

Stand Firm in God's Grace: Part 4

Introduction:

I know you have read and heard **Galatians 5:4** over and over again throughout your Christian life. There is absolutely no doubt that this text says someone has been severed from Christ. There is no doubt it says someone has fallen away from God's grace. No matter how we cut it, no matter how we explain it, this passage clearly teaches that I can be in Christ and then cut off from Him. It teaches I can be saved by grace and then fall away from that grace and the salvation it promises. But for a long time, in my haste to prove that point, I completely overlooked who this text actually said had fallen from grace. Have you ever noticed who it is? I've just always treated it like we are talking about people who are looking for permission to sin, those who are rebelling against God and His will. Imagine my shock when what this passage really said hit me like a ton of bricks. Who is severed from Christ? "You who would be justified by the law" (ESV). In other words, Paul said that people who were extremely concerned about God's law had fallen from God's grace. These were so concerned they were doing everything they could to keep the law so they could turn to God and say, "Look at how well we kept your law." These were not impenitent and rebellious adulterers, whoremongers, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, murderers, liars. These were folks who desperately wanted to be righteous. They wanted justification. And they were applying themselves to God's law to get it. I want you to let that sit with you for just a moment. Now let me be clear. I know that the law these folks were looking to was the law God gave through Moses. But we need to understand that God was using that Law to illustrate a major point about legal stipulations and law systems in general. While I have no doubt that people who turn their backs on God in rebellion will fall from His grace, this passage actually says it is those who are trying to impress God with their law-keeping who fall. Worse, they have been severed from Christ. If those who live by law have fallen from grace, how do we stand firmly in God's grace? The answer is live by faith, not by law.

I know that is shocking. Please, before you start trying to figure out what is wrong with that statement, bear with me. Allow me to show you what the Bible really says about law, grace, faith, and how we will be saved. We're going to let **Romans 9:30-10:4** help us understand what is going on here.

Discussion:

I. Pursuing law will not lead to righteousness.

- A. **Romans 9:31** shocks me. The Jews wanted righteousness too. Paul didn't view the Jews as immoral rebels. He saw them as people very zealous for God and God's will. They were so zealous they became great students of God's law. They were certain that if they lived by God's law they would attain life through God's law. That would have worked. Except that it didn't, because they didn't keep the law. Please understand that in this lesson, I am not using the word "law" as a synonym for "covenant" or "testament." Often, we simply refer to God's covenant with Abraham and Israel as the "Old Law" and God's covenant with His church through Christ as the "New Law." Certainly, there is a proper way to do that. But in this lesson, I'm not using "law" that way. By "law" in this lesson, I mean the "legal code" or the "legal stipulations" of the covenant.
- B. Read **Romans 2:17-24**. Paul was not saying the Israelites were hypocritically wicked people who couldn't care less about God's law. They loved God's law. They boasted in it. They knew His will, believed it was excellent, were instructed in it, and were instructors of it. The problem was, try as they might, they all missed it somewhere. **Romans 2:12-13** drives the trouble home. If you sinned under the law, you would be judged by the law. To be justified by the law, you didn't just need to hear it. You had to do it. You had to do all of it, without fail, without mistake, without sin.
- C. **James 2:10** explains, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" (ESV). Consider what **Deuteronomy 27:26** said: "Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them" (ESV). Then again in **Deuteronomy 28:15**: "But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you" (ESV). Paul expounded on this in **Galatians 3:10**. If we try to be saved by law, we are under a curse because none of us has kept the whole thing. We've all failed. Thus Paul's description of all mankind in **Romans 3:10-18, 23**. If we have sinned in one point, we have destroyed our righteousness. No amount of keeping the law from now on will give us that righteousness back.

