

Lecture 27 – Galatians 5 & 6

Greetings! I am writing this in the middle of the world-wide pandemic. This is a time like no other in modern history. People are being asked to sacrifice their comforts and freedoms in exchange for the hope that such sacrifices will minimize the highly contagious nature of this virus. I know these are scary times, but if you're willing to hang in there for the next 25-30 minutes, my prayer is God will provide you a spiritual covering to allow you to receive the truth of His hope and love for you.

For today's lecture, we're covering chapters 5 & 6 of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians. I like how Pastor Jon Courson outlined this epistle in his commentary on the New Testament. He noted chapters 1 & 2 offered Paul's personal experience with grace. In chapters 3 & 4, he gave a doctrinal instruction on grace. And here in chapters 5 & 6 he gets into demonstrating the practical application of grace.

Chapter 5 kicks off with a discussion about freedom in Christ. I get more into the topic of freedom when we get to verse 13, but for now, I'll provide some important context as we read these verses. Paul will repeatedly reference the circumcised vs. the uncircumcised. The circumcised is symbolic of the Jew as well as to those who believe the path to God is through obedience or adherence to the Law. The uncircumcised are the Gentiles, and the assumption is they have no knowledge of the Law.

For the circumcised, Paul labels their doctrine as one that is of slavery or bondage. Going back to the beginning of this year's study, you may recall Paul's teaching on the law's true purpose. Romans 3:20 says, "*Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*" Later in Romans, Paul added, "*Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?*" In summary, Paul's point is that living a life in an attempt to live perfectly is futile. We will fail, and that makes us guilty before God. The Law shows us how to live as God wants us to, but it does not give us the power to live as God wants us to. Therefore, for the person devoted to trying to live perfectly, they will be imprisoned by their inevitable failure to do so and live with the guilt that comes with this mindset.

In the first 5 verses, Paul is admonishing those who are promoting, or attempting, to blend faith in Christ and living according to the Law. One of Jesus' last words on the cross was "*It is finished.*" What was finished? All that was required of God to satisfy the Father's wrath on the sin of those who would come to believe in His only begotten Son. Finished means finished. Nothing more is required. Anyone who tells you that Christ's finished work on the cross isn't enough to secure your salvation is a weapon of Satan, and you are to reject that person.

In verse four, Paul further introduces the central component of salvation by faith – grace. Ephesians 2:8 says, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*” Those who choose to live a life according to the rules and regulations of the law – also known as legalists – are in effect rejecting the grace of God and have been alienated from Christ.

Verse five says, “*For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.*” For us to be reconciled to God, we must be declared righteous for God cannot commune with the unrighteous. By faith in Christ, we take on His righteousness and become reconciled to God the Father. Verse 6b adds, “*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*” Faith should be the natural response to God’s love. The greater you understand God’s love for you, the greater the faith you’ll have in God. The greater the faith you have in God, the greater love you will have for Him and for those He brings into your life. Faith and love are the perfect marriage partners.

Verse nine warns, “*A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.*” Yeast, or leaven in other versions of the Bible, is used as a symbol of evil throughout Scripture. Paul is linking yeast to legalism – being stuck in and shackled to adhering to the Law as opposed the freedom and liberty in the sole and finished work of Christ crucified and His resurrection. Again, quoting Pastor Jon Courson, he says, “*The tricky thing about legalism is that it begins with the right motives. Although the motives are sincere, it ends in disaster because rules and regulations produce only one of two things: self-glorification, or self-condemnation.*”

In verse 11, Paul asks an important question to his critics, “*Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.*” Paul was being accused of preaching circumcision – adherence to the Law. His point is that if he is indeed doing this, why is he being persecuted by the people who support this doctrine? I wanted to spend some time on the concept of the “offense of the cross.” I can see why the cross is an offense to Jesus, but why is it an offense to everyone else?

- For the unbeliever, the cross is an undeniable testimony to the truth of the reality of sin and its deadly consequences. Unbelievers may play the game of “Relativity” – the one that sizes you up against how other people are doing. Finding people who are in worse shape than you in terms of conduct shouldn’t take too much effort. However, Scripture clearly tells us all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This means the only true basis of evaluating our condition is to compare it to Jesus, who had no sin. Look what happened to Him who had no

sin. He was crucified. If Jesus, who had no sin, was crucified, what does that mean for me who is full of sin? Do you see the conviction? Do you see the offense of the cross to the unbeliever?

