

Freedom in Christ

Gal 5:1-17

SS Lesson for 02/19/2017

Devotional Scripture: John 8:31-38

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches that there are contrasts between a life under the law and a life under grace, and how we can have **Freedom in Christ**. The **study's aim** is to understand that we are saved by God's grace, not by our works. The **study's application** is to live a life of freedom in the Holy Spirit and love to others.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Gal 5:13

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Having defended both his authority as an apostle and the doctrine of justification by faith, Paul turned to defend the life of Christian freedom. Would the apostle's teaching lead the Galatians into lawlessness or into godliness? The Christian life is described as a life apart from Law, a life apart from license, a life according to the Spirit, and a life of service.

5:1. This verse summarizes chapter 4, where the theme is bondage and freedom. It also serves to introduce chapter 5. Paul declared that **Christ** was the great Liberator who **set** believers **free** from bondage. The apostle then appealed to the Galatians to **stand firm** (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 1:27; 4:1; 1 Thes. 3:8; 2 Thes. 2:15) in that liberty, for having been delivered from **slavery** to heathenism, they were in danger of becoming entangled in slavery to the Mosaic Law.

5:2. Taking up a prime example of such entanglement, namely circumcision, Paul issued a strong warning to the Galatians who were considering submitting to that rite. If they did, and were thereby seeking righteousness by works, Paul declared that **Christ will be of no value to you at all**. It is not that the apostle condemned circumcision in itself, for he had Timothy circumcised (in Galatia) so that the young man would have a wider ministry (Acts 16:1-3). But Paul was strongly opposed to the Judaistic theology which insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Anyone who was circumcised for that reason added works to faith and demonstrated that he had not exercised saving faith in Christ.

5:3. In addition to the fact that turning to the Law ruins grace, it also creates an entirely new obligation: a person **is obligated to obey the whole Law**. The Law is a unit, and if a person puts himself under any part of it for justification, he is a "debtor" (KJV) to the entire code with its requirements and its curse (cf. 3:10; James 2:10).

5:4. Turning to the Law and accepting circumcision as a meritorious work has further dire implications which the Galatians were called on to consider. Anyone seeking justification **by Law** has **been alienated** (*katērgēthēte*) **from Christ**, that is, such a person would not be living in a sphere where Christ was operative. The KJV has a helpful rendering, "Christ is become of no effect unto you." In addition, said Paul, they would **have fallen away from grace**. The issue here is not the possible loss of salvation, for "grace" is referred to not as salvation itself but as a method of salvation (cf. 2:21 where "a Law" route is mentioned as an unworkable way to come to Christ). If the Galatians accepted circumcision as necessary for salvation, they would be leaving the grace system for the Mosaic Law system. The same error is repeated today when a believer leaves a church that emphasizes salvation by grace through faith and joins one which teaches that salvation depends on repentance, confession, faith, baptism, and church membership.

5:5. In contrast with legalists, true believers **by faith** (not works) **eagerly await** (*apekdechometha*; used seven times in the NT of the return of Christ: Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28) the consummation of their salvation (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). Then **the righteousness for which we hope** will be fully realized (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4, 13). At the coming of Christ believers will be completely conformed to all the requirements of God's will. The inward and forensic righteousness which began at justification will be transformed into an outward righteousness at glorification. God will then publicly acknowledge all believers' full acceptability with Him.

5:6. For those **in Christ Jesus**, the true sphere of salvation, **neither circumcision nor** the lack of it is of any significance (cf. 3:28; 6:15). What matters **is faith expressing itself through love** (cf. 5:13). Though salvation is by faith apart from works, faith that is genuine does work itself out "through love" (cf. Eph. 2:10; James 2:14-18).

5:7. Employing a metaphor he was fond of, Paul described the Galatians' Christian experience as a **race** (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-26; 2 Tim. 4:7). They had begun their race well, but someone had **cut in on** them, causing them to break stride and stumble. Though many false teachers were disturbing the Galatians, the singular pronoun (**who**) indicates the leader of the Judaizers was in view here. The result was that the believers were no longer **obeying the truth**, but were attempting to complete the race by legalistic self-effort rather than by faith.

