

CHRISTIANS STUCK IN THE DITCH

Galatians 5:1-6

Tomorrow is the last Monday of May, which means tomorrow is Memorial Day. Memorial Day is a day in this nation where we intentionally remember those in the Armed Forces who have given their lives for our freedom. And we are so thankful for all of the wonderful freedoms we have and get to experience because of their sacrifices. I was looking at some of the numbers, and there was definitely some fluctuation depending on whose stats you looked at, but they say that approximately 1 million soldiers have died fighting for our freedom in the history of the United States. That's a staggering number. The U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs¹ observed:

- Revolutionary War – around 4,400 lost their lives.
- Korean War – around 54,000
- Vietnam War – around 90,000
- WWI – around 116,000 American soldiers lost their lives
- WWII – around 405,000
- War on Terror – 7,000

The one that's really astonishing is this one right here:

- Civil War/War between the States – around 500,000 men gave their lives.

The civil battle over slavery almost cost as many lives as all the other conflicts in U.S. history combined! What a great price that has been paid for freedom. And we do honor those who have paid that price with their lives this weekend. But there's another price that has been paid that's even more important and worth fighting for even more, and that's Christ's sacrifice for our *spiritual freedom* – He shed His blood so that we could be forgiven and set free from the slavery we were in: to the sin nature and to the Law. We've been set free spiritually to live for Christ by the Spirit. That's what our passage is all about today.

This is a wonderful passage to be in on Memorial Day weekend, Paul exhorting these believers to **stand firm in their freedom** and to not go back to slavery. Remember the One who has died for you, who has freed you. As we know and have studied, as we've worked our way through this powerful epistle written to the Galatian churches in what would be modern day central Turkey, is that false teachers known as Judaizers snuck in and began to teach that faith in Christ wasn't enough. These were Jewish men who were very adamant about the Law of Moses and keeping the Law. They were teaching that the way to become a partaker of the Promise given to Abraham by God was to keep the Law, being circumcised and observing different months and seasons and years (4:10). It's quite amazing they fell into this bondage because when you study the account of the church plant in Acts 13 and 14, these churches got off to a good start. They believed the gospel and trusted in Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit. They were rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord through Paul (Acts 13:48). They wanted to hear more and more about God's grace (Acts 13:43). God had testified to Paul's apostleship and message by doing many miracles among them, confirming the Word by the sign gifts he exercised (3:5; Acts 14:8-10; Mk. 16:20). And when Paul left, he encouraged them to continue in the faith and prayed for them, appointed elders for them, and commended them to the Lord in whom they believed (Acts 14:22-23). And they were even persecuted by many Jews in the area for Christ, suffered many things (3:4). Many of the Jews responded violently towards the gospel and violently towards the messengers, Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:45; 14:19), verbally contradicting them and physically stoning Paul. They endured some suffering too for the gospel.

However, the pressure eventually got to them. They let the false teachers come in and convince them that God's grace in Christ wasn't sufficient – to the point that they even considered Paul an enemy now (Gal. 4:16). So with great precision in this letter, he has defend his apostleship (mainly in chapters 1 and 2), and defended the gospel (in chapters 3 and 4). He has made it clear we are not under *works* of the Law, but we are under grace. So with his own personal defense and the doctrines clearly laid out, we're now switching gears and focusing on the practical – **the practice of faith**. One of the key signs that we know Paul is switching gears to the practical sides of things is by his use of the word "therefore". Whenever we see that word "therefore," we're to ask ourselves, "Well, what's the word 'therefore,' *there for*?" And so basically what he's doing is saying that in light of everything we've just covered doctrinally – in light of everything that has just been taught – here's what it looks like to live it out.

He followed this same pattern in **Romans 12:1** – In light of all those first 11 chapters of Romans on the gospel, he said, "Therefore, I urge you to offer your bodies as a holy and living sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." **Same with Ephesians 4:1** – "Therefore," in light of all those great truths in the first three chapters about how you've been chosen and forgiven and sealed and saved by grace, "I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." The same "**therefore**" **signal** that Paul is known for when he switches to the practical, is seen right here in Galatians 5:1. So we're going to see what it looks like practically, in our lives – the difference between living by works and living by faith. You're going to notice an emphasis on the Spirit of God in chapter 5 because it's only through the Spirit that the Law is written on our hearts, morally, ethically and even theologically in how we approach to God. It's only by His enabling power we can live this Christian life.

