

## Saving Faith

One of the greatest messages the Apostle Paul tells the churches of Galatia is that faith working through love has value. Our works are meaningless, Paul says, if they are performed for any other motivation than love. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:6 [ESV], ***“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”***

In order to understand the teaching of the Scripture concerning saving faith, we must see the context in which our text is used. The context of this verse is the issue of circumcision. There were Jewish brethren coming into the churches of Galatia teaching that in order to become a Christian one had to become a Jew first. They were teaching those Gentiles that they needed to keep the Law of Moses. But Paul was quick to rectify that heinous error, saying that if a person is in Christ then circumcision or not being circumcised did not matter at all to God. Circumcision is serving under the letter of the Law of Moses, and not serving under the spirit of the Law of Liberty found in Jesus Christ. Circumcision avails us nothing, and if you believe you are pleasing God by being circumcised then you are voiding the sacrifice of Jesus. You are telling the world that what He did on the Cross was not sufficient. You are saying, “I will take Christ, but I really need more.” And Paul says that thinking is garbage. What matters is ***“faith working through love.”*** That is what has value.

In teaching that circumcision and keeping of the Law of Moses was of no avail to the Christian, Paul offers his sharpest criticism of those Judaizers when he tells the Galatians, ***“I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”*** (Galatians 5:12 [ESV])

In his *Epistle to the Colossians*, Paul also dealt with those who had a misunderstanding of what true, obedient saving faith was all about. Those people in Colosse were also under the impression that Jesus Christ was not enough. Not only were there Judaizers in Colosse trying to get the Gentile converts to Christ to also keep the Law of Moses, there was a sect of Gnostics that had come in that were teaching mysticism and the worship of Angels. Paul warns the church,

***16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of Angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from Whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*** (Colossians 2:16-18 [ESV])

Look at all that the Apostle Paul deals with in these four verses. We see the hand of the Judaizers perverting the grace of God as they were trying to get the Gentile Christians

to follow the diet restrictions of the Law of Moses. They were intent on demanding that the Gentiles adhere to their customs regarding festivals, new moons and Sabbaths. Paul was so fed up with what was taking place with the Judaizing Christians that he relayed a story to them of how he handled a situation with the Apostle Peter while Paul was in Antioch. Paul writes in Galatians 2:3-14 [ESV],

**3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in – who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery – 5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. 6 And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) – those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. 7 On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised 8 (for He Who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 9 and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.**

**11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”**

Becoming a Jew was not the type of faith that saves. Keeping the Law of Moses was not what God demanded for those who had been washed in the blood of His only begotten Son. Saving faith is trusting in the sufficiency of the grace of God in Christ. When we come to Him in obedient, saving faith, confessing Him as our Lord and Master, repenting of our sins, and submitting to have our sins washed away in that watery grave of baptism to rise up and walk in newness of life, clothed in His holy garments, we need to understand that His work performed on the Cross of Calvary was sufficient for our needs. We do not trust in law keeping, but we grasp hold of His hand, holding tightly to it as we journey through this life together. As the Apostle John puts it,

**5 This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the Light, as He is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we**

**deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.** (1 John 1:5-10 [ESV])

Are we going to trust in Jesus, or are we going to reject His grace? If we choose to reject His grace and believe we can earn our salvation through good works, we do so at our own peril, for our justification comes through the work of Christ, not of ourselves. As Paul says again to the Galatians who had allowed their selves to become so far removed from Christ through the influence of false brethren,

**1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** (Galatians 3:1-3 [ESV])

Once again, Paul is mincing no words in telling the churches that Jesus Christ is all-sufficient for our needs. Our saving faith must be based upon our trusting fully in His power to save, not in our own works. We begin by His Spirit, and we are completed in His Spirit.

Christians should never allow themselves to be rounded up in the corral of religion, as the Judaizers were attempting to do to the Galatians. Paul commands the Galatians to avoid being confined, loaded down, and oppressed by the burdensome restrictions of performance regulations. He employs the metaphor of a yoke being placed upon a beast of burden in order to restrict its freedom and cause it to perform as desired. "Don't be a dumb ox, and let those religious slave-drivers put the religious yoke upon you in order to drive you to perform according to their expectations," Paul seems to say. That, indeed, is a binding slavery. It is interesting that the same metaphor was used when Paul went to Jerusalem soon after writing this letter. There it was Peter who asked the gathering of predominantly Jewish-Christian conferees (many of whom were demanding circumcision and Law of Moses observance in Acts 15:5), why they insisted upon **"placing a neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?"** (Acts 15:10 [ESV]). It was determined that there should not be restrictive requirements placed upon Gentile believers, but that did not seem to stop the Judaizing traditionalists from dogging Paul's steps wherever he went, intent on implementing their agenda to impose Jewish traditions on Gentile Christians. There is, indeed, a sense in which Christians are yoked to Jesus Christ, for freedom must always have a context, but our connection with Christ is not oppressive or burdensome, as He provides the all-sufficient dynamic of His life. **"Take My yoke upon you...and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light"** (Matthew 11:29-30 [ESV]).

