

**Galatians 5: 1-6**—<sup>1</sup>It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup>Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup>Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup>You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup>But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

- **J. Bligh:** “In the third main division, St. Paul turns his attention from the initial justification of the sinner by faith and baptism towards his final justification and admission to the Kingdom of God. The message of these last two chapters is that entry into the promised inheritance does not depend on faith alone but on works rendered possible by the Spirit of Christ given to believers in and through their faith.”<sup>1</sup>
- “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**

- The text begins with a clear and refreshing statement of Christ’s will for our lives.
  - Sometimes we get bogged down in a quandary about God’s will.
  - Often we worry about decisions which are simply not a great issue with God (where to go to school, what job to take, where to live, etc.).
    - We need to orient our lives on the clear statements of Scripture regarding God’s will.
  - And here is one: “For freedom Christ has set us free.”
  - God’s will for you is that you enjoy freedom.
  - **Piper:** “Where you go to school, what job you do, where you live, etc., are not nearly so crucial as whether you stand fast in freedom. If they were, the Bible would have commanded those things as clearly as it here commands freedom. But it doesn’t. So your enjoyment of freedom is much more important to God than many of the day-to-day decisions that fill us with so much concern.”<sup>2</sup>
  - A good test of your priorities in life would be whether you are as concerned about the command to enjoy your freedom as you are about other pressing decisions in your life.
    - Do you exercise as much diligence in prayer and study to stand fast in freedom as you do to decide about home, job, school, marriage partner?
  - This is the will of God for you: your freedom. Uncompromising, unrelenting, indomitable freedom.
  - Other than the glory of his own name, there is nothing he wills with more intensity than this: your freedom.

**Ills.:** Cleaning day at the Andersons<sup>3</sup>

- Saturdays are frequently “cleaning days,” at the Andersons. Sometimes Trish or I will simply

<sup>1</sup> J. Bligh, *Galatians* (London: St. Paul Publications, 1969), 411.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “Faith: The Link Between God’s Love for Us and Ours for Others,” April 1995, [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/910\\_Faith\\_The\\_Link\\_Between\\_Gods\\_Love\\_for\\_Us\\_and\\_Ours\\_for\\_Others/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/910_Faith_The_Link_Between_Gods_Love_for_Us_and_Ours_for_Others/).

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, “For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free,” May 1983, [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/395\\_For\\_Freedom\\_Christ\\_Has\\_Set\\_Us\\_Free/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/395_For_Freedom_Christ_Has_Set_Us_Free/).

- i) Make out a list for our boys and tell them, “Get these done by such and such time, or else!” Other times
- ii) I will tell them that I will join them and do the chores *with* them. I will try and make a game of it by, sometimes, making the list on the computer but putting all of the items on the list in “Wingdings” instead of normal font. Additionally, I insert things like “3) Pick up toys in rec-room. 4) Find Mommy and give her a hug. 5) Vacuum rec-room. 6) Do ten push-ups and then get a Diet Pepsi. Etc.” But more than inserting odd things, is that I will get down with them and actually do the work with them. It becomes much more fun for them. When I do this they tend to work much more quickly and stay much more focused, all the while getting the exact same tasks done.
- The boys experience is very different in each of those cases. In the first case, they are not really free. They go about their work as though a yoke of slavery were on their back and a heavy frog was on their soul. They are not acting in freedom because the tasks are oppressive and irritate them.
- But they are not acting in freedom because the task is oppressive and it irritates and discourages them.
- But in the second case they are free. They do better work without irritation. They have freedom and joy and feel no oppressive burden on their back. They still know that their father will discipline for disobedience, but that is not a heavy yoke because they are quite happy to clean. What’s the difference? Their father was helping them—making even the process of household chores enjoyable.
- There is a clue here for how we can live in freedom and obey Galatians 5:1. The key to freedom is whether we have to do the work ourselves to escape punishment, or whether our Father comes down to be with us and help us.
  - I think this will be evident from Galatians 5:2–5.
    - Verses 2, 3, and 4 each portray a way to stay under a yoke of slavery. So these verses function as warnings against slavery.

