

Freedom in Christ or bondage under law (Galatians 5:1–6)

To be saved by grace through faith and not by works gives to the believer freedom in Christ (Gal 2:4) and removes the believer from being in bondage to the law. Though there is the appearance of a simplicity and a sense of security in keeping regulations, it is a dangerous attraction which leads to slavery. Therefore, Paul must again remind his fellow-believers in Galatia that Christ had called them to freedom and he lays out for them the consequences if they should made the wrong choice of bondage under law.

I. The choice you have to make (5:1)

A. The Savior's work: "For freedom Christ has set us free"

This implies first of all the need to be set free. The natural man is under bondage to both sin and the law. The Lord Jesus Christ, by living in perfect obedience even unto death, fulfilled the law and became in His death the perfect substitute to set believers free. He set believers to live in freedom from sin and from the law, not to live for the flesh (v.13), but to live by the power of the Spirit (vv. 16ff.).

B. The believer's two-fold responsibility: stand firm and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery

The Galatians had begun to keep the Jewish calendar (4:10), thereby stepping away from a complete trust in the grace of God. They needed to stand firm in God's grace and not burden themselves again with the unbearable burden of law-keeping as a way to be right with God (cf. Acts 15:10).

II. The consequences of the path you choose (5:2–6)

A. Under law

1. Christ would become of no advantage, or of no profit, if they chose circumcision and the Old Testament system of which it was a sign. Such a choice would effectively deny salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. To embrace law would remove them from benefitting from Christ's work.
2. To choose circumcision and the system it represented would obligate them to keep the whole law. Join the system and you must accept the whole system. Fail in one point and you fail in all (cf. James 2:10–11).
3. Those who choose the law as a path to have a right standing with God release themselves from Christ. Law and grace do not mix. There is no compromise between these two ways of seeking to be right with God.
4. Choose the path of law for justification and you have fully rejected the way of grace for salvation. (In that sense a person has "fallen" from grace. Paul is dealing with the way of salvation, not the alleged possibility of losing one's salvation.)

There is no mixing of grace and law as a way of being right with God. You cannot be saved by Christ plus your own efforts. It would then be no longer grace.

B. Under Christ

1. The true believer trusts in God for a present right standing with God and on that basis has a firm hope of righteousness for the future, even though believers continue to battle with sin now. By faith believers place their hope in God because of the work of Christ, a faith which is present and strengthened through the work of the Spirit of God.
2. Any form of legalism is ruled out. Neither Judaism (represented in circumcision) nor legalistic anti-Judaism (represented in requiring no circumcision) attains a right standing with God. Paul was free to have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3), but denied it for Titus (Gal 2:3).
3. In contrast to rule-keeping, what is important is faith working through love. The one who truly believes God's revelation in Jesus Christ, His work and His person, will demonstrate a changed heart in loving God and loving his or her neighbor (cf. 5:13–14, 22).

The yoke of slavery to the law is unbearable, but Jesus offers His yoke as one that is easy, and a burden that is light. He gives forgiveness, peace, hope, and a multitude of blessing which you cannot earn and cannot produce on your own. He offers freedom instead of slavery to sin and the law.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- When might Christians today be confronted with the choice of freedom in Christ and bondage to law?
- If a person claims to have contributed to his or her salvation by some deed done, can that person truly be a child of God? Why or why not?
- Why should waiting for the hope of righteousness be done eagerly? Do you? Why/why not?
- Is your faith working itself out in love? How does it show in your life as more important than any legalistic living?