

The Fight for Freedom

Galatians 5:1-6

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Galatians Chapter 5, consider verses 1 through 6. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Indeed, I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."

Let us pray. Lord, we come to You once again, asking now that You would send the Holy Spirit to teach us of our freedom in Christ Jesus through the gospel given to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. And I pray that we would live as free children, those that have been justified freely by Your grace through faith in Your name. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

We ended last time in Galatians in verse 21 of Chapter 4 through to verse 31, where we saw Paul's analogy that he gave to demonstrate who the children of the free are: The sons of Abraham, those who believe in Jesus Christ by faith alone and not by the works of the law. And he described that all those who are outside of that truth are children of bondage, born unto Hagar, represented by Mount Sinai. And Paul, when he concludes that section in Chapter 4, gives a kind of charge or an exhortation for the believers at Galatia to fight for freedom. And he gives the charge, a very confronting charge, that they were to cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the free woman should not be heir with the son of the bondwoman. And reaffirming to them that they are children of the free.

And Paul continues this exhortation in Chapter 5, verses 1 to 6, encouraging them to continue to fight for Christian freedom and fight for the liberty secured unto them by the gospel of Christ. This is very fitting and providential because on Friday we remembered the soldiers who fought in World War One, and we remembered that they fought for freedom. That great war that took place there between Britain and France, and then also you had the against the Germans and the Ottoman Empire, basically caused a threat

to the global freedom of nations that upheld democracy.

And it was Prime Minister of Australia, Billy Hughes, at the time who spoke of another kind of freedom that wasn't just a global protection of freedom for the democratic nations, but rather brought freedom specifically to Australia and brought Australia national sovereignty and independence. This is what he said, "We fight," this is Billy Hughes, "not for material wealth nor for the aggrandizement of empire, but for the rights of every nation, small as well as large, to live its own life in its own way. We fight for those free institutions upon which democratic government rests." This marks an epoch in our history. "We were," this says here, "we were by the assembled nations of the earth granted the status of a nation. By our deeds on the battlefields, we had earned the right to a voice in framing the terms of peace." Goes on to say, "This is the price Australia paid for freedom and safety. Our heritage, our free institutions of government, all that we hold dear, are handed back into our keeping, stained with the blood of sacrifice." Speaking of the sacrifice of those soldiers. He speaks of the blood of sacrifice that earned Australia a seat at the peace conference in 1919, membership in the League of Nations, and no longer under British governance in terms of its relationship to the other nations.

Of course, Australia has always been independent and its own democratic nation, but it has its relationship to the other nations. It did not have that status. A status which Billy Hughes recognizes was bought through the war and through the sacrifice of those who died, and we remembered them on Anzac Day.

And in a very similar way, such is Paul's argument against the Judaizing control in Galatia. What he is simply saying is that the church is free from old covenant Israel's laws and ceremonies. She is not a subgroup of Israel, controlled by the old laws of the old covenant by which she ought to submit herself to, like circumcision. Rather, the church is independent. She is part of the new covenant workings of God, and through the blood of sacrifice, that is the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, she has been bought into freedom.

And the Judaizers were simply trying to bring these believers in the church of Jesus Christ back under that bondage by which Christ died to set them free from. Back under the rule of the law. Back under the realm of the law. The condemnation of the law to which Christ had set them free through the new covenant in His blood.

And Paul extends this application of casting out the bondwoman into Chapter 5, verses 1 to 6, by encouraging these believers to stand fast in the freedom which Christ has made them free and to not let themselves be yoked

in bondage again.

This passage teaches us that the fight for freedom was ultimately and first and foremost the fight that Christ fought. Verse 1 of this passage says, "Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free." Paul is explaining here that it is Christ who has made us free and not we ourselves. We did not free ourselves from our bondage. We did not fulfill the law. We would be under its guilt and condemnation still to this day were it not for the work of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the law perfectly and stands as our mediator.

And the kind of freedom that Paul is referring to in this passage is not the freedom which is ultimately bondage, which is lawlessness, the freedom to do whatever I want, you know, any old time. That is lawlessness and ultimately our bondage. But the freedom that he speaks of is the freedom of justification. What he is trying to help us realize is that the righteousness of Jesus Christ, imputed to us, received by faith in Christ, brings us into freedom, true freedom, a freedom from the law's demands that resulted in our perpetual waywardness and sin, which was leading to our death, which was keeping us under condemnation, and causing our consciences to be heavy laden with sin and in bondage.

