

Lesson 20 – Galatians 5:1-12

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Review/Introduction

Imagine that you are buying a big-ticket item. You do your research. You determine the right maker, right options, etc. And you dig into consumer reports looking for the most reliable model. But, when you go to buy it on Amazon (because we buy everything from Amazon), you click the “Add a Protection Plan”. You get an insurance policy. You trust the maker to make a good product, but only so far. You don’t fully trust the maker.

The same is true about faith in Christ. If you trust Christ for eternal life, but you add works/law, then you don’t fully trust Christ. And not “fully” trusting in Christ, not trusting Christ alone, is the same as not trusting Christ at all. Adding anything to Christ is the same as rejecting Christ. You will stand before God on the day of your death (should the Lord tarry) and you will be dismayed that Christ plus your effort was not enough to redeem you. This is the problem with the Galatians.

Paul is writing to the Galatian churches who are in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He is correcting the heresy of the Judaizers who are disturbing the Galatians with a different, distorted gospel, which is really not another since there is only one gospel of Christ.

Main Point of Galatians – Salvation is NOT by Good works, moral living, religious ritual or observance, heredity, or organizational membership, but by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!!!** All attempts to insert works as the means of salvation or sanctification are a perversion of the true gospel.

Chapters 1 and 2

Paul begins in chapters 1 and 2 by presenting the authentication of the gospel through the source (God) and its power to change lives (persecutor/murderer to preacher; slave of sin to slave of Christ). That same authentication is true for the follower of Christ today.

Chapters 3 and 4

Paul defends justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He shows the things that the Law cannot do: bring about Spirit baptism (3:1-5); justify (3:6-9); deal with its own curse (3:10-14); set aside the previous covenant of promise (3:15-18); eliminate cultural, ethnic, racial, past religious, financial, or social distinctions; and overcome slavery (4:8-11). But the Law does take us by the hand and lead us to Christ (3:23-29).

Paul then displayed his pastoral heart in fearing for the Galatians that they revert to slavery, to a works mindset and/or practice and begged them to not turn away from the pure gospel.

Finally, as a climax to his argument concerning justification by faith from the OT, Paul uses the Judaizer’s faulty hermeneutic against them when he looks at the account of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael to demonstrate how those justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone are children of promise, children of the free woman and not children of slavery.

Today, we begin Chapter 5, the practical application of justification by faith. Having nailed down his argument for freedom in Christ through justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, Paul looks to the practical application of that freedom. Paul starts with an appeal to the true believers and a confrontation to those who would be considering reverting to a mindset and lifestyle of works righteousness.

Practical Application of Justification – Standing Firm in Liberty (5:1-12)

1. The command (5:1)

¹It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (NASB95)

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

As we work our way down through this section, it is important in this section to note the pronouns Paul is using.

v1 – “us” where Paul and the Galatian believers have been set free in Christ.

v2-4 – “you” where Paul directs his comments to the Judaizers and vacillating Galatians.

v5 – “we” where Paul returns to himself and the redeemed at Galatia.

v7 – “you” where Paul looks again to the non-yet-grace-abandoning Galatians.

Paul just finished condemning the Judaizers through allegorically explaining the account of Abraham and Sarah. Those who are children of promise or children of the free woman have been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Those who are children of the flesh or children of the slave woman trust in the law (works) for salvation.

Before surrendering your life to Christ, you were a slave to sin, a slave to a works-based mentality, and a slave to trusting something else for salvation than the promises of the one true God. Christ set you free from all of that slavery. In fact, that is one of the reasons God chose you from the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3-5).

“It was for freedom” that Christ set us free. “Freedom” means unfettered and describes the state of being free and stands in opposition to slavery or bondage. The word was used in a formal ceremony in which literal slaves were set free never to be enslaved again. A poignant picture given that the Judaizers were seeking to enslave the Galatians again. Paul already addressed this goal of the Judaizers.

⁴But *it was* because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. (Galatians 2:4)

Jesus sets free from sin those that surrender their life to Him. Not just free, but free indeed.

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:34-36)

Since Christ died to set us free, therefore we must act. “Keep standing firm” figuratively means to stand firm in faith, to be constant, to persevere, to remain steadfast.

¹³Be on the alert, **stand firm in the faith**, act like men, be strong. (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Its usage here calls for the Galatians (and us) to make standing firm their lifestyle, their daily habitual practice. It is also an imperative, a command.

❖ **Are you standing firm in grace?**

We must “stand firm” but Paul also commands the Galatians to “and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery”. Do not allow yourself to become entangled or ensnared in a yoke of slavery. This takes effort at walking in the Spirit and a mind saturated with the word of God.

