

An Exegetical Glance at *ἐλευθερία* in the Context of Galatians 5:1-6 and its Application to Nigerian Christianity

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Introduction

One of the most controversial issues in Christianity today (which is not modern but primitive discourse), is the understanding of Christian liberty. Fatokun and Goppelt opined that both the Jews and the Gentiles were liberated via the salvific adventure of Jesus Christ which gives no room for monopoly of salvation by the Jews.² In other words, the Christian liberty is laconically rooted in the saving grace of the Lord. From this it is expedient that the Christian liberty comes via the vertical link (Jesus) not the horizontal (man). But the question one may ask is; are Christian at liberty to do whatever they feel like or wrong (antinomianism)? This question is answered at the long run in this paper. Be that as it may, this paper however, addresses the Christian liberty (freedom) within the confine of Galatians 5:1-6. In doing this, certain things of keen interest are delved into to have a holistic discourse. The historical purview (writer or authorship, occasion, purpose, place and date of writing), forms a latitudinarian platform to commence this exegetical paper, and the Exegetical and Literary Analysis follows. The researcher uses the word liberty and freedom interchangeably in the context of this paper.

² Samson A. Fatokun, *The Church in the Apostolic Age* (Ibadan: Erodise Publications, 2014), 70-72. Fatokun is a seasoned African scholar with specialization in church history; Leonard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1962), 69.

Key word: Liberty

Liberty.

This word from a layman understanding has the connotation of being free from bondage. Invariably, it means freedom. It is good to note that this word is from the Greek word ἐλευθερία which simply means freedom. This could be freedom from anything known to be bondage. ἐλευθερία is a compound word combining ἐλεεῖν which means to “to take pity on”³ and εὐθερία which is closely related to euthanasia, connoting “mercy killing.” Invariably, bringing these words together give a sense of being removed from danger or bondage. Liberty is directly opposite to servitude whether physical, moral, or spiritual.⁴

Historical Purview of the Book of Galatians

The Writer

The fact that Paul, the Apostle wrote this letter is not misconstrued in recent scholarship. This is conspicuous in the preceding independent phrases in the chapter 1:1a, of the book (παυλος αποστολος) i.e. Paul, an apostle.⁵ An Apostle (as used in Paul’s letter) in the nontechnical sense has the idea of one sent on a mission by a man or a mission agency which could be seen in 2 Corinthians 8:16-24) when Paul was writing from Macedonia to prepare the Corinthians for the coming of two men, about whom he wrote a brief recommendation.⁶

³ *New American Standard Exhaustive concordance of the Bible: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (California: the Lock Man Foundation, 1980)

⁴ Merry Tenney (Ed.), *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publications, 1967), 594; Chad Brams et.al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1998), 10034.

⁵ Michael Olajide, *A Class Note on Galatians* (ETSI, ND), 1; _____ *Quest Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 168.; J.B. Lightfoot, “The Name and Office of Apostles, in *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (London: Macmillan Publications, 1986), 92-101.

⁶ Gerald F. Hawthorne et.al., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Illinois: intervarsity Press, 1993), 47.

In the solemn sense, it has the idea of one sent by Christ not necessarily on mundane mission.⁷

On this subject matter, Olajide citing Precepts opines that one could subscribe to the position that Paul was the writer because of his identity used in the first verse.⁸ Furthermore, this connotes that Paul himself wrote this letter probably not necessarily using his amanuensis⁹ as he used to do.¹⁰ This fact is “confirmed by the literary form and style, argumentative methods, and theological content, as well as by the tradition, which never doubted it.”¹¹ But, from the late 19th and early 20th centuries some scholars denied Pauline authorship, yet their argumentations are insufficient. “Since in the original, the postscript was handwritten by Paul (6:11), the remainder of the letter must have been written by an amanuensis, a fact which complicates authorship technically but not substantially.”¹²

Recipients of the Letter

The recipients of Paul’s letter are the churches at Galatia were the fruits of Paul’s first missionary journey (cf. Acts 14). This is to say that Paul had a sense of affiliation with the recipients in this context

⁷ Ibid, 47.

