

## Keep Living in Grace

### *Galatians 5:1-12*

Today we come to chapter 5 in Galatians. The passage that we are looking at marks a point of transition in this letter. After this passage, Paul will begin to address the charge that following his Gospel, without the constraints of the law, leads to sinful living. But in our passage today, Paul lays out his final case against legalism. The passage that we are looking at today, connects back to 4:31, where Paul said that we are "not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman." Out of that context, and really out of the whole argument that he has built against legalism over the past four chapters, Paul urges us to:

#### **I. Stand Firm in Grace (5:1-6)**

In 5:1, which is probably the key verse in the entire letter, Paul says,

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

Christ came set us free. This is the Gospel that Paul has been defending to the Galatians. We are free and because of this truth, Paul makes two appeals. He says, *keep standing firm* in the freedom that Christ gives. To stand firm in freedom is to stand firm in grace. Later Paul will say that if you turn to the law you've fallen from grace. So, stand firm in grace. And secondly, he says, *do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery*. Taking on a yoke was not necessarily a bad thing. Jesus, himself, urged his followers to take His yoke upon themselves (Matt. 11:29). But the Jews of Paul's day urged people to take on the yoke of the law. That is a *yoke of slavery*.

Paul doesn't want them to go that route. He wants them to continue to live in grace, not legalism. To drive home his point, he goes on to give some sobering warnings about legalism.

In 5:2 he says:

<sup>2</sup> *Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.*

The false teachers in Galatia were trying to persuade the Galatians to be circumcised. The fact that Paul uses the word, *if*, shows that they had not yet gone this route. But they were considering it. And for them to receive circumcision would be say, "We are going to follow the Law as a system for our standing with God."

Circumcision had originally been given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant that God was making with His people (Gen. 17). It originally signified the gracious activity of God on behalf of man. But for the Jews of Paul's day they mostly associated it with Moses. For them, circumcision was not so much about a sign reminding them of God's gracious

activity on their behalf, rather it was a statement of one's intent to follow the Law of Moses as a way to be right with God.

If you go this route, Paul says, *Christ will be of no benefit to you*. To choose legalism is to relinquish grace as the principle by which one desires to be related to God. That's the first warning.

In verse 3, Paul gives another warning:

*<sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.*

If you want to choose the works of the law as the way to be right before God, then you are obligated to obey every part of it. You can't pick and choose the parts you will obey. You must obey it all. And that's impossible.

And then the most sobering warning is found in verse 4. Paul says:

*<sup>4</sup> You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*

When we hear this verse we naturally wonder if Paul is saying that we can lose our salvation. One of the things you have to do, to correctly understand any passage, but certainly difficult passages is to let Scripture interpret Scripture, because Scripture does not contradict itself. And so when we try to figure out the meaning of this verse, we need to see it in light of Paul's clear teaching elsewhere about salvation as well as the rest of Scripture. Elsewhere Paul says things like, nothing is able to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:31-39); he talks about how we are sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13) and how we've been adopted.

As well, Jesus said in John 10,

*<sup>27</sup> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> "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.*

I could go on and on and with verses that speak of the certainty of our salvation based completely on what God has done. And so, in light of clear and consistent teaching elsewhere, I don't believe Paul is talking about salvation here. And so what is he talking about?

Well, as you look at verse 4, who is it that Paul is addressing? He is talking to *you who are seeking to be justified by law*. He is talking to people who are trying to be made right before God on the basis of their own works of following the law. They haven't yet

gone all the way and received circumcision, but already, in their hearts, they are beginning to trust in their own efforts to be *justified* before God. To that person who has that approach to his spiritual life, he says, *You have been severed from Christ*. He says, *you have fallen from grace*. I believe Paul is talking about experiential grace here; grace for living, not the grace of salvation.

As I've shared before, even though I genuinely trusted Christ when I was a young boy, my basic approach to life for many years was trying really hard to be good enough - to do enough good things to please God. During this time, I was the one seeking to be justified by the works of the law and because of that I was cut off from the help that Christ wanted to give me. I had fallen from grace. I wasn't experiencing the resources of grace for living the Christian life. It was all up to me. I was cut off from this experiential grace because of my lack of knowledge. The Galatians didn't lack knowledge; Paul had taught them. But because of the persuasiveness of the Judiazers, they were tempted to turn to law as the way to do life with God. But if they chose to do so they would fall from experiential grace.

It is a strong warning for the Galatians and for us that we must not turn away from trust in Christ alone for our standing with God. We must never turn to the works of the law to try and accomplish a righteous standing before God.

Now, another reason that I believe verse 4 is speaking about grace for living is what Paul goes on to say in verse 5. He says:

*<sup>5</sup> For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.*

In contrast to those who are working to be justified by law, Paul says, *we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting*. We are waiting *for the hope of righteousness*. The *righteousness* that Paul talks about here is not the imputed righteousness that every believer has positionally through Christ, but it is the experiential righteousness that believers are to more and more grow into. The Galatians were being tempted to believe that the way to grow in righteousness was through the works of the law, but Paul says we don't work for it, we wait for it *through the Spirit, by faith*.

But waiting doesn't mean passivity. In verse 6, Paul says,

*<sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.*

For the person who is *in Christ*, whether it is the believing Jew, already circumcised, or the believing Gentile, not circumcised, the fact of, or the absence of circumcision means nothing. What means something is *faith working through love*. True faith will work itself out in genuine love for God and for others. This is the mark of one standing in grace - love. And love the fulfillment of all the commands. Love fulfills the requirements of right-

teousness. Following the law can never do so, because it does not give birth to love. And so, Paul urges us, stand firm in grace. That's how you do life with God.

