

Grace Didn't Die
What Does Christ's Work Accomplish?
Galatians 5:1-6

Introduction:

Christian Religion and Christianity are not the same thing.

Christian Religion is any system of rules, traditions, or accomplishments that claim to give us a favored status and an experience with God in which we receive His blessings.

Christian religion is an attempt to turn God's heart towards us. Ironically, however, no work can free mankind from his sinful state, and thus he's never capable of achieving that which is by definition totally unachievable by a sinner. Being a sinner leaves us separated from God and under his wrath! On the other hand,

Christianity is the exclusive personal and sincere relationship with God made possible because He sent His one and only eternal Son (Jesus) to entirely accomplish the work that frees us from sin and permanently blesses us with the greatest status possible – fully favored sons and daughters of God!

Because of what Christ has accomplished for us, when we surrender our lives to know and follow Him, not through a system of rituals, rules, and traditions, but personally, intimately, and sincerely in a real relationship with Him; He takes us, not based on the measure of our faith, but on the measure of Christ's righteousness!

Nowhere is this contrast exposed and dealt with more than in the book of Galatians, and the most prominent effort in the Book of Galatians to demonstrate the difference between Christian Religion and Christianity is in chapter 5. I've divided this chapter into three sections, and today we will look at the first of those sections – Galatians 5:1-6.

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. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. (Galatians 5:1-6)

Proposition: Galatians 5:1-6 teaches us four lessons about the significance of what Christ accomplished for us, that is, what the work of Christ achieved on our behalf.

The first lesson, Galatians 5:1-6, teaches us about the significance of the work Christ did for us is,

(1) The work Christ did for us gives us the freedom of living in a family relationship with God. (5:1a)

- A. 1 For freedom Christ has set us free;**
- B.** At various times in our lives, we have all tried to work our way into relational circles and then felt the constant worry and anxiety of wondering whether we have met the standard to not only get in the circle but also be favored in the circle. Ironically, even after getting in the circle and achieving favor, you can never shake the ever-present worry that you will do something that gets you demoted or banished. After every communication and encounter, there is at least a subconscious worry that you may have done something that will leave you excluded or deprioritized in the relationship. Therefore, you always feel the weight and bondage of having to perform. You're always interviewing for a job even after getting it.
- C.** On the other hand, there are other relationships where you know you are accepted right out of the gate. There is no overlooking of your faults and failures, but rather a willingness to love you in spite of them. You don't have to work your way into the relationship because it was clear that you were invited and welcomed as one who fully belongs. You don't feel pressured to entertain or perform because you know you are welcomed and favored. You can sit with them in silence with no fear. You don't perform to overcome the worry of losing the relationship, or even to feel justified. Instead, you serve, support, and honor the person because you are loved. You value them enough to give them what they unconditionally gave you. You don't abuse them or the relationship because you can't imagine doing anything other than honoring them and the relationship!
- D.** This is precisely what Paul is saying here. Religion is living in the constant threat of losing the relationship; living with the constant need to justify your existence; of justifying your worthiness; of constantly demonstrating why you not only belong, but why you have earned the right to be loved and favored; of constantly making sure you don't do anything that gets you cast out. It's a horrible way to live!
- E.** On the other hand, freedom is knowing you are loved because you are loved; you are accepted and welcomed not as a guest but as a fully favored part of the family! It removes doubt and worry and replaces them with joy and fulfillment! It's not an excuse or even motivation to live in complacency or entitlement, more on that in a minute, but rather the motivation to sincerely serve and honor God with our lives because of how much He loves us!

