

‘Freedom.’ (13)

We’re about to enter **Galatians 5** today in our sermon series where we find Paul is going to conclude his argument with the Judaizers that we’re saved by grace and not by some legal performance of the law. He’s going to talk a lot about freedom, especially being free in Christ.

I heard a story the other day about what happened in an American school classroom. Seemingly the 4th of July was coming up, and the nursery school teacher took the opportunity to tell her class about patriotism. She said, ‘We live in a great country, one of the things we should be happy about is that in this country, we are all free.’ One little boy came walking up to her from the back of the room, he stood with his hands on his hips and said, ‘I’m not free. I’m four.’

You see, in a way, that little boy is much like the Judaizers in Paul’s day, they didn’t understand what was being said. Paul’s own life was a testimony to the effectiveness of the grace of God in the life of the individual who is truly motivated by an appreciation of God’s salvation. Christians today who recognise the grace of God that is in their lives. Christians today who know that they are saved will always work with appreciation and thanksgiving in their lives because of that grace and salvation.

In other words, they work **because** of their salvation not **for** their salvation. Or as Paul says in **Romans 12:1** “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Paul doesn’t say, ‘offer your bodies as living sacrifices and then you will receive God’s mercy.’ No! he says, ‘because of God’s mercy, because of everything God has done, offer your bodies as living sacrifices.’

You see loved ones, the legalist is either trying to accomplish their salvation, or they’re trying to add to the grace of God. Their motivation is to try and keep up with the demands of law and keep them perfectly. But all that does is bring about doubt about their salvation because they know they can’t perfectly keep the law. And what Paul is going to share with us today, is the practical evidence of freedom in Christ being shown in our Christian behaviour.

Now please don’t misunderstand when I say, we’re free in Christ, I don’t mean that we’re free to sin. That’s what some Christians tried to do in the first century. **Jude 4** “For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

Peter warns us of the same thing in **1 Peter 2:16** “Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves.” These people totally misunderstood the concept of grace and went on to abuse the freedom they had. So, let me say it again, we don’t work in order **to earn** our salvation we work **because** of our salvation.

Galatians 5:1 “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.” Now Paul is very serious about the Galatians taking a bold stand for their salvation by grace. And he tells them they need to stop allowing anyone from distorting God’s grace which will ultimately turn them away from God’s grace.

And he sets forth a fundamental principle which only Christianity offers and that’s freedom. God’s grace through Jesus has set us free from the burden of trying to keep law perfectly in order to be right with God. **And aren’t you glad about that loved ones? Aren’t you glad that no one can be justified by works of the law?**

Jesus shared with us this very same principle in **John 8:34-36** “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Most people have seen the film **Braveheart** and heard the **William Wallace speech to prepare his men to fight against the English and he shouts out that famous one word, ‘freedom’**. Well loved ones, just before Jesus died on the cross, He said in **John 19:30** “It is finished.” That’s His way of saying, ‘freedom’. Freedom from the power of death, freedom from the power of sin, freedom from being justified by law. We’re free from the bondage of sin because we’re free from the bondage of justification by perfect law-keeping and meritorious works.

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that Christians are set free by being created in Christ to be new creatures.

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that Christians are set free in order to serve. We don't have to obey God but we choose to obey Him and obey Him freely.

Throughout their history, the Jews had on many occasions been in either the political or national bondage of some nation. They had gone into Assyrian bondage and Babylonian bondage. They were a possessed land by the Romans even while this letter was being written. And when Paul says, 'do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery' this would had been a very sensitive issue with them. He's asking them, 'listen, do you Gentile Christians want to be burdened with slavery the Jews had for many years? Paul says don't let these people intimidate you, don't let them make slaves of you like they are. All they'll do is get to you be circumcised, all they'll do is bind you to a law keeping kind of religion.

Galatians 5:2+3 "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law." Paul doesn't mix his words and tells them straight, if you allow yourself to be circumcised, your committing yourself to full obedience to the law. And more importantly Christ and the grace He offers will be worth nothing at all.

You see loved ones, legalism really does lead us away from the grace of God which in turn leads us away from salvation. And notice what Paul says, 'You will be obligated to obey the whole law'. These Judaizers were wanting to take part of the Old Testament law and part of the law of Christ in order to form a legal system of justification. And that one verse causes the **Seventh Day Adventists** and all those who practice **tithing** a great problem.

Romans 7:1-4 "Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Paul says you can't have it both ways, it's either law or grace. Loved ones, we don't have the privilege of choosing and selecting laws as we so desire. It is either grace plus law, or grace in and of itself with total dependence on God to save us as a result of our obedient response to His law. **James 2:9-11** "But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker."

Now I know this may sound a bit harsh but if Paul was serious about this, then we too should be serious about it. It's serious because we're dealing with someone's soul. It's serious because it really shows the hypocrisy of the legalists because they pick and choose which laws to keep.

A man sat down to supper with his family, saying grace, thanking God for the food, for the hands which prepared it, and for the source of all life. But during the meal he complained about the freshness of the bread, the bitterness of the coffee and the sharpness of the cheese. His young daughter questioned him, 'Dad, do you think God heard the grace today?' He answered confidently, 'Of course.' Then she asked, 'And do you think God heard what you said about the coffee, the cheese, and the bread?' Not so confidently, he answered, 'Why, yes, I believe so.'

The little girl concluded, 'Then which do you think God believed, Dad?' The man was suddenly aware that his mealtime prayer had become a thoughtless habit rather than an attentive and honest conversation with God. Remember what Jesus said to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees who were putting themselves in the position of the law giver, Moses?

