

# Galatians: No Other Gospel

## *Part 10. Standing Firm in Freedom*

As we continue our study of Paul's letter to the Galatians, we come to chapter 5. In the first 12 verses, Paul emphasizes the importance of standing firm in the freedom that Christ has won for us and warns against the dangers of returning to the bondage of the law. He calls the Galatians to live by faith and to reject any attempt to be justified by works. This message is crucial for us today as we seek to live out our faith in a world that often values performance over grace. Let us read the passage together:

**Galatians 5:1-12** *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"*

### 1. The Freedom We Have in Christ (Verse 1)

Paul begins this section with a powerful declaration of the freedom that Christ has won for us.

#### *The Purpose of Christ's Work*

Paul states, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."* The purpose of Christ's redemptive work is to bring us into a state of true freedom. This freedom is not just a release from the penalty of sin, but a liberation from the power and bondage of sin, the law, and the world's oppressive systems. The freedom Christ offers is holistic, encompassing every aspect of our lives. It is a freedom that allows us to live in the fullness of God's grace and love, unburdened by guilt, fear, or the need to earn God's favour. This freedom is a fundamental aspect of the gospel, highlighting the transformative power of Christ's work on our behalf.

#### *Standing Firm in Freedom*

Paul exhorts the Galatians, *"Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* This command to stand firm implies a conscious and deliberate effort to remain in the freedom that Christ has provided. It involves resisting any attempt to return to the bondage of the law or any other form of legalism. Standing firm in freedom requires vigilance and perseverance. It means recognizing and rejecting any teaching or practice that seeks to undermine the sufficiency of Christ's work. By standing firm, we affirm our trust in the completed work of Christ and our commitment to living in the liberty He has given us.

## *The Yoke of Slavery*

Paul warns against being burdened again by a yoke of slavery. The imagery of a yoke signifies the heavy and oppressive nature of the law when used as a means of justification. The law, with its numerous regulations and requirements, becomes an unbearable burden for those who seek to be justified by it. The yoke of slavery represents any system of works-based righteousness that demands human effort to achieve acceptance with God. This yoke stands in stark contrast to the freedom Christ offers, which is based on grace and received through faith. Paul's warning calls us to reject any return to legalism and to embrace the liberating grace of the gospel.

## **2. The Consequences of Legalism (Verses 2-4)**

Paul outlines the serious consequences of seeking justification through the law.

### *Christ Will Be of No Value*

Paul declares, *“Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.”* The act of circumcision, in this context, represents a reliance on the law for justification. Paul warns that if the Galatians choose this path, they nullify the benefits of Christ's work. Choosing to be circumcised as a means of justification indicates a rejection of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. It implies that Christ's death and resurrection are not enough, and that something more is needed to achieve righteousness. This attitude undermines the core message of the gospel and separates believers from the grace that is in Christ.

### *Obligated to Obey the Whole Law*

Paul continues, *“Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.”* The law is an indivisible whole, and those who seek to be justified by one part of it are bound to keep all of it. This is an impossible burden, as no one can perfectly keep the entire law. The obligation to obey the whole law highlights the futility and impossibility of achieving righteousness through human effort. The law's demands are comprehensive and exacting, and failure in even one aspect results in guilt. This reality underscores the need for a different means of justification - one that is based on grace and faith, not works.

### *Fallen Away from Grace*

Paul warns, *“You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”* Seeking justification through the law alienates believers from the grace of Christ. It represents a departure from the gospel of grace and a return to a system of works. Falling away from grace does not mean losing salvation but indicates a departure from the principle of grace as the basis for our relationship with God. It involves turning away from the sufficiency of Christ's work and relying on human effort. This departure is a serious error, as it undermines the very foundation of the Christian faith.

## **3. Living by Faith (Verses 5-6)**

Paul contrasts the futility of legalism with the life of faith empowered by the Spirit.

### *Eagerly Awaiting Righteousness*

Paul states, *“For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.”* The life of faith involves a confident expectation of the righteousness that comes through the Spirit. This righteousness is not something we achieve but something we receive by faith. The righteousness for which we hope is both a present reality and a future expectation. In Christ, we are already declared righteous before God. Yet, we also look forward to the full realization of this righteousness when Christ returns. This eager waiting is characterized by faith and a reliance on the Spirit's work in our lives.

### *The Value of Faith Expressed Through Love*

Paul declares, *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”* The external act of circumcision, or the lack thereof, is irrelevant in Christ. What matters is faith that is active and demonstrated through love. Faith expressing itself through love is the true mark of a believer. Genuine faith results in a transformed life characterized by love for God and others. This love is the fruit of the Spirit and the evidence of a living and active faith. Paul’s emphasis on faith and love underscores the essence of the Christian life and the futility of legalistic practices.

### **4. The Danger of False Teaching (Verses 7-10)**

Paul addresses the influence of false teachers and the need for vigilance.

#### *Who Cut in on You?*

Paul laments, *“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?”* The Galatians were making good progress in their faith, but false teachers had disrupted their course. Paul’s question highlights the disruptive and harmful influence of these teachers. The imagery of running a race emphasizes the importance of perseverance and focus in the Christian life. False teaching is like an obstacle that hinders our progress and diverts us from the truth. Paul’s lament calls us to be vigilant and discerning, ensuring that we remain on the path of truth and avoid being led astray.