- D. So, what do we do? Some folks spin their wheels working harder at keeping the law. They hope that trying harder today will make up for missing it yesterday. There are two problems with that. First, as **Romans 2:25** demonstrates, keeping one legal stipulation does not make up for having broken a different one. No amount of keeping the law today will make up for violating the law yesterday. The only way I can ever be justified or declared righteous by law is if I've never broken it. But I have. Second, there is an even greater problem demonstrated by Paul's own life in **Romans 7:14-24**. So long as I'm trying to be saved by simply keeping the law of God in which I delight in my inner being, the more I'll see that the law of sin dwells in my body and leads me to disobey.
- E. We must understand that God never intended law to save us. He never intended law to justify us.
1. **Romans 3:20**—"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (ESV).
 2. **Galatians 2:16a**—"...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law..." (ESV).
 3. **Galatians 2:16b**—"...because by works of the law no one will be justified" (ESV).
 4. **Galatians 3:11**—"Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law..." (ESV).
 5. **Galatians 5:4**—"You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law..." (ESV).
 6. **Hebrews 7:18-19**—"for on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect)..." (ESV).
- F. No law has been given to save or justify anyone. Law was given to demonstrate, convict of, and imprison us under the power of sin. **Romans 3:20** shows that law gives the knowledge of sin. **Galatians 3:22** shows that the written law imprisoned us under sin. **I Timothy 1:8-11** demonstrates that law was not intended to guide the just or justify the sinner but rather to convict sinners and demonstrate their unholiness. That is all law is good for. It is good for showing us how sinful we are, but it will never save us or give us life. Though God's law is good, in us, it only produces death. In **Romans 7:7-12**, Paul explains that sin uses the law to bring about death. Consider also **I Corinthians 15:56**. Death's sting is sin. But what gives sin its power? Law. Though I'm getting ahead of myself, I hope you thought of **Romans 1:16-17**. While the law is sin's power to produce damnation and death, the gospel is God's power to produce salvation and life.
- G. Look again at **Romans 9:31**. Israel tried to get to righteousness by pursuing a law. They failed. If we try to get to righteousness the same way, we will also fail.

II. Establishing our own righteousness doesn't work.

- A. At this point, some might say, "Yes, Edwin, but this is about the Old Law, not our law." And I admit it. I have been somewhat melding these things together to drive home the point I believe God through Paul was striving to make with His object lesson of the Old Covenant Law. To be sure, there has been a change of law (cf. **Hebrews 7:12**). The legal stipulations under the New Covenant are different from the Old. Further, we are subject to this new law. Sadly, the moment we start talking about grace, some fear we are saying God's law doesn't matter. That is not the case. It is precisely because God's law matters that we need God's grace. Sin is the violation of law (**I John 3:4**). If there were no law, there would be no sin (**Romans 5:13**). If there were no sin, we wouldn't need grace. So we are under a new law that we must keep. Was God's issue that the Jews were trying to be justified by the legal stipulations of the Old Covenant and not the legal stipulations of the New Covenant? Are we to learn from this that we should be justified by the new law and not the old?
- B. As if to answer this, Paul goes on to further explain what the Jews were doing wrong in **Romans 10:2-3**. "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the New Law, and seeking to follow the Old, they will not submit to God's New Law." That isn't what Paul said at all. The problem was not simply with which law they were following. The problem was that trying to be justified by any law was an attempt to establish their own righteousness. Like the Pharisees of **Luke 18:9**, they trusted themselves that they were righteous. They wanted to bring righteousness to God as their gift to Him. The problem is if I try to bring my righteousness to God and He lays His law alongside my life so the legal stipulations can justify me, if I have ever broken even one of those stipulations, they won't justify me, they will condemn me. So, have you sinned? Have you ever broken one of the legal stipulations of God whether in the New or Old Covenant? Then the legal stipulations of those laws cannot justify you. And hoping to take your obedience to the legal stipulations to God as the reason you should be in heaven, will only land you separated from Him and condemned to hell.
- C. Paul deals with this objection again in **Galatians 3:21**. First, he points out that none of this means we think God's law is