

Liberty in Christ
Galatians 5:1-6
September 23, 2012

After studying the book of Hebrews and the book of Galatians, I doubt that any of us will ever be tempted to adopt the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism as a way of salvation. I don't know that I have ever seen any of you bringing your animal sacrifices to church, so I presume that you are well aware that we now serve Christ under a different administration. As the book of Hebrews taught us, there is a new priest in town and his name is Jesus.

Judaism was designed to be a pre-Christ administration. It was God's administration of things in the Jewish nation until the seed should come. And when you study the rituals and the types under this Jewish economy, you find that Judaism was quite a beautiful picture of Christ. Everything pictured Him. And as long as Judaism was seen in its proper sense as the forerunner of Christ, then it was a true and appropriate religion for the time.

But the serious error of many of the Jews was that they rejected the very Christ that Judaism prefigured. And instead of bowing to the coming Savior, they bowed to their religion. They worshipped their tabernacle. They worshipped their priests. They worshipped the altar. They worshipped their ceremonies. But without Christ it was an empty religion of works.

When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees he spoke of their spiritual emptiness in the inward parts.

Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Matthew 23:25-27

This adherence to the outward formalities of Judaism was typical of the nation throughout its history. And it is typical of mankind in general. Man would love to be saved from his sin by a religion. But there is not a ceremony in all the world that will save a man. There is not a tabernacle or a temple where a man can go to be saved. There is not a feast day known to man that would save you from sins.

There is only one way to salvation and that is through a person. You cannot be saved without a relationship to Jesus Christ. Religion does not get you to heaven, but Jesus does. That is why in one way Christianity is so simple. It is just a matter of loving Him. When they asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, he said,

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Matthew 22:37

But the Jews loved their religion. They loved seeing their priests dressed up in their beautiful garments. They loved watching the priests go about their business in the tabernacle and in the temple. And they felt so secure in their religion. But it was all empty religion without Christ.

When Jesus finally came in the fullness of time, the message was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and do not continue in Judaism." This is the message of Hebrews and this is the message of Galatians. You see,

God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law . . .

Galatians 4:4,5

That is, Jesus came to gloriously take Israel out from under that old religion called Judaism. Paul describes that old religion as a schoolmaster, as a tutor and a governor. The law served as prison bars that them kept shut in to all the requirements of the Law. Judaism put the people in bondage and they were enslaved to all of those rituals and ceremonies. But in the fullness of time, Jesus came to redeem them that were under the Law.

That brings us to our text for this morning which says,

Stand Fast

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Galatians 5:1

Now there are many different opinions as to what it means to have liberty in Christ. But, in this context there is a very narrow and simple meaning. Paul is hammering the same old message home to the Galatian converts. He is telling them not to return to Judaism. He says, "Stand fast."

Example: When my wife and I went to Disney World recently, we had to change flights in Atlanta. And we had to take the bullet train to the gate where our next flight would depart. And when you get on this train, there are no seats. You just stand there. And when the train takes off, it takes off with a jerk. And the first time I rode it I almost ended up lying in the floor. So, you learn to brace yourself and to hold on to the pole or the straps hanging above.

And Paul says, "Stand fast." Brace yourself and hold on. And don't let the Judaizers pull you out of your liberty. Remember that the Jewish teachers had come down from Jerusalem and they were trying to bring the Galatians under the Law. Specifically, they were telling the Galatians that they at least had to be circumcised to be saved. And they were really trying to bring the Galatians into that old religion called Judaism.

And Paul tells the Galatians, "Stand fast." Spread your feet apart a little. Brace yourself. Hold on, and don't be moved.

You know, we pride ourselves here in our country as being the land of the free. And we have gone to war many times to preserve our freedom. And this word translated "stand fast" carries with it the idea of an aggressive perseverance in defense of our spiritual freedom. We are to vigilantly protect the freedom that we have in the gospel. We are not to let anyone move us from the sheer grace of Christ. We must not let anyone convince us that our salvation hinges on anything other than His finished

work. It is His work that saves us. His work will always save us. And it is our duty to stand fast against the false doctrine of this world that tells us that we must do something.

