



Lesson 12 February 18th, 2017

Freedom in Christ

Study Scripture – Galatians 5:1-17

Background Scripture – Galatians 5

Key Verse:

For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve ye one another.

Galatians 5:13

INTRODUCTION

We have been told repeatedly by modern intellectuals and academics that freedom (and this posture is almost always stated in connection with debates on political affairs and organization) is one of those ideals that all humans desire in as many of its expressions as possible. In contrast, they say, men instinctively recoil from any and all forms of bondage. We are accustomed to hear that the ideals of freedom of speech, assembly, association, religion, economic and the list goes on... were all pursued from the dawn of history.

But in fact, this is a myth and has never been the case in any society. In fact, our modern ideas on this matter can be traced from the Greek intellectual and philosophical heritage which is proudly stated as one of man's great philosophic achievements. But this is simply a cleverly constructed false myth. Athenian and Greek society or any other human society has never offered their limited concept of "freedom" or "equality" to anyone else but a small group of their favoured "citizens". And even then, what they had cannot be termed "freedom"

The reality is that proud or attractive words by men who promise great benefits to humanity is easily seen in their omissions than in the commission.

Arguably and from a Christian perspective, freedom from the penalty, power and presence of sin is in fact of mankind's greatest need. This is easily so, because in one form or another sin holds humanity in bondage.

When we examine the biblical description of the human condition we see that men are caught in a great predicament. There is much wrong with us and that is why human societies experience the same problems over and over again.

Let us remember that human beings were the crown of God's creation, imprinted with God's image, made in the image and likeness of God. But men disobeyed, made the wrong choice, and fell in Eden. Despite this Fall man retained a broken form of this image, was not totally wicked, but was totally twisted and hence the flaws they had taken on had made them and everything they touched subject to decay, perversion, a twisted state, and ultimate disintegration. As one writer laments:

“The best ideas, the loveliest people, the strongest hopes all rise in a moment, but they are always dragged back down again. The human race never gives in totally to despair, but we are endlessly disappointed: we can never quite attain heights we aspire to. The principle of rebellion within us that causes us to ruin all we contact is termed “the flesh” in Scripture.

This matter of liberty or freedom is at the centre of Paul’s argument at this point in his letter, which carries a very polemical tone. The Galatian Christians had started their spiritual journey in very commendable fashion however subsequent to Paul’s departure from the region, a grievous error was introduced into those churches and the Apostle is at great pains to refute the error.

His focus on freedom dealt with the legalistic (human merit) perversion of freedom and with the antinomian (lawlessness) perversion of freedom (vs.13-15), (See Rom. 14:1-15:13; I Cor. 8; 10:23-33)

Clearly therefore the flesh we have within us makes men take the law of God, think they can use the law and follow it without the help of God, thereby in the heart reject God. Thus because of “pride”, something that God hates, pervert the law, and turn it into a system that aims not to correct evil, but simply to mask evil.

The law is perfect and good, but when it is attached to the flesh it makes you focus on other people and what they think of you and your worth as an individual.

This focus on what other people think of you instead of a focus on what God wants and thinks of you is defined in Scripture as slavery. It is man-centered. It is designed to show off a person’s achievements which man thinks will earn them brownie points with God. It is a perversion of the flesh and this creates a false religion. It is from this that the Apostle calls the Galatian brethren and us also.

We see all around us men and women who struggle to free themselves from sundry forms of addiction, bad habits, idolatrous practices, satanic inspired practices such as obeah, necromancy, zodiac readings, and other forms of evildoing, as well as the continuing pressures of society to control and direct them. But some have simply accepted the state they are in and have chosen the bondage of evil, rejecting true freedom and liberty. They accept and prefer evil rather than good. Note that the example of the Israelites after they left Egypt illustrate that man prefer bondage rather than freedom. They long for Egypt, forgetting what their real experiences were.

The Study Scripture pictures any positioning away from being in Christ, and being indwelt and guided by the Holy Spirit, accepting the religion of slavery is a most awful circumstance.

