

Liberty with Law

May 28 – Galatians 5:1-26

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 148 – 217 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul continued the same theme from the second half of Chapter 4. **Now that we are free in Christ, why would we subject ourselves to slavery again by keeping the Law?** Christ delivered us from the Law (v.1).

Paul included strong warnings to anyone trying to justify himself through works, particularly the act of circumcision (v.2-4). There is nothing wrong with circumcision itself, except when it is used as a requirement for salvation, for salvation through works is no salvation at all. Therefore, Paul wrote that “Christ would be of no benefit” to the one trying to justify himself through the Law (v.2). Christ is sufficient alone to save one from sin, but when anything is added to Christ as a requirement for salvation, he is no longer trusting in Christ alone but in works. To add anything to Christ’s work of salvation is to take away from what Christ did, to diminish His sufficiency as a complete Savior.

Furthermore, Paul pointed out that the Law had to be taken as a whole or not taken at all (v.3). A person was not at liberty to pick and choose parts of the Law to follow or ignore. Thus, when one requires circumcision for salvation, he is committing another error. He must fulfill the entire Law, which no man, other than Christ, can do. One must choose the Law or Christ, but he cannot choose both. **To choose the Law is to be severed or separated from Christ. To choose Christ is to be separated from the Law.**

When Paul used the phrase “fallen from grace” (v.4), he was not implying that a believer can lose his salvation. One who combines Christ and the Law for salvation is forfeiting the benefits of Christ. He cannot embrace the grace found in Christ while holding onto the Law. Salvation is entirely a work of God through faith in Christ. Our righteousness is found in Him. By His Spirit, He is perfecting us in this life and will complete that perfection in the life to come (v.5, 6).

Next, Paul reprimanded the Galatians again for abandoning the truth (v.7-12). Whoever was hindering them was an agent of the enemy. He warned that if the “leaven” (bad influence) was not dealt with immediately, it would leaven the entire congregation (v.9). Paul even wrote, “I wish that those who are troubling you would mutilate themselves” (v.12), meaning cut off or crush their male parts. Yikes! But did the Galatians get the message?

Daily Reflection

In the last few verses (v.13-15), Paul addressed a question that is often raised against Christianity — if Christians are freed from all sin, then what keeps them from doing whatever they want? If they are not under the Law, then what is it that restrains their sinful behavior? People often confuse freedom or liberty with license or unrestraint. **With all liberty there is law.** A society with no restraints will descend into chaos and be consumed (v.15). Sinful men need laws to curb their impulses and actions.

But aren’t Christians free from the Law? Yes, Christ fulfilled the Law for us, but **we are now restrained by His law, the law of love.** We are to love our neighbor as ourselves (v.14). We were set free from the yoke of slavery, but we were not set free from all yokes. We took on the yoke of Christ, which is not burdensome (*Matt. 11:30*). **Under His law, we are free.**

Because His Spirit indwells us, we no longer live according to the flesh, fulfilling sinful desires; rather our desires and actions change (v.16, 17). We are governed internally by the Spirit. Instead of producing rotten fruit (v.19-21), we now yield the fruit of the Spirit (v.22, 23).

Christ set you free internally and externally, but now you are under His law of love — loving God and loving others. “Do not turn freedom into an opportunity for the flesh (for sin) but through love serve one another” (v.13). **Let the love of Christ be that which restrains your liberty.**

The Law of Christ

May 29 – Galatians 6:1-10

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 149 – 216 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul continued writing about the Law of Christ (v.2). What is the Law of Christ? The Law of Christ is the summary of the Law of Moses, that is to love the Lord with all your heart (*Mk. 12:30, 31*) and to love your neighbor as yourself (*Gal. 5:14*). The Law of Christ can also be called the Law of Love. In this passage (*Gal 6:1-10*), Paul provided practical ways to fulfill the Law of Christ.

First, **we can help restore those who stumble** (v.1). Though it is the natural tendency of our flesh to judge or condemn someone “caught in a trespass” (a sin, somewhere he should not be), the Law of Christ commands us to love him. Those “who are spiritual” (mature) should show him grace and deal with him in gentleness, understanding that in another situation, the same thing could happen to us.

In the restoration process, Paul warned us against pride (v.3, 4). Bailing out those who are ensnared in sin may boost our ego, but allowing this inflation is dangerous. To avoid danger, we must steer clear of comparing ourselves to others. If we boast about anything, let it not be how we stack up with others, but let us boast in how Christ has changed our lives (v.14).

The second way to fulfill the Law of Christ is to help bear someone else’s burden (v.2). In context, Paul is referring to the restoration in the previous verse. But the term *burden* can include various scenarios. While we are expected to live responsibly and not be a burden to anyone else (v.5), there are times when we have too much on our plate, too much to carry alone. At times life deals us an unusual circumstance that is heavy and causes a great deal of anxiety, frustration, stress, or fatigue. These are burdens, and to fulfill the Law of Love (Christ), we must be alert, to know when and how we can help others.

