

CHAPTER 5:1-12

5:1 to 6:10 Application: Freedom in Christ by the Spirit

Once you are free, remain free. Because it is so easy to use freedom for wrong reasons, Paul explains what true freedom is. Use freedom to love one another, to live by the Spirit and not by the flesh. The focus turns more to the application of his arguments,

- much more on the positive by showing what it means for our lives (v 1, 7, 10, 13, 14, 16 etc.)
- although Paul keeps contrasting it with the negative consequences of not living like that.

Maintain your freedom! (5:1) ³⁹

Gal 5:1 is the link between chapter 4 and chapter 5. Some take it as the end of the former paragraph, others as the beginning of the next. The summary of the previous leads to a strong admonition.

Everybody wants freedom, but what is freedom? Being free to do what you want? It is:

- NOT: freedom “to indulge in the [flesh]” (5:13; licence, opportunity), which is bondage to selfish desires!
- NOT: freedom promised by “slaves of depravity”, “slave to whatever mastered him”. (2 Pet 2:19)
- NOT: changing “the grace of our God into a licence for immorality” (Jude: 4).

Christ has made us free and outside him is no freedom at all (Jn 8:34-36). Christ’s freedom is:

- from imprisonment by the law (3:23-25)
- from the curse of the law (3:13);
- from the power of sin (Rom 6:14, 18);
- from condemnation and from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1-2);
- from a guilty conscience (Heb 10:22);
- from sinning (1 Jn 5:18);
- from bondage to decay and ... into glorious freedom (Rom 8:21);
- from slavery to Satan and slavery by fear of death (Heb 2:14-15); also, 2 Tim 2:26;
- from the wrath of God (Rom 5:9), receiving peace instead (Rom 5:1); also, 1 Thes 1:10.

This freedom is even more; it is freedom with many positive aspects (Galatians, before and after):

- to be sons of God and heirs (4:4-7).
- to serve one another in love (5:13-14);
- to produce the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23);
- to live and walk by the Spirit (5:25);
- to fulfil the law of Christ (6:2);
- *but also, see Romans, to be slaves to righteousness (Rom 6:18) and slaves to God (Rom 6:22).*

³⁹ Martin Luther, “Christ has made us free – freedom from God’s wrath ... Our freedom stays there and goes no further, for Christ has made us free, not civilly, not physically, but divinely; that is to say, we are made free in such a way that our conscience is free and quiet, not fearing God’s future wrath. This is true and inestimable freedom. (...) Who can describe our state when we are assured in our heart that God neither is nor will be angry with us, but will forever be a merciful and loving Father to us for Christ’s sake.” (...)

“It is indeed a wonderful freedom to have the most high and sovereign majesty so favorable to us. He not only defends, maintains, and helps us in this life, but also will so deliver us that our bodies that are sown in corruption, dishonor, and weakness will rise again in incorruption, glory and power (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). This is greater than heaven and earth and all creation.”

In: *Galatians*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton ILL: Crossway Books, 1998), p 241-242.

“It is for freedom ...” Christ didn't set us free (didn't open the gate of the prison) to transfer us to another prison. We are (lit.) “freed to freedom”, emphasising the freedom by putting it up front.

“Christ has set us free.” It had cost him everything, he paid the highest price – and will be restored to the highest position. Christ:

- Phil 2:5-8, his example; 9-11, his exaltation; 12-13, our commitment to work out our salvation.

“Stand firm, then ...” It is so easy to lose your freedom in Christ. There is always the danger of going back to human effort, flesh, works, laws and regulations.

- Remain in your freely given freedom, purchased through Christ's blood and given to us by God.
- Safeguard: relationship with Christ, through the Holy Spirit!
- Why try to do the impossible, trying to “earn” what Christ had already given us?
- Obeying the law is rejecting the sufficiency of the cross (Christ's provision).
- Don't go back to the law (even if it is the God ordained one).
- Don't go back to man-made, legalistic rules. These are also of the “flesh”.

“Do not let yourselves be burdened⁴⁰ again by a yoke of slavery.”

- The following verses explain this yoke as being circumcised (v 2) and trying to be justified by the law (v4).⁴¹
- 6:13; “Not even those who are circumcised obey the law ...”
- Peter admitted at the council at Jerusalem that nobody was able to bear the yoke of the law (“... a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear”; Acts 15:10).
- The Galatians were mostly Gentiles freed from a yoke of paganism; why did they now voluntarily accept another unbearable yoke and harness? Cf 4:8-9.
- Christ's yoke is much better (Mt 11:29-30).

Choose! Either Christ or law (5:2-12)

Paul set out to convince them to choose *everlasting freedom rather than everlasting slavery*.

“**Mark my words!**⁴² **I, Paul, tell you ...**” (v 2) Paul used his full authority here to convince them of the importance of what he says.

(v 2) **If** you let yourselves be circumcised⁴³ (one step according to the law), this means:

- Christ will be of no value to you at all (v 2).

