

The Message of Paul
Law and Grace
Galatians 5:1-6

Intro: All humans are subject to moral failure—to sin. Christ came into the world to save sinners. He accomplished our salvation by his death upon the cross. Understanding the nature of his sacrificial death on our behalf is a lifelong process.

Jesus was rejected by the religious authorities of his own generation. This should give pause to all religious authorities in all times and places. There is something seductive about achieving position and power in a religious system.

The authorities of Jesus' day rejected him because he came with a message that was outside of their experience and their own religious disciplines. They were working hard to keep every jot and tittle of the law of Moses. Jesus came breaking their food laws, their Sabbath laws, and their fellowship laws.

John the Baptist and Jesus had contrasting styles. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'* [34](#) *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners"'* (Luke 7:33-34). Jesus lived his life with great enthusiasm. While his opponents pictured God as austere, stern, and distant, Jesus described God as a Father who cares for his children and loves to gather them to himself in safety and love.

Jesus insisted that the prostitutes would get into the kingdom of God before the religious authorities.

What was he talking about?

He was talking about the tremendous human tendency to answer our moral failure with strict adherence to our own lists of laws. If we keep these laws, we convince ourselves, we will please God.

Inevitably, these moral laws that we gather and paste together are friendly to our own tendencies and station in life. If we are not particularly tempted by drugs and alcohol, that would certainly be on the list of necessary things to avoid. But if we have a loose tongue, gossip would probably not be on our list.

By first collecting and then obeying our made-up list of moral duties, we comfort ourselves and achieve "self-righteousness." Sometimes we adopt the lists of others, preachers and teachers, and make them our own. As long as we do not have an abortion or go to bed with members of the same sex, we will be okay with God.

The problems with this "self-righteousness" are many. Paul understands this trap better than most. Hear what he says.

I. Take no other Yoke: *Do Not Let Yourselves Be Burdened Again with a Yoke of Bondage v1.*

***Have you ever seen oxen in a yoke? Here is what it looks like (show pic).

A. We become sons of God through faith. Galatians 3:26-29: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27](#) for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28](#) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29](#) If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs*

according to the promise. We become the children of Abraham through faith if we belong to Christ.

B. We are set free from the Law: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (v1). Jesus has set us free from law-keeping. How? He has solved our moral failure, not by demanding more good works from us, but by paying the penalty for our sin himself.

C. We find rest for our souls as we take on the Yoke of Christ. *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light*, Jesus said (Matthew 11:28-30). Working to achieve your own manufactured self-righteousness is an exhausting task. Jesus was aware that people are weary and heavy-laden by their religions. He knows we need rest. He encourages us, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

The yoke of Jesus is his teaching, being his follower. It was a common way to talk about the disciplines assumed by disciples of the rabbis. Jesus tells us that his yoke is easy. He will not burden us like other religious authorities. His burden is light. We will not be heavy-laden if we take on his burden.

D. The verb “be burdened” is PASSIVE. The yoke of religious law-keeping is almost always imposed by others. For whatever reasons, religious leaders love to impose laws on their followers. And followers love to assume these burdens. Always there will be religious authorities who are seeking to put their yoke on you. They want to weigh you down.

E. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant under the law. Some Christians thought that you had to be circumcised to really be God’s children. Paul is pushing this issue to the limit. If you are circumcised in an effort to achieve right-standing with God, then you have surrendered what Christ bought for you at the cross.

II. Try no other Justification: *You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ: you have fallen away from grace* (v4).

***My wife, Janet, sometimes persuades me to go with her when she is shopping for dresses. I never knew how much fun it is for a woman to try on new clothes. We sometimes treat our spiritual life like a set of clothes. We want to keep experimenting.

A. This word “justified” is a big word. It means “to render righteous.” It is the verb form of the noun “righteous.” Most people want to be “right.” Many people want to be “right with God.” The shorthand for “justified” is to be “just as if I had not sinned.” That is, justification is the process by which we fix our sin problem.

You can try to fix your sin problem with law—achieving some form of self-justification.

B. This “law” is generic. It can be any religious law. In the first reference it was the law of Moses—Judaism. This is the system that Jesus reacted against so powerfully during his ministry. And it was the system that eventually achieved his crucifixion. They knew that the grace he was preaching and pouring out on everyone around him was a liberating grace that stood against what they were preaching and propagating.

C. This “trying” implies human effort: *you who are trying*.... I want to talk to everyone who is “trying” today. You have been trying. You keep trying. Yet you have a perpetual sense of

FAILURE. You cannot work hard enough. You cannot do enough. The harder you try, the farther you fall from the goal.

Stop trying to measure up to some standard you have created in your own mind. You are a sinner. You always fall short. You will never feel good about yourself if you keep striving to do it this way.

D. This “alienation” is automatic. You cannot be justified both by the law and by Christ. Law-keeping alienates you from Christ. Christ is the ALTERNATIVE to the religious law. The word means either “rendered inactive” or “separated from.” Different translations go different ways. The point is this—you must choose between the two. It is either salvation by law or salvation by grace.

E. This “fallen away from grace” is graphic. Picture it like a man on a ladder trying to reach an apple and pulling the ladder away from the tree. The ladder finally passes the midpoint of that fulcrum and comes crashing down.

If you are going to lean on and trust in the grace of God, you cannot depend on your law-keeping. If you try to stretch and reach that apple, you will fall away from the tree. It is either grace or it is works. Galatians 2:15-16: *“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ [16](#) know that a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

III. Use No Other Measure: *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (v6).*

***How you measure things is of great consequence. Liters are different from gallons, meters are different from yards, and kilos are different from pounds.

A. There is a solitary measurement for life. Paul is a man of “one thing.” He wants to get to the heart of the issue and commit himself wholeheartedly to it. There is one way to value—to count, to measure—in the Christian life.

B. The measure of faith. What counts is faith. This is opposed to law. The religious law is not the supreme value. Faith is the overriding value of the Christian life. He speaks of FAITH IN GOD through Christ. He is talking about TRUSTING GOD and ENTRUSTING OURSELVES TO GOD. This is the walk of faith.

We are justified by faith, Paul says repeatedly. God has called upon us to believe in him. This is our supreme duty—faith in God.

C. The measure of LOVE. Faith EXPRESSES ITSELF through LOVE. We saw last week in the matter of ethical dilemmas that relationships are to prevail over freedom or knowledge. Yes, God has made us free. But as Paul says in Galatians 5:13-14: *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. [14](#) The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Conclusion: Everything in life comes down to RELATIONSHIPS rather than rules, faith rather than

law, love rather than regulations. We are delighted about this truth, for it means that God has taken care of all accounts against us through his Son Jesus.