The third way to fulfill the Law of Christ is to express our gratitude to those who have impacted our lives (v.6). In context of the restoration that has taken place (v.1), the one restored should thank the one who helped in the restoration. However, in the bigger picture, all of us are in the process of restoration or sanctification. The Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ (*Rom. 8:29*). In that process, God uses various people to teach us. The Law of Christ or the Law of Love compels us to express our appreciation to those who have helped us grow spiritually, either with material resources or with our words.

Paul also pointed out that the one who is selfish and does things to fulfill his fleshly desires will reap corruption (v.7, 8), but the one who lives by the Spirit and does the things that please the Lord (the Law of Christ) will reap life. This everlasting life may refer to the present, but more than likely it is referring to the future. We will be rewarded for fulfilling the Law of Christ.

The last thing Paul said that we could do to fulfill the Law of Christ is to do good to all people (v.9, 10). Paul acknowledged the fact that our struggle between the flesh and spirit is difficult, but he challenged us not to lose heart. Our reward is coming. Let us be do-gooders, especially in the church, not for show or attention, but because we love God and people. **Let us always be fulfilling the Law of Christ!**

Daily Reflection

In what ways have you fulfilled the Law of Christ lately?

A Good Showing

May 30 – Galatians 6:11-18

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Day 150 – 215 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We closed Paul's letter to the Galatians. He captured the heart of his message in his final words. Paul may have written in large letters to emphasize his final points (v.11), or he may have dictated the letter to an assistant up to the end where Paul began writing words himself. The large letters may indicate poor eyesight.

Paul reserved his harshest words towards the Judaizers for the end of his letter (v.12, 13). The true motive behind the teaching of the Judaizers (those who require circumcision for salvation) was only to make "a good showing," so that they could brag about how many people they had converted to their ways. They would rather protect their public perception, make good impressions, keep up appearances, and avoid persecution than hold to right doctrine. Quite simply, the Judaizers symbolize those who take the easy road over taking any heat for their faith.

Paul said that the only thing he wanted to be guilty of was boasting about Christ, not his own doctrine or how many people he had converted (v.14). We should follow his lead and make much of Christ, for because of Him, the world has been crucified to us. We should celebrate the changes the Lord has made in our lives, the good fruit that we see because of His Spirit, and the blessings that we have experienced because of His love, His forgiveness, and His grace.

When Paul wrote that "the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (v.14), he was saying that the things of this world no longer enslaved him. They were no longer his master. He was now under the rule of Christ. He had a new set of desires and motives. As we grow in Christ, the attraction and temptations of this world should diminish in our eyes. We should find ourselves dead to the world, no longer enslaved to its passions, because we have found complete satisfaction in Christ.

Although Paul had said it many times in different ways, he finally ended the letter with a direct statement, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything" (v.15). Judaizers were missing the point completely. The sign of true salvation, the evidence of true conversion, is not in the flesh but in the heart. Paul referred to us as a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), with a new love, a new spirit, with new desires and direction. Those who live under this new rule, or governance of the Spirit (v.16), find peace and mercy rather than legalism and judgment. They are also made part of the true Israel of God, those of the promise of Abraham (3:29).

While Judaizers were afraid of persecution, Paul was not. He bore the marks of his suffering for Christ (v.17). He wasn't complaining. Rather he viewed his scars and wounds as evidence of his loyalty to Christ. He belonged to Him, and his loyalty had been proven by his injuries.

Daily Reflection

These words are challenging for us. What battle scars do we bear? Where is the evidence that we have suffered for the Lord? **If we have none, then perhaps we have made a good showing for men but not for God, that we've been too worried about what people may think of us.**

For whom do you want to make a good showing — God or men? How can you tell?

Paul ended his letter by saying, "The grace of our Lord be with you" (v.18). Salvation is not about following laws or achieving works. It's about the work of God in our lives, not adhering to traditions or regulations. In Christ we find grace, freedom, and peace. Thank God for His grace, for setting us free from religious rules.

Big Decisions

May 31 – Acts 15:1-35

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 151 – 214 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul and Barnabas were sent again to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles and elders (v.2). There was an issue that arose, which was causing a disturbance in the church in Antioch, and they needed to resolve it. The dispute was over whether Gentiles needed circumcision to be saved (v.1). The issue was one with which Paul was very familiar, as he had just written about it in his letter to the Galatians.

In his letter, Paul argued against requiring any regulation, including circumcision, for a person to be saved. "Man is not justified by the works of the Law," he wrote, "but through faith in Christ Jesus..." (*Gal. 2:15, 16*). He also wrote, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (*Gal. 5:1*). Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Nothing else is required.