Losing focus and making even what may be considered a small turn away from being totally in Christ and accepting even a small element of the seductive appeal of the flesh is more dangerous than we might think, for sadly, a “little leaven” will leaven the whole lump, eventually change the character of a person, and pollute the entire body. The immensity of this danger horrifies the Apostle and leads the Apostle to vilify and condemn those teaching any varying of the gospel he preached as worthy of being under the judgment of God.



The issue of the necessity to be circumcised, a view being taught by certain teachers, is used to stand for the need or the desire to adopt the old Jewish practises from which Christ had liberated them and brought them into the freedom of the Spirit.

Circumcision appears to have been the particular rite being imposed on the Galatians and it being the signature mark of God's covenant people, the implication was clear; faith in Jesus Christ through God's grace was not sufficient to appropriate His salvation, justification and sanctification.

One writer explains why the existing Jewish system that had been constructed from the rabbinical interpretation of Scriptural commandments had to be changed and the Law written on the heart under the New Covenant.

“When Christ came, the emphasis changed to salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The difference was life-changing. The law (613 commandments) prescribed in great detail exactly what a person could and could not do. The Talmud (thousands more rules) tried to specify the exact limits of commandments, such as the prohibition of work on the Sabbath. Even Biblical scholars had problems remembering all the rules. The ordinary person, even if literate, had little access to the Biblical text and could have only a vague idea when he/she had transgressed the law. It was an impossible situation.

But Christ set us free by subjecting us to the rule of grace rather than the rule of law. He too gave commandments (“Love God...love your neighbour) Matthew 22:37-40, but he was “full of grace” (John 1:14)—meaning that transgressors who are also believers can expect the blood of Christ to make them whole in God’s sight.

But we would be amiss if we were to ignore the grace of the Old Testament. Without grace, God would have abandoned the Israelites when they built a calf of gold at the base of Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:1-6)—or when they complained in the wilderness (Exodus 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Numbers 11:1-2; 14:27-36; Jeremiah 2:29)—or when they refused to enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1:19-33). He chastened Israel—he punished the Israelites—but he didn’t abandon them or cease to love them”.

The Apostle was at pains using Scripture, logic, metaphor or allegory to convince the Galatians their salvation was due to God's grace in Jesus Christ and was founded on God's unconditional promise to Abraham. This in fact was the experience of the Galatians. The false teachers however would have them believe that to truly belong to the people of God, they needed to adopt circumcision and maybe other Jewish practices.

The law clearly points men to Christ and at the same time and among other things, place a curse on all men due to the fact they could not observe the law perfectly and thus were under its condemnation. Paul's emphatic point was that those who by faith accepted Jesus' sacrificial death were completely liberated from the curse and condemnation of the law or that of any other religious system in which they might have placed trust to obtain justification with God. All 'works based' belief systems, Jewish or pagan were in fact bondage, with no provision for escape.



Paul decried the folly of the Galatians for giving consideration to the idea that somehow circumcision or any other practice or rite would make them more acceptable to God. As well they might have been ignorant of the fact that those who put themselves under the law must of necessity observe the whole law and that perfectly! They did not realize that circumcision implied certain binding obligations. To be circumcised was to submit oneself to the Old Testament Law as interpreted by the Talmud, thus exchanging freedom for bondage.

It was Paul's intention in this passage to point out the consequences of circumcision, showing them the high cost. They had everything to lose by it and nothing to gain.

Following his declaration that Christians are the children of the 'free woman' and thus of 'promise' at the end of chapter 4, he articulated the crucial and practical aspects of justification by grace through faith. Paul was very concerned with godliness, which the Judaizers might have used to bolster their argument. He however affirmed that holiness before God is not a result of external rules but of a changed heart (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26,27).

It's a personal relationship with Christ by faith which leads to a life of godliness through gratitude. The new life in Christ is the basis of one's right standing with God. Faith led to the evidence of it. Paul was also concerned with his readers living moral, upright, service-oriented lives, which he begins to articulate in our Study text.

The gospel is a call to freedom, but not a freedom that leads to licensed excess (vv. 13-15); one that leads to loving service. All believers need to see that believers are truly free in Christ and by being free from the Law they are now free to respond appropriately to God's freely-given love (Rom.6).

