GALATIANS 5:1-26

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 20th October 2024 @ Deal Christian Fellowship **Reading:** John 15:4-8

Introduction

Chapter overview of Galatians

• Chapters 1-2: Personal

Chapters 3-4: Doctrinal

Chapters 5-6: Practical

This morning in our Bible study of Paul's letter to the Galatians, we are going to begin the final of three sections that we can divide this book into. The first two chapters, as we saw, largely deal with Paul's personal experience of grace, including the discussion with Peter and the other apostles that took place in Jerusalem.

Chapters 3 & 4 then dealt with the doctrinal part of this book — that is, they set out very clearly what we believe as Christians with regard to the law and grace, defending against those who would try and twist the gospel into something else.

And now, as we enter the final two chapters, we'll still be learning *more* of what the Bible says, more about what we *believe*, but, it will become very practical in what it talks about. And that means there is going to be much to apply to our daily lives.

Overview of chapter five

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- v1-6 Grace offers liberty
- **v7-15** Liberty from sin, not liberty to sin
- v16-26 Walk in the Spirit, and produce fruit

First, in verses 1-6, Paul will underline how grace offers us liberty, that is freedom from the demands of the law. But next, in verses 7-15, he'll make clear that *that* liberty is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin. But, given that we are prone to sin, he'll conclude this chapter by saying that we can't keep ourselves from sinning through our *own* efforts, but only by walking in the Spirit.

In other words, having been justified by *faith*, that it might appear as we had *never* sinned, we are now *sanctified* by the *Spirit*, that we would *no longer* sin, and that we would see the *fruit* of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Chapter five

So, let's get going in verse one, then. We read:

Galatians 5:1

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

So, looking back at what he had just written about the examples of Ishmael and Isaac, and given that we are also children of *promise*, and *not* of works, Paul says *don't* be moved from the freedom that grace brings, back into bondage of the law. For like getting tangled up in anything, it will slow your walk with the Lord down. And he borrows this phrase about the *yoke of bondage* from Peter, who back at the council in Jerusalem had said:

Acts 15:10

Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

And Paul continues:

Galatians 5:2

Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

In other words, even I, Paul, who as a Pharisee was more zealous about the law than *any* of you, even I am saying to you that you can't have it both ways; you can't say Christ's death was sufficient, and then say that we must do good works in order to be saved — for that would be to say that Christ's death on the cross was *insufficient* to pay for your sin, leaving you in no better place than before He died for you. Either Jesus' death on the cross was sufficient to pay for all your sin, or it was not. It's as simple as that.

And that's why the preaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons is so corrupt, for it says that Jesus' death was not sufficient to pay for our sin. It's also why it is utterly detestable when some try and merge the teachings of other man made religions with the good news of the gospel. And that's why we must be so careful to not let legalism creep into our theology, doctrine, or practice.

Now, I'm not saying that folks who do this are all malicious in doing so. Many are not. But like the well meaning chef who accidentally covers their dessert in salt instead of sugar, even accidentally adding legalism to liberty is to end up without liberty at all. Both leave an unpalatable mess that are no longer sweet to the taste.

And Paul goes on to say that the moment you add one bit of the law to grace, we become debtors to *all* of the law — not just the bits we like, or the bits we think we can keep. He says in verse 3:

Galatians 5:3

And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

So that is, whichever route you go, you have to be all in. You can't sort of believe in Christ. You can't keep some of the law. You either trust fully in Jesus for your Salvation, or you have to keep the whole law yourself. The law is that unforgiving, as James also noted in his letter. And Paul says next:

Galatians 5:4

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

That is, if you think that by trying to keep the law you've somehow reached the pinnacle of Christianity, that you're somehow operating on a higher level than Christians who rely solely on the completed work of Christ, then you're utterly wrong. For in fact, you've fallen to a far lesser thing.

You see, putting yourself back under the law is to replace a personal relationship with the Lord, with regulations. It is to move from being an adopted son, to being a slave. It is demotion, *not* promotion.

And note, this isn't to say you can lose your salvation (Jesus Himself was very clear that losing your salvation is not possible). But rather, this is repeating what Paul stated in verse 2, that if you're going to try and earn your way into heaven, then Jesus death on the cross won't help you with that one bit. Indeed, Christ will profit you nothing.