5:8-10. Such false teaching as the Galatians were beginning to embrace did not originate in the God who called them (cf. 1:6). He called them by and into grace. They were now being seduced by other voices into following a false gospel. And lest someone would feel that the apostle was making too much of the problem, he quoted a proverb (5:9) to the effect that false teaching, like **yeast**, spreads and permeates. Its converts may have been few but the believers must be on guard lest the error affect the entire church. Paul's point may also have been that one apparently small deviation from the truth could destroy the entire system. If circumcision, for example, were made necessary for salvation, the whole grace system would fall. But Paul was optimistic about the outcome. He was **confident** the Galatians would share his views and that the leading false teacher, whose identity was unknown to Paul, would suffer his due judgment.

5:11. Apparently Paul was charged with **still preaching circumcision**. Certainly before his conversion he zealously proclaimed circumcision and the Law, and it is easy to see how the apostle's attitude could be interpreted as being in favor of circumcision. Paul countered with a simple question: How is it that he was **still being persecuted** by Judaizers if he preached the same message they did? If Paul were preaching circumcision, **the offense** (*skandalon*, "stumbling block"; cf. 1 Cor. 1:23) **of the Cross** would have ceased to exist in his ministry. But it had not because people still found the gospel message, which proclaims man's total inability to contribute anything to his salvation, offensive. Thus the Cross marked the end of the Law system and rendered circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law unnecessary.

5:12. Speaking out of deep concern for the gospel of the grace of God, Paul uttered a strong expression. He wished that the Judaizers, who were so enthusiastic about circumcision, **would go the whole way** and castrate **themselves**, as did the pagan priests of the cult of Cybele in Asia Minor. Perhaps the resulting physical impotence pictured Paul's desire that they also be unable to produce new converts. While circumcision had once been the sign of the covenant in Israel, it now had no more religious meaning than any other ritual of cutting and marking practiced by ancient pagans

5:13-14. In verse 1 Paul spoke of the Christian's freedom and warned against the danger of lapsing into slavery. Here the apostle again reminded believers of their freedom in Christ and warned against its being converted into license. Specifically he charged the Galatians not to use their liberty as "a base of operation" for sin to gain a foothold. Rather than liberty being used for lust, the real goal should be **love**. Rather than being in bondage to the Law or to **the sinful nature**, the Galatians were to be in bondage to **one another**. ("Sinful nature" is an appropriate trans. of the Gr. *sarx*, used by Paul in that sense seven times in Gal. 5:13, 16-17 [thrice], 19, 24; 6:8.) Having discouraged two forms of slavery as burdensome and terrible, he commended another form that was beneficial—a slavery of mutual love. In support, Paul quoted Leviticus 19:18 and stated that **the entire Law** was summarized **in this single command to love** their neighbors. Jesus affirmed the same truth (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:25-28). But Paul also wanted to show that Christian love is the "fulfillment" or "the carrying out" of the Law. The apostle developed this point in Romans 13:8-10.

5:15. That such love needed to be mutually expressed in the Galatian churches is made clear here. As a result of the inroads of the false teachers the church was divided and engaged in bitter strife. The followers of the legalists and those who remained steadfast were **biting and devouring each other**. This was far from the biblical ideal of believers dwelling together in a loving unity, and threatened the churches with destruction, that is, the loss of their individual and corporate testimonies.

5:16. The answer to the abuses described in the previous verse is to **live by the Spirit**. The verb *peripateite* is a present imperative and is literally translated, "keep on walking." As a believer walks through life he should depend on the indwelling Holy Spirit for guidance and power. But the Spirit does not operate automatically in a believer's heart. He waits to be depended on. When a Christian does yield to the Spirit's control, the promise is that he will not in anywise (the double negative *ou mē* is emphatic) **gratify** (*telesēte*, "complete, fulfill" in outward action) **the desires of the sinful nature**. Thus, while no believer will ever be entirely free in this life from the evil desires that stem from his fallen human nature, he need not capitulate to them, but may experience victory by the Spirit's help.