The freedom which was granted at salvation was a freedom from servitude to servanthood. This new mindset was not happening however due to strife among the brethren. On this matter one writer comments:

Freedom, he is saying, is the option to fleshly religion (man's pride trying to keep the law of God). Here we learn that the flesh can ruin freedom too. Not only the law, therefore, but freedom can be ruined by our rebel nature, so that if we try to carry out the call to freedom in the flesh we end up with a kind of licence that degrades and destroys relationships. You will not have to think very long to come up with examples of freedom misused. Some of the most violent people in history have called themselves "freedom fighters". Man, in the name of freedom, is capable of all kinds of debauchery. We may think we are living in freedom, but what we are doing is degrading ourselves. Thus, Paul says that not only the law but the call to freedom can become destructive if we do not recognize the power and the activity of the flesh, of our rebel nature". Galatians 5:13-24.

It is important to note that the Scriptures speak of the Law of Christ (Gal.6:2). Jesus gave two commandments that He said summarized the Law (Matt.22:36-40). Of course, God-given codes of laws that governed people's behavior existed before God gave the Law of Moses (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:16-17; 3:14-19; 9:1-17). Note there is only one God and one Law!



The Apostle claimed that the strife among the Galatian Christians was the result of walking in the flesh, rather than of walking in the Spirit. Walking in the flesh was one fall-out from the Galatians' turning to another gospel, a gospel which added law-keeping to grace. Paul sought to solve the practical problem of disunity by exposing its roots: legalism or external law keeping. He attempted to convince his readers that legalism will only promote sin, rather than prevent it, because of a war which is being waged within the soul.

The latter part of the Study text begins to show us the supernatural source of Christian freedom which is the Holy Spirit. As salvation is a free act of God's love through Christ, so also is the Christian life through the Spirit. As believers, must yield in repentance and faith to salvation, they must yield in repentance and faith to the ongoing leadership of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. Justification starts the process of sanctification. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to live godly lives. Note that it was God's grace that made Him create the beautiful world and create man. We have done nothing and can do nothing to deserve God's unmerited favour.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. This verse is a logical and apt conclusion to the argument of chapters 3 and 4, where Paul showed the superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant to the Mosaic Law and thus of grace to law. Since the Law leads only to bondage, and grace to freedom, it was foolish to seek to return to bondage by placing oneself under the Mosaic Law. It is important to note that the Mosaic Law / Covenant was not intended to replace the former and had a different design.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Some translations have this sentence which highlights the Christians liberty, which liberty is the freedom from the curse and condemnation of the law. Christ died for our salvation!

Remember that when God made Adam before he sinned he was free. His daily desires which came from deep down in his heart were always good and attractive to God. Adam did not have to control any fleshly impulse, evaluate his actions constantly, did not have to be hard on himself, or get help from others to help judge his motivations. He was on a kind of automatic pilot.

But we are not that way and we have to judge our thoughts, obey when we do feel like obeying and must pay close attention to the conflict going on within us. We cannot trust our flesh or body to take us where we often want to go so we have to buffet our bodies and take even take our thoughts "***captive to the obedience of Christ***" according to the Apostle's advice in 1 Corinthians. We need therefore the Spirit's control.

Stand fast therefore indicates the diligence and commitment required to maintain our freedom. The Apostle has shown that bondage is the natural condition of men, whether Jew or Gentile (3:10-11, 22-23; 4:3, 8-9, 21-31). Unless we diligently guard our liberty, we will be drawn back into bondage. Paul's words here help us understand why spiritual apathy is taken so seriously in the Scriptures (Rev. 3:14-22).



Be not entangled again... implies that there is personal accountability for falling back into bondage. It is neither entirely an unconscious choice, nor is such a choice the fault of someone else. We fall back into bondage because we allow ourselves to do so (Heb. 2:1).

Again ... is Paul's way of equating the evil of the Galatians' former bondage in their pagan beliefs and practices (Gal. 4:8; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 12:2) with the bondage to which they would succumb "under the Law" accepting circumcision. Paul teaches that to turn from grace results in bondage; whether the brand of bondage is Jewish or Gentile is of little consequence. Thus, Paul can say that to follow the teaching of the Judaizers was to return "*again*" to bondage, not precisely the same bondage, but bondage nonetheless.