And what he is simply showing us here is that what Christ has done is that by His death and by His life and by His resurrection, and by believing on His name, we have been freed from all those things that condemned us and brought us under the judgment of God. It's the freedom of a criminal who stands condemned in the court of justice, whose conscience is weighed down as his case has been read, debated, discussed, and concluded that he is nothing more than a violator of the law, worthy of death, worthy of judgment, worthy of destruction. And as that criminal bows in shame, remembering all his sins before him at the court of justice, the judge takes the gavel and declares him innocent and says, "This man has done no wrong. I find no cause to judge him." Of course, there is plenty of cause to judge him, but that is because one has paid the price for his sin. One has intercepted, one has stood between him and the law, one has stood to take the guilt, the shame, the condemnation, the helplessness for him. And therefore, not only is the judgment passed from that criminal forever, but also the judge declares that criminal as righteous, saying that he is the most upright citizen, like none other in all the land.

Now, think about what kind of freedom of conscience that would bring to that criminal, what freedom from guilt and damnation, and the resulting way in which it would free him from the power of the life that he used to live. I could not imagine a person really coming to grips with the sinfulness of their sin, like a criminal like that, being pardoned forever, going about

just going on with the same stuff again. I could see that it would produce in him a power to live for the one that freed him. It would produce in him a power to love Him that paid his debt and to honor the one through whom the law came because he has been pardoned and forgiven.

Well, such is the freedom that Christ has purchased for us through the blood of His sacrifice that obtained our freedom. Because Christ lived the life that we could not live. He fulfilled the law that we failed to uphold, and He fulfilled it perfectly so that in Him there was no sin, and He fulfilled the will of the Father perfectly. And beyond that, He went to the cross and submitted Himself to death as an innocent man, but death for our freedom, so that the sins that we have already committed and will commit forever will be pardoned by His sacrifice. So that the justice of God, that the holiness of God, that the wrath of God, that had, as it were, God's judgment pointed toward us, would rather be pointed at Him, and we would go free.

And God did more than this. He did not only send His Son; He also sent His Spirit, and He sent His Word, the gospel, to us, to proclaim freedom to the captives. To help us recognize and understand and to see our bondage for what it is and the wonderful freedom that He alone can provide. He sent His Spirit, and He sent His gospel because without His Spirit and without His gospel, no matter the sacrifice, we would not have eyes to see the wonder of His love.

And so, He made us alive in Christ, and He gave us a new heart, and He put the Spirit within us, so that we can cherish and love and understand and have the veil that is on our hearts removed, and that we might see the glory of the cross of Jesus Christ. And this was the freedom that the Galatians knew something about because Paul, by the Spirit and by the Word, proclaimed that liberty to them.

This is the freedom that Charles Wesley sings about in "And Can It Be that I Should Gain an Interest in the Savior's Blood?" He says, "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night; but Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee." And he goes on to sing in the next verse, "No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine; alive in Him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine." And he says all this to help us, in this song, to help us understand, as it were, these truths. And how did this happen? And Wesley even sings that in the second verse of the hymn, and he says, "He left His Father's throne above, so free, so infinite His grace; He emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race." And this is what Paul's trying to say: from heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride. He came to rescue her, to deliver her, to save her, so that she might walk

in the freedom of the children of God, freedom that has been made known to us by the gospel and by the Spirit. "For if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." And Paul says that Christ has made us free.

You see, this is not about us freeing ourselves; this is not a fight for freedom in the sense that we are the ones obtaining our freedom. It is Christ that has purchased the freedom for us. Paul's charge to the church is here: stand fast in the freedom by which Christ has set you free. His call to the church is to hold their ground, to not give way to the Judaizing influences that would bring them back into bondage. To stand fast in freedom, not to obtain freedom by their works or by their efforts or by whatever they're doing, but to recognize the freedom that has been bought for them in Christ and to hold their ground and stand upon the promises of God in Christ Jesus.

And he does this because there is a great thief of freedom, which is a law-works gospel that was infiltrating the churches of Galatia, a gospel of circumcision, simply saying that yes, we've got to believe in Jesus, but, but, but, but, but, God told Abraham to be circumcised, and Moses and all the Israelites were circumcised. To really belong to the children of God, you must be circumcised. And Paul describes this other gospel that was coming in, that gospel of circumcision, which was no good news at all, as a yoke of bondage. And he says, "You stand fast in the freedom; don't let them bring you under that bondage. Hold your ground. Christ has made you free; you're complete in Him."

