

Galatians 5 – Chapter Study

INTRO

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Because the Apostle Paul wrote this to the Galatians, a group of people he knew from experience were a bit thick & slow to comprehend the kinds of things he needed to tell them –

He used several different ways to get the message across.

He repeats himself, saying the same thing in different ways.

He uses illustrations.

He uses sarcasm.

And he even speaks ultra-plainly; using blunt, straight-forward, no-holds barred kind of speech – as we'll see tonight.

The reason he was so urgent to get his message across was because false teachers called Judaizers had infiltrated the churches of Galatia & spread dangerous lies.

They told Gentile believers in Jesus that they had to become Jews & keep the Mosaic Law in order to be approved by God.

This message of salvation by works appealed to the natural can-do attitude of the Galatians.

But it was a complete denial of the Gospel of Grace Paul had originally brought them and they had been so dramatically saved by.

The Judaizers had said that while the Gospel of Grace was a good start, perfection, spiritual maturity was attained by keeping the Law.

Paul wrote to say there's no mixing grace & works.

If you try to please God by the works of the Law, then you are no longer under grace.

And you can't pick & chose which laws you'll keep.

If you try to approach God on the basis of works, then you have to keep ALL the Law.

Can you go to the DMV & get a CA driver's license, then when you drive out of the parking lot at the DMV, decide to obey only the traffic light laws?

Can you say, "I don't have to keep the speed limit law. Or which side of the road to drive on. Or the passing laws."

No! Once you get a license & take your vehicle out on the road – you're subject to every & all traffic laws. You can't pick & choose which you'll keep & which you'll ignore.

It's all binding on you.

So it is with the Law of God & the path of works.

You can't say "I'll obey some but not others. I'll not murder or steal, but lying & coveting is okay."

In the churches of Galatia, the Judaizers had already persuaded a lot of the Gentiles to their position and were urging them to take the first step – circumcision.

Jews believed circumcision was necessary for a man & his family to identify with Abraham as being a Jews.

They said without circumcision, they weren't Jews & if they weren't Jews, they couldn't please God.

It seems Paul heard about what was happening in the churches of Galatia & fired off this letter just as the Gentiles were working themselves up to the point of consenting to circumcision.

He wrote to warn them off from doing it.

E. Stay Loyal to the Gospel of Grace 5:1-6:10

1. Stay Free 5:1-15

¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

The Gospel of Grace, the message that Jesus has set us free from sin & death through the work of His cross, had delivered the Galatians from fear & bondage to their idols & false gods.

But if they turned to the Law now, they'd find themselves back in bondage.

Paul uses an interesting term here when he calls it a "yoke of bondage."

In Acts 15 **Peter** had used a similar term in describing the Mosaic Law.

The church headquarters in Jerusalem summoned Paul & Barnabas to come & answer the charge that they were preaching a message of "cheap grace."

There were elements in the Church back then that thought Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be REAL Christians.

They were furious with Paul for saying that Jesus fulfilled the Law & that salvation is by grace through faith alone.

So when Paul & Barnabas shared how God had demonstrated His approval of their message with mighty signs & wonders, Peter stood up to support them by reminding the leadership there in Jerusalem how the same thing had happened to him in his preaching the Gospel to the household of Cornelius in Caesarea.

Peter then reminded the leaders how Israel's long history had shown time & again how the Jews were not able to bear the *yoke* of the law.

Why then should that yoke be put on the neck of Gentiles?

The council realized the wisdom of Peter's words & affirming Paul's message & ministry, they made an official ruling **rejecting** the idea that Gentiles had to keep the law.

The Judaizers demand that Gentiles be circumcised was **contrary** to the Church's position & practice.

² Indeed I, Paul, say to you

He's saying this now on the basis of his *apostolic authority* -

that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

Because you can't mix grace & law, faith & flesh.

Again - we can't pick & chose **which laws** we'll make part of our repertoire for gaining approval by God.

Either we cast ourselves in total dependence on God & look **all** to grace -

Or we keep the law - all of it!

The Sabbath, circumcision, no cheeseburgers, no bacon, no lobster.

Must go to Jerusalem 3 times a year.

Can't travel more than ¾'s of a mile & only then by foot.

You see, when we set about to approach God on the basis of the **Law**, a heavy weight of prohibitions is the result.

When we come to God on the basis of **Grace**, what Jesus has done rather than what we do -

It's no longer about what we can't do;

It's all about what we **CAN** do because Christ dwells in & through us.

That's why Paul contrasts grace & the law here as the difference between freedom & bondage.

³ And I testify again

Let me say it once more -

to every man who becomes circumcised → that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

You're driving along tonight on the way home & see the flashing red light of a police car behind you.

You pull over & the officer walks up to the window & says, "You were doing 60 in a 40 mile per hour zone."

You reply, “Come on officer, I’ve never robbed a bank, done a drive-by shooting, never sprayed graffiti, never blackmailed anyone.”

He’s going to say, “It doesn’t matter how many other laws you’ve kept – you broke this law.”

4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law;

“Estranged” isn’t a great translation of this word.

That’s more a *relational* word that speak of alienation.

