

Τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν·
στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε.

The verse functions as a bridge between the previous and the following. Christ has set the Galatians free. Going under Torah would be a return to slavery. Instead, it's important to learn how to live in the freedom of the Messiah. This freedom is not a freedom from all ethical obligation, but specifically a freedom from the yoke of the flesh.

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 κατηργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ,

οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε,

τῆς χάριτος ἐξεπέσατε.

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.

It seems that what Paul believed concerning circumcision had been in question, or muddied by the false teachers – Paul seeks to make it plain here, “Look, I Paul, this is what I say about circumcision...”

The fact that he speaks conditionally here – “if you become circumcised” – indicates that they (or most of them) had not yet gone through with that procedure, though they had already begun observing some of the Sabbath observances and were contemplating the next step.

If you do so, he says, the Messiah will profit you nothing. There is no “having it both ways.” If the law is the means by which we are delivered from the flesh, then the Messiah is of no benefit.

if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (Ga 2:21)

if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise (Ga 3:18).

if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. (Ga 3:21).

I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. (Ga 4:11).

Furthermore, contrary to what the teachers had been telling them, they cannot simply adopt the external forms of Judaism (e.g. Circumcision, holy days, food laws). If they put themselves under Torah, they will be obligated to keep all of Torah. This is effectively a repudiation of the Messiah death and deliverance from Torah and an attempt to gain life through the law. “You are cut off from Christ” he says. The sin is the same one being committed by the Hebrews:

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:26–31).

The author of Hebrews is warning those who are being tempted to return to Torah after having come to Christ. In Chapter 10, after expounding how Christ has once for all put an end to sacrifice by his own blood, the effect is that by returning to Torah you face the prospect of having no means of atonement for sin.

Just as to be “in Christ” was to be delivered/separated from Torah, so here to join oneself with Torah is the inverse – you will be delivered/separated from Christ. You’re leaving the family.

What are the implications of v4 for Eternal Security/Perseverance?

Instead of putting ourselves under the slavery the law (which will be to no effect), we remain in the Spirit and eagerly anticipate the fullness of coming new creation – the hope of righteousness. This is a future which we long for with perseverance, of which the Spirit is the down-payment.

The flesh plays no part in this – “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision mean anything” – but it is life in the Messiah, which is characterized by faith working through love – i.e. Gal 2:20 - ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Ga 2:20).

This whole section can be seen as a practical application of Jesus’ teaching in John 15:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. (Jn 15:1–6)

7 Ἐτρέχετε καλῶς·

τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοψεν [τῆ] ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι;

8 ἡ πεισμονὴ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς.

9 μικρὰ ζύμη ὄλον τὸ φύραμα ζυμοῖ.

10 ἐγὼ πέποιθα εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο φρονήσετε·

ὁ δὲ ταρασσὼν ὑμᾶς βαστάσει τὸ κρίμα, ὅστις ἐὰν ᾖ.

11 Ἐγὼ δέ, ἀδελφοί, εἰ περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω,

τί ἔτι διώκομαι;

ἄρα κατήργηται τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ.

12 Ὅφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς.

Paul laments that they had been running well, and had been led astray, but trusts that the Galatians will follow him and that those who are stirring up trouble will be held accountable to judgement.

The metaphor of the leaven is appropriate here – leaven which comes from the old dough is mixed in with the pure dough and changes the whole. “The pure loaf of the Messiah has been corrupted into the sourdough of the old creation.” (Gallant)

Countering the claim that he actually is in favor of circumcision, Paul asks – “why am I still being persecuted? If that were the case (me still preaching circumcision), there would be no offense in the message of the cross.” Implied in this is the fact that the false teachers have themselves abandoned the cross.

He closes with an exclamatory – “I wish those troubling you would cut themselves off (e.g. castrate themselves).”

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 πεπλήρωται, ἐν τῷ·
ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.

15 εἰ δὲ ἀλλήλους δάκνετε καὶ κατεσθίετε,
βλέπετε μὴ ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων ἀναλωθῆτε.

To be free, but serving as an occasion to the flesh, is just as much slavery as submitting to the Torah. True freedom is found in serving one another in love (“the love” referring back to v6 and through it to v2:20).

The gospel brings about the intent of the Torah – the overcoming of the flesh and the freeing of human beings to love their neighbor as themselves. He’s not saying, keep the whole law and you will love, but rather, Love and you will end up fulfilling the original intent of the law. C.f. Romans 8:4

Love is not automatic, however. The alternative – using freedom from Torah as an occasion for the flesh results, not in us fulfilling our true design as human beings, but descending to beasts – “biting and devouring one another” to the point of “destroying one another.” Flesh destroys.

16 Λέγω δέ, πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε.

17 ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος,

τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σαρκὸς,

ταῦτα γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται,

ἵνα μὴ ἂν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε.

18 εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμον.

The way to not walk in the flesh is to walk in the Spirit. The Spirit and the flesh are antithetical to one another, and cannot co-exist. If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

The Spirit is sufficient for life without Torah and is sufficient to war against life in the flesh.

The life of the Spirit is alternative to the Torah – the new covenant fulfillment of Psalm 1 is to walk by the Spirit. In fact, it’s the only way to accomplish the intent. As we saw, the Torah is

powerless to overcome the flesh, but Paul says, “if you walk by the Spirit, you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.”

19 φανερά δέ ἐστὶν τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός,
ἅτινά ἐστιν πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια, **20** εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία, ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζῆλος,
θυμοί, ἐριθεΐαι, διχοστασίαι, αἰρέσεις, **21** φθόνοι, μέθαι, κῶμοι καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις,
ἃ προλέγω ὑμῖν,
καθὼς προεῖπον ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες βασιλείαν θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν.
22 ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἀγάπη χαρὰ εἰρήνη, μακροθυμία χρηστότης ἀγαθωσύνη,
πίστις **23** πραΰτης ἐγκράτεια·
κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος.
24 οἱ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις.
25 Εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματι, πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν.
26 μὴ γινώμεθα κενόδοξοι, ἀλλήλους προκαλούμενοι, ἀλλήλοις φθονοῦντες.