And he goes on to say, "Don't be yoked in this bondage." He describes this law-works gospel as a yoke of bondage. A yoke is an instrument of union. Ultimately, what happens in a yoke is you have oxen that are bound together by this instrument that holds them together so that they cannot walk away from each other and that they tread the same path so they can be, as it were, fruitful in their plowing. And Paul refers to this as a yoke of bondage. This is not the yoke that Jesus calls you to, who says, "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly at heart." He says, "My yoke is easy," Jesus says, "My burden is light." That's the union with Christ that we have by faith, where we find rest for our souls, where we don't live a life trying to please God by our good works, hoping that God may accept us. That's a yoke of bondage. That is the yoke of circumcision, as it were, the yoke that these Judaizers are bringing through another gospel.

And he says, "Don't be yoked in this yoke of bondage." Refuse to put your neck down under its teaching. Hold your ground. Stand up high. Don't let you be bound with that yoke of bondage. And Paul also calls this law-works gospel not only a yoke of bondage but a religion of debt. Look what

he says in verse number three of this passage: "And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law." This was a message of circumcision that would be added to their faith to be accepted before God in Christ. And so, he says, it's a yoke of bondage, but also it's a religion of debt.

He wants them to understand: you just can't choose one of the laws and not the others. If you want to put yourself under that system, if you want to be under the old covenant, if you want to be regarded as Abraham's children in the sense of through circumcision, not through faith in Jesus Christ, then you don't just have to be circumcised; you have to keep the entire law of God, all 613 laws. You're a debtor to do all the law. And what Paul is simply saying is you can't say, "Well, I believe in Jesus, and I'll be right before God because I'll choose this law and that law. Yeah, I like these ones here; these are the ones that I think I'm doing pretty well at." Well, God says, "Listen, if you don't want to come to me by faith alone in Jesus Christ as your only hope of righteousness, and you want to have just one percent of your own effort to satisfy the justice of God, then you're a debtor to do the whole law." The whole law stands against you. You cannot pick and choose and formulate your own religion that suits you, as so many people do.

"We believe in Jesus, but yes, we want to have the sacraments. Oh yeah, don't worry about circumcision; we're done with that. But this is another thing that we have to add here so that we can really be accepted before God." Well, Paul says, if you are a debtor to do one of the laws, if you commit yourself to one of the laws, you're a debtor to the whole law. If you're going to find righteousness in yourself, then it depends upon yourself, and that debt will leave you bankrupt, and it will leave you utterly disappointed or self-deceived because you will not see the law as it really is.

And then he describes this law-works gospel as a yoke of bondage or a religion of debt, but he describes it as a Christless religion. Oh, the Judaizers could say circumcision and Christ, but he says if it's circumcision and Christ, then it's circumcision and no Christ. And he says that in this passage. He says you can't have both, essentially. But look what he says in verse number four: "You have become estranged from Christ, severed from Christ. Christ has become of no effect to you," is as it's also translated in another translation, "you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

If you think and attempt to satisfy the justice of God and be righteous in the sight of God by your own law-works, understand this: you are severed from Christ. You are not His. You do not belong to Him. You are not receiving the benefits of His saving grace. You are alienated from Him and

His life and His power and His Spirit, and you stand alone before God as your judge with your own self-effort to satisfy God. And he says, "You are estranged from Christ; you have fallen from grace."

The picture that perfectly paints this is John 15, where Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. And every branch in me that bears fruit, He purges it, so he can bring forth more fruit." And then He goes on to say, "Now you are clean through the word which I've spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abides in the vine, no more can you, except you abide in me." Isn't this, "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, for without me, you can do nothing. For herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples." And He goes on to say in this passage, if a man does not bear forth fruit, he's like a branch which is dried up and is dead and is cut off and withered. That's the picture there, isn't it? Severed from Christ. And men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

And what Jesus is trying to help His disciples understand, and what Paul is simply saying the same thing here, is that if you espouse a law-works gospel, there is no life in you, no matter if you are superficially joined to Christ by some sort of confession or because you belong to some kind of Christian community or because you call yourself a disciple of Jesus Christ or because you belong to the churches of Galatia or because you've been baptized or grew up in a Christian home. It makes no difference; at the end of the day, you are severed from Christ if you do not depend upon Christ solely for your salvation. If you seek to be justified by the works of the law, then you are estranged from Christ.

