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## ***Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ***

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

***“Don’t Be Cut Off From Christ”***

**January 19, 2014**

**Sermon Text:** Galatians 5:1-15

**Scripture Reading:** 2 Cor 5

### **Introduction-**

Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept any of them, and am still inclined to all evil, yet God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes

to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. He grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me, if only I accept this gift with a believing heart. [Heidelberg Catechism]

This is the source of our freedom. The perfect righteousness credited to our account, effected by the perfect life and atoning death of Christ. Through faith. Through faith alone. You can be sure that whenever you hear someone in any way connecting our works to our justification before God, what you are hearing is a false gospel.

Listen once more as the Apostle Paul challenges the Galatian churches, as well as us, to set our feet firmly in the on the rock of Christ's righteousness, lest we be deceived and brought once again into the bondage of some kind of law:

Galatians 5:1-15 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (2) **Look: I,**

**Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. (3) I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. (4) You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (5) For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. (6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. (7) You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? (8) This persuasion is not from him who calls you. (9) A little leaven leavens the whole lump. (10) I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. (11) But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. (12) I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! (13) For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**

(14) For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (15) But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Let's begin by looking at this matter of being "severed from Christ" or "falling away from grace."

Paul is speaking to people who have professed faith in Christ. But he has some doubts about the reality of their profession because they have been "bewitched" by a false gospel of works.

Galatians 4:11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Galatians 5:7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Jewish false teachers, who also claimed faith in Christ, had come and were insisting that in order to be saved, these people must also submit to the law of Moses. That is what this circumcision business was all about. It was the sign of the Mosaic covenant. To be circumcised is to embrace the Law and its requirements as a means of becoming righteous before God.

Paul has been admonishing these people and reminding them of what the Law says:

Galatians 3:10-12 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (12) But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

Like light and darkness, black and white, the Law and the gospel cannot be intermingled. Paul will not permit us to have it both ways. Either we are justified before God by faith in Christ, OR we are cursed by the Law, Christ being of no benefit to us. It is all Christ, or none of Him. Listen again:

**(2) Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. (3) I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. (4) You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.**

Does this mean then that Paul is teaching that a Christian can be ultimately lost? No. There are too many other Scriptures that teach us that when Christ grants a person saving faith, that faith will never perish. Our confession of faith agrees:

"This faith, although it be different in degrees, and may be weak or strong, yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it, as is all other saving grace, from the faith and common grace of temporary believers; and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith. ( Hebrews 5:13, 14; Matthew 6:30; Romans 4:19, 20; 2 Peter 1:1; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 5:4, 5; Hebrews 6:11, 12; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 12:2 )"

I won't go into a close examination of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but you are aware that we hold to the eternal security of the believer

and we will proceed based upon this assumption.

What, then, does Paul mean when he speaks of being severed from Christ or falling away from grace? Well, it can simply mean that if a person embraces works as a means of being justified before God, even if they also claim to have faith in Christ, then the saving grace of Christ is not theirs. They are not sons, but slaves and therefore they are not heirs of the Promise. They have been “severed” and have “fallen away” in the sense that they once professed faith in Christ alone and appeared to share in His benefits, but their trust in the law reveals that they are not in Christ, and never truly were.

But there is also another way in which a genuine Christian can be severed from Christ and fall away from the benefits He has effected for us. This is not speaking of the loss of salvation, but about being cut off from the joyful experience of the peace and freedom that is ours in Christ.

Listen to Martin Luther explain it:

“This passage is like a touchstone by which we may judge all human doctrine, practice, religion, and ceremony. Whoever teaches that anything besides faith in Christ is necessary for salvation or who devises any practice or religion or observes any rule, tradition, or ceremony

whatsoever with the idea that they will obtain forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and everlasting life by these things – this passage contains the Holy Spirit’s sentence against them: Christ is of no value to them at all. If Paul dares to pronounce this sentence on the law and circumcision, both of which were ordained by God himself, what might he not do against the chaff and dross of human traditions?

Nothing under the sun is more harmful than the doctrine of human traditions and actions, for they utterly abolish the truth of the Gospel, faith, the true worship of God, and Christ Himself, in whom the Father has ordained everything:

1 Corinthians 1:30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

Therefore, all those who are either authors or maintainers of the doctrine of works are oppressors of the Gospel. They make the death and victory of Christ, useless; they blemish and deface his sacraments, utterly removing their true use. In short, they are blasphemers, enemies, and deniers of God and of all His promises and benefits.”

