



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Galatians 5:1-17

New Revised Standard Version

February 19, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, February 19, 2017**, is from **Galatians 5:1-17**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Galatians 5:1) For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Jesus Christ came to do the will of His Father for our benefit. Christ set us free from slavery to sin, Satan, and the ceremonial laws of Judaism for the sake of our freedom – freedom is valued in and of itself, and if we misuse our freedom we fall back into slavery again. We need to stand firm in our faithful obedience to Jesus Christ in order to maintain our freedom. His yoke is easy and his burden is light (see Matthew 11:30).

(Galatians 5:2) Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

Paul wants us to know that no matter what we might have heard otherwise, if we convert to Judaism (as Gentiles, by the initiatory right of circumcision), then Jesus Christ will be of no value to us. We will have turned from trusting in Christ to trusting in religious rules and ceremonies to be saved. Furthermore, we would need to obey perfectly the religious rules of the Old Testament, and we cannot and have not done that. Salvation can only be by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

(Galatians 5:3) Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law.

The “whole law” includes the ceremonial laws that point to the coming of Jesus Christ, which give His coming meaning; as well as the moral laws, summed up as the Law of Love. The law will not free us from selfishness and self-centeredness – the root of much sin – because we keep the focus on the law and our performance or obedience to the law instead of on loving God, others, and ourselves and how to best express our love. The grace of Jesus Christ through faith in Him can free us from self-centeredness and fill us with Christ-centeredness.

(Galatians 5:4) You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

If our focus is on the law and keeping it perfectly in order to be right with God, we are trying to do the impossible. We have turned from Christ; we have turned from God’s gracious forgiveness; we have turned from loving and serving Christ and others in the power of the Holy Spirit. If we seek to be saved by keeping the law, a wall of separation will come between Christ and ourselves.

(Galatians 5:5) For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

The Holy Spirit empowers and guides us to keep the Law of Love, but we will not do so perfectly in this life. Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to love God and others in ways that bless God and others. They trust in Christ, and through faith in Christ they hope that when they see the Father face-to-face He will declare them righteous. They do not try to follow religious rules to be righteous, but seek to be righteous God’s way, which means following Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Galatians 5:6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

For both Jews and Gentiles who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, whether they are circumcised or not has no value. What does have value is their expressing their faith in Christ and what Christ has done for them by his death and resurrection in loving deeds of kindness and loving ways of teaching and preaching the truth of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

(Galatians 5:7) You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?

Using an athletic analogy, Paul describes the Christian way of life as “obeying the truth.” The Christian life is actively seeking ways to share the truth of Jesus Christ with others in both words and deeds. The Christian eagerly looks for opportunities to help others in ways that the law could never define, especially in different countries and throughout history. The Holy Spirit shows them how to apply the Law of Love in everyday life.

(Galatians 5:8) Such persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.

The devil or those committed to him or sincerely wrong religious people had stepped in to persuade the Christians in Galatia to turn back to religious practices and ceremonies as the way to stay right with God. God who called them to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation did not persuade them or tell them to turn from Jesus Christ to following rules

(Galatians 5:9) A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough.

Jesus warned His disciples to beware the “yeast” or the “teaching” of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:11). As a Pharisee, Paul had once persecuted the Church. Neither Jesus nor Paul wanted the teaching of the Pharisees (or those who followed Paul from town to town to attack him and his teaching of the gospel) to begin to influence and spread among Christians. Paul did not want false teaching to captivate a whole church or so mislead a Christian to adopt a rule that would eventually lead a person to adopt the entire Jewish ceremonial system and reject Christ.

(Galatians 5:10) I am confident about you in the Lord that you will not think otherwise. But whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty.

Paul expressed confidence that the Holy Spirit within a true Christian would eventually lead the one who had been misled back to Christ and the truth, and based on that confidence Paul prayerfully sent them a letter warning them and reminding them of the gospel he had preached and they had received. Jesus said there was a penalty for misleading Christians: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

(Galatians 5:11) But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I am still preaching circumcision? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

When Paul was a Pharisee and preached circumcision (or that a person had to be a practicing Jew to be right with God and be saved), he was not persecuted: he was the persecutor. Now he is being persecuted because he has become like the Christians he once persecuted. The cross is offensive to some, because many people will not believe that the “Son of God” died on the cross so God could be both just and merciful when forgiving the sins of believers. The cross was an offense to the Jews because they would not accept the fact that one who was cursed by hanging on a tree could be the Son of God, Lord and Savior. The cross was an offense to the Greeks because they would not accept the fact that a Son of God would not have the wisdom and power to avoid crucifixion.

(Galatians 5:12) I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves!

Paul did not want false teaching to spread. A person who is emasculated cannot produce children. Paul did not want any of these agitators to produce any spiritual children, for then the Christians in Galatia would become worse than they were before they received Christ as their Savior: “Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation” (Matthew 12:45).

(Galatians 5:13) For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

God the Father called the Galatian Christians to be free from religious rules through faith in Jesus Christ. Gentiles did not need to convert to Judaism and Jews no longer needed to observe food laws and make sacrifices. But they were not free to follow unholy emotions and desires and behave in ways that violated the Law of Love (or the moral law). They were free to love and serve one another, not to do whatever they desired.

(Galatians 5:14) For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus and Paul summed up the moral law as love for God and others. Jesus gave the Golden Rule: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). Jesus commanded Christians to love one another as He had loved them. Jesus Christ gave His life so Christians could love God and others from the heart as the Holy Spirit led them in practical ways rather than be consumed with concern over whether or not they were following every rule.

(Galatians 5:15) If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

The agitators in the church were dividing the church over racial (Jews versus Greeks) and religious (practicing circumcision are not) issues. They were involved in ever deepening conflict described as biting and devouring one another. If they did not return to faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and love for one another, the church would be divided and destroyed.

(Galatians 5:16) Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Their walk or way of life day-by-day and even moment-by-moment needed to be based on following the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit and praying for and receiving the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve others wisely according to the will of God. If they did this they would not need laws, rules, or regulations to enforce their good conduct and they would not follow their emotions, feelings, or desires that would result in destructive behavior and destroyed lives.

(Galatians 5:17) For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

Until a Christian goes to be with the Lord Jesus face-to-face, they are susceptible to desires that are contrary to the will of God, the Law of Love, as revealed by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures (the Bible) that the Holy Spirit inspired to teach us the truth. Christians are not to do whatever they want or feel like doing. Christians need to distinguish between what the Holy Spirit wants them to do and what their flesh (emotions and desires) wants them to do. Then, they are to pray for divine wisdom and power to do what the Holy Spirit wants them to do. If there is confusion, the Holy Spirit will never lead a Christian to violate the Law of Love as detailed in the Ten Commandments, the teachings of Jesus, or any other part of the New Testament that explains right and wrong or describes moral and immoral actions or thoughts.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What are some of the freedoms that Christians can enjoy?
2. What did circumcision mean if you were Gentile?

3. Are there any laws that Christians should continue to obey?
4. How do we have a reasonable hope of righteousness?
5. In what way does Paul warn us about the misuse of our freedoms?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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