And he goes on to say that you have fallen from grace. Obviously, this has created much controversy as to what it means to fall from grace, and I'm not going to develop that entirely this morning, but I want us to understand this: that there are many people, many people who walked with Christ, that no longer walked with Him. Countless examples in the Bible, men like Judas, who tasted of the grace of God, who saw the miracles, who even performed miracles himself, who was one who saw Jesus, heard His teaching, was there as one who appeared to be receiving life from the vine, but in him was no life at all. He was not born again; he was not born of the Spirit. He was a devil from the beginning. He knew not God, yet he was deceived. In fact, so deceived, even that the disciples, when they were at the table at the Last Supper and Jesus said, "One of you will betray me," they're like, "Is it me? Is it me? I don't know who it is." Wow, isn't that an amazing thought? You wouldn't have picked it from a mile away, Judas among the disciples, Judas, as it were, in Jesus's church, singing and confessing and

saying and doing all the things that the other disciples did, but had no life in him. Demas, having loved this present world, forsook Paul. What about Simon the sorcerer in Acts chapter 8, who receives the word of the apostles, is baptized, and even continues with Philip for some time, the evangelist? Later on, he wants that power, and all he's hungry for is the power. He says, "Let me buy that from you, so I can, whoever I lay my hands on, they'll receive the Holy Spirit." And Peter says to him, "Your money perish with you."

Maybe no one would have guessed it. What a great conversion testimony this man had. Used to be a sorcerer, now he's among the disciples. But one who severed from Christ, fallen from grace. It is not that they lost their salvation, as if it depended on them in the first place. No, otherwise, you might as well do away with the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ. But as the Bible repeatedly tells us, as it does in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."

He also says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which you are also saved," listen to this, "by which you are also saved, you are saved," he's saying, "if you keep in memory or hold fast that word which I preached to you," listen to this, "unless you have believed in vain." You know what Paul's trying to say here? Those that don't hold fast the word of the gospel that I preached to you, they give evidence that they have believed in vain and were never of us, even though they appeared to be joined to us.

And Paul is saying to the Galatians, "You are not safe because you darken the door of a church. Whoever thinks they can be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace and are estranged from Christ." But Paul contrasts them with we who are true believers. Look what he says there in verse number five in verse four, "You who have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit," isn't that beautiful? Not through our own effort, not through the diligence of our own thing, but we have our own energy and effort, but we through the Spirit. The Spirit has birthed us into new life so that we now believe in Jesus in such a way that through the Spirit, we long for Him, wait for Him, believe in Him, and hope in Him.

We are like that, like those who have the true life of the vine in them, those that have been born again by the Spirit of God. He says, "You are the ones that are taking that path, but we are not like those that draw back unto perdition, but we through the Spirit, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." Paul's saying, the great sign of true believers and true freedom is that they are ones and people that are marked by true faith.

Oh no, not the faith, he says, of a mere intellectual ascent to the truth of the gospel, so that they can just repeat you the words of it or simply point you to the passages and simply say to you, "Yes, I'm saved. Yes, I know I'm saved. Why do you know you're saved?" "Well, oh, because the Bible says so, and I just prayed a prayer, and I'm okay now." That's not the people he's describing in this passage, is he? The children of the free are those who eagerly wait, and it's through the Spirit that they do that. They are those that are stirred up in their soul within them, not by their own strength and by their own vitality and by their own determinations, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit that gives them eyes to see the beauty of the cross, eyes to behold the gospel, and keeps them looking unto Jesus and the desire to be with Him.

You see, the faith that is true freedom is faith that eagerly waits, hopes, and is doing that by faith. And this is the kind of faith that should mark true Christians, a vitality in their religion, a liveliness about their spirit. They know whom they have believed. God has rescued them; God has saved them. They have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious. They're not in a yoke of bondage; they're at rest and peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God within them stirs them up to love and to good works, and they cannot remain and stay in sin because they're troubled by the grace of Christ and by the power of the Spirit to go on and live for the glory of God.

