

Stand Fast

Liberty, Circumcision, and the Whole Law

Galatians 5:1–13

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2026

A Galatians Doctrinal Library

Booklet Eight

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Stand Fast: Liberty, Circumcision, and the Whole Law

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Where a verse is mentioned, it is written out in this edition, so the reader does not have to leave the page. This booklet is the eighth of nine readings from Paul's letter to the Galatians. The booklets may also be issued as one volume.

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Introduction

Justified by faith → Dead to Law → Alive with Christ → No longer under the tutor → A son and an heir → Known by God → A child of the free. Paul has brought the Galatians this far before he tells them to, stand fast.

If those phrases are new to you, here is the thread: God receives us through Christ, not through our success at keeping a religious code. The Law once exposed our need and guarded Israel; it cannot give the life Christ gives. In Him, you belong to the Father.

Now Paul asks, *what happens when someone offers a free believer one more condition for acceptance?*

Galatians 5:1–13 takes up the yoke of bondage, circumcision, obligation to the whole Law, faith working through love, and liberty that serves. The warning is sharp because Christ has already made us free.

Stand there.

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Part One — Stand Fast

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

Galatians 5:1, NKJV

Stand—Do Not Earn

Stand.

Not earn freedom, achieve freedom, or become worthy of freedom. Christ made us free. Therefore stand fast in it.

Freedom is territory Christ has already given. Believers must refuse the yoke that continually attempts to return.

Notice who produced the freedom. Not Paul. Not the church. Not doctrinal knowledge. Not personal courage. Christ. Therefore, no institution has the authority to place back upon the Christian a spiritual yoke that Christ removed.

A pastor may teach, correct, counsel, warn, and serve. He cannot legitimately recreate bondage in Christ's name. The freedom belongs to Christ's work.

Standing is not a new performance. You do not wake up and manufacture ground. You refuse to leave the ground Christ already put under your feet.

Not every correction is a yoke. Not every warning is bondage. The question is whether correction serves your life in Christ or replaces Christ as the basis of your standing. Correction can call a son back to truth. Bondage tells the son he is no longer safe until the system says so.

The inner court will reconvene on Tuesday:

You were sharp with your child. You missed the meeting. You are tired of church.

The yoke answers every time: Then you are unsafe until you repair the record.

The Gospel answers: Repair the relationship because you are a son. Do not repair it in order to become one again.

Standing is quiet. You do not announce that you will not take the yoke. You simply refuse the, “unless.” Christ is enough—unless you do this. You are accepted—unless you fail there. You are free—unless someone important says you are not. The word is small. The shift is massive.

Again

Again, the same shocking idea from Galatians 4. The Gentile Galatians once served pagan gods. Now circumcision and Mosaic obligation were being offered as spiritual advancement.

Paul says, “again.”

Different religion. Same slave posture.

A yoke determines direction. An animal beneath a yoke does not simply carry weight. It is controlled.

The question is not merely whether rules are difficult. The deeper question is what governs your relationship with God.

Christ or Law?

Grace or performance?

Sonship or obligation?

Paul calls the return “a yoke of bondage.” Nobody says, “Come back into slavery.”

They say:

“You need balance.”

“You need accountability.”

“You need standards.”

“Grace is wonderful, but...”

“You cannot simply tell people they are forgiven.”

“You cannot tell believers they are no longer under Law. People will sin. We need something to restrain them.”

The yoke rarely advertises itself as bondage. It usually calls itself *maturity*.

Paul calls it what it is.

How the Yoke Enters a Free Church

It rarely arrives as Moses. It arrives as concern.

“We are worried about the young people.”

“We are worried about holiness.”

“We are worried people will take advantage of grace.”

Those worries are not imaginary. Paul shares the concern about flesh. He does not share the solution.

The yoke says, “Then manage them.” Paul says, “Then give them Christ and teach them to stand.”