❖ **Are you proactively seeking to not become entangled in a yoke of slavery?**

2. The danger of embracing law/works (5:2-4)

²Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. ⁴You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (NASB95)

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. (ESV)

Paul starts by grabbing the Galatians’ attention. “Behold I, Paul, say to you” means listen, pay attention. Paul is the apostle who the Lord used to bring the true gospel to you; the one who received the gospel directly from the Lord Jesus; the one who the Lord changed from persecutor to preacher. In contrast to “whoever he is” (v10), I Paul, tell you the truth.

❖ **When you read the Bible, do you listen, pay attention?**

What other organizations add works to Christ? Look at these statements.

Canon 9: If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.

Canon 24: If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.

Canon 27: If anyone says that there is no mortal sin except that of unbelief, or that grace once received is not lost through any other sin however grievous and enormous except by that of unbelief, let him be anathema.

Canon 30: If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.

Canon 33: If anyone says that the Catholic doctrine of justification as set forth by the holy council in the present decree, derogates in some respect from the glory of God or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and does not rather illustrate the truth of our faith and no less the glory of God and of Christ Jesus, let him be anathema."

These are from the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church's response to the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church still maintains these today.

❖ **Are you adding anything to Christ?**

The usage of "if you receive circumcision" shows that the Galatians had yet not allowed themselves to be circumcised. For a Gentile, receiving circumcision was a testimony that they had made a choice to come under the law. They had made a choice to either reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone or in their errant thinking they thought that they could add works to Christ.

In either case, "Christ will be of no benefit". Christ is of absolutely no value to the one who receives circumcision as a sign of coming under the law.

Paul restates this point from a different perspective in v3. "I testify" means to make a strong, solemn, serious declaration. This is like a formal declaration under oath in a court of law.

If you reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and trust in law or works (in the Galatians case, circumcision), then you are under obligation to keep all of the law. "Obligation" means to be a debtor. If you think you need keep the law (or work your way to heaven), then you have a debt to keep all the law. James spoke to this:

¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. (James 2:10)

❖ **How difficult would it be to keep the whole law?**

When looking at verse 4, we need to understand something first. It is important to apply the Biblical interpretation principle of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. Since the Bible is the Word of God and God cannot lie or contradict Himself (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), then one passage will never contradict another.

Based on this interpretive principle, we know that verse 4 cannot mean that a true believer can lose their salvation. A true believer cannot lose their salvation for the Scriptures declare that nothing can separate the believer from Christ. All true believers once saved are kept by God's power and are always saved, they are never separated from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Romans 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24).

This doctrine is called the “Perseverance of the Saints” or “Eternal Security” and we often say, “Once saved, always saved”.

²⁴“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **has eternal life**, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (John 5:24)

³⁷“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹“This is the will of Him who sent Me, **that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing**, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:37-39)

²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and **they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.** ²⁹“**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.** (John 10:28-29)

¹Therefore there is now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** (Rom 8:1)

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)

⁵who are **protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:5)

❖ Are you persevering?

So, it seems best to understand verse 4 as Paul talking about people who were never true believers to begin with. By receiving circumcision or transferring what they once thought was true saving faith from Christ alone to Christ plus works, these people demonstrate that they were never believers to begin with.

¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19)

Verse 4 is what happens to supposed believers (or the hypothetical Galatians) who profess allegiance to Christ, but who are demonstrated unregenerate when they dedicate themselves to salvation by Christ plus works.

This also serves as a stringent warning to those who might be entertaining something other than justification by grace alone through faith along in Christ alone. If you change your heart and trust works then you are “severed from Christ” and “have fallen from grace”. You are not justified and are bound for hell.

❖ Are you terrified to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31)?

3. Faith over Law (5:5-6)

⁵For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. (NASB95)

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. (ESV)

“We” here is emphatic; we Christians. In contrast to the ones who received circumcision, abandoned justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and have been severed from Christ and fallen from grace, “we” have been born again by the Spirit by faith. No one is seeking works salvation by the Spirit.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

True believers are “waiting for the hope of righteousness”. “Waiting” means waiting in great anticipation but with patience (eagerly waiting – ESV and LSB). Its usage indicates that this eagerly waiting is the believer’s continual mindset. In Paul’s usage, the word refers to believers waiting eagerly for the return of Christ.

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the anxious longing of the creation **waits eagerly** for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:18-19)

²³And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting eagerly** for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we **wait eagerly** for it. (Romans 8:23-25)

⁷so that you are not lacking in any gift, **awaiting eagerly** the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:7-8)

²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we **eagerly wait** for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (Philippians 3:20)

²⁸so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to* sin, to those who **eagerly await** Him. (Hebrews 9:28)

❖ Are you eagerly waiting for Christ?