This is the great sign of those that truly belong to Christ, those that have not fallen from grace, those that are among the people of God. They possess a Spirit-wrought anticipation, a faith and hope which produces works of love. This is what is the language that he says here, "For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." Now, hang on a minute. If you're looking closely at this text, you're going to have a question here, and you should have a question. "We through the Spirit eagerly wait for what? The hope of righteousness by faith." Wait a minute, Paul, you've been telling us we're already righteous, already justified by faith in Christ. Now, what do you mean we're waiting for the hope of righteousness? Aren't we already right in the sight of God? Our justification is not future; God has declared us righteous. Christ has paid for our sins. God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to us now, so that we stand righteous now. What do you mean by this, Paul?

Well, what Paul is saying by this is that there is coming a day where what God has declared in the courts of heaven will be made manifest to all. There is coming a day where the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, that seems so hidden in our own lives from our own eyes and so often in the eyes of the world around us, will shine bright as the sun on the day

when Christ returns, and He will crown us with the crown of righteousness, and we will be in the beauty and splendor, and we hope for that day that God, what You declared us to be now in Christ, we shall be before the world, righteous.

Tom Schreiner puts it this way: "Believers are already righteous before God by virtue of their union with Jesus Christ. Still, their righteousness is hidden from the world and will only be unveiled on the last day. Indeed, the righteousness of believers is hidden to some extent even to them since they grasp it now by faith. On that last day, however, their righteousness will be undeniable, both to themselves and to the whole world." That's their hope; that's our hope. We eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith, that one day we will shine in the brightness of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and God will look upon us and say, "These are My righteous ones. These are the ones who have believed on My name. These are the ones to whom the righteousness of Christ has been imputed."

I think this is what Paul longed for when he said, "Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not to me only but to all those who also have loved His appearing." Imputed, yes, to our account; in one sense, hidden from us; in another sense, hidden from the world. But in that day, we'll be crowned with the crown of righteousness, and the beauty of the righteousness of Christ will shine for all the world to see. What a glorious hope that is for those that have tasted of the righteousness of Christ here and have been declared righteous by God.

This is the faith that eagerly waits and that eagerly works. It's not an idle faith; it is a faith that is vital, that is producing works of love. He says in verse six, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." He's saying our religion is a religion of true faith and true life, true eager expectation and hope, but beyond that, it's a religion that works for the glory of God out of a heart of love.

It's not about our externalism, circumcision or uncircumcision; it's about what God has done in our hearts through the Spirit, the faith that we possess, and how that moves us to know a love that we never loved before and motivates us to serve and love God and love our neighbor as ourselves as a result of that power. We're not sitting there looking at the commandment, saying, "I did that one today, and oh yes, that one, oh yeah, no, I'm good on that one." Anyway, we are people that have taken up in the love of God that aren't calculating what I did last week for this person and what I did for that person and who owes me this and who owes me that, and God, You better be good to me this week because I prayed three times extra than I

did, and I spent an hour extra in the Bible, and I'm just waiting for Your blessing, oh God.

No, we are those that understand that what we have is a gift of God by grace through faith, and we are taken up in the love of God's mercy, and so we're not measuring our works in a sense we were trying to satisfy God's justice. We are taken up in His love, and we serve Him because we think, "Lord, I cannot repay You. I'm not even going to attempt to. You're worthy. You're worthy, and I'm going to live and breathe and move and love and serve all for Your worthy name."

This is the mark of those that have a Spirit-wrought faith, a born-again believer that has been taken up by the Spirit and made alive in Christ, that haven't got the legalistic framework in their minds. They're taken up in the mercy of God that they just think, "Lord, You showed me mercy. How can I show them mercy?"

And Paul's warning to the churches of Galatia is, "You be very careful because if you espouse the gospel of circumcision, you will be severed from Christ." Verse 2: "If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." Listen to this: "If you become circumcised, you're a debtor to the whole law. If you attempt to be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace." What is Paul saying to the Galatians? The gospel of circumcision and the gospel of Christ is incompatible. Don't you dare think that you can have one and the other. Christ either will be all your righteousness, or He will be none of your righteousness. He will be the one that represents you to the Father, or He will not represent you at all. It is Christ's righteousness or nothing. It is His salvation, or it's your self-salvation. It is the justification that He gives, or you got to seek it to justify yourself before God on the final day, and you're a debtor to do the whole law.