Now Paul says, “Stand fast therefore. Paul says “therefore” because he has just shown in Galatians 3 and 4 that the Old Covenant is not the preferred covenant. The preferred Covenant is the Abrahamic Covenant. The preferred message is the gospel that was spoken to Abraham. The message that saves is the message of Jesus Christ. “Abraham, you will have a seed, and through Him all nations of the earth will be blessed.” And Paul spent two chapters contrasting the everlasting covenant spoken to Abraham against the temporary covenant that was spoken to Moses. And the undeniable message of Paul is that the Old Covenant was not a saving covenant, it was a cursing covenant. It was not a permanent fixture, but was temporary. It was not a covenant to be clung to as the final word from God, but it was a covenant from which even Israel needed redemption.

And so, given the weak nature of that Old Covenant of works and the vast superiority of the Covenant of Grace given to Abraham, Paul says, “Therefore, stand fast.”

We Have Liberty in Christ

Paul says that the Galatians are to,

Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

The first and primary meaning of this verse is that Christians are free from the Law of Moses. This is the message of Galatians and this message is summarized in this verse. Paul is concluding his letter to the Galatians and he is stating his theme in the simplest terms. He is saying, “You are free from that old form of religion. You are free from the rituals and the ceremonies. You are free from those old, human priests. You are free from all the types that prefigured Christ. You are free from the temple services. You are free from that old city of Jerusalem.” This is what it means in the last half of the verse when it says,

And be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Freedom, in this context is having the yoke of bondage removed from their necks. And when the chains of that old religion are removed, there is freedom indeed.

Now, of course, as to the Gentile Galatians, they were never under that old system. But the Jewish teachers were telling them that they must be under it to be saved. And Paul says, "No, no. You are free from that old administration."

Freedom from the Mosaic Law was the goal of Christ

Notice that it says,

Christ hath made us free.

It is interesting to me that Christ came for the purpose of removing the yoke of bondage. He came to remove Judaism, not to establish it. He came to set His own people free from it. He certainly didn't come to validate Judaism and to set up a kingdom and force the Gentiles to be under it. Rather, he came for the exact opposite purpose. He came to set us free from it. He set the Jews free from it and He abolished it so that Gentiles are not under it.

There are those who would suggest that Jesus came for the purpose of validating Judaism; that he came to set up a Jewish kingdom; that he was going to be their King and he was going to set up shop in Jerusalem and Judaism would continue to reign if only they had accepted him.

No. Jesus came to redeem them that were under the Law. (Gal.4:5) Jesus came to remove that old yoke of bondage called Judaism. Jesus came to die for sinners and to give them freedom. Jesus came to give the gospel to all nations. And so it says,

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. And be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Continuing in Judaism Makes Christ of no Effect

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

This is one of the great principles of the gospel. It is all Christ or it is not Christ at all. We are not joint operatives with Christ in the work of salvation. It is all the work of Christ. Jesus Christ has done it all from beginning to end. Jesus has painted a beautiful picture called redemption and we don't pick up a brush and help him paint. Salvation is his work and his alone and the moment we claim that it is partially our work is the moment that we have abandoned the concept of grace.

Paul tells the Galatians that if they are circumcised that Christ will profit them nothing. Now we are not talking about circumcision as a cultural act or a medical procedure, but we are talking about circumcision as a religious act. We are talking about circumcision as a means of salvation. This is how circumcision had come to be viewed in Israel. They viewed circumcision as a ritual that secured their acceptance with God. Circumcision became associated with the Mosaic Law itself. The Jews were the "Circumcision" and the Gentiles were the "Uncircumcision." So circumcision was identified with law keeping. It was one of the fundamental requirements of the Law. It was an essential requirement of Judaism. And needless to say, they thought circumcision saved them.

