

Ga 5:1-6 (ESV) 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. The letter to the Galatians is an expose on two different types of religion

- A. As we've learned - there are only two – Christianity and everything else
- 1). There is the religion of *human effort* where man works to earn God's acceptance and love
 - a). God is a responder to what man does
 - 1a). Man lives up to a standard and God accepts them and blesses them
 - 2). Then there is Christianity that stands alone – this is based on *divine achievement*
 - a). This is based on what God has done for man
 - b). Man is the responder to what God has done
 - 1a). Christ has lived up to the standard and man simply trusts in what He did
And God blesses them based on the perfect obedience of Christ

Point: Only Christianity has a God who came to earth Himself to meet the requirements He demanded
Then treats the one who believes in Him as if he met those requirements himself

- A. Every other religion is based on man's effort to meet divine requirements

2. Last few weeks we've looked at the freedom we have in Christ

- A. Freedom *from* the power of guilt and sin – from the wrath of God
From the tyranny of Satan and from the law
- B. Freedom *to* live life in a new divine power – to serve God creatively without fear of failure
Freedom to relax in God's presence and freedom to obey God from the proper motive

Transition: Let's continue on with a bit of review – what it takes to enjoy that freedom

- A. The we will look at what we lose if we allow that freedom to slip away and embrace legalism

I. STAND FIRM AGAINST LEGALISM

Ga 5:1 (ESV) For freedom Christ has set us free; *stand firm therefore*, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

1. Christ has set us free so that we can truly enjoy freedom

- A. Truly enjoy our relationship with God – resting in Him – rejoicing in His finished work
- 1). But this freedom is fragile – if we don't guard it we lose it
 - 2). That's my story – met Jesus – so in love – but looked away from Him to me
Was I doing enough? Was I reading enough? Praying enough? Witnessing enough?
 - a). Me, me, me and I lost all my joy = miserable

Problem: Why grace is difficult to hold on to – everything around us works by works

- A. We are so used to the idea you get what you earn – you receive what you deserve
- 1). If you do well in school – study hard – you get good grades – you don't and you fail
 - 2). Excel at work you get a raise – do poorly you get fired = works
- B. But Christianity turns this all on its head – *we get what Christ deserves – what He earned*
- 1). It's not based on what I do for God – but on what God has done for me
- C. Because it is so unnatural – since grace is so counter intuitive
- 1). I have to stand firm against this natural bent that wants to focus on me again
 - a). I have to train myself to look through the work of Christ and His perfection
 - b). I have to preach the Gospel to myself daily

Transition: To convince us to make that stand Paul gives us 5 tragic consequences if we don't

II. THE TRAGIC RESULTS OF LEGALISM

1. Notice the whole issue here revolves around the rite of circumcision

A. Paul mentions it 3 times in 6 verses

- 1). False teachers in Galatia were telling the believers they needed to be circumcised to be saved

Thought: Without understanding what the implications were – we might think

“No big deal Paul. A minor operation. Why get so upset about it? Relax!”

A. The idea of circumcision to these false teachers carried tremendous spiritual implications

- 1). This wasn't just a minor operation – this was a theological symbol

- a). Circumcision represented a particular type of religion and a total direction of life

B. To be circumcised meant to embrace salvation by works through obedience to the law

- 1). Listen to how these Jewish legalist viewed this in Acts 15

Ac 15:5 (ESV) But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, *“It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”*

Point: To be circumcised meant to move away from being saved by trusting in Christ's work

A. To earning salvation through your own works – *it was an embrace of legalism*

Transition: Let's look at what it means if they allowed themselves to embrace legalism

First: They Could Expect to Have A Crushing Spiritual Experience

Ga 5:1 (ESV) For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Gal 5:1 (NIV) ...Stand firm, then, *and do not let yourselves be BURDENED again by a yoke of slavery.*

1. Burdened - picture of an ox bowed down under a crushing load - unable to stand

A. Perfect picture of what relating to God under a works system will do to you

- 1). The law or a set of rules or some other man has developed always *demand perfection*
And we're not - Therefore we are crushed under the weight of guilt & condemnation