- For the legalist – the person hung up on rules and regulations as a way to get to God, the finished work of Christ crucified is an offense and takes all the wind out of their black sails. The pedestal of pride by complying to rules and regulations as a means to elevate one's self before God and others is kicked out from under him or her by the cross of Christ.
- For the believer, the cross is offensive because it reminds us of the price our beloved Savior paid to save us from the bondage to and consequence of our sin. However, while periodically remembering what Jesus did for us at the cross is helpful in terms of helping us maintain our repentance, the cross should never be a symbol of guilt, shame, and condemnation. Those things were the very things Jesus represented while He was on the cross. With His death, those things died as well. Satan doesn't want you to hear this, but it is true.
- No one else is more offended by the cross than Satan. Why? Because Jesus won the war at the cross. Satan thought he won the war when Jesus died on the cross, but when Jesus rose again, He conquered the wages of sin – He conquered death. All the “fruit” of sin was defeated at the cross. By faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, you are set free of the bondage of sin and its deadly effects. That is worth a “Praise the Lord!”

In verse 13, we read, *“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”* What does freedom mean to you? Think that is a relevant question in this time? This pandemic has led to a significant limitation of our freedoms – at least to those who have chosen to take this seriously enough to heed the warnings of the CDC. For most of us, when we think of the concept of freedom, we think of all the things we can do – all the options we can choose from and take advantage. Paul is telling us that by our faith in Christ, we are called to be free from the legalism of the Law.

However, there are pitfalls in this kind of freedom to do stuff. Not all stuff that we have the freedom to do is good for us. Our flesh loves freedom because the only boundaries to fleshly freedom is the inevitable destruction of the flesh by over-indulging in the freedoms. Do you see the evil vicious cycle in this kind of freedom? Sin tempts the flesh because the flesh is insatiable – it can't get enough of what it wants. That is a type of bondage or slavery. Do you recall the old Lays Potato Chips commercials? Their key marketing phrase was “You can't eat just one.” What's the implication of this phrase?

The taste of a Lays Potato Chip is so good, you will feel compelled to snarf down the whole bag! What's at the bottom of that bag? A big bellyache!

Please allow me to offer a different kind of freedom, and I believe this is much more the kind of freedom the Bible is offering. This freedom is the freedom to not do things. In this verse, Paul is invoking us to use this freedom to not serve the flesh, but use it to serve others in love. The flesh doesn't want any part of this serving stuff because it's not the one being served! This is the beauty of this kind of freedom. By the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells in you, you can choose to use your freedom to not serve the flesh but to serve others. On the night before Jesus was to be crucified, He knew what was coming. He had the freedom to do whatever He wanted – including not go through with the crucifixion. But, in His freedom, He chose not to listen to His flesh. In His freedom, He wanted to eat with His disciples and then do something extraordinary. In His freedom, do you remember what He chose to do? He washed His disciples' feet. This is what Paul is referring to in this verse – to use our freedom to not serve our flesh but to serve one another in love. This is the better freedom.

One of the millions of things I love about Jesus is He keeps things simple. Being a guy, that should sound about par for the course – right ladies? Verse 14 says, *“For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* Jesus takes the entire Old Testament teaching of the Law and summarizes in one word – love. The Pharisees got hung up on the actions of the Law thinking that's the way to please God. They got it backwards. If we have true love for one another, then adhering to the law becomes a “want to” instead of a “have to.” We may not get our love-based actions right all the time, but that is where grace fills in the gaps. There is no grace in legalism.

Verse 15 warns, *“If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”* One of the terms from modern-day philosophies I despise is “karma.” I won't waste your time on where it came from or who adheres to it, but it basically means that if you do something bad, you can count on something bad happening to you. Conversely, if you do something good, you can expect the “universe” to bring you good things. Personally, I believe karma is a secular concept of some mystical righteous judgment on what is good or bad. That being said, verse 15 indicates there is a relationship in how we treat others and how, eventually, we will be treated by them.