5:17. Paul next explained the need for a life that is controlled and energized by **the Spirit**. The explanation is found in the fact that each Christian has two natures, a **sinful nature** received at birth, inherited from fallen Adam, and a new nature received at regeneration when said Christian became a participant in the

divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). Both natures have desires, the one for evil and the other for holiness. Thus **they are in conflict with each other**, and the result can be that they keep a believer from doing what he otherwise would. In other words the Holy Spirit blocks, when He is allowed to do so, the evil cravings of the flesh. (Some hold the view that each believer *is* a new person, still possessing the fallen human nature, but not having a new nature. Others prefer to define “nature” as capacity, the old nature being that capacity to serve sin and self and the new nature the capacity to serve God and righteousness.)

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

In Galatians, Paul was correcting a young church's slide into a false understanding of salvation. The church had been born aright—on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, on salvation by grace through faith—but its spiritual growth had faltered due to unsound doctrine. They were being told to add works to grace. So Paul was emphasizing the great truth of liberty in Christ. Christian liberty means freedom— freedom from the debt we incur by our failure to live up to God's law. Through faith in Christ, believers are set free from the dominion of the law, that is, from having to try to work their way into God's favor and heaven. The Galatians had lost the precious sense of their standing in Christ. This happened through false teaching that added works to faith. Paul called them to return to and embrace grace, that they might once again live in the realm of liberty. Salvation is by grace through simple faith in Christ. Once liberty was firmly in place, Paul had two admonitions for pressing on in the Christian faith. The first was not to use freedom in Christ as an opportunity for the flesh. "Flesh" is a term that refers to our inward sinfulness, the ungodly appetites that lead to sin. If grace is understood in a false way, sinful indulgence can be a real temptation. Someone might think, if I am saved by grace and not by works, then I can go ahead and do anything I want. It cannot affect my salvation. Although it is certainly true that a truly regenerated believer cannot come into God's eternal judgment, a life of prevailing sinfulness is an utterly false response to grace. Indulging in sin fails to acknowledge the inward change that the new birth brings as the Holy Spirit invades the personality of the believer and creates a capacity to walk with God in the Spirit. To live our lives serving the cravings of the flesh is simply to return again to bondage, the exact opposite of what the Lord intends when He saves us. That is unthinkable! That is wrong! Salvation by grace through faith was meant to make us free to serve God, not to make us slaves to the basest part of our natures. That leads us to Paul's second admonition. Instead of serving the flesh, believers are instructed to serve one another in love. The nature of biblical love is demonstrated in concrete actions. It is a practical love that reflects the great commandment that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. Sincere love for God and others is the sum of the whole law. Love is not merely a feeling; it also involves a firm commitment to do all the good we can do in this world. Every Christian should be a blessing to others. That is why Paul emphasizes serving. In love we are to become the servants of all. Servanthood expresses love. We have been set free to serve. Far from being a license to serve our flesh and to sin at will, our freedom in Christ is an invitation to glorify God by becoming loving servants. The believer set free in Christ should spend his or her life looking for ways to glorify God through serving others.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Occasionally we see newscasts of people experiencing political freedom for the first time. As totalitarian regimes fall, nations have to learn new habits. How can people live together in freedom without chaos? What does a free person look like? Freedom in Christ raises the same questions, but with distinct answers. What keeps us from using our freedom as an excuse for the chaos of selfishness? What does a free person in Christ look like? Today's text addresses these questions.

