

There are **four theme ideas** in the first 15 verses of Galatians 5 that all begin with the letter "L":

Liberty, Law, Love, and Leaven.

These themes are **inner-connected**, and teach us something **important and very practical**.

The **Liberty** Paul talks about here is the **freedom** of God's people from an **evil bondage**, a bondage to **sin**.

It's **not freedom to do anything** we want without consequences.

And it's not a freedom to **worship** or to **think of God** in anyway that just seems right to us.

It's a freedom to be the way God calls us to be.

That's the **only way** that **really satisfies** our hearts, because that's **what honors our God**.

The **Law** of God shows us **which things** actually **honor God**, and **how God planned** to redeem us.

The **moral laws** spell out what's always **right** and what's **wrong** in the eyes of God/

God's **ceremonial laws** symbolized out **how we will be restored** to fellowship with God.

They were given to **point ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus** as the Lamb of God.

God's **Love** is what **changes us**, and **opens our eyes** to God's **promises** revealed in the His word.

It's how **through Christ** we're **delivered** from the **condemnation** revealed by the law,

and it's how we're **made able to honor God** to **live lovingly**, the way we were **created** to live.

But even when the gospel of grace comes into our lives, **we can't stop there**.

Leaven is the **4th "L" idea**: Paul uses it to represent those **little things** can have **devastating results**.

We need to be aware of the **dangers** around us that **entice us to forget** the **liberation of God's love**.

Chapter 5 of Galatians begins with a reminder: the first "L" -- don't neglect the liberation we have in Christ.

1. For **freedom** Christ has set us **free**; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
2. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.
3. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.
4. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.
5. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.
6. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through **love**.

1. When you trust in Christ alone to make you right with God -- you're set free, liberated.

You're **set free** from the **burden** of trying to **meet impossible standards** to be redeemed,

and you're **set free** from the **chains of sin**, and from the **guilt** of what you've already done wrong.

Instead of those enslavements, you become the **servant of a kind and loving Master**.

He **took up your guilt** and the **penalties** you deserve, and made you part of his **spiritual family**.

Those he liberates he **forgives**, he **makes them spiritually alive**.

He fills them with the **fruit of the Holy Spirit**, and loves them as his own.

But we're **not liberated from our obligation** to **honor God** and to **live by his moral principles**.

Our **liberation** is from the **foolish notion** of **merit by things we do or by rituals**.

No one can ever **earn** his way into God's favor.

God's **law** shows us that we **deserve his wrath**. That's **why Jesus** had to come to **pay our debt**.

He **satisfied the demands of the law** in place of his people.

He **sets us free** from the **curse** of the law, and into the **joys of grace** through Christ.

We as believers need to **cling** to the **liberty Christ earned** for us.

The **Gentiles** in Galatia had at one time lived under the **yoke of paganism**.

They'd been **raised** with **heathen ideas** idolizing **prosperity** and **pleasure** and **worshipping false gods**.

The gospel of **Christ** set **many of them free** from that false idea.

Many **Jews** there had accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah.

They learned that **the Mosaic ceremonies don't remove guilt**, they **prefigured the Savior's work**.

But along came these **Judaizers** who were enticing them into **salvation by works**.

The new believers were being drawn **into the yoke of Rabbinical Judaism**.

The "**yoke**" was a Hebrew expression. It's the word עֹל ('ol), a **wooden beam that locked oxen to a plough**.

It represented **forced servitude, enslavement**.

They **perverted God's law** into a method of **removing our guilt**. But only the work of Christ can do that.

2. The Judaizers were saying that all believers need to keep the ceremonial requirements of the law.

But **no one** can keep the perfect standards of God's law.

The law **exposes** our fallen nature, and **points to** the Promised Messiah who would pay for our guilt.

At the **Council of Jerusalem** the Apostles met to deal with this error. They warned in **Acts 15:10**

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

The **issue** was **Circumcision**, the **old sign** of God's Covenant, replaced by **Baptism**.

Paul was reminding them that **trusting in Christ alone** is **incompatible** with **relying upon circumcision**.

Either they believed that Jesus **Christ** was the one who **alone** satisfied the laws demands for us, **or** they believed that the **ceremonial laws didn't get fulfilled in Christ**, and still need to be kept.

Dr. William Hendriksen said, "**A Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted**"

So **why stop at circumcision?** To demand that, brings you **back into the whole ceremonial law**.

It's to live the way things were before Christ's atonement on the Cross.

Paul urged the Galatians to continue to stand firm in that **freedom** from their former bondage.

To be **re-enslaved** to the ceremonial law again, is to **deny** the **sufficiency** of the work Christ did.