**<sup>2</sup>Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup>Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup>You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.**

- A reader who is not aware of all that has gone before in Galatians might say, “O, that’s easy. Paul says circumcision is wrong and displeases God and non-circumcision is right and pleases God. So the point is: do what pleases God—avoid circumcision at all costs.”
  - However this kind of superficial reading makes non-circumcision into something just as dangerous as circumcision, namely, a work that you can use to earn things from God.
  - The point of verses 2 and 3 is not that circumcision in itself is wrong, but that any act is wrong that we do to bribe God for blessings.
    - Circumcision happened to be the foremost requirement of the Judaizers who were teaching the Galatians to work their way into God’s favor. Galatians 2:3–5
- Earlier Paul has said, “*We did not give into them for a moment that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*” That’s what Paul means in 5:1 by “stand fast and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” That is, do not let the Judaizers bewitch you into thinking that

circumcision or any other outward act of obedience can be offered to God as a benefit to him, which he must then reward with some payment.

- Look more closely at verse 2. “...**if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.**”
  - The problem with the Judaizers was that they wanted to cash in on Christ’s profit, but only by making investments with him from their own moral assets. It’s important that you see is taking place here.
  - Paul says that if you try to earn dividends from Christ from your own investment of circumcision or dietary rules or feast days, Christ will profit you nothing. Why? Because all the spiritual and physical benefits Christ gives are benefits that are paid from his own investment at Calvary. So great are the dividends (infinite & endless), and they are available to all who...who what? Verse 2 says: Christ’s profits are not yours if you try to earn them with your own investments. Why? Because that dishonors Christ, nullifies grace (2:21), and removes the stumbling block of the cross (5:11).
  - So verse 2 teaches that *slavery* is when you reject Christ as the merciful benefactor who gives us freely a share in his endless profit. Slavery is when you choose to deal with him as a banker who needs *your* investment to produce dividends for his customers.
- **Beware The debtor’s ethic:** It comes packaged as a gratitude ethic and says things like: ‘God has done so much for you; now what will you do for Him?’<sup>4</sup>
  - “When our virtue—toward other people, or toward God—is born out of this sense of ‘paying back,’ we are in the grip of the debtor’s ethic...What’s gone wrong? It’s not wrong to feel gratitude when someone gives us a gift. The trouble starts with the impulse that now we *owe* a ‘gift’. What this feeling does is turn gifts into legal currency. Subtly the gift is no longer a gift but a business transaction.”<sup>5</sup>
  - In the debtor’s ethic the Christian life is pictured as an effort to pay back the debt we owe to God. Usually the concession is made that we can never fully pay it off. But ‘gratitude’ demands that we work at it. Good deeds and religious acts are the installment payments we make on the unending debt we own God. This debtor’s ethic often lies, perhaps unintentionally, beneath the words, ‘We should obey Christ out of gratitude.’”
- Gratitude will always degenerate into the debtor’s ethic if it only looks back on past grace and not forward as well to future grace...gratitude functions well as a motive only as it gives rise to faith. Gratitude says to faith, ‘Keep trusting your Father for more grace; I know He will supply. I have experienced it, and it was sweet.’<sup>6</sup>
- There are at least three reasons why this debtor’s ethic is misguided.
  - First, true gratitude is, indeed, a sense of joyful indebtedness. But as soon as this delight in another person’s generosity turns into a feeling that we must pay something back, what once was a free gift starts to become a business transaction. Genuine gratitude is not the feeling of having to pay back.

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Broadman Holman Publishers: Nashville, 2002), 34.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters: Multnomah, 1995), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, 38.

