

**Reformation Sunday November 2, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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Galatians 5:1-6

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... 4) You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace...6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Brothers and sisters who have been saved by God's grace through faith:

I'd like you all to pretend that you have fallen into a swimming pool and can't get out. If I threw you a rope to pull you out, what would you do? You would grab the rope. But, if I don't pull on the rope you won't be able to get out of the water.

Faith is like a rope connected to Jesus. Jesus will always hang on to his end of the rope and will use it to pull us to eternal life. That's a promise we can count on. In his letter to the Galatians Paul has carefully explained that faith in Jesus is the only way to eternal life. The precious gifts of forgiveness of sins, peace with God and a good conscience comes from faith in God's grace. **(Ephesians 2:8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—**

Unfortunately, not everyone believes this. Some false teachers had come to the people in Galatia and had told them that they needed more than faith. The Judiazers, as they were known, were teaching that if you wanted to be saved – you not only had to believe but you also had to keep the OT Law.

They were tying people to the Law of God instead of the grace (Gospel) of God. That kind of teaching appeals to our sinful nature. Since faith is invisible, people by nature attach a great importance to works. The works make them look pious. Maybe it will be easier for us to understand what these false teachers were doing if we make use of this rope again. When the rope is connected to Christ – we have salvation. However, these teachers told the people to tie the rope to the Law -- to trust in what they did and not in what Jesus did for them. That's why Paul told them: **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.** Paul is reminding us to:

Theme: Stay connected to Christ

1. He has set us free (1)
2. He has done it all for us (2-4)
3. He enables us to live in hope and love (5-6)

Without faith in Jesus – you and I would be tied to the Law. In fact, you could say we'd be tied up in the law. The law would convict us of our sins, we'd be condemned as guilty of eternal death and the more we would try to set ourselves free from the law, the more tangled up we'd become. We were slaves to sin and the law. But Jesus came to untie us from the law. He did that by keeping God's law perfectly for us. Jesus set us free from the law. The law no longer condemns us because Jesus died in our place and rose again.

Stand firm in the freedom won by Christ's perfect life, as well as his death and resurrection. You are free. That means you don't have to do something to try to earn God's favor. It means that you are free from the fear of everlasting punishment. The Savior has given us freedom from sin, death, hell. He's untied us from the Law including the Old Testament ceremonial laws which the Judiazers were trying to convince the Galatians to

follow. That's why Paul wrote: **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.**

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1. He has set us free (1)
2. He has done it all for us (2-4)

Our text continues: **Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3) Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4) You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.**

Paul insists that the Galatians should not listen to the false teachers who told them that they had to be circumcised to be sure of their salvation. Circumcision was part of the OT ceremonial law. The cutting away of the flesh served as reminder that the Jewish people had been cut away or set apart from the other nations. God's Son – the Savior of the world would come from this people. The cutting away of the flesh was also a reminder of the need for repentance – setting aside our sinful flesh. It is important to realize that God had made a promise to these people. Circumcision was a reminder of God's promise. Unfortunately, people forgot the promise – they believed that the act of circumcision made them special in God's eyes.

They wanted to do something for God. They regarded their keeping of the OT ceremonial laws regarding worship festivals, social customs, dress, and diet as something that made them special in God's eyes. However, whoever tries to do something for God to earn his favor rejects the gift or grace of God. Now they are trying to buy or pay for God's favor. Anyone who wants to buy God's favor will have to pay a big price. God reminds us of that price when he says; **“Be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy.”** Today's text puts it this way: anyone who wants to do something to buy God's favor will be obligated to obey the whole law. The apostle James reminds us of just how impossible that is when he says: **For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.**

When it comes to using the law to gain God's favor it's all or nothing. Suppose a child wants a toy that costs \$25.00 and they want to use their own money to get it. How much will they have to pay? Well of course – they would have to pay \$25.00. That's a lot of money for a little child. So the child might empty out all of the pennies from their piggy bank to pay for the toy. When they count their pennies, they have 500 of them. That's a lot of pennies but not enough to buy the toy. A generous parent might come to the rescue. They would tell the child to put the pennies back in the bank and let them pay for the toy so they could have it as a gift. That's the only way possible for the child to obtain the toy. If the child insists on paying for the toy by themselves and refuses the gift – the child won't be able to enjoy the toy.

