

## Justified by the Faith of Messiah – Part 4

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The scripture reading is Galatians 5:1-6:18

The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/O-AeqVjiOc>

In Galatians chapter four, Paul completed his argument that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised in order to receive salvation. Paul now turns his attention to how he expects that the Galatians will receive his words and, once they finally accept them, what his words will mean for who they are and how they should live.

Galatians 5:1 NKJV 1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Paul's gospel, that salvation is available to all who believe in Messiah Yeshua, is a gospel of liberty; but, liberty from what bondage? And from what yoke of slavery have they been set free? As always, Paul's words need to be understood in context to answer these questions.

A summary from the previous teachings in this series is necessary to remember the context of Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul's reference to the yoke of bondage is the bondage to elementary principles which we learned were most probably the philosophies and traditions of men including man's vain efforts to win or earn the favor of God by their own actions. For example, Cain attempted to propitiate God by meaningless offerings. Roman religion with their multitude of gods encouraged this same type of thinking. Paul will later encounter the epitome of this thinking in Athens where they had idols to every god they had ever heard of including one to an unknown god just in case they missed one! For the believer, this mindset manifested itself in the idea that a believer in Yeshua had to be circumcised in order to truly receive salvation. Paul warned the Galatians not to fall back into this mindset.

Galatians 4:8-9 NKJV 8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

It seems to be human nature to fall into this mindset. Abraham and Sarah fell into this type of thinking when they tried to help God fulfill his promise that Abraham would have a son by making it happen with Sarah's handmaid Hagar. This is the yoke of bondage that Paul is warning the Galatians not to be once again entangled with!

The liberty that Paul writes about, then, is the liberty from this mindset which, over time, had infiltrated the very foundation of Judaism. It is the liberty from thinking that we must somehow earn God's favor and salvation. It is liberty from trying to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the Torah and knowing that we will fall short. Instead, we have the liberty of knowing that our salvation is freely granted to us by the faith of Yeshua. Paul wrote to the Galatians that this was true even for the Jews.

Galatians 2:15-16 KJV 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

After warning about falling into the trap of thinking that we must work for our salvation, Paul continues by reminding them that keeping the Torah is not the path to salvation.

Galatians 5:2-6 NKJV 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

When we take the first sentence of this passage in isolation, it looks like Paul is saying that circumcision itself is wrong. This contradicts God's words in Genesis seventeen when God gave Abraham circumcision as a sign of the covenant promise to him.

Genesis 17:10-11 NKJV 10 "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11 "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

We need to take this sentence of Paul's and look at the rest of the passage. Paul used the words circumcision and uncircumcision to refer to Jews and Gentiles. Paul is not talking about Jews becoming circumcised; they are already circumcised. He is talking about Gentiles converting to Judaism. Paul explains this statement in verse four; it is those Gentiles who convert to Judaism in order to be justified by keeping the Torah who would be trading salvation by faith in Yeshua to the bondage of the mindset that we are saved by works. Notice, that the issue is not about keeping or not keeping the Torah. The issue is converting to Judaism in order to be saved! The Jewish people are saved by faith just like the Gentiles, but as Jews, under the covenant of Mt. Sinai, they are, also obligated to keep the Torah.

Paul makes that clear in verse three; those who convert to Judaism are obligated to keep the whole Torah. The Gentiles would gain nothing from conversion; they don't get a better salvation or become more saved once they convert to Judaism. Everything they need for salvation has been accomplished by Yeshua. D. Thomas Lancaster in his book The Holy Epistle to the Galatians writes about the Galatians' mindset:

Under the influence of the influencers, they began to doubt the legitimacy of their participation in Abraham's family, and they doubted their citizenship in the kingdom. They sought another way to achieve that same status. In so doing, they devalued and discredited what Messiah had already done for them. They dismissed Messiah's work on their behalf to bring them into the kingdom.<sup>i</sup>

Paul turns to chide the Galatians for listening to those who would sow doubts in their minds about their citizenship in the kingdom.

Galatians 5:7-10 NKJV 7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Paul was more than a little upset about those who taught that circumcision was required to receive salvation. It is not that Paul is against being born a Jew or becoming a Jew; it is that this doctrine diminishes or even nullifies the work of Yeshua in bringing salvation through His own death and resurrection; that is through the power and grace of the Father!

Galatians 5:11-12 NKJV 11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. 12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

What is this liberty that Paul wrote about? If the Gentiles are not to convert to Judaism and take on all the requirements of the Torah, what are they to do? Most of the Galatians who originally heard and received Paul's words of salvation were already among those called the God-fearers. They had already embraced the God of Israel and met weekly in the local synagogues with the Jews. They, like Cornelius, were already living Torah lifestyles. Should they cease following Torah?

