

I don't think any of us could truthfully say we live tension-free lives. Each of us, in our own way, attempts to navigate tension. The tension between work and family, time for self or others, needs of our aging parents, and needs of our children.

To navigate tension, we need all the help from God we can get. We need all the strength, wisdom, and faith we can get to balance it all. So, if you are like me, you pray, and you ask God to intervene in your situation. God is faithful, and he will allow us more than we can handle, so our faith will grow, and we depend on him and abide in him more and more. And abiding in Christ while navigating tension gives good results.

But tension doesn't always come out of outside circumstances. There are real tensions to navigate that come for anyone who seeks to grow in their Christian faith. In Galatians, Paul raises a tension that every Christian must navigate. *"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"* (Gal. 5:1).

Paul brings this idea that because of Christ, we can live free. Because of what Christ did for us, and when we accept what he did for us on faith, he picks us up and puts us down in a new place. A place he fought to give us, a place of freedom.

We try to understand that we are saved in Christ alone, and there is nothing we have to do to be made right with God except believe in Christ. That is how we are saved. The tension comes with this idea: If believing in Christ is how we are saved and nothing more, then aren't people just going to live any way they want? Because there are no rules, no law, no way to earn or lose our salvation if Christ has set us free, then isn't being free in Christ a license to really do whatever the heck we want?

How can we live a life that is free and also live a life that brings glory to God? We are used to rules and boundaries. But there is something very attractive about this idea of freedom. It's certainly important, or Paul wouldn't make such a big deal out of it. But how can I follow something that I can't transfer to a list? How can I embrace something that can't be broken out into steps with little rewards at the end of each step?

We navigate this "live free in Christ tension" when we focus on letting our faith lead us so that our faith in Christ expresses itself through love, love for God, and love for our neighbors. It's grace, not law. It's faith, not work. It's a relationship, not a rule.

It's faith that keeps us from drifting left into legalism. It's faith that keeps us from drifting right into license. It's faith that keeps us firmly planted in that proper middle ground we should all be seeking.

And if we do this, we figure out that God's system of justification by faith actually works. That through faith, the law of God is fulfilled. That through faith, we become filled with love from God. That through faith, we can turn this love from God outward and love others.

So how do we experience this wondrous thing called "faith expressing itself in love?" Galatians chapter 5:1-12 will help us understand it. In verses 1-6, we will learn how to stand firm in Christ. In verses 7-12, we will learn how to run with Christ. And we will explore more deeply, "How do we experience faith expressing itself through love?"

In chapters 1 and 2, Paul gave us his credentials and showed us that he was a genuine apostle of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. In chapters 3-4, Paul explained that the law is not the means to our salvation. Last week, Kevin showed us how Paul used Hagar and Sarah as an allegory showing that we are children of Sarah, children who depend on God's promises. And today, we move into chapter 5. In chapters 5 and 6, we will see that Paul's teaching gets very practical. He says if we depend in any way on the law instead of grace for righteousness, it's a no-win situation. Because if we depend on the law in even one little detail, we must stay in compliance with every single part of the law. And that can't be done. Then Paul turns a new direction. He explains how a Christian lives under grace instead of the law.

Paul is explaining how a Christian should follow the Lord. We should live in the grace of God and enjoy the freedom won for us on the cross; while always remaining under the control of the Spirit, growing in holiness and self-control, and letting our faith express itself in love. *"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"* (v. 1).

Paul is saying, "Christ has freed you to be free, so be free!" It's an active imperative voice, which means, we must continuously make an effort to keep this command. It means we must actively protect our freedom, stand in the confidence that we do not need the law for anything. People might come along and convince us that we need those Old Testament rules and regulations to be

righteous. We must resist these people. We must persevere in our freedom.

Americans value the ideal of freedom. We love our Bill of Rights. We love that we can freely protest, freely vote, freely worship, and freely complain about, well, anything. We honor our citizens who sacrificed to preserve these freedoms and who fought wars to protect these freedoms.

The American longing for freedom is a longing to be free to be left alone. But this American freedom concept is not the Christian freedom concept Paul is talking about. When the Bible talks about freedom, it always means freedom in Jesus Christ. Christian freedom doesn't mean freedom to live for oneself; it means to live for a higher purpose than oneself.

From what were we set free by Christ? Paul uses allegory again he says, "Jesus came to give us freedom from the yoke of the slaveholders." These slaveholders are that heavy yoke that comes in the form of sin, death, and the devil. These are major burdens that we can't escape on our own.

Jesus came to set us free from the guilt that comes from sin. The one and only sacrifice of Christ accomplished what the blood of bulls and goats in the Old Testament could never do. It set us free from the guilt that comes from sin. His death provided us with forgiveness. His death cleansed us of our sins and set us apart as God's people.