That's what Jesus did for us. He realized that there was no way we could be perfect – so he gives us his perfection. If we reject his gift we will not be able to enjoy eternal life. It's a gift of God – it's not for sale! Christ paid the full price! He did it all. There's nothing left for us to do. Therefore there's no reason for us start trying to keep the law to earn salvation. If we do that, Christ's gift will mean nothing to us.

It seems that the Judiazers were insisting that the Christians in Galatia had to be circumcised. It seems like a little thing – but it meant giving up the freedom that Christ had won for them and placing themselves under the law again and under the curse of the law. At the time of Luther the church was teaching that you could buy forgiveness by purchasing indulgences. It pointed people to the Law and told them to add their works to what Christ had done. Like Paul before him, Luther proclaimed that Christ did it all for us.

Today no one is trying to convince us that we have to be circumcised in order to receive salvation. No telemarketers interrupt our dinner hour offering to sell us indulgences. But Paul's warnings are still needed because we face similar situations. Have you ever heard anyone tell you that a Christian must make a decision for Christ. Or have you ever heard someone teach that to be a Christian you must be kind, loving, gentle etc. I'm sure most of you have heard that kind of teaching before. Many churches teach that you have to do something to become a Christian. Others insist that you have to add your works to what Christ did in order to be sure of your salvation. That's the same teaching which Paul condemns in our text: **You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.**

Maybe you've heard someone say, I try my best to be a good Christian. The trouble with that statement is that reflects the attitude that we can do something to contribute to our salvation. It's all or nothing. Our best isn't good enough. That's why Jesus did it all – he offers us his perfect. It's either Jesus' perfection or nothing when it comes to salvation. That's why Paul urges us in our text: Stay connected to Christ

1. He has set us free (1)
2. He has done it all for us (2-4)
3. He enables us to live in hope and love (5-6)

Let's take another look at the closing verses of our text: **For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. 6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

In these verses Paul is making a comparison between those who want to do something to save themselves and those who remain connected to Christ. Those who want to do something for themselves have become alienated from Christ and his blessings. They have become slaves to the law. They have lost the freedom from the curse of the law that Christ offered them. But we (that is the believers or those who are connected to Christ) eagerly await the gift of perfection in heaven.

God's favor and the gift of heaven are the Christian's treasures not by their own efforts but by faith, by believing in God's promises concerning the work of Christ. The Savior's work alone conveys to us the righteousness for which we hope. God's righteousness belongs to the believer "through the Spirit" who alone has given us the gift of faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9) **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9) not by works, so that no one can boast.**

Faith makes all the difference to us when it comes to our salvation. Salvation is only through faith in the perfect life, death and resurrection of our Savior, God's only Son. Through Christ the Galatian Christians were righteous before God. That is why Paul told them, **the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love.**

We are a people who have been blessed with a faith that provides us with the sure hope of a rescue from this sinful world. We look forward to living in perfection with our Lord and Savior. His righteousness is the foundation for our faith not our works. Christ enables us to live in hope and love. It is true for us too, that **the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love.**

Paul echoes the words of James: (James 2:26) **Faith without deeds is dead.** Faith alone saves – but faith is never alone! Together with faith, the Holy Spirit creates an appreciation – a thankfulness for God's gift in Christ. He fills us with love. This love flows forth naturally from faith. The Christian's appreciation for God's righteousness in Christ motivates a response of love to God and to neighbor. That Spirit created appreciation expressed in thought word and deed is the sanctification – the Christian life that flows naturally from hearts and heads touched by the realities of our justification (the fact that we have been declared not guilty for Christ's sake.)

Christ has enabled us to live in hope and love.

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Amen.