

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

GALATIANS 5-6

Perched atop our nation's Capitol in Washington DC is a twenty-foot statue known as the "Freedom Lady." She was sculpted in Rome and imported to America.

But during the delivery, the ship encountered a bitter storm - howling winds, and huge waves. The seas were so severe the captain feared the boat might capsize so he ordered the cargo thrown overboard.

But when the crew went to toss over the "Freedom Lady", the skipper stopped them. He shouted over the noise of the storm, "No, never! We'll flounder before we throw "Freedom" away." And this is Paul's message in Galatians 5, "Never throw away your freedom!"

Yet many Christians do.

Legalism is the storm that rocks the boat of faith.

It's the mentality that a right standing with God is up to me. *God will reject me unless I do this or that...*

Whether the rules I try to keep come from God or of my own making, or they're part of a tradition - the idea is the same... *Our work proves our worthiness.*

Yet the Gospel of grace teaches us just the opposite. There is nothing we can do to earn God's favor. On our own, even the most obedient among us are unworthy.

But God extends His grace. On the cross, Jesus did all that needed to be done to resolve our sin and earn for us God's favor. Now, our job is to simply humble ourselves and

put our faith in the merits of another.

But sometimes the storm blows and we get bullied by legalism. A friend, or a preacher, or even our own conscience tells us we should be doing more!

And we doubt the sufficiency of Christ - we add a few good deeds just to be on the safe side. **But hey, trying to be on the safe side will put you on the wrong side.**

When we lean toward legalism, we *diminish the cross of Christ and drift from God's grace*. In essence, we throw away our freedom. Paul warns the Galatians...

Chapter 5 begins, **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”** Jesus sets us **free from the treadmill of performance-based religion**. It's no longer about striving and never measuring up. We live by faith in the merits of Jesus.

In Acts 15, Peter told the Jerusalem Church not to expect Gentile believers to conform to the Jewish Law.

He said in verse 10, **“Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”** Peter referred to the demands of the Law as a *yoke*. It's a harness that **chokes off the joy of Jesus and the life of God's Spirit...**

Anytime Christians stop living by faith in Jesus and rely on their own deeds they buckle back on the *yoke*.

This is what the false teachers did to the Galatians.

Rather than teach them to live by grace and faith, they

ramped back up the treadmill. They demanded that the Christians in Galatia live by a concoction of laws and traditions. It was a lethal self-righteousness.

And here's the problem... The legalist appears pious, disciplined, sincere - and new believers get intimidated.

Who am I to buck such a spiritual person?

Some religious-folk like to throw their weight around. By enforcing their rules they control others - or make themselves look good - or create a pecking order...

And the new believer gets sucked in. Because of his ignorance, or fear, or uncertainty, he becomes saddled with unnecessary baggage. A person who Jesus died to set free, ends up living under *"a yoke of bondage."*

This is why **"freedom is always unfinished business."**

It's not only true politically, but spiritually. There's always somebody trying to rob you of your liberty.

Paul tells the new believers in Galatia, *"stand fast... in the liberty by which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."*

A yoke is no joke. There will always be people trying to refit you for a new harness. **Stand fast and stay free!**

Paul tells the Galatians, verse 2, *"Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing."* One of the legalistic stipulations being forced on the Galatians was Jewish circumcision. This was an OT symbol adopted by God's people, Israel.

But the **Judaizers insisted the Christians in Galatia should**

also wear this badge. This is classical legalism. Understand, *real faith is under the lapel. It's unseen.* Whereas, religion loves to assign external badges.

This is why some churches emphasize certain commitments like *church membership, or baptism, or daily devotions, or homeschooling your kids, or speaking in tongues, or tithing, or keeping a holy day...*

All these activities are good and serve a purpose, but when they're made mandatory for pleasing God - you insult His grace and diminished the work of Jesus. It's faith in Him alone that makes a person right with God!

And notice Paul's strong warning in verse 2... If you adopt the thinking - "I'll practice this legalism just to be on the safe side" - remember it puts you on "the wrong side." For Paul says, "*Christ will profit you nothing.*"

That's a big deal! Faith in Christ is an all or nothing proposition. Add anything to your personal trust in Jesus - *rack up a few good works, or rely on a couple of traditions just in case* - and you forego the saving merits of Jesus! His benefits no longer accrue to you.