Luther, you see, appreciates the severity of the matter, as obviously

does the Apostle Paul. This is a matter of heaven or hell. It is a matter of eternity. These are not things to be trifled with by foolish human beings. It is why we are sights on the teachings of John Piper, even though we are going to be though too harsh and judgmental by many. Listen to Luther again, this time pointing us to the peace and assurance that the believe has in the knowledge that Christ alone is our righteousness:

“Let us bear this in mind when the devil accuses and frightens our conscience, attempting to drive us to despair. He is the father of lying and the enemy of Christian freedom; he torments us every moment with false fears, so that when our conscience has lost this Christian freedom, it will feel remorse for sin and condemnation and always remain in anguish and terror. When that great dragon—that old snake, the devil—comes and tells you that not only have you done no good, but you have also transgressed God’s law, say to him, ‘You are troubling me with the memory of my past sins; you are also reminding me that I have done no good. But this is nothing to me, for if I either trusted in my own good deeds or feared because I have done no such deeds, Christ would in either case be of no value to me at all. I rest only in the freedom Christ has given me. I know he is of value to me, and so I will not make him of no value, which I

would be doing if I either presumed to purchase favor and everlasting life for myself by my good deeds or despaired of my salvation because of my sins.’”

You understand? The freedom Christ has purchased for us is freedom from obligation to the Law, freedom from the curse of the Law, freedom from God’s condemnation, freedom from fear of death.” [Commentary on Galatians; Crossway]

Standing firm for these truths, you see, is the standing firm that Paul is talking about here in 5:1.

Let’s take some more encouragement from Luther:

“Let us learn, then, carefully to separate Christ from all that we do, both good and evil, from all laws, both human and divine, and from all troubled consciences. Christ has nothing to do with any of these. He does have something to do with afflicted consciences but not to afflict them further, but to raise them up and in their affliction comfort them. If Christ seems like an angry judge or lawgiver who requires a strict account of our past life, then let us assure ourselves THAT is not Christ, but a raging fiend. The Scripture depicts Christ as our reconciliation, our advocate, and our comforter. He is and always will be such; he cannot be unlike Himself.”

Now of course Luther is speaking to people who have been brought to the end of themselves by the Law, and He is speaking to His own people as well. He is speaking of the gospel. And he goes on:

“The devil will disguise himself in the likeness of Christ and argue with us as follows: ‘You were admonished by my word and ought to have done this, but you have not done it; you ought not to have done that, and you have done it; be sure that I will take vengeance upon you.’ When he does this, we should not let it move us at all but should immediately think, ‘Christ does not speak like this to poor, afflicted, and despairing consciences. He does not add afflicted to the afflicted; he does not break the bruised reed or snuff out the smoldering wick (Isaiah 42:3). It is true that he speaks sharply to the hard-hearted, but if people are afraid and afflicted, he entices them most lovingly and comfortingly:

Matthew 9:2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

Matthew 9:13 Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

We must take good care, therefore, that we are not deceived by Satan’s tricks and receive an accuser and condemner instead of a comforter and Savior. In that case we should lose the true Christ and make him of no value to us.”

Does that encourage you as well as caution you? What is your peace and joy, Christian? Christ! His righteousness! Your standing with God does not depend upon you! Stand firmly in that freedom. There always have been and always will be people parading as wonderful, gifted, Christians who hate this freedom and work with all of their energy to bring us back under bondage and condemnation. Why?

1. They don’t know Christ themselves
2. Paul tells us here in Galatians that they are looking for people to follow them and “make much of them.” That is, they want glory for themselves and one of the slickest ways to do that is to present a system of supposedly divinely ordained rules that are the secret of obtaining God’s blessing. Of course, since these rules come from

THEM, it turns out that people have to look to them for those rules. They enslave those who fall for it, just as Satan does:

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and deliver all those who **through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.**

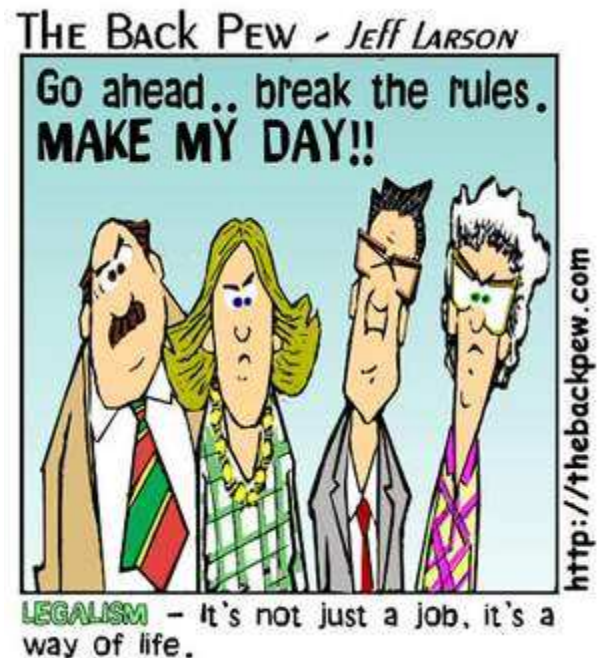
See it? If someone can bring people under the fear of death, the fear of God's condemnation, and tell them that they need to do certain works and deeds to hopefully escape that death, then what happens? Such people are enslaved.