... yoke of bondage ... One writer notes: "**The 'yoke' was used in current Jewish parlance in an honorable sense for the obligation to keep the law of Moses, and the Judaizers may well have urged the Galatians to 'take the yoke of the law' upon themselves. But Paul bluntly points out that the ordinances of the law as demanded by the Judaizers constitute a slave's yoke, so that he uses the word in the bad sense of an imposed burden, like slavery (Acts 15:10; Matt. 11:29-30; James 1:25; 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:1).**"

Note one writer describes what a yoke was to help us understand the Apostle's thinking.

"A yoke was the wooden implement used to join two oxen to serve the purpose of their master. Because a yoke so restricted the oxen's movement, it became a symbol of servitude Biblical authors used the yoke as a metaphor for various kinds of bondage (Genesis 27:40; Leviticus 26:13; Numbers 25:3; Deuteronomy 28:48; 1 Kings 12:10-14; Isaiah 9:4; 10:27; 14:25; 47:6; 58:6,9; Jeremiah 2:20 and so on. The Jewish law was a yoke (Jeremiah 5:5))."

Verses 2-6

The Judaizers had been busy at work among the Gentile Galatian churches. They preached a different gospel, claiming a superior spiritual status for all who would live under the Law. Paul's words suggest that most (if not all) of the Galatian saints had not made a decision to follow the Judaizers when he wrote the epistle. The one issue, one act, which served as a touchstone for the Judaizers and a kind of watershed for the Galatians was circumcision. Paul focuses on this issue in these verses.

Verse 2. ... *behold I Paul say* ... an emphatic and bottom-line statement with apostolic authority. Circumcision was commanded (or at least commended) by the Judaizers and contemplated by the Galatian saints. From the account in Acts 15 (vv. 1, 5) and chapter 2 of this epistle, it is clear that circumcision was a fundamental issue for the Judaizers. The context suggests that some of the saints were considering circumcision, but most, at least, had not yet committed themselves. Paul is thus addressing circumcision as an imminent decision which his readers must make.

Paul indicates that submitting to circumcision is a far more serious issue than the Galatian Christians might have imagined. These introductory words alerted them to the urgency of the issue.



... *if ye be circumcised* ... what Paul's introduction implies, his subsequent words make clear. The seriousness of the error is indicated by its consequences;
Christ shall profit you nothing!

Paul is contrasting two ways of being right with God: (1) human effort and (2) free grace.

Verse 3. Circumcision was a serious regression because it puts one back under the Law and thus makes righteousness a matter of works and not of faith.

Paul here reminded his readers of a fact which the Judaizers had no doubt avoided to mention: one who is circumcised is under obligation to keep the whole Law. The Galatians would be obligating themselves to obey the whole Mosaic Code if they allowed the false teachers to circumcise them.

Verse 4. The implications and result of accepting circumcision were far-reaching. It would mean a confidence in their own ability to earn salvation by obeying the Law. This legal approach to salvation would separate them from Christ since what He did was provide salvation as a gift.

The one who is circumcised is thus seeking to establish his righteousness before God by law-keeping and no longer by faith. For this reason, Paul, can say their situation was such that *Christ is become of no effect* and "have fallen from grace". Circumcision signified a change in the basis of one's righteousness.

... *of no effect* = to render useless; (powerless; unproductive; unprofitable; empty; make null and void;

... *ye are fallen from grace* ... They would have fallen away from the grace method of salvation if they chose the law method. In view of the many scriptural promises that God never withdraws His gift of salvation, this verse cannot mean the readers had lost their salvation (John 1:12; 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39; et al.).

Paul is trying to shock his readers into a realization of the seriousness of submitting to circumcision which they were contemplating. Paul is not teaching that the Galatian Christian who submitted to circumcision immediately lost his salvation. He is stressing the implications of circumcision. Circumcision is an acknowledgment that one is placing himself under Law, thereby turning from grace, and setting aside the work of Christ. Paul did not believe the Galatians wanted to enslave themselves under the Law, so he set forth the seriousness of the implications of circumcision.