- The second reason the gratitude ethic is wrong is that it diminishes the cross of Christ; it is an insult to the infinite value of Christ and his work. Yes, all the good things that come to us must be paid for, but the gospel is that they have already been paid for by someone else. Therefore, we must never try to relate to God as a debtor trying to pay back a debt,
    - *Ills.* Perry Mason helping an old lady that wanted to repay him for his services. First \$5.00 then after the case was finally won she paid him \$20.
  - The third reason why the gratitude ethic is wrong is that it tends to think of God's work for us as only in the past. It says, God *has* done so much for me, now I will do for him. But this overlooks the fact that God's work for us is past, present, and future, *and* it is not only work *for* us but *in* us. The gratitude ethic overlooks the never-ending work of grace in our lives. We can't even begin to pay God back because the slightest movement toward him is a new gift from him.
- Now verse 4 says the same thing as verses 2 and 3
  - If you take upon yourself the yoke of the law and aim to use it to achieve your own righteousness before God, you have submitted to a yoke of slavery
  - Slavery is what happens when you fall away from the power of grace. The key to freedom is to keep depending on grace.
  - It is conceivable that my children might pout and say, "We don't want your help. We'll pick up the blocks ourselves. We'll show you what we can do. We'll show you that we don't need your charity." If they continued in that proud way, they'll fall from grace and I will be of no advantage to them. This is opting for legalistic slavery over grace. But the human side of freedom is faith.
    - 1) One side is the sovereign, gracious work of God in us and for us day by day—Daddy coming down onto the floor and turning obedience into fun.
    - 2) The other side is our faith—a life of joyful reliance on what God does for us, not what we can do for God
  - **George:** "The energizing principle of Christian ethics, then, is union with Christ and life in the Spirit. Justification by faith is not a morally barren doctrine. We are justified by faith, a faith that is active in love leading to holiness. Justification is the presupposition of the Christian life."<sup>7</sup>
  - **Luther:** "Having been justified by grace, we then do good works, yes, Christ himself does all in us."<sup>8</sup>
  - "The Christian stands in the tension of a double reality. Basically freed from sin, redeemed, and reconciled...he is actually at war with sin, threatened, attacked and placed in jeopardy by it."<sup>9</sup>

**<sup>5</sup>But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."**

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture in The New American Commentary* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 352.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1964), 34:111.

<sup>9</sup> W. Grundmann, "ámaptavo," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. G. Kittel & G. Friedrich, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1.313.

- What makes verse 6 so remarkable is that the faith that connects us with Jesus and receives his justification is “faith that works through love.”
  - In other words it is a kind of faith that proves its reality by producing love. Love doesn’t merit our salvation. Love proves the reality of the faith that receives the salvation.
- **John Calvin**, “Thus it appears how true it is that we are justified not without, and yet not by works.”<sup>10</sup>
- **Walter R. Martin** “We must understand, then, that faith and works can never in themselves (or together, for that matter) save anyone. It is sovereign grace *alone* that forms the basis for eternal salvation. Good works “complete” the testimony of faith by witnessing to the fact of that faith’s existence; they serve to justify us before *men*, who cannot *see* the grace or the faith that has already justified us before God.”<sup>11</sup>
- **Luther**: “It is impossible, indeed, to separate works from faith, just as it is impossible to separate heat and light from fire.”<sup>12</sup>
- The Christian life is supposed to be lived every day in the same way that it began. In the Christian life you don’t graduate from Spirit to flesh or from faith to works. The Christian life begins with faith and the Holy Spirit; and it is lived by faith and by the Spirit. Faith is the first grade of the Christian life and it is the graduate school of the Christian life. And the Holy Spirit is the teacher and the power at every level. We never graduate to something else.
- So if you ask, what can I do to become a more loving person this afternoon, the first answer is have the Holy Spirit fill your life with his power and fruit.
- But faith in what? What practically do I do? Paul says, it is a hearing with faith. That means there is a message that you need to hear and believe. There is a word that you need to hear with faith.
- Then make it your aim day and night to be filled with the fruit-bearing Holy Spirit.
- Filled day and night with the Word of God. Especially with powerful pictures of the love of Christ for you—like Christ crucified.

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<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., Henry Beveridge, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 2: 99 or III, XVI, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Martin, *Essential Christianity* (Gospel Light Publishing, 1985), p.73.

<sup>12</sup> John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 24.