One of the marks of such a false teacher is celebrity status. It is necessarily so, and we need to be wise to this characteristic:

Galatians 4:17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

Galatians 6:12-13 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the

cross of Christ. (13) For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.



You recall from two weeks ago that we considered the works righteousness of the federal vision theology and the very close parallels to it in Piper's writings. Both of those sources want to include the works that faith produces as part of faith as necessary for justification. It is all quite confusing, but all we need remember is that whenever anyone says that our works are necessary in any way for justification, we are hearing a false gospel. Here is Walther on this very point:

"...the Word of God—Law and Gospel—is not rightly distinguished, but mingled, **when one preaches that**



**faith justifies and saves because of the love and renewal it produces.** The Holy Scriptures emphatically testify that there can be no genuine faith without love, without a renewal of heart, without sanctification, or without an abundance of good works. **But at the same time Scripture testifies that the renewal of heart, love, and the good works that faith produces is not the justifying and saving element in a person's faith.** Innumerable passages of Scripture could be cited to prove this statement. [For example:]

**Romans 4:16 states:**

“That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring.”

Here Paul declares that the very reason we teach righteousness by faith is because we teach that a person is saved by grace, which justifies him before God. Now, if faith were to make us righteous because of some good quality inherent in us, it would be wrong to conclude that the reason we teach that people are justified by faith is because they are justified and saved by grace. **Justification takes place by grace through faith—not because of any good qualities inherent in faith.** In justification, it is not the person's faith that is taken into consideration, but the fact that Jesus Christ has

redeemed the entire world. **Justification is based on the fact that Jesus has already done what was necessary and has suffered all that mankind ought to have done and suffered, and that people merely have to accept this.**

Therefore, the way to salvation is this: We contribute nothing—absolutely nothing—toward our salvation. Rather, Christ has already done everything for us, and we must merely cling to what He has done, drawing consolation from His finished work of redemption and trusting in it for our salvation.

This passage in Romans is a precious text, a text that deserves to be remembered. If something that we ourselves must do belonged to the justifying quality of faith, the apostle would be drawing a false conclusion here. In that case Paul should have said, “By faith, insofar as it enables us to accomplish something good.” But that is not the reason faith justifies. **It justifies because it accepts the merit of Christ. Faith is only the hand with which we grasp what God offers.”**

Ferdinand, Carl; Wilhelm Walther (1905-07-02). Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible (Kindle Locations 8263-8285). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

And again from Walther:



**Phil. 3:8–9** *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*

This is another precious passage! As bright as the sun, it sheds bright light on the real essence of faith. The apostle declares that he is indeed righteous. **However, the righteousness that he has obtained by faith is not at all his own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ.** Accordingly, when we become righteous by faith, we are made righteous by an **“alien righteousness.”** God sees in us absolutely nothing that He could credit to us as righteousness. **The righteousness that we have by faith is foreign to us; it is from another.** We have not purchased it or contributed anything toward it. Had we contributed love toward it, and were God to justify us on that account, our righteousness would not be an alien righteousness, or at least it would be only half alien, to supplement our own imperfect righteousness.

For the apostle declares: “I have no righteousness of my own, but only the righteousness that God credits to faith.”

**Romans 4:5:** *“And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”*

When a person is justified, though he was previously a godless—not a godly—person, he is now made godly by faith. Anyone having genuine faith acknowledges that he has been godless, deserving hell and damnation, lost, contaminated with sin from head to toe, and that a divine miracle of grace was performed on him when God said to him the moment he believed in his Savior: “You are counted as righteous. I see in you no righteousness of your own, yet I am covering you with the righteousness of My Son. From now on, I will see in you nothing but righteousness.”

Whoever does not come to Christ as an **ungodly person** does not come to Him at all.