The opposite is true with grace, however. For not only are we *saved* by faith alone in Christ alone, but we also find that we are adopted, filled with His Spirit, and we have this hope in what He will do in our lives as He *sanctifies* us. Verse 5 says:

Galatians 5:5

For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

Contrasted to salvation by works, which causes you to look over your shoulder at the law, thinking "have I done enough?!", salvation through grace causes you to look forward to all that is to come, looking forward to that time where God's work of sanctification in our lives is complete. But again, that's His work, not our work — which Paul underlines once more, saying:

Galatians 5:6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

You see, law keeping never changed hearts. It didn't even produce obedience. But knowing what Christ has done for us, having been saved through faith, our response is now born out of love, not compulsion. We don't seek to be righteous for reward, but in response to what God has already done. Grace is opposed to earning, but not opposed to effort. And so we want to please Him.

It's like this; you meet someone, you fall in love, and you marry. And what do you find yourself doing? Serving them. Is it because you have to? No, it's because you want to. One of the joys that should be present in marriage is to serve one another in love. And sometimes that looks like unloading the dishwasher before they do. Or doing a chore that wasn't on your list. Or making them a cuppa without any prompting. Again, not because you have to, but because you want to.

And the Galatians knew this. They knew the gospel. They had been saved by faith. But they had gotten distracted by those who tried to add to it. And so Paul asks them:

Galatians 5:7

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Elsewhere we read in 1 Corinthians that we are to run to *win*. In Hebrews we read that we are to run with *endurance*. Here in Galatians, Paul is saying we need to run despite those who would set us back. The idea being that these Judaisers, these legalists, had crept in, and had cut into their lane, causing them to stumble. And Paul says, these folks — whoever they are — who have come in and tripped you up in your walk with the Lord, trying to convince you that Jesus' sacrifice was not sufficient to pay for your sin, are not people that are sent from God at all. We read:

Galatians 5:8

This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.

For, if we could have been saved by works, Jesus would have simply told us to try harder. Not die on the cross in our place! And that's the madness of the legalist, that they forget all that Christ endured for us. Not because He wanted to give us *another* way to be saved, but to make *a* way to be saved.

Remember how we read that Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane, the night of His betrayal, and began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed, even saying to Peter, James and John "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." And then He went on to pray *three* times "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." And what happened? He continued, was betrayed, was crucified, and rose again from the dead. Why? Because it was not possible for us to be saved any other way.

So then, this is of fundamental importance. It's not something that the Galatians could, or we can shrug off, saying, well, everyone is entitled to believe what they want to, the important thing is we make people feel welcome. No, Paul warns, saying:

Galatians 5:9

A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

So using the analogy of yeast, a consistent metaphor for sin throughout the Bible, Paul says you get even a little of it in what you're trying to bake, and it puffs up. And that's what legalism will do. Even just a little bit of it in your life, or the life of this church, will cause either to puff up, having a holier than thou attitude. And that can cause people to leave churches, and it can cause your kids to think that being a Christian is all about keeping rules, rather than coming to Christ in faith.

And we really *are* talking about details making the difference here, that's why we need to be so careful. And in case you think I'm overstating this, let me give you two more examples. First, we must not tolerate false teaching on the basis that there are *some* good things being said. For Rat poison is 99% nutritious — that's why the rats like it! It's the 1% that kills.

Second, when setting sail, you want your course to be precisely in the right direction. For 1% off course might not make much difference as you leave port, but the further you go in that wrong direction, as little off course as you think it is, you could miss your destination by miles!

So we must not let legalism into our thinking. Either we are saved by works, or by faith. We cannot be saved by both. And, as we've clearly seen, the law doesn't rescue us, it only reveals our sin.

Now, Paul has made his point. He has clearly stated His case, that we are saved by grace. And, knowing that the Galatians were indeed saved by grace, that they had genuinely come to the Lord on *that* basis alone, and that these troubles were the result of poor teaching, and not a sign that they were not saved, he writes:

Galatians 5:10

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.

In other words, though he was worried about them, he was also confident that they would see the sense in what he was saying. That they would remember how wonderful God's grace was. And that they would not, in the end, tolerate those who tried to twist the gospel into something that it was not. Rather, he was confident that those who were doing this would be exposed as false teachers.