Verse 3, "*And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.*" The legalist picks and chooses which rules and rituals he wants to obey, but that's not how it works. God's Law isn't a spiritual smorgasbord. If you live by the Law; then you are under all the Mosaic Law.

Did you kindle a fire on the Sabbath? Yesterday, did you flip on a light, or turn on your stove - if so, you blew it. *Do you*

keep a kosher diet? If you've ever bitten into a ham and cheese sandwich, you're a lawbreaker! Bow to the law in one point, and you're a slave to it all!

Verse 4 is the strongest warning yet, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." It's one or the other, you can't trust in the work of Christ and in your own works. Either you're *living by law or by grace.*

"For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." Our only hope of being right with God is "*faith.*" Which poses a question, *if we stop having faith, how can we continue to be right with God?*

And here, Paul issues some stern warnings - if a believer abandons their faith and stops trusting in Jesus, they are "*estranged from Christ.*" They've "*fallen from grace.*" "*Christ profits (them) nothing.*"

These are fateful, serious statements. It's hard for me to say such a person maintains their salvation.

Understand, none of us receive God's salvation because of what we do or don't do, **so** no one can lose their salvation because of what they do or don't do.

It's not as if there are certain sins that are *salvation-snuffers* - commit them and you're no longer saved.

We *obtain and maintain* a right standing with God "*by faith.*" Yet evidently, *faith isn't a once-and-for-all status.*

Faith isn't a sign-on-the-bottom-line-for-life type of proposition. Faith is a living thing. It's more like a plant.

If you want the plant to live, you water it and feed it. But if you ignore the plant, it'll shrivel up and die.

This is how Paul sees salvation. He declares in Colossians 1:23, "You... He has reconciled... *if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel...*"

Some churches believe in what's called **once-saved-always-saved**. That once you believe in Jesus, you're *in* regardless of your future decisions. I used to believe that until I read the NT. For Paul is emphatic throughout - **to be saved, we must continue in our faith.**

Verse 6, "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." In Christ, religious deeds and badges don't matter. God looks below the badge to the heart!

What makes you right with God is not whether you tithe or don't... attend church or stay home... read your Bible or the newspaper... these acts may be ways to demonstrate *your love for God* and *grow in God*, but they don't determine *God's love for you*! He accepts us and blesses us not because of our *feats*, but our *faith*.

A lot of pastors are afraid to preach grace. They think if they do, they'll give up their leverage. If the church members realize the reason God blesses us is because of what Jesus *did*, not what they *do* - what motivation will they have to serve and work and obey?

"Who'll come to a church workday if everyone thinks God will bless them the same if they stay home?"

Yet these pastors don't understand the power of God's grace. Tell a person that God blesses them regardless... and it causes them to love the Lord. They serve Him **not because they have to, but they want to.**

Paul tells us how this operates in verse 6, **"faith works through love."** The more you know of God's love the more you trust Him - and the more you trust Him the more He demonstrates His love. The Law drives a wedge between us and God, but grace creates a bond.

In verse 7, Paul asks the Galatians, **"You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?"** This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you."

The toxic mixture of grace and grunt the Galatians were following wasn't the message taught by Paul.

He warns them... **"A little leaven leavens the whole lump."** Legalism is like yeast. It corrupts by puffing up. It plays on our pride. It's show-me religion **"Look at how good I am!"** - and it can pollute an entire church.

Verse 10, **"I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased."** The message Paul preached was the cross of Christ - which was what offended the Jews. That Jesus had to die meant man could never be good enough for God... God's grace is an assault on man's pride.

Paul wasn't the target of Jewish persecution for preaching

OT legalism... Paul taught amazing grace!

Keep in mind, the flashpoint for the Jewish legalists in Galatia was circumcision. This was the rule on which they insisted. You couldn't please God without it. And this is why Paul says in verse 12... "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!"

Paul gets angry. He says to the legalists who insist on circumcision, "If you think clipping the male foreskin is what pleases God; then why not go all out and emasculate yourself?" One paraphrase puts it, "Why don't these agitators, obsessive as they are about circumcision, go all the way and castrate themselves!"

Verse 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." For four chapters, Paul commands us to hold fast to our liberty in Christ. But he also knows he can be misunderstood.

