

The liberty we need is reliance.

“For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all. 3 Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we eagerly await through the Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love.” --

Galatians 5:1-6 (CSB)

The liberty we need is reliance.

We can hear of freedom and faith and yet still get mixed up with what is necessary to be saved. To be justified before God and in life. We can even walk with Jesus and still miss what we are meant for...

Setting the scene for foot washing. Jesus’ last moments before the cross with his disciples.

“So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. 5 Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who asked him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

7 Jesus answered him, “What I’m doing you don’t realize now, but afterward you will understand.”

8 “You will never wash my feet,” Peter said.

Jesus replied, “If I don’t wash you, you have no part with me.”

9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.”

10 “One who has bathed,” Jesus told him, “doesn’t need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean.” -- **John 13:4-10** (CSB)

This is the danger in the Galatian churches - and this is exactly how we react to dependence on Christ in essentials/salvation.

Galatians is about what ultimately counts - what we actually treasure and cherish - what we hold onto with all of who we are.

The letter crescendos here at verse 1. “For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery.” -- **Galatians 5:1** (CSB)

The two kingdoms, flesh and Spirit, battle on. One is freedom, the lifting of burden, the hope of eternity and new identity, whereas the other is slavery, remaining lost in pursuit of self.

What a glorious truth that serves as a warning - for freedom Christ set us free. Stand firm in that. Because there are plenty of people, and the cosmic enemy, that would have you submit to slavery again.

Legalism is Slavery

Here I am using a term we don’t find in the text but that expresses what is going on.

“What is legalism? A simple definition would be this: Legalism is treating that which is good as though it were essential. Whenever Christians turn something valuable into something ultimate, legalism is at work and freedom is forfeited. On the other hand, we preserve our freedom in Christ when what is essential to God is essential to us, and everything else is kept in its place.” Todd Wilson

In our experience this happens in two key ways.

Moralistic - Sin is bad and we should avoid sin; creating rules to “get clean” before coming to Christ or categories to exclude others from the covenant of grace “because they are so sinful and awful.”

Ritualistic - If only I keep parts of the law, God will love me more... or I will love God more.

Both ways are caught up in what we do to establish standing before God. And they are both dangerous.

In the Galatian churches the circumcision party has come to town preaching that you must be circumcised to be a real Christian - Jesus is great but you also need to do some cutting and keep specific holidays. Or you are nothing more than a Gentile sinner. And there is a ton of energy around this idea, it is becoming the fad in the churches.

Some party this is! It is like a *LuLaRoe* pop-up. Really exciting at first but you end up with moldy tights and debt on the back end.

It is not that circumcision is bad, certainly not. But relying on it for salvation brings the opposite of our expectation.

Like those good Bible-believing Christians in Galatia, we are tempted to turn good things like circumcision and Biblical fidelity into ultimate things.

“You can substitute anything you want for circumcision: customs, traditions, ceremonies, moral assets—anything by which you think you might gain God’s approval by doing, or increase your piety by refraining. Paul doesn’t exchange abstinence or action as a way to bribe God. For him, the entire notion that you can invest anything that would require God to pay out dividends is fundamentally flawed.”

Paul’s focus is our fleshly moral actions—our righteous deposits, which delude us into thinking Jesus is pleased with us and which cause us to sneer and snicker at others.

This is what is at play - a re-embrace or discovery of the old things of the Mosaic covenant. Feast days, behavior and physical modification. Things that are not bad

but that begin to be seen as necessary for salvation. Legalism that is a departure from Christ.

What happens if you lose sight of what ultimately counts, allow legalism to set in, and slip back into slavery? Paul says quite plainly that we lose Christ. We lose the benefit of the blood that Christ shed for us (vv. 2, 3). Christ is no longer any advantage to us because we have sought spiritual benefit elsewhere.

“Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all.” -- **Galatians 5:2** (CSB)

“You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace.” -- **Galatians 5:4** (CSB)

We don't need clever preaching to uncover the truth here. It's clear. If you embrace the law for salvation, for standing before God, you are severed from Christ - lost in your slavery to self.

The response might come... ‘oh I still trust in Jesus, but I just need to do this thing to get right, to be better off.’ Seems acceptable. But Paul says we have to go further.

“Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law.” -- **Galatians 5:3** (CSB)

Don't just cut off a few centimeters - you have to accomplish all of the law. It is not a catalog you can choose that which you think you might be interested in or can handle - it is a burden you must keep in totality or be apart from God.

“We must give up either Christ or the righteousness or the law. If you keep Christ, you are righteous in the sight of God. If you keep the law, Christ is no avail to you; then you are obliged to keep the whole law.” Martin Luther

And it is just a guardian - made to make clear our need for rescue. So it can never be kept in its entirety. The result is slavery. Captivity.

“Sin and the law pay wages, but the kingdom's currency is grace. Most of us are accustomed to applying elbow grease... we believe that life is governed by a direct

proportionality: The more grease we use, the smoother everything goes. In fact, we pride ourselves on our ability to overcome obstacles. A lack of natural gifts can be overcome with hard-won skills; sheer determination, fortitude, and elbow grease are all we need. There is something to be said for that, after all; it seems to work so well in so many ways. And that makes it difficult to imagine such an attitude as toxic when transferred to salvation and spiritual transformation.”
Daniel Bush

We are meant for faith. The opposite of faith is self-reliance. This is what the Circumcision Party is preaching and it is what Paul says must be added to the trash heap.

Trying harder doesn't make God love you more, and it doesn't make you love God more. It ends us replacing Jesus with your efforts as your object of faith. Jesus' work can't be mixed with some of our own, not for justification or for sanctification.