If you were wounded by that exchange, you remember the moment liberty was reframed as danger. Someone you trusted looked pained. You felt selfish for wanting rest. You took the yoke because you did not want to be the reason the church went soft.

Paul would have called the soft thing something else. He would have called the yoke entanglement.

Listen for the shift. The meeting begins with Jesus and ends with control. Someone says, “We believe the Gospel,” then adds a procedure that decides who is safe this week. The room grows quiet because someone important has entered. Liberty is not disproved. It is postponed.

That postponement is how a free church becomes an entangled one without ever announcing Sinai.

If you sat in that meeting and felt selfish for wanting rest, you were not watching a small policy change. You were watching the basis move.

Christ made you free. A meeting does not get to take that back and call the theft maturity.

Part Two — Circumcision and the Whole Law

Circumcision was the sign given to Abraham and later belonged to Israel's life under the Law. Some teachers wanted Gentile believers to accept it as a requirement for standing with God. Paul now explains what that requirement would mean.

“Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.”

Galatians 5:2–3, NKJV

Function, Not the Knife

Paul puts his own name behind the warning. This is not optional theological nuance.

Circumcision itself was not inherently sinful. God had commanded it to Abraham. It belonged to Israel's history. Paul himself had been circumcised.

The issue is not merely the physical act. The issue is what circumcision now means. Paul is not attacking Abraham, Jewish identity, or the Old Testament. He is confronting circumcision when it becomes a condition added to Christ for righteous standing.

If the Galatians accept it as a necessary religious obligation for standing before God, it represents submission to the Law system.

Function matters. The same act can mean something different.

Medical circumcision is not what Galatians 5 is addressing. A Jewish family practicing it as an ethnic custom without making it a condition of righteousness is not what Paul is confronting.

He is confronting circumcision as religious obligation—as something necessary to secure what Christ supposedly has not fully provided.

Christ will profit you nothing.

Why?

Because the person is turning from dependence upon Christ toward dependence upon Law.

Not necessarily verbally denying Jesus. Perhaps still worshiping Him, still calling Him Messiah, still believing He died and rose. But functionally saying Christ is not enough.

Jesus—and circumcision.

Jesus—and Moses.

Jesus—and religious performance.

Jesus—and another condition for acceptance.

WHEN THE ADDITION BECOMES THE BASIS, CHRIST PROFITS NOTHING.

The size of the addition is not the issue. The question is where confidence now rests. If the added requirement becomes necessary for righteousness, dependence shifts. Christ becomes necessary but insufficient.

No Buffet Law

You do not get to choose circumcision, Sabbath, diet, selected moral commands, and then leave everything else behind.

If circumcision brings you under Law as your governing religious obligation, you are a debtor to the whole Law.

Religious people often treat Law as a buffet: the Ten Commandments, maybe the tithe, perhaps dietary principles, a few festivals and blessing promises—but not animal sacrifice, ritual impurity, civil penalties, or priesthood regulations.

Paul gives no such category.

The Law is a coherent covenantal obligation. You cannot place yourself under the authority of one part as your righteousness system while claiming no debt to the whole.

Booklet Five already established the principle:

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”

Galatians 3:10, NKJV

**THE LAW DOES NOT SAY, “DO THE PARTS YOU PREFER.”
ITS STANDARD IS ALL.**

Accepting circumcision as Law obligation is not adding one harmless religious practice. It changes your governing relationship.

Modern churches have their own buffet. Not Sinai’s whole code—our selected slice.

Dress. Attendance. A confession formula. A covering. A political loyalty. A second blessing. One more class before you are safe.

Paul is not impressed by how small the slice looks. He is watching whether the slice has become the basis.

Fallen From Grace Can Look Very Religious

“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

Galatians 5:4, NKJV

The qualifier matters: *you who attempt to be justified by law*.

Paul is not condemning every Christian who accidentally observes an Old Testament practice. The problem is justification by Law—the attempt to establish righteous standing through religious performance.

