**CHRIST HAS SET US FREE**

Galatians 5:1-12

Key Verse 1

**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**

**Introduction**

 

 Freedom is one of the key words in Galatians. In this chapter, Paul teaches us what it means to be truly free in Christ. God has given us freedom in Jesus Christ. But to live joyfully in this freedom we must guard against falling into legalism. Let us think about how we can stand firm in our freedom in Christ.

1. Read verses 1-4. What did Paul encourage the Galatian believers to do? (1) What did he sternly say to them about the law of circumcision and why? (2-4)

1-1, Read verses 1-4.

 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. **2** Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. **3** Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. **4** You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. **5** For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. **6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

1-2, What did Paul encourage the Galatian believers to do? (1)

 ***It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.***

* Jesus set us free from the bondage of sin and death by giving his life on the cross as a ransom sacrifice.
* Freedom is a gift of Jesus, given to us and received by faith. When we struggle to free ourselves, we just become more entangled with a yoke of bondange.
* Today, people think that freedom is defined to do whatever they want to do, and never denying any of their desires. This is not true liberty.
* Rather true liberty is our freedom from the tyranny of having to earn our own way to God, the freedom from sin, guilt, and condemnation.
* Some Jewish Christians tried to persuade their fellow Christians in Galatia that they needed Jesus plus alpha (something else).
* They claimed that faith in Christ was not enough. They told them to observe the Jewish law, beginning with circumcision.
* But Paul says that to require something other than faith in Jesus is to put an unnecessary burden on the shoulders of believers.
* Jesus set us free by paying the price of our sins. He said on the cross, “It is finished.” He completed the work of redemption.
* So we cannot improve upon what Jesus already did by observing some religious rules and traditions.
* Such legalism would take away the meaning of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross.
* Paul told them, “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”
* Let us remember that it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. He did not set us free from sin and death so that we would be enslaved again by other things.
* He set us free so that we would freely serve the Lord and others with the love of God.
* Jesus Christ has given an "Emancipation Proclamation," but people still live in bondage because their "old master" has deceived them. We better stand firm!

1-3, What did he sternly say to them about the law of circumcision and why? (2-4)

 ***Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.***

* Adding something else(circumcision) to the gospel of Jesus is very dangerous for our spiritual growth. That is why Paul says, “Mark my words!”
* To require circumcision means, in effect, to set aside the grace of salvation through the blood of Jesus, for they are incompatible with each other.
* This is because, behind the requirement of circumcision is the claim that the law can somehow improve our spiritual life. This is a dangerous false teaching.
* It sets aside the importance of our personal relationship with Christ. In addition, circumcision may lead to other forms of observing religious traditions.
* Why must we keep the whole law? Because if we come to God on the basis of our own law-keeping, then our law-keeping must be perfect.
* Observation of the law or something else may provide us some psychological benefits, but it can impede our spiritual growth by giving us false security.
* That’s why Paul was so adamant about this practice. Of course, there is nothing wrong with Jews or anyone else being circumcised and keeping the law.
* Culturally, there was no harm to follow their customs. In fact, Paul had Timothy circumcised.
* Circumcision per se was not the problem. The problem was making circumcision a requirement for justification and spiritual growth.
* Circumcision represented a person’s commitment to follow the law. This caused the person to lose sight of the really important thing, which is their relationship with Christ.
* Paul realized the danger of this false teaching as it diverted the focus of the gospel to something other than the grace of God through our Lord Jesus.
* We should not cause young people to be alienated from Christ. We must come to the word of God and follow his ways. We should not let them fall into this trap, as Paul says.
* To lose(fallen away from) the grace of God means to gain the wrath and judgment of God, death, bondage of the devil, and everlasting condemnation.
1. Read verses 5-9. What do we so eagerly await by faith? (5) What is the only thing

 that counts? (6) Describe Paul’s warning to the Galatians concerning the bad

 influence of the Judaizers. (7-9)

2-1, Read verses 5-9.

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? **8** That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. **9** “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”

2-2, What do we so eagerly await by faith? (5)

 ***For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.***

* Paul explains how the life of faith is so different from the life of observing the law.
* Paul says that when we accept Jesus as our Savior and live by faith, the Holy Spirit helps us to know we have been made right with God because of Jesus.
* Deep down in our hearts, we know that we cannot possibly satisfy the demands of the law. It is impossible for anyone to keep all 613 laws. It is hopeless.
* In Galatians 4:6, we learned that God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, allowing us to call our Heavenly Father, “Abba Father.”
* Also the Spirit who functions as a deposit for the things to come, helps us to wait eagerly for the children of God to be revealed!