Verses 5 - 6. Circumcision betrayed a complete reversal of crucial Christian doctrines. These verses forcefully conclude Paul's arguments against submitting to circumcision. He points out three characteristics of Christian faith and practice which directly opposed the view of the Judaizers.



a). Faith works by means of the Spirit (v. 5). The religion of the Judaizers was not of God, and thus was not empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God works through men of faith, empowering them to live lives which are acceptable in God's sight.

b). Faith hopes for ultimate and final righteousness (v. 5). The Judaizers it seems promised complete righteousness in ones' earthly life, beginning with circumcision and achieved with obedience to the Law. Paul spoke of righteousness coming in completeness in the age to come (1:4), rather than in the present age. Righteousness, of course, should be manifested in our lives in the present, but not sinlessness. Complete righteousness will be ours when Christ comes to take us from this evil age. The Judaizers looked for full righteousness in the present, Paul, in the future.

c). Faith works through love (v. 6). The Judaizers believed that righteousness was displayed in outward, physical forms. The scribes and Pharisees before them viewed righteousness also as that which is external (Matt. 6:1-18). The faith of the true believer is manifested through love, a quality obviously lacking in the legalist. The characteristics by which we know God's people are the "fruit of the Spirit," beginning with love (Gal. 5:22).

... through the Spirit ... by faith ... This phrase shows two necessary qualifications involved in our salvation:

1. The drawing/wooing of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44, 65; 16:7-13)
2. Human response (Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21)

... the hope of righteousness ... hope is often used in the New Testament for the Second Coming. The Second Coming is the time when believers will be completely saved. The New Testament describes our salvation as a completed act; a state of being; a process and as a future consummation.

These four attributes of salvation are complimentary not mutually exclusive. We are saved, have been saved, are being saved, and shall be saved. The future aspect of salvation entails the believers' glorification at the Second Coming (I John 3:2). (See Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21 and Col. 3:3, 4).

... neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision... God does not care if a Christian has a circumcised body or not. What does matter is that we trust God because we love Him. Paul united the three basic Christian virtues in these verses: faith, hope, and love. The Holy Spirit empowers all three.

Paul elsewhere reiterated that true circumcision is of the heart (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4), not the body (Rom. 2:28-29; Col. 2:11). The issue was not circumcision but how a person is brought into right standing with God (cf. v. 4).

Verses 7 - 8. Here Paul turned his attention from the arguments against circumcision to the advocates of circumcision. He pointed to the lamentable fact that while the Galatian saints had



started out well, they had since faltered. Using an athletic metaphor (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 3:14; 2 Timothy 4:7), he suggested someone had strayed into their lane and caused a collision. They had somehow been hindered from obedience to the truth.

... *him that calleth you* ... whatever the false teachers might have claimed, Paul asserted that the source of their change for the worse was not from God. He reminded his readers that God was the One that had called them.

One writer notes: **It is important to understand that “persuasion” is probably the most effective weapon of the deceiver in turning Christians from truth to error. It would seem that Paul identified the influence of the Judaizers as the leading cause of the Galatian misconception. When the persuasive genius of the Judaizers was combined with the gullibility of the Galatians, error resulted.**

In Galatians, as elsewhere, Paul contrasts his straightforwardness in proclaiming the truth of God’s Word with the persuasive techniques of the pagans and false teachers (cf. Gal. 3:1; Eph. 4:15; 5:6; Col. 2:4, 8; 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). The “con artist” always peddles his goods to those who see his wares as a wise acquisition. Whether peddling stolen merchandise in some dark alley or peddling a false gospel, the methods are nearly identical. It is no wonder that an evil way of life is portrayed in the Book of Proverbs as a prostitute selling her wares. The Galatian saints have been persuaded, or to put it more crassly, they have been “conned.”

Verse 9. *Leaven* is yeast, the ingredient that makes bread rise. When used figuratively, the imagery of leaven is almost always in a negative or evil context (Matt. 16:6; 1 Corin.5:6-8). Only a *little* of this substance is required to make a loaf rise properly. And as leaven affects bread, so false teaching can affect a church.

The ‘*leaven*’ in Paul’s proverb could refer to the error in the church, the leading false teacher in their midst (the bad apple in the barrel, (vs. 10), and the single requirement of circumcision already mentioned (vs. 2-3).