Fallen from grace is often used as though it means a Christian committed a terrible sin.

Look at Paul’s context. The Galatians are not falling from grace by becoming too immoral. They are falling from grace by turning toward Law for righteousness.

A person may become more disciplined, more observant, more serious, more rule-conscious, or more outwardly religious—and Paul can call the movement falling from grace.

Grace depends upon what Christ provides. Law-based righteousness depends upon what I perform.

The outward behavior may look impressive. The inward dependence has changed.

Grace is not God lowering the standard. Grace means God provides in Christ what human flesh cannot establish for itself.

Turning from Christ to Law is not becoming more serious about righteousness. It is turning away from God's provision of righteousness.

If you have been told you fell from grace because you failed a rule, hear the text. Paul locates the fall in a change of trust, not in last Tuesday's sin.

The frightening possibility in this letter is not that you sinned. It is that you stopped standing in what Christ provided and started standing in what you can maintain.

A man can become more disciplined, more observant, more useful to the church—and Paul can still call the movement falling from grace.

The room will look better. The dependence has changed.

Part Three — Faith Working Through Love

After warning against seeking righteousness through Law, Paul turns to the life of someone who trusts Christ. The Spirit is God's presence and power with His people. Faith receives what Christ gives, and that faith expresses itself in love.

“For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”

Galatians 5:5–6, NKJV

Neither Badge Avails

Spirit. Faith.

We do not manufacture righteousness. We rely upon God's provision in Christ.

Law-based justification looks toward fleshly performance. The believer waits through the Spirit and by faith. The difference is dependence.

Walking in the Spirit will be developed in Booklet Nine. Here Paul simply contrasts the source.

Not only circumcision avails nothing. Uncircumcision avails nothing.

That protects freedom from becoming another badge of superiority.

The circumcised person cannot say, “I am superior because I observe the religious requirement.”

The uncircumcised person cannot say, “I am superior because I reject the religious requirement.”

Neither fleshly condition avails anything in Christ.

You cannot turn freedom from Law into a new religion of self-righteousness. Christ remains the center.

Faith Works—Through Love

Faith working through love.

Love does not photograph well. A church that has lived by output will not trust this at first. They will ask for numbers, attendance, and visible zeal.

Paul points at something quieter.

If it does not work through love, it is not the faith he is describing.

That sentence is not softness. It is how you test a system that wants your liberty back.

Not faith working through fear, religious pressure, or condemnation.

There is movement, expression, and action. But the source is radically different.

The accusation against grace is always: *if you remove Law, people will do nothing.*

Paul says, *faith works through love.*

Grace does not eliminate Christian action. It changes the source of action.

You can inspect circumcision, diet, clothing, attendance, giving, and church participation but love is harder.

Love can be quiet, invisible to crowds, patient, private, sacrificial, and often unnoticed. Religious systems naturally gravitate toward what can be measured. God looks deeper.

How do you know if God is working in someone? Religion says, “Look at the flesh. Are they observing the rules, matching the culture, attending everything, saying the right phrases?”

Paul says, “faith working through love.”

Maybe the work God is doing is quieter than your checklist.

Booklet Seven emphasized knowing God. That becomes important here. The better you know the Father’s heart, the more you recognize His character when it appears in others: patience, mercy, kindness, grace, compassion, faithfulness—not merely religious conformity.

Knowing God reshapes discernment.

A wounded person who has only been measured by output will not trust this at first. The church that hurt you may have called love weakness and called pressure care.

Paul reverses the labels.

**IF IT DOES NOT WORK THROUGH LOVE,
IT IS NOT THE FAITH HE IS DESCRIBING.**

Freedom from Law does not leave the believer empty or inactive. Faith works. But it works through love, not fear, pressure, condemnation, or religious measurement. The evidence Paul names is not a fleshly badge, but the life of Christ expressed through love.

