

Fact Sheet for **"Freedom!"**
Galatians 5:1-15

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This week Helen and I have been with nearly 3,000 others at the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting in San Diego. This conference is on the cutting edge of theology. It can be encouraging. It can be challenging. It can be dangerous. We will encounter a verse today that is all three of these... encouraging, challenging, and dangerous. It is Galatians 5:4.

⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

Can we lose our salvation? Let's get into this passage and find out. Paul, the master of unbelievably long and complicated sentences, launches into a long series of short, to-the-point, sentences. You can almost hear the emotion of his voice rising as he continues into chapter 5.

ESV 5:1 **For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.**

5:1 is the transitional statement between the example of Sarah and Hagar in 4:21-31 and Paul's application of their example in 5:2-15. You can see this from Paul's ten uses of the words "free" and "freedom in Galatians (2:4; 3:28; but then **4:22, 23, 26, 30, 31**; and finally twice in 5:1, 5:13). Paul's thought went like this... Just as Isaac was the child of promise, the son of the free woman Sarah... while Ismael was the son of works, the son of the slave woman Hagar... so Christ has set us free, has saved us, through faith and through promise... not through the slavery of works of the Mosaic Law. What follows is Paul's application.

² Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

Circumcision was one key point that those the Galatians were listening to pressed. But this was just the beginning. The ending point would eventually be strict obedience to the Old Testament Law. If salvation indeed came through Law obedience, then faith in Christ would be of absolutely no advantage to them... or to us.

³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

Only focusing on circumcision, the Ten Commandments, feast days, dietary laws, or on some arbitrary limited number of the 613 commands of the Old Testament Law for salvation is not biblical! It has to be all or nothing! The Galatian Christians were being influenced by persuasive voices who said that they had to obey the Mosaic Law, or at the very least certain aspects of it, or they could not be saved. They were beginning to listen and beginning to drift away from believing in the gospel, the good news, of salvation by faith alone. Here is Paul's next statement to them.

⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

Had they lost their salvation? **"You are severed from Christ"** and **"you have fallen away from grace"** are clearly set in past tenses. If they had really lost their salvation then our saying "once saved, always saved" is not true. The middle part of this verse, **"you who would be justified by the law"**, is consistently translated as the Galatians trying or seeking to be justified or

declared righteous by the Law. Consider Paul's use of the term "brothers" for instance throughout this book (1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18). This is a clear reference to Christian brothers. If they had indeed lost their salvation then Paul would not have referred to them this way. Instead take Paul referred to those who were influencing them as "false brothers" (Galatians 2:4). And there is no other verse in this whole book from which you might get even the slightest idea that Paul was writing to those who were not saved. In fact, it's just the opposite. There is another way of understanding 5:4 that is perfectly legitimate. It wasn't that they had lost their salvation. Instead they were in danger of forsaking the sound theology of salvation by faith for a theology that could only lead to feelings of guilt and inadequacy, and to argumentation. To be severed from Christ would be to feel bound to obey the Law of Moses. To fall away from grace would be to fall into legalism.

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.

Take note of Paul's words "**through the Spirit**" in 5:5. Take note of Paul's words "**faith working through love**" in 5:6. These hints about the Spirit and love are hints at an alternative to Law observance that Paul would write about later in this letter.

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.

This wrong theology would have the effect of spreading if not checked.

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. 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.

I don't know how to preach the next verse in polite company. I will just read it then go on. Suffice it to say that Paul had no good words for these false teachers.

¹² I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

Now, Paul begins to transition to the next portion of his letter. As he does this look at further hints he makes concerning an alternative to Law observance.

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."

This is not Law observance, but it is a principle seen in the Law.

¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Their drift from sound theology was already having bad ramifications among them.

Let's come back to 5:4 briefly. This verse is encouraging because it is a reminder that Our salvation is through faith in Christ, not through Law observance. It is challenging because it causes us to think and to be always appreciative our salvation in Christ. It is dangerous because there are no good results if we slip into legalism. Next week we will arrive in full force to Paul's alternative to Law observance in how we should be living.