

Introduction

Do you use instructions when you build something? When I was in high school, I had a robotics class. We would build robotic systems and write programs for running those systems. I remember building a four-way stoplight system with a program for changing the lights. Somehow, I managed to have a lot of left-over parts when I was finished.

I had the same problem when I replaced the engine in an old car. I had a handful of left-over bolts when I was finished. It turns out that an oil pan really needs all of its bolts.

But that is the American way, isn't it. We are free people. We do what we **want** to do. No one tells us how to live.

That freedom is great until the shelf we built without instructions falls apart. That freedom is great until our stoplights have every direction on green at the same time. That freedom is great until all of the oil leaks out of our car engine. True freedom is **not** doing whatever we want.

Main Idea

How does a Christian live in freedom? That is the question answered in [Galatians 5:1-15](#). Christ has set us free; therefore, we should live in the freedom that **He defines**.

Works vs Faith

Verses 1-6 contrast the freedom that we have through living by **faith** with the slavery that comes through **legalism**.

Stand firm

Before the explanation, we have the command. [Galatians 5:1](#) "1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Everything in these verses rests in the starting point that "Christ has set us free" (5:1). We are all slaves to sin; therefore, we are all destined for eternal death. But Christ died to bear the guilt of our sin and the penalty of death. **IF** you have true faith in Christ, then you have been set free from sin and death.

Verse 1 makes the point that we have been set free **for freedom**, not slavery. This verse implies that returning to slavery to sin is **possible**, even **probable**. But Christ did not set you free to live in sin; He set you free to live in freedom. So, this passage is an encouragement to "Stand firm" in your fight against sin ([Heb 12:1-4](#)).

Works

One form of slavery that we must avoid is **legalism**. [Galatians 5:2-4](#) “2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”

Legalism describes any works-based approach to pursuing God, including adding burdens to people based on **tradition**. The example given here is **circumcision**. Some in the churches of Galatia insisted that circumcision was a **requirement** for Christians.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes for **adding burdens** on people based on **tradition**, not Scripture. I suspect we add far more to Scripture than we are willing to admit.

There are two warnings here about legalism. First, legalism requires **perfection**. Verse 3 states that if you return to a works-based justification (legalism), then you are “obligated to keep the whole law.” That is, you must obey **everything** that God commands. If you break even one command, then you are a lawbreaker ([James 2:10-11](#)). If your works justify you, then your sin condemns you.

Second, legalism is a **rejection of Christ**. Verse 2 says that “Christ will be of no advantage to you.” Verse 4 says that “you are severed from Christ.” The moment you **add** to the gospel, you **remove** Christ from the gospel. Salvation is by **Christ alone**, or it is not by Christ at all. Christian living is in **Christ alone**, or it is not in Christ at all.

The last phrase of verse 4 is often misunderstood. Some people interpret “fallen away from grace” to mean that a person can lose his salvation. There are two major problems with that interpretation. First, salvation is more than a **declaration of status**. Salvation is not like an organization that you can enter and exit. Salvation is **new birth**. In Christ, you are a **new creation**. God has eternally created you as something new.

Second, to interpret this phrase to mean that you can lose salvation contradicts the immediate context and the letter of Galatians. Galatians insists that **Christ’s** obedience determines your righteousness. At **no point** are **you** responsible for your own righteousness, including **remaining** righteous. Falling from grace describes our rejection of God’s grace in Christ **by** turning to legalism ([Rom 11:6](#)).

Faith alone

Christ set us free from legalism. Therefore, living in Christ’s freedom means living by faith. [Galatians 5:5-6](#) “5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

This says two things about living by faith. **By faith, we “wait for the hope of righteousness”** (5:5). Hope, here, would better be translated “anticipation.” This statement is really important at this point in Galatians, especially in relation to the “fallen away from grace” statement. Anglican scholar, N. T. **Wright**, states that we are currently justified by faith alone, but **final justification** is by our works. However, we are righteousness **now** by faith alone and I wait confidently in **anticipation** of my justification in Christ - **by faith alone**.

The second thing these verses say about living by faith is that the only thing that counts is “**faith working through love**” (5:6). Notice that works are not absent in Christian faith. We are saved by faith alone, but genuine faith **results** in works.

Also notice that “faith working through love” is contrasted with circumcision (5:6). I think the point here is that works done out of **obligation** are not an expression of faith. Rather, works done out of genuine **love for Christ** expresses my faith in Him.

Legalism adds the burdens of tradition and obligation, but in Christ we are free to live by faith.

Obey the truth

Verses 7-12 contrast submitting to the slavery of false teaching with the freedom of obeying the truth.

False teaching

The Galatian churches were being misled by false teaching. [Galatians 5:7-10](#) “7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.”

