

The Book of Galatians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: Freedom in Christ; Do Not Submit to the Yoke

Galatians 5:1–12

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage opens the practical section of Galatians, but it remains weighty with doctrine. Paul presents the freedom Christ has won and commands believers to stand firm in it and not return to the yoke of the law. He insists that justification cannot be a blend of law and grace: to seek to be justified by law is to be severed from Christ and to fall away from grace. The lesson must teach both the preciousness of gospel freedom and the genuine danger of forfeiting it, and it must present the nature of saving faith as faith working through love, against both empty ritual and a bare faith only.

The heaviest doctrinal matter here is the warning of 5:4, that a person can fall away from grace. For our heritage this is an important text against the doctrine of once saved, always saved. The teacher should present clearly that Scripture warns real believers against falling away and calls them to remain faithful, so that salvation is preserved through ongoing faith and obedience rather than guaranteed regardless of how one lives. At the same time, this warning must not be turned into morbid insecurity; the same God who warns us also assures and keeps those who remain in Christ. Hold warning and assurance together, exactly as Scripture does.

Pastorally, the lesson calls students to stand firm and keep running well. Paul speaks with both severity toward the false teaching and tenderness toward the believers, and the teacher should do the same. Aim to leave students treasuring their freedom, alert to the small compromises that can spread like leaven, and committed to a living faith that works through love, all while resting in the assurance God gives to those who hold fast to Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul proclaims, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). What is the freedom that Christ won for us, and why must such freedom be actively guarded rather than passively assumed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul raises a banner over the whole chapter: "For freedom Christ has set us free." Freedom is not a side benefit of the gospel; it is its very purpose. Christ did not redeem us merely to move us from one master to another but to liberate us, to make us free children rather than slaves. And he paid for that freedom with his own blood.

Notice that the gift comes with a command: “stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Freedom must be guarded. Paul pictures a yoke, the heavy wooden bar laid across an animal’s neck, and warns against bending down to take it on again. The freedom Christ won can be surrendered if we are not watchful.

Explain why freedom requires standing firm. The pressures to return to slavery are constant: the pull of legalism, the fear that grace is too good to be true, the voices insisting we must do more to be acceptable. Freedom is not self-maintaining. It is held by a settled, deliberate refusal to put the yoke back on, anchored in the finished work of Christ.

Define the freedom carefully, since Paul will guard it from misuse later in the chapter. This is freedom from the law as a system of justification, freedom from condemnation, freedom to approach God as beloved children. It is not freedom to sin, which Paul will rule out plainly. It is the glorious liberty of those whom the Son has set free.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Freedom as the very purpose of Christ’s redeeming work (Galatians 5:1)
- Freedom purchased at the cost of Christ’s blood
- Freedom as a gift to be actively guarded, not passively assumed
- Freedom from law as justification, not freedom to sin

Discussion Prompts

- What is the freedom Christ won for us?
- Why must freedom be guarded rather than assumed?
- What pressures tempt believers to take the yoke back on?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul warns against putting the yoke of slavery back on. Where in your own walk are you most tempted to take up a yoke again, whether rule-keeping, performance, or someone else’s expectations, in place of resting in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses Paul’s command into our own experience. The yoke the Galatians faced was circumcision and the law, but the instinct to take up a yoke again is universal. Many believers who would never return to the law of Moses still bend their necks to other yokes of their own making.

Help students identify their particular yoke. For some it is a self-imposed list of rules by which they measure their acceptance. For others it is the relentless drive to perform, to prove themselves to God or to people. For others it is the weight of someone else’s expectations,

carried as if their standing depended on meeting them. These yokes feel responsible, even spiritual, but they enslave.

Explain why we choose the yoke. Slavery, oddly, can feel safer than freedom. A list of rules gives us something to control, a way to feel we have earned our place. Freedom asks us to rest entirely on Christ, which is harder for the self-reliant heart. We take the yoke back on because grace feels too good to trust.