#### *That Kind of Persuasion*

Paul states, *“That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.”* The false teachers’ influence is not from God, who calls believers to freedom and truth. Their persuasion leads away from the gospel and into bondage. Understanding the source of persuasion is crucial for discernment. God’s call leads to freedom, truth, and life. Any teaching that leads to bondage, error, or confusion is not from God. By discerning the source of teaching, we can protect ourselves from deception and remain anchored in the truth of the gospel.

#### *A Little Yeast*

Paul warns, *“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”* False teaching, like yeast, can spread and permeate the entire community, leading to widespread error and confusion. Even a small amount of false teaching can have significant and harmful effects. The analogy of yeast emphasizes the insidious nature of false teaching. It can start small but quickly spread, affecting the entire community. This warning calls us to be vigilant in guarding the purity of the gospel and to address false teaching promptly and decisively.

#### *Confidence in the Lord*

Paul expresses his confidence, *“I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty.”* Despite the current confusion, Paul is confident that the Galatians will return to the truth. He also warns that those who are causing confusion will face consequences.

Paul’s confidence is rooted in the Lord, not in the Galatians’ ability. He trusts that God will bring them back to the truth. This confidence encourages us to trust in God’s faithfulness and to be patient and hopeful in the face of challenges. It also serves as a warning to those who lead others astray, reminding them of the serious consequences of their actions.

## 5. The Offense of the Cross (Verses 11-12)

Paul addresses the issue of persecution and the offense of the cross.

### *Persecution for the Cross*

Paul asks, “*Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.*” Paul’s persecution is evidence that he is preaching the true gospel, which centers on the cross of Christ. If he were preaching circumcision, he would not face opposition. The cross is inherently offensive because it challenges human pride and self-sufficiency. It declares that salvation is not achieved by human effort but received as a gift through faith in Christ’s finished work. This message is countercultural and often met with resistance. Paul’s persecution underscores the radical nature of the gospel and the opposition it can provoke.

### *The Offense of the Cross*

The offense of the cross lies in its message of grace and dependence on Christ alone for salvation. It confronts the human desire to earn and achieve righteousness through personal effort. The cross declares that human efforts are insufficient and that only through Christ’s sacrifice can we be reconciled to God. Understanding the offense of the cross helps us appreciate the radical nature of the gospel. It calls us to humility and dependence on God’s grace, rejecting any reliance on our efforts. This message is liberating, as it frees us from the burden of trying to earn God’s favor and invites us to rest in His grace.

### *Paul’s Strong Language*

Paul concludes with strong language: “*As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*” This harsh statement reflects Paul’s intense frustration with the false teachers and their harmful influence. It emphasizes the seriousness of their error and the need for decisive action. Paul’s strong language serves as a stark warning about the dangers of false teaching. It underscores the importance of protecting the purity of the gospel and the well-being of the community. By addressing false teaching decisively, we can prevent its spread and maintain the integrity of the gospel.

## 6. Practical Applications for Our Lives

As we reflect on Galatians 5:1-12, several practical applications emerge for our lives today.

### *Stand Firm in the Freedom of Christ*

Paul’s exhortation to stand firm in the freedom Christ has won for us challenges us to embrace and live out this freedom daily. We must resist any attempt to return to legalism or works-based righteousness and instead trust in the sufficiency of Christ’s work. Standing firm in freedom involves a conscious and deliberate effort to remain grounded in the gospel of grace. It means rejecting any teaching or practice that seeks to undermine the sufficiency of Christ’s work and embracing the liberty that comes from living in the truth of the gospel.

### *Reject Legalism and Embrace Grace*

Paul’s warning about the consequences of legalism calls us to reject any system that seeks to justify us by our efforts. We must embrace the grace that comes through faith in Christ and live in the freedom and joy it brings. Rejecting legalism involves a commitment to living by faith and relying on God’s grace. It means letting go of the need to earn God’s favor and trusting in the sufficiency of Christ’s work. By embracing grace, we can experience the freedom and joy that come from being in a right relationship with God.

### *Live by Faith, Expressed Through Love*

Paul's emphasis on faith expressing itself through love challenges us to live out our faith in practical ways. Genuine faith results in a transformed life characterized by love for God and others. Living by faith expressed through love involves a daily commitment to love God and to love others. It means allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us, producing the fruit of love in our lives. This love is the evidence of a living and active faith and reflects the character of Christ to the world.

### *Be Vigilant Against False Teaching*

Paul's warning about the influence of false teachers calls us to be vigilant and discerning. We must guard the purity of the gospel and be aware of any teaching or practice that seeks to lead us astray. Being vigilant against false teaching involves a commitment to knowing and understanding the truth of the gospel. It means being discerning in our choice of leaders and influencers and being willing to address false teaching promptly and decisively. By guarding the purity of the gospel, we can protect ourselves and our community from deception.

