

Freedom and Fruitfulness

Galatians 5:1–12

Intro: In dealing with the child that ran into the street in front of a car and was almost hit, you've got them out of the yard, into the house. The yelling has mostly concluded, lecturing is somewhat over — “Do you know what could have happened? Do you know the danger...” And now comes the time to give practical instruction. Maybe you ask some questions: Alright, the next time your ball goes in the street, what are you to?

And so in Galatians, we enter the third and final aspect of the letter. The first is argument of justification by faith alone on the basis of his authority as an apostle. The second aspect of the argument is the theological underpinning of justification by faith alone. And this third section is the ethical or practical living guidelines of justification by faith alone.

V. 1 is a transitional verse that could just as easily appear at the end of chapter 4 and it could at the beginning of chapter 5. He restates the themes of slavery and freedom that he just finished with the slave woman and the free woman at the end of chapter 4, but then immediately makes a truth assertion that we are set free in Christ to be free, and there is immediately a practical command for how we deal with that massive truth. Stand in freedom in Christ.

Galatians 5:1–12 — For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

²Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. ⁷You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion is not from him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. ¹¹But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. ¹²I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

PRAY

2

Sermon in a sentence: In Christ we have a clean break and a new hope producing new fruit tethered to truth, all purchased by Christ.

A Clean Break — v. 1 — For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

We are freed by Christ, and in Christ, from the guilt and condemnation of the Law. The Law could not heal, but only wound. It provided no relief from sin, but rather shined the light of holiness on sin, exposing our guilt and condemnation. For freedom from the guilt and condemnation from the Law, Christ set us free.

That does not mean we are no longer aware of our sin. It does not mean sin is less sinful or less evil for the believer. It does mean that we no longer need to work off our guilt. Christ did that! The Judaizers were promoting rituals to ease guilt and move toward God. But Christ became the curse of sin, bearing all the guilt and shame. All of it. If we are in Christ, he has borne away our guilt and we are free. Look away from yourself to Christ.

Christian, are you laboring under the false belief that you have sinned one sin too far? Yes, Christ's atonement covered 99.9% of your sin, but this one you must make some remediation for on your own? Do not believe. The one who would believe such thinks too much of himself and too little of Christ. Look away to Christ, who, as we read in the Call to Worship, by a single offering has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Stand firm in his sin-atonement sacrifice and do not submit to a yoke of guilt and condemnation. Fight sin, do away with besetting sins — but always in light of his finished, wrath-bearing work on the cross.

A New Hope — vvs. 2–5

Paul makes use of his authority as an apostle again here, as he did in the opening of the letter. As a God-appointed apostle, do not go backwards to trying to fix yourself at any level. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot add a little ritual to move you closer to God. Christ has brought us to Father. Any attempt to bring yourself does not take away a little from Christ, it negates completely the work of Christ. If you can fix yourself at any level, the atonement of Christ was all for naught. If you want to add some of the Law for righteousness, you must keep all of it flawlessly from conception, or you will not achieve the righteousness it points to. You can't do it, and efforts to do it cut you from Christ as much as circumcision cuts off the foreskin.

3

The phrase “fallen away from grace” does not mean hear what the modern religious ear hears. It is not a loss of salvation that he is describing. In the context of this paragraph, Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. There is no mixture of self-improvement. Grace is in and through Christ. To embrace ritualism is to reject grace in Christ, as he says in vvs. 2 & 3. One does not fall from grace, but near reaches and grasps grace if one chooses circumcision.

It is not through rituals, but through faith that we are born again, and we held in the grip of Christ through his resurrection power. That faith *does* produce living fruit. There is progressive advance in righteousness brought about by God’s spirit at work in us. But note that it is an ongoing work — not instant. Christ is being formed in us now, and will be finally fully formed then. That is the hope of v. 5. We aren’t what we were, but we are not yet what we will be when Christ’s work is completed on that day. We have this hope, as Philippians 1:6 instructs us — And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Be encouraged by this. In difficult days of failure, look away to Christ. Believe in the totality of his atonement. Turn from sin — repent. Get up in resurrection power and hope in what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will bring to perfect completion on the Day. We do grow, and we do increasing turn from sin.

And that brings us to v. 6 — **Producing New Fruit — v. 6**

Repentance from dead works — turning from dead works — like circumcision and ceremonial law, produces a different kind of fruit rooted in a new heart that God gives, not human effort. This is what John the Baptist prophet was calling the religious leaders to in Matthew 3: “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”

Galatians 5:6 points us to the futility of human effort and rituals in any direction. **Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything.** Whether you want to virtue signal by cutting something off to show you are improved, or virtue signal by doing nothing but singing, “Well, Jesus paid it all,” **no outward behavior produces inward life.** If there is not a new heart, outward signs amount to buying a bushel of apples and stapling them on a dead tree. You may point to the apples as evidence of life, but you’re only fooling yourself.

Faith in Christ moves us into right relationship with God. When are placed in Christ through faith — when we are saved — we are given a new heart. The old nature — dead in sins and trespasses

4

— is replaced with a new heart. Salvation is as much about changing behavior, but changing what we want at the heart level.

When the bible talks about the heart, it is dealing with us at the core of who we are. We are lovers. We love, we desire, and we bend our lives around what we love. That's not to say that everything we love is good. Indeed, the old nature loves its sinful self. The old nature pursues what satisfies its own lusts. But faith in Christ produces a turning from sinful desires, which produce death, to new love, new affection, new desires that are in keeping with the heart of Christ. The phrase "faith working through love" is describing these new desires at the heart level, at the level of love, and affections, and wants, and desires. The evidence of saving faith is not stapling apples on a dead tree to try to show evidence of life, nor any ritual in the flesh to show evidence of spiritual life... No, the evidence that we are free from the condemnation of the Law — the evidence that I am alive in Christ, that Christ is being formed in me, is that what I love has changed because who I am at the core has been made alive to love the things of God.