However, since this issue would set the course for the future of the church, Paul and Barnabas sought counsel from the Apostles and elders (*Acts 15:6*). As the leader of the Apostles, Peter shared his story of the conversion of Cornelius and his family (v.7-11). They were saved by Christ and received the Holy Spirit without being circumcised. "We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus," he said, "in the same way as they also are" (v.11).

Paul and Barnabas also shared stories from their travels through Cyprus and Galatia, that Gentiles were being saved and receiving the Holy Spirit without being circumcised (v.12). Finally, James the brother of Jesus, who had risen to leadership as an elder in Jerusalem, confirmed Peter's experience with Scripture (v.13-21). The prophet Amos foretold of the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom of God (*Amos 9:11, 12*).

Thus, a decision was made, with the approval of the church, and it was written in a letter to the

churches throughout the northern region, that circumcision would not be required for salvation (v.22-29). However, included in the letter were some essentials for believers to avoid, activities that were associated with idol worship (v.29). These activities were not required for salvation; rather they were activities from which Christians should refrain to pursue holiness.

Daily Reflection

What must a person do to be saved from their sin? Is Christ enough, or are there other requirements we must fulfill? **These were big questions, and the early church answered them correctly.** Christ alone is all we need, not circumcision, not baptism, not church membership, not keeping the Sabbath, not adhering to any law or commandment. Salvation can only be found in Christ alone. We all have the same problem — sin; and we all have the same solution — Christ.

While this issue was extremely important for the future of the church, I appreciate the way in which it was handled. A plurality of church leaders (Apostles and elders) discussed the issue at length. They sought wisdom in God's Word and confirmed His Word with experiences they had witnessed. When they made a decision, the church body affirmed it with their approval, and the decision was codified in a document, a letter for other believers to read. **This process should be instructive for us regarding how to address issues in the church.**

How does your church address issues? Does the process produce unity or division? Does it seek the wisdom of God or follow the whims of men?

Disagreements and Discipleship

June 1 – Acts 15:36-41

Today in Your Reading

After having settled the circumcision debate (v.1-35), and after having spent some time teaching in Antioch, Paul desired to return to the churches he and Barnabas had planted on their first missionary journey (v.36). Several months, perhaps even years, had passed, and Paul wanted to see how they were doing (v.36).

However, a bitter argument ensued when Barnabas proposed taking Mark along with them (v.37, 38). What did Paul have against Mark? He had abandoned them during their first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). While we don't know the reason behind Mark's quitting the mission, it caused Paul to fear that he was not ready for such an arduous task. However, Mark, also called John Mark, was Barnabas' cousin, so they were family (Acts 12:12). Therefore, Barnabas felt obligated to take Mark with him. Besides, Barnabas was an encourager, so we should not be surprised at his desire to mentor this young man.

Nonetheless, Paul and Barnabas could not come to agreement, so they decided to separate (v.39). Barnabas and Mark returned to Cyprus, Barnabas' home (Acts 4:36), and revisited the churches there. Paul chose another disciple named Silas to partner with him (v.40), and after they were commissioned by the believers in Antioch, they traveled north and west to revisit the churches there (v.41).

Silas was a good choice as Paul's ministry partner. Like Paul, Silas was a Roman Jew (Acts 16:37), which gave him access to synagogues but also to speak into the Gentile world. He had already proven to be a leader in the church at Jerusalem and a faithful man of God (15:22).

Despite Paul and Barnabas' disagreement and separation, the Lord turned a seemingly negative situation into positive ministry. Instead of one missionary team, there were now two. More people heard about the gospel.

Neither Barnabas nor Mark are mentioned again in the book of Acts. However, these men were reconciled because Paul mentioned them in his letters (1 Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24). This means that Barnabas' time with Mark proved profitable. Mentoring him took time and patience, but it paid off. Mark later became Peter's personal assistant (1 Pet. 5:13) and penned the gospel of Mark.

Daily Reflection

Have you ever had a sharp disagreement with another believer, one that caused you to separate? How did God use it for good?

Have you reconciled? If not, why not? If so, explain the benefits of reconciliation.

Is it okay for believers to disagree at times? Do disagreements help or hinder gospel ministry? Explain your answer.

Doors and Mentors

June 2 – Acts 16:1-15

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Day 153 – 212 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After his separation from Barnabas, Paul left Antioch for his second missionary journey. This time, Silas was his partner, and the objective was to encourage the churches Paul helped to plant on his first journey. Thus, they traveled to the region of Galatia (Asia Minor), to the cities of Derbe and Lystra.