Recently, I ran across some modern headlines that ran the same risk... "Police begin campaign to run down jaywalkers." "Iraqi head seeks arms." "Astronaut takes blame for gas in spacecraft." "Local High School dropouts cut in half." "Man minus ear waives hearing."

Well, Paul also realizes he can be misunderstood.

Just because we're *free from living under the Law* doesn't mean *we have liberty to sin*. Yes, rules no longer govern a Christian's behavior, but that doesn't mean his or her behavior doesn't matter. *Law* is out, but *love* is in. We've swapped

rules for a relationship.

Pleasing God is still the goal, but the method has changed. The Law worked from the outside in - *you conformed to the rules*. But grace puts us in touch with God, and *His love transforms us* from the inside out.

Paul encourages us, *"only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."* God wants us controlled not by *law* or *lust*, but by *love*. People gravitate toward the extreme - it's either **legalism or license** - but grace produces **love!**

The love of Christ produces gratitude toward God. Grace isn't an excuse to sin, it's a reason not to sin!

Verse 14, *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word..."* And here it is... drumroll please... one word sums up the whole OT... *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* The whole intent of the Law is to love others.

"But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" One of the most famous **bites** in history occurred in a 1997 heavyweight title fight between Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson.

The two boxers were tied up when Tyson leaned in and took a bite out of Holyfield's ear. The boxing world was appalled by such a barbaric, classless tactic.

Yet I wonder how many Christians have taken a bite out of another brother or sister. Paul is saying that no one is free to snip at each other with gossip and take a bite out of a reputation. Believers need to walk in love.

Verse 16, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." The "lust of the flesh" is a biblical name for "selfish desires." And how do you overcome a lifestyle of selfish-gratification?

Some say the answer is "willpower," or "the power of positive thinking," or "self-discipline," or "the twelve steps," or "psychological therapy." But the answer is much simpler... Paul tells us to "walk in the Spirit..."

When you're caught up and wrapped up in the influence of the Spirit, you don't have time to pursue your own lusts. You're too busy *loving God and others.*

"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." Paul pinpoints two approaches to life...

Either you see yourself "in Christ" or "apart from Christ..." Either your world revolves *around Jesus* or *around you...*

Either you're into Jesus or into yourself.

Get caught up in Jesus - walk in the influence of the Holy Spirit - and you'll lose interest in fleshly desires.

Paul tells us in verse 18, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." The influence of the Holy Spirit accomplishes what the Law never achieves.

In fact these two approaches to life produce predictable paths. Paul lists "*the works of the flesh*" and "*the fruit of the Spirit.*" The "*flesh*" - which is *me apart from Christ* - works. It's me at work. But the Holy Spirit inside me is God at work - and the result is "*fruit.*"

The flesh is *self-made*. The fruit is *Spirit-grown*.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like...”

Notice, it's not an exhaustive list. "*And the like*" means all the other stuff that's in the same category.

This is not an impressive resume. Left to ourselves here's what our flesh is capable of... "illicit sex, moral perversion, turmoil, temper, telling lies, believing lies, intoxication, *and the like*." That's what can be expected of us! Here's why we needed the Law - to protect us from us. It was a safeguard. A playpen until we mature.

And obviously, the works of the flesh, our works, can never work our way to God. Paul says, "of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things - or literally, "practice them habitually" - will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Understand the idea here isn't that a single act of *envy* or *hatred* or *sexual sin* will send a person to hell.

But Paul is saying that a person who consistently practices the works of the flesh - is proving he or she doesn't have a relationship with Jesus - and is headed to hell. The problem is *evil habits*! Remember, this was the problem the Pope had with the nuns - *dirty habits*.

But if you walk in the Spirit, you can also predict the results,

verse 22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

Notice nine spiritual fruits are grown in three clusters of three each. Cluster #1 flows from our relationship with God: *love, joy, peace*... Cluster #2 involves relationships with each other: *longsuffering, kindness, goodness*... And Cluster #3 centers on our relationship with ourselves: *faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*.

None of these attributes are man-made. They’re not mustered by the flesh. They’re the work of God’s Spirit.

Try on your own to conjure up joy... or be kind... or exert self-control... *it’s fake fruit*. But trust in the Holy Spirit to produce what you lack, and He’ll manufacture true, genuine, *Juicy fruit*... A spontaneous joy, a peace that flourishes despite fear, lasting patience, genuine kindness, decision-altering self-control. *It’s beautiful*.

