



Galatians 5:1-15
Compelled by Love

Summary: Jesus has set us free to know Him and love others, keeping extra religious rules just gets in the way but be warned: people will try to persuade otherwise.

Stand fast. Stand firm. That was the message God sent to the churches in region of Galatia nearly 2000 years ago. They knew the gospel. They had been saved by Jesus. The Holy Spirit was in them and upon them. They had seen miracles and their lives had been transformed, but the command was: stand firm. Stand fast.

It's a command that requires awareness, a command that requires intent. Awareness that forces are work which could move you, shake you, perhaps even knock you down, and the intent to resist those forces, not by personal strength alone, but by hope and faith in God.

Friends, it's a message we need to hear today. We need it for different reasons, but we need the same command – stand firm church, stand fast. People in Galatia were telling Christians they needed to take action, they needed to get involved, they needed to start doing things. But their suggestions would only lead the Galatian Christians away from the grace, mercy, salvation, and strength they had found in the gospel. Today there are still voices speaking to the church – whether whispering, whining, or shouting, they are speaking to us – telling us what we need to do, what we need to think, and what this all means.

But which direction are they leading you, Christian? Are the voices you listen to anchoring you in Christ, or are they are causing you to drift away? Are they encouraging you to look to God, or to look at what is happening in the world? And, when you speak about current issues, who do you sound like? Do you sound like the people of this world who place all their hope, energy and efforts here and now? do you echo their concerns? and call for their same strategies? Or do you sound like someone who has faith and trust in the saving power of the gospel and the everlasting kingdom of God?

You and I are like the moon spiritually speaking, we don't generate any light of our own, we receive the light of the sun, in this case, the son of God, and then we reflect it back to earth.

This is the way a healthy Christian life functions. We receive grace, wisdom, guidance, instruction, strength, and spiritual gifts *from God* and then we use those to reflect love and service back to God and out to others.

The problem is, other things often come along and distract or disrupt us. They slowly nudge us, or suddenly knock us, off course and as we get out of alignment with God it begins to have a downstream effect on our relationships with others.

This is what was happening in Galatia as people in the church started listening to outsiders who said they should take their spiritual game up a notch by following all the Jewish religious rules and rituals too.

But Paul said no, you can't add more rules, rituals, and traditions to Jesus. The way to true spiritual growth is to press closer and deeper into a relationship with God through faith in Christ and then reflecting what you have received from Him out to others.

Let's look at how this all plays out for them and see what we can learn about ourselves in the process:

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

He's talking about all the Jewish rules and rituals that the people had developed, all the traditions they had made, all the stuff the outsiders were telling the Galatians to adopt, and he called it a **yoke of bondage**.

Now, they weren't meant to be that way originally. But over the years people had added a bunch of extra stuff to God's original rules. They had reshaped them, modified and interpreted them so much that they no longer functioned the way God intended.

For example – God told them to observe the Sabbath, it's the fourth commandment – there should be one day a week when they did no work. And the whole point of that was to remind them that God was present and providing for them. Yes, they could accomplish more by working seven days a week, but God would take care of them if they would work six and rest the seventh, and then their neighbors would see what was happening and wonder: what's up with you guys? How come you have everything you need and you work less than we do?

The Sabbath was supposed to be a blessing to them, to be a time of rest, a time with family and community, and a time each week to remember God's direct impact on their daily lives. But over time they twisted it and came up with all kinds of extra laws to help with things like defining when the Sabbath actually began and when it stopped and what work was, because you didn't want to be caught doing work if it was the Sabbath.

So Jesus came along and healed people on the Sabbath and the religious zealots got upset because they decided healing someone was work. And you can just imagine Jesus looking at them, stunned and sad. You don't want someone to be healed *because it's work*? You've held onto the rule, but completely lost sight of why you have it. You're keeping rules and ruining relationships in the process.

This is the way of life that the outsiders are dangling in front of the Galatians, encouraging them to identify with the cross of Christ *and* their version of the law of Moses. And Paul says, 'No way, the two don't fit together!'

2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

Now that's a strong claim isn't it? He's saying you can't add anything to your life in an attempt to make yourself a better person. Christians have *nothing* to gain by adding anything to Christ. It's like multiplying by zero – it doesn't matter how big a number you start with, if you multiply it by zero, you have nothing left.