⁸ Michael Olajide, *Paul and the Foolish Galatians: An Exegetical Analysis of Galatians 3:1-14*, 1.; Lawton Precepts, “Galatians” *Lawton Precepts Digital Library* www.lawtonprecepts.org_this was accessed by Olajide on 26/04/2008.

⁹ This is in a simple sense related to a clerk or secretary who most of the Bible writers used in their days for penning down their works. However, the scribes were leading persons in religious learning and judgment; they were different from ordinary ancient secretaries. E.g: Baruch son of Maaseiah was the scribe/secretary of Jeremiah... David Mandel, *The Ultimate Who’s Who in the Bible* (Alaucha: Bridge-Logos Publication, 2007), 86; James O. Adeyanju, *New Testament Background: A Historical, Socio-Political and Religious Perspective* (Ilorin: Amazing Grace Press, 2015), 122.

¹⁰ Olajide, *Paul and the Foolish Galatians: An Exegetical Analysis of Galatians 3:1-14*.

¹¹ David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2, D-G (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 872.

¹² Ibid.

prior the writing of the letter. Since they were spiritually children of Paul “*my dear children*” (Galatians 4:19), it is apparent that before they had a wonderful and strong relationship in the Lord but not now in this situation (Galatians 4:12-16). That was why when Paul heard about they were beginning to turn away (apostate) from their faith and sound gospel into false teachers’ teaching on another gospel which is spurious (fake) gospel.¹³ His concerned for them was so deep and painful. Therefore, he used strong words just like “*you foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*” (Galatians 3:1). If he had not had an intimate relationship with them before, he would not use such kind of rebuking or admonishing words as to children or brothers. Thus, Paul wanted them to turn back to him and the gospel of Christ. He wrote this epistle not only to one or two believers in Galatia rather to all the churches in Galatia (1:2). It is a letter for all members of Galatians’ churches.

Occasion for Writing

For every effect, there is a cause. The Galatia churches were starting to turn away from the gospel of Christ (as aforementioned) which is justification by faith alone (Galatians 2:16) into “another”¹⁴ gospel which is faith plus observing the Law of Moses particularly on circumcision (Galatians 1:7; 2:3; cf II Corinthians 11:4). This is tantamount to basing faith in Christ Jesus on legalism. The false teachers said that faith in Christ alone is not enough, even if you believe in Christ you have to observe the Law of Moses in order to save (Acts 15:1. 14). That false teachings and teachers confused the churches in Galatia. Besides, those Judaizers perhaps envied Paul and

¹³ Paul Nadim. Tarazi, *Galatians: A Commentary*. Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 89.; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33a (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 78.

¹⁴ There is need to clarify an issue here Gal. 1:6, 7. Two different words are used here: ἄλλο in verse 6 which means “another” in the sense of one that is different in quality; ἕτερον in verse 7 which means “another” in the sense of difference in numeric identity. R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: WBE Publishing Co., 1948), 358-361.

hated him for his success. As Paul mentioned in chapter 6:12 and 13 the reasons why they wanted Galatian Christians to circumcise is “to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ” and to be boast their flesh (Phi 3:3).

It is obvious that when Paul preached the gospel to them (in Galatia) for the first time, they welcomed him as if he was an angel of God as if he was like Christ himself, they were full of joy for his visit and the gospel that he brought to them (Galatians 4:14-15). But their situation changed because of the false teachers against Paul and the gospel of Jesus. The Galatians were wavering in their faith and even turned back to their old principles, “observing special days and months and seasons and years” (Galatians 4:10). Therefore, Paul wrote this letter to them as “brothers, dear children” (4:12, 14) with deep concern, explaining that obeying Jewish law especially circumcision, was not necessary for the Gentiles. He taught them that believing in Christ i.e., faith in Christ (*πίστις ἐν κριστου*)¹⁵ is enough for justification nothing more and nothing less (Galatians 2:15-16; 3:25). Paul also felt that he had to defend his apostleship against false brothers (Judaizers) in order to protect the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:11-12; 2:7-10) and his ministry in the Lord. He also encouraged them that you are free in Christ from bondage of slavery (Galatians 5:1; 2:4), not to do wrong but to do good for all (Galatians 6:10), to live by the spirit against sinful nature (Galatians 5:15) and to serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13).

¹⁵ Michale Eaton, *No condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downer Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 160-161.