And next, Paul notes for clarity, should the Galatians have still be confused on the matter, that he is not one of those teaching the keeping of the law as a means to be saved, noting:

Galatians 5:11

And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offence of the cross has ceased.

In other words, Paul says, if I taught that works were necessary, then not only only would I have these legalists off my back, but I wouldn't be persecuted at *all* because people are not offended by hearing they need to be good to please God. Why? Because they all think they *are* good people. But the gospel says that none of us are good, and that we all need a Saviour — and *that* is offensive. And we're not to water it down, to make it more palatable to them, for people need the whole gospel. They need to know the bad news, for the good news to make sense, as we've see in the last couple of weeks.

And as such, Paul wanted to see these legalists, who preached another gospel, nowhere near these Christians in Galatia. And he writes:

Galatians 5:12

I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Effectively saying, they're suggesting cutting things off to keep the law. Why don't they do us all a favour and cut themselves off from your presence!

Galatians 5:13

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

That is, God didn't call you to Him so you would live under the law. Rather, He saved you that you might be set *free* from the demands of the law. However, the liberty, the freedom that we now have isn't liberty *to* sin, but liberty *from* sin. That is, we're not to treat God's grace as if it were permission to sin, since Christ has paid for it all. No, no. Rather, out of love for God, we are now to love Him, and love one another. That is what this freedom is for.

Another way one person put it, is that there are three methods of trying to life the Christian life — and two of them will not work. The first is legalism, which Paul has exposed for the false gospel it is. The second, is license, that we can do whatever we like, because Christ died for us. But that is to mock God, and to treat Jesus' sacrifice with contempt. And the third, which is really the only way to live as a Christian, is in liberty. But liberty is different to licence — for it doesn't do what it pleases because it can, but rather loves because of the love it has been shown. And Paul says:

Galatians 5:14

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

That is, the end of the law, the essence of what it was always pointing us to do, was love. And that, is a very different word to legalism. Jesus Himself made this clear. We read in Matthew's gospel:

Matthew 22:34-40

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Galatians 5:15

But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

And so Paul warns that we must not use this freedom from the law to attack one another. And oh how tragic it is when Christians do this, for we have been shown such love by our Saviour, so it is desperately sad when we then try and take chunks out of each other with snide remarks, whispering behinds peoples backs, being overly critical, and just plain being nasty. If we do that, we'll end up fighting each other, and that is *not* how Christians should be.

And the reality is, that many people have walked away from the Lord, because of how other Christians have treated them. Let that not be you that causes that. But, let is also not be you that avoids Christian fellowship because of that. For one bad experience in a church should not stop you going to another church, in the same way that you wouldn't stop going to *all* restaurants because of a bad experience in *one* restaurant.

So love is the way. That is what we must show. But, in case you haven't noticed, it's not easy. We fail at it. At times we find it very hard to do. Why? Because we have so many competing desires, that the Bible calls the lust of the flesh. That's why back in chapter two he wrote "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."

That is, just as our salvation wasn't accomplished by our own efforts, neither will our sanctification be by our own efforts either. And so, as we go through the remainder of this chapter, Paul is going to show not only what the works of the flesh look like, but what is the key to avoiding them, and further still, what a Christians life should look like as a result. And he writes:

Galatians 5:16

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

What? How? Paul says we are to walk in the Spirit. What does that mean? Well, it doesn't mean suppressing the flesh. It doesn't mean trying *really* hard to not sin. You see, Romans 7 describes in detail the battle of *wanting* to do right, but the law being unable to help. Concluding with "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" — the answer? "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

That is, with Christ's Spirit in us, through which we cry *Abba, Father!*, we now have new likes, new desires, but more than that — the possibility of doing good like never before. Not in our own strength, but by Christ living in us. Filled with the Spirit, we can live right before the Lord.

Galatians 5:17-18

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

So then, before we were saved we turned to the law, and it couldn't help. Now, we turn the Spirit, and He can. But we still have to turn. It's not automatic.

So, let me ask you; how much are you struggling with sin right now in your life? Not specifically this morning, but generally at this point in your life? Maybe your answer is, quite a bit. If so, let me ask you two other questions:

How hard are you trying to not sin? Really hard? Well, you're never going to conquer it in your own strength. As Paul writes here you will not do the things that you wish.