For me, I immediately think of my struggles with judgment. If I walk around judging others all day long, Paul's point is it won't be long before others are judging me. Not too long ago, I bought for myself a gavel – a symbol of judgment. I had inscribed on it, *“This is My job – not yours. – God”* I then reference Matthew 7:1 which Jesus says, *“Judge not, that you be not judged.”* While I don't believe in karma, I do believe there is

fruit we grow in how we treat others. If we're going to be walking around with sour grapes, we shouldn't expect to be treated like fine wine.

In verse 16, Paul mentions an important component of a Christian's faith, "*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*"

What do you think Paul is talking about when he encourages to "*walk by the Spirit*"? I like what Jon Courson said, "*In the arena of liberty, the key is not to suppress the flesh. The key is to surrender to the Spirit.*" If you knew you were going into a battle or fight, who would you rather be your leader? George Washington or the Gerber baby?

Hopefully, this isn't a tough choice, but the imagery is intentional. Many Christians don't know this, but in the spiritual realm, there is a relentless war going on between good and evil. The undeniable truth of this ongoing war is every one of us is involved and impacted by it. How we choose to live each day determines what side of the battle we're going to participate.

If we're going to choose the Gerber baby as our leader, we are basically surrendering to the wants, fears, anxieties, and self-preserving actions of our flesh. Even by doing nothing, we have chosen not to fight. This is not meant to be a judgmental shot at anyone (I remember the gavel!!!). However, it is the truth. However, if we're going to go into battle, don't we want a proven leader who is stronger than any of the opposing forces? If you take the time to read about George Washington and his leadership, you will find great comfort in following someone like him into battle.

If you come into agreement with the truth of the existence of a constant spiritual war going on, then you should want to find someone to help you/lead you in the battle. Praise God, He has given each believer the Holy Spirit as a seal of redemption. Each believer has Him dwelling in us – there to be our Helper, our Teacher, our Guide, our Friend, and our power. To walk by the Spirit means we are making a conscious effort to seek God's presence – to listen to Him through His Word and to enjoy Him. One of the most beautiful benefits of walking by the Spirit is we forget about sin. Sin loses its grip on us when we are basking in the loving, merciful, and forgiving presence of God through the Holy Spirit.

A key component of walking by, or in, the Spirit is doing what He tells you to do. A relationship with God through the Spirit is not solely some academic or healing environment. Jesus was a man of action, so being a follower of His, you should anticipate He is going to ask you to take action as you walk with Him. What does this look like? Well, say you're just sitting somewhere, and the name of a person pops into your mind. You should ask God why that name came up. Perhaps He wants you to call, text, or e-mail this person with a word of encouragement or simply an inquiry as to how he/she is

doing. We aren't saved by works, but remember what James said, "*Faith without works is dead.*" Walking by the Spirit involves obedience to His leading.

Verse 17 states, "*For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.*" Paul describes the root of the spiritual war – the flesh vs. the Spirit. The flesh and the Spirit are in conflict with each other – they cannot coexist. Satan can tempt the flesh, but by walking by the Spirit, you will gain victory over the temptation. Why? Because the power of the Holy Spirit is far greater than the power of Satan – the power of temptation.

In verse 18, which says, "*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*" Paul makes a critical point – *if* you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. What does that mean? The Law tells you what *not* to do. The Spirit tells you what *to* do. Which sounds more liberating? Walking by the Spirit is so fulfilling that you literally will forget to sin.

In verses 19-23, Paul prepares for us clear distinctions of what our lives will look like living under the guidance for the flesh vs. living under the guidance of the Spirit. As he notes in verse 21, this is not the first time he has provided lists of behaviors that have no place in the Kingdom of God. He offered similar lists in 1 Corinthians 6:9, Ephesians 5:5, and Colossians 3:6. I'm not going to spend any time on belaboring the list of sins because that's what Satan wants to do with each of us. First, he tempts us to sin and then, after we sin, he heaps all the guilt, shame, and condemnation that comes with the sin he tempted us! This is a key point to remember: Satan will always remind us of where we've been – all the sins and mistakes we've made. In a forgiven state, we don't need to belabor our past, because it has been cleansed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Think of it this way – when you are driving a car, which part is more prominent – the rearview mirror or the windshield? It's a whole lot easier "driving" in life if we're looking forward than trying to drive constantly looking in the rearview mirror – looking in the past.