Paul's letter to the Galatians addressed a struggle to come to terms with God's plan in history. The struggle involved deciding whether Gentile believers in Jesus had to adhere to the law that God gave to Israel. Some taught that Gentiles who accepted Christ had to be circumcised in order to become part of God's people; Gentiles had to receive the mark that distinguished Israel as having received God's covenant. Paul's response is a lesson on the shape of God's work in history, which focuses on Christ's death and resurrection. Everything that came before was preparatory. God did not give Israel its law as the final expression of his purpose, but as a means of pointing to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Part of that preparation had to do with what Israel's law did not accomplish. Even while God was giving the law to Israel, Israel was rejecting the God who gave it (Exodus 32:1-6). That pattern of rejection continued, as failure to keep God's law was the story of successive generations. This pattern demonstrated that if God's will was to be done on earth, it would take something more

powerful than law. Israel's Scriptures included promises that God would indeed do something greater: He would make a new covenant with his people, writing the law "on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:31-34). He would replace stony hearts with new ones as his Spirit enabled them to obey (Ezekiel 36:22-32). The cross of Christ signals the fulfillment of these promises. Now the people of God are defined not by the covenant of circumcision, but by faith in Christ who died for their sin. Because of Christ's death, God's Spirit is given to all Christians (Acts 2:38). The Galatian Christians needed to understand these truths.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Maintaining Freedom (Gal 5:1-6)

- 1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.
- 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.
- 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.
- 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
- 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.
- 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

By standing firm (1)

Spiritual Recidivism (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

The word *recidivism* (re-sid-uh-viz-um) refers to the process of reverting to a previous state of being, and is often used with regard to various addictive behaviors and criminal lifestyles. Sometimes these behaviors work in conjunction with each other. For example, some statistics indicate that more than 30 percent of the people arrested for DUI (driving under the influence of alcohol) are repeat offenders. Most recidivists deny that they either have an addiction to alcohol or are a danger to themselves and others when they drive while drunk. Obviously, the human mind has a tremendous capacity to deceive itself! When Paul talks about returning to the bondage of the Old Testament law, he is describing a form of addictive behavior. The legalist keeps saying, in effect, "I just know that if I try harder this next time, I can do it right and make myself right with God." But like the alcoholic or drug addict or compulsive gambler, spiritual recidivism is the result. The real solution to this problem is to admit our failures and trust in Christ's forgiveness and the power of the Spirit of God to bring hope to a hopeless situation. We can never be good enough to deserve God's love. Instead, God offers his love to all who, through faith in Christ, accept his redeeming, renewing power.

Standing firm and giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58)

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Standing firm in the faith (1 Cor 16:13)

13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.

Standing firm using the full armor of God (Eph 6:13-18)

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Standing firm by contending for the faith of the gospel (Phil 1:27)

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

Standing firm in faith because of having a great high priest in Jesus (Heb 4:14)

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

By choosing grace over law (2-4)

Grace over law because God's promises come by grace (Rom 4:16)

16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

Grace over law because grace reigns over the law (Rom 5:20-21)

20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grace over law because we are under grace not the law (Rom 6:13-18)

14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Grace over law because God has chosen His remnant by grace (Rom 11:5-6)

5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Grace over law because God makes grace abound in us (2 Cor 9:8)

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Grace over law because God's grace is sufficient in all things (2 Cor 12:9)

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Grace over law because we are saved by grace (Eph 2:8-9)

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

By expressing faith through love (5-6)

Faith through love because without love there is nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3)

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Faith through love because of hope (Col 1:3-5)

4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints- 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel

Faith through love because godly labor is always accomplished through love (1 Thess 1:3)

3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith through love because it is a command (1 Tim 1:5)

5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Faith through love because God commands us to pursue this (1 Tim 6:11)

11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

Faith through love because God knows our deeds (Rev 2:19)

19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Freedom is Threatened by False Teachers (Gal 5:7-12)

7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Through hindering believers (7-8)

Hindering through a different gospel (Gal 1:6-7)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel- 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Hindrances that should be thrown off (Heb 12:1)

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Hindrances through hypocritical teachers (Matt 23:13-15)

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. 15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

Hindrances through rebellious deceivers (Titus 1:10-11)

10 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach-and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Hindering by not acknowledging that Jesus is God in the flesh (2 John 7-11)

7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. 11 Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

Through exerting great influence (9)

Influence through peer pressure (Ex 32:21-24)

21 He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" 22 "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' 24 So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

Influence through false prophets that come as wolf in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15)

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Influence to turn away from the faith (Matt 24:10-13)

10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Influence through introducing destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1-2)

2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute

Influence through performing signs and wonders (Matt 24:24)

24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

Through confusing the Church (10-12)

Confusion through perverting the gospel (Gal 1:7-9)

Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Confusion through alienation (Gal 4:17-18)

17 Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good,

Confusion through disputes (1 Cor 6:3-7)

4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! 7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already.