Purpose of Writing

One cannot but observe that there is no familiar and friendly introduction to this letter as is common in Paul's letters.¹⁶ At a glance, the purpose of this epistle is to scold or chastise the Galatians for abandoning their faith which Paul had preached to them by later accepting circumcision,¹⁷ and convince back their confusing heart regarding the gospel that Paul preached against other people preached (Galatians 1:6). It is Paul's intention to make them sure that there is no other gospel apart from what he had taught them (Galatians 1:7, 9).

The second reason is to defend his apostleship (Galatians 1:11-23; 2:1-3, 7-10; 6:17) due to the attack of false brothers - Judaizers (Galatians 2:4). In such kind of situation, if Paul had hesitated to defend his apostolic authority, he might be doubted not only by Gentile believers but also by the agitator (Galatians 5:12), and even might affect the true gospel that he brought to them in vain. Therefore, he established his apostolic authority by long explanation (Galatians 1:11-14; 2:7-10; 6:17; Acts 9:15) so that he might sustain the gospel that he preaches; the only gospel and his apostleship also might be accepted to them as well. In other words, if they have doubt on his apostleship, they would also not believe in the gospel that he preached. Thus, Paul wrote this letter to them by referring as "brothers or my dear children" (Galatians 4:12, 19; 6:1) Indeed, the churches in Galatia were the results of Paul's first missionary journey (Galatians 4:12-13; cf I Corinthians 2:3-5; Acts 18:1-18) and when he addressed them as his children that expressed what kind of warm relationship that they had before and how much he concerned about their lives.

The third reason is to explain clearer about how a man is justified by grace through faith in Christ for Gentile Christians (Galatians 3:6, 8),

¹⁶ Walter M. Dunnnett, *Exploring the New Testament* (Illinois: Crossway Books, 2001), 56.

¹⁷ F.F. Bruce, *Paul: An Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), 151-152.

contrary to observing the Law of Moses for justification as others preached. The fourth reason is to let them know that they are sons of God by faith in Christ. They are special and heirs of God so that they might be able to live out their unity in Christ regardless of their status (Galatians 3:26-4:7). Finally, Paul also would like to challenge and encourage them to live out their freedom in Christ as a new creation by doing good things to others, serving others with love, living by the spirit of God against the sinful natures (Galatians 5:1, 6; 6:10, 15).

Date and Place of Writing

Dating the book of Galatians is one of the most controversial issues dealing with, in Pauline epistles. The actual dating of this letter depends on the views of whether it was written to the North or Southern Galatia.¹⁸ “Scholars have argued in favor of both early and late dates in relation to the other Pauline letters.”¹⁹ For those who favour North Galatianist theory, the letter was written on Paul’s third missionary journey, sometimes around 53-58 A.D. and for those who favour South Galatianist theory, the epistle would be written earlier during the early part of Paul’s second missionary journey sometimes around 49-50 A.D. or Paul’s first missionary journey but before the Jerusalem council 49 A.D.²⁰ because Churches in Galatia were the fruits of Paul’s ministry (Galatians 4:12-16), including churches at Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14). In modern days, Galatia is called Turkey. It was situated in central Asia Minor, extending in the north from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean in the south.²¹ Regarding the place of writing, there is no specific indication from which the letter was sent. Fee and Stuart opine that some scholars

¹⁸ Merrill Tenney, *Galatians: The Charter of Christians Liberty* (London: Pickering & Inglis Limited, 1950), 58; David Smith, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul* (New York: George H. Doran, N.D), 649.

¹⁹ David Noel Freedman, 827.

²⁰ Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol 41(Dallas, Texas: Word books, Publisher, 1990), lxxiii.

²¹ L. Ann Jervis, *New International Biblical Commentary: Galatians* (Peabody, Massachusetts, 1999), 13.

have various proposals such as Ephesus, Macedonia, and Corinth, however those are just proposals and there is “no indication of place of origin.”²² Nevertheless, regardless of the uncertainty or relative views about the date, the message of Galatians remains natural (unaffected).²³

Exegetical and Literary Analysis

1. Τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν 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 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.

(Galatians 5:1-6. Nestle GNT 1904)

1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

²² Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature Inc, 2002), 340.

²³ Walter M. Dunnnett, 55.

3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.