I. AN APPEAL TO FREEDOM IN CHRIST (V. 1a)

Paul gives two commands regarding our freedom: one positive and one negative.

A. The Positive Command: Keep standing firm! (v. 1b)

Implying that have been set free at one point, Paul says, "Take a stand! Stand firm! Continue in the grace of God. Don't compromise or settle for anything less than freedom through God's grace in Christ. Take a stand against these Judaizers and stop allowing them to come into the church and weigh you down with all these works of the Law." In last week's text, he said, we're children of the freewoman and not of the bondwoman, so cast out the bondwoman and her son – cast out these legalists and legalism! Again, that doesn't mean we're casting out the morality. It never fails, the moment you start talking about obedience and right and wrong, those who abuse grace are there to cry out legalism! Any mention of obedience – legalism! Doing away with legalism doesn't mean we're doing away with clear distinctions made by God through the Law about right and wrong. We're not casting out morality and obedience and saying we can now live how we want.

Jesus said, "Don't think I came to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17)." Just because we're not under Law doesn't mean it doesn't have a purpose in the world, restraining sin. We all know what the world was like without some form of restraint – God flooded it. Paul said if a guy doesn't agree with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he's conceited and understands nothing (1 Tim. 6:4). Hebrews 10:26-31 warns that turning grace into a license to sins; it **insults the Spirit of grace and tramples underfoot the Son of God**. God has set a standard for the world of sinners to look to, to know Him and to know their sin and it's not going to pass away. I guess I say all of that because as much as we've talked about not being under the Law as Christians, we don't want to come away from this thinking, well now I can just go do what I want and live how I want to live. That's not the point of this at all. There's still right and wrong. There's still divine demands made upon God's people. 2 Timothy 2:19 says, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain

from wickedness.” Much of the Law, even 9 out of 10 commandments are restated in the NT for us to live by, not for justification, but once we’ve been justified in grace.

So the problem, I remind you, wasn’t with the Law. It was with **man who turned the Law into a system by which to build up his own self-righteousness or self-achievement to justify himself**. They turned the works of the Law into a legalistic system (see Romans 9:30-32). The longer I’m in Galatians, the more I realize Paul could’ve really benefited from our word “legalism”. Sometimes he speaks of the Law as good and sometimes it seems like he’s just crushing the Law. But in reality, he’s condemning those who try to justify themselves by works of the Law and misuse the Law.

B. The Negative Command: Do not be subject to a yoke of slavery! (v. 1b)

The word **subject** (*enecho*) carries the idea of “holding” or “bearing”. The idea is like **holding** a grudge (Mk. 6:19). Grudges can consume you and weigh you down if you don’t throw them off and forgive. You’re **bearing** that grudge – under the control of it. Hebrew 2:15 uses it in regards to fear – Christ has freed those, “who through fear of death, have been *subject* to slavery all their lives.” Fear can control you and weigh you down. Paul describes the legalistic system of the Judaizers as a **yoke**, weighing them down; like a frame for draft animals like oxen that they would put on their necks for pulling and labor; maybe pulling a heavily loaded cart or a plow. Slaves were also sometimes hindered by being yoked together. I just happened to come across something interesting recently about ancient Italians when they conquered a people: Evidently, when Romans or Samnites conquered a people, they would humiliate them by having them line up and walk under a yoke or a “yoke” made of spears that two soldiers held up on each end and they would hold it at a certain height that made you bend down to go under it. So they were using it symbolically to put it in the people’s minds that they now had to bow under their new yoke, like the Roman Empire. And well, what Paul’s saying is that this one yoke that you don’t have to bear and you don’t have to walk under and shouldn’t. Don’t try to be justified by the works of the Law because Jesus paid it all. His yoke is easy and burden light.

Paul then lays out the **drastic results** for those who want to try to justify themselves by works of the Law.

II. RESULTS OF SEEKING JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS (VV. 2-4)

If you want to use the Law to justify yourself, you’d better do it perfectly like Christ.