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. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Here's what you have to remember: the law was originally given to the Jews *by God* as a tutor, as a teacher, to show us the righteous requirements of God, to show us what it takes to live a life that is completely pleasing to Him. But it was also impossible to do it all or to do it consistently, and so there was a system of offerings and sacrifices to be made as well.

The law told you what to do, what not to do, and what to do when you did what you weren't supposed to do - what the consequences were. But that was kind of depressing because pretty soon you realized you were going to have to make a lot of sacrifices because you kept breaking rules either intentionally or unintentionally, and you just weren't going to be able to keep doing all this – you would run out of stuff to sacrifice before you ran out of reasons to sacrifice.

Fortunately, God promised that one day He would provide a sacrifice that would take the place of all the other sacrifices and pay the penalty for all our sins. That was Jesus, the Lamb of God who was sacrificed on the cross for us, just like a man would bring a bull or goat to be sacrificed for his sins at the Temple.

Now pay attention here, because this is super important Christian stuff - this is absolutely key for you to understand so you can make sense of the Bible. Before Jesus came, people made offerings and sacrifices at the Temple - in part to worship God, but in part to recognize their sin and restore their fellowship with God. Killing the lamb didn't have any power on its own, but it was a connection point, a way of saying: this helps me see and understand how bad I am, how far I am from God. This helps me understand the impact of sin – it brings death, it brings pain, it brings separation. As this animal dies, I see and understand that, and that's what I've done by my sin.

But I also know this can't save me. Killing some animal or burning some grain can't save me. There's no connection here between what I've done and this sacrifice except my faith. I make the sacrifice by obedience, trusting God. He said do this, and so, I am.

You see: the faith, the trust, was always meant to be in God, never in the animal, as if the size of the animal and its condition related in any way to the size and nature of the sin I had committed.

But then God sent His son. He lived a perfect life, He completely and entirely fulfilled the laws, kept all the rules, observed all the rituals, He never needed to make a sacrifice for His own sins. He traded His perfection for our guilt, shortcomings, and shame. He traded His perfection for everything we owed and became the sacrifice that all the other sacrifices pointed to.

So today, we still break God's laws, we still need to recognize that and confess that, but instead of slaughtering some livestock out back after the service, we remember that Jesus was slaughtered for us. And instead of making our own sacrifices by faith, trusting that God will some day, some how, make things right and forgive us, we look back to Calvary and believe by faith, that He already has. We receive communion, wine or juice that reminds us of His blood and bread or cracker that reminds us of His body – everything points us to the sacrifice He made.

That's cornerstone to the faith right there. That's essential doctrine, understanding that Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins.

So, look, either that worked, or it didn't, but you can't improve on it or modify it. And if you try, you're actually choosing something else, something that is not God's plan. So Paul says, if you attempt to be justified by anything else, any other rules you keep, things you do, or promises you make, you have fallen from grace. You're multiplying by zero.

Either Jesus was the Son of God who died to take away all of our sins, either He was the perfect sacrifice that all other sacrifices pointed toward, or He was not. You can't have it both ways. You can't order your own little personal size spiritual fusion salad by adding a little of my own efforts, a little bit of self-help advice from this guy I like to listen to, a prayer that my roommate taught me, and Jesus.

[5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.](#)

Christians count on God to make us righteous as we put our hope in Christ by faith. And as long we are doing that, it doesn't matter what other religious rules or rituals you take part in or don't take part in, because there's nothing left over outside of Christ that you need to take action on. He didn't miss anything. There's no clean-up for you to run.

That meant there were no religious rules or rituals for the Galatians to add to Jesus. And it means there is nothing happening today that Jesus is unaware of either. There's nothing you need to do, or worry about, as if He overlooked it, wasn't aware, or isn't able to control world events.

But if the Christian life is not about keeping all sorts of rules and going through all kinds of rituals, or freaking out in response to current events, what do you do instead? Love. This is what matters as a Christian. Love God first, in response to what He has done for us, then love others as a reflection of what you received – you’re going to do something, you’re going to take action, and it may even be very similar action to what you would do without Jesus, but you’re going to do it for Jesus, because of Jesus, in love.