“You were running well” (5:7). They **began** well; that is, they initially responded to the gospel by faith alone ([Gal 1:6-9](#); [3:1-5](#)). Now, they were not “obeying the truth” (5:7). In light of [Gal 2:5](#) and [Gal 4:16](#), I think the refers to the truth of the gospel. You are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Notice the warning of verse 9 “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (5:9). It is dangerous to allow false teaching to remain in the church. Let the false teacher bear his penalty (5:10); remove him from the church.

How do we evaluate truth? Surely these false teachers **claimed** that their teaching was true. We evaluate truth through Scripture; **Scripture is God’s revelation and is true**. This is the point of verse 8. They **should** be persuaded by **God**, but they were persuaded by false teachers.

If someone claims that God has spoken to them, I am **bound** by Scripture to view your “word from God” with nothing but **skepticism**. Likewise, you as a church are **bound** by Scripture to evaluate my preaching against Scripture. Scripture alone is our authority in the church and in life.

The sad reality is that Christians today do not know Scripture; therefore, we cannot evaluate truth. We fill our time with sports, hobbies, movies, and television. We fill our kids’ time with sports and hobbies, placing on them the unattainable burden of making time for Scripture. Until we commit our time to understanding Scripture, we will always be at the mercy of false teaching.

Offensive cross

Accepting false teaching is a return to slavery. However, holding to truth is freedom. To be clear, holding to truth is freedom, but it is not convenient. [Galatians 5:11–12](#) “11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”

Consider for a moment, *why might the believers in Galatia embrace the added burden of circumcision?* Notice Paul’s example in verse 11. He makes the point that if he would proclaim the necessity of circumcision, he would no longer be persecuted. The **added burden** of circumcision is **easier** than the burden of persecution.

But what is the outcome of this kind of compromise? “In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed” (5:11). Jesus’s crucifixion **was** an offense. How dare we tell people that they will face eternal destruction in hell because of their sins? How dare we tell them that they must repent and devote themselves to Christ in faith? How dare we tell them that the **only** way to be forgiven of sins is by faith in Jesus and that every other means of salvation is false.

Bethlehem would be far more “successful” if we would compromise on truth. We would have far more professions of faith if we encouraged people to simply repeat a prayer. We would have far more people attending if we were a seeker-sensitive church, catering to consumers rather than souls.

We can remove the offense of the cross if we compromise the message of the gospel. The only things we have to sacrifice are truth, Christ’s atonement, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and knowing God. But at least we will be free of persecution and we will be “successful.”

Love others

Finally, verses 13-15 explain that living in freedom includes loving others. [Galatians 5:13-15](#) “13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

Antinomianism

Antinomianism is the belief that we are not bound to **any** commands of Scripture. We can live however we choose. Verse 13 warns us that our freedom in Christ is not an opportunity for the flesh. Christ does not set us free for the purpose of sin ([1 Pet 2:16](#)). We are set free to follow Christ, not to return to slavery to sin. Genuine faith is evidenced by repentance.

Serve one another

This passage says two things about loving others. First, is that we love our neighbor by **serving one another** (5:13). This definitely refers to providing for physical needs. However, we see from Jesus’s example the greatest way to serve others is to share the gospel with people. Jesus often walked away from crowds of people who came to him for healing so He could go somewhere to proclaim the gospel ([Mark 1:35-39](#)).

Do not rely on the church to share the gospel. Far too often, we ask what the **church** should do, rather than what **I** should do. *Do you want the church to share the gospel with our community?* If **you** share the gospel with your neighbors, that is the church sharing the gospel. *Do you want the church to invite families to worship with us?* If **you** invite people, that is the church inviting people. *Do you want the church to comfort someone who has lost a family member?* When **you** comfort them, that is the church comforting them.

We love by serving others.

Unity

Second, we love our neighbor by maintaining **unity** within the church. [Galatians 5:15](#) “15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

Jesus said that His disciples would be known by their love for one another ([John 13:35](#)). Churches can easily be destroyed by its members who speak and think against one another. Christians are far too willing today to criticize one another. People who think about themselves tend to find faults in others. People who think about Christ tend to find faults in themselves. If God’s people are known by their love for one another, **then false believers are known by their animosity toward one another.**

Conclusion

How does a Christian live in freedom? Freedom in Christ is not a license to live however you please. That is not freedom. If we submit to legalism or impose legalism on others, that is not freedom. Rather, we should submit to Christ; live by faith in Him alone. Freedom in Christ does not mean that we are free to determine our own truth. That is not freedom. Rather, we should submit to God’s revealed truth in Scripture. Freedom in Christ does not mean that we are free to serve ourselves. That is not freedom. Rather, we should serve others in love.

In what ways do you find yourself in slavery to sin? If you have not devoted yourself to Christ in faith, then you **are** enslaved to sin and the outcome is eternal death. I encourage you today to repent and believe the gospel.

For those of you who know the freedom from sin that we have by faith in Jesus. We are always in danger of returning to slavery. As verse 1 states, I want to encourage you to “stand firm.” Live by faith. Obey the truth. Love others. That is how we live in freedom.

Closing Scripture: [John 8:34–36](#) “34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”