Matthew 23:3+4 "So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

Jesus said that these teachers were putting heavy burdens on other people when they themselves can't carry them, that's what the Bible calls hypocrisy.

When Jesus is talking about giving to the needy, prayers and fasting in **Matthew 6:1-18**, he tells us not to be like the hypocrites. The word for ‘**hypocrites**’ in Greek is the word ‘**hupokrites**’ which basically means someone who is acting, someone who is pretending to be someone else. And Paul says that what these legalisers are, they are pretending to be law keepers when they aren’t.

And so, Paul continues and addresses those hypocrites and tells them in **Galatians 5:4-6** “**You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.**”

Paul says if you want to return to perfect law keeping, to be right with God, then you have been cut off from Christ. And when a person is cut off from Christ, they are cut off from the grace of Christ. Now for the life of me I can’t understand the doctrine of ‘**once saved always saved**’ especially in light of what Paul says here.

But let me ask you, **can you think of anyone in the Bible who was first to present the idea of once saved always saved?** When I think of that doctrine, my mind goes all the way back to Balaam. In **Numbers 23** we find the story where the Israelites were on their way to the Promised Land and the King of Moab, a man named Balak was getting nervous about them taking over his land. So, he went to a prophet named Balaam and asked him to curse Israel but he couldn’t because God wouldn’t let him. Three times Balak asked Balaam to curse the Israelites but all that God would let him do is bless the Israelites. So, Balaam came up with a plan, he suggested that the Israelite men get together with the Moabite woman.

Speaking about the Moabite women who were still living, Moses says in **Numbers 31:16** “**They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the LORD in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the LORD’s people.**” In other words, Balaam was saying to the Israelites, ‘**hey I tried three times to curse you guys but God wouldn’t let me, all I could do was bless you all. So, you guys must be so highly favoured with God, it doesn’t really matter what you do, just go ahead and marry these Moabite women, God won’t mind.**’

Loved ones, that’s the doctrine of once saved always saved. It doesn’t matter what you do, you can’t lose your salvation. And think about this, if once saved always saved is true, **then why are you here today? Why aren’t you down the pub getting drunk, sleeping with the woman next door and murdering your neighbour?** If once saved always saved is true then it doesn’t matter what you do because your saved regardless, you can’t lose your salvation.

But it’s not true and we know it’s not true because Paul clearly says that a person can ‘**fall from grace**’. Think about Peter’s words in **2 Peter 2:19-21** “**They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.**”

How can a person be ‘worse off at the end than they were at the beginning’ if they are saved anyway? I can’t fall from a ten-story block of flats, if I was never in the block on flats in the first place. Peter and Paul both agree that a person can be cut off from the grace of God, become lost and lose their salvation. In the context, Paul is saying that anyone who would turn the law of Christ into some kind of legalised religious system to keep right with God will be lost, not saved.

Paul has already mentioned this back in **Galatians 2:16** “**Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So, we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.**”

And so, Paul goes on and says, it’s through the Spirit, as opposed to performance of the flesh, that we wait for our final redemption to heaven. **Do you know why?** Paul says I’ll tell you why. **Galatians 4:6** “**The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**” Paul says that no amount of meritorious work of either deeds or law will account for one being righteous before God. What is necessary is a faith that works through love.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 “**We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

The work that we do is produced by faith, our labour is prompted by love. In other words, when we finally realise that our salvation is a free gift of grace from God, we'll quit trying to work for our salvation and start working because of our salvation. This spiritual growth that Paul is talking about comes from the heart, not from the outside with a bunch of rules and regulations to keep us in check.

Now before we finish I think it's important to elaborate a little on what we're talking about, when we're talking about works. Because I've lost count of the amount of people who try to convince me that baptism for example is a work. In the religious world today, you would think that the word 'work' is a dirty word which should never be used because it implies we're working for our salvation. But the word 'work' in the Bible simply refers to something that takes effort.

And did you know that faith is a work? Jesus Himself said in [John 6:29](#) "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." And like faith did you know that baptism is a work? [Colossians 2:11+12](#) "In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Now notice this, when it comes to faith and baptism, whose work is it? It's God's work, not man's.

Now remember what happened on the day of Pentecost. Peter had just finished preaching the first Gospel message to the Jews and some of them turned around and asked the apostles in [Acts 2:37](#) "Brothers, what shall we do?" The very fact that they asked what to 'do' implies they had to do something, doesn't it?

When Paul and Barnabas miraculously escaped from their prison cell, the Philippian jailer asked in [Acts 16:30](#) "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Again, this implies that to be saved you have to do something. And what were they told to do? [Acts 16:31](#) "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

Oh, wait a minute the text says, all they had to do to be saved is believe! Well yes, but read on in [Acts 16:32+33](#) "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized."

What were they told to do in [Acts 2](#)? [Acts 2:38](#) "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Now loved ones, you show me one verse in the Bible that calls baptism a work of merit. There isn't one and that's because just like, faith, repentance, and confession, baptism is an act of faith by which we receive salvation.

Think about when a person needs dental surgery, say they need a rotten tooth removed, faith is required in the skills of the dentist to remove it, otherwise you wouldn't agree to be placed on the table in the first place. But when the surgery is over, did you earn or merit your treatment because you submitted to being placed on the dentist table? No! Yet to be treated and having that broken tooth removed, required both faith in the surgeon and a willingness to submit to the surgery.

Loved ones, our faith in God and in the death of His Son prompts us to submit to the spiritual operation of baptism where God does His work of cleansing our soul by the blood of Jesus and the renewing of the Spirit. Faith, repentance, and confession are all acts which require much from the worker but baptism is something done to us.

May we thank God for our freedom but may we never forget how much it cost God to set us free.