**Ephesians 2:8–9:** *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

This almost sounds as if the apostle felt he was not saying enough to keep the reader from falling into self-

righteousness, because he first says, **“By grace you have been saved.”** Next, he adds **“through faith.”** Lest people think they had achieved this feat by their faith, the apostle continues: **“and this is not your own doing.”**

Well, from where does it come, if not from us? **“It is the gift of God.”** And completely to ward off any thought of a person’s own merit, he adds **“not a result of works,”** such as a person’s love, or charity, would be. He concludes with the statement **“so that no one may boast.”**

Now, a person who claims that faith justifies on account of the love that follows it could say,

*“I have been justified by faith, but that was because I also loved, because I had also performed good works, because I had also become a different person. That is why God regards me as righteous.”*

The apostle tosses out this thought in his concluding remarks. Anyone who imagines that there is a little “halo,” a little glory, that he might claim as his own is still without the faith that justifies. These people are still blind and are not walking in the way of salvation. Rather, they are headed straight for hell.”

Ferdinand, Carl; Wilhelm Walther (1905-07-02). Law & Gospel: How to

Read and Apply the Bible (Kindle Locations 8288-8320). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

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### **Faith Working Through Love**

In contrast to the law, the gospel gives us a certain righteousness that gives us a certain hope:

Galatians 5:5-6 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. (6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, **but only faith working through love.**

Listen to Walther’s comments here:

“As you know, Luther taught that only faith—apart from good works—saves a person. Correspondingly, he taught that good works do not save. Based on Luther’s rejection of good works, Papists draw the conclusion that he must have been a wicked man. They have claimed that Luther said that, in order to get into heaven, you need only believe and not do any good works. But this is not Luther’s doctrine at all. In fact, Luther taught the exact opposite. He did not say, “You need faith—but also good works and love.” Rather, what Luther said was that “you need faith that is so strong that it will

produce love on its own, generating an abundance of good works.”

This does not mean that faith saves **on account of** the love that springs from it. What it means is that the faith which the Holy Spirit creates **cannot help but do good works**. This faith justifies because it clings to the gracious promises of Christ. It justifies because it lays hold of Christ. This faith is active in good works because it is genuine faith. **There is no need to urge believers to do good works**. Their faith generates good works automatically. Believers engage in good works—not from a sense of duty, in return for the forgiveness of their sins, but chiefly because they cannot help but do them.

It is completely impossible for genuine faith not to gush forth from the believer’s heart in works of love. This is a point that the Papists simply do not grasp. They imagine that a person may have true faith and still live in mortal sin. This is why they sneer at the teaching that “faith saves.” They call this a “fine religion,” meaning that it is the worst and most wicked religion that has ever been invented. This is what they teach about Luther.

In Galatians 5:6 we read: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” **If faith is lacking love, the reason it**

**is not effective is not because of its lack of love but because it is not genuine, righteous faith in the first place.** It is not that love must be added to faith. Rather, love must grow out of faith.

A fruitful tree does not produce fruit because someone ordered it to grow fruit but because, as long as there is still some life in it and it is not dried up, it cannot help but produce fruit spontaneously. **Faith is like that tree.** If it fails to bring forth fruit, it is obviously withered. In the same way, the sun does not need to be told to shine. It will continue shining until the Last Day—without anyone commanding it to do so. Faith is like the sun.” [Ferdinand, Carl; Wilhelm Walther (1905-07-02). Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible (Kindle Locations 7890-7904). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

## Conclusion

Do you see then the source of the Christian’s assurance? It is not in us, it is in Christ! This hymn writer knew this very well. Listen to his words as we close, and then we will sing these same words:

**Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
’Midst flaming worlds, in these**

arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in Thy great day;  
For who aught to my charge shall  
lay?

Fully absolved through these I am  
From sin and fear, from guilt and  
shame.

The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb,  
Who from the Father's bosom came,  
Who died for me, e'en me to atone,  
Now for my Lord and God I own.

Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,  
Which, at the mercy seat of God,  
Forever doth for sinners plead,  
For me, e'en for my soul, was shed.

Lord, I believe were sinners more  
Than sands upon the ocean shore,  
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,  
For all a full atonement made.

When from the dust of death I rise  
To claim my mansion in the skies,  
Ev'n then this shall be all my plea,  
Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me.

This spotless robe the same appears,  
When ruined nature sinks in years;  
No age can change its glorious hue,  
The robe of Christ is ever new.

Jesus, the endless praise to Thee,  
Whose boundless mercy hath for  
me—

For me a full atonement made,  
An everlasting ransom paid.

O let the dead now hear Thy voice;  
Now bid Thy banished ones rejoice;  
Their beauty this, their glorious  
dress,  
Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness.