

Lessons from Galatians

Righteousness by Faith Series



Lesson 5—The Flesh vs. the Spirit Galatians 5:1-26

I. **Introduction:** *In this lesson we'll be seeking to understand what true Christian Liberty is, living by God's law of love, and finding victory in the battle between the flesh and the Spirit!*

II. The practical facts of Experiencing true Christian Liberty (v.1-6)

- a. (v.1) *"...the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free"—Christ has set us free from the bondage of sin in our lives, and also from the bondage of a legalistic and guilt-filled experience with God. Some were trying labor and work their own way to heaven, and this was entirely impossible. We cannot, nor should we ever try to "work our way into Heaven!" **Salvation is a free gift** through Jesus Christ! We must **receive it by faith (Ephesians 2:8,9)**. "Do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage."—the yoke of bondage would be to enter into an experience where you think that your own works of the law are going to produce some saving merit between you and God. (i. e.—if I'm circumcised, then Christ will accept me.—NO WAY!!)—a covenant of relating to God like that is bondage. God accepts us through "belief" or FAITH. He then enables us to live righteous lives through the power of His Spirit working in us (John 15:4,5).*
- b. (v.2,3) *Being circumcised in hopes that such an action will bring you salvation will mean that Christ will profit you nothing. If salvation was by works of the law, then it is not a free gift from God. If it is something you can earn, then it is not by grace or mercy at all, it would be something you actually deserved. Impossible! You and I deserve death for our sins (Romans 6:23). (v.3)—If you think circumcision is necessary for Salvation, then you can't just stop there—you've got to keep the rest of the covenant of Law (the "day, months, seasons, years"—Jewish holy days, etc.)—And for that matter, if you must perform this work to achieve salvation, then you perform all sorts of other works to achieve salvation (even thinking that your own efforts in keeping the Moral Law will achieve your salvation). You must be saved rather by grace through faith (Eph.2:8,9). It is NOT by works!*
- c. (v.5,6) *"Eagerly" waiting "for the hope of righteousness by faith." This "Hope" is the end result of our trusting in Christ's righteousness—the full salvation of our souls at the return of Jesus Christ! We should look at **salvation in three parts**—(1) We are **saved** by Christ (Justification), (2) we are **being saved** by Christ (from our sinfulness. This is "Sanctification"), and (3) we **will be saved** by Christ at His Second Coming (a future event—glorification).*
- d. (v.6) *Circumcision or uncircumcision does not avail anything in Christ—it is not needed, but rather is useless now. Originally, this was a "sign" or a "token" of the covenant made by God with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14). All his descendants (including Christ) were to receive it. This covenant was reinforced in the days of Moses and within the covenant made at Sinai. It was an outward sign of who the people belonged to—God! It was symbolic of cutting away the fleshly or sinful nature, as the flesh was cut away. The deeper meaning has always been "circumcision of the heart"—or true conversion—as even the Old Testament makes clear (Deuteronomy 10:16). Circumcision was also a promise of the "seed" who was to come—the pure and undefiled One—Christ! We must become a Jew inwardly by our faith in Christ, not merely by a fleshly ordinance (Romans 2:25-29). Some of the Jews had thought their mere outward lineage, profession of faith, and legalistic, self-righteous works, would actually grant them salvation. John the Baptist*

proclaimed to them otherwise (Matthew 3:8,9). We should “bring forth fruit worthy of repentance,” as in the fruits of the Spirit.

- e. Remember also “**faith**” works “**by love**.”(v.6). Not just by fear, or some thought to earn salvation, but by love! “If you love me, keep my commandments,” said Jesus (John 14:15).

III. Those who are hindering with false teachings (v.7-12) A little bit of leaven or false influence in the camp goes a long way—be careful, as then, so today as well! The true message of the cross was an “offense” to many who followed their own self-righteous workings and could not see the beauty of Jesus Christ! It is still an offense often times to those unconverted and unwilling to surrender to God. Paul wished that these troublemakers would even be “cut off” (v.12). The Greek word used here is “*apokopsontai*,” and the word for circumcision is “*peritomen*.” Though the words may be different, the idea seems to come through clearly yet! Not that men should cut off their flesh for God’s approval, but that unapproved troublemakers of the faith should be cut off rather!

IV. What is true Christian Liberty? (v.13-15) By love we should obey God as did Abraham—a man of faith! (Genesis 26:5). Do not approach God by fearfulness as at Sinai, but rather have that perfect love which casts out all fear (Exodus 20:18-21; 1 John 4:17-21). If you’re keeping the law to attempt earning your salvation, or you’re trusting in your own self-righteous workings to save you then this burden will crush out your spiritual life. Keep in mind though, if you have LOVE then disobedience should be the farthest thing from your mind! Love works to do the will of God and to please Him (you wouldn’t even think about committing a sin against your brother or sister)! If tempted to disobedience, remember, God is desiring you to escape (Genesis 4:7; James 1:12), and will make a way for you to do so (1 Corinthians 10:13; Jude 1:24). Jesus gives us this liberty, setting us free from the bondage of sin, guilt, shame, or fruitless efforts to save ourselves!

V. The Battle between the flesh and the Spirit (v.16-26)

- a. This same struggle mentioned here is also mentioned in Romans 7:15,21-25. “So that you do not do the things that you wish” (v.17). Three laws are set forth in Romans 7 and 8. (1) The “**Law of sin and death**” (working against us), (2) “**Law of God or my Mind**” (good), (3) “**law of the Spirit**” (Romans 8:2—this “Law” means that the HS leads us to obedience and gives us power to do so). (Gal.2:18)—We are not under “condemnation” of the Law (**See Romans 8:1**) (not under a covenant of Law approach to God). You are made “FREE” (free from “law of sin and death”, free from “condemnation”, if in Christ, free from an idea you need to “earn your way to heaven”)
- b. We are not debtors to live after the flesh (Romans 8:12,13). If we choose to do so, such a course will surely result in death! (Galatians 5:19-21).
- c. We must surely have the true evidence of conversion in our lives—the fruit of the Spirit! We need to be those who are living by the Spirit and obeying God’s word! This is what the Holy Spirit teaches us to do (John 16:8), and we’ll be exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in our lives if we are truly abiding in Christ! (John 15:4,5). We are saved by God’s grace, but judged by our works in the sense that these things will reveal whether or not our life is truly submitted and surrendered to the Holy Spirit (Matthew 7:16,21-27). The true evidence of conversion is the fruit of a changed life! The desires and all things become entirely new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)! Sin and selfishness must be “crucified”!

Taking it Home: Do you want to experience the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Will you choose to live a life of “liberty” in Christ and to let Him daily transform your life? ____ (God will do it, if you ask him.)