A. It requires perfection. (v. 3)

And we’ve been through this already, but the reminder’s good. “And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.” James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all [guilty of breaking all of it – NIV]. You can’t cherry pick the Law like that, annulling certain commands and keeping others. It’s all or nothing. It’s a goofy illustration, but you can’t treat it like a 3-year-old treats Lucky Charms – you can’t just pick out the things you like, like the marshmallows; you’ve got to eat the whole bowl. You can’t seek to be justified by your ability to keep the Law and by trusting in grace at the same time. You either have to pick one or the other. You either have to be totally trusting God’s free grace in Christ or you trust your own ability to measure up, which no one can. The question we have to ask ourselves is: What would you rather have? Your own self-righteousness by works? Or Christ’s perfect righteousness by faith? Who do you trust to pay for your sin? Your own goodness, or Christ sacrifice?”

The second **drastic result** of living under the self-justification of legalism is that...

B. It severs you from Christ – He is of no benefit to you (vv. 2, 4)

And this is where we get into one of most disputed verses in all the Bible. This is one of those old **proof texts** that many turn to, to claim that you can lose your salvation. And proof texts are fine, as long as you take them in their context. Basically every issue with false doctrine like that can be solved by studying the context – the verses surrounding it. This is why we're going through this book of the Bible the way we are, because we've seen that these Galatians, or most of them are genuinely saved. Paul keeps calling them brethren and has reflected on their past reception of Christ; they have received the Spirit of God into their lives and we know when a person does that, they are sealed by Him as well. Once saved, always saved.

1 John 5:11-13 say, "And the testimony of God is this: God **has given us eternal life**, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son **has the life**; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **so that you may know that you have eternal life.**" Look at all that assurance there John's trying to get across. You have to have assurance. It's required to live a victorious Christian life – knowing who you are in Christ, knowing you have all you need in Christ. The way the Judaizers deceived these believers into works was by getting them to doubt their salvation and then telling them they had to work for it. One of my favorite verses to go back to on assurance is John 10:27-30: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and **I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.** My Father, who has given them to Me, is **greater than all**; and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.** I and the Father are one." So if you include the Holy Spirit in that with His baptizing and sealing ministry, you are triple-secure in the hands of the Triune God!

So what's going on? How can they be saved and severed from Christ? **The answer** is that it's in regards to sanctification. God is a God of manifold grace. He gives us grace for **salvation**, grace for **sanctification** and for **glorification**. If the Galatians were insistent on trying to live by the works of the Law, Christ would not benefit them **practically for their sanctification** – growing in Christlikeness and living out this Christian life – because **they weren't depending on God's grace anymore. They were operating independently of the Spirit of God and in the realm of self-effort** (like Abraham with Hagar). Paul asked them in Galatians 3:3, "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" So what was happening is that they were genuinely saved by grace through faith in Christ but were turning away from grace and faith in Christ and dependence upon the Spirit, to live out the Christian life by their self-effort and works and flesh. Putting our faith in Christ isn't just what we do to get saved. It's what we continue to do to grow in Him.

The first place we should go when we're about to do anything for the Lord in regards to **service** for Him is, "Lord, I am completely dependent upon You." Acknowledging, apart from Him, we can do nothing. And one of the first places we should go when we're **tempted** to sin is back to the cross. You go back to our identity in Christ and say, "No. I'm dead to sin. I died with Christ. I have been raised to new life with Christ." No matter what we do, we go back to Christ by faith. Like Paul said in 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." The way we progress in the Christian life is not just through self-efforts but by faith in Christ by the enabling power of the Spirit.

The Galatians weren't turning to Christ and His grace to live their Christian lives, so **He's not going to help them live out a lie or live something out that's not true.** He wasn't going to bless their efforts to work for justification when they'd already been justified for their faith in Him. Therefore, He is of no benefit in this sense. Trying to do it in our own power by works results in the loss of the benefits that come with being a child of God.

The third **drastic result** is that...