The second lesson, Galatians 5:1-6, teaches us about the significance of the work Christ did for us is,

(2) The work Christ did for us should cause us to never entertain any thought that a relationship with God is something earned or sustained by our efforts. (5:1b-4)

A. stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

1. "The Galatian Christians, having escaped from the slavery of heathenism, were in danger of becoming entangled in the meshes of legalistic Judaism."¹
2. A yoke is something that attaches one animal to another animal so they can work together more efficiently. Paul is not saying that we shouldn't be yoked to God or others; he's saying not to be yoked to slavery! Slavery is an obligatory relationship where there is no freedom and no familiarity. A slave serves his master but is never allowed to be family. A slave receives rewards based on performance, but there is also a consequence for failure. A slave relationship is never equal to a family relationship. A slave is always an outsider in that, no matter how well he is treated, he is still never entirely accepted into the family as one who can enjoy the rights and privileges of being in the family.
3. This is how religion of any kind, including the Old Testament Law/Judaism, leaves us. Therefore, the direct application concerns those in Galatia considering a return to religious thinking. However, it can also just as easily apply to a return to anything other than the freedom and joy in the healthy and active family relationship with God, Christ has given us! Whether that be a life surrendered to the desires of our flesh, or the efforts of religion, both are relationships where we are yoked to that which has no unconditional love for us, never accepts us as family, and will kick us out the moment we don't meet its standards, and as such, both are slavery.
4. Paul then gets really blunt about why they need to reject any kind of religious thinking. He writes,

B. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

1. Now, remember the context. The Judaizers were trying to get Gentile males who gave their lives to Christ to get circumcised so that they could be "1st class Christians" who truly received and experienced the grace of God.
2. Paul is not saying it's wrong to get circumcised. Part of the purpose of his second missionary journey was to carry forth the proclamation that the

¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 137). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Apostles and the Elders of the Church in Jerusalem commissioned Paul to proclaim on their behalf, that is, that they officially agreed with Paul that a person did not have to become Jewish to be a faithful follower of Jesus, which included males not needing to be circumcised. However, when Paul was going back through the province of Galatia, this happened:

3. **1 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. (Acts 16:1-5)**
4. Therefore, some suggest that Paul is telling the Galatians to do something he personally disagrees with. However, that's a total misinterpretation of what happened in Acts 16. Paul required Timothy to get circumcised not to increase his relationship with God, or help Timothy receive more of God's grace, but rather for Timothy to be accepted by the Jews and thus more effective in his ministry to Jews! He had Timothy circumcised so that Timothy could preach the Gospel to the Jews without someone suggesting he was only trying to justify the fact that he wasn't himself circumcised. It was to establish the credibility and sincerity of Timothy's message to the Jews, not to establish credibility and sincerity with God! It was about effective ministry and not effective spirituality.
5. Therefore, Paul is NOT saying that if they get circumcised, they will lose their salvation, but rather, that what they have in Christ is of no real use to them if they are going to accept the teaching that they must also perform a religious act to truly belong to the family of God and experience His grace, favor and blessings! Circumcision was being preached to them as a way to have truly effective spirituality, not effective ministry! The Gentiles are being told their credibility and sincerity with God require that they live according to the Old Testament law!
6. Therefore, Paul is saying if you believe the mutilation of your body must supplement the brutal mutilation of Christ's body, then you're also saying Christ isn't enough. Paul is saying if you accept the teaching that you need to be circumcised to receive more of God's grace and be favored in the family of God, then you are literally saying the brutal mutilation of the perfect and glorious son of God to pay the penalty of our sin, isn't enough to earn our right to be fully favored sons of God, but the removing of flesh from your penis is!

7. More specifically, Paul is saying that if you believe you have to be circumcised to be accepted by God and receive His grace truly, then you are necessarily rejecting the preaching of Gospel that says God has adopted us as fully favored sons and daughters so that we can now follow Him, not based on our works, but entirely through the work of Christ. The moment you add any of your works to the Gospel, you are necessarily placing yourself into a religious yoke; into a mindset that sees your relationship with God as one based on what you do and don't do rather than on what Christ did. This is necessarily redefining your relationship with God as a slave relationship, and as such, you are, in all practicality, nullifying the experience with God Christ has given you.
 8. In addition, Paul writes,
- C. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.**
1. Paul is not telling the believers in Galatia they will lose their salvation if they get circumcised because that would suggest we are in a relationship with God where we have to perform to maintain our status, and as such, it would no longer be based on His Grace but rather our works. Paul is writing to confront their ideology, not agree with it! K.S. Wuest states it's exceptionally well,
 2. **"The words "Christ is become of no effect unto you," must be understood in their context to refer, not to their justification but to their spiritual lives as Christians. The apostle is not here speaking of their standing but of their experience. ... But because they had lost their hold upon sanctifying grace, does not mean that God's grace had lost its hold upon them in the sphere of justification. Because they had refused to accept God's grace in sanctification is no reason why God should withdraw His grace for justification. They had received the latter when they accepted the Lord Jesus. That transaction was closed and permanent at the moment they believed. Justification is a judicial act of God done once for all. Sanctification is a process which goes on all through the Christian's life. Just because the process of sanctification is temporarily retarded in a believer's life, does not say that his justification is taken away. If that were the case, then the retention of salvation would depend upon the believer's works, and then salvation would not depend upon grace anymore. And we find ourselves in the camp of the Judaizers, ancient and modern."**²

² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 140–141). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

3. Therefore, verse four restates the principle in verses one and two, that is, if you accept circumcision as a way to be more spiritually powerful and earn a better standing with God, then you have left the experience with God provided by Christ for something that is slavery. However, this time he does so with some vivid language. If you think severing flesh from your penis will make you more spiritual, then you need to know that's not the only thing getting severed; you are severing yourself from the experience and joy of knowing God as a son, to instead know Him as a slave who must perform to maintain his right of being in a lesser relationship.
4. However, in verse three, Paul adds a caveat to what the Gentiles are not understanding about the Law, that is, the Judaizers are hand-picking things they feel the Gentiles need to obey. He tells them that if they are going to yoke themselves to that way of thinking, they are yoked to the entire thing! You can't partially yoke a mule to another mule in that you are only yoked to part of the direction and reality of the other mule. Rather, when you yoke a mule to another mule, the entirety of the direction the other mule is going and the entirety of the condition of the mule are what you are now joined with! You don't get to handpick the parts of the mule you are yoked to; you are yoked to the mule!
5. In the same way, if the Galatians agreed they needed to get circumcised to have a better standing with God and receive more of His favor and blessings; then that necessarily meant they were yoked to all the other requirements in the law as well! The Sabbath laws, the dietary laws, the ceremonial laws, the sacrificial laws, the feasts, the holy weeks, and their practices; everything!
6. Ironically, knowing this verse, some of my favorite scholars still adopt the teaching that the Bible divides the law given to Moses into different groups of laws, and as such, Christians are only obligated to obey certain groups in certain ways. Moral laws must be obeyed fully, and ceremonial laws must be obeyed in their New Testament form (i.e., the sabbath is now Sunday and must be observed in a new way versus the old way, but nonetheless observed for holiness). It's rooted in a belief that Christ fulfilled the Law but didn't replace it, that is, He empowered us to obey it, but interestingly, only expects us to follow parts of it. It's an extremely popular view in the conservative Christian church, however, here's the deal, there is literally no place in the New Testament, or even the Old Testament, that contains any such divisions of law, nor is there anything in the New Testament other than the teaching that Christ fulfilled the purpose of the Old Testament Law, and as such, entirely replaced it with something better! This is literally the entire point of the book of Galatians and Hebrews!
7. Now it's important to know that you can undoubtedly find the moral and ethical expectations of the New Covenant in the Old Testament Law.

However, they are not there as some remnant to justify living our life under the Mosaic Law, but rather because they are reflective of the character and nature of God, and thus the character and nature of those living God's life in the New Covenant! In addition, nowhere in the New Testament are these moral and ethical expectations listed as works for us to be in a relationship with God and receive His grace and blessings, but rather as an unambiguous distinction between the behavior of those who are living in a healthy relationship with God, and as such, being led by the Holy Spirit within them, versus those who are not (more on that later in Galatians 5).

8. So again, the lesson in verses 5:1b-4 is that we should never entertain the idea of justifying any religious thinking in our lives!