Verse 24, “And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” When we become Christians, we die with Christ. He rises in us.

But we need to acknowledge this reality in our daily living. Are we renouncing our flesh and its desires and trusting in God’s Spirit to live His life in us?

Paul says in verse 25, for “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” God has made us spiritually alive by His Spirit. Now lean into Him in all that you do.

“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” God expects better from His kids. Walk in the Spirit and we’ll walk in love!

Chapter 6, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one...”

The word translated “*trespass*” refers to “a lapse, a stumble, a slip-up.” Paul isn’t referring to a false teacher who’s deliberately spewing false doctrine. He’s already told us what to do with them - **cast them out!**

This is the brother who falls victim to a weakness.

And we’re told to “*restore*” him. The word is used in the NT to describe the setting of a broken bone. This is a tender task - it involves a careful evaluation of the break - and then a gentle manipulation of the bones...which is the reason this is not the job of a novice. He is specific, “*You who are spiritual restore such a one...*”

The what is to restore. *The who* does it is a man who is spiritual. Now *the how*... “in a spirit of gentleness.”

The word “*gentleness*” is translated most other places as “meekness” which means “strength under control, firmness tempered with love.” When a little boy comes to mom with a boo-boo, she doesn’t start poking and prodding - *not until she affirms to him her love.*

So it is with a saint who’s slipped. You don’t barge in with both barrels blazing. “Hey, shape up or ship out.” You’ll run him off before you can bandage his wound.

You’ve got to be firm and loving. And the best way to strike that balance is to take heed to what comes next... “considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

Be humble or you'll stumble. If not for the grace of God, so go I. Never underestimate your own ability to blow it! Legalism creates a self-righteous, judgmental church, while grace produces a healing environment.

Paul continues in verse 2, **“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”** After a brother is restored, our job isn't over. For in the restoration, you discover there were stresses and pressures that led to his sin. We need to help him bear his burdens until God removes them or teaches him how to carry them.

When we get under someone else's load and help lighten it in some way, we **“fulfill the law of Christ!”**

“For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” Here's a riddle. *“What did the mama whale say to her baby?”* **“Son, it's only when you're spouting that you get harpooned.”**

And the same is true for us. Don't get haughty.

At times, we're called on to carry someone else's load, and at other times, someone helps carry our load. As Christians, we all spent time on both ends of a burden.

Verse 4, **“But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.”**

At first, this sounds contradictory. Do we **“bear one another's burdens”** or do we **“bear our own load.”**

The answer is **“both.”** We're responsible for each other, but my responsibility for you never supersedes your responsibility

for yourself. **Your burden is still your burden**, and God promises we won't be tempted above what we can handle. We can bear our own load.

Now the topic shifts to spiritual investments, and one of the best investments you can make is in blessing a good Bible teacher. Verse 6, **“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”**

Did you know Christianity was the first religion whose teachers relied on the voluntary contributions of the folks they taught? Judaism taxed the people to pay the priests. Roman religions exacted fees and dues.

But a *tithe* is not a *tax*. Rather than an *invoice*, think of it as an *investment*. Bless the teacher in proportion to how much you've been blessed by what he's taught.

Once a pastor told his church that he had a \$200 sermon that would take ten minutes to preach - a \$100 sermon that took thirty minutes - and a \$10 sermon that took all of an hour. He told everyone that once the offering was collected and counted; then he'd decide which sermon to preach... *a shrewd pastor indeed*.

In verse 7, Paul continues his thoughts on spiritual investments, **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”**

Here's a natural law that also applies to the spiritual realm. Sow corn and you'll be up to your *ears* in corn.

A farmer understands this principle. **He'd never sow corn and expect soybeans. You reap what you sow.**

And the same is true spiritually. **“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.**

Sow to the flesh - entertain thoughts that *promote self-centeredness* - and you end up corrupt or rotten.

Here’s the rule of thumb... **Garbage in. Garbage out.**

Fill **your head with impure images and filthy talk and your life will gravitate downward. You'll wake up in bondage to what you thought was just fun and games.**

Notice what Paul says, **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked.”** This is a natural law - a divine principle.

