

**Introduction:**

- A. When I was young, one of the cults we were warned about was the Worldwide Church of God led by Herbert W. Armstrong. They were cousins, you might say, of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Among other things, they condemned the Trinity as a pagan doctrine, prohibited celebrating Christmas or Easter, and urged keeping the Old Testament law, including strict Sabbath observance and dietary restrictions.

The reason most of you who are younger are not familiar with this cult is that in an unprecedented move, this group abandoned their false teachings and moved toward orthodoxy in the 1990s. Today their name is Grace Communion International. **How could such a thing happen?**

Several years ago we had as part of our congregation here a TEDS student named **Raj Rao**. As a young believer he had gotten involved in a congregation of the Worldwide Church of God. I recalled him telling me a remarkable story so I wrote and asked him to tell it to me again. This is what he wrote.

I remember going to a church conference where a WCG pastor, giving the sermon talked about how he had been reading Galatians while in bed one night. As he read it, he was like blinking again and again. He then turned to his wife and said, *“Honey! Is this the same book, that I have been reading all my life? Is this the same book? I am now reading this as if for the first time in my life and it makes sense! It makes sense! This makes me wonder what I have been reading and thinking all these years! I can’t believe my eyes! Is this the same book?”*

When he preached that in the sermon, I was like  
*"Yes. Yes. Yes! That's exactly what's going on with me! I cannot believe that I apparently read Galatians all my life and now it's like - What??? Every sentence is like brand new. I cannot believe my eyes. It's like I am on the road to Emmaus!"*

*Basically if you come out of a legalistic background and really come to know Christ, then Galatians and Romans will be like big time eye-opening.*

- B. Turn to **Gal. 5**. You'll remember that in this letter, the Apostle Paul comes out swinging at Jewish Christians who had gone to the new Gentile believers in Galatia, teaching them that to fully experience God's salvation in Christ they needed to become observant Jews, beginning with circumcision. So they *should* put their trust in Christ but they must *also* observe the laws—at least *that* law—laid down in the OT by Moses.

Paul has been hammering away at that because it tries to add something to the saving work of Christ. Last week we saw that it is also a complete misunderstanding of what the OT scripture was for. It was only a tutor, a guardian, shaping the 'underaged' Jewish people so that they might be ready to be responsible sons and daughters of Father God. **But in the end the only way anyone, Jew or Gentile, becomes a son or daughter of God is not by birth but by adoption.** When we put our faith in Christ to save us, God the Father adopted us, not as little children, but as his adult heirs along with Jesus his Son.

- C. So now, beginning in Gal. 5, Paul spells out what it means to live as the beloved, adopted sons and daughters of God.  
**V.1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."**

## I. NEVER SURRENDER YOUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST (5:1-4)

- A. To put it another way, never again do anything to earn God's grace. We are not just people who know and worship God. We are *literally* God's his sons and daughters, whom God loves with no strings attached. We aren't God's sons and daughters because he created us and "we're all God's children." No, it is because Jesus forgave all our sin and because God the Father adopted us, wrapping us in Christ himself. So let me say it again: **never again do anything to earn God's grace**. Your heavenly Father cannot love you more than he does now. You cannot be safer than you are now. You and I can *please* him or *displease* him, just as any sons and daughters can, but we can never do anything to *secure* his love nor to *cancel* it.
- B. If we try to add something to our salvation in order to make sure God accepts us we are putting a slave's yoke back on our shoulders. Do you want a life again where every sin counts against you, where your thoughts and behavior condemn you and poison you? Do you want to return to the dark alleys or empty wilderness of this world? Do you want to be the pawn of Satan again? Do you want to feel the heavy weight of guilt again? Do you want to drain the life out of your prayers and come to worship with nothing to sing about? That's the slavery you get if you try to add anything to what Christ has done for you.
- C. There are terrible consequences of trying to earn God's favor on your own. When you do these things—just like when the Jews insisted the Gentiles be circumcised—you *think* you are helping your cause but you are actually becoming a heretic. Look at how Paul describes such a position: **vv.2-4**, "*Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if*

*you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*” Did you see the three terrible consequences there?

1. *Christ will be of no value to you at all.* We don’t get Christ’s redemption *plus* some added value that we contribute to our standing before God. Just the contrary: we lose all the benefits of Jesus’ dying for us because now we take credit for a part. It is all or nothing.
  2. *You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ.* Estranged from Christ. Think of that! *Unfriended*. Who will intercede for you before the Father? Who will prepare a place for you?
  3. *You have fallen away from grace.* We typically use that phrase—to *fall from grace*—to describe someone who has done something so bad that they have fallen away from God’s favor. **But the meaning here is that someone is trying to do something so good that they don’t really need God’s grace in its fullness.** To fall from grace is to try to bring your own effort and accomplishment to secure God’s salvation and favor. To fall from grace is to go back to the bland but toxic religion of “I’m a good person so God will accept me.” That is to fall from grace!
- D. So that brings me back to Paul’s opening statement, “*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*” You and I are of no use to God when we keep trying to be good enough for God, or when we keep asking

forgiveness for sins he has already forgiven, or when we try to find ways to pay for our sins. We are free from all that. All our debts are paid. **There are no requirements for you to live as full sons and daughters of God but for this: our trust must be in Christ alone to save and secure us.**