Call them to lay it down. Invite each student to name the yoke they are tempted to wear and to consciously refuse it this week, returning instead to the rest Christ offers. Standing firm in freedom is a daily, deliberate choice to keep the yoke off.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal instinct to take up self-made yokes
- Yokes of rule-keeping, performance, and others' expectations
- Slavery chosen because it feels safer than resting in grace
- Standing firm as a daily refusal to wear the yoke

Discussion Prompts

- What yoke are you most tempted to put back on?
- Why can slavery feel safer than freedom?
- How can you deliberately refuse that yoke this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul warns that whoever accepts circumcision to be justified "is obligated to keep the whole law" and that "Christ will be of no advantage" to him (5:2-3). Why is it all or nothing, so that a person cannot simply add a little law to a little Christ as the ground of their standing with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul speaks with unusual force: if you accept circumcision as a way to be justified, "Christ will be of no advantage to you," and you are "obligated to keep the whole law." This is the all-or-nothing logic of justification. You cannot take a little law and a little Christ. The moment you make law the basis of your standing, you must keep all of it, and you have stepped off the ground of grace.

Explain why mixing is impossible. Grace and law-righteousness operate on opposite principles, gift versus wage, and they cannot be combined as the ground of acceptance. To add law to Christ is not to supplement him but to replace him, because it says his work was not enough. A partial trust in Christ plus a partial trust in our performance is not a stronger position; it is no salvation at all.

Help students feel the seriousness without despair. Paul is not saying that any imperfection severs us from Christ; he is addressing those who deliberately adopt law-keeping as their basis for justification. The warning is against a settled return to earning, not against the ordinary stumbles of a believer who is trusting Christ.

Draw the application. We must rest our acceptance fully on Christ, not partly on him and partly on ourselves. Any scheme that makes our standing depend even a little on our own merit puts us back under the whole burden of the law. The only safe place to stand is wholly on grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The all-or-nothing nature of justification: law plus Christ equals no Christ (Galatians 5:2–4)
- Law and grace as opposite, unmixable principles for our standing
- Adding law to Christ as replacing him, not supplementing him
- Resting acceptance wholly on Christ, not partly on our merit

Discussion Prompts

- Why can a person not combine a little law with a little Christ?
- What does adding law to Christ actually say about his work?
- Where are you tempted to base your standing partly on yourself?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul asks, “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (5:7). Have you ever been running well spiritually and then been knocked off course? What, or who, hindered you, and how did it happen?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul’s question is tinged with grief: “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” He pictures the Christian life as a race, and the Galatians as runners who had been going strong until someone cut in on them and threw off their stride. This question invites honest reflection on our own derailments.

Help students recall their own experience. Most believers can remember a season of running well, of growth, joy, and momentum, that was later interrupted. Sometimes the hindrance was false teaching, sometimes a relationship, sometimes a disappointment, a sin, or a slow drift of neglect. Identifying what knocked us off course helps us guard against it.

Note how derailment usually happens. It is rarely a single dramatic decision to abandon Christ. More often it is a subtle hindrance, a voice that sows doubt, a compromise that seems small, a busyness that crowds out devotion. The runner does not decide to stop; someone or something simply gets in the way.

Point toward recovery. The good news is that a runner who has been hindered can get back in the race. The question is not meant to shame but to wake us up, to help us recognize the hindrance, deal with it, and resume the course. Invite students to name what has hindered them and what getting back on track would require.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life as a race requiring sustained running (Hebrews 12:1–2)
- Common hindrances: false teaching, sin, disappointment, and drift
- Derailment as usually subtle rather than dramatic
- Recovery and resuming the race after being hindered

Discussion Prompts

- When have you been running well and then knocked off course?
- What or who hindered you, and how did it happen?
- What would getting back in the race require of you now?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul warns that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (5:9). How does a small compromise in doctrine or in life tend to spread, and why does Paul treat a seemingly minor concession as so dangerous?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reaches for a vivid proverb: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” A small amount of yeast works its way silently through an entire batch of dough. So it is with compromise. The false teaching in Galatia may have seemed like a minor adjustment, but Paul knows that a little error, left unchecked, will permeate and corrupt the whole.

Explain why Paul treats a small concession so seriously. Error and sin are rarely static; they spread. A small compromise in doctrine reshapes how we read everything else; a small compromise in conduct grows easier to repeat until it becomes a pattern. What looks harmless in isolation does not stay isolated. The nature of leaven is to spread.

Apply this to the church and to the individual. A congregation that tolerates a little false teaching will find it working through the whole body in time. A believer who excuses a little sin will find it expanding its territory. This is why vigilance over both doctrine and life matters, not out of fearfulness, but out of realism about how compromise behaves.