Part Four — A Little Leaven and the Offense of the Cross

Paul pictures the Galatians as runners whose progress has been interrupted. He also uses leaven, the small amount of yeast that spreads through dough, to show how one added requirement can affect an entire church.

“You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

Galatians 5:7–9, NKJV

Who Hindered You?

They had been moving well. Then something obstructed them.

Paul does not ask what hindered you. He asks *who*.

People had influenced them. That does not remove Galatian responsibility. But religious teaching has consequences. These teachers probably used Scripture—Abraham, Moses, circumcision, commands God genuinely gave. That is what made the error powerful.

False teaching is not always obvious nonsense. Sometimes it uses true biblical material in the wrong relationship.

The Law really came from God. Circumcision really had been commanded. But neither could now be added to Christ as a condition of righteous standing.

The teaching sounds religious. It may use Scripture. It may appeal to history. It may come from respected people. But true biblical material can still be used in the wrong covenantal relationship.

Paul says it, “does not come from Him who calls you.”

Source still matters.

Booklet Two asked where Paul’s Gospel came from. Booklet Eight asks where this persuasion comes from.

One “Unless”

Small addition. Large effect.

One religious condition. One apparently modest qualification. One “unless” and soon the whole relationship changes.

The “unless” is the added door. It does not have to be large to be dangerous. It only has to become necessary.

Someone says, “We are not putting people under Law; we only require this”—one ritual, one confession system, one authority structure, one condition for restored fellowship, one thing required before God will bless.

If that one thing changes the basis of acceptance, the leaven spreads.

The problem is not quantity. It is principle.

Wounded readers can usually name their *unless*.

Unless you come back under covering.

Unless you redo the prayer.

Unless you sit out.

Unless you agree.

The *unless* is how a free person is taught to distrust the Cross in practice while still praising it in song.

Name yours if you can. Not the ancient one. The one that still works on you.

The size of the requirement is not the point. The point is that the requirement has become the door.

Paul will not let a door like that stand next to the Cross.

Yet Paul says,

“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.”

Galatians 5:10, NKJV

“In the Lord.”

He is severe without becoming hopeless. He believes God can correct them.

GRACE ALLOWS BOTH STRONG WARNING AND REAL HOPE.

“but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.” Reputation does not protect false teaching. Title does not. History does not. Institution does not.

We can honor pastors, teachers, elders, historic leaders, and church traditions—and still say the text is above them.

That is not rebellion. That is Christian faithfulness.

The Offense of the Cross

“And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.”

Galatians 5:11, NKJV

Apparently, someone may have claimed Paul still taught circumcision under some circumstances. Paul points to his persecution as evidence. If he preached circumcision as a Gospel requirement, why would the controversy remain?

The Cross is offensive because it announces that your religious performance cannot complete what Christ had to die to accomplish.

It strips human beings of boasting, religious credentials, moral superiority, ethnic advantage, and self-righteousness.

THE CROSS SAYS CHRIST OR NOTHING.

That offends flesh.

The immoral person may be offended when the Cross says your sin is serious enough that Christ had to die.

The religious person may be offended for another reason: *your goodness could not save you either.*

The Cross levels both. No one approaches God holding a superior résumé. Paul says,

“I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!”

Galatians 5:12, NKJV

The language is deliberately sharp. The teachers were obsessing over cutting the flesh through circumcision. Paul responds with biting rhetoric.

This is how serious he considers the threat.

There are times when pastoral gentleness is essential. There are also times when love requires unmistakable warning.

Strong language is not automatically unloving. Its legitimacy depends upon truth, purpose, and whether it protects people rather than feeds the speaker’s ego.

The danger of leaven is not its size but its spread. One added condition can alter the whole relationship. The Cross remains offensive because it leaves no room for boasting, religious superiority, or Christ-plus confidence. Paul’s sharpness is pastoral because the threat is real.

Part Five — Called to Liberty

Paul has defended freedom from the Law as a way to earn standing with God. Now he addresses a natural concern: what keeps freedom from becoming an excuse to harm others?