Illustration: I am a Texan, born and raised. The spirit of Texas runs in my blood. I grew up on all things Texas: Bluebonnets and wild flowers, heroism at the Alamo, personal freedom, Whataburger. That's part of who I am in a natural sense. (I love Wichita — don't misunderstand me.)

As I have been preparing for our mission trip to Utah in July — one which we are all supporting in prayer and giving, even as some are going — I found that there are three or four primary ways to get from here to there, depending on the airline. They all cost essentially the same thing. To get from here to Salt Lake City, you can go through Chicago; you can go through Houston; You can go through Dallas; You can go through Denver. As I looked at flights, you know which one I chose? The one that goes through Houston. You know why? There's a Whataburger in the Houston airport, and I love Whataburger. I bent the flight around what I love.

When we enter Christ by faith, it changes what we love, and life begins to be bent around the new affections of a Christ-formed heart. Faith works out these new desires. This is a new, living tree, if you will, producing the living fruit of love and affections God and the things of God. This is evidence of life, not behaviors, not rituals, not even offices or positions in the church, or baptism, or communion. Those things can be so many apples stapled on a dead tree.

5

This a benchmark for us — a self-examination to see if we are in the faith and Christ Jesus is in us, as 2 Corinthians 13:5 tells. This is a warning to those leading a double life, or virtue signaling by stapling store-bought religious fruit onto your life. Your appearance is not what is of concern today. What *others* think is of no consequence. Your record of giving, church attendance, baptism — though these outward things are certainly impacted by inward change, none of them work from the outside into the heart to change you. Let this question probe your heart: What do you love? Is the character of Christ so shaping your loves and affections that what you love is what Christ loves? If not, flee to Christ this morning, and experience new life that does what reformed behaviors cannot produce.

Now, the new loves and affections are always **tethered to truth**. The problems the Galatians were running into were rooted in certain false brothers who had come from Jerusalem, who perhaps were dropping James's name, and had some fancy ideas that they presented that appealed to pride. The Galatians had embraced the Gospel, and were seeking to love God, but were becoming untethered from the truth of Gospel.

vv. 7–10 — ⁷You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion is not from him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

Tethered to Truth

Note our vulnerability to smooth talkers. The Galatians were being drawn away by a *who*, not a *what*. *Whats* can pull us off, too, but for the safety of our souls, let's pay attention to what is happening here. Some guys with a clever argument showed up, and the Galatians, young in the faith as I think they were, were not grounded in the truth. So they were susceptible to spiritual charlatans and false teachers.

We are not sure precisely of the entire teaching of the Judaizers, but verse 9 seems to indicate it involved gradualism, so there is the reference to yeast as it works through the lump of dough. It doesn't take much. Just a little, and before long the entire lump is impacted by the yeast. It seems Paul is suggesting that circumcision was just the initial self-effort they were imposing. "Well, at least let's make a start at your holiness by the old sign of circumcision. Then we'll see what needs to happen after that. In **v. 12** he even takes a rather hard swipe at the Judaizers using their own approach of gradualism against them. He says to those who say that circumcision helps, if you want

6

to add things up to improve your merit, don't just stop at the foreskin, go ahead and castrate yourself. That should really help. It is a biting comment, and a sharp blow against self-improvement.

Whether the first step of circumcision, or subsequent steps of legalism — none of these improved anything because Christ's work cannot be improved. They were disconnected from the freedom from the guilt and condemnation from the Law that Christ gained.

We must be diligent in our study and knowledge of God's word and the Gospel. God's truth is what we tie ourselves to.

- **Truth trumps trends.** Theological trends come and go. Different generations assess spirituality by different measures. The only measure or stackpole we are to use is the enduring word of God that points to our hope in Christ.
- **Truth trumps teachers.** Teachers are one of God's gifts to the church, but in Galatia there were false teachers. How can you discern true teachers from false teachers? Be like the Berean believers in **Acts 17**. "They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." As a church, the first of our core values is God's word. As a believer, you must be first devoted to, and a student of God's word so that you protected from false teaching.
- **Truth trumps teeth.** Yes, teeth. There is a smiling preacher in Houston who has a great set of made-for-tv flashy teeth. He has a positive way of saying things that draws over 50,000 people to attend his church every Sunday. And his message anti-Gospel, convincing people they need to be nice and think positive thoughts. He is not the first flashy personality. He won't be the last. Truth trumps teeth and flashy personalities. Tether your soul to the unchanging, enduring word of God that makes you wise unto salvation. It shows us our God. It shows us ourselves. And it shows us our Savior, who purchased our salvation on the cross.

Purchased by Christ on the Cross — vv. 11–12

The work and offense of the cross.

"But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed."

What is the offense of the cross, and how does that figure in his comparison to circumcision here?

The offense, the scandal of the cross is this: The fact that Jesus came and died to pay for sin demonstrates that there is no goodness in human beings. The cross is a rejection all human

7

attempts to be made right with God. You are immoral at the core. You are spiritually bankrupt. There is nothing you can say, there is nothing you can do that will make you righteous before a holy God.

That is an offense to our pride. And in light of the circumcision, it destroys the thought and argument that circumcision can do something to help you. The offense of the cross must remain, or we are lost. We must embrace and believe what God has said about us, and what the cross of Christ demonstrates about us. As the hymn writer has said:

Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

And save, he does. **Hebrews 10:11-12** —

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Look away from yourself. Look to Christ. As John Newton said, “I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior.” Stand firm in the freedom from sin and guilt Christ has purchased.

PRAY

GOSPEL THREAD

COMMUNION