It's incompatible, these religions of works that declare faith in Jesus Christ are false religions because they bring in another gospel and try and marry it with the true gospel, and Jesus says, "I'm not yoking up with bondage, and none of My people are either," because My children are the children of the free. And we have to be very careful that we make sure that the law is not our master because whoever keeps the whole law and yet offends in one point, he is guilty of all. And the seeds of legalism and apostasy are not far from any of us. They're all over the internet, and I'll doubt to say they're even in the midst of our hearts. We are by nature legalists; we are by nature people that justify ourselves.

And you say, "Josh, but I don't believe in circumcision and all this kind of stuff. That's not the gospel that I proclaim." Look, as it doesn't come to us in the form of circumcision. You know the form that comes to us? It

comes to us in the form of service, Christian service. Christian gets saved, new believer in Jesus, "Go serve the Lord now," and he goes serving the Lord, serving the Lord, serving the Lord, and he should serve the Lord. But somewhere along the line, he equates or shifts in his thinking that my service and sacrifices for God is what makes me acceptable in the sight of God.

So how do I know if I'm feeling this way? When you have a bad week of Bible reading and prayer, or you're falling into sin, do you think, "God doesn't love me, and I've got to spend the rest of my week working back on my way to God"? Do you think, "I've got to double down now because God won't receive me, He won't hear my prayer, I have to earn His forgiveness, earn His favor"? Oh, you can say that you believe in justification by faith alone, dear brothers and sisters, but you might be in that yoke of bondage and not even realize it. Your relationship to God is one of just climbing uphill, and your relationship to God feels like bondage.

Somewhere along the line, you've become like those people that on the last day are going to stand before the Lord and say, "Lord, Lord," they're going to confess the right things, but they're going to point the ground of their acceptance as their works. "Have we not prophesied in Your name? Have we not cast out devils? Have we not done many wonderful works?" And Jesus will profess unto them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of iniquity." These are those that shift, and we've got to be very careful because it's so easy in our hearts and in our minds to shift.

We have to keep the gospel before us at all times. We have to preach Jesus to ourselves every day, and every time we sin, we must stand before the throne of grace saying, "God, I'm only accepted here because of the blood of Your Son, which You gave for my sins. My iniquity has been forgiven; my transgressions have been covered. I am blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, not because one iota of my works, but because of the grace of God in Christ."

Don't be like that person who possessed a great item of memorabilia, like a jersey signed by Michael Jordan or a baseball signed by Babe Ruth, and he saw that it's fading, the ink is fading on the signature, and so he took out his own pen and traced over the signature again, not realizing that by tracing over the signature with his own hand, he made that piece of memorabilia worthless. And that is what happens if we touch the gospel. We distort the gospel because our hands are filthy, and you can try and trace over it with all the fine argumentation you can, but who are you trusting in this morning for your salvation?

Or let me ask it this way: Are you complete in Jesus Christ or not? That's a

good way to put it. Do you feel and believe and know that "I am complete in Jesus Christ"? Because if you alter that gospel, if you add to that gospel, it ceases to be the gospel, and Christ will become of no effect unto you, and you will not have that eager waiting anticipation for the hope of righteousness. You'll be here below trying to earn your own righteousness and turn over a new leaf and do something for God, and you'll label it with service, and you'll confess yourself to be an evangelical, but you may be one who has fallen from grace.

Beware of the self-pitying form of legalism that confesses things like, "I'm so sinful that God can't forgive me." What an offense to God's mercy, what an offense to the righteousness of Christ. Or it comes in the form of, "I don't think I'm good enough for heaven." "I don't think I'm good enough for heaven." What part of your brain thinks that you are good enough for heaven? That part needs to be cut out because none of us have ever been good enough for heaven.

Or, "I hope I've done enough," or even worse and more subtly, "I believe in Jesus, and I'm saved, but you know what, if I sin and I don't confess in time, oh, I don't know if I'm going to make it." You have to make it; you've simply just confessed to yourself and before God that we set ourselves free. No, Christ sets us free.

May God help us to be those Christians that eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness, to be the ones that daily confess, "Lord, I know, I know that I'm not who I ought to be. I know that about myself, but I know You've accepted me in Christ Jesus." And so, I'm going to eagerly wait for that hope of righteousness because I know my righteousness has nothing to do with my efforts and my works in this life, but it's got everything to do with what You have done and what You declare. Jesus, You be my hope, You be my righteousness.

And church, stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has set you free. Slay every form of legalism in your life, in your theology, in the church of Jesus Christ, because we have been freed by the blood of Jesus. And let's not give ground to legalism, ground to legalism at all. Let us pray.