His answer begins with love and service.

“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.”

Galatians 5:13, NKJV

Liberty Is the Calling

Freedom is not a side benefit. It belongs to Christian calling.

Christ made you free. Paul commands stand fast.

Now: “you were called to it.

Some Christians imagine God saying, *I suppose you are technically free, but I would prefer you still live like a slave.*

Paul does not. Christ intends the believer to live free.

Liberty creates a question. *If believers are free from Law, what stops freedom from becoming self-indulgence, selfishness, immorality, or chaos?*

Paul does not dodge it.

Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. Freedom can be abused. Paul does not deny that. But notice what he does not say:

- Therefore, you are no longer free.
- Therefore, go back under Law.
- Therefore, the tutor must return.
- Therefore, bondage was safer.

The possibility of abusing freedom does not cause Paul to withdraw freedom. This is where many religious systems retreat. They hear *complete forgiveness, no longer under Law, sons, heirs, known by God, liberty*—and immediately ask, “But what if people sin?”

That fear is understandable. Paul asks the same practical question, but his answer is not to take back the freedom.

Liberty Is Not a New God Named Me

Liberty does not mean I am my own god. It does not mean I do whatever I want, nobody can tell me anything, and my desires define morality. That would simply be another expression of flesh.

Christian liberty is freedom from bondage so that we can live with God. Freedom from Law as the system establishing our standing. Freedom from condemnation. Freedom from religious negotiation. Freedom from human mediation replacing Christ.

And freedom has a positive direction: through love serve one another. Free—and yet serve.

Paul does not produce service by putting the believer back under slavery. Love does it.

The believer is free, and because he is free from needing everyone else to give him identity, approval, security, and significance, he can finally serve them. Not use them. Not manipulate them. Not demand Life from them. Serve.

**BONDAGE SAYS YOU MUST SERVE TO BECOME ACCEPTABLE.
LOVE SAYS I AM ACCEPTED—THEREFORE I AM FREE TO SERVE.**

Same outward act, perhaps. Different heart. Different relationship. Different source.

If I need you to make me feel valuable, I will use you.

If I need your approval, I will manipulate you.

If I need your obedience to feel successful as a pastor, I may control you.

If my Life is in Christ—if I am loved, accepted, secure, an heir—then I do not need to extract Life from you. I can love you. That is freedom.

Verse 6: “faith working through love.” Verse 13: “through love serve one another.” Love surrounds Paul’s definition of liberty. The answer to legalism is not selfishness. The answer to selfishness is not legalism. Paul points toward love.

Service that needed your exhaustion was not Galatians 5:13. Love that is free can work hard. It can also stop when the work has become a way of buying a place in the room. You do not honor Christ by remaining useful to a system that cannot bear your freedom.

Serve from fullness when you can. Rest without apology when fullness is still a sentence you are learning to believe.

What Standing Looks Like on an Ordinary Tuesday

Stand fast is not a conference sentence. It is how you answer the inner court that reconvenes every morning.

The court says, *You were sharp with your child.*

The yoke says, *Then you are probably not in standing until you repair the record.*

The Gospel says, *Repair the relationship because you are a son—not in order to become one again.*

The court says, *You missed the meeting.*

The yoke says, *Then you are unsafe.*

The Gospel says, *You may need to be faithful in community, but your acceptance was not on the agenda.*

The court says, *You are tired of church.*

The yoke says, *Tired people are drifting.*

The Gospel says, *Tired people may be telling the truth about a system that confused output with Life.*

Rest is not always rebellion. Sometimes rest is the first honest sentence a wounded believer has spoken in years.

Standing is quiet work. You do not have to announce that you will not take the yoke. You simply refuse the *unless*.

You keep Christ as the basis when a conversation tries to move the basis.

You stay in the room without selling the room your conscience.

You tell the truth without becoming a new kind of inspector.

Do Not Hire the Tutor Because You Failed

Failure is not an argument for the yoke. It is an argument for walking.