Point to the remedy. Paul elsewhere says to cleanse out the old leaven (1 Corinthians 5:6–8). The answer to a little leaven is not to ignore it but to deal with it early and decisively, before it spreads. Small compromises are best addressed while they are still small.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A little leaven spreading through the whole lump (Galatians 5:9)
- Error and sin as dynamic, spreading realities rather than static
- The danger of tolerating small compromises in doctrine and life
- Dealing with leaven early and decisively (1 Corinthians 5:6–8)

Discussion Prompts

- How does a small compromise tend to spread?
- Why does Paul treat a minor concession as so dangerous?
- Where is it wisest to deal with leaven early?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul is concerned about small beginnings that grow. What small compromises have you been tempted to treat as harmless, and where might a little leaven already be working in your own life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the leaven principle on our own lives. It is easy to recognize the danger of compromise in the abstract and to overlook the little leaven quietly working in us. Paul's warning calls for honest self-examination about the small concessions we have been treating as harmless.

Help students identify their own leaven. It may be a small habit of dishonesty, a slowly cooling devotion, a tolerated resentment, a compromise at work, a private indulgence excused as no big deal. The very fact that we have labeled it harmless is often the sign that it has begun to spread.

Explain the deceptive comfort of small sins. We tell ourselves that a little compromise is manageable, that we have it under control, that it affects nothing else. But leaven does not announce itself; it works quietly. The honest question is not whether a compromise feels small but where it is already spreading.

Call for early action. Invite students to name one small compromise they have been excusing and to deal with it now, while it is still small, through confession, repentance, and concrete change. Catching the leaven early is far easier than cleaning up after it has filled the lump.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination for the small compromises we excuse
- The deceptive comfort of sins labeled harmless
- Compromise spreading quietly before it is obvious

- Confession and repentance as cleansing out the leaven

Discussion Prompts

- What small compromise have you been treating as harmless?
- Where might a little leaven already be spreading in your life?
- What would it look like to deal with it now, while it is small?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says that in Christ what counts is “faith working through love” (5:6), not circumcision or uncircumcision. What does this phrase teach about the nature of true saving faith, and why does it rule out both empty ritual and a bare faith only that never works through love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul offers a luminous definition of what matters in Christ: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” External markers and rituals, in themselves, count for nothing. What counts is a faith that is alive and active, expressing itself in love. This phrase beautifully captures the nature of true saving faith.

Draw out what it rules out on one side. It rules out empty ritual and external religion. Circumcision, church attendance, religious activity, none of these means anything if it is merely outward. God is not impressed by badges and ceremonies divorced from a living heart. The form without the faith counts for nothing.

Draw out what it rules out on the other side, which matters greatly for our teaching. The faith that counts is faith working through love, not a bare faith only that never acts. Paul, the great champion of justification by faith, here defines that faith as inherently active, expressing itself in love. A faith that does nothing, that never works through love, is not the saving faith Paul commends. This is the very thing James means when he says faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26).

Bring the two truths together. We are justified by faith and not by works of the law, yet the faith that justifies is never alone; it works through love. This is not a contradiction but the consistent witness of Scripture. Help students see that real faith and active love are not rivals but a single living reality, faith with its sleeves rolled up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith working through love as the nature of true saving faith (Galatians 5:6)
- External ritual counting for nothing without a living heart
- Against a bare faith only: saving faith is inherently active in love
- Harmony of justification by faith with faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26)

Discussion Prompts

- What does faith working through love rule out on both sides?
- How is this phrase a definition of true saving faith?
- How do justification by faith and active love fit together?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul calls for a faith that actively works through love. In what specific relationships or situations is God calling your faith to express itself in concrete acts of love this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves faith working through love from definition to practice. If saving faith expresses itself in love, then the test is not merely what we believe but how our believing shows up in concrete acts toward real people. Paul wants a faith with hands and feet.

Help students get specific. Faith works through love in the ordinary places, patience with a difficult family member, generosity toward someone in need, forgiveness extended, service quietly rendered, a hard conversation handled with grace. Love is not an abstraction; it takes shape in particular actions toward particular people.

Guard against two distortions. This is not earning our salvation by good deeds; it is the natural overflow of a faith that has received grace. Nor is it a vague sentiment; it is active, costly love that does something. The faith that has truly grasped the love of Christ cannot help but pour that love outward.