4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

(Galatians 5:1-6, NIV)

Verse 1: Vos observes that this is a ringing exhortation to maintain Christian freedom.²⁴ The sentence “*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free*” is a dative statement which indicates the purpose of Christ’s death for our freedom. And this is another way of saying what Paul earlier said that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...” (3:13)²⁵. Yet, here, “the stress is not on what he had done but rather on our response to it, not on what he has given but on our acceptance of the gift.”²⁶ In other words, since Christ has already set us free, we are to live like the free man. His use of the word freedom springs from the statement and vocabulary of 4:31 that deals the Hagar-Sarah allegory interpretation which clarifies “the freedom of believers in Christ”²⁷ “Freedom from bondage in Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac would be impossible without the work of Christ. Christ is the great liberator; He freed us from bondage unto a

²⁴ Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 90.

²⁵ Jervis, *New International Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 126.

²⁶ Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 265.

²⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol 41(Dallas, Texas: Word books, Publisher, 1990), 233.

life of Christian Liberty.”²⁸ Thus, one could see a close nexus in the salvific work of Christ and the subsequent to the response to the salvation which is human responsibility.

Verse 1b introduces freedom as the outcome of Christ’s works specifically as the basis for an appeal in verse 1b asking the Galatians to cherish their new-found freedom by choosing to abide in it.²⁹ Thus, the focus of verse 1a is not on the fact that “Christ has set us free” but rather on the fact that he did so “for freedom” as the emphatic position of “for freedom” demonstrates.³⁰ In fact, while we cannot set ourselves free from bandage of law, or the curse of the law, the principles of this world, sins, and self- righteousness and the wrath of God, “Christ did act on his own initiative to free us”, and offered a free gift of freedom by faith through his grace, not by obeying the law. However, as receivers of liberty, “we have a responsibility to dearly preserve this gift at all costs and we must maintain our freedom by living accordingly (5:18, 22). We should “have, maintain, exercise and enjoy this freedom”³¹ escaping from the law of circumcision. And when we do that “this freedom became a reality in our experience through the power of the Spirit, who had invested us with the liberty of sons by applying the all-sufficient merit of that redemptive accomplishment to our hearts”³² (3:2; 4:6). Therefore, to live out our freedom it is crucial that “we must remain exclusively “in Christ.”³³ By implication, our allegiance and affiliation with Christ is the basis for our liberty (freedom).

Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. The word “*Stand firm* ” here is the imperative and it

²⁸ F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty* , 90.

²⁹ Paul Nadim, *Galatians: A Commentary*, 265.

³⁰ Ibid, 265.

³¹ Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Character of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove: Illinois, 1996), 153.

³² Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Galatians: A Digest of Reformed Comment* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 93.

³³ Paul Nadim , *Galatians: A Commentary*, 265.

is a command and a call to stand firm “*for freedom that Christ has set us free*”. Paul is saying that since Christ has already set you free, you are to stand firm in that freedom (human responsibility).³⁴ There are some equivalent passages in Pauline epistles about “stand firm” such as I Corinthians 16:13, “*stand firm in the faith*”; Phi 1:27, “*stand firm in one spirit*” and Phi 4:1, “*stand firm in the Lord*”. For them “a great price has been paid to bring about their freedom: let them then live in the freedom into which Christ has brought them. Morris said; “it is perverse for free people to seek bondage.”³⁵ Paul gives them a warning that they should not create burden for themselves after they had been set free rather to continuously live on their way of living as freedom.

The word, “*again*” here does not mean that before becoming believers in Christ the Galatians had been under the “yoke” of the Jewish law. Rather, in Paul’s usage of the word, they had been under “the basic principles of the world”, referring paganism. Yet in Paul’s view, from the perspective of being “in Christ,” Judaism and paganism could be lumped together under the rubric “the basic principles of the world” and so a leaving of Christian principle for either Jewish law or principles of the world was a renunciation of freedom and a return “again” to slavery.³⁶ Probably, when Paul used the word “yoke” he was thinking of a beast of burden with its yoke that fastens the burden to the animal so that it cannot shake it free. And a “yoke” here is “used figuratively in antiquity for any disagreeable burden that was unwillingly tolerated, like slavery”.³⁷ For the Galatians, “the multitude of regulations (the Jews found 613 commandments in the Law, the books Genesis to Deuteronomy) was such that even to remember them all was a burden, and to keep them all bordered on

³⁴ Fred Smith, “Leading with Integrity” in M.A. Olubamigbe, and Michael Olajide, *Shepherding the Flock of God* (Ibadan: Feyisetan Press, 2014), 178.