So, let me ask the second question. **Are you walking in the Spirit?** Are you reading your Bible — and not on special occasions, but daily, taking the time to think about what you read? Are you praying often each day? Are you spending any dedicated time in prayer that is not while commuting, making a coffee or doing chores? Are you fellowshipping with Christians at every opportunity? Are you surrounding yourselves with Christian company? Or when was the last time you listened to a Bible study outside of a church meeting, or just sat in prayer, asking God to reveal His will, to speak to you on a particular subject or topic?

You see, the flesh and the Spirit war against one another, they are opposites. That's the wrestling that is going on inside each one of us. And the one we feed will be the one that lives, while the one we starve will be the one that gives. If you try to overcome sin in your own strength then you'll fail, you'll become exhausted even trying. But if you yield to God, bringing everything to Him, then His Spirit will sanctify you, making you more like Him. *That*, is walking in the Spirit. And walking in the Spirit is the key to not fulfilling the lust of the flesh, for as you do, you simply won't want to do the works of the flesh — they will not only become undesirable to you, they will be abhorrent to you.

Now, you might wonder what the works of the flesh are — that is, what exactly is Paul talking about? Well, that's where he takes us next, and writes:

Galatians 5:19-21

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So then, we're told these are things are evident, that is they are plain to see. They are not things of which we should have any doubt that they are wrong. And they *include* these 17 things...

- 1. **Adultery** which, as the dictionary so directly puts it, is voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their spouse.
- 2. **Fornication** which is sexual intercourse between people not married to each other, which of course could include adultery, but also includes pre-marital sex, and even extends to homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, and incest. The Bible is indeed clear that the only place that sex should take place is between a man and woman that are married to each other.
- 3. Uncleanness refers to unclean thoughts, impure motives, indeed the opposite of purity.
- 4. **Lewdness** which is also translated as lasciviousness, speaks of unbridled lust, of excess, of shamelessness, of rude and disrespectful behaviour.
- 5. **Idolatry** is where our worship is fixed on anything that is not God whether possessions, career, power, people, hobbies, sports, TV, movies, music, or idols.
- 6. **Sorcery** comes from the greek word pharmakeia, which is where we get our word pharmacy from. And the idea of this is using drugs, potions, and hallucinogens for pleasure or gain.
- 7. **Hatred** seems straightforward enough at first glance, as it is talking of malice or ill will against others, including grudges. But as we know from Jesus' words, God looks on this as murder in the heart.
- 8. **Contentions** speaks of wrangling, contention, debate, strife, or even being inconsistent leading to heated disagreements.

- 9. **Jealousies** is taken from the word zēlos which is where we get zeal from. But the implication here isn't a positive one, but rather implies jealousy, envying, or resentment of someone for their perceived achievements or possessions.
- 10. **Outbursts of wrath** implies fierceness, and a sudden release of extreme anger, of rage.
- 11. **Selfish ambitions** speaks of pushing yourself forward, looking for superiority or advantage. And of note, the only use of the Greek word behind this prior to the New Testament, was in the writings of Aristotle, where it denoted a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.
- 12. **Dissensions** is the idea of disagreements, divisiveness, even sedition stirring up strife.
- 13. **Heresies** is more about doctrine, and specifically in the case of Christianity that is holding a belief contrary to the Bible.
- 14. Envy is not too tricky to guess, meaning that resentful longing to have what others do.
- 15. **Murders** is mostly obvious, but we should at least acknowledge that this covers abortion and euthanasia, especially with the upcoming vote in our Parliament on the later.
- 16. **Drunkenness** of course, refers to being intoxicated.
- 17. While... **Revelries** refers to what often follows drunkenness, described by Strong's Bible dictionary as a nocturnal and riotous procession of half drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honour of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before houses of male and female friends; hence used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry.