(v 3) **Again I declare** to every man who lets himself be circumcised that

- he is required to obey the whole law (v 3). Cf 3:10.
 - Are these Galatians aware what the whole law entails? Cf 4:21.
 - Breaking the law at one point, means breaking all of it. Cf Rom 2:25; Jas 2:10.

(v 4) **“You are alienated from Christ,**

- you who are trying to be justified by law, [the original text starts with alienation, to greater effect]
- you have fallen away from grace”;
 - (by that one step of circumcision; also dropping the “if” in v 2)
 - (essentially saying, you have lost your freedom in Christ)
- NEB translates: “... your relation with Christ is completely severed: you have fallen out of the domain of grace.”

It is not Christ **and** the law (not even a bit of it). It is **either** Christ **or** the law. Make your choice.

⁴⁰ Gr *en-echesthe* = held in; also: entangled, caught (from: *en-echo*).

⁴¹ Apparently, Jews in those days spoke about “taking the yoke of the law upon oneself”, priding themselves in their commitment to their religion. Paul used similar language to discourage them.

⁴² Gr *ide* is a call for attention, such as: Look! Behold! Listen up!

⁴³ Not meaning being circumcised in general, but as related to salvation. Paul and other Jews had already been circumcised.

- Paul knew the futility of the law for attaining righteousness. He had been as much a zealous Jew as was possible, but it could not bring salvation, therefore he considered it loss, rubbish⁴⁴ (Phil 3:4-9).
- Today, to us in general, circumcision is not the issue. But Christians are often prone to making all kinds of important “rules” for being a Christian. By the “rules” you know exactly what to do and what not to do. However, under such slavery you are in bondage.
- Those who come out of religions with all kinds of rules and ceremonies can easily fall back.
- The way of human effort often looks so much more logical than the way of grace. But you cannot mix them (oil and water). Repent of the bad deeds and repent also of doing good deeds for the sake of salvation (rubbish, Phil 3), repent of making new laws.

(v 5-6) Paul emphasised the centrality of faith again, with its positive fruit:

- But by **faith** we eagerly await through the **Spirit** the **righteousness** for which we **hope**.
 - The importance of the Spirit was also mentioned before (3:2, 14; 4:6, 29)
 - The false teachers could only offer false hope, not the sure hope by faith.
 - **Faith** and **Spirit** were the key words separating the true believers from them.
 - Righteousness is the gift that we receive by faith, not by earned by works, awaiting in its fullness in a sure hope, with certainty that is given by the Spirit.⁴⁵
- In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.
 - In Christ all fundamental differences between Jew and Gentile have disappeared. Cf 3:28.
 - Paul said before: circumcision has no value for salvation (5:2); lets you fall from grace (5:4).
 - Here: in Christ it is a non-issue whether you are circumcised or not.
- The only thing that counts is faith expressing⁴⁶ itself through love.
 - NASB: faith working through love.
 - Interestingly, there are ‘works’ after all, but works of love, by faith. Cf Jas 2:17-18.
 - In our love and our gratefulness we want to actively work.
- In the Bible, faith hope and love are closely related. Cf 1 Cor 13:13.
 - Hope is a certainty, as it is based on the certainty of our faith. Cf Heb 11:1.
 - Cf 1 Thes 1:3 ... your work produced by faith
your labour prompted by love
your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord JC

(v 7-10) They were running a good race, but were hindered now and kept from obeying the truth. Who had stopped them from running the race?

- “Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?”
- That persuasion had certainly not come from God, who had called them.
 - God did not want them to put on this yoke (5:1).
 - Paul had asked earlier (3:1), who had bewitched them.
- “A little yeast ...”
 - Little things can have enormous consequences, both positive and negative!
 - Giving in a little (circumcision) would contaminate and spoil the whole gospel of faith.
- “I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view (pursuing and obeying the truth).
- Saying also that the false teachers would pay the penalty, whoever they may be.

(v 11) “Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision ...” Possibly, they also may have said that Paul preached that circumcision is essential, or maybe that he was inconsistent in his message.⁴⁷ They knew about Timothy's circumcision.⁴⁸ But if so, there is no reason for persecuting Paul, as the offence of the cross wouldn't be there (Cf 6:12; also stumbling block in 1 Cor 1:23; Rom 9:33).

⁴⁴ Gr *skubala* (plural) = (bits/pieces of) rubbish. The singular *skubalon* can mean “dung” or “rubbish”.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, “I am made righteous already by that righteousness that has begun in me; and I am raised up in the same hope against sin and wait for the full consummation of perfect righteousness in heaven.” p 250.

⁴⁶ Gr *en-ergoumene* from *en-ergeo* = to work, to function, to be active.

⁴⁷ Cf 1:8.

⁴⁸ Cf Acts 16:3.

(v 12) Paul's judgement was clear: agitators; I wish ... and emasculate themselves!

- Did he go too far by talking of castration? Think of Jesus' millstone (Mt 18:6).
- See another sarcastic word play in Phil 3:2: mutilation of the flesh.

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