³⁵ Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Character of Christian*, 153.

³⁶ Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, 225.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 225.

the impossible.³⁸ Thus, Paul referred to subjecting oneself to them all as entering into slavery. And this passage is a call to stand firm in their freedom guaranteed in Christ, and a warning for the yoke of slavery.

2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. With the exclamation “Mark my words!”, Paul draws “his reader’s attention to the seriousness and importance of the matter and then backs up his admonition in verse 1b with a warning issued on the basis of his apostolic authority”³⁹ with the word, “I, Paul” for stress. He wanted the Galatians to pay attention on the matters that he was going to say in the following passages. And he proved by stressing his apostleship that he was Paul, an apostle (1:1, 15) indicating that his admonition is valid.

The form of the conditional clause “*if you let yourselves be circumcised*” suggests that Paul is not thinking of just the future act of being circumcised but of his converts’ present decision to become circumcised.⁴⁰ And from his expression “*Christ will be of no value to you at all*”, he informs them that if they “accept circumcision they will benefit “nothing whatsoever” from Christ. They will not gain the sonship, not the inheritance, not the promise, not the freedom—nothing”⁴¹ There is nothing wrong with circumcision for Jewish Christians, and Paul didn’t oppose that, but what Paul opposed is “the imposition of circumcision and a monistic lifestyle on Gentile believers as being necessary for living out their Christian faith in a proper fashion, for that takes us right back to the basic issue of righteousness (both forensic and ethical) as being based on either

³⁸ Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Character of Christian*, 154.

³⁹ Wilson, *Galatians: A Digest of Reformed Comment*, 267.

⁴⁰ Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, 226.

⁴¹ F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty*, 267.

“works of the law” or faith in “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” (2:15–16).⁴² As Jack Hunter says:

In the Galatia situation, circumcision to Paul was not a surgical operation, nor merely a religious observance. It represented a system of salvation by good works. It declared a gospel of human effort apart from divine grace. It was law supplanting grace; Moses supplanting Christ; for to add to Christ was to take from Christ. Christ supplemented was Christ supplanted; Christ is the only Savior—solitary and exclusive. Circumcision would mean excision (removal) from Christ.⁴³

To depend on circumcision is the same with to make Christ of no benefit. Therefore, “for Gentiles, to revert to the prescriptions of the Jewish law as a necessary form of Christian lifestyle is, in effect, to make Christianity legalistic rather than Christocentric, and so not to have Christ’s guidance in one’s life.”⁴⁴ Thus, dancing to Judaistic ideology (legalism) poses a question to the “freedom acquired via the blood of Jesus.

3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. The word, “*be circumcised*” here has to do with the obligation of keeping the Mosaic Law. The Galatians were urged to accept circumcision so as to be more fully related to Abraham, the Abrahamic promise, and the Jewish nation, and they were persuaded to adopt the Jewish cycle of Sabbaths, festivals, and high holy days (cf. 4:10). In effect, then, Christians in Galatia had accepted the Judaizers’ counsel to signal their separation from the Gentile world by keeping the Jewish cultic calendar, and they were seriously contemplating signaling their union with the

⁴² Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, 266.

⁴³ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (electronic ed.) (Galatians 5:2) (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1997),

⁴⁴ Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, 266.

Jewish world by accepting circumcision. Before they do, however, Paul wants to make it plain that with circumcision comes obligation “to obey the whole Law.”⁴⁵

Paul’s saying is that if a person attempts to please God by being circumcised, then he is under obligation to keep the whole law. And if the man is entirely under the law, Christ is valueless to him⁴⁶ because he tries to justify himself by obeying the Law. In fact, this passage is parallel with James 2:10: “*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it*” . Thus, “Paul was strongly opposed to the Judaistic theology which insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Anyone who was circumcised for that reason added works to faith and demonstrated that he had not exercised saving faith in Christ.”⁴⁷ “Paul is not referring in this verse to any who might have been circumcised in the past, but only to those who might undergo this rite as a necessity for complete justification, to those who assert the obligations of law-keeping for their acceptance with God.”⁴⁸ He is making sure that no one can be justified by circumcision, works of law or any human effort because no one can completely follow the whole law. Therefore, Paul is declaring that we are not justified by any mean but only by faith in Christ for freedom and salvation.