And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Acts 15:1

But look what Paul says.

If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

Galatians 5:2

Principles Related to Law and Grace

I. Law and grace are mutually exclusive concepts. Either a person is saved by the keeping of the Law or he is saved by grace. It is one or the other. This is what Paul meant when he

said, "If you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."

Example: One of these days we will all seek entrance into that heavenly city. And none of us will deserve to enter in on our own merit. But the key question will be, "What were you trusting?" And some will say, "I was a pretty good person." And it will be obvious that they were trusting their own righteousness. And they may have been a pretty good person compared to others, but they did not measure up to God's holy standard. Others will say, "I belonged to this or that religion. I was a Jew or I was a Jehovah's Witness. I was a Mormon." Some will even say, "I was a Baptist," and Jesus will inform them that it is not enough to belong to a religious organization. Some will say, "I was circumcised." Others will say, "I was baptized." And God will say, "If you trusted in these things, then Christ shall profit you nothing."

There is one thing that we must trust in and that is Christ himself. We must cast all of our hope in Him. It is all or nothing.

Example: There was a preacher who was approached by an elderly couple who wanted to be baptized. And he went to visit with them about the matter and he asked them why they wanted to be baptized. And the husband said, "Well, you see, my Wife and I are getting up in years and we are getting all of our affairs in order. And we want to make sure that we are going to heaven, but we haven't been baptized. We thought that we would not leave any stone unturned and so we would like your church to baptize us."

Now in this example, they were taking out an insurance policy. In effect they were saying, we are not sure what it is that will get us to heaven and certainly we are not trusting Christ wholly, so we are doing everything we know to do in hopes that it will get us there.

And Paul says in such a case that "Christ shall profit you nothing."

It seems to me that the Galatian converts looked at circumcision in a similar light. They viewed it as a ritualistic act

that would somehow contribute to their salvation. And Paul says, "Christ shall profit you nothing."

My hope for us here is that we will never place hope in anything whatsoever besides Jesus Christ. We must lay hold of Him and Him alone. Our salvation hinges on Him and nothing else. There is nothing else to be done to insure our salvation. Either His work is good enough or it is not. Either we are raised up in Him or we are not. Either we are seated with Him in the heavenly places or we are not. And if we are not, then we might as well all go home because there is no hope for us other than Christ. Whatever it is besides Christ that you are trusting in this morning, I would urge you to give it up because if you cling to something other than Christ, then Christ will profit you nothing.

2. The Law requires perfect compliance.

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

Galatians 5:3

You see, these Galatians were making a fatal mistake. They thought that they could pick and choose which requirements of the Mosaic Law they would obey. They said, "Ah, circumcision is doable. We think we can do that. It is a little painful for a few days, but then we will be saved forever." They forgot about all the other requirements of the Law. They forgot about all the other ceremonies and rituals. They didn't intend to take on all of that. They said, "Hey, we will just take out a little insurance policy, just in case circumcision will get us to heaven."

And not only did they forget most of the other ceremonies of the Law, but also they forgot about the spiritual requirements of the Law. What about the moral requirements of the Law. What about the Ten Commandments?

And Paul says, "If you are putting your faith in one requirement of the Law, circumcision, then remember, you must obey it all. This is the nature of the Law. It requires obedience and it requires perfect obedience and it requires total obedience.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in

all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.
Galatians 3:10

This is the problem with every person who wants to be justified by doing good. He always picks and chooses. Perhaps he chooses baptism as his way of salvation because this is relatively easy. But he forgets that he also must love God with all his heart and love his neighbor as himself. He forgets that he must not commit adultery and must not steal. But he thinks baptism is a magic potion that atones for his sins.

So, the point is that the Law requires perfect obedience in every point. And if you obey 90 percent of the Law you don't get to enjoy 90 percent of heaven. If you obey 90 percent of the Law, you get 100 percent of hell.