It’s simple. But it’s not easy. And there is always the threat of being nudged or knocked off course, like the Galatians. Look:

7 You ran well.

Things started off well in Galatia. They heard the gospel and responded. They repented of their sin and received Christ. They were sealed by the Holy Spirit, they saw miracles. We saw all of that chapters 1-4. And the same is true for some of you.

You started off well in your Christian life, there was a season of real joy, of incredible release, and overwhelming peace, of vibrant worship and excited study. *You ran well.* But are you still running the way? Are you still on track, still on pace?

The Galatians were not. And Paul asked:

(Vs 7 cont) Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.

Salvation begins with God calling you – getting your attention. But then, notice this: you can be hindered in receiving and obeying the truth. Other voices creep in, other influences begin leading you astray. But they’re not from God. And if you’re not cautious you can come under their sway, under the influence and persuasion of other voices that will lead you away from Jesus. So Christian beware, because:

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

I like bread. I don’t believe in no carb or low carb diets. Every major civilization in world history had a carb-based diet from the Asian empires in the East that depend on rice, to the South American empires that depended on maize, to European empires that depended on wheat – the story of human history is fueled by carbs, and specifically by grains that could be harvested and stored.

Jesus even said He is the bread of life, so, we eat carbs in our house – because it’s historical, theological, and delicious.

Each week we bake our own bread. It’s simple, it’s good, and for me, it’s magical. Bread making inspires me with a sense of awe and wonder. I marvel at the process of taking just a few ingredients, mixing them all together, adding some time for it to rise and some heat for

it to cook and then what comes out of the oven is completely transformed and gives you life and energy.

There's been a surge of interest in sourdough during COVID with people staying home. Sourdough is especially amazing to me because it's just two ingredients – three if you want it to taste better – water and flour, but it's better if you add some salt.

Seriously, it's just those two ingredients. And you say, wait, what about the starter? Do you know what sourdough starter is? Water and flour. And yeast. But you don't add the yeast, there's yeast in the air all around you. You capture it in a starter and then yes, you use that.

I like sourdough, but it's kind of finicky, so I have a modified recipe we use and we add a small amount of yeast. We make a 1.5lb loaf that needs ½ teaspoon of yeast. That's a loaf the size of a bowling ball made with a small marble's worth of yeast because, [a little leaven leavens the whole lump](#).

Given time, the yeast will travel through the entire loaf and make it rise. A small little amount of yeast will affect everything else in the loaf.

Now, if that's true in your kitchen, God's trying to warn you – it's also true for your soul. So, how are you 'no carb' people going to learn important theological truths like this? 😊

Seriously though - here's the real application: last week we spoke about the fact that the kingdoms of men are in chaos right now. And we talked about the fact that there are a lot of voices out there speaking right now, from political commentators to pastors, from media outlets to ministries and you're reading them, watching them, listening to them, and you're getting agitated, you're getting worked up, you're getting stressed out. You feel physical reactions to the information you're taking in as the yeast of information works its way through your heart, soul, and mind.

And what's it causing you to do? Bubble up and rise up like a good yeast in dough.

Now, remember, I use ½ teaspoon of yeast in a pound and a half of flour and [a little leaven leavens the whole lump](#). How much "news" or social media are you taking in? And how is it [persuading](#) you? Are the voices you listen to pointing you back to Jesus? Are they helping you obey the truth? Are they helping you [eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith](#)? Are they helping you [work out your faith in love](#)?

Outside voices led the Galatian Christians astray. The voices persuaded them, shaped them, redirected them, *away from Christ*.

What direction are you being led Christian? What are the people on your iPad or your phone, or your tv telling you?

Remember, this is all written *to the Church*. Are you still running as well, right now, as you were in the past? Or have you slowed down? Have you drifted off course? Have you been

distracted? It *can* happen, it *does* happen, and so, we need someone to call us back on course.

But good news, listen to what we read next:

10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Paul says, 'hey, I know you guys and I have confidence - you've gone astray, but you're going to come back. You're going to recognize what's happened, and you're going to respond. And, I'm confident that the people that are leading you astray will face judgment. God knows what is happening.'