The word here refers to something becoming inoperative, inactive, rendered idle.

And notice that it isn’t Christ who’s rendered idle – it’s the person who turns from grace to the law.

If the Galatians goal was to please God – there’s only one way to do it – by being IN the only One who’s ever pleased Him because He kept the law perfectly – Jesus!

you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

“Fallen from grace” – a terrible, terrifying phrase. Just what does Paul mean by fallen from grace?

The word “fall” means to depart from a thing, to drop off, to lose your place.

It’s not the stumble of the walker.

It’s the plunge of the one who’s gone over the edge.

Paul is just *repeating* himself – you can’t mix grace with works; It’s one or the other.

If you’ve been saved by grace, then buy in to the heresy of the legalists & think you can go on to spiritual maturity by keeping the Law, you’re no longer the recipient of grace.

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

Here’s one of the *most important differences* between the legalist & the *gracist* – the one who looks to God by grace.

The one under grace looks forward to seeing God because it means the fulfillment of all His promises & blessings.

The one under law is *terrified* of standing before God because it’ll be *test time*!

Remember in school when the teacher said, “Clear your desk; it’s time for a test”?

There were times when you weren’t prepared – but did okay.

Then there were other times when you thought you had the material down – and the test was on a bunch of stuff you hadn’t studied & didn’t know!

Well, imagine the teacher saying, “Clear your desk and take out a sheet of paper. Now – give me word for word all of the textbook for chs. 1-5.”

It doesn’t matter how well you’ve studied. You’re going to flunk that test!

That’s the Law and trying to keep it.

But what if the author of the textbook walked into the classroom and walked over to your seat & handed you the original manuscript for the textbook and said you could turn that in?

That’s what Christ does. The Word of God who gave the Law, fulfilled it perfectly and offers his merit to you – to be taken by faith.

Our righteousness is by faith – it’s a gift bestowed on those who believe in Jesus.

That’s why we eagerly look forward to standing before God.

Because it means the final, full application of all God promises.

The legalist *dreads* the idea of standing before God because then he/she is going to be measured.

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Circumcision & uncircumcision are synonyms for Jew & Gentile.

Paul already said in 3:28 that in Christ, all such distinctions are erased.

All that matters now is an abiding trust in Jesus Christ that produces a love –

First for God → Then for one another → & finally for others. == Him/Us/Them

7 You ran well.

At first.

Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion

This new line of thought that's enthralled you -

does not come from Him who calls you.

Just as Jesus in Revelation 2 & 3 calls the errant churches to remember back to the days when they were faithful.

Paul reminds the Galatians of the time at the start when the Gospel of Grace effected such a dramatic change in them.

He wanted them to contrast the effect of grace with the results of the legalism they had now bought into. Grace had set them free and given them hope.

It had filled them with Joy & set them on fire with a love for God that had transformed their homes and in some cases their towns.

What did the legalism of the Judaizers affect?

Well, the Galatians had become weighed down with a burden of guilt.

Those who weren't consumed with how poorly they were doing were filled with an arrogant self-righteousness that was judgmental and condemning.

There was no joy nor love for the lost.

The lost were to be *shunned* for the danger they presented to the pursuit of holiness.

Look around and see that what Paul says here is still true.

The Grace of God brings a love & joy that so delights in God it overflows in being holy.

The believers who are *most fun* to be around are *gracists*.

Those who had the biggest kill-joys are legalists.

You can never be at peace around them because you get the sense they're waiting to pounce on you for something.

They are – because part of shoring up their flaws is by finding something worse in others.

Think about Jesus. Did people like being around Him?

What kind of people were specially attracted to Him? Why?

Who seemed to not want to hang out with Him? Why?

Grace!

⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

A simple illustration from the kitchen – only a tiny amount of leaven is used when making bread – yet look at it's influence.

Paul means this in regards to legalism – it is a spiritual leaven which cannot be tolerated even in the smallest dose.

Grace & law cannot be mixed.

¹⁰ I have confidence in you, → in the Lord, that you will have no other mind;

That you'll *purge* the leaven of legalism

but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

The false teachers will indeed stand before God – not just for a review according to the law but having tried to mislead believers.

¹¹ And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

One of the lies the false teachers had spread in Galatia was that even Paul taught the necessity of circumcision.

So he asks – “If that's true, then why do the legalists attack me?”

“If I really agree with them as they claim, why do they try to discredit me and say I'm not an apostle?”

No – the reason they opposed him & sought to discredit him was because he steadfastly preached the message of Christ crucified.

Paul has been pretty careful in what he's said about the Judaizers so far.

He's dealt with their message & left their character alone.

But they'd been beyond brutal in their attacks & lies about him.

Because the Galatians had come to know Paul pretty well, he let's down his guard a bit and tells them how he feels about the legalists who are endangering them.

¹² I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

This is his frustration showing through. He's had to deal with the Judaizers so many times and has seen the devastation they wreak so often – he's done with them.

So he says something here that's harsh.

If the legalists are that earnest about circumcision he wishes they'd cut a bit higher & take it all off. Really – he wished they'd disappear.

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

One of the objections legalists made to grace was that without rules, without the law, people who do whatever they wanted & grace would become an excuse for morally sloppy living.