3. A legalistic attitude excludes you from the grace of God.

There is only one way for a man to be saved and that is by the grace of God.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

This is the first building block of the doctrine of salvation. This is the ABC's. This is theology suitable for the first grade. Salvation is by grace.

The ladies have been learning in Ephesians that one of the primary reasons behind salvation is that God wants to demonstrate how gracious He is.

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:5-7

Now if God wants to demonstrate His grace, then how offensive is it when we say, "No, it is not by grace, it is by

something I have done.” This is what the Galatians did when they sought to be justified by circumcision. And Paul says,

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Galatians 5:4

Now when it says that you are fallen from grace it doesn't mean that you were saved and then you became lost. The Scriptures teach that salvation is a work of God and God can never fail in his work.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

The only way that salvation could be lost is if salvation were a work of man. If the work of man secures salvation, then I suppose you could float in and out of salvation depending on the quality of your work from day to day. But, salvation is thoroughly and completely a work of God from beginning to end and God works it in us according to His great power. And His work can never fail and it cannot be undone.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.

Jude 24

But Paul says in verse 4 that if you seek to be justified by the law you are fallen from grace. This clearly means that you have chosen a legal way of salvation rather than a grace way. You were not saved at all. Rather, your heart was seeking to be justified by the law. Your old wicked heart wants to prove that you are righteous after all. It wants to prove that you are not fallen, that you are worthy and that God should accept you on your own merit. Therefore, you are seeking to be justified by the law.

You have come to a road that diverges. One road is called grace and the other is called law. And you looked at the

street signs and you chose the one that said law. And there you went. You set out down the road of the law hoping to get to heaven. You didn't take the road that said grace, but you took the road that said law. You have made a deadly turn and you have left the road of grace behind. And Paul says, "Ye have fallen from grace." Now you were never on the road of grace because your self-righteous heart was always seeking that street named law. You never had any intent to give God the glory. You never recognized your own helplessness. You never recognized your need for Him. You were just seeking some way to demonstrate your own righteousness. So, you took the road of the law and left grace miles behind. Self-righteousness and legalism will exclude you from the grace of God.

Salvation is found in an expectation of righteousness by faith.

For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

We as Christians are not engaged in a campaign in this life to prove how wonderful we are. We are not engaged in an effort to gain God's acceptance by law keeping. We have been set free from all of that. We are engaged in a love affair with Jesus who has showered his grace upon us. But we are not engaged in an effort to prove our own worth.

What we are doing is looking for a righteousness which is to come. It says in verse five that we wait for it. (apekdechomai) This means that we look for it with full expectation. You see, we are not trying to prove to God how righteous we are presently, but we are looking up into the heavens waiting expectantly for the righteousness which he will give us in that day.

I know that every one of us has had a battle with sin during this life. But there is coming a day when Jesus will appear in the heavens and he is going to bring with him a righteousness that he is going to give to us. And when he glorifies us he will give it to us. And that old sin nature that we inherited from Adam will be a thing of the past. And we will have the righteousness of Christ imparted to us. What a glorious day that will be when we will no longer have any inclination to sin. There will be no more lusting after the things of this world. There will be no more selfish

desires. But we will have the righteousness of Christ imparted to us through the Spirit.

For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

I want you to notice that we are not seeking righteousness by the law. We are not seeking to be justified by law keeping. But we are seeking righteousness by faith. We are standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. We are holding onto to Him and forsaking everything else. We are simply believing in Him for our righteousness which is to come.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 5:6

Circumcision is a completely irrelevant matter to God. What God is looking for is faith, not just an intellectual faith, but a faith that works. We may study the book of James soon and we will find that the only real kind of faith is a faith that works. And it is a faith that works by love.

Under the law, a man worked by compulsion. The law demanded that a man act a certain way. But under God's grace, a man works by love. Out of sheer gratitude to God a man acts in such and such a way.

May we all let loose of our attempts to gain heaven by works and lay hold of the only thing that pleases God – a faith that worketh by love.