In verses 22-23, we get the beautiful fruits of the Spirit. There is no way I can do justice to these two verses in this lecture. Instead, I'm going to attempt to come up with some bullet points to help you apply them in your life. As a reminder, the fruits of the Spirit are: "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

- The fruits of the Spirit are good "litmus tests", or testimonies, as to whether or not you living by, or walking in, the Spirit. If you're not seeing much evidence of these in your daily life, that is a likely indication you are living more for your flesh. This is neither an attempt to condemn you nor make you think you are not

saved. If you're not seeing these fruits in your life, you should consider what you're sowing. I'll get more into this in a little bit, but if you're not investing your time and energy in the things of God – such as reading the Bible, praying, worshipping, praising, and serving – then you should not be surprised you're not seeing much of the fruits of the Spirit in your life.

- The fruits of the Spirit are to be evident in both the good *and* the bad times. Regardless of your circumstances, people should be seeing and hearing the fruits of the Spirit in your words and deeds. Arguably, they are more powerful when they are evident during trials and storms. Why? Because they are living testimonies to the power and the victory of someone who is choosing to live by the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit are visible witnesses to God.
- The order of the fruits of the Spirit is significant. What's the *first* one? – Love. I would argue that without love the rest of the fruits of the Spirit are not available. For those of us who have experienced painful examples of love in our childhoods or adult lives, showing love is tough. It's tough because we never really had an example of a pure love. This is why knowing Jesus and His love is so vital to the development of a Christian. The more you come to know and truly believe how much Jesus loves you, healing beyond your comprehension will come into your heart and mind and overwhelm the scars of the old life's concept of love. You are a new creation in Christ, and that creation is designed to show the love that God showed you.
- It is okay if you're not showing all of these fruits all the time. Don't get caught up in the Devil's trap of making you feel guilty that you're not perfect. Get over yourself – you never have been, and you never will be until Jesus calls you home. Each day, ask God to help you show a little bit of Jesus to those in your life – to show them the fruits of the Spirit. He will absolutely provide you this, if you choose to believe.

Verse 24 is a critical doctrinal component every believer should come to understand and believe as it is a remarkably liberating proclamation. Paul said, "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*" Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us when He was on the cross. He was symbolic of every one of our past, present, and future sins. When He died on the cross, by our faith in what He did, so did our sins and their punishment. In verse 24, we are told by faith in Christ, the fleshly passions and desire are crucified. The key point of this verse is there was a gigantic "spiritual transaction" at the cross. Being symbolic of our sin, Jesus was put to death on the cross. By faith, we come into agreement with God's offer to take our crucified flesh-

driven life and exchange it for a new life that is led by the Spirit. Let's look at some additional Scriptures to further prove this vital component of our faith.

Galatians 2:20: "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."

Romans 6:6: "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

Romans 6:11: "Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We've spoken earlier in this lecture about freedom. This great exchange is our source of freedom. Through faith, we are leaving at the foot of the cross our sins and slavery to our flesh. God rewards us with that step of faith by forgiving us and providing us a new freedom – a freedom to no longer be in bondage to those sins but be free to follow and live like Jesus.

Verses 25 and 26, say, "*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*"

Paul once again encourages us to keep in step with the Spirit, but he warns of spiritual pride. Even though we are forgiven, we are still vulnerable to temptation. There is great power in a life walking by the Spirit. With power, comes the temptation to feel more powerful or better than the rest. What we need to remember is whatever power we possess in walking *by* the Spirit, is only there because it has been provided *from* the Spirit.

At the beginning of Chapter 6, Paul invokes some warnings for us as we minister goodness to those in our lives. In verse 1, if we see someone caught in a sin, our mindset should not be to judge and condemn but to love and restore. That is the heart of God to all sinners – to offer mercy and forgiveness and see them restored into His original design – in a close, personal, and intimate relationship with Him. That can't happen, though, until that person deals with his/her sin. A great daily prayer is to ask God to give you *His* eyes to help you see people as He sees them. Those eyes are looking to forgive, and you may be the vehicle to deliver the news of the availability of God's forgiveness. However, Paul warns that there is a risk of joining that person in their sin in our attempt to minister to them.

