

Study 12
Galatians 5:1-6

1. Why is the Mosaic law described as a yoke of slavery?

The Mosaic law is described as a "yoke of slavery" because it places a heavy burden on individuals by requiring perfect adherence to a set of rules and regulations. The term "yoke" is a metaphor that conveys the oppressive nature of the law, especially when viewed as a means of achieving righteousness.

While the Mosaic law was given to God's people, it is impossible for anyone to fully keep it, as even failing at one point makes a person guilty of breaking the whole law. This creates a curse, as people cannot achieve salvation or righteousness through their own efforts under the law.

Thus, trying to be justified by following the law, instead of relying on faith in Christ, is seen as a form of spiritual slavery. It enslaves individuals by keeping them focused on their own works and performance rather than on the grace and freedom offered through Christ. The law demands perfection, but human beings are incapable of meeting its demands, making it a burden that leads to spiritual bondage rather than true freedom.

2. Why can't a Gentile or Chinese Christian undergo circumcision anyway knowing that his ultimate salvation is in Christ but he wanted to undergo it just to be sure cover his bets, and be more authentic?

If a Gentile Christian undergoes circumcision with the idea of securing salvation or trying to be more authentic, they are essentially falling away from the grace of Christ. They are choosing to rely on their own works (symbolized by circumcision) rather than trusting fully in the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross.

Ultimately, trying to add the law (even circumcision) to the gospel is a rejection of the freedom and righteousness that come through faith in Christ alone. It diminishes the power of grace and faith, and it can lead to spiritual slavery, as it shifts the focus from Christ's completed work to personal performance. Therefore, Paul makes it clear that circumcision (or any other legalistic act) does not contribute to salvation or make a believer more authentic—faith in Christ alone is what matters.

3. Why does Paul place such a non-compromising stand by saying that if we are circumcised we have broken off our relationship with Christ?

By making this strong statement, Paul is highlighting the seriousness of returning to legalism and works-based righteousness. He wants the Galatians (and all Christians) to understand that their relationship with Christ hinges on faith in His grace, not on any legalistic observance of the law, including

circumcision. Thus, compromising in this area would be spiritually disastrous, as it moves believers away from the true gospel of freedom in Christ.

4. a) In Gal 1 Paul writes in Galatians 1:6 (ESV) "*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.*" How is insisting on circumcision as well as the cross a different Gospel?

Insisting on circumcision as well as the cross is a different gospel because it shifts the basis of salvation from the grace of Christ alone to a combined system of faith and works. It undermines the core message of the gospel—that salvation is a free gift given through faith in Christ—and replaces it with a distorted message that relies on human efforts to complete what Christ started. This is why Paul is so adamant and forceful in his condemnation of such teachings, calling them a perversion of the true gospel.

b) Discussion Question. Can you think of some church practices that are imposed on believers as a supplement to the cross which may pose a danger of being a different gospel?

5. If in all honesty, righteousness is not what we daily hope or live for, as we are so distracted with so many worldly pursuits in our lives right now, how do we change our perspective and trajectory of our lives to gain this? How does this give us true freedom?

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

Firstly, this change of perspective or even our decision to change does not come from within ourselves, it is a Spirit-led desire for change in our lives hence we cannot will ourselves to do so.

Secondly it begins and ends with faith. Hence it is in reading His Word and gaining an ever-increasing understanding of the true nature of God, His majesty, His holiness, His purpose in our creation in His image, and our true standing in Christ that we are enabled by the Spirit to change our perspective. Faith comprises Knowledge, Assent, and Trust.