Confusion through false doctrines (1 Tim 6:3-5)

3 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Confusion through arguments over useless issues (Titus 3:9-11)

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. 11 You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Demonstrating Freedom (Gal 5:13-17)

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

By serving one another (13)

Serve by bearing with the failings of others (Rom 15:1-2)

15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

Serve by sharing and protecting others (1 John 3:16-18)

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Serve as serving God (Eph 6:7)

7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,

Serve by using the gifts God has provided (1 Peter 4:10)

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

By fulfilling the law (14)

Fulfill by loving others (Rom 13:8)

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10)

10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Fulfill by being obedient to God (John 14:15)

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

By avoiding destructive behavior (15)

Avoid all evil (1 Thess 5:22)

22 Avoid every kind of evil.

Avoid wickedness (Prov 4:14-15)

14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. 15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

Avoid evil desires (1 Peter 1:14-16)

14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Avoid godless chatter (2 Tim 2:16)

16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

Avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18)

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Avoid idolatry (1 Cor 10:14)

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

Avoid Satan (James 4:7)

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

By living by the Holy Spirit (16-17)

Living by the Spirit to set mind on the Spirit's desires (Rom 8:5)

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Living by the Spirit to be sons of God (Rom 8:14)

14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Living by the Spirit by keeping step with the Spirit (Gal 5:25)

25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Living by the Spirit to reap eternal life (Gal 6:8)

8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Living by the Spirit to be guided into all truth (John 16:13)

13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

Living by the Spirit as an obligation (Rom 8:12)

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

There are several levels of application which this passage has for Christians in our day and age. Let us conclude by a consideration of the application of the text to our lives.

(1) **Our passage condemns a return to the Old Testament Law as our rule of life.** The first level of application is the most direct. While the Old Testament provides a standard for righteousness, it does not provide us with the means of meeting this standard. In the day of the Galatian saints, circumcision was a commitment to return to the rule of the Law. For this reason, circumcision was condemned. Today, while circumcision does not have the same implications for Gentile Christians, there are still those who would have us return to living under the Old Testament Law as the Judaizers taught. We must beware of any return to the Law in this sense.

Let me hasten to say that this principle does not cast the Old Testament aside. Both our Lord and the New Testament writers relied heavily on the Old Testament, including the Law. We have much to learn from the Law, but we dare not turn back the clock and attempt to live under the Law as men did before the cross.

We must remember that Paul is not trying to give a full exposition on the merits and use of the Old Testament Law in Galatians—he is attempting to refute a serious error which sought to misuse the Law. We must always interpret Paul’s words in this book in the light of his argument. I would encourage each reader to engage in a fuller study of the merits of the Old Testament and the Mosaic Law, so long as they distinguish between the Law as a means of edification and the Law as a means of justification (or sanctification).

(2) **This text condemns any teaching which portrays a particular act as producing in the believer a “quantum leap” in his spiritual status.** Some today teach the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. To those who hold this doctrine, salvation cannot be obtained other than by means of baptism. Apart from changing the rite from circumcision to baptism, this teaching does not differ from that of the Judaizers (cf. Acts 15:1,5). There are other “rites” or “rituals” which fall into this same category, I believe, including the experiences related to the “second blessing.” Let us beware of viewing some “rite” as the passageway into a higher spiritual standing.