B. Teaching at Fire Fighters – girl “I'm so tired of this constant weight of all that I must do.”

“I always feel guilty. I never feel like I've done enough” – YES that's the fruit of legalism

2. Jesus said when we come to Him that He puts a different yoke upon us

Mt 11:28–30 (ESV) Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ⁽²⁹⁾ *Take my yoke upon you*, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ⁽³⁰⁾ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*”

A. When we go to Christ by faith He takes off that yoke of legalism

- 1). This is great news for those caught up in mere religion
 - a). The burden of always trying to earn God's love
 - b). That list of thou shalt's and thou shalt not's constantly hanging over your head
 - 1a). Creating that burden of guilt and condemnation – frustration and pain

- 2). It makes you weary because you can't keep them like you want too

- a). You get so tired in your service for God – no joy – just drudgery

B. But Jesus puts a new yoke on us – drenched in grace and love

- 1). Here we find rest for our souls – why? The work is finished
- 2). This yoke is easy and light – why? It is based on His work not our sweat!

Point: Paul says “Stand firm against this legalism. Embrace it and it will crush you.”

A. How foolish to take that crushing yoke upon you when Christ has taken it off at the cross

- B. How much better to learn to rest in His finished work - trusting that God accepts us because of that

Second: Christ Will Be of No Benefit

Ga 5:2 (ESV) Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, *Christ will be of no advantage to you.*

Gal 5:2 (NASB) ...Christ will be of *no benefit* to you.

1. Go back under the law – depend upon your own works rather than resting in His And Christ work for you loses its value in your life

- A. You may still be saved – but you won't enjoy it
- 1). The work of Christ meant to give you abundant life (John 10:10) is hindered
 - a). Instead you experience frustration not joy inexpressible as Peter put it
 - b). You lose God's presence – His peace that passes understanding
 - c). You lose your rest – satisfaction and contentment that He desires to give you
 - d). Your spiritual experience dries up and you become miserable

Point: How foolish to take this wonderful work of Christ on your behalf

- A. God Himself doing what is necessary for you to live a life that is spiritually rich and filled with joy
- 1). A life that experiences Him and His glory
- B. But allow legalism to strip the work of Christ from its ability to do that! How foolish!

Third: You Become Obligated to the Whole Law

Ga 5:3 (ESV) I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that *he is obligated to keep the whole law.*

1. You must think carefully here

- A. If you want to base your acceptance and blessing by God on your own works and effort
- 1). There is *only one* path to do that – His law!
 - a). It is either by faith in Christ OR by obedience to His law – no other options
- B. If you choose to earn God's acceptance by your effort – then you have chosen the law
- 1). But not part of the law – not a few laws you like
 - a). You are obligated to keep the whole law – every rule, regulation, ceremony, ritual

Thought: Let me ask you who are trusting in your own works a question to see how you're doing?

- A. You been keeping the festivals right? Their part of the law
So that's your responsibility if you're earning your own salvation – not just being nice!
- 1). How'd it go with the festival of unleavened bread – was it a blessing?
How about the festival of booths – must have been interesting living in that little shelter
 - a). What about the feasts of weeks? Trumpets? Unleavened bread, firstfruits?
- B. Of course you're not eating pork! You're earning your salvation – the law says NO PORK!
- C. Certainly you've been keeping the Sabbath – Friday sunset to Saturday sunset – no work
- D. If you're not observing all these then you're lost if you're counting on your own works!
- 1). To break any of them is to break them all

James 2:10 (NIV) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Point: If you can't keep the law perfectly – I have good news – God has a different plan

- A. You can place your faith in Christ – trusting that He kept the law perfectly for you
- 1). Trusting that God will view you through His performance

Question: Do you see how foolish it is to bring yourself under a system you can't possibly keep