The knowledge of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ is the basic foundation of the gospel. We read about it in the Word or hear the sermons. It may take us a while but this knowledge gradually gains a foothold in our hearts. We begin to understand what it means, we start to work out its implications in our hearts. What He has done for us becomes real as we agree and accept it (assent) and we begin to trust these truths when we compare them to the lies the world tells us, and we respond to these truths by trusting them and basing our lives on these truths. The natural response to our faith in the gospel is love. We were made for love and we are capable of responding

to love. Love for Him begins to fill our hearts and we begin to want to become like the one we love. He is God and Righteousness is His nature hence we want to be righteous like Him. We reject all other idols in our lives when we compare them to Him. This is the process of repentance when we realize that we are all idol worshipers and being like our idols whatever they are, is what we live for, desire, and fight for every day. Once these truths replace the idols with God then we will want to be like Him. We want to be what we were originally created to be in " His Image "To be like Him is to be righteous, behaving like Him in every circumstance.

It is like a little child who wants to be like His Dad, we if we are truly His sons want to be like Him.

This is a Spirit-enabled process and transition and is enabled by faith. The more we encounter Him in His Word and the way He faithfully leads us through life the more our spiritual eyes are enabled to see Him and His beauty and this beauty begins to fill our imaginations and our hearts and become our ultimate hope in life. We of our own free will " naturally " desire to be righteous to be like Him. Even our emotions align with our faith as Paul uses the word "eagerly". Once we eagerly have the hope of righteousness we catch a glimpse of what true freedom was designed to be for us as His creations. This is totally opposed to the previous delusion of wanting to be like our idols resulting in our enslavement to them. Repentance is the realization of this and the shifting of our attitudes and trust which will result in our emotions being transformed.

Sadly the default mode in most of us is that righteousness is regarded as just a politically correct hope for a Christian which we declare to others whilst our emotions will betray our actual ambitions. Prayer meetings or bible studies will be a drag, fellowship will be a pain. Righteousness is just a yoke, something we need to do in order to be saved or in order to avoid eternal hell. Christianity becomes a sterile lifeless affair with the Law and righteousness a strait jacket and Jesus that eternal kill joy. This is religious slavery. This can never change our hopes.

6. What does this verse mean to you and how do you see all your ministry actions in the light of this verse? *Galatians 5:6 (ESV) 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

What Paul is saying here is that eternal religious observances no longer count in our lives as believers. What is the cornerstone of our spiritual lives is Jesus Christ. He is our righteousness, our salvation, the unmerited favor given to us by the Father and He saved us and gave us new life when we totally did not deserve this. It is from our belief or faith in this fundamental truth that springs up spirit-enabled love and this love is for Him and for our fellow man. Hence the wellspring of ministry is love for Him. We cannot love Him and hate our fellow man. The temptation is to do ministry in an effort to save ourselves,

gain self-righteousness burnish our own credentials as spiritual godly persons to our community and to Him which Paul declares in *1 Corinthians 13:1-2 (ESV)* *1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

On the other hand, there are plenty of Christians who do not ministry at all and we need to understand that is not that they are not capable of love but the fundamental problem lies at the level of faith. They are only guilty of not making the effort to minister to others but Paul already said external religious efforts count for nothing. Only faith in Christ Jesus. If they had a real dynamic and growing faith, you would begin to see it in the way they love people. They will be forgiving people caring people not because by nature they are like this but because their faith in Him and what He has done for them has elicited a response and that response is love. They reach out to others because they love Him and they see Him in others.

Case Study

Patty was a single lady in her 30s who came from a large family. All her 6 sisters had married early and had many children. Her parents were marvelous with all their grandkids and with the arrival of each one there was much celebration. Being a typical traditional Chinese family whose grandfather had come straight off the boat from Shanghai during the Malayan Federation they believed that there was something radically wrong with any woman of that age who was still single. She wrestled greatly with shame and unworthiness. She also had tremendous unresolved anger against a man she had dated for many years but who had not married her. She went to a counselor in the 3rd Baptist church. The therapist rightly told her that she had taken to heart her family's approach to personal value and worth. They taught that a woman had to have a husband and children if she was to have any value or worth. She was bitter against this man only because he had come between her and the thing she felt she needed to have to have value. The counselor then proposed that she throw off such an unenlightened view and throw herself into a career. ☒