Verse two of chapter six encourages us to, "*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*" One way we can know we are walking by the Spirit is how much we are helping those God has brought into our lives. At nicer hotels,

they provide bellmen or porters to help us with our baggage to our room. If you're staying a long time, you're likely bringing a lot of baggage with you. Well, if we live long enough, don't we all build up some "baggage"? Some of that "baggage" – our own sin or sins committed against us - can be pretty heavy baggage, right? As believers, we are to come along side people and help them bear the burden of their baggage. How do we do that? By simply listening and being kind-hearted to them – exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit to them. In other words, be like Jesus was – showing genuine Godly love for them.

Then we get to verse five, which says, "*for each one should carry their own load.*" Doesn't that seem like a contradictory statement to verse two? Verse two tells us to carry others' burdens, but verse five tells each one of us should carry their own load. Is this a contradiction? Not at all. There are times in life – especially during the storms and trials of life – that the load of burdens becomes too great. In the perfect world, we should be able to carry our own loads, but when the heaviness of life hits, and it always does, we should pray for others to feel led by God to come into our lives and provide some help – to carry some of our burden. That is a reasonable prayer to ask for help.

That being said, we must not develop what has infiltrated our society today, which is a spirit of entitlement. There is zero shame in asking for help to carry some of your burdens when they are heavier. However, when those burdens lighten, permanently relying on someone else to continue to carry those burdens when you are capable to carry them on your own is unbiblical and taking advantage of the helping nature of those who are carrying your burdens.

Verses seven and eight proclaim, "*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*" Paul speaks to reaping and sowing. I'm sure you've heard the saying, "*You are what you eat.*" Well, what are you feeding on these days? Are you focused on all the news about the pandemic and how big it is? How is that working for you? When we sow to the flesh – what we choose to feed it – this will determine how much control it has over us. If we're pinned to listening to all the horror stories of the pandemic – meaning sowing to the flesh, the likely reaping of that sowing will be fear, hopelessness, and anger. However, if we choose to starve the flesh and sow to the Word of God and its teaching, we will undoubtedly reap a victorious mindset and not be held captive to one of the enemy's favorite weapons – fear. A good periodic question for every believer is to ask himself/herself, or better yet, God, '*What am I sowing in my life right now?*' The glorious promise of sowing to the Spirit is the reaping of eternal life and the Kingdom mindset.

In verses 12-15, Paul uses circumcision as a symbol of those seeking to find God and be reconciled to Him through strictly adhering to the Law – or legalism. In Paul’s time, Jews were following him and pushing a faith in Jesus *plus* following the Law for salvation. These people’s motivation of this doctrine was, as Paul noted, to impress others by means of the flesh. Interestingly, Paul noted the only reason they did this, “*to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.*” (vs. 12) What he means is they knew following Jesus would come at a cost - there would be a sacrifice to that which is dear to them. What was that? Their pride and reputation. That’s the flesh speaking.

Paul goes on with the real truth of these legalism proponents – not even they keep the Law. They didn’t want to hear what James said in his epistle in chapter two, verse 10, “*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*” They wanted the Galatians to follow their circumcision doctrine, so they could boast to others about how they got these people back in line with their heavy doctrine. Paul openly prays that may he never boast in anything but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s a great prayer because it proclaims as John the Baptist said of Jesus, “*I’m must decrease, so you may increase.*” (John 3:30)

Verse 15 is a beautiful verse because it offers another core component of the blessings of being saved, “*Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.*” Paul’s point is the emphasis on the flesh – be circumcised (Jew) or uncircumcised (Gentile) – neither of these matters because they are of the flesh life. Upon coming to faith in Christ, Paul exhorts us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*” The life of living in the flesh and the deadly consequences of such a life was crucified with Christ. The old things have passed away. In God’s eyes, you are born again and are a new creation. Whatever baggage you were carrying from your old life, you spiritually left them at the foot of the cross and became totally unburdened and free to follow Christ wherever He leads you.

In conclusion, we are living in an unprecedented time, but God is not surprised or concerned about it one bit. He wouldn’t have allowed or initiated this time were He not thinking of the good things that could come from it. I challenge you from this point forward to stop listening to how big this pandemic is and start focusing on how much bigger God is. When fear, anxiety, and frustration come to your mind, lean on the truth and wisdom of 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, “*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*” If you’re struggling with this time, I understand. More importantly, the One who carried your sin burden to the cross, understands even more.

The One who led you out of your captivity wants you to bring every thought to Him, and, if you believe Him, He will exchange those thoughts of defeat to assurances of victory as a new creation forever under the loving care of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!