C. It causes you to fall from grace. (v. 4)

This is another one of those touchy phrases that makes perfect sense as long you take it in context, in regard to their walk with God. **Always interpret difficult and obscure passages in light of those clear passages and clear doctrines you know to be true.** This **doesn't** mean they've fallen *out of* grace completely – as if they're no longer saved. The word (*ekpipto*) means to “*fall alongside or drift off course*” Like, here you were **on the straight and narrow highway** as this totally justified Christian, very smoothly progressing in your walk with Christ through the Spirit by faith – and now, since you've turned back to works and trying to justify yourself, you've gone off into the ditch. You're not on the highway of the Christian life anymore. **You're stuck in the ditch.** The word is actually used in Acts to describe Paul's ship being **run aground and stuck in the shallow water** (Acts 27:17). The Galatians' ship too, has run aground **in the muck of shallow theology** that is denying Christ's sufficiency for the lives.

This last Wednesday when me and Courtney were heading to Alliance and we got to about the Old Dunlap area, there was a line of cars just stopped on the highway, but what was weird about it was that there weren't any construction signs, so we figured there was an accident of some kind. Well what happened was a semi-truck gone in the ditch and got stuck, I'm guessing the night before in the snow. And they had to stop a hundred cars or so just to get this semi pulled out and back on the highway.

That's the same idea here. Real Christians, justified Christians, trying to be justified by works, have gone off into the ditch and gotten stuck in their walk. And the harder they work for grace, the further they fall from it. They're not becoming more spiritual, but less spiritual², not depending on the Spirit. They've been hindered and are going backwards. “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? (5:7)” The Christian life is sometimes described as a race and their race has really gone off course.

III. RESULTS OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (VV. 5-6)

A. There's a hope-filled waiting. (v. 5)

In contrast to the Judaizers, who are busy trying to earn righteousness, Paul says here that true believers are simply waiting! Remember this anthem of the Judaizers by Swindoll?

“Excessive works! How sweaty the sound That came from the god in me!

I once was bad but now I'm good Thanks to my sincerity.

'Twas works that earned my place with God And deeds that made Him smile.

How long I toiled and proved my worth And trudged that second mile.

When we've been there ten thousand years Being paid our hard-earned fun,

We've no less days to sing our praise And boast of all we've done!’

That just makes you cringe. Legalists are always working for it. **Believers, in contrast, are waiters.** Remember how long **Abraham had to wait** for that promise to be fulfilled? 25 years! Lenski says, “Faith produces the sure hope, **the glad waiting.**”³ We believe God going to see this whole salvation process through from beginning to end.

Spiritual waiting is real thing (though I've never systematically put a name to it like this). It's a sign of a true believer because legalists are always working. I remember a testimony from an ex Jehovah's Witness I heard once (who believe salvation is by works), that he always desired to die while he was out working by knocking on doors, so he would have the best chance of guaranteeing himself a place in heaven. Gromacki wrote, "Within legalism, justification is an ongoing process. It is never achieved before death. A person can never attain a justified position because he must continually obey all of the laws all of the time. He can never rest in what he has done or in what someone else has done because there is always more to do."⁴ But **true believers are hopeful waiters. A hope so sure we're waiting.** To not work for salvation requires a lot of waiting and trust in the God, that He's going to keep His Word and save us for our faith and not because of works. His yoke is easy and burden light. Because, I mean, if it's by works, then we're foolish to just sit around reflecting on the cross all the time, right? We'd better get to doing something (not really)! A life lived under grace is described as one of hope-filled, spiritual waiting. But that doesn't just mean we're idle. We serve out of love while we wait.

B. There's a focus on what really matters: faith working, through love. (v. 6)

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." Same thing is said in 6:15, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." Circumcision and uncircumcision – they don't mean anything – they're mere external works. What really matters is on the inside – circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, (Romans 2:28-29) motivated by God's love in Christ. The love of Christ compels us. The love of Christ has changed our heart. "The life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:20)." Our motivation to live for God and serve God **doesn't** come from fear that we won't measure up and we're working trying to get our good deeds to outweigh our bad deeds – no – Our motivation to live for God and serve God comes from a heart of gratitude because of what He has done for us. Because we have been saved and we have been forgiven. He who is forgiven much loves much, and we've all been forgiven much. Real faith works through love, producing genuine Spirit-led fruit.

¹ https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf

² John F. MacArthur, "Galatians," *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 135.

³ R. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961) 260.

⁴ Robert Gromacki, *Stand Fast in Liberty* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2002), 150.