

Galatians 5

Enslaved by the Law (5:1-6)

1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

- The Law is the “yoke of slavery” Paul is addressing here.
- For those unfamiliar with a *yoke*, it was a wooden bar which fastened together two animals, such as oxen, for working together. By joining two animals together, a yoke increased the productivity of the labor.
- The Judaizers wanted to place the Galatians under the heavy yoke of the Law. It was a heavy burdened that weighed upon the Israelites for centuries.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ came to set humanity free from every yoke, including the heavy yoke of the Law. The gospel of justification by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law removed the burdensome yoke of the Law.
- During the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, when the church leaders decided the requirements for Gentile believers, Peter described the Law like this: “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10).
- Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).
- When Jesus said this, He wasn’t referring to people worn-out from a rough week of working and parenting. Though we can certainly apply this statement to physical and emotional exhaustion, Jesus was speaking about the heavy burden of the Law.
- For hundreds of years, the Law of Moses weighed upon the shoulders of the Israelites, burdening them with commandments impossible to fully obey internally and externally. Most Israelites were emotionally and mentally scarred by guilt, shame, and condemnation. They could never do enough to be accepted by God or to please Him.
- Jesus offered them—and us—a new way of living. Rather than being weighed down with a law-keeping obsession, we could come to Jesus and experience a deeply personal relationship with Him. Knowing Him intimately would yoke us together with a Person rather than tablets of stone. Jesus invited us to walk with Him day by day, moment by moment. The era of meticulous obedience to God’s lofty standards was coming to an end. The external commandments of *you musts* and *thou shalt*s was being replaced by an internal relationship with Christ by the indwelling Spirit. External compliance was now obsolete. Internal revelation, intimacy, and transformation through the indwelling Spirit was the new way of living. Jesus invited both Jews and Gentiles into this life-giving relationship.

2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.

- Circumcision was a covenant sign for the ancient Israelites (Gen. 17:11). Circumcision was a mark of their covenant with the Lord.

Galatians 5

- Circumcision went hand-in-hand with full obedience to the Law. During the Jerusalem Council, the Pharisees said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses" (Acts 15:5).
- Circumcision was how Israelites entered into the Old Covenant. Once they were considered to be in the Old Covenant, they were required to obey all of the 613 commandments of the Law.
- Paul sternly warned the Galatians, basically saying, "You received Christ by faith apart from the works of the Law. Now if you are circumcised as a sign of entering the Old Covenant, you will be under obligation to keep the whole Law. You will be required to keep all 613 commandments if you want to be right with God. If you go down this path, Christ will be of no benefit to you. You will be on your own."

4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

- Paul's serious warnings continued. If you try to be accepted by God through law-keeping, through obedience to God's commandments, you will be severed from Christ. You will fall from grace.
- Grace is the free and undeserved gift of God that justifies us and the unmerited and unearned power of God that sanctifies us as the Spirit prepares to glorify us.
- If you try to obey God's commands in order to become righteous and accepted by Him, you will get a wage that corresponds with your work. Like ancient Israel, if you are obedient then you will be blessed. If you are disobedient in the slightest way, even in the invisible desires of your heart, then you will be cursed.
- Whether obedient or disobedient, if you trust in your own discipline and goodwill to justify you, your work will be rewarded with the wages you deserve. This bless-me-for-obedience and curse-me-for-disobedience lifestyle is the opposite of living by grace through faith.
- But if you put your faith in Jesus and in His finished work before you obey one commandment in either the Old or New Testament, then God will give you the gift of imputed righteousness as a free gift of grace.
- Grace not only gives us better than we deserve (Rom. 4:4-5). Grace gives us what we cannot produce. Grace does the humanly impossible of bringing forth life from the dead, calling forth what doesn't exist, recreating the human spirit in the likeness of God, conforming us into the image of Christ, and giving us an inheritance as a coheir with Jesus for all eternity.
- Paul issued two serious warnings to the Galatians: If you seek to be justified and sanctified by law-keeping, *you will be severed from Christ and you will fall from grace.*

5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

- *The hope of righteousness* likely refers to what Paul said in Titus 2:13: "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."
- *The hope of righteousness* is also connected to Romans 8:23-25: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

Galatians 5

- *The hope of righteousness* includes the glorious appearing and revelation of Jesus Christ when He returns, the fullness of the Spirit in our spirits, hearts, souls, and bodies, son placement into Christ's inheritance, and the transformation of our soulical, sin-laden bodies into spiritual, glory-radiating bodies.
- In essence, Paul told the Galatians, "Christ, the Messiah, is the goal of the Law. Not strict obedience to the 613 commandments. It's the person of Christ, not the shadows you see in the Law. Our hope is not in a book but in a glorious, beautiful Person—the person of Jesus Christ. When He appears, our adoption as sons will be finalized, we will receive resurrection bodies full of glory, and we will be conformed into His image. This is what life is all about. Don't settle for the shadows when you can have the substance."
- This glorious future is what we wait for *through the Spirit* and *by faith*. As we surrender ourselves to Christ, the indwelling Spirit fills us and supplies us with the faith of Jesus Christ. This enables us to wait with perseverance for the blessed hope of righteousness, Christ Jesus Himself.