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
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.  
Amazing love, how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!  
No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.  
Amazing love, how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!*

*Illus.:* Years ago there was a preacher to come to our area for some special meetings. He had quite an impact on people because he drove home the expansive grace of Christ. A woman from our church at that time came to see me to tell me what a revolutionary thing this had been for her. “*This is like another Reformation,*” she said. “*Why don't we hear about this?*” Which, I'll admit, put me on edge. My unspoken answer was, “*Well, apparently you haven't been listening till now.*” But then she pushed on to talk about how wrong it was—how counterproductive to the message of God's grace—to tell believers that there were things they should *do*. She

felt she had discovered a gospel with no *ought tos*. I've known other believers like that who see a gospel-choking return to legalism in any emphasis on godly Christian behavior.

With that in mind, look at **vv.5-6**, “*For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*”

## **II. OUR FAITH IN CHRIST ONLY ENHANCES OUR DESIRE TO BE RIGHTEOUS (5:5-6)**

- A. Look again at **v.5**, *For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.*” First, when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives he gives us his own desire for our holiness. Righteousness is natural to the Holy Spirit, and when we live *unrighteously* he stirs our consciences, he makes us inwardly uneasy, not just for having done something wrong, but for displeasing our loving Father. Then he guides us back to a place of loving obedience.

Not only that, but the Holy Spirit gives us a yearning for the day when we will be made completely righteous, when we will be like Christ himself. The best part of heaven will not be release from these decrepit bodies nor reunions with loved ones. **Next to seeing Jesus, the best part will be that we will be righteous, through and through.**

**John Stott's** writing showed me something else. He looked at that phrase, “*we eagerly await by faith the righteousness,*” and he noted, “***We do not work for it. We wait for it.***” The final accomplishment of the gospel in our lives will be when seeing Christ will make us *like* him—his love, his joy, his peace, his devotion to the Father. We are

not working for that day by accumulating enough righteous accomplishments. We are simply *waiting*, glad for the ability to pursue Christlikeness now.

**All we bring to this—all we *do* (and you can't even really call it *doing something*)—is entrust ourselves to God's promise to save and bless us forever.** Our trust is all we bring to the gospel, and it is all we need to bring.

- B. **V.6**, “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*” The sure proof of saving faith is love for one another. We don't love one another in order to be saved but **once we are saved there is no surer evidence than our love for one another.** And Jesus said that we will know if someone is his disciple by looking at the fruit in their lives. If someone claims to be a Christian but gives no more evidence of loving others than any nonchristian would, then that person's profession of faith is suspect.

Look ahead to **vv.13-15**, “*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*” Does that feel like a restriction upon your freedom in Christ? It isn't. It is what the Holy Spirit within you wants to do. It is the natural response of your faith. But loving one another does conflict with our own self—our *flesh*, so being obedient requires effort.

This brings us back again to the fact that Christianity cannot be lived out without being in a community of other believers. We cannot very well love one another if we don't

know one another. That means that in one way or another we must be engaged in each other's lives. We must be close enough to others that we feel the stresses of a relationship, that we see and own the needs of our brothers or sisters, close enough that instead of *biting and devouring* each other we nourish and build up each other. There is no command of our beloved Jesus more important than this: *Love one another*. Our faith in Christ is empty if we do not love one another. We are not actually free, not really the heirs of God, the adult sons and daughters of the Father, if we do not love one another. **The measure of our church is not our music or our preaching or anything else but this: does our faith in Christ express itself through love for one another?**

## Conclusion

*Illus.*: A March, 2011, issue of *The New York Times* featured a story about a 51-year-old ex-convict named Robert Salzman. After a horrific childhood, Salzman spent most of his adult life in prison. When he was released from prison in 2001, Salzman found it difficult to enjoy freedom outside prison walls, struggling to pay rent or doing stints in homeless shelters.

Finally, in June of 2010 Salzman had a grace-like experience. While he was riding a New York City subway car, he was "found" by Rashaad Ernesto Green, a writer and director who was searching for someone to play a tough-looking former convict for an upcoming film. After an audition, Green surprised nearly everyone when he gave Salzman a key role for the film.

In the ensuing months Salzman found it hard to believe that he had actually been set free from his prison life. On one occasion, while filming with Green on location in a Long Island penitentiary, an exhausted Salzman fell asleep on a cot in the prison cell. When

he woke up, he became confused and thought he was still a prisoner. Salzman started weeping in despair ... until it slowly dawned on him that he was now a free man. Salzman was overwhelmed by the joy of knowing that at any moment he could walk out of that cramped cell and through the prison doors. On the other side of the prison walls he could enjoy his new life of freedom.

*No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.  
Amazing love, how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!*