Paul says that those going **back to the law** are **fallen from Grace**. (verse 4)

It makes **no sense** for those believing in Christ to **go back** to the **symbolism of the law**.

If they turned away from grace alone as what redeemed them,

then **either** they **weren't really regenerated** to begin with,

or were being **tragically deceived**, and were forfeiting the **blessings** of living by **God's principles**.

We're not tempted in exactly the same way today.

We're **not** tempted by Judaizers to adopt the **old Jewish rituals**.

But there **are influences** that can tempt us to think that **God accepts us because** of things we do.

Some try to draw us into **ritualistic religions** - they're nothing more than **sanctified superstitions**.

The **Sacraments aren't magical rites** that automatically take your sins away.

There are **no sacred objects** that carry blessings with them.

Crosses and statues won't keep you from accidents, illness, or temptation.

These are **not** the ways **revealed in the Bible**.

Nothing you **do**, or **touch**, or **say** carries the power to **bring down God's blessings**.

God looks on the heart held captive by Christ and blesses because of **what Jesus did** for you.

It's **not your good deeds, conservative social attitudes, or denial of personal comforts** that makes you **right with God**.

It's **his grace alone** that transforms your heart through Christ.

That's what moves you to **love him**, to **love others**, and to **do what's right** out of thankful gratitude.

Paul warns against getting tangled up in bondage again.

There's a **natural tendency** in us to **become self-absorbed**.

We tend to think **that our eternal destiny is in our own hands**.

If you believe your **outward deeds or words** can earn God's blessings

whether it's circumcision, sacraments, repeated prayers, sacred objects, or social programs,

you **deny the sufficiency of the work of Jesus Christ** in redeeming you.

Those who believe this false gospel have **fallen away from what grace is all about**.

Instead of resting in God's provision, they think they have to **earn it for themselves**.

3. In place of self-caused salvation, God's word teaches that it's faith working by Love.

By faith, hoping in Christ's righteousness alone, a person is made right with his Creator.

Biblical religion teaches that when **Christ brings you back into fellowship with God** you **learn to love** as he loved you.

Love and good deeds are the **fruit** of **grace and faith**, **not the cause or root** of it.

Paul expands on this more beginning in verse 13, but first there's a warning.

4. In verses 7-12 Paul reminds them that the newly Christianized Galatians had to now learn to live as they should.

7. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

8. This persuasion is not from him who calls you.

9. **A little leaven leavens the whole lump.**

10. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine,
and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

11. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?

In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

12. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

Paul had seen the **evidence** of **Christ at work** in their lives **when they first believed**.

He had **confidence** that by God's grace they could **go back** to their **former "well-run-race"**.

He wanted them to **realize** that **bad influences** were **hindering** them from living by God's truth.

It doesn't take much to ruin a good thing.

A little **too much sugar or salt** can ruin the taste of an otherwise good dish.

A **bad tire** can cause an accident that destroys a car and kills its passengers.

A **small leak in a gas line** can cause an entire building to explode.

Or as Paul puts it here, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump*.

I always remember that *I Love Lucy* episode where Ricky and Fred tried to make bread.

They put in **too much leaven, yeast**, into the dough and a **12 foot loaf** pushed itself out of the oven.

The point here is that even what **seems like a little deviation** from God's truth
can get your **life** going in the **wrong direction**.

By **hoping in outward things you** do, you **forget** the **heart of the gospel**.

Don't count how long you prayer or the how many **minutes you read the Bible**.

Look on your heart as you pray and read. Are you **aware of the Living Christ**?

Are you **speaking in faith to him**? Are you remembering that you're **reading God's own word**?

It's **not rituals or practices** that **take away your guilt**.

It's no wonder that people have **anxiety** and **depression** in their lives

if they **forget** that it's **God's perfect love** that **redeems** and **keeps** them.

Leave your worries at the cross of Christ where they're **paid for in full**.

Benjamin Franklin once said,

"for want of a nail the shoe was lost, for want of a shoe a horse was lost,
for want of a horse a rider was lost, for want of a rider a battle was lost,
for want of a battle a kingdom was lost."

That **little nail** could be the **tiny thought in your heart** that **you haven't done enough**.

To accept a **misunderstanding** of God's law, of the Gospel, **effects your whole life**.

It **arranges** your **every attitude** around a **false starting point**.

You **can't keep God's law enough** to erase your past sins.

Give in to one point like that and you're **condemned** because you **can't be good enough**.

James 2:10, "**For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.**"

Paul says that those who promote ideas like that will bear their own judgment.