Verse 10. ... *I have confidence* ... here we find a strong affirmation of Paul’s confidence in the midst of these distressing circumstances. We should note the basis for Paul’s confidence. He is confident concerning the final decision of the Galatian Christians. He felt assured that they would not adopt a different view, or, we could say, a ‘different gospel’. Second, Paul is confident that God will deal justly with those Judaizers who had caused so much trouble in the Galatian churches.

Note that Paul’s assurance rests in the Lord. Paul is confident of the ultimate decision and destiny of the Galatian saints, for it is God who called them, and God is faithful to fulfill His purposes. Paul writes of his assurance to the Philippians: “*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 1:6). Likewise, Paul can be confident that God will deal in justice with those who lead others astray:



...*whosoever he be*... may allude to the high standing of the false teacher in the Galatians' minds rather than expressing Paul's ignorance about his identity.

In effect, Paul would be saying, "God will deal with this person in judgment, no matter how high his position, nor how highly he is esteemed by others."

There may be an additional nuance to the expression "whoever he is," which very nicely fits the context of the passage. If Paul's confidence is in the Lord, who will judge false teachers, then Paul does not need to know who the individual(s) is.

Verse 11. It appears the false teachers were teaching that Paul himself was an advocate of circumcision (1 Cor. 7:18). They might have seen, for example, the circumcision of Timothy as support for their case (Acts 16:3). Paul refutes this claim by pointing out that he was still being persecuted. He was ridiculed because he did not preach circumcision. If he continued to preach circumcision, as he had done prior to his encounter with Jesus Christ, he would not be persecuted. The fact that he was still persecuted proved that he did not, as the Judaizers implied or stated, preach circumcision.

To preach circumcision was to set aside the cross and its offense to the Jew (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 3:1, 13). The Jews would not accept that their Messiah would die on a cross. One writer notes:

"On an individual basis, the cross is an offense to human pride. If I must believe in the death of Messiah on a Roman cross, a death suffered in my place, then I must also admit that I deserved such a death (Gal. 2:15-21). The cross is the measure of my sin and of my utter inability to be justified in God's sight by my own deeds. To cease to preach circumcision (which was promoted by the Judaizers as a means of being righteous) was to seek to minimize the offense of the cross. This was precisely why the Judaizers so aggressively promoted circumcision (Gal. 6:12).

Verse 12. The Judaizers had gone overboard with circumcision. His wish that the Judaizers who were so keen on circumcision would ("*were even cut off*") mutilate (i.e., castrate) themselves reflects his deep feelings about the seriousness of their heresy.

This would be a logical step if one followed the false teacher's argument. However, the Old Testament barred castrated persons from entering the assembly of the Lord (Deut. 23:1) and it was a known pagan practice and would hardly be palatable to the Galatians. Thus, Paul's desire for the false teachers seems to have been that they would cut themselves off from the company of believers.

Verse 13 - 14. While many view Galatians as the great document of justification by faith; many seems to miss the fact that in reality it is a document that sets out a Christ-centered lifestyle—one that stands in opposition to both nomism and libertinism.

... *the flesh*... is the sinful human nature that every person, saved and unsaved, possesses. Some might have concluded that since it is unnecessary to keep the Law to be saved, it is unnecessary to pay attention to the Law for any reason.



The Law has values, as Paul previously noted, one of which is to reveal how to express love for God and other people. The whole Law is a revelation of how to love (Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:28-31). The Mosaic Law has *revelatory* value (2 Tim. 3:16-17) even though it does not have *regulatory* value, controlling our behavior.

If 'bondage' was such an attraction, Paul wished his readers would enslave themselves to love of one another. If living under law was so enticing, let it be the law of Christ (6:2) impelled by the indwelling Spirit rather than by some external code. There is no external entity that can enable us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but the Holy Spirit can produce that love within us.

... *'the law is fulfilled'* ... one writer provides some insight: **“There is a play on two meanings of the Greek word *peplerotai*, translated 'summed up' [NIV, or fulfilled, NASB]. On the one hand, it refers to the fact that the law can aptly be summarized by the words of Leviticus 19:18. This idea was a commonplace of rabbinic opinion and Jesus endorsed it in Matthew 22:39 and Luke 10:25-28. On the other hand, the word can also mean 'fulfilled' (as in Rom 13:8), and in this sense Paul is suggesting that it is actually out of the new life of love made possible within the Christian community through the Spirit that the law finds fulfillment.”**

Verse 15. The circumcision controversy seems to have engendered bitter division in the Galatian churches. Paul cautioned both sides to love one another or they would destroy each other, which would not be a good example of the Christian love he spoke of earlier.

God's love means His people must love one another. To fail to live such love can mean the destruction of a church, to the ruin of God's purpose.

Verse 16. Paul followed his injunctions against living either under the Mosaic Law or licentiously with positive directions about the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Walk in the Spirit... (keep on walking) is a command that means:

- a). living moment by moment submissively trusting in the Holy Spirit rather than in self.
- b). let your conduct be directed by the Spirit.
- c). to be under the constant, moment-by-moment direction, control, and guidance of the Spirit.

'Walking' was a metaphor used often in Scripture to denote spiritual progress. Walking was the slowest way to cover distance but it showed steady progress. If anyone kept walking, she or he would cover the ground and eventually reach the destination.

... *fulfil the lust of the flesh...* is the contrary way of living to '*walk in the Spirit*'. The *flesh* is the physical part of our being and stands accordingly for that which is opposed to the Holy Spirit. It is characterized by *lust*, which is the strong, but sometimes evil desires that are associated with bodily living. It refers not just to physical desires but to all desires that put self on the throne. God's Holy Spirit empowers us to enthrone Christ instead. As we *walk in the Spirit*, we do not desire to return to the old, self-centered life.



Verse 17. This verse does not present two natures fighting each other inside the Christian. The conflicting entities are God's Holy Spirit within the believer and the believer's sinful human nature (3:3; 4:29; 5:16, 18, 22, 25; Rom. 8:4-6, 9, 13).

... the things that ye would ... may be good or evil.

Note, that we cannot blame Satan and his demons for all the conflicts we experience. Our own sinful nature is responsible for many of them.

As long as we remain in our present life, we are never free from the spiritual conflict Paul describes here. There is no spiritual technique or second blessing that can propel the believer onto a higher plane of Christian living where this battle must no longer be fought.

CONCLUSION

Our passage condemns a return to any system that purports to provide favor with God or salvation based on works. The Old Testament provides a standard for righteousness, but it does not provide the means of meeting this standard.

Emphasis is on being led by the Spirit. In later verses the Apostle Paul lists some of the activities and attitudes which show that those who constantly do such are not being led by the Spirit but are being led by the flesh.

The issue of whether one should be circumcised or not is not of great spiritual significance nowadays. But the Apostle Paul is warning us about the temptation to compromise, adopting external religious activities and marks to get men's approval and to impress others. We have to stay away from activities where the focus is on obtaining money and using it as a means to standing, concentrating on "numbers", loving titles and positions in the fellowship and loving these in place of Christ.

Fellowship groups can easily become social clubs and evangelism program can become just a boring routine. If we go in to do things mainly to look good and acceptable to others and to the world instead of longing for righteousness and behaving accordingly we are really following those that used circumcision as a social and psychological mark which brought benefits.

Make sure therefore that you are growing in intimacy with Christ. Make sure your religion is that of being led by the Spirit instead of the phony fleshly religion.

We must be involved in the things that God loves. There are very many things that the Spirit is waiting to involve us in. There are no shortages of opportunities to pray, serve, help, care for, and lift the burdens from others shoulders. Let the Spirit lead you to those things He wants you to do.



When the Spirit leads, it means you will have freedom, not slavery. Freedom means you are involved in doing work for God that has eternal value and which God pays attention to, even while the world does not pay attention to these tasks.

Remember you cannot mix anything with being led by the Spirit. Choose the path of love and live by faith. Our destiny is to be with the Lord throughout eternity.

We should keep in mind 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. Paul's words must always be interpreted in the light of his argument.

The Study text provides some very helpful principles for correcting an erring brother or sister. We know from other texts that rebuke is the obligation of the Christian (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1-2).

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.

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 (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.

Christians must endeavor to be firmly grounded in the fundamental teachings of Scripture, always growing in our knowledge of God and so avoid error and heresy. Our aim is to bring glory to God and this is best manifested in our demonstrated love for the brethren.