Romans 8:19-25 says,

 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. **19** For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. **20** For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,in hope **21** that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. **22** We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **23** Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? **25** But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

2-3, What is the only thing that counts? (6)

***6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.***

* The point is that legalists lack both “eagerly waiting by faith” and “faith expressing itself through love”.

* Faith expresses itself through love means that faith is much more than an idea or a feeling.
* Paul says that true faith expresses itself through love. Faith is expressed in love, not with mere lip service or in religiosity.
* Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross for us because he loved us so much. His love was not theoretical. He didn’t just talk about love. He showed his love.
* Knowing this, how can we have faith that expresses itself through love? We should follow the footsteps of Christ.
* Jesus said, “If you love me, you will do what I command” (Jn 14:15). Jesus said to Peter “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me? Take care of my sheep” (Jn 21:16).
* We can express our love for Jesus and others by sharing with them God's word of truth.

2-4, Describe Paul’s warning to the Galatians concerning the bad influence of the Judaizers. (7-9)

 ***You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”***

* The young Galatian believers were running a good race toward the kingdom of God, our finish line. They had been growing in faith and love for each other. They had been full of hope and vision in God.
* Then the Judaizers came to cut in on their race. The false teachers confused new and growing Christians by subtly changing their direction.
* They planted poisonous ideas in their hearts and kept them from obeying the truth. Bad influence spreads quickly just as a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.
* The Galatian Christians shifted their focus from Christ to laws and regulations. Then they lost joy. Their relationship became sour and burdensome.

3. Read verses 10-12. What confidence did Paul have about those ‘troublemakers’?

 (10) How did Paul stand firm in the truth of the gospel despite offense and

 persecution? (11) What was his warning for the agitators? (12)

 3-1, Read verses 10-12.

I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. **11** Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. **12** As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

3-2, What confidence did Paul have about those ‘troublemakers’? (10)

 ***I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty.***

* Paul expresses his confidence in the Galatians, which is really a confidence in the Lord who is able to keep them. Paul is also mentioning that judgment awaits those who lead them astray and away from Jesus.
* Remember Jesus' solemn warning against those who would lead one of these little ones astray.

Matthew 18:6-7 reads,

“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.**7** Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!

3-3, How did Paul stand firm in the truth of the gospel despite offense and persecution? (11)

 ***Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.***

* Circumcision or observing the law had a certain appeal to the believers in Galatia, as it seemed to give them something tangible to hold on to.
* Circumcision added human achievement to the gospel. They felt good to be able to do something on their own for their salvation and spiritual growth. It boosted their ego and pride.

* But Paul preached the cross of Jesus only, not the cross plus circumcision. That's why he was persecuted. He could have chosen the easier and popular way.
* He could have become popular. He could have built a mega-church. But he decided to stick to the message of the cross.
* The cross is offensive to some people because it is a symbol of shame and suffering. Also, it offends our pride, because it reminds us that forgiveness is a gift that we cannot earn.
* We can only come to God with repentant hearts and, by faith, receive the gift of forgiveness and salvation which Jesus purchased for us with his blood.
* The cross reminds us that we are nothing but forgiven sinners, debtors to God's grace. So proud people reject the cross and look for a way to earn their own.
* But when we really come to know the grace of Jesus, we can appreciate the depth of his love.

1Corinthians 1:22-25 says,

“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength”

* As the apostle Paul did, let us stick to the message of the cross, even though it is not popular.
* The way of the cross is the way of our Lord Jesus. It is the way of life. May God help us to share the message of the cross, even if we are persecuted because of it.

3-4, What was his warning for the agitators? (12)

 ***As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!***

* Finally, Paul wishes that those who demanded circumcision among the Gentiles would go all the way themselves, and amputate their genitalia altogether, not merely their foreskins.
* Sacred castration was known to citizens of the ancient world; it was frequently practiced by pagan priests in the cults in the region of Galatia.
* Paul's idea here is something like this: "If cutting will make you righteous, why don't you do like the pagan priests, go all the way and castrate yourself?"
* Paul could have reminded of Deuteronomy 23:1. “No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord.”

**Conclusion**

 With such an extreme conclusion(12), Paul has made one thing clear. Legalism is not a small thing. It takes away our liberty and puts us into bondage. It makes Jesus and His work of no value to us. It puts us under obligation to obey the whole law perfectly and all the time. It violates the work of the Spirit of God. It makes us focus on things that are irrelevant. It keeps us from running the race Jesus set before us. It isn't from Jesus. A little bit of legalism will infect a whole church. Those who promote it will face certain judgment, no matter who they are. Legalism tries to take away the glory of the cross. In light of how serious this matter is, it's no wonder that Paul says he wishes they would even cut themselves off!

**One word: Jesus has made us free!**