

Stand Firm in Freedom!
Galatians 5:1-6

***“For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then,
and do not be subject to the yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).***

In 49 AD a delegation of Judean religious teachers came to the predominately Gentile church at Syrian Antioch and started teaching the Christians that those who were not circumcised as followers of the Law of Moses could not be saved from their sin by simple belief in Jesus (Acts 15:1). They were part of a conspiracy to undermine the Gospel of grace sending emissaries of the lie to the daughter churches planted by the church at Antioch (Acts 15:23).

The most vulnerable to the lie were the fledgling assemblies of the Roman province of Galatia. Paul and Barnabas had planted these churches on their first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Paul’s response is swift and strong. He will not tolerate this false gospel—that works are essential to salvation—to take root in the lives of these new Christians and churches. On the eve of the Jerusalem Council, Paul writes his most passionate letter, reminding the church of the real basis of our salvation.

In the first section of the epistle proper, **1:11-2:21**, Paul defended his apostleship. In **3:1-4:31** the Apostle clarifies the implications of justification and sanctification by faith and why it’s true. His final section (**5:1-6:10**) demonstrates how this grace works in life. Grace works through liberty. Christ set us free to demonstrate His righteousness in ways that transcend any enslaving set of rules or moral codes (5:1-12). This liberty isn’t so that we can indulge the self-centered desires of our flesh as we did before we trusted in Christ. Using our freedom in that way will cause us to lose our inheritance in the coming kingdom (5:13-21). We’ve been set free to walk in the Spirit (5:16-18) so that we can display Christ’s righteousness through the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-25). But even this transformation isn’t about us; it’s about Christ and others. What we’ve really been set free to do is to love and serve others (6:1-10).

The big picture of Paul’s glorious presentation of Christian liberty contrasts two systems of righteousness: works-righteousness, which always enslaves and grace-righteousness, which always liberates. It also forces us to see that true liberty is always about Christ and others. And it all begins with by standing firm in grace because we understand what is at stake:

Stand firm in your freedom!
Don’t fall from grace, but let the Spirit give you faith, hope and love!

- I. Stand fast in your freedom rather than being enslaved by the law so that you can pursue righteousness by faith that is expressed through love (5:1-6).

Note: Five reasons why this paragraph does not teach loss of salvation.

1. This would revoke the promises of God (John 3:16; John 6:47; Ephesians 2:8-9). Romans 8:29 tells us plainly that this will never happen.
2. Paul calls the readers brothers and sisters (v 11) even after telling them that those who are submitting to circumcision have “fallen from grace.”
3. This is describing two contrasting systems of righteousness—law/grace; works/faith—not two states of being (saved/unsaved).
4. The verbs speak of losing *our* grip on something (grace) or rendering something useless (our resources in Christ). They do not speak of God losing His grip on us because that will never happen (John 10:29-30).
5. Logically, this would mean that even the slightest submission to legalism would mean loss of salvation.

A. Transitional Command: Stand firm in freedom—introducing chapters 5-6), and stop being enslaved by works-righteousness—a summarizing chapters 1-4 (5:1).

B. Warning Against the Enslaving Power of the Yoke of Legalism (5:2-4):

1. *Listen, I Paul!* Paul is emphasizing his authority in the strongest way. **If you submit to this** (condition uncertain, maybe you will/won't), then (**conclusion certain**) *Christ will be of no benefit to you at all!* Literally: *Christ will be an advantage to you in now way* (2).
2. I say again (5:2; 3:10; 3:24), **if** you submit to even one aspect of the law, you're obligated to follow the whole law (3).
3. **If** you try to be righteous by works, you have been alienated (passive—by these works) from Christ. The verb means to be estranged, make ineffective (4a).
4. If you try to be righteous by works, you have already fallen away from grace. The verb means to lose one's grip and fall away. It was used to describe withered flowers that fall to the ground or a ship that drifts off course (4b).

C. Invitation to the Liberating Power of the Spirit (5:5-6):

1. *By the power of the Spirit* we (who still cling to grace, cf. v 4) wait expectantly or eagerly for the hope of righteousness (5). I believe this hope is for both the present transformation that is making us more righteous in our experience daily as we by faith trust the Spirit's power working in us and our future hope to be a righteous citizen of His righteous Kingdom (Isaiah 51:5).
2. *By the power of the Spirit* we who remain in the sphere of our benefits in Christ (who do not alienate ourselves from Him, cf. v 4) know that these works don't matter to God. We know that what matters to God is our faith being expressed through love (6). Note: This is the first mention of love in the epistle. When faith becomes operative, when grace works, it becomes operative and observable in love.

II. Stand in the freedom of grace or wallow in the slavery of works.

A. The choice is yours. You, not the legalist, decide to submit to their religious nonsense. And when you do, you sever yourself from the real-time benefits of the grace that is yours in Christ Jesus.

B. More is at stake than you ever imagined. Literally your sanctification and your impact for the Lord Jesus depend on your decision to either rely on your works or to rely on the Spirit.

C. The Spirit is compelling you to use your liberty in ways that your faith causes you to become impatient for experiences of true righteousness in this world and the world to come. Would you say that your heart is listening to the Spirit and wanting this righteousness more and more?

D. The Spirit is compelling you to use your liberty in ways that your faith is expressed through love. Would those closest to you—your family, friends, coworkers and neighbors—say that this is what most impresses them about the way you use your freedom in Christ?