If there is one thing that I hope you've gotten from this Galatian series is that the works of the law, you own self effort, is not how you do life with God. It's grace. When Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, he accomplished everything that is necessary for you to stand before God holy and righteous. When you trusted Him, His righteousness was applied to you. And so, you cannot do anything to make yourself more acceptable to God. And you cannot sin enough to lose your righteous standing before God. It is all about Christ and what He did for you; not about what you do. And so, if you are trusting your own good works for your standing with God - stop! You cannot contribute anything to what Christ has already done. So, stand in the freedom of what Christ accomplished for you. Stand firm in grace.

Now, in seeking to stand firm in grace, Paul wants us to know that we are not playing on a neutral playing field; there are grace-killers around. And so we need to:

## **II. Stay Aware of Grace-Killers (5:7-12)**

For the Galatians it was the Judiazers. For you it might be a family member. It might be someone you know in this or another church. It might be a parent or a friend. It could be a author you are reading or some other Bible teacher. We need to stay aware that there are grace-killers.

In the next six verses, Paul's argument becomes a number of loosely constructed comments as he draws his discussion on legalism to an end. But staying aware of grace-killers is the idea that ties them all together. He says, in verse 7:

<sup>7</sup> *You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?*

*Running* is one of the metaphors that Paul likes to use for the Christian life. They had been *running well*. They had been running in grace. But then someone *hindered* them. The image is of a runner cutting in on another runner and interfering with them. This is what happened to them. This hindrance was turning them from *obeying the truth*.

In verse 8, Paul calls this hindering a kind of persuasion. He says:

<sup>8</sup> *This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.*

The way the Judiazers had hindered the Galatians was by persuading them to turn to the Law. Apparently, the Judiazers had presented their message as being from God. But Paul says it *did not come from Him*. It has nothing to do with God.

And so it is dangerous and can spread. Verse 9:

<sup>9</sup> *A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.*

Leaven was often used as a metaphor for the corrupting influences of evil. This false teaching of the Judiazers was leaven. It was corrupting. And they need to reject it because it has the potential to leaven *the whole lump of dough*. It threatened all of the Galatian churches.

Ultimately, Paul has confidence in how this will all turn out. Verse 10:

*<sup>10</sup> I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.*

They were being disturbed. They were confronting grace-killers. But Paul believed that ultimately the Galatians would do the right thing. He believed that ultimately they will adopt the view that this persuasion was not from God and they will reject it.

In verse 11, Paul says:

*<sup>11</sup> But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.*

This is apparently a response to a false claim that Paul actually did teach circumcision, and that he simply withheld that teaching from the Galatians to earn their favor. But Paul's point is that he does not teach circumcision, because if he did he would not be persecuted by the Jews.

And then finally, Paul says:

*<sup>12</sup> Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.*

These are strong words, but Paul is so frustrated with the Judiazers. They were *troubling* the Galatians. They were disturbing them. They were hindering their faith. They were grace-killers.

There are grace-killers around. We need to stay aware of that fact. We need to resist their messages and stand firm in grace. Do you have any grace-killers in your life? In our day, grace-killers aren't going around explicitly saying that you need to follow the law of Moses in so many words. It's a little more subtle than that. But they do try to get you to conform to their standards and their beliefs and practices.

I want to list a few things grace-killers tend to do. As I go through this list, there are two ways to look at it. You can think about whether you have been letting anyone do this to you. But you can also ask yourself, "Do I do this to anyone?" Ok? Here we go:

First, grace-killers **give you their list of do's and don'ts**. They want you to do the things they do and avoid the things that they have determined are wrong. But the prob-

lem is that their list of do's and don'ts may not be biblical do's and don'ts, rather they come from their traditions and preferences. But they don't see that and in their mind, if you don't keep their list, then you are not a good Christian.

Second, they want to **apply God's particular leading in their lives to everyone else**. Maybe God has led them to develop particular convictions about movies, or clothing, or what kind of music they should listen to, or what kind of car they drive, or how to pursue God. All of this is great. They should develop their convictions. But the problem comes when they take how God has led them in these areas and try to apply it to everyone else. God does not lead everyone in the same way.

A third thing they do is probably the umbrella issue over many of these things I'm mentioning. They **have no room for gray areas**. Everything is either black or white - how you discipline your kids; how you handle your money; how you spend your free time; or how you \_\_\_\_\_. If you line up with them in these gray areas they can fellowship with you; but if you don't you're not a committed Christian. You are weak in your faith.

Fourth, they **expect you to line up with them on every theological issue**. This is really a specific application of no room for gray areas. For them there are simply no gray areas of theology. God has spoken clearly on many things. There are things that are black and white. But there are other things that God has been less clear about. These things are gray areas of theology - things like your beliefs about baptism, or how much does God predestine everything, or the age of the earth, or the best Bible translation. Grace-killers want you to believe like them in every matter of theology and they make full agreement the basis for fellowship.

Finally, they can **have a judgmental attitude**. If you don't believe and live and conform to their beliefs and practices; if you don't follow their do's and don'ts; if you don't line up like they do on the gray areas you will be judged. They might even cut off fellowship with you, because in their mind you are not a very committed Christian.

There will always be grace killers around who have a more restrictive approach or a different approach to the Christian life than you. And some of them will look at you and think that you are not as committed or as serious about your faith because of how you are living. And under this pressure, it is easy to begin to feel like, "Maybe I need to be more restrictive. Maybe I need to stop doing this or start doing that" when in fact you have perfect freedom in Christ to live how you are living. But you hear the comments and you feel the judgment of not being very committed and you begin to be tempted to stop living in your freedom.

In the face of all of this, hear Paul's words again:

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