Paul refutes that. Grace is no excuse for sin.

When grace really gets a hold of someone, it produces a new life – the life of Jesus.

Grace makes a life of loving service.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

You know the story; one day Jesus was asked which was the greatest law.

He said – "Love God, and love your neighbor."

Loving God fulfills the first 4 of the Ten Commandments. Loving others keeps the last 6.

Then Paul throws in another little contrast with the legalists -

15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

Legalism absolutely destroys love and replaces it with competition & envy.

Listen – where you see people bickering and sniping at each other,

Where you hear gossip & criticism – that's a sure sign of a lack of grace but plenty of legalism.

2. Walk in the Spirit 5:16-26

16 I say then:

In light of all that -

Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Paul switches terms. Same subject but different words.

Walking in the Spirit means abiding in grace – it's actively trusting in Jesus.

The flesh is self & self effort = Works.

You see, one of the great dangers of legalism is that it looks to the flesh to do what's right.

But once you activate the flesh, you get all that the flesh is about & into – including all its evil desires.

Grace, walking in the Spirit replaces the lusts of the flesh with the longings & desire of God.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Just as grace & law are opposed to one another, so are the Spirit & the flesh.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Of course you aren't – because Christ fulfilled the Law!

Remember, the law was a tutor to bring us to Christ.

Once we have Christ we have no more need of the tutor.

The believer who's walking in the Spirit doesn't need to look to the law as a code or playbook in how to live.

The abiding presence of the Spirit of God is an ever present guide showing us how to live.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are:

adultery, - sex outside of marriage

fornication, - all forms of sexual immorality

uncleanness, - a general word for all immorality, sin

lewdness, - *nasty* immorality

20 idolatry, - devotion to false gods.

sorcery, - converse with demons; drugs

hatred, - hostile

contentions, - contrary; naysayer

jealousies, - obsession with something or someone; stalkers

outbursts of wrath, - violent anger

selfish ambitions, - self-promotion; usually at the expense of others

dissensions, - to set at odds; toxic people who control by stirring up others

heresies, - opinions with which you must agree!

²¹ **envy**, - to want what belongs to another

murders, - taking of innocent life

drunkenness, - altered state of consciousness

revelries, - partying, carousing

and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The word “practice” ought to be understood this way – “Those who constantly are doing these things” will not inherit the Kingdom – which is the same as being saved.

All of us did some or all of these things before we came to Christ.

But once grace gets a hold of us, it delivers us from that stuff.

If someone continues in this stuff & is content to do so – very simple, as Paul says here – they aren’t saved!

In contrast with the works of the flesh -

²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love,**

Let’s pause there to note that Paul doesn’t say fruits, plural. Fruit is singular.

THE fruit of the Spirit is love, and the word here for love is that amazing word agape.

The kind of love that seeks the highest good for the one loved with no thought of return.

The 8 words that follow are flavors, shades, colors of the Fruit of the Spirit that is Love.

joy, - delight; the uplifted countenance that reflects an inner positive confidence not diminished by circumstances.

peace, - tranquil; unruffled, confident

longsuffering, - patience, endurance, steadfast, perseverance, slowness to avenge wrong. Not reluctance, but not moved by a desire for revenge.

kindness, (gentleness) – Virtuous; Constantly conscious of what’s best, rather than living with self at the center.

goodness, - Upright, just

faithfulness, - Loyal, honest, integrity

²³ **gentleness**, - This is the mindset that relies on the above as the basis for living and treating others & refuses to use power, coercion, to get things done.

self-control. – self-mastery. Proverbs 16:32

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Against such there is no law.

Interesting in looking at the law, there are all kinds of commands to do this or that, or not do the other – but we don’t find a law that says, “You shall be longsuffering, filled with joy, at peace. Etc.”

But if people by nature did all this – if they truly lived by love and all the ways it manifests itself, there’d be no need for laws stipulating what to do & not do.

²⁴ **And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

This harkens back to 2:20 – Let’s read it

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

There’s an important insight v. 24 that comes by learning the verb tense of the word “crucified.”

It’s an aorist, active, indicative.

Aorist – simple completed action.

Active - the subject performs the action.

Indicative – a simple statement of fact, not speculation or assumption – it's something real.

Here's the idea - & it speaks right to the heart of Paul's message to the Galatians.

There comes a point in the life of the believer when he/she must realize that grace & the law, faith & the flesh are mutually exclusive.

And living in grace, walking in the Spirit, means making a conscious decision to die to self-effort in pleasing God or growing in Christ.

So that whenever legalism raises its ugly head in the future, there's no heeding it, no listening to it, no entertaining its voice, because you've already dispensed with it.

I've found in my own life & in talking with so many believers that unless & until you have this talk with yourself and come to this place of decision, your spiritual life will be unstable and you'll make little consistent progress.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Really, this is more an affirmation than a suggestion.

What Paul means is, if we truly are living in the Spirit, then our walk, our lifestyle will reflect the life of Jesus.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

And that was another of Paul backhanded references to the Judaizers who were conceited and were forever trying to out-righteous each other.

Feed My Sheep

Feed My Sheep