1. Is her counselor correct in this advice? Why or why not?

One should realize that the well-meaning counselor was asking her to throw off a politically incorrect system of works- righteousness for a politically correct one! She would be correct to point out, "Why should I leave the ranks of the many women who make family their worth and value to join the ranks of the many men who make career the same thing? Would I not be as devastated then by career setbacks as I have been by romantic ones? She would be exchanging one set of idols for another

2. How should she apply the gospel in this situation instead of learning to forgive?

She should be told that the gospel is *not* that we live a worthy life and then give it to God and then he owes us but that in Jesus Christ he has already lived a worthy life. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. When we believe, he gives it to us. Then we are completely accepted and loved by the only One in the universe who counts. This gives us the ultimate emotional wealth, a sense of being loved so deeply that we can afford to forgive anyone. She will receive the righteousness of Christ and learn to rejoice in it. Then she can look at either men or a career and say, 'What makes me beautiful to God is Jesus, not these things.' Only then will I have power and freedom. And power to forgive" She found the "pre-conditions" for forgiveness.

3. When we have been hurt by someone we will find it difficult to forgive them. We feel they owe us a debt for the hurt they have inflicted. It is either they pay or we pay and absorb the debt.

a) What are the ways in which we typically make those who have wronged us pay?

i) In our dealing with the offender:

- (1) We can make cutting remarks and drag out the past.
- (2) We can be far more demanding and controlling with the person than we are with others, all because "they owe us."
- (3) We can punish with self-righteous "mercy" which makes them feel small.
- (4) We can avoid them, and be cold to them in overt and/or subtle ways.
- (5) We can actively seek and scheme to hurt or harm them, taking from them something valuable to them.

ii) In our dealing with others:

- (1) We can run them down to others, under the guise of "warning" people about them.
- (2) We can run them down to others, under the guise of seeking sympathy and sharing our hurt.

iii) In our dealing with ourselves:

- (1) We can replay the tapes of what they did to us, to justify our anger and hostility.
- (2) We can "root" for their failure or fall or pain.

Forgiveness is a promise, to not "bring the matter up" to the person, others, or even ourselves. At each point when we are tempted to exact payment, we refuse, and though it hurts, that is a payment.

b. If we decide to forgive them we must therefore absorb the debt instead of making them pay. How can we do this practically?

i) With the person: In our dealings with the person we are courteous and warm as possible. If the person is repentant, we seek to restore the relationship as much as possible. Why say "as much as possible?" If the person has done grievous wrong, it

may mean the trust can only be restored in degrees. If the person is continuing in a hostile manner, you must not make it easy for them to sin against you. And there are other circumstances. (E.g. If the person is a former “love interest,” then to re-create the same relationship may be inappropriate.)

The speed and degree of this restoration entails the re-creation of trust, and that takes time, depending on the nature and severity of the offenses involved. Part of real repentance usually means asking: “What could I do that would make you trust me?” and being willing to accept the answer. Part of real forgiveness means being open to the possibility of lasting change in the offender and being truly unbiased and willing to offer more trust little by little.

ii) With others: We must not criticize the offender to others. We should be careful, when seeking support for our “burdens” (Galatians 6:1-6) that we aren’t using them as an excuse to get others to justify us by agreeing how horrible the other person is! We must be reasonable. This is not to say you can never say anything that casts a bad light on someone else, but you must watch your motives. If the person stays in a hostile and unrepentant mode, it may be necessary to “warn” someone about him or her, but again, motives must be watched.

iii) With yourself: What does it mean to “not bring it up yourself?” It means not to dwell on it in the heart, and not to re-play the “videotapes” of the wrong in your imagination, in order to keep the sense of loss and hurt fresh and real to you. It means, when you are ready to do so, you should pray for the person and yourself, remind yourself of the cross (see below), and turn your mind to other things.

4. Reflection Question. Have you had encounters in your life where you had been hurt by certain people and had difficulty forgiving them? Share with the group your experience and now that you know the gospel how would you have dealt with them differently?

Takeaway

Galatians 5:1-6 invites believers to embrace the freedom that comes from faith in Christ, rejecting legalistic attempts to achieve righteousness and instead living out a life of love as evidence of genuine faith.