Jesus, the only human who is guiltless, took the penalty for our guilt. And he provided us confession and repentance, including restitution to those we wronged. As Hebrews tells us, Christ's death is the fulfillment of all the sin offerings that were laid out in the Old Testament sacrificial system. And even though we continue to battle our flesh, Romans 8 tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ. The only reason we can unite with Christ is because he was fully human too, even though he never sinned. So, we unite with Christ, who became our sin offering and guilt offering by paying the full penalty for our sin.

Jesus came to set us free from death. If we are in Christ, death is not the end. Because of the empty tomb and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can be assured that even though we die, we will live again with Christ and be raised again to eternal life.

Jesus came to set us free from the devil. Through his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus broke Satan's stranglehold on the hearts of people who have faith. As the writer of Hebrews said,

**Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15**

The yokes of slavery take the form of sin, death, and the devil. The only way to be set free from the yoke of sin is to hold on to the cross where he died for our sins. The only way to be free from the yoke of death is to believe in the resurrection of Jesus and the empty tomb that validates his promise to us of the gift of eternal life. The only way to be free from the yoke of the devil is to trust in God's final victory, trust in the gift of the Holy Spirit given to believers to empower them to fight off the attacks and defeat the devil's schemes.

*"Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (v. 2).* We might be wondering why the Bible talks about circumcision so much. Since the time of Abraham, circumcision had a special meaning for God's people, those who followed Jewish laws and lifestyles. If you received circumcision, you were agreeing with all the teachings of the law. If you received circumcision after Christ died and rose again, you were agreeing that the death of Christ was not enough to save. Circumcision was a relatively minor surgery, but it became a major issue.

When we think about circumcision, I want us to think about a religious system that stands on human achievement. And when we think about Christ, I want us to think about a religion that stands on divine achievement. Paul is saying, "Stop turning our Lord and Savior, who is priceless, into something of no value because you want your human achievement to matter."

When I was a boy, I was given a baseball signed by Maury Wills. In case you haven't heard of Maury Wills, he was a shortstop for the Dodgers back in the 1960s. He was also the greatest base stealer of all time until Lou Brock broke his record. Anyway, my authentic Maury Wills signature was fading. I took the ball to my dad, and I said, "We can hardly see his signature anymore. I think I'm going to take a dark pen and trace over his signature so I can see it better." My dad yelled out, "Don't do that. Don't ever do that. You add your mark on that ball, and it will be of no value at all."

It's the same with Jesus Christ. If we add our mark over his signature work that he did for us, his work becomes of no value at all. We can't refinish his work. His work will be destroyed for us unless we receive it on faith alone. We can't have it both ways. We either choose to live by human achievement and die, or we choose to live by divine achievement and live.

**Again (Paul repeats for emphasis) 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. vv. 3-4**

For those Paul is describing in verses 3-4, he says they have fallen away from grace. The idea is that some may "come short" of the grace of God. Like they didn't fully receive or accept it. Maybe they joined for a time, but something happened that revealed

they were not depending on faith. Some may read these words and conclude that Paul was describing a believer losing his salvation. But the context of Paul's argument and the entire New Testament doesn't teach that we can lose our salvation. Paul is talking here about someone who never truly came to faith in the first place.

But in verse 5, Paul offers a vision for those who seek to navigate their freedom in Christ well. *"For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope"* (v. 5). When we think of someone who is free in Christ, we need to think of someone who is content: content to wait on Christ, content to trust in God's righteousness, and content because of the faith they have been given.

When we think of a person who is free in Christ, we think of someone who seeks to be attentive to the Holy Spirit inside them. We think of someone who has hope. Hope because they know that no matter their current trials, their future is secured by Christ on the cross.

When we think of someone who is not free in Christ, we don't think of someone with hope. We don't think of someone at rest. We think of someone who worries, someone who strives, someone who foolishly relies on their own achievements to become righteous through works.

To put it bluntly: Our vision at CPC is Transformed People Transforming the Peninsula. There is nothing a Christian can do to transform themselves. Verse 5 says that we wait on the Spirit to work to bring God's righteousness to us. We wait by faith, which means that my ego must get off the stage in my life. Literally that I must decrease, as John puts it, and die to self, as Jesus puts it, for me to be transformed.

Verse 6 is the key application verse of the entire passage this morning. It's how we apply what we have now learned about being justified by grace through faith. *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love"* (v. 6).

He has already given us the spirit of righteousness. And one day, every part of our body, mind, and soul will be righteous, so now we wait for that day with joyful hope. What do we do while we wait? We serve him. We serve him without concern about rewards or earning His approval. We serve him to express our faith through love—love for God and love for our neighbor.

On judgment day, our denominations will not matter, our views on end times will not matter, our politics will not matter. It's our faith that matters. And Paul is saying that our faith is displayed by loving God and loving our neighbors. Our culture can do random acts of love probably better than we can in the church. But we have something the culture can't offer. The culture can't offer eternity. Our culture can't offer the peace that comes when one trusts in Christ and seeks to let him lead our lives.