4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. Paul is warning here for those who had accepted Judaizer’s teaching about justification by law particularly on circumcision. In fact, those teachers taught that justification by faith alone is not enough; you have to add good works or law. They insisted the Gentile Christians to obey the law in order

⁴⁵ Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, 227.

⁴⁶ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (electronic ed.) (Gal. 5:3).

⁴⁷ John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (USA: Victor books, 1983), 604.

⁴⁸ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (electronic ed)(Gal. 5:3).

for belonging to God's family or have salvation. In contrast to their teaching, Paul said that to seek justification by law was really to "have been alienated from Christ" because "justification can come about only because of what Christ has done."⁴⁹ According to Paul, to seek justification by law is "to reject God's way of justification"⁵⁰ and ignore Christ "as the provider of righteousness, and a non-reliance upon God's grace as the source for our salvation"⁵¹ Thus, "a rejection of God's way of justification necessarily means alienation."⁵² It is "being removed from Christ's sphere of operation and completely cut off from relations with him."⁵³

In mentioning the word "grace" (χάρις) Paul is thinking of "the grace of God, favor of God, gracious gift of God"⁵⁴ through Christ which is the subject of this epistle. And when Paul says, "you have fallen away from grace" he means that "you are no longer in the Kingdom of grace,"⁵⁵ because when someone tries to justify himself by keeping all the laws, he does not rely on God's provision of grace and that separates him from God. For he has fallen from grace, he utterly loses "the atonement, the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness, liberty, and life that Jesus has merited for us by his death and resurrection; instead, he purchases to himself the wrath and judgment of God, sin, death, the bondage of the devil, and damnation."⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Character of Christian*, 156.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 156.

⁵¹ Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Galatians: A Digest of Reformed Comment* . 96.; Graig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 78.

⁵² Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Character of Christian*, 156.

⁵³ Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 223.

⁵⁴ Edward W. Goodrich & John R. Kohlenberger III, *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 1806.

⁵⁵ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1979), 308.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 308.

5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. Paul uses the pronoun “we” in this verse, referring to true Christians, whereas in verse 4 he uses the pronoun “you” when speaking to those who seek justification by works of law.⁵⁷ Thus, Paul is saying that the Christian’s hope of righteousness before God only come to us through the Spirit and the Christian receives that righteousness by faith in Christ. In other words, “salvation is by faith.”⁵⁸ It is not a human merit, as though we are rewarded for faith by being granted salvation. Rather, faith is the means by which we receive the gift.”⁵⁹ Besides, Paul is saying that salvation is “the sphere of the divine Spirit, and, of course, by an activity of the divine Spirit.”⁶⁰ And the Christian “waits for the hope of righteousness. He hopes for the time when the Lord will come, when he will receive a glorified body, and when he will sin no more. Notice that it does not say that the Christian hopes for righteousness; he already has a right standing before God through the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). But he waits for the moment when he will be completely righteous in himself.”⁶¹

The believer or Christian does not hope to achieve this by anything that he can do, but rather through the Spirit and by faith. The Holy Spirit is going to do it all, and the believer simply looks to God in faith to bring it to pass. On the other hand, the legalist hopes to earn righteousness by his own works, law-keeping, or religious observances. However, it is a vain hope because righteousness cannot be achieved in this way.

⁵⁷ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (electronic ed.) (Galatians 5:5).

⁵⁸ C.M. Horne, “Salvation” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 222.

⁵⁹ Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Character of Christian*, 156.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 156.

⁶¹ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (electronic ed.) (Galatians 5:5)

6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.* The words “*for in Christ Jesus*” indicates “being a real Christian; the essential things about the state of the believer is that of being in Christ Jesus.”⁶² Paul is stating that for the Christian who believes in Jesus Christ “*neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value*” but “faith is the key, the heart, the soul, the life and the essence of salvation”⁶³. Here, Paul emphasizes “the importance of vital fellowship with the Savior. The Christian is wholly committed to Christ, so wholly that he or she does not merely stand ‘for’ him or ‘by’ him, but is really ‘in’ him, and surrounded by him.”⁶⁴ Therefore, in the community of believers, “*the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*”; which is pragmatic Christianity.