Booklet Four already told you Christ lives in you. Booklet Six already told you that you are a son. This booklet tells you not to let a bad week become the reason the guardian moves back into the house.

Say the true thing to the Father: *I was wrong. I hurt someone. I hid. Help me.* That is a son talking.

Then refuse the second sentence the yoke always adds: *And now you are unsafe until we say otherwise.*

Correction can be real, but eviction is not the Christian meaning of correction.

Love After a Controlling Church

Some readers will feel unable to hear “serve one another.” Those words were used to keep them in the building past the point of health. If that is you, hear the order again.

1. *Called to liberty*
2. *Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh*
3. *Then, through love serve.*

The command to serve does not cancel the calling to liberty. If a community will only let you serve while refusing you liberty, it is not asking for Galatians 5:13.

It is asking for 5:1 in reverse.

Love that is free can leave a room that requires bondage.

Love that is free can also stay and tell the truth.

Love that is free can support a pastor without making him a mediator.

Love that is free can receive correction without calling every correction a yoke.

Discernment is part of standing.

Standing is not a mood. It is allegiance to the basis Christ established.

Give yourself time to learn the difference between flesh taking opportunity and a soul refusing to be owned. Those two can feel similar in the first months.

One moves toward using people. The other moves toward not being used. Paul is against the first. He is not against the second.

Christian liberty is not selfishness. It is freedom from bondage so that love, not fear, becomes the source of service. Paul does not answer the abuse of freedom by taking freedom away. He directs free people toward love.

If This Was Not Your Church Story

Even if you have never been in a controlling church, the yoke can still speak through your own conscience, your family system, your religious habits, or your fear of disappointing God.

The question remains the same:

WHAT IS GOVERNING YOUR STANDING BEFORE GOD?

If the answer is Christ, stand there.

If the answer has become your performance, your record, your usefulness, your rule-keeping, or another person's approval, hear Paul's warning.

Christ made you free.

Conclusion — Do Not Give Back What Christ Gave You

Christ made you free.

Stand there.

Do not drift. Do not surrender. Do not allow fear to persuade you that bondage is safer.

The yoke always promises security:

Let me manage you.

Let me measure you.

Let me tell you whether God is pleased.

Let me define your standing.

Let me give you rules so you never have to trust.

It feels secure.

Paul says it's a "yoke of bondage."

Christ did not free you so someone else could become your spiritual master.

Circumcision itself was not evil. When it became a requirement for righteous standing, Paul said Christ will profit you nothing—because the addition says Christ is not enough.

Then: *debtor to keep the whole Law.*

Then: *you who attempt to be justified by Law are—estranged from Christ, fallen from grace.*

Those words must retain their force.

Falling from grace can look very religious. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. Religious flesh has nothing to boast about. Anti-religious flesh has nothing to boast about either. Faith working through love is what matters.

A little leaven matters because one condition can change the whole relationship.

If love is the answer, how is love produced? Do we create another command: *love harder*? Do we turn love into another Law? Do we replace the Ten Commandments with "Be loving, or God will reject you?" That would simply restart the same machine with kinder vocabulary.

There must be a Source. Paul has removed Law as the believer's governing relationship. The religious mind says, "Then the flesh will win." That is the last great fear. Paul is about to answer it—not by reinstalling Law, not by reducing liberty, not by returning believers to childhood, but by explaining how the Life of God actually operates in the believer.

Until that sentence arrives, keep this one in your mouth:

Christ made me free.

I will not be entangled again. Not by Sinai recovered as a Christian lifestyle, not by a modern slice of Law wearing the name of covering, not by my own fear dressed as humility.

If you must say something to the inner court this week, say that. Then go love somebody without using the love as a payment.

That is standing. That is the liberty to which you were called.

No added condition.

No returned yoke.

No liberty used for flesh.

Faith working through love.

Freedom that serves.

Walk in the Spirit.