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

- In the New Covenant, or using Paul's words *in Christ*, circumcision means nothing. It doesn't matter if you are a circumcised Jew or an uncircumcised Gentile. Physical circumcision means nothing in the New Covenant. What matters then? *Faith working through love*.
- A few verses down, Paul introduced the revolutionary concept of how the Law is fulfilled in one word—love. If we love God and love our neighbors, we will fulfill the entire Law. We will fulfill what the 613 commandments were seeking to accomplish externally and internally.
- The New Covenant is not about gritting our teeth to obey God's external commandments with all the power of self-determination we can muster. It's about the Spirit pouring out His love upon our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Then, as our hearts are tenderized by His inward touch, faith springs up within us. And faith, which is never stagnant nor sterile, begins to move us to love-motivated action. Our hands and feet become the hands and feet of Jesus. We lay down our lives to love and serve our neighbors. This is the obedience of faith that fulfills the entire Law (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Faith working through love empowers us to keep all the requirements of the Law (Rom. 8:4).

The Judaizes Disturbed the Galatians (5:7-12)

7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?

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

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

- When the Galatians responded to the gospel with *hearing with faith*, they had a glorious beginning. Using Paul's words, they "were running well." But when the Judaizers came preaching their false gospel of legalism and the Galatians shifted to *the works of the Law*, they were "hindered . . . from obeying the truth."
- Paul wanted the Galatians to know, even though God Himself hand-delivered the Law to Moses on tablets of stone, a new era had been inaugurated. The Judaizers' persuasion was not Spirit-inspired. It did not come from the Lord.

Galatians 5

- Paul borrowed the phrase “a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” from Jesus. The Lord used this metaphor to describe the legalistic teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:11-12).
- Some think a little false teaching or a few unbiblical positions are harmless. Jesus and Paul thought otherwise. Even a little mixture of soulish or demonic doctrines can poison the entire batch of bread. Speaking of legalistic leaven, Jesus said to “watch out and beware” of it (Matt. 16:6).
- Like we saw in Chapter 4, fleshly religion and Spirit-led living can not coexist. We must cast out the bondwoman and her son. We must ruthlessly remove every tainted influence of legalism, or even more prevalent in our day, lawlessness. Even a little legalism or lawlessness will alter the entire loaf of bread. We must beware and watch for the poison of legalism and lawlessness in the teachings we hear.

10 I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.

11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.

12 I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

- Though the Galatians were tilting toward forsaking Christ in favor of the Law, Paul was confident they could still be persuaded. Paul trusted the Lord to preserve the Galatians and to help them from embracing the Judaizers’ view.
- Not only was Paul confident in the Lord to keep the Galatians from stumbling. He also knew the Judaizers’ ringleader, “whoever he” was, would “bear his judgment.” Paul was confident that the Lord would bring swift judgment upon the false teachers disturbing his spiritual children.
- One of the Judaizers’ accusations was Paul still preached circumcision. Perhaps they said something like this to the Galatians: “Paul preaches a watered-down gospel to you. But you should hear what he says when speaking to the Jews. To you he downplays the importance of circumcision. But when he preaches to the Jews, he expounds upon the necessity of circumcision.”
- Paul was defending against the Judaizers’ accusations against him. Here’s his basic argument: “If I still preach circumcision as these Judaizers’ claim, then why am I now being persecuted by them for preaching uncircumcision to you? If I truly preached circumcision as they claim, I would not be persecuted by legalists like you.”
- Circumcision as an Old Covenant mark is a “stumbling block of the cross.” In other words, the finished work of the cross caused the legalists of Paul’s day to stumble. It was deeply offensive to their self-righteous, self-determined law-keeping. It was like a sledgehammer destroying their religious pride.
- The Judaizers wanted the Galatians to be circumcised. Paul basically said, in a beautiful tone of sarcasm, “If they want you to be circumcised, how about they mutilate themselves first.”

Love Fulfills the Law (5:13-15)

13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

- Our liberty in Christ is freedom from the heavy-burden of the Law. It is liberation from the heavy-yoke of external commandments that always produce guilt, shame, condemnation, and death.

