

The previous chapter ended with an allusion to the freedom we have in Christ and Paul now urges the Galatians to firmly stand in that freedom from sin and the bondage of the law. He then makes the bold statement that Christ's work on the cross has no benefit to those who are seeking to be justified by the law. Paul goes on to explain that those who have obtained righteousness by faith will by nature obey the spirit of the law as the result of love.

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

“Stand fast [*to stand firm; to persevere*] **therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free**” – The previous verse (Gal. 4:31) was a statement that we are children of the “freewoman” (Sarah, who gave birth to the son that God had promised) and not the children of bondage (represented by Hagar, the bondwoman). Paul now urges us to stand firm in the freedom that we have through Jesus Christ. We are not to give up this freedom or lured away from it by false teachers.

“and be not entangled [*to be held; ensnared*] **again with the yoke of bondage**” – A yoke restricts the freedom of an ox, limiting its movements to the work of plowing. Because we have freedom in Christ, we ought not allow ourselves to be ensnared by the “yoke of bondage” that the law presents, something that has been “cast out” (Gal. 4:30).

2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. 3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

“Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing” – Paul is not saying that once a man has been circumcised then he is doomed to hell since Paul himself had been circumcised as part of his Jewish upbringing (Phil. 3:5). What he is saying is that if a Gentile decides to become circumcised in an effort to save himself or to complete his salvation then he's demonstrating that he's not trusting in Christ alone for salvation. Such a man reaps no benefit from Christ's sacrifice on the cross (**Gal. 2:21** “*I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain*”).

“For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law” – If you are seeking salvation through keeping the law, then you can't pick and choose which elements of the law you want to keep. You can't decide to be circumcised and think that it alone is enough for salvation. If you aren't trusting in Christ alone for salvation then you must keep the entire law in order to be righteous. Salvation is either through Christ or through the law; they cannot be mixed.

4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

“Christ is become of no effect unto you [*to be separated from*], **whosoever of you are justified** [*made righteous*] **by the law**” – Since righteousness through Christ cannot be combined with righteousness through the law, seeking salvation from one automatically excludes you from the other. Since they are mutually exclusive, someone who is seeking to be righteous by keeping the law has severed themselves from salvation through faith in Christ.

“ye are fallen from grace” – Paul is speaking to those seeking to be righteous through the law. Since they had severed themselves from being saved by Christ, it is evident that these particular Galatians had never truly been saved. Paul is not saying that they had lost their salvation, but that, after having salvation by grace presented to them, they had fallen back to reliance on the law to save themselves.

5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

“For we through the Spirit” – In contrast to those who are looking for obtaining righteousness through the law, Paul and those who, like him, are trusting in Christ are following a different path under the guidance and revelation of the Holy Spirit.

“wait [*to eagerly await with anticipation*] **for the hope** [*expectation*] **of righteousness by faith**” – Those who are trusting in Christ for their righteousness are eagerly waiting for it with a confident expectation. They will receive it by faith while those who are trusting in the law can never be confident that they won't accidentally transgress and doom themselves.

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth [*to have strength or power*] **any thing, nor uncircumcision**” – When it comes to faith in Jesus Christ, it does not matter whether you are circumcised or not. Neither state (circumcised or uncircumcised) has any power to change anything concerning our salvation.

“but faith which worketh by love” – What does make the difference in salvation is faith, which manifests itself through love. Love for God and love for your neighbor will cause the believer to fulfill the law, as Paul states later in v. 14. Thus, the righteousness that we receive through faith in Christ will cause us to fulfill the law rather than us receiving righteousness by keeping the law. The Judaizers had it backwards.

7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? 8 This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. 9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

“Ye did run well; who did hinder [*to block or place obstacles in the path*] **you that ye should not obey the truth?**” – Apparently Paul had been satisfied with what he saw when he was with them. The Galatians had appeared to accept the truth of the gospel and to live lives of faith in Christ. Paul now asks who it was that stood in their way to prevent them from obeying the truth of the gospel.