What God looks for in the believer or Christian is faith working through love. Though, faith is complete dependence on God. It is not idle; it manifests itself in unselfish service to God and man.⁶⁵ The motive of all such service is love. Thus faith “works through love; it is prompted by love, not by law.”⁶⁶ Our faith in Christ Jesus should be manifested in our action of love for God and others because our freedom in Christ is not a license to do evil, but to express our love for God and others.

⁶² Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Character of Christian*, 156.

⁶³ Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Greenville, South Carolina: The Gospel Hour, Inc, 1962), 150.

⁶⁴ Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Character of Christian*, 157.

⁶⁵ Jim Robert, *The General Epistle: An Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, N.D.), 27.

⁶⁶ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (electronic ed.) (Galatians 5:6).

Succinct Analysis

The main intention of the passages is to let the Galatians know the purpose why Christ has set us free and that is for ‘freedom’ from legalism. He exhorts them to live as freeman and not to turn back on “*a yoke of slavery*”. He is telling them that Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf is enough to free us and we do not need to observe the Mosaic Law or any earthly yoke. Furthermore, it is an exhortation to stand firm in their freedom and a warning for them not to turn back on ‘*a yoke of slavery*’ which can imply the law of Circumcision (good works) and the principles of this world for justification. Because, Paul says that after being set free from the bondage of slavery through the death of Christ, yet if anyone tries to be justified by the law, he has been alienated from Christ and he has fallen away from grace. He reminds the Galatians that we are justified by faith in Christ; not by obeying the law therefore you should live out your freedom with love for the glory of the Lord. We should express our faith in good works which edifies others.⁶⁷ And we should use our freedom to serve others in love and not to oppress others.

Conclusion/Contextualization

It should be noted that liberty/freedom in the context of the Christian faith rest solely on the volitional prerogative of Christ Jesus; He granted man freedom **not** on the platform of legalism (keeping the Law). Paul was very explicit in the above considered passage that it is not about the tenacity of the law that man attains liberty but **through faith expressed in love in Christ** regardless of racial or gender affiliation (Gal. 5:5-6). Nonetheless, liberty is attained subsequent to man’s spontaneous response to faith in Christ and not in the nitty-gritty of the Mosaic Law.⁶⁸ The law is like a mirror that reveals the

⁶⁷ J.C. Wenger, *The Family of Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 5.

⁶⁸ Homer A. Kent, *Faith that Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 99-100.

nakedness of man and cannot salvage man from the eternal doom however, faith in Christ does that. Freedom is not procured because of religious legalism.⁶⁹ In view of this, the researcher opines and recommends for Christians in Nigeria and the body of Christ at large that:

- a. Liberty does not suggest antinomianism in other words, it is never a pass or an approval for liberalism.
- b. Since there is no monopoly in salvation, no one should be looked down upon as one condemned to Hell because of an odd past. The faith is for all who desire it genuinely.
- c. The church of God must hold to biblical teaching tenaciously and not some man-made ideologies when addressing salvific adventure.
- d. As Paul had emphasized to the church at Galatia, circumcision is not the basis for salvation, in the same vein, undue rituals in the church must be curbed.
- e. Love must be practical not only a profession of faith.
- f. Faith is the currency after regeneration to be set free indeed.
- g. Christians' absolute liberty is given through a filial relation with God (Rom. 8:15-16)⁷⁰ and not our religious rites and rituals.
- h. Christians must realize that once they are in union with Christ, it carries with it "liberty/freedom" from the ceremonial Law (Gal. 5:1).
- i. If Yahweh throughout the Old Testament history could liberate His people from the tyrants in their time which is a major theme in the old testament, (physical liberty/freedom), then, He (Yahweh) is also concerned about granting His

⁶⁹ *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 713.

⁷⁰ Peter Richardson, *Paul's Ethics of Freedom* (NIDNTT, 1979), 715-720.

people in the context of the New Age liberty from any form of undue religious rites.

- j. Christians are not to be unduly pilot by Law but led by the Spirit.

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