

Galatians 5:1-6

Free to Love

There is a song that my church sings with these lyrics, "Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song. By mercy made holy, by the Spirit made strong."¹ These lyrics are what Paul's letter to the Galatians is all about.

The letter is divided into three sections. Section one is biography where Paul tells us that both his office as an apostle and his message about salvation come directly from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wasn't a con-artist. He wasn't deluded. He was an apostle or an official representative of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Part two is theological where we are brought face to face with God's grace to us in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our sins. The cross is our glory and the Lord our song for it was on the cross that Jesus paid the full penalty for all of our sins. And in receiving him as our Lord and Savior we are justified and made righteous.

Our final section is practical and ethical. Doctrine is not just truth to be believed, it is truth that should affect how we live. Truth should determine our thinking, feeling, attitudes and actions. And all of this new godly thinking, feeling and doing is empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit. By mercy we are made holy and by the Spirit we are made strong. And this brings us to Galatians 5.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty
by which Christ has made us free,
and do not be entangled again
with a yoke of bondage.
(Galatians 5:1)

The best Greek manuscripts begin verse 1 as a declaration: "For freedom Christ has made you free." And then follows the command: "do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." The yoke of bondage was the burden of trying to keep all of the Old Testament law on your own in order to be righteous before God. Let me try to give you an example of what I mean.

Let's say you are a father of a young child who is playing with his or her toys. And you tell that child "Play time is over. Pick up all the toys and put them

¹ Let It Be Said Of Us, by Promise Keepers

in the toy box. If there are any toys not put away you will be punished." Now, that child may put away the toys. But he will also pout and fuss and worry about punishment and resent me. And most likely leave one or two toys out.

But what if I say, "It's time to put the toys away and Daddy will help you. Let's see how fast we can get this done. And afterwards we can have ice cream." In the first example my child goes about his or her work with a yoke of slavery on his back. He or she is not living in freedom, because the task is a commandment with the possibility of punishment.

But in the second example the child is free. He or she carries no heavy yoke. In fact the child enjoys picking up the toys. Why? Because Daddy is on the floor helping, making the task enjoyable. Jesus Christ has set us free from God's wrath against sin; free from trying to work to earn God's favor. Do you remember the old Hymn "At Calvary"?

Mercy there was great and grace was free.
Pardon there was multiplied to me.
There my burdened soul found liberty—
At Calvary

For freedom Christ has made us free. Do not allow yourself to be entangled with a yoke of bondage. But there is one yoke we can put on and should put on, Christ's yoke. He said,

Come to Me, all you 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.
(Matthew 11:28-30)

In ancient farming cultures a farmer would yoke together a stronger, more experienced ox with a young, inexperienced ox. And the stronger ox would do most of the pulling as the younger one learned. Jesus Christ is the stronger ox from whom we are to learn and gain strength. Philippians 4:13 declares "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It is the Spirit of God in Christ in us that enables us to live like Christ with joy in our hearts.

Now, verses 2, 3, and 4 each reveal how to stay under a yoke of bondage and the consequences. And then verse 5 and 6 show us how to stand in freedom.

Indeed I, Paul, say to you
that if you become circumcised,
Christ will profit you nothing.
³ And I testify again to every man
who becomes circumcised that
he is a debtor to keep the whole
law. ⁴ You have become estranged
from Christ, you who *attempt to be*
justified by law; you have fallen from
grace
(Galatians 5:2-4)

In verse 2, if you are circumcised you are under the yoke of the law and Christ is no profit to you. In verse 3, if you are circumcised, you are obligated to keep all of the law and if you fail you are under a curse. In verse 4, if you put yourself under the law you are without God's grace.

Why was circumcision such a big deal? In the Old Testament it symbolized trusting in God and not in ourselves, in our flesh, our own works to be saved. But the ceremony came to be seen as the actual means by which someone is saved. In Acts 15:1 we learn that the false teachers were saying "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." In other words faith in Jesus Christ is not enough to save you. Moses and the law must be allowed to finish what Christ started.

So Paul warns the Galatians in three sentences what the results of such actions will bring. Number one, Christ will profit you nothing, Two, you are obligated to keep the whole law. Three, you are severed from Christ. And four, if you follow law and ritual you are taken out of the sphere of God's grace—you are on your own.

You either have salvation by God's grace, His free favor and goodness to us in Christ. Or you add law and ritual to your life and lose Christ. You cannot intermix the two. You cannot be drowning in an ocean of sin and reach for the life saver of Christ and then let go of Christ and try to save yourself by doing backstrokes to the shore!

Think of it this way. There was a man who had an old baseball signed by Babe Ruth. He heard that it was very valuable and decided to sell it. But he was worried about the sale, because the signature was really faded. So he took a

permanent marker and wrote over the letters B-A-B-E R-U-T-H. When he was done he turned what was once priceless into something worthless.

You cannot add to the work of Christ, but you can ruin it by thinking that your works earn you favor with God. The wonderful, surprising point of all of this is that God does not want to deal with you as a slave in debt to Him. He has set you free in Christ and He wants to lavish you with good things through His grace. And grace is always coming to you. Let's look at the beginning of this letter.

Grace to you and peace from
God the Father and our Lord
Jesus Christ
(Galatians 1:3)

As you begin the letter God's grace is coming to you to help you understand it. Then at the end of the letter we read,

Brethren, the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ be with your spirit
(Galatians 6:18)

Grace is now going with you to help you obey and do what you have learned. God our Father, Dad and Jesus Christ our big brother are always with us to help us to pick up our toys with joy! Someone once said that grace, spelled G-r-a-c-e stands for "God's Riches At Christ's Expense." You cannot pay God for what Christ already paid.

Now, let's return to Galatians 5 and read verse 5 and 6. And notice that the pronoun has changed from "you" to "we." Paul is not speaking any longer about the Galatians and the false teachers but about himself and the Galatians.

For we through the Spirit eagerly
wait for the hope of righteousness
by faith.
(Galatians 5:5)

We are a people who are waiting. And what we are waiting for is for our hope of righteousness to be fulfilled. We already have imputed righteousness placed into our account. But we are eagerly expecting a completed and perfect righteousness in all we do and say when Christ returns and we are glorified. We have a similar expression in Romans 8.

For we know that the whole

creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

²³ Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

(Romans 8:22, 23)

We are righteous now. It is in our account because of Christ. But we still sin at times. We still get physically sick. And we groan waiting for our complete victory. But right now we wait for it. This is why the word “hope” is used in Galatians 5:5. The biblical word “hope” does not mean a mere wish, but a sure and certain expectation.

One day we will all celebrate at the banquet table of the Lord. But right now through the Spirit the appetizers are being served. By faith, through the power of the Spirit we can experience love, joy, peace, goodness, longsuffering, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The Christian life is not only a life of faith and hope, it is a life empowered by the Spirit. And it is the Spirit of God in us that enables us to love God and to love others—to be kind, holy, compassionate, gracious and full of peace and joy.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.
(Galatians 5:6)

The faith that saves us is also a faith that works. And the work we do through the power of the Spirit is the work of love. We love God and we love one another. Romans 12 shows us how we love one another.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹ not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing

in hope, patient in tribulation,
continuing steadfastly in prayer;
13 distributing to the needs of the
saints, given to hospitality.
(Romans 12:9-13)

As we wait for our hope of righteousness, as we wait for dinner at the Lord's banquet table let's help each other serve and share the appetizers. And let us keep an eye open for those on the outside of God's house who want to come in. We are free in Christ to truly love.