It’s like the law of gravity. You can doubt it, deny it, defy it... *jump off a bridge, and shout all the way down that you don’t believe in gravity - even half-way to the bottom shout, “See, nothing’s happened” - then splat!*

God is not mocked. Like the guy who sowed his wild oats Monday through Saturday then went to church on Sunday and prayed for a crop failure. *It doesn’t work.*

When you download a song, or rent a movie, or browse a website - remember, **you reap what you sow!**

And realize what's so deceptive about *the Law of Sowing and Reaping* - **you seldom reap in the same season that you sow.** If harvest came the day after the planting, farming would be easier - but it doesn’t. A farmer seldom reaps in the season that he sows.

And the same is true spiritually. What we sow today can take years to sprout its fruit. Adultery is fun for a while. But when infidelity blossoms, there’s hell to pay.

And on the other hand, studying your Bible and learning to pray can be hard - like planting on a hot day. But when you harvest its riches, it's all worth it.

If you want to grow a strong faith, sow good seed. Log on to good Bible teaching and Christian music, and take walks with God, and think God's thoughts... the more you sow to the spirit the more you'll reap!

This is why Paul says in verse 9, **“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”** Our biggest obstacle is weariness and discouragement. We can get tired and lose heart. Thus, we need endurance. Press on!

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” We all take care of our family before we feed strangers. The same should be the priority in the body of Christ. Let's help everyone, but first our own church.

Paul starts to wrap up his letter to the Galatians in 6:11, **“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!”** In **2 Thessalonians 3:17**, we learn that Paul dictated his letters through a stenographer. He then signed them with his own signature to assure their authenticity. *But Galatians was the exception.*

Paul was so passionate about this letter - its subject, God's grace - and its readers, the Galatians - he wrote this with his own hand. Paul penned Galatians himself.

Some folks think Paul wrote in large letters because he was

having problems with his eyes. His *“thorn in the flesh”* had flared up. Of course, it also could have been an attempt to make sure the Galatians read every word.

At the bottom of the Declaration of Independence, you find the words *“John Hancock”* in abnormally large letters. Hancock used large script to be sure King George saw his name. This might be Paul’s motive!

Paul concludes Galatians, *“As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”* The false teachers in Galatia insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised.

To stand for grace would’ve drawn persecution.

“For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.” The false teachers were hypocrites. Though they browbeat the Galatians into circumcision there were other areas of the Law they ignored. *The Galatians were just notches on their belt.*

Verse 14, *“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...”* Paul did more for the cause of Christ than any other Christian who’s ever lived. Yet when he looked at his resume, his only reason to boast was what Jesus had done for Him.

The cross changed Paul's life. He says, *“by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

Before he came to Christ, this *world’s power, and wealth, and religion* had a hold on Paul. But at the cross, the world

was exposed for the evil it is... The world's system joined forces to execute an innocent man for no other reason than jealousy and fear.

After seeing what the world did to Jesus, Paul would never be enchanted by the world and its charms again. He died to whatever hold this world had on his life.

Author Neil Strait makes a penetrating observation, "Christ on our cross is the way Calvary really reads. He died for us - in our place. We, then, are debtors. *Strange, that so often we act like we owe nothing...*"

Why is it when the world knocks on our heart's door, we react as if we owe it a hearing? Not so, let's also renounce this world and any hold it might have on us.

We have a debt, *for sure*, but it's not to this world - our obligation is to the Savior hanging on the cross.

Verse 15, "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." Again, it's not what we have done or can do for God that counts, but what Jesus has done in us.

We are "*a new creation*" in Christ!

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The false teachers in Galatia had not only questioned the legitimacy of Paul's message, but also the sincerity of his ministry.

Now he rips off his shirt and shows the crisscrossed scars

on his torso. This was the result of his stoning in Lystra - proof of the suffering he'd endured to bring the Gospel to Galatia. His scars testified of his sincerity.

Adoniram Judson was a Christian missionary to Burma. For seven years he was imprisoned and kept in leg-irons and handcuffs for preaching the Gospel.

His wrists and ankles bore severe scars.

Upon his release, Judson asked the Burmese King if he might be granted permission to preach about Jesus.

The king responded, "My people are not fools enough to listen to anything a missionary might say, but I fear they might be impressed by your scars and turn to your religion." Paul also spoke by his scars.

Paul ends his Gospel of grace... "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Let me close with a quote that sums up Galatians, "Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. Your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace."

We're saved, and we stand, and we live, and we grow - all through faith in God's amazing grace!