn from the true gospel.

V. 8 This Persuasion Is Not From Him Who Called You - This reminds us of the words of Paul in 1:6, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you.”

V. 9 A Little Leaven Leavens The Whole Lump - Just as one rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel, a little false teaching goes a long ways. The use of leaven to illustrate an evil influence was also used by Jesus in Matt. 16:6.

V. 10 I Have Confidence - Paul expresses confidence that his “brethren,” as he calls them twice in the next three verses, will accept his epistle as truth. They will agree that the legalistic influence of the Judaizers is not from God. For similar expressions of confidence following stern rebukes, see Heb. 6:9 and 10:32-39.

He Who Is Troubling You Will Bear His Judgment - The false teacher should have a two-fold judgment. First, he should be exposed and rejected by the united church. Second, he will ultimately stand before God on Judgment Day.

V. 11 But If I, Brethren, Still Preach Circumcision - Apparently the false teacher(s) had even claimed that Paul still supported circumcision! (They could have pointed to Timothy, whom Paul had circumcised as an expedient for Jewish evangelism, Acts 16:3). One verse is all that is needed to show the folly of such a claim.

The Stumbling Block Of The Cross - The cross of Christ was a major stumbling block to the Jews (1 Cor. 1:23), who expected the Messiah to be a hero-king. They could not accept the shame-filled cross as the replacement for their own works of virtue. If the Jews could cling to circumcision and works when they became Christians, the stumbling block of the cross would be removed.

V. 12 Those Who Unsettle You - The same word here for “unsettle” is used in Acts 21:38 of the man who “stirred up a revolt” and got a lot of people killed.

Would Mutilate Themselves! - Those who make so much of circumcision (“cutting around”) should go all the way and emasculate (“cutting off”) themselves! Paul should not be thought crude or vengeful for this statement, for he was simply recommending that they follow their own teaching to its logical conclusion.

The Galatian readers would undoubtedly have thought of the pagan cult of Attis in nearby Phrygia. When priests of this religion were being initiated into their priesthood, they used wine and dance to work themselves into a frenzy and then castrated themselves. If the Galatians knew the O.T. Law, they would also remember that the eunuch was ineligible for the priesthood of the true God.

V. 13 For You Were Called To Freedom, Brethren - This echoes the triumphant cry of 5:1. God’s plan and purpose for His people is that they should be free!

Only Do Not Use Your Freedom As An Opportunity For The Flesh - While verse one urged the Galatians not to lose their freedom, this verse urges them not to abuse it. Freedom from law is not intended to be lawlessness. Freedom must not be used as an opportunity (“point from which ships are launched”) for the flesh. Rather, our freedom is to be a launching-pad for flight into higher and higher spiritual realms.

There are two ways in which the Christian can lose his freedom. One is by submitting to the false doctrine of legalism. The other is by yielding to his own selfish sinful nature (Rom. 6:12-22). To lose our freedom in either way results in slavery.

Through Love Be Servants Of One Another - We are set free not to do evil, but to do good - especially to one another. It is this application of our freedom which will be especially in view in Chapter six. The force that motivates us to volunteer for slavery to each other is simply love.

V. 14 For The Whole Law Is Fulfilled In One Word - As Paul explained in Romans 13:8-10, the man who truly loves his neighbor does not need any commandment to forbid him to

steal or kill. Love tells him that and much more. No legal code could ever be detailed enough to cover all the territory encompassed in the one word - love.

“You Shall Love Your Neighbor As Yourself” - Jesus quoted this law from Lev. 19:18 as being second only to the command to love God (Matt. 22:36-40). All that men have to do with one another is governed by this grand command: Love your neighbor as yourself.

But who is my neighbor? Who is included in the group I must love? The ancient Qumran sect, as known from the Dead Sea Scrolls, demanded strict observance of this scripture. But since “neighbor” included only the other members at Qumran, they were free to hate everyone else. Jesus taught that love must extend to include even our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48) and used a lowly Samaritan to illustrate real love (Luke 10:29-37). It is in this way that love carries us far beyond where law ever could.