But Paul also adds "and the like" — in effect saying that this list is not exhaustive. Rather, this is only a sample of what the flesh is like. And he goes on to say "that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Does that mean that the Christian who gets drunk is going to lose their salvation? No, what Paul is saying that is that those who happily, comfortably, even proudly and consistently live in these things, are not Christians. Jon Courson notes:

"That's legalism!" you protest. No. It's not legalism—it's revelation. The works of the flesh in one's life reveal an absence of relationship with the Lord. You see, Paul is not speaking of the person who struggles with these things, or has fallen into these things. He's speaking of the one who perpetually, habitually practices these things arrogantly, stubbornly, and with no desire to be set free from them. **Jon Courson**

Now, as mentioned, the flesh and the Spirit are warring against each other. And if we feed the flesh on it's favourite diet of worldly TV, streaming services, music, books, magazines, movies, podcasts, newspapers, and social media, then it's going to lick it's lips and cause us to sin. But if instead we walk in the Spirit, feeding on God's Word, spending time in prayer, and reading, listening, and watching things that edify, that encourage, that build us up in our faith, then we're going to see a different result — not through our own efforts, but through the Holy Spirit working in our lives, sanctifying us, setting us apart from this world to God.

And Paul next shows the contrast that is to the works of the flesh, writing:

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

And note, that it is fruit singular. These are not the gifts of the Spirit, they are the fruit of the Spirit. And so we can't say "oh, well, I didn't get that fruit!" as if it's not your gifting or calling. No, no. The fruit of the Spirit, is that which should be evident in the life of every believer that is walking in the Spirit. And Paul starts with...

- Love which is taken here from the Greek word agapē that speaks of sacrificial love, of tender devotion to another person for their good, regardless of cost to yourself.
- 2. **Joy** which speaks of calm delight, of cheerfulness.
- 3. **Peace** which in the case of a Christian is the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God, and content.
- 4. **Long suffering** implies patient endurance, even in the face of adversity. Of bearing the provocations of others, without retaliation or resentment.
- 5. **Kindness** speaks of gentleness, of moral goodness, of integrity, of being refined in character and conduct.
- 6. **Goodness** is uprightness of heart and life.
- 7. Then we have faithfulness, which actually is better translated as **faith**, such as the King James Version translates it as. For this isn't about *devotion* to another, but of *trust in* and *reliance* upon Christ for our salvation, and for all things. Believing that He is able to do all things.
- 8. **Gentleness** is the idea of being meek. But meekness isn't weakness, rather, it is power under control, exercising necessary and proper restraint.
- 9. Then finally, we have **self-control** which is being in control of our desires, passions, appetites, and passions. Not letting them run wild and free.

In other words, with Christ's Holy Spirit in us, we are to take on the *character* of Christ. It's really that simple! And Paul says "Against such there is no law." for indeed, the law cannot condemn righteousness, it can only condemn sin. Paul continues...

Galatians 5:24

And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

That is, our very sin nature was crucified with Him, not through our own efforts, but through His grace. And now, as we read in Romans, reckoning ourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God, Paul says:

Galatians 5:25

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

That is, if we have been saved by the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit too. Taking one step after another in our pursuit of the things of God. Learning to walk in Him. Not following our hearts, but following Him. Following His leading and prompting. Not yielding to the desires of our flesh, but yielding to Him — that His will may be done in and through us. Not through our own efforts, not through our own awesomeness, but through His Spirit living in us, producing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. But that walking in the Spirit is a choice we must make, which is why Jesus said in John 15:

John 15:4-8

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

In summary of that, you cannot bear Christian fruit without having Christian roots. You must walk in the Spirit if you want to bear the fruit of the Spirit. It's no good simply trying *really* hard to do those things. You need the Lord's help. And as we do so, as we grow in Him, let us take note of this final verse of chapter 5:

Galatians 5:26

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

That is, let us not become excessively proud of ourselves, for it is the Holy Spirit that produces the fruit. And let us not provoke one another, for we're not to be the ones that test a Christian brother or sister's patience. And let us not envy one another, being resentful of others' walk with the Lord, nor the blessings He pours out on them. Simply put, let us walk in the Spirit, prioritising the things of God, starting with the daily reading of His Word, the regular habit of prayer to Him, having an urgency to fellowship with other Christians, and a steadfast commitment to remember all He did for us on the cross, that we might not only be saved by grace, but sanctified by His grace.

Application questions

As I close this morning's study, let me ask you a couple of questions. And as you have a coffee after the service, as you go home today, and as you start this coming week, ask yourself them again:

- Are you serving others through love? Are you doing so sacrificially, at the cost of convenience to yourself? At the cost of your finances, your hobbies, even your family time?
- Are you walking in the Spirit? Are you putting aside time for reading your Bible, for prayer, and for fellowship with other believers?