Am I creating a Galatian strawman? Aren't we better now after the Reformation? Surely we are not so easily convinced to be alienated from Jesus.

I wish. It is confounding how often the Galatian issue arises. Even to the extent that it matches exactly. “I have to quit the church because I want to live under Torah...”

Some novel approach to the “old ways” catches our attention like a fly sparks the hunger of a trout in a shallow river. I have to “go back” to get right.

Jesus dealt with this very thing.

“I do not accept glory from people, 42 but I know you — that you have no love for God within you. 43 I have come in my Father's name, and yet you don't accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but don't seek the glory that comes from the only God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. 47 But if you don't believe what he wrote, how will you believe my words? ” -- **John 5:41-47** (CSB)

All of it, the law, the teachings, the prophets, they speak of Christ - our need for him and his grace toward us through his work on the cross.

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied about the grace that would come to you, searched and carefully investigated. 11 They inquired into what time or what circumstances the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified in advance to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you. These things have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — angels long to catch a glimpse of these things.” -- **1 Peter 1:10-12** (CSB)

Friends, be careful who you are discipled by - they might be the circumcision party. If they encourage you away from Jesus and the church, they are not for you.

Listen, I have strong opinions - about Christian celebrities (pastors) - and I express them because I freaking care about who is discipling you! Why I want you to learn from and hear from people that smell like Jesus!

We can be so passive about it that it makes me want to scream. We think people are just going through a phase... or we wonder what harm they are really doing by dabbling. We don't want to challenge them or question their motives because we shy away from any form of confrontation. They are being severed from Christ. It's serious.

We need freedom from that - for salvation and transformation.

We need Christian liberty.

Liberty is Reliance

“True spiritual growth (personally and corporately) doesn't occur by fleshly energy; that's why Paul says, “Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). Change isn't a do-it-yourself project. And that's why repeatedly assessing how we're doing by comparison to others fails; security in our own righteousness—or self-pity over the lack of it—diverts us from the promise of Calvary. Change occurs only by faith: remembering who you are in Christ, remembering that God

is your Father who calls you into an ever-deepening realization of his grace and mercy.”

“For we eagerly await through the Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness.” --
Galatians 5:5 (CSB)

We live waiting through the Spirit, by faith, for the “hope of righteousness.” Hope here is a bad translation because in its modern sense it means “maybe.” Like we hope it will happen is saying it might not. But the sense of the word Paul wrote was settled, secure. A done thing. From that we wait.

This means we live from Christ’s righteousness. Knowing it is ours now and will be what is judged when we stand before him.

If you think you will hear at his throne - “you trusted in your circumcision... or your participation in the feast of booths...or even, ‘you were a generally good person, welcome!” Then you are in slavery.

It is by Christ’s righteousness, his keeping of the entire law, his sinlessness, that we are judged when we have faith in him. His inheritance that is ours. And we will stand before God and it will be by the blood of Christ that we are welcomed with shouts of joy.

“By referring to the future, Paul turns our imaginations to what it will mean to be radiant, glorious, beautiful and perfect. Elsewhere Paul says that Jesus lives to present us to Himself “radiant... without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27). We know that this is guaranteed, and therefore, is essentially true now. We are to live today knowing we are, and always will be, an absolute beauty in the eyes of God. Put another way, we are as loved and honored by God now as we will be when we are perfectly radiant in heaven.” Tim Keller

It’s liberty. This freedom is a total reliance on the work of Christ for your salvation, for your sanctification, and the coming glorification. His work and nothing else.

As we cling to the gospel we realize only God can establish and secure and improve our relationship with him. And so we wait, not with resignation, but expectation.

Which is why we live by faith, trusting in God's promises. And why we live through the Spirit, relying upon God's power.

In his grace is where we stand firm. This is where we are transformed.

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love.” -- **Galatians 5:6** (CSB)

What ultimately matters...

“When Jesus is the sole object of your faith, and you're not looking to itemize your virtues and sum up your righteousness, something miraculous and wonderful occurs inside you: You begin to love God. And you discover that you begin to love others too.”

Faith working through love. An increasing love for God because of the love he pours into our hearts by the Spirit. An increasing love for others as this fruit of the Spirit recalibrates life. This is worth standing firm for. For yourself and your beloved brothers and sisters.

And in reliance, we need the Spirit's work. It's the Spirit that enables living by faith not living by fleshly energy. Faith that looks away from self and looks to Jesus comes from the Spirit of God.

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, 2 because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, 4 in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. 6 Now the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace.” -- **Romans 8:1-6** (CSB)

When your life is rooted in the gospel, you realize that “faith working through love” is what ultimately counts. This is what ultimately matters to God and what ultimately makes a difference on the day of judgment.

But does this ultimately count to you? It will then. But does it now?

The liberty we need is reliance.

For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Rely on Jesus, his work for you, for salvation. Rely on His Spirit for life.

All of life is a feet-washing moment - Jesus by his Spirit asking “may I wash you?” And when we say yes, we are transformed to be like him.

“When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothing, he reclined again and said to them, “Do you know what I have done for you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you.” -- **John 13:12-15** (CSB)

Freedom is only found in the yes to Christ and nothing else.

Cast off self-reliance. Your ability isn't it. Your yoke of burden isn't it. Salvation, life, freedom is found in the finished work of Jesus for you. Rest in his finished work for you.

Look to Jesus. Stare at the glory of Christ until you see it for all of life. Hang with people that encourage you toward Jesus and his body. And live free.

Faith working through love, may it be what we are about more and more.