11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

You have to know: the Christian message is offensive. It's offensive to the amoral liberal on the left because it says 'you're a sinner, and you need Jesus. You're not saved by being woke and working hard for social justice and the environment.' But the Christian message is just as offensive on right because it says, 'you're a sinner and you need Jesus. You're not saved by singing God Bless America, driving a pickup truck and waving a flag.'

You see, the greatest problem in our lives is not immigration, gender politics, or environmental change, the greatest problem in our lives is that we have offended God and rebelled against Him. You can spend your entire life pouring your time, energy, and efforts into changing things on earth and still be cursed for all eternity. And if that sounds kind of harsh, listen to this, Paul says:

12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Now the funny thing here is I feel the need to be more careful in explaining this than Paul was in writing it. Because he's saying, the people telling you that you can have a better religious life by being circumcised ought to just emasculate themselves so they can't reproduce.

It sounds harsh, but if they're leading people astray from God, they're going to be under eternal judgment. Jesus specifically warned about the dangers of leading people astray.

So, turn away from all of that, turn away from all the stuff other people want you to add to your life, add to your list of concerns, add to the list of things you're working on or worried about, and turn toward Jesus.

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

In case you wonder what a normal, sane, life should look like – here it is. There is a God and this is what He says your life is all about – to know Him and then be good to others as you learn how good He is to you – to love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus came to set people free, to bring hope, healing, forgiveness, and salvation. To offer a fresh start and new beginning because we could never earn one on our own and because left to our own, we come up all kinds of other things to do – unnecessary rules to follow, or we run in the wrong direction or get worked up about the wrong stuff. We spend our limited lives the wrong way.

Do you believe that what Jesus has done for the Father and for you is sufficient? If so, you can move on. There's nothing for you to add, or do, or maintain. You are completely freed up from worrying about any of that – it's all taken care of. You will sin, but there is no need to offer another sacrifice or religious rule or ritual, you just look back on what He has already done. You confess, you repent, and you ask God for guidance and strength, just like you did the first time when you were saved.

And then you get up, and you get after it in life again. You live in liberty. And you ask: God where do you want me to love, where do you want me to serve, where do you want me to make a difference for You *in light of all the difference You're making in me?*

Do you know the answer to that question?

Once again, this is core Christian stuff – this is what the faith is all about – you've been called to liberty, and you're supposed to use it as an opportunity to love and serve others, to make the lives of other people better *because of the difference God is making in you.*

In some ways it would be easier if Christianity was all about things you could do and then know I'm good because it's done: wear this dress and make sure it's this long. Grow a beard like this. Wear this jewelry. Don't eat this food. Pray this prayer. Give me a checklist, something to follow.

But God says, no. You want something to follow, I'll give you Someone to follow – follow Jesus. Seek Him, follow Him, make yourself increasingly available to Him to have an impact on others – let His love for you be poured out as love for your neighbor.

I'm not sure exactly what that's going to look like for you, but I've got good news. Our world is full of darkness and demonic activity right now. Men and women are scheming, plotting and planning how to cause chaos and assert their control. People are plotting revenge and the virus is mutating. It's chaos out there. But we were made for this! None of this takes God by surprise. He knows what's happened, what's happening, and what happens next. There is no need to freak out or get worked up. There is no need to fear.

If anything, it's time to get up and get to work – God's work.

You're part of His plan – He's filling you with His love and His Spirit to be salt and light in the midst of the darkness. He's put you right where you are to make an impact for Him, to love others in His name. You are part of His plan to comfort, encourage, protect, strengthen, and even save people. So stand fast church, stand firm.

But be warned – others will try to persuade you, they will try to nudge you, or knock you off course. Stay focused on Jesus. Bring your concerns to Him. Tell Him what you're worried about, scared of, and angry about. And then ask Him to remind you of what is really true – that you're called to liberty – freedom from worrying about other stuff, freedom to trust that God knows and is taking care of things – freed from those burdens so you can make an impact in the lives of others in light of the impact Christ has made in yours.

Let's pray

Come back next week and we'll be encouraged even more as we see how God makes all this happen through the power of His Holy Spirit in our lives.