



Moving Into Maturity

Sunday 14th April 2024

GALATIANS 5:1-6

Newborn babies cry for what they want when they want it – they are individualistic and seeking instant gratification.

Somehow it is possible to move from childhood to adulthood without putting off the habits of instant gratification, and individualism. And this is highly destructive of community – marriage, family, church, workplace teams, sports teams, etc.

When you ask ‘who am I?’ your culture (UK specifically) tells you to refer to yourself, to look within. Take these couple of lines from Taylor Swift’s song ‘Bejewelled’ – “**putting someone first only works when you’re in their top 5**” and then “Best believe I’m still bejewelled, When I walk in the room, I can still make the whole place shimmer.”

So, let’s see what Paul speaks into our culture of individualism and instant gratification. How do the Scriptures help you step into freedom without making sure everything is about you?

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

One thing is for sure, just because you have been born again, does not mean you will not sin again. However, let’s not confuse, the potential to get it wrong as a Christian with the worldly idea that it’s ok, and it doesn’t matter.

Paul helpfully opens this up further in verse 2,

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

In other words, if you want to define your faith (or add to your faith) by some other way of thinking then who Christ is does not bring any benefit to your life. Now you’re only half a step from taking the rest of this world’s thinking and bring up an excuse for your un-Christlike behaviour with words like, “you know me” or “that’s just the way I am” or “well, I just couldn’t help it” and the world seems absolutely fine with it. You know why? Because, those responses are simply the echoes of individualism for which, you will likely get a round of applause from someone.

Now let's continue as Paul unpacks the problem of coming to Christ and then living for self, in verse 3,

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

When you make the choice to live by certain rules, or add certain rules to your faith you invite a much bigger problem into your heart.

You are going to have to go 'all in'. The enemy will never be satisfied to get you to add a little 'what can I get away with' or 'it'll fine, I didn't actually sleep with her' or 'no one got hurt, let's move on'. When those phrase are moving through your mind, you need to run a mile from whatever is on offer. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 the Bible says,

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

Notice, he does not recommend you negotiate with sin, or see how close you can get to the line. He says run as hard as you can away from sin.

And now Paul hits pause on this drifting that has gone on and says take a look at where you have ended up, in verse 4,

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

Notice who drifted, who moved. It is not Christ who has moved, it is us who have drifted, away from Him. Christ has not forsaken you, you have forsaken Christ. You have exchanged the freedom, for which He paid the highest price, for a 'faux freedom'. The world's version of freedom says, do what you want be what you want, as long as it does no harm to others.

Now it sounds 'right enough' that we will try and live this way. But you will soon discover it is impossible to live like this, especially if you want to live for yourself. Both you and every individual you encounter has to define the word 'harm'. Problem is, harm means different things to different people at different times in their lives.

What sin promotes above all else, is self. But Christ both exemplifies living for others (specifically the glory of God) and calls us to something entirely different in Luke 9:23,

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

▶ You are in a battle with the old you, the ‘self’ within. Every. Single. Day.

▶ So what is the solution? Look at the next verse (5),

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

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1. ‘We’ means this is the same solution for all Christians
 2. ‘through the Spirit’ means not of ourselves
 3. ‘eagerly waiting for’ is a to fully expect a certain thing
 4. ‘the hope of righteousness’ the righteousness we will fully receive is that of Christ, not of our own
 5. ‘by faith’ – not by works, not by effort, not by manifesting, (for we walk by faith, not by sight says Paul)

▶ Paul summarizes what should govern the Christian’s life and what it should therefore look like with this in verse 6,

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

Now the key to understanding this verse and living in its power is in that tiny phrase ‘in Christ’. When you are in Christ, everything changes. When you are in Christ, you eternity has shifted, from hell to heaven. When you are in Christ you move from being dead to being alive. When you are in Christ you no longer need this world’s way of thinking and being, everything has become new.

▶ When he says ‘neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything’ this can be applied to every thought and every action that we could possibly add to our faith in Christ. To avail nothing means to get you nowhere, to add nothing to you, to take nothing from you. There is zero benefit in adding these things to your faith.

▶ Which brings me back to my opening thoughts. Adding anything to your faith cannot add anything to who you are. So why does it feel good? Because that’s the lie, that how something makes you feel NOW is better than anything that delays that feeling, even if the alternative (i.e. Christ in glory) is way better. This is why Paul says to ‘stand fast’. In other words, do not move from who you are in Christ, do not wander towards the things that appeal to your sense of individualism, or instant gratification – that’s how we move into maturity.

So what shall we do? Show you faith through love. This is not some ancient form of self-love that Paul is referring to but agape, which is that love which chooses to love, because it is free to do so, and never for what it can get or how it can make you feel.



How shall we live in the freedom of Christ?

- Daily take up the battle of fighting off 'self'
- Daily aim to live the words of Christ (Matt. 7:12, 'Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.') – train your children in this too; live it in the workplace too.
- Daily 'put away childish things' (1 Corinthians 13:11 'When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.')
- Daily affirm each other within your family to ensure you never leave the house with the question 'who am I' unanswered.
- Daily spend time together in your marriage, knowing that the greatest tragedy and separation to ever impact mankind happened in a moment when Satan separated Eve from her husband and came between them.