Our freedom in Christ is not just freedom from something—sin, death, and the devil—it's freedom for something. As we live in our freedom in Christ, what ultimately counts in this life is that each of us expresses our faith in God through love for God and for our neighbors. So not only does Paul exhort us to stand firm in Christ. He then finishes this section up with one of his favorite metaphors for the Christian life, running a race. Paul must have been a sports fan. *"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you"* (vv. 7-8).

Once you are standing firm in your freedom, run. Keep running. You began so well. Don't be pulled to the right or left. Don't let anything cut in on you. The Greek word for "cut in" originated in the ancient Greek Olympic games. Runners didn't run on an oval track; they ran to a post and back. It was unsportsmanlike to cut in and trip or interfere with their opponent as they ran their race.

It raises questions for us. Is someone cutting you off? Is someone hindering you? Who are you blaming for any drift left into legalism or drift right into license? It is easy to become hindered. Whoever or whatever is hindering you is a strong influence against you. Remember the truth that you have committed to. As you run your race., remember your identity in Christ. Remember what obedience looks like. Remember to stay focused on your faith expressing itself in love.

*"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough"* (v. 9). What do yeast and dough have to do with running with Christ? Yeast in the Bible is a picture of sin or false teaching. That just as a little pinch of yeast thoroughly affects the whole batch of dough, a little pinch of law thoroughly contaminates the whole pure gospel that was received by the Galatians.

I don't see how Paul could warn us any better or more clearly. Legalism and license lead to pain and suffering. They will ruin our lives and our witness. *"I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty"* (v. 10).

The one who was putting in the pinches of law will pay a penalty. The phrase "the penalty" is really the phrase "the judgment." On that day, when we who have trusted Christ for our justification eagerly await the fullness of hope in eternity, there will also be others, Paul says, who will await their final judgment because they confused the gospel message by adding something to it and led people astray.

*"Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished"* (v. 11). Paul blows away their logic here. He is saying if I was preaching circumcision, I would not be persecuted. Human achievement is what people want to hear. The reason I am being persecuted is because I am preaching the pure gospel. The gospel offends. The cross offends because people do not want to admit

that they need someone else to save them or admit that they need to surrender to someone infinitely greater than they are.

Why is the cross an offense? As I see it, I am not made right because I am a pastor or because I serve, pray, or how much I do. I am made right with God because of what Jesus Christ has done, and I have believed it. I have trusted him, committed my life to him, and sought to surrender to him. Christianity is the only religion, the only system of morality that says, you cannot measure up, you don't measure up, you will never measure up. God measures up. God, in His infinite grace and mercy, has sought to elevate us simply because we trust in him.

Paul is pretty worked up by the time we get here to verse 12. In fact, he ends on a pretty crude note. *"As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"* (v. 12). He either means, "I wish these agitators would get a taste of the real pain they are causing others by their false teachings," Or he is saying, "I wish that their total emasculation would not allow them to reproduce themselves and their false doctrine would become extinct."

How do we experience faith expressing itself through love in our lives? How do we stand firm in freedom and run, steering clear of legalism or license? *"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..."* (Acts 16:31b). It starts here for some of us. To realize that we are saved by grace through faith. To realize that believing in the Lord, Jesus Christ, is trusting in Jesus. It's surrendering your will to Him. It's an act of faith. "Lord, I'm ready to follow you. I believe in your promises of forgiveness for all my sins. I believe you will give me a new spiritual life." God is calling you to trust his promise that you can experience life with God from the moment you surrender to follow Christ through all eternity.

**Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18; Mt. 11: 28-30).** Peter encourages us to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus has encouraged us to take on his lighter yoke, submit to him, learn from him, and be with him. How do we grow in grace and knowledge? Bible reading, prayer, reflection, gathering in a community of faith, serving God by serving others, and serving God through giving and hospitality.

**Grow in love for God and your neighbors.** When you examine your life, Is there change happening? Is there tangible evidence that you are growing in your love for God and love for others? Are you becoming more attentive to God, more attentive to the needs around you? Are you taking steps to practice hospitality as we are called to do as the *Ekklesia* of God?

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

**Remove obstacles to Jesus. (Hebrews 12:1; 1st Corinthians 5:7, Revelation 3:18).** Obstacles can take many forms, not just false teaching. Obstacles to running the race can look like apathy, like a life dominated by a particular sin, or an obstacle can be a love for the world instead of love for Jesus.

Galatians 5 should lead us to contentment. Let's not beat ourselves up. We are always in process. Don't let the enemy condemn you or discourage you. Our heavenly Father sees you as his child. There is no condemnation. He sees you as his child—perfect.

We have every reason, in our freedom in Christ, to be content. I feel contentment because I know God loves me. I know that I am loved by my church family. I hope you know God's love for you today. I hope you feel the love from your church family today. But being content doesn't mean that I'm satisfied. I have room to grow. Our church has room to improve as a beacon of hope for the world. So I am determined to grow in my faith and express my faith in love. And I do that by remembering his grace, standing firm in my freedom, and running the good race well until Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith, calls me home.

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