“This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you” – “Him that called you” was obviously God. The Galatians had been persuaded that they needed to keep the law to be righteous before God. Paul tells the Galatians very plainly that this teaching that they have been persuaded to believe did not come from God.

“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” – This was a common saying at the time, referencing how something small can have a big influence. Scripture often uses leaven to illustrate how even a little sin can permeate and influence our lives. Here, Paul uses this common saying to remind us that even small errors can distort and corrupt the gospel and make it useless for salvation (v. 2).

10 I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

“I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded” – Paul is confident that, after reading this epistle, the Galatians will see their error and return to trusting in Christ alone for salvation. Notice that Paul’s confidence is not based on his writing ability or the Galatians’ ability to think logically. Paul is confident that the Lord will guide His children away from error and back to the truth.

“but he that troubleth [to agitate; to make anxious] you shall bear his judgment [condemnation; punishment], whosoever he be” – The individual or individuals who have been teaching that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the law had been “troubling” the Galatians. The word means “to cause anxiety or agitation” and they had caused the Galatians to become anxious at the thought that Christ was not enough to guarantee their salvation. These false teachers had caused the Galatians to doubt Christ and look to the law for salvation. Paul may not have known who the specific individuals were who had harmed the faith of the Galatians but it was certain that God did know and would punish them (Gal. 1:8).

11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. 12 I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

“And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution?” – Apparently one of the arguments that these false teachers used to convince the Galatians of the need to be circumcised was the false claim that Paul agreed with their teachings. Paul denies that he taught that Gentiles should be circumcised and points out the flaw in thinking that was the case. Why was Paul being persecuted by the Jews if he taught the same circumcision that they did?

“then is the offence [stumbling block; obstacle] of the cross ceased” – The cross was a stumbling block for Jews because it meant that they had to trust in Christ’s sacrifice alone rather than their own ability to keep the law. This was a substantial hurdle to cross for a Jew who was proud of his own self-righteousness. Paul points out that preaching circumcision would remove the reason for being persecuted because he would not be preaching faith in the cross of Christ alone.

“I would they were even cut off [to amputate] which trouble [unsettle; upset] you” – Paul is so protective of the Galatians that he would like to see anyone who has been upsetting their faith to be “cut off.” Paul is likely using a figurative expression here, since circumcision is a cutting off of a specific piece of flesh. He may be saying these false teachers needed to be “amputated” out of the lives of the Galatians. Some commentators suggest Paul may want to see these false teachers go beyond circumcision to the point of actually castrating themselves. This would be consistent with his strong statements at the beginning of this epistle (Gal. 1:8 *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed”*).

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty” – Christ’s invitation to follow Him is a calling to freedom from the condemnation of the law (Rom. 7:6 *“But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter”*).

“only use not liberty for an occasion [opportunity; a base of military operations] to the flesh, but by love serve one another” – Just because the law no longer has the ability to condemn us for our sin, that is no reason to allow our flesh to govern our behavior. Instead, we are to express love for other Christians by serving them. We are to see to their needs as well instead of selfishly seeking to fulfill our own desires only.

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” – Paul quotes Lev. 19:18: *“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.”* Jesus also quoted this verse when he was asked about the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36-40 *“Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”*). The point is that love will cause us to fulfill God’s law since we will not intentionally sin against those we love.

15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

Paul uses the imagery of wild animals attacking and killing each other. Without love, we are no better than wild animals subject to the whims of our flesh, which is inherently selfish.

16 *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” – The Holy Spirit will never lead us to fulfill the sinful desires of the flesh, so walking according to the Spirit’s leading will prevent us from sinning.

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” – The Holy Spirit and the flesh have different goals and so they are always struggling against one another for dominance in our lives.

“and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” – The flesh fights against our desire to serve God, trying to lead us in directions contrary to where the Holy Spirit wants us to go.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Fortunately we are not under the law’s condemnation if we are “led by the Spirit” (born again), so there is forgiveness even when we sin.