(3) **Our passage provides us with some very helpful principles for correcting an erring brother.** We know from other texts that rebuke is the obligation of the Christian (cf. Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1-2). Paul’s actions give us several guidelines for correction. First, we learn that rebuke should not be delayed. Paul did not wait until the Galatians had submitted to circumcision; he warned them before such an error occurred. If it is better to “keep out” of sin than to “get out,” correction should not be delayed. Second, we learn that godly correction points out the implications and consequences of one’s actions. In Proverbs we are told that the wise man will consider the consequences of his deeds and will act according to wisdom (cf. Prov. 22:3). Paul thus points out the consequences of following the doctrine of the Judaizers. Third, correction never minimizes the seriousness of sin. We often tend to play down the seriousness of sin, but Paul emphasized it. There is grave danger in following false doctrine; Paul was emphatic on this point. Fourth, we learn from Paul to correct in confidence. He emphasized the foolishness of following the Judaizers (e.g. 3:1) and the seriousness of submitting to circumcision, and yet he was not fearful of failing in his task. Paul’s assurance was based in the Lord, and he knew that the God of the Galatians would finish the good work He had started in them.

(4) **This passage instructs us about the value of foresight.** We have seen how the previous chapters in Galatians looked backward, while in chapter 5 Paul begins to look ahead. There are several ways in which looking forward can and should be adopted by the Christian. First, we should exercise foresight in the goals which God has for our lives. Far too often Christians are in a dither to know God’s will for them in some particular area and have forgotten the central focus of God’s will for them in general. God’s will for us is that we be holy and sanctified (cf. 1 Thes. 4:3). Paul speaks of this goal particularly in respect to our sexual purity. If we are conscious of this broad goal, we need not agonize about God’s will on a particular matter when the outcome would be immorality. I personally believe that Christians in this generation have become obsessed with the particulars, because they have neglected the principles; we have become fascinated with guidance because we have lost sight of our goals. If our text stresses anything, it is that God’s goals for our lives should

serve as guideposts. If God had called the Galatians for liberty, why would He possibly lead them into bondage again?

A second way of looking ahead is to consider the implications of our actions. Paul saw that Peter's actions were a denial of the gospel and thus he rebuked him (Gal. 2:11-21). Paul saw that the Galatians' contemplated action (circumcision) was also a departure from the gospel and from the freedom it was intended to produce. It is very important that we consider the implications of our actions. This is foresight.

Perhaps you have never considered the eternal implication of your response to Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that all men (this includes you) are sinners, deserving and destined to eternal separation from Him in hell. The Bible also teaches that God has provided men with a solution to their problem of sin and its consequence of death. Jesus Christ, God's sinless Son, came to the earth, lived a perfect life, and died on a Roman cross. He did this in our place, so that everyone who accepts Him has already died to sin and its consequences, and may thus be accepted by God in Christ's righteousness. To neglect this provision is to commit the most serious error of all and to await eternal judgment. May God enable you to trust in His Son, even now.

For those of us who are saved, may God enable us to consider the implications for our lives of the goals which God has for us, and may we also consider the implications of our actions in the light of these goals.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/14-goal-gospel-galatians-51-12>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

If you were free to become anything that you chose to be, what would you choose? To what use would you put such radical freedom? We should all consider how our honest answer to such a question compares with what we confess as Christians. If we truly believe that Christ's cross saves us from the ruin of our lives, do we let the cross define what should become the purpose of our lives? For what has Christ set us free?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. The freedom that Christ gives must be guarded so that the old ways do not enslave us again (Gal. 5:1)
2. Tradition, rituals, and customs cannot save us (Gal. 5:2-4; cf. Rom. 10:9)
3. Righteousness is an attribute of God. Our goal is to be like Him (Gal. 5:5; cf. 2 Tim. 4:8)
4. Love overcomes obstacles, breaks barriers, and creates opportunities. It unifies the body of Christ (Gal. 5:6; cf. 1 Pet. 4:8; Matt. 22:38-39; 2 Tim. 1:7)
5. A bad influence can retard spiritual growth (Gal. 5:7-10)
6. Following Christ means a complete break with the past (vss. 11-17)