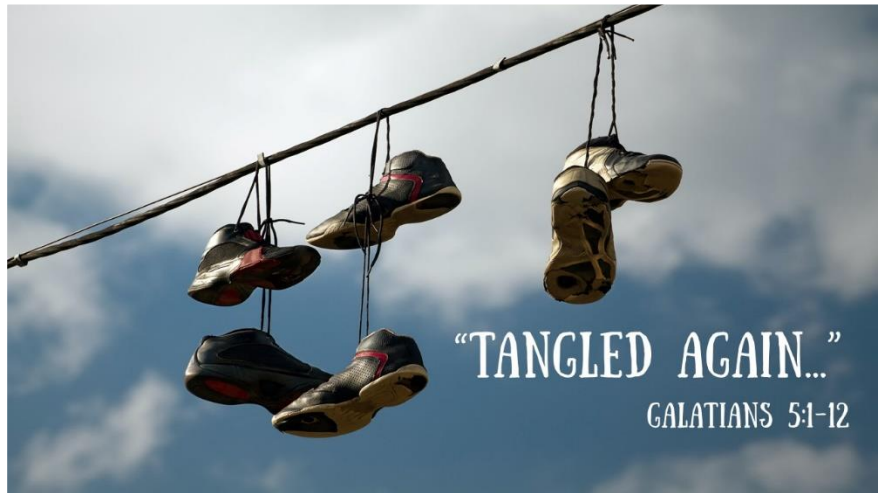


“Tangled again...”

- Galatians 5:1-12 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Galatians 5:1-12 *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who [attempt to] be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. 7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion does not [come] from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 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. 11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. 12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!*



Chapter 5

5:1

Chapter 5 opens with one of the great verses of scripture: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*” The Word of God often calls us to run or to walk, but seldom calls to “stand.” So I think we need to set up and take notice. The word in its original means to *remain firm... to persevere, to persist.*

Throughout history man seems to have had a problem with this concept. How many have “begun this race” only to conk out somewhere along the way? As we dealt with over the past couple of times together...sometimes it was due to a worldly sin in the classic sense, and sometimes it was an attempt to be one’s own savior/redeemer. The latter is trying to *earn* their standing with God...to procure God’s love by adhering to religious rules and doing good works.

How many of us have embraced that incredible and yes *inexplicable* grace given to us by God on behalf of Christ? We accepted that grace and experienced rebirth...*new life...salvation*, and we knew then that we didn’t deserve it nor had we in any way earned it. It was clearly a “free gift” through His love for us and nothing more. Yet ironically, so many of us set out almost immediately to rectify that error by diligently working... striving... **struggling** to achieve some perceived level of excellence so that we could feel deserving of the sacrifice of Christ and thus our redemption. All the while we wore the mantle of self-righteousness...declaring both verbally and in lifestyle that we shunned worldly sin and spurned the overt sins of the flesh. Ah...*but did we really?* Or was our sin of choice an idolatrous exercise in self-justification and pride? Sadly, many have found that it took years or maybe decades to come to the realization that that was exactly how they had been spending their lives. They had inscrutably ...unwittingly...gone *back* to lives of trying to make it on their own efforts only to be, *as this passage puts it, entangled again.*

“*Yoke of bondage.*” That’s ‘bible talk’ which means “all tied up in slavery.” That’s what trying to help God brings us: slavery, bondage, **entanglement**. And as we discussed previously, our post salvation forays into

worldly sin or self-imposed legalism for points with God... can be very messy. So much so that you may never find your way back out. Verse 4 describes this state of life as “fallen from grace.” That phrase deserves our acute attention.

Let us be reminded at this point that Paul was not addressing unbelievers out on the street, but rather those who at least *believed* themselves to have been converted. Those which Hebrews 6:5 says have “*tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.*” Its always easy to let scripture roll off our backs with the idea that it is all aspects of chastening the unredeemed sinner and not intended for children of God. That position is eventually fatal. Because while I believe scripture is explicit in the matter of the security of our salvation, Paul is overtly clear here in his warning. Paul was warning these believers to not “go back.”

On this side of our personal day of redemption, we most often just never think that such exit is even plausible. If asked as to the possibility of such a retreat, we almost invariably cop to Peter’s mantra...“*No way! Even if I have to die with you Jesus, I will never deny you!*” (Matt 26:35) But look around. Obviously *alot* folks are bailing out or we would be up to two services by this point easy! Truth be told, this actually happens all the time. We know it to be a fact, don’t we? Some went down in flames through the simple and base sins of the world and the flesh. But some went down waving the religious flag the whole way out the door. They had just grown “too cool for school” and God and church could no longer speak into their lives. Still religious? Oh ya! But the phone line had long ago gone dead and they are still on hold. They didn’t need church, or a pastor, or even brothers and sisters to assist them in their walk. They didn’t even need *God* to direct their path any more. At some point they took the position that “*it’s all good God! I got it from here!*”

How did this happen? Do you think they woke up one morning and just decided to jump ship? Usually not. It invariably was a ‘slow creep.’ We just started to ‘help God out a little.’ We just began to reject a little of the teaching and counseling...after all, we hear from God too! *We don’t need some babysitter. We’ve been doing pretty good. In fact, compared to others around here, we’re kind a stellar! Good thing God has us on His side! I think I have just kind of outgrown this church and these people. And obviously they don’t look up to me to the degree I deserve. I think I will just move on down the road. Maybe even start my own fellowship! Because I am really at a pastor level...*

All of this happens when we get so into church, into our service, into morality, into religion or theology, ...when we get into *ourselves*, we always seem to forget about Jesus. We forget that it was **grace** that saved us.

Rev 2:1-4 *"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. "Nevertheless I have [this] against you, **that you have left your first love.***

The church in Ephesus was doing all their stuff “right” and still they were not where they belonged. They had lost track of their “first love.” They lost track of **relationship**. The bond...the *connection*. You see, we aren’t supposed to just believe free, or think free, we are called to **live** free. No, not free to sin or freedom in the context of a lazy day at the beach. But freedom in the setting where we no longer are constrained to earn our position with God via works and rules. No longer are we towing the line to gain position and standing. No counting points or operating with a cosmic scale. All that brings absolutely *no* security and surety.

I was brought up in that world and it was always stressful. After all, if you could stumble your way out of your salvation, then who ever knew for sure where they stood with God? Of course, the tendency in that environment was and *is* to continually attempt too “hedge your bet.” One wouldn’t want to “miss heaven” by an inch right? So maybe just a little more work... tweak it a bit... a little more sacrifice... a few more rules? And maybe ...well...a few *more*. And a *few more*... That is not freedom. That’s bondage!

It’s a hard concept to accept because the world tells us that freedom comes from earning it, like the marines or something. But our faith tells us that our freedom is given to us rather out of great love and great expense of another, A.K.A. Jesus Christ. And just like our life in Him, it all has to be more than just a belief or a decision. Being a Christian calls us to *live* for Him, just as Christ calls us to live in freedom. So are we caught in some conundrum with no way out?

The problem lies in the fact that law **commands** but does not **enable**. Grace enables what law demands, then gives man the ability to live a life consistent with his position by the power of the Holy Spirit and rewards him for doing it. As C. H. Mackintosh says, “*The law demands strength from one who has none, and curses him if he cannot display it. The gospel gives strength to one who has none, and blesses him in the exhibition of it.*” Our “doing” then becomes a true expression of our love and relationship instead of a job...instead of business or occupation. It becomes an overflow of our expression of thanks and worship.

Don’t be ‘entangled again.’ That sounds like a clear warning that we once *were* so entangled and that we can truly be again. Please remember that Paul was intensely passionate about this. He saw it as a very real danger! The bodies were stacking up, and he had had enough. They certainly have stacked up around here too. There are estimates that 100,000 churches will close in the next 3 years...much of which has to do with these issues. Where will you land? Stand fast, don’t move. You’re free *in Him*. Stay in Him. Stay free.

5:2

Paul was actually taking a very dramatic position here even if we don’t wholly grasp that. A position that has seemingly been lost in the pages of time. Paul is effectively saying that if you add anything to the cross of Christ, you are not born again, you are not saved.

It’s a bold and serious position to take, but certainly grounded in biblical truth! The Mormons, the J.W.s, as well as many protestant churches that would consider themselves evangelical, Bible believing churches are clearly zealous. But it matters little if they are all pumped up over a lie!

The Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses, the 7th day Adventists, even many hyper-Pentecostal/charismatic churches have said the cross is a good starting point, but it’s not enough to redeem a person. They believe you must do more...more *yourself*, to stand in the realm of the redeemed. Paul was calling this heresy.

Paul said to the believers in Galatia that if they go out and get circumcised then Christ “profits them nothing.” That’s very direct and emphatic. Maybe even a bit extreme? I mean seriously, does it matter that much? We must realize that any such action on our part is an attempt to supplant the work of Christ with our own work. Jesus...and apparently Paul too, was having no part of it. We both cannot share the throne of our lives.

This is the cosmic battle that wages within each of us throughout our whole lives. The battle of: ‘*Who will call the shots in my life? Who will be in control?*’ The irony of all of this is in our heads we could actually be trying to make things right with God, when those very attempts are what is breaking off our fellowship with him! Those efforts are keeping us estranged from Him! Any time we add to the plan of salvation in any way, we are

taking back the control of and the responsibility for our salvation and our standing before God. And that is simply unacceptable to our Creator.