As was mentioned earlier, to reject the saving power of Jesus is to do so at one's own peril. Paul tells the Galatians,

**1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the Law; you have fallen away from grace.** (Galatians 5:1-4 [ESV])

Paul says we are to stand firm in Christ! We are to trust completely in the Lord with our entire being, which is what Jesus taught in Mark 12:30 [ESV]: **“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”** If we falter in doing so and believe that we can do something to earn our salvation, we, too, have fallen from grace.

Paul had no problem with the Jews or the Gentiles in Colosse having a festival day in and of itself, his problem was when those who chose to follow those customs passed judgment on those who chose not to follow them. As Paul told the Galatians, keeping the Law of Moses was to no avail. Why? Because as he says to the Colossians, all those things were but **“a shadow of the things to come, but the substance is Christ.”** If you already have the substance, then what good is the shadow?

Paul also further substantiates the sufficiency of Christ by reminding the Colossians,

**9 For in Him the whole fullness of Deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in Him, Who is the Head of all rule and authority. 11 In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, Who raised Him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the Cross.** (Colossians 2:9-14 [ESV])

The situation was critical! If the Colossian and Galatian Christians would not respond to Paul's appeal to live in the freedom of God's grace, they would likely be lost to religious slavery. Paul seems to have regarded this letter as a last chance, a “now or never” opportunity to explain the “either/or” choice between religious performance and God's grace received by faith. The dichotomy of the alternatives is clearly delineated. Either Christ is all-sufficient, or Christ is nothing!

Those who walk by saving faith, which is motivated by love of God, are not only well pleasing unto the Lord, but they have a great reward that awaits them, as we see in Galatians 6:15-16 [ESV]. **15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.** God gives the believer a reward of peace and mercy for faith when their faith is motivated by love. As the Apostle

Paul also warned, ***“if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing”*** (1 Corinthians 13:2b [ESV]). The Lord is pleased with that faith, that new man, and that new heart filled with desires when that all comes from the law of love.

Only those whose faith is motivated by love are said to be blessed peacemakers. Jesus called these individuals the ***“sons of God”*** (Matthew 5:9 [ESV]). To the faithful believers in Philippi, Paul wrote, ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 4:7 [ESV]). No longer are we enemies of God once we come to Him in obedient, saving faith, we are now His children through adoption, which means we are joint-heirs with His one and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:15-17). We have had our sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb (Acts 22:16).

While speaking of Jesus Christ, Peter said in Acts 4:11-12 [ESV], ***11. This is the Stone that was rejected by you, the builders, but which has become the Cornerstone. 12. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*** So many people have varying beliefs regarding what constitutes Biblical salvation. To be saved from oneself, an individual who is lost in sin and rebellion, is salvation. Salvation means to be saved from serving the prince of the power of the air, who is Satan. But ultimately, salvation is having peace with God. It is reconciliation between God and the individual who had formerly through transgression walked away from the Lord. That is salvation. So true, saving faith does have its rewards as the grace of God reaches across the mighty gulf created by our sins that separated us from our Father.

Hebrews 11:6 [ESV] says, ***“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.”*** Faith has its eye on this reward. It is the object of its faith. The reward, as Paul stated, is having peace with God and being reconciled to Him. It is coming under the mercy of God through the blood of Christ. It is peace, true peace. Faith does have its eye on the reward, but the motivation comes from love, not in seeking to follow the letter of the law out of compulsion. This reward is not given to those who serve the Lord by the letter of the law out of compulsion, but it is awarded to those who serve God in the spirit of the law from a motive of love.

In Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus taught that loving God with all of our heart, and with all of our soul, and with all of our mind is the first and greatest commandment. The second was like it: to love our neighbors as ourselves. Accepting the gospel plan of salvation is loving God above all else, and sharing the gospel with others shows our love for our neighbor. This is obedient, saving faith fully motivated out of love, and not of compulsion.

A hearty desire to serve the Lord from a motive of love is very well pleasing in the eyes of the Father, and it has a great reward. We see this in John 14:21 [ESV]: ***“Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves***

***Me will be loved of My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.***” Do you see the emphasis on keeping His commandments out of love for Him? By the act of keeping His commandments, we pass the test. It proves we love Him. It is very pleasing to the Lord when we love our neighbor and do things for them out of love. Our actions should not be based on merit or trying to prove something. The motive of our heart is to help others because we love them and the Lord. Our reward is that we will have the love of the Father and Jesus Christ, and in His salvation He will manifest Himself to us.

When the Lord Jesus made that statement, His disciples did not catch the distinction between this exercise of saving faith and the world. We can see that by the question that followed. John 14:22 [ESV] says, ***“Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?’”*** This disciple did not see the need for a motive of love. A motive of love is not the motive of the world. Therefore, Jesus will not manifest Himself to the world. Judas did not catch that distinction, so he asked the question, and Jesus went on to explain how delighted the Father is with those who are exercised by the ***“faith working through love.”***

John 14:23 [ESV] says, ***“Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’”*** There, again, is the reward. When we love the Lord by keeping the word of Jesus, then He and the Father will make Their home with us.

James tells us in James 5:16 [ESV], ***“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”***

What is effectual prayer that avails much, and is so forceful? Jesus tells us in John 15:7-10 [ESV], ***7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples. 9 As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.***

By the grace of God we can subdue all kinds of fleshly evils of our fallen human nature. However, we must remember that it is a lifelong war. Galatians 5:17 [ESV] says, ***“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”***