Galatians 5

- However, as Paul warned, our freedom in Christ is not “an opportunity for the flesh.” This Scripture is a much-needed warning to the hyper-grace teachers of our day and to those who blindly sit under their teaching.
- Though legalism is certainly an issue in our day, lawlessness is on the rise through false teachings about God’s grace. Some hyper-grace teachers—who take God’s beautiful and glorious grace to an unbiblical extreme—claim that believers no longer need to repent or confess their sins. They teach their followers that Jesus’ teachings before the cross were Law—things such as the Sermon on the Mount and taking up your cross daily. Only what Jesus said after His resurrection applies to New Covenant believers today. This type of libertinism is producing lawlessness in the church. People claim freedom from the Law while becoming enslaved to their flesh.
- Many theological libertarians are giving God’s people a license to sin. Jude warned about these false teachers, saying they were “ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness” (Jude 1:4). *Licentiousness* is a long word that means *lacking legal or moral restraints*.
- Freedom in Christ is not opportunity for the flesh. The false teaching of hyper-grace is giving many sincere believers a fleshly license to sin. Claiming their freedom in Christ, they party just like the world, getting drunk, engaging in pornography and other sexual sins, and watching movies that dishonor Jesus Christ and the cross. They have lost the fear of God in the name of freedom.
- Paul described what he meant by “an opportunity for the flesh” a few verses down, when he listed the sins of the flesh (5:19-21).

14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

- In Romans 13:8-10, Paul reiterated this statement but with much more detail. He said,

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
- Jesus said the same thing but also mentioned the first commandment—our wholehearted love and devotion to God. He taught that “the whole Law and the Prophets” hinged on loving God fully and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40).
- Think about Jesus’ and Paul’s words for a minute in light of the 10 commandments.

Commandment	Sin	How Love Fulfills the Law
First and Second	Idolatry	If we love God wholeheartedly, we will not put any other god, idol, or love above Him.
Third	Blasphemy	If we love God wholeheartedly, we will not speak anything profane or unholy against God.

Galatians 5

Commandment	Sin	How Love Fulfills the Law
Fifth	Honor	If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will show honor to all people, just as we would want to be honored. This starts with our parents and works its way up and down all authority structures.
Sixth	Murder	If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not kill another. Nor will we even speak against, slander, or gossip about another.
Seventh	Sexual Immorality	If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not violate God's requirement of sex within the context of marriage between one man and one woman. All forms of sexual sin outside this context of marriage are selfish and self-serving.
Eighth	Stealing	If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not steal anything from another. Moved by love, we will not steal another's valuable time, money, or possessions.
Ninth	Honesty	If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will treat others the way we want to be treated. We will deal honestly with others. We will not bear false witness against another. We will not accuse another with lies or falsehood.
Tenth	Coveting	If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will rejoice in their blessings. We will be happy they are happy. We will not envy or covet after their blessings because we love them and are happy God has blessed them abundantly.

- Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). Most of the 613 commandments in the Law would be fulfilled by Jesus' new commandment to love like He loves.
- Internal love for God and others, springing forth from the Spirit and filling our hearts, leads to faith that takes action. Faith working through love. This is how the entire Law is fulfilled through love.
- However, here's a warning we must heed. Jesus' new commandment to love like He loves does not negate the definition of sin defined by the Law. There's a growing trend in the church, in the name of love and freedom, to abandon the Law's definition of sin. Paul dealt with this in Romans 7:7, saying, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."
- When Jesus gave us a new commandment to love, this did not abolish the Law's lofty requirements nor did it give new definitions for what's morally permissible. Rather, the love of the Spirit poured out upon our hearts gives us the power to keep the Law's requirements. Paul said that "the requirement of the Law" is "fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Galatians 5

- Morally speaking, the Law's lofty requirements, expectations, and definitions of sin are eternal. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17).
- The moral law is fulfilled in us as we walk by the Spirit, are filled with the Spirit's love, take love-motivated action, and become the hands and feet of Jesus in this earth.
- If we think Jesus' new commandment to love replaces the moral Law it becomes a slippery slope. Some use this verse as an excuse to sin. For example, some claim, "If two men love each other, why can't they be together. After all, Jesus' one commandment replaced the 613 commandments of the Law." Or some say, "Jesus says to love one another. I love five women equally; therefore, based on Jesus' commandment to love, I can take all five women as wives." Numerous other examples could be cited.
- Jesus' new commandment to love does not abolish the moral law. It gives us the power to fulfill it. It gives us the ability to keep the Law's moral requirements.

15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

- The way we speak about others demonstrates the degree of our second-commandment love. *Biting* and *devouring* are both done with our mouth. Figuratively speaking, *biting* is the small and persistent nibbles of accusations, gossip, slander, fault-finding, judgment, and criticism that we speak against others. *Devouring* is when we take this small and persistent yet subtle attacks to an entirely different level. When we devour someone with our words we are seeking to harm and destroy them.
- The way we speak about others, even our children, proves the reality of our second-commandment love for others. If we slowly wear down another or if we quickly abuse them with words of destruction, Paul warned us that we will reap what we sow. We ourselves will be *consumed* if we seek to harm others with our words.