The third lesson, Galatians 5:1-6, teaches us about the significance of the work Christ did for us is,

(3) The work Christ did for us empowers us to confidently look forward to the future! (5:5)

- A. **5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.**
- B. When you know you've earned something, you can't wait for the acknowledgment and payment to show up! But the problem with religion is that you can never have confidence that you've earned salvation, or even God's favor, because there's always more for you to do tomorrow, not to mention all the things you fell short of today.
- C. However, the Gospel promises our future, not because of our performance, but because of Christ!
 1. **13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)**
 2. **3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)**

- D. **"We have a righteousness that we dare present before God, for it is perfect. In it there is no omission and no excess. We are righteous before God and without fault before His throne."**³
- E. Therefore, we are not living our lives to try and attain righteousness, that is the right to be God's children and be favored by Him, but instead we get to EAGERLY WAIT for the hope of the righteousness that we have been given, that is, the right to what we deserve from God, because Christ is the one who earned that right for us! You deserve to be children of God, and as such, you deserve to inherit the entire Kingdom of God, not because of a single thing you did but entirely because of what Jesus did. As such, we can confidently know it's coming!
- F. One of my favorite descriptions of this truth is from a preacher named Alistair Begg. Here's a link to it:
- G. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDI8euKhd3U>

This leads us straight to the fourth lesson, Galatians 5:1-6 teaches us about the significance of the work Christ did for us.

(4) The work Christ did for us should realign our priorities. (5:6)

- A. **6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.**
- B. Verse six is earth-shattering to those who love to argue over which religious acts should be performed and which shouldn't. In verse six, Paul says God doesn't care about any of it! Religion is totally irrelevant to Him. It doesn't earn His favor or admiration in doing or not doing it! He literally doesn't care about it! It's of absolutely no value, positively or negatively, to Him! Listen to some other Scriptures on what God thinks about all the religious stuff people believe to be so important:
 - 1. **16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:16-17)**
 - 2. **20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now**

³ Spurgeon, C. (2013). [Galatians](#). (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 5:5). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:20-24)

- 3. 20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations- - 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:20-23)**
- C.** If you have a baby boy and want to circumcise him, then do it; if you don't, then don't, but just know God doesn't care either way! He doesn't care when, where and even how the church gathers to hear His Word taught and worship Him, but rather that we as His children regularly gather as His family to encourage each other with the Truth that stirs our hearts to trust, love and obey Him, as well as love others as He loves us! It's amazing how we twist Scriptures to prioritize and even govern things that God just doesn't care about; that there is literally no Scriptural basis for us being concerned with, and thus whether a person does it, or doesn't do it, shouldn't matter to us either, because it doesn't matter to Him!
- D.** For God, all this religious stuff that people are so concerned over is the same as if I were to spend this entire sermon trying to convince you to be concerned about what color clothes you wear. Imagine if I spent 45 minutes explaining why you needed to wear red color clothes instead of yellow; I hope you would quickly get disinterested in such a meaningless conversation and quickly find something better to do with your time! That's exactly how Paul says God feels about all the religious traditions, customs, and rules people feel are so utterly vital to God and godliness! They literally mean nothing to Him – all of them!
- E.** But it does mean something to Him that our faith in Him shows itself outwardly in love! It's why Paul wrote this,
- F. 1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1Corinthians 13:1-3)**
- G.** So let me wrap this up with a challenge based on this lesson.

Challenge: Are you fully trusting the work of Christ to give you the right to experience a relationship with God as His child? If so, how is that trust demonstrating itself in your love for Him and others?

If you have yoked yourself to Him, then His direction and His condition will become your direction and your condition!

Jesus was very clear that if you love Him, you will obey Him. His love is not a reason to define morality and ethics how we want, nor is it to do whatever we want with the life that He clearly gave us. The work Christ accomplished for us is the ultimate motive to live confidently submitted to Him and seek to personally know Him, because He has fully accepted and wants to know us! His love for us is the reason we can come to Him just as we are, knowing He will not justify the desires of our flesh, but He will also not run us off because of them. Instead, because He unconditionally loves us, He never quits rescuing us from our own sinful ways and thinking, He never quits rescuing us from our selfishness and arrogance; from our immaturities; from our inability to love others, or even to truly receive love from others. We will never run Him off from that effort because He loves us too much to leave us in sin! It's why Paul wrote,

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

So, what does your relationship with God and others say you are yoked to? The work of Christian Religion or the work of Christ (Christianity)?