V. 15 But If You Bite And Devour One Another - If we reject love for one another as the highest good, we necessarily revert to the law of the jungle. It is every man for himself! The unity of the Galatian churches has no doubt been ruined by false doctrine, creating the enmity and strife mentioned in the next few verses.

Take Heed That You Are Not Consumed By One Another - If it is to be the law of the jungle, then they had better be on constant guard! The members of the Body will hack away at each other, until there is literally nothing left.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Once we have been set free by Christ, how can we lose our freedom?
2. If a man receives circumcision, why is it necessary for him to keep the whole law?
3. Is it possible to “fall away” from grace? How?
4. How does our text resolve the Faith vs. Works controversy?
5. What is the picture behind the word “hindered” in verse seven?
6. Why is even a little false teaching so dangerous?
7. Why did those who believed in circumcision find the cross of Christ to be such a stumbling block?
8. Verse thirteen suggests both the wrong and the right use of Christian freedom. What are they?
9. How does love fulfill the law?

10. Who is your neighbor?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. "We are free because _____ set us free! As free men we owe nothing to the _____ of _____. And if we should ever go back and yield to this _____ of _____, we would _____ to be free, and we would _____ to be in _____."
2. What is the conclusion to which all the arguments of chapters 3 and 4 were leading?
3. Review Hebrews 6:4-6 and summarize the terrible verdict on those who forsake freedom in Christ and return to lawkeeping.
4. Refer to 2 Peter 2:21 and explain what it teaches about one who turns away from the way of righteousness and salvation in Christ.
5. "If Jesus is to save us, we must _____ to His authority and _____ Him. We must quit fighting to _____ and do whatever He tells us."
6. In Gal. 5:3, does Paul condemn modern circumcision practiced for reasons of hygiene? If not, then what type of circumcision is Paul condemning?
7. "Circumcision was not merely an _____ commandment in the Old Testament. It signified _____ into the _____. It was the _____ of the whole law."
8. Discuss the meaning of the word "severed" in Gal. 5:4.
9. "Legalists are thus _____ from Christ and His _____ when they try to _____ upon the law."
10. "It is indeed possible to _____ from _____ and _____ yourself from Christ. In this context, at least, the way to _____ from _____ is to fall back on to _____ of _____, rather than _____ God's promise."
11. Discuss the background of the term "fall away" in Gal 5:4.
12. "The verdict of _____ is eagerly awaited by those who _____ in Jesus. We will not get what we _____, but what He _____!"
13. "We have been _____ into Christ (Gal. 3:27) where the old _____ between male and female, free and slave, Jew and Greek are _____. God does not care whether a man has been _____ or not. What does matter is whether that man is in _____."
14. What does this lesson teach about "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6)?

15. What does James 2:14-26 teach about inactive and unproductive faith?
16. "God does not want _____ produced by fear, attempting to _____ salvation; He wants works produced by _____, responding in love because _____ has _____ given."
17. List two verses which describe the Christian life as a race.
18. How were the false teachers hindering the Galatians from obeying the truth?
19. What judgment awaits the false teachers of Galatia?
20. Explain the word "unsettle" in Gal. 5:12.
21. "Those who make so much of circumcision ("_____") should go all the way and emasculate ("_____") themselves! Paul should not be thought _____ or _____ for this statement, for he was simply recommending that they follow their own teaching to its _____."
22. How were the priests of the pagan cult Attis initiated into their priesthood?
23. "Freedom from _____ is not intended to be _____. Freedom must not be used as an _____ ("point from which _____ are _____") for the flesh. Rather, our _____ is to be a launching-pad for flight into higher and higher _____ realms."
24. List two ways in which Christians can lose their freedom.
25. "All that men have to do with one another is governed by this grand command: _____ your _____ as _____."
26. "If we _____ love for one another as the _____, we necessarily revert to the _____ of the _____. It is every man for himself!"
27. What can you personally do to insure that members of the Body will not consume one another?
28. Please take a moment to review Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17, pray for unity in the Body of Christ, and ask God to use you as an ambassador who will help unite all of God's people and promote peace and love in His church.