

## **Galatians 5:1-6 – Stand Fast for Liberty!**

### **I. Introduction**

- A false but popular definition of liberty: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life” (Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy, 1992)
- Our Lord Jesus emphasized liberty as freedom from the enslavement of sin (John 8:34-36)
- Many who boast of liberty are actually advertising various forms of slavery (2 Pet. 2:19)
- Galatians 5-6 is a unique section in Galatians where Paul works out the implications of the gospel for the Christian life. Union with Christ is the source of new life in the believer (Gal. 2:19-20)

### **II. Stand Fast in the Liberty of Christ (vs. 1)**

- One of the key presenting issues in Galatians was circumcision for Gentile believers, as a pre-requisite to membership with God’s people, and as a necessity for salvation (compare Acts 15:1)
- Circumcision was a matter of indifference so long as it was not imposed as a necessity or seen as a meritorious act before God (compare Acts 16)
- What Christian Liberty IS:
  1. Freedom from the guilt of sin (Rom. 4:6-8, Tit. 2:14)
  2. Freedom from the condemning wrath of God (Rom. 5:9, 1 Thess. 1:10)
  3. Freedom from the curse of the moral law (Gal. 3:13)
  4. Freedom from this present evil age, with its destructive corruptions (Gal. 1:4)
  5. Freedom from bondage to Satan (Acts 26:18, Col. 1:13)
  6. Freedom from the dominion of sin, and freedom to yield oneself as a slave to Jesus Christ and a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:14, 20-23)
  7. Freedom from the evil of afflictions (Rom. 8:28)
  8. Freedom from the sting of death and the victory of the grave (1 Cor. 15:54-57)
  9. Freedom from everlasting damnation (Rom. 8:1, 39)
  10. Free access to God (Rom. 5:1-2)
  11. Free to yield obedience to God not in slavish fear but out of a childlike love and willing heart (Gal. 4:6, 5:6, 1 John 4:18)
  12. Freedom from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in addition to the Word of God, or contrary to it (Matt. 15:1-9, Acts 5:29, 1 Cor. 7:22-23, Gal. 4:9-10, Col. 2:20-23)
  13. Freedom from the unlawful commands of lawful authorities (i.e. the civil magistrate cannot act outside of its sphere, nor can the family, nor can the church, furthermore, none of these God-established authorities can command us to do unlawful things, see Ex. 1-15, 21, 1 Sam. 14:43-45, 2 Chron. 26:18, Dan. 6:5-10, Acts 4:19-20, 5:29, 16:39-40)
- What Christian Liberty is NOT:
  1. The “freedom” to practice or cherish any sin, which is in fact slavery (2 Pet. 2:19)
  2. The “freedom” to think however I want (Rom. 8:5-6, 2 Cor. 10:4-5)
  3. The “freedom” to do whatever I want (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
  4. The “freedom” to disobey lawful authority in family, church, and state, i.e. anarchism (Rom. 13:1-8, 1 Pet. 2:13-14, Heb. 13:17)
  5. The “freedom” to seek one’s own interests, which becomes another form of slavery (Rom. 13:8, Phil. 2:21, 2 Tim. 3:1-2)

### **III. Justification by Law is to Fall Away from Grace (vs. 2-4)**

- Righteousness through the law is impossible (Gal. 2:21)
- Paul establishes two points in these verses:
  1. If you submit yourself to a pattern of law-keeping as the grounds of your righteousness before God, one act of obedience is not enough. You are now a debtor to keep the whole law, and to keep it without a single failure (Deut. 27:26)!

2. If you decide to go the route of law-keeping to secure your righteousness before God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you, because you either take Christ as a whole, or you cannot have Him at all.

#### **IV. Awaiting the Hope of Righteousness (vs. 5)**

- This verse succinctly expresses the hope of the Christian. This hope takes root in our hearts because of the Holy Spirit's work in us (see Gal. 4:6).
- We are justified the moment we put our faith in Christ. As Romans 5 says, "having been justified by faith (past tense), we have peace (present tense) with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1)
- Paul is confident that because of His union with Jesus Christ, he presently stands righteous before God, and so he is confident that on the day of Christ's return, and the day of final judgment, he will be vindicated.
- Consider the testimonies of the dying martyrs (such as the Scottish Covenanters) as living expressions of the reality of vs. 5.

#### **V. What Matters: Not Circumcision, but Faith Working Through Love (vs. 6)**

- The triad of faith, hope, and love are present in vs. 5-6.
- Union with the resurrected, living Christ, is the source of divine life in the Christian (Gal. 2:19-20, 6:15)
- Paul and James agree: saving faith will evidence itself in a life of love (Jas. 2:26).

#### **Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 20 (Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience)**

1. The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin (Rom. 4:6-8, Tit. 2:14), the condemning wrath of God (Rom. 5:9, 1 Thess. 1:10), the curse of the moral law (Gal. 3:13); and, in their being delivered from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4), bondage to Satan (Acts 26:18, Col. 1:13), and dominion of sin (Rom. 6:14); from the evil of afflictions (Rom. 8:28), the sting of death, the victory of the grave (1 Cor. 15:54-57), and everlasting damnation (Rom. 8:1, 39); as also, in their free access to God (Rom. 5:1-2), and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear (Rom. 8:15), but a childlike love and willing mind (Gal. 4:6, 5:6, 1 John 4:18). All which were common also to believers under the law (Rom. 4:6-8, 1 Cor. 10:3-4, Gal. 3:8-9, 14). But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law (Gal. 4:1-7, 5:1), to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16, 10:19-22), and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of (2 Cor. 3:8-18).

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience (Rom. 14:4, 10, 1 Cor. 10:29, Jas. 4:12), and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship (Matt. 15:1-9, Acts 5:29, 1 Cor. 7:22-23). So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience (Gal. 1:10, 2:4-5, 4:9-10, 5:1, Col. 2:20-23): and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also (Isa. 8:20, Jer. 8:8-9, Acts 17:11).

3. They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty (John 8:31-34, Rom. 6:15-16, Gal. 5:13, 2 Pet. 2:19), which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life (Luke 1:74-75).

4. And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God (Rom. 13:1-8, 1 Thess. 5:12-13, 1 Pet. 2:13-14, 16, Heb. 13:17, . . . And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church (Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:1, 5, 11-13, Rom. 16:17, 1 Tim. 6:3-4, Tit. 3:10, 2 John 10-11).