While in Lystra, Paul met a young disciple named Timothy who was a Greek Jew (v.1). **He immediately asked Timothy to assist him in the ministry.** Someone who is both Jewish and Greek would be well-qualified to minister to both groups. However, though Timothy was Jewish, he had not yet been circumcised, which would've been offensive to a Jewish audience. Therefore, to avoid a possible offense, Paul circumcised Timothy (v.3). After being commissioned by the elders, Timothy became the third member of the team (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

However, as they passed through other parts of Asia Minor, they did not have opportunities to share the gospel. **The Holy Spirit did not permit them to speak of Jesus** (v.6, 7). While this had to be very discouraging and even confusing, Paul understood the Lord's intentions after he had a vision of a man inviting him to come to Macedonia (v.9, 10). Macedonia was not in Asia but rather across the sea in Europe. Paul and his teammates immediately traveled to Macedonia. At this point, Luke may have joined the team. Notice the pronoun shift from *they* to *we* (v.10).

Once in Macedonia, the team traveled to Philippi (where we later get the letter of *Philippians*). On the Sabbath day, they searched out a group of women who were praying down by the river (v.13). After Paul introduced himself and his teammates, he shared the gospel with the ladies. One of them named Lydia was listening intently, and "the Lord opened her heart" to the message of salvation (v.14).

Lydia and those in her house (servants or family members) were the first converts to Christianity in Europe. The gospel had reached a new continent, a fulfillment of **Acts 1:8**. The first church in Europe met in Lydia's house (v.40).

Daily Reflection

Two things stood out to me today. First, although Mark had disappointed him during the previous missionary journey, **Paul still sought out young disciples to mentor.** Both Timothy and Luke joined his team, and after spending time with Paul, they would have fruitful ministries of their own.

Perhaps you had a mentor like Paul in your life, someone who discipled you. **But are you seeking out young disciples to mentor? Who is your Timothy or Luke?** In what ways are you pouring into them for future ministry?

Second, notice that even Paul experienced closed doors at times on his journey (v.6, 7). He sensed the Lord leading him (through the Spirit) to the places that He wanted the team to go and the people that He wanted it to reach.

How do you determine when God is opening or closing a door? Share an example of an open or closed door that you have recently experienced.

Jailhouse Rock

June 3 – Acts 16:16-40

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 154 – 211 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul and Silas were arrested and imprisoned in Philippi (Macedonia). What started out as a great visit to Europe turned into a nightmare. But, as usual, **God caused all things to work for His glory and the good of the gospel.**

Satan was losing ground as Christianity spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Antioch, Cyprus, Asia Minor, and into Europe (*Acts 1:8*). Of course, he opposed it any way that he could. His greatest annoyance was the Apostle Paul who now had taken Christ to a new continent. He had to derail or destroy Paul's ministry.

That's when Satan ordered one of his demons to intercept Paul and Silas on their way to pray (*v.16*). The demon possessed a slave girl, and she identified Paul and Silas as "servants of the Most High God who were proclaiming the way of salvation" (*v.17*). While the demon's theology was spot on, Paul didn't appreciate the demon's endorsement. In fact, he was so annoyed that he admonished and removed the demon in the name of Jesus (*v.18*).

But Satan did not give up; rather he applied more pressure through persecution. Much like Jesus, Paul and Silas were dragged before the authorities, condemned with false charges, beaten, and imprisoned (*v.19-24*). Satan thought he had triumphed over his enemies, but God intervened. By sending an earthquake and opening the doors of the prison, He allowed Paul and Silas the opportunity to befriend the jailer (*v.25-30*). He also changed the hearts of the authorities who ordered their release and publicly apologized for their actions (*v.31-39*).

Rather than view this ordeal as a roadblock, Paul and Silas saw it as an opportunity. While in jail, "they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (*v.25*). I'm sure they even shared the gospel while they were there. Why not? The prisoners were truly a captive audience.

But the Lord arranged all of this to get the gospel to the jailer and his household (*v.30-34*). His life was radically changed that night, so much that he treated their wounds, invited them to his home, introduced them to his family, and fed them a meal. **None of this would've happened had Paul and Silas not been wrongfully imprisoned.**

Daily Reflection

For the Lord to get the gospel to the jailer, the jailer first had to hear it preached. To hear the gospel preached, someone who knew the gospel had to be imprisoned. To be imprisoned, those who knew the gospel had to be arrested, even if for phony charges. **The Lord arranged all this so Paul and Silas could engage the jailer and the jailhouse,** not to mention the jailer's household.

How do we typically view these kinds of circumstances? Why is that?

Take a minute to read *Philippians 1:12-14*. **To reach a jailer with the gospel, someone who knows the gospel must be jailed. To reach prisoners for Christ, someone who knows Christ must be imprisoned.** What a marvelous thought. How does this truth impact how you view your "calamitous" circumstances?