### *Embrace the Offense of the Cross*

Paul's discussion of the offense of the cross challenges us to embrace the radical nature of the gospel. We must be willing to face opposition and persecution for the sake of the truth and to rely on God's grace for our salvation. Embracing the offense of the cross involves a commitment to humility and dependence on God's grace. It means rejecting any reliance on our efforts and trusting in the sufficiency of Christ's work. By embracing the offense of the cross, we can experience the freedom and joy that come from being in a right relationship with God.

## **7. Theological Insights from the Passage**

As we delve deeper into Galatians 5:1-12, several theological insights emerge that are crucial for understanding Paul's message and its implications for our faith.

### *The Sufficiency of Christ's Work*

Paul's warning about the consequences of seeking justification through the law underscores the sufficiency of Christ's work. Christ's death and resurrection are sufficient for our salvation, and any attempt to add to it undermines the gospel. The sufficiency of Christ's work highlights the completeness and finality of His sacrifice. It assures us that there is nothing more we need to do to be accepted by God. This understanding deepens our trust in Christ and frees us from the burden of trying to earn God's favour.

### *The Role of the Holy Spirit*

Paul's emphasis on living by the Spirit and awaiting righteousness by faith highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. The Spirit empowers us to live in the freedom of the gospel and to produce the fruit of love. The role of the Holy Spirit is central to the Christian life. The Spirit indwells believers, guiding, empowering, and transforming them. By relying on the Holy Spirit, we can live in the freedom and fullness of the gospel and reflect the character of Christ in our lives.

### *The Nature of Justification*

Paul's discussion of justification by faith versus justification by the law underscores the nature of justification. Justification is a gift received by faith, not a reward earned by works. The nature of justification highlights the grace and mercy of God. It assures us that our standing before God is not based on our performance but on His grace. This understanding frees us from the burden of trying to earn God's favor and invites us to rest in His grace.

### *The Danger of Legalism*

Paul's warning about the consequences of legalism highlights the danger of relying on human effort for justification. Legalism leads to bondage and alienation from Christ. The danger of legalism underscores the importance of relying on God's grace for our salvation. It reminds us that our efforts are insufficient to achieve righteousness and that we must trust in the sufficiency of Christ's work. By rejecting legalism, we can experience the freedom and joy that come from living in the truth of the gospel.

### *The Transformative Power of Grace*

Paul's emphasis on faith expressing itself through love highlights the transformative power of God's grace. Grace not only justifies us but also transforms us, producing the fruit of love in our lives. The transformative power of grace is at the heart of the gospel message. It is not just about forgiveness of sins but about a new life in Christ, characterized by freedom, joy, and spiritual growth. This transformation is a testimony to the power of God's grace and a witness to the world.

## **8. Living Out the Truth of the Passage**

The teachings of Galatians 5:1-12 have profound implications for how we live our daily lives as believers.

### *Embrace the Freedom of the Gospel*

Paul's exhortation to stand firm in the freedom Christ has won for us challenges us to embrace and live out this freedom daily. We must resist any attempt to return to legalism or works-based righteousness and instead trust in the sufficiency of Christ's work. Embracing the freedom of the gospel involves a daily commitment to trust in God's grace and to live by faith. It means letting go of the need to control our lives and relying on God's guidance and provision. This freedom leads to a life of peace, joy, and purpose.

### *Trust in the Sufficiency of Christ's Work*

Paul's warning about the consequences of seeking justification through the law calls us to trust in the sufficiency of Christ's work. We must rely on His sacrifice for our salvation and reject any attempt to add to it. Trusting in the sufficiency of Christ's work involves a deep reliance on His grace and a rejection of any reliance on our efforts. It means believing that His work is complete and that we are fully accepted by God because of Him. This trust leads to a life of rest and assurance in God's love.

### *Live by the Spirit*

Paul's emphasis on living by the Spirit challenges us to rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and empowerment. The Spirit empowers us to live in the freedom of the gospel and to produce the fruit of love. Living by the Spirit involves a daily commitment to seek the Spirit's guidance and to rely on His power. It means allowing the Spirit to work in us and through us, producing the fruit of love in our lives. By living by the Spirit, we can experience the fullness of the gospel and reflect the character of Christ in our lives.

### *Cultivate a Community of Grace*

Paul's teaching encourages us to cultivate a community of grace within the body of Christ. We must support and encourage one another in living out the truth of the gospel and rejecting legalism. Cultivating a community of grace involves fostering relationships built on love, trust, and mutual respect. It means creating an environment where people can grow in their faith and experience the freedom of God's grace. By cultivating a community of grace, we can reflect the love and unity of Christ to the world.

## **Conclusion**

As we conclude our reflection on Galatians 5:1-12, we are reminded of the profound theological truths and practical applications of Paul's message. Paul's teaching challenges us to embrace our identity as children of promise, to reject legalism and embrace grace, to stand firm in the face of persecution, to celebrate the freedom of the new covenant, and to cultivate a community of grace.

May we be a people who live out these truths with integrity, standing firm in our faith and reflecting the love and grace of Christ in all that we do. Let us strive to maintain the unity of the body of Christ, working together to advance His kingdom and bring glory to His name.