- A. And don't fool yourself that there is any other way – there are only two

- 1). It is faith alone in Christ alone – His work – OR it is faith in your work by keeping the law
 - B. Paul says if you think it is Christ PLUS law – faith in His work PLUS in yours
 - 1). You have chosen law
- Transition:** To add to Christ is to lose Christ – next verse
- A. Here we see the cost of seeking justification by works

Fourth: You Are Alienated from Christ

Ga 5:4 (ESV) You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

1. Here we find a test to see if we've truly been saved

- A. It is possible he is speaking in this verse to those who profess to be Christians but are not
 - 1). The LOST seek to be *justified by keeping the law*
 - a). Justified = to be legally declared by God to be *not guilty*

Point: Again the Apostle is telling them that they cannot have two Saviors

 - A. They must choose either Christ or the law
 - 1). To choose the law is to sever themselves from the way of salvation through Christ
 - 2). To choose law is to walk away from grace as a principle of salvation
 - a). Since grace is the only way you can be saved

Eph 2:8–9 (ESV) For *by grace you have been saved through faith*. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁽⁹⁾ *not a result of works*, so that no one may boast.
 - b). Therefore this person is lost

They are trying to enter the God's kingdom in a way He has not authorized
 - B. So Paul bottom lines it

The one who is justified by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is a Christian but the one who seeks to be justified by the law (their own works) is not

Thought: Such an important thought isn't it

Many all over the world think they are right with God because of what they do for God

 - A. That is every other religion that is not Christianity
 - 1). That means that Churches are filling up every Sunday morning with the lost
 - 2). Mosques fill up all through out the week with the lost

Jesus said Mt 7:13 (ESV) "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

 - a). That wide way is filled with people who are extremely religious – moral - nice
 - 1a). Hell is going to be filled with religious people
 - b). But that narrow way is only occupied by those who know they aren't good enough

And have placed their faith in Christ alone for their salvation
- Transition:** So this verse is definitely for the merely religious – trying to earn God's acceptance
- A. But I think it can also be for believer who came to Christ by simply trusting Him – walked with Him

But didn't guard his or her freedom – slipped into legalism

The Believer and Alienation from Christ

- A. Doesn't mean you lose your salvation – but you lose fellowship with Christ
 - 1). You step out of the sphere He dwells in – the sphere of grace
 - 2). You step away from His blessing, His presence, enjoying His love
- B. I think the KJV is helpful here. *"Christ is become of no effect unto you"*

The Believer and Falling Away from Grace

- A. Again not from salvation - but from grace as the operative principle in your life
 - 1). Simply enjoying the fact that God blesses those who don't deserve it - WONDERFUL
- B. The Galatians were walking away from grace and walking towards the law
 - 1). Began to try to earn what God had already given
 - a). We're trying to earn it through a set of rules they couldn't keep – had no power
 - b). The result was naturally frustration – lack of joy – lack of peace

Summary: So Paul talks to two kinds of people here

- A. To the merely religious – your works cannot save you – religion can't save you
 - 1). You've chosen a way that doesn't connect with God at all – you are still severed from Christ
- B. To the saved who know Christ but have allowed legalism to creep in
 - 1). You've walked away from grace and the blessings it brings
 - a). Now the work of Christ is left without effect
 - While you may be saved – that fellowship with Christ is severed
 - You've lost your joy – peace – rest – security – how foolish

Thought: To the true Christian these words “severed from Christ” should wake you up

- A. That's the last thing a believer wants – to lose fellowship with Christ
 - 1). Because if you're a Christian Christ is the most important thing in your life

Fifth: We Lose Our Hope of Righteousness

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

1. Christians by faith eagerly await the return of Christ

2 Tim 4:8 (NLT) And now the prize awaits me--the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me *but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return.*

- A. At that time we will experience righteousness in its ultimate expression
 - 1). We are righteous now in Christ – that will get us into heaven
 - a). But I still struggle with sin – I hate it – can't wait to be rid of this flesh that hinders me
- B. Here is my hope – one day I will be as righteous in my daily living
 - As I am in my legal standing before God
 - 1). Now God considers us righteous in Christ not holding against us all of our failures
 - 2). Then there will be no failure – only perfect holiness – the fight with sin is over