People sometimes approach God's word as if they can **choose what they like** and **ignore the rest**.

Without realizing how it **effects their attitude** toward God

people to **latch on** to **some wrong ideas** that get them **off the track of truth**.

As God pointed out here through the Apostle Paul,

it **just takes a little error** to send a life into a **horrible spin out of control**.

Paul wanted them to understand that he was being **persecuted** for **standing up for truth**.

He could **easily have compromised** on that **little point** of allowing **circumcision** to continue.

But to do that **undermines** the **whole Gospel message**.

In the last part of this section, verses 13-15, Paul explained **the boundaries of Christian liberty.**

13. For you were called to **freedom**, brothers.

Only **do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**

14. For **the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

15. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Liberty in Christ isn't a liberty *from* Christ.

It's a **liberation from bondage to error**, so that you can enjoy **freedom to live by God's truth.**

Here's where he brings the **focus** back to that 3rd key "**L**" theme: **Love.**

Love as God speaks of it in his word isn't a **romantic moment** or just an **emotional feeling.**

It's **defined by his word** as expressed in his **law.**

The **law**, in the broad use of the word, teaches **the perfect way** which can't be followed aside from Christ.

It tells us **how to love**, how to **honor God** in our lives, and **how to live among others** here in God's world.

Jesus explained it this way all through his ministry. In **John 14:21** he said,

"Whoever **has my commandments and keeps them**, he it is **who loves me...**"

In **Romans 13:10** Paul said, "**Love does no wrong** to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfilling of the law.**"

Biblically, "**Love is an attitude** implanted into our needful human hearts by the prevailing grace of God whereby we are **enabled** to joyfully obey the revealed desires of our Creator both toward the Lord himself and toward those he Created."

When **Christ works in you** to move you **to honor God and to treat others as he says**, *that's love.*

His perfect love is credited to you even when you don't deserve it. That's *a work of grace.*

He also works in those **changed by his grace** so that they **strive to do** what God says is *right.*

We need to make sure that these 4 Key "**L**" themes are active in our lives every day.

Rest in the **liberty** we have in **Christ**, the **freedom** we have in him.

Don't become **enslaved by the lie** that we have to **earn our way** into God's blessings.

Let God's law teach us and convict us of our **deep need for the Savior.**

Appreciate **God's standards** for morality and serious worship.

See how **the ceremonial laws prefigure the work of our Savior** who would die to redeem his people.

Learn to love as **God defines it** in his word.

Rely on the **power of the Risen Savior** to **make us able** to live to **promote God's glory** in all things, and to stir us to **live by his moral principles.**

And don't let little pieces of leaven, wrong beliefs and practices, **spoil our lives.**

Let **his word identify the dangers** and **direct our steps** in the narrow way.

In Christ we're **free** from the **chains of self-effort, guilt, and anxiety.**

Jesus Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law in our place,

and he **lives in our heart to do** what's **impossible to do** without him.

We can **overcome** the depressions and agonies which are **exaggerated by focusing on ourselves.**

Let's **turn our attention to Jesus** and **rest in his gracious victory** that delivers us.

Note: Bible quotations are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

ESV:

Galatians 5:1-15

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12. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!
13. For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
14. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
15. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Galatians 5:1-14 (original Greek text)

1. τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ οὖν, ἧ Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἠλευθέρωσε, στήκετε, καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε.
2. Ἴδε ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε, Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει.
3. μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι.
4. κατηγορήθητε ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξέπεσατε·
5. ἡμεῖς γὰρ Πνεύματι ἐκ πίστεως ἐλπίδα δικαιοσύνης ἀπεκδεχόμεθα.
6. ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομὴ τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία, ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη.
7. Ἐτρέχετε καλῶς· τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοψε τῆ ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι;
8. ἡ πεισμονὴ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς.
9. μικρὰ ζύμη ὅλον τὸ φύραμα ζυμοῖ.
10. ἐγὼ πέποιθα εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν Κυρίῳ ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο φρονήσετε· ὁ δὲ ταράσσων ὑμᾶς βαστάσει τὸ κρίμα, ὅστις ἂν ᾖ.
11. ἐγὼ δέ, ἀδελφοί, εἰ περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω, τί ἔτι διώκομαι; ἄρα κατηγορηται τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ.
12. ὄφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς.
13. Ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ ἐκλήθητε, ἀδελφοί· μόνον μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῆ σαρκί, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις.
14. ὁ γὰρ πᾶς νόμος ἐν ἐνὶ λόγῳ πληροῦται, ἐν τῷ, ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.