Galatians 5:13-15 NKJV 13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

It seems that there were big problems in Galatia probably exacerbated by the Judaizers who with their teaching of excluding Gentiles who didn't convert to Judaism created friction between Jew and Gentile. Paul reminded the Galatians of the second greatest commandment of the Torah to love their neighbors as themselves. Far from doing away with the Torah and nullifying Torah principles, Paul is instructing the Galatians to live by the Torah, specifically by the power of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-18 NKJV 16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

In the flesh, the Galatians were turning against each other, but by the Spirit, they were to love one another. In the flesh, they were breaking the commandments of the Torah even as they contemplated converting to Judaism! Those who sought to be justified by the law were in danger of being condemned by that same law! If the Galatians were led by the Spirit instead of living according to the flesh, then they were not under the condemnation of the law. They were, instead, under the guidance of the Spirit. Ezekiel wrote about walking by the Spirit in connection with the new Covenant God would make with Israel.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV 26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

There is no conflict between Torah and Spirit. Ezekiel said it is the Spirit that causes them to walk in the Torah. So there would be no misunderstanding, Paul goes on to describe the works of the flesh.

Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul lists several examples of behaviors that are works of the flesh. This list is not complete; Paul concludes his list with the words "and the like." Behaviors like these are clear works of the flesh. The details of these and others are found in the Torah. Yeshua said that only those who exhibit the fruits of the Spirit and do the will of the Father enter the kingdom of God.

Matthew 7:20-21 NKJV 20 "Therefore by their fruits you will know them. 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Paul contrasts acts of the flesh with acts of the spirit. Again, this is not a complete list but an example of behaviors that walking by the Spirit will produce.

Galatians 5:22-26 NKJV 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Paul's instructions about provocation and envy are applicable to believers in general, but in this context, they were necessary to combat a situation between Jew and Gentile, convert and non-convert, that was threatening to devour the community of believers in Galatia. Broken relationships needed to be repaired. Paul's next words address mending rifts in the community as well as dealing with transgressions.

Galatians 6:1 NKJV 1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

It is clear from Paul's words that well-known standards of behavior were expected among the believers in Yeshua. The instructions for these standards would be from the Torah given by God for how to live in peace with God and man. This is best done in community.

Galatians 6:2 NKJV 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

This word for "burdens" is the Greek word "bar'-os" number 922 in Strong's Concordance meaning weight. When we help each other through the hard times, helping to carry the weight, we are fulfilling what Paul calls the law of Christ. This probably refers to Yeshua's explicit instructions to love each other.

John 13:34-35 NKJV 34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

However, ultimately each person is answerable to God for their own actions.

Galatians 6:3-5 NKJV 3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 For each one shall bear his own load.

The word translated as "load" is the Greek word "for-tee'-on" number 5413 meaning an invoice or bill of lading. Each person has their role, position, or task in this life. Paul is telling the Galatians to support and love one another while avoiding comparing ourselves with others. We are to pay attention to the task given to us, not the tasks given to others, and thus, fall to covetousness, envy, or pride. In this Galatian society of Jew and Gentile, each person had their role or task given by God. The Jew should not think himself to be better than a Gentile just because he is a Jew. The convert should not think himself better than the non-convert. We could go on to include comparisons with the Roman citizen or the slave, but Paul's message is that each person has his own position to which he is accountable to God including teacher and student.

Galatians 6:6 NKJV 6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

As Paul concludes this section about loving your neighbor as yourself, he warns that it must be with sincerity and perseverance.

Galatians 6:7-10 NKJV 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

As Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians, he does so in his own handwriting. He writes large probably because of poor eye sight. He takes on this task to emphasize the importance of this letter. Paul takes the time to write, probably laboriously, that those who are pushing for circumcision are doing so for appearances and so they can boast that they have converted many people to Judaism.

Galatians 6:11-15 NKJV 11 See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! 12 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. 13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

Paul's desire is not for appearance or numbers. If it was, he would be right in among the Judaizers pushing for conversion and making himself look good in the eyes of the Jewish religious leaders. But Paul's heart is only for the gospel message. This message is not a message of bondage, but a message of liberty. We are not bound by futile efforts to attain salvation by being good enough. Instead, we have liberty from these efforts knowing that we receive salvation through the unconditional promise that God gave to Abraham that through his seed all nations of the Earth would be blessed. It is only through the faithfulness of Yeshua and His obedience to the Father that we receive salvation and citizenship in the kingdom of God. And, once we are citizens, we are to love one another.

Study Questions:

1. This teaching opens with Galatians 5:1 and the statement to stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free. What is that liberty we are to stand fast in? What is the bondage we are to avoid?
2. In Galatians 5:11, Paul refers to the "offense of the cross." In this context, what is the offense of the cross?
3. What is walking and being led by the Spirit? Why are we not "under the law" when we walk in the Spirit? (Gal. 5:18)
4. Paul says that we are to bear one another's burdens but each person is to carry his own load in Galatians 6:2-4. What does he mean?
5. Now, that we have completed the study on Galatians, what is the overall theme? Why is this epistle so important in the establishment of the doctrine of the New Covenant?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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<sup>1</sup> Lancaster, D. Thomas. The Holy Epistle to the Galatians. First Fruits of Zion. ©2014. P. 235