5:3-4

There is an innate problem with the “rules and regulations” route. And that is that if you break one law, you are guilty. Guilty totally and guilty of all. We can get out a pad and pencil and begin recording all the laws we didn’t break and yet still we are guilty. Just because we didn’t break a bunch of the laws doesn’t mean we didn’t break any. If I robbed a bank, but didn’t kill anyone, I’m still guilty. Paul says anyone who tries to go this route, is obliged to follow **all the rules**. Good luck with that. We cannot be “half-way” in or “half-way” out. The law is not a “cafeteria line” where we can choose some items but leave behind others. I know we are trying in our generation to do just that but it will be a bust every time and you will pay with your eternity for trying.

Jesus is either a complete Savior, or He is no Savior at all. If we try to **go it on our own**, the sad fact is that we are already busted before we even get out of the gate. It is the original sin of the garden. The ramifications of this life choice is staggering. Such a move innately causes us to become “estranged,” separated from Christ. The text goes on to say something dramatic and even scary: you have “fallen from grace.” Wow, there is nothing good sounding in that!

Many folks want to make this say that you can be saved and then “unsaved.” The problem with that premise is the whole of the rest of scripture. For such a stance contradicts the over-all, consistent testimony of the rest of scripture. The Bible clearly teaches that every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is eternally saved, that no child of Christ will ever perish, and that salvation depends entirely on the finished work of the Savior, and not on man’s feeble efforts (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28-29, Eph 1:12-14, Col 3:3).

The Commentators Hogg and Vine says this: “*Christ must be everything or nothing to a man; no limited trust or divided allegiance is acceptable to Him. The man who is justified by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is a Christian; the man who seeks to be justified by the works of the law is not.*”

Paul is not inferring that you can once be saved and then lose it, but rather if you are choosing salvation on the front end, and then later you choose the path of the law...*the path of your own works and efforts*, you fall from the grace that is offered you in communion, fellowship, growth and relationship. Any soldier that goes to battle and separates himself from his company will find his supply line doesn’t last for long. When we attempt to separate ourselves from our ‘lifeline’ we’re finished. It’s only a matter of time.

Romans 10:4 tells us “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

5:5-6

The one thing that will both break us from trying to ‘walk the path’ through our own efforts ...as well as establish us firm once we get there ...is the presence of the Holy Spirit. We know that any practical and real time manifest of righteousness out of us comes only through the on-going presence of Christ in our daily lives.

The “waiting” spoken of herein is not some “sit-on-the-couch’ passivity. This is an “earnest expectation.” An active lifestyle of living forward an existence full of faith working through love. **That** life is an **active** life. Note the word “eagerly.” For Paul, this life was a passion, one that ruled his time on this earth. Paul knew that the *answer*, the *drive*, the *motivation*... must be our love for Christ. When we love Him, we serve, we obey, we give, and we live all matters for Him. Such will never make Him love us, nor will it make us righteous before Him. But knowing that **He has made us** righteous, we love Him, and we act upon that love. Because both love and faith is ever idle. Note that love does not add anything to faith, but it does give it a place to operate!

5:7

The Galatians started out their walk well, but they were sidetracked by those who had come among them and, quite simply, lied. Now this is an important aspect to the account before us...at least in this case. Because it doesn't say **what** hindered you. It says **who**. Again, the trouble is traced back to those who had come amongst them and filled their heads and hearts with ungodly issues. However it wasn't all the fault of these troublemakers, for the believers themselves had forgotten what was important and they forgot where they came from. They weren't attentive and that is a fatal mistake. Most of all, they failed to recognize what was the truth and what was a lie. When the facts no longer rule the day, emotions and one's self, will! Our secular world is doing a fine job of proving that.

5:8-12

Paul points out the obvious: **this is not from Christ**. However it seems his declaration was only having a limited impact. Perhaps when we are offered up such a meal we would do well to just ask ourselves: Did this stuff actually come from the Bible?

Sadly, it seems that what happened to the Galatians was not some overwhelming coup. The folks there were clearly not aware of Satan's ploys...they were not watching for the enemy. So they let in just a little doubt...a little hearsay...a small rumor, a little self-centered will. And that 'little bit of leaven' was all it took. We want to believe we can hang around such people and we will still be ok...none of it will rub off!

1Corinthian 15:33 reminds us: "Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character."

The Galatians apparently thought this issue *...at least at first...* was no big deal. They allowed their flesh to rule over their spirit, and men love dirty laundry! So they began to just listen a little, and soon they began to believe it and later began to live it.

Paul finishes off this oration with an honest telling of his heart: "Frankly, those that think you should be circumcised...*these folks who are messing with you...*I wish they would go ahead and cut a little deeper...literally that they would castrate themselves." Hmmm...so much for the "Christian nice" that so many people hold to when it even comes to wolves. We certainly gather just how serious Paul was about this. There was no grace for wolves...