With that understanding, “eagerly awaiting” for the “hope of righteousness” refers to the complete and perfect righteousness in glory. We long for heaven. We long to be perfectly free from sin.

❖ Do you long for sanctification?

For those that are truly in Christ Jesus by grace alone through faith alone, religious ceremony (circumcision or uncircumcision) means nothing. The external means nothing. Works done in the flesh mean nothing.

But what does matter is “faith through love working” (literal Greek). What matters is that saving faith has placed you into Christ and that saving faith is demonstrated in works done out of gratitude and because of regeneration with a motivation of love for the Savior.

The Greek for “working” is where we get “energetic”. It means to work effectively to cause something to happen. Paul often uses it to describe God’s power that works energetically, effectively, and efficiently and produces results.

⁵So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and **works** miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:5)

Yes, we “work” because true saving faith results in works, but God is also working.

Those that have been made new in Christ are such because they have exercised the gift of true saving faith. True saving faith is a living faith; it exhibits fruit in keeping with repentance; it is a faith that works; it is a faith that demonstrates itself true; it is a faith that is progressing in sanctification.

¹⁷Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

⁶For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

True saving faith demonstrates that it is a real, living faith. Conversely, a non-working, non-fruit producing, spurious faith is a dead faith. Genuine faith cannot fail to bring forth works.

¹⁴What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? ¹⁷Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. ¹⁸But someone may *well* say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” ¹⁹You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. ²⁰But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ... ²⁶For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:14-26)

❖ Does your faith work?

But faith works out of love. Faith is not working to gain glory; glory is already given as a gift. Faith is working out of a motivation of love.

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸and **though you have not seen Him, you love Him**, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:6-9)

¹⁵"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (John 14:15)

❖ **How is your love for Christ demonstrated?**

4. The confrontation (5:7-12)

⁷You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion *did* not *come* from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*. ¹⁰I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. ¹¹But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. ¹²I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves. (NASB95)

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! (ESV)

Paul now confronts the non-yet-grace-abandoning Galatians and in the process describes the character of the false teachers.

He starts with stating that the Galatians “were running well”. It isn’t enough to start well, we must also finish well. True saving faith takes us to the end, it perseveres.

The movement away from running well does not come from God. It is not uncommon to see professing believers move away from the gospel and in doing so they attribute that “true” understanding to God Himself. Paul states clearly that false teachers hinder believers from obeying the truth. God does not persuade you to move away from Scripture. That persuasion comes from false teachers.

❖ **In what ways are you persuaded to move away from Scripture?**

Paul uses a classic Jewish metaphor to describe the corrupting influence of the Judaizers (or any other teaching that elevates human/demonic thought above God's word). Any little bit of corrupting influence will soon corrupt the entire body.

❖ **What corrupting influences have you believed?**

Paul encourages the Galatians to return to a firm commitment to justification by grace alone in faith alone in Christ alone. There is no other view than the biblical view that we must adopt. The false teacher(s) will bear his judgment. Judgment is coming on false teachers; a judgment that cannot be out run.

Paul makes it clear that there is a grand difference between him and the Judaizers; between salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and Christ plus anything. That difference is demonstrated by the false teachers persecuting Paul. False teachers persecute preachers of the truth (4:29).

Paul could have stopped the persecution by agreeing with the distorted gospel of the Judaizers. By doing so he would "abolish" or "reduce to inactivity" the cross.

²²For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

❖ **By your words or life do you "reduce to inactivity" the cross of Christ?**

The word for "mutilate" was used to describe "sacred castration" which was a practice of pagan cults in the Galatian region. The Galatian Gentiles would have known this well. Paul's thought here is that if the cutting of circumcision makes you righteous, go all the way. Then this would put you out of the congregation (from a Jewish mindset).

¹"No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 23:1)

Paul places an exclamation point on his description of false teachers. Legalism, a perversion of the true gospel is no small thing.

❖ **How serious do you take a perversion of the Scriptures?**

Summary

The Galatians were in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Paul calls the Galatians and us to stand firm in the true gospel and to not be subject to the yoke of legalism.

Additional Study

1. Read Galatians through in one sitting?
2. Consider what legalistic tendencies you have in your life (e.g., do not handle, do not taste, do not touch – Colossians 2:21)?
3. What demonstrations of working faith do you see in your life? How might you increase?
4. Are you allowing any teaching to “hinder you from obeying the truth”?