Press for one concrete expression. Ask each student to name a specific relationship or situation where their faith is being called to work through love this week, and to identify the actual act of love that faith would produce there. Real faith always finds a way to love.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith expressed in concrete acts of love toward real people
- Love as active and costly, not abstract sentiment
- Good works as the overflow of grace received, not a means of earning
- The inseparability of living faith and active love

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your faith being called to work through love right now?
- What concrete act of love would that faith produce?
- How is this love different from trying to earn God's favor?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul issues a sobering warning to those seeking justification by law: "You are severed from Christ ... you have fallen away from grace" (5:4). What does this teach about whether a Christian can fall away and be lost, and how do we take this warning with full seriousness while still resting in the assurance God gives to those who remain faithful in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question carries the heaviest doctrinal weight of the lesson, and it must be taught with both seriousness and care. Paul tells those who would be justified by law, "You are severed from Christ ... you have fallen away from grace." These are not words about unbelievers but about people in the church who were drifting toward a false ground of salvation. Paul plainly teaches that a person can fall away from grace and be lost.

State the doctrine clearly, since this is an important point for our heritage. Scripture does not teach that a believer is unconditionally secure regardless of how they live or what they come to trust. It repeatedly warns Christians not to fall away and calls them to remain faithful (Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6; 10:26–31; 2 Peter 2:20–22). The phrase fallen away from grace assumes that one was, at some point, within grace. You cannot fall from a place you never stood. So the popular teaching of once saved, always saved cannot be squared with Paul's warning here. Salvation is preserved through ongoing faith and obedience, and it can be forfeited by abandoning Christ.

Now guard against the opposite distortion, morbid insecurity. The warning is not meant to leave believers in constant terror, anxiously wondering if each stumble has severed them from Christ. Paul addresses a deliberate turning to another ground of salvation, not the ordinary failures of a heart that is trusting Christ. The same Scriptures that warn us also assure us: God keeps those who keep trusting him, and nothing can snatch them from his hand as they remain in him (John 10:27–29; Philippians 1:6). Assurance is real for the faithful; it is simply not unconditional.

Help the teacher hold warning and assurance together, exactly as the Bible does. The believer is neither presumptuous, treating salvation as a possession that requires nothing of them, nor paralyzed, living in dread of losing it through a single misstep. They walk the secure middle path: resting confidently in Christ while taking seriously the call to remain faithful. Security is found not in a one-time decision that can never be undone, but in a living, ongoing relationship with the Savior who holds us as we hold to him.

End with the pastoral point Paul himself models. He warns the Galatians sharply precisely because he loves them and does not want them to be lost. The warning is an act of love, a hand reaching out to pull them back from the edge. Help students receive it that way, not as a threat

that destroys peace, but as a loving caution that keeps them close to Christ, where their security truly lies.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A Christian can fall away from grace and be lost (Galatians 5:4)
- Scripture's repeated warnings to believers against falling away (Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6; 2 Peter 2:20–22)
- Against once saved, always saved: salvation preserved through ongoing faith and obedience
- Against morbid insecurity: real assurance for those who remain in Christ (John 10:27–29; Philippians 1:6)
- Security as a living relationship maintained, not an unconditional, undoable decision
- The warning as an act of love meant to keep us close to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What does fallen away from grace assume about where a person once stood?
- How do we take this warning seriously without falling into constant dread?
- How can a sharp warning actually be an expression of love?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Paul urges the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom Christ won and to keep running well. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, this week, to stand firm in your freedom and guard it rather than let it slip.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone returns to Paul's opening command: stand firm. The whole passage has held up freedom as a treasure won by Christ and warned of the many ways it can be lost, through legalism, through small compromises, through being hindered in the race. The lesson ends by calling students to take one concrete step to stand firm and guard their freedom.

Help them name that step. Standing firm might mean refusing a particular yoke they have been tempted to wear, dealing decisively with a little leaven they have excused, getting back in a race they have wandered from, or simply resting more deliberately in Christ rather than in performance. The aim is one clear act of guarding freedom.

Remind them that standing firm is not white-knuckled striving but rooted in Christ. We hold our freedom by holding on to him, by returning again to the gospel, leaning on his Spirit, and walking with his people. Freedom is guarded in dependence, not in isolation or sheer willpower.

Close by holding warning and grace together one last time. The same passage that warns us against falling away assures us that Christ has truly set us free and will keep all who hold fast to

him. Send students home alert but not anxious, standing firm in a freedom that is both precious and secure in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Standing firm as the guarding of hard-won freedom
- Freedom held by holding on to Christ, not by willpower alone
- Dependence on the gospel, the Spirit, and the church
- Warning and assurance held together to the end

Discussion Prompts

- What is one way you will stand firm in your freedom this week?
- How is standing firm rooted in Christ rather than sheer effort?
- How do warning and assurance both help you hold fast?