Notice: It says “by faith we *wait* for this righteousness” NOT “we *work* for this righteousness”

- A. We don't anxiously strive for it – trying to secure it by what we do
 - 1). We place our faith in Christ and we rest – it will be ours
 - He will finish the work in us that He started (Phil 1:6)
 - 2). So we wait confidently – expectantly – that's hope = *confident expectation*

2. Legalism steals this confidence

- A. If my assurance is based on what I do – how do I know I've done enough? Well enough? Long enough?
 - 1). How can I be confident? How much imperfection is too much
 - 2). Under legalism I didn't look eagerly for His return – wait – let me get my life together a bit more
- B. The only way that I can have this confident expectation is if I look away from me
 - 1). If I focus on Christ and His work alone!
- C. But most don't - Evangelism explosion – diagnostic question

“If you were to die tonight and God asked you why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?”

- 1). The majority have an answer that is based on their goodness, effort, morality
- 2). The only answer that gets you in is this

“I trusted in your Son. I stand before you not expecting anything based on my life. I come to you only in the fact that when I believed you gave me His righteousness. Therefore, I should be allowed into heaven because I’ve trusted in what He did. His work was sufficient.”

Transition: Notice what Paul adds in v. 6

- A. He answers the question – if I am free in grace can I live in any way I choose

III. CAN I LIVE IN ANYWAY I PLEASE

1. Does salvation by faith in Christ’s work eliminate obedience and works?

- A. No! Paul is very careful with his wording here

Beginning with v. 5 Ga 5:5 (ESV) For *through the Spirit*, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

- 1). The Christian life is a life of faith that brings us into an intimate relationship with God
 - a). The Spirit takes up residence within us
 - b). When the Holy Spirit moves into our life – He’s not passive – He produces works

- B. Paul specifies what those works will be – and here is a test of Christianity

Ga 5:6 (ESV) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, *but only faith working through love.*

- 1). The Jew had so elevated circumcision – if you were circumcised you’re good to go – you’re in
 - a). Like some elevate confirmation or baptism as a child
- 2). Paul says that means nothing
 - a). What God is looking for is faith in His Son
 - b). The evidence that you’ve placed faith in His Son is love

Jn 13:35 (ESV) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- 3). So the evidence of having saving faith is NOT circumcision – it is love

1 Jn 3:14 (ESV) We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Thought: Here we see a balanced view of faith

- A. Faith is the entry point – we are saved by faith in Christ PLUS NOTHING else

- 1). But genuine faith doesn’t stop there – why? It links you to God and His power
And God does radical things in your life

2 Co 5:17 (ESV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

- B. If you’re that new creation – empowered by the Holy Spirit – you WILL live differently

- 1). Not to be accepted by God – Not to keep Him liking you
 - a). It is because of God’s work – grace – He has changed you

Point: So you must see change – evidence of salvation – but you’ll never see perfection

- A. In the times of imperfection – we find our comfort in grace – why we are still accepted

- 1). One day that grace will make us perfect – when we are with God
- 2). Now grace is changing us – and comforting us when we aren’t perfect

CONCLUSION

1. **There is a great price to legalism**

- A. You exchange that light and easy yoke of Christ for a crushing burden
- B. You exchange the value of Christ's work that is meant to give us a spiritually rich experience
 - 1). For a dried up wilderness experience - no joy, peace rest
- C. You become obligated to keeping the whole law to be accepted - you can't do it
- D. You exchange the presence of Christ for distance – shattered fellowship
You forsake the principle of grace (Unmerited favor) - to jump on the performance treadmill!
 - 1). Lived in your own power - the sweat of your own brow
- E. You lose the assurance of your hope of righteousness
 - 1). Because your assurance is based on you and your performance

2. **Don't put that yoke back upon your neck**

- A. Christ has done it - earned it - finished it - rest in that!