

Galatians 5:1–26

True Freedom: Living by the Spirit, Not the Flesh

Introduction: The Question of Righteousness

At the heart of Galatians chapter five lies a fundamental question: *How is a person made righteous before God?* Is righteousness achieved through obedience to religious law, or is it received through faith in Jesus Christ?

Paul had preached righteousness through faith alone. After his departure, teachers arrived insisting that faith was insufficient—that believers must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul writes this chapter to draw a clear line between freedom in Christ and bondage to religious legalism.

1. Freedom Must Be Guarded

Galatians 5:1

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

Christian freedom is not automatic; it must be actively protected. Christ has already accomplished our freedom through the cross, but believers can still allow themselves to be drawn back into systems of fear, guilt, and performance-based religion.

The “yoke of bondage” refers to law-keeping as a means of righteousness. Even the apostles recognized that the law was a burden no one could bear. Peter himself said, “Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

Freedom in Christ is not freedom *to sin*, but freedom *from sin’s dominion*.

2. Law and Grace Cannot Be Mixed

Galatians 5:2–4

“If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.”

Paul is not opposing circumcision as a cultural or medical practice, but as a means of justification. If a person seeks righteousness through ritual, he obligates himself to keep the entire law.

“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

To fall from grace does not mean losing salvation; it means abandoning grace as the basis of one’s standing with God. Law and grace operate on entirely different principles. You cannot be justified by both.

Righteousness through law depends on human performance and therefore collapses under failure. Righteousness through faith depends on Christ’s finished work and therefore stands secure.

3. Righteousness Is Received Through Faith

Galatians 5:5–6

“For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

The believer’s hope rests not in effort, but in expectation—confidence that God has already done what He promised.

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”

Rituals have no power to make a person righteous. What matters is faith—living trust in Jesus Christ—that expresses itself through love. Genuine faith always produces a transformed life, but the transformation is the result, not the cause, of righteousness.

Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross. His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. Faith rests in *that work alone*.

4. Error Spreads Subtly but Destructively

Galatians 5:7–10

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

The Galatians had begun well, but spiritual progress had been disrupted.

“This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.”

False doctrine does not originate with God, even when it sounds religious. Paul warns:

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

Small doctrinal compromises grow into major distortions. Truth must be guarded carefully, because even slight deviations eventually lead far off course. Paul expresses confidence that God will preserve His people, but he also warns that those who trouble the church will answer to God.

5. The Offense of the Cross

Galatians 5:11–12

If Paul were preaching law-keeping, persecution would have ceased. The cross is offensive because it declares that human effort contributes nothing to salvation.

Jesus paid the full price. Nothing can be added. That message humbles human pride and provokes resistance.

6. Freedom Expressed Through Love

Galatians 5:13–15

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

Christian freedom is not license. It is freedom from fleshly domination, not freedom to indulge it.

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Love fulfills the law because love seeks the good of others. Where love governs the heart, law becomes unnecessary.

7. Walking in the Spirit

Galatians 5:16–18

“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

The Christian life is lived in the realm of the Spirit. Humanity was created for fellowship with God, but sin brought spiritual death and fleshly domination. Through Christ, believers are made alive by the Spirit and restored to fellowship with God.

There is an ongoing conflict:

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.”

This struggle is daily and personal. Victory comes not through willpower, but through yielding to the Spirit.

“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

8. The Works of the Flesh

Galatians 5:19–21

Paul lists behaviors that characterize life dominated by the flesh—sexual immorality, idolatry, hatred, strife, envy, drunkenness, and more.

“Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

This is a solemn warning. A life ruled by the flesh is incompatible with God’s kingdom. These behaviors are not isolated failures, but patterns of domination.

9. The Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22–23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

“Fruit” is singular. Love is the primary fruit, and the remaining qualities describe love in action. This fruit is produced by the Spirit, not manufactured by human effort.

“Against such there is no law.”

Where the Spirit governs, law is unnecessary.

10. Crucified Flesh, Spirit-Led Life

Galatians 5:24–26

“Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

The old life was judged at the cross.

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

Daily life must align with spiritual identity. Pride, rivalry, and self-promotion are incompatible with Spirit-led living.

Practical Application for Believers

- Guard your freedom in Christ from legalism
- Refuse to measure righteousness by performance
- Choose daily to walk in the Spirit
- Let love govern your relationships
- Depend on the Spirit, not self-effort

A Challenge for Believers

Do not return to bondage after Christ has set you free. Having begun in grace, continue in grace. Yield daily to the Spirit and allow God to produce His fruit in you.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

You cannot make yourself righteous. No ritual, rule, or moral effort can remove sin.

Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross for your sins. He rose from the dead, proving that He is Lord. Through faith in Him, you can be forgiven, made righteous, and given new life by the Spirit.

Turn from sin. Trust in Jesus Christ today.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for the freedom we have in Christ. Teach us to walk in the Spirit and to live lives marked by love, joy, and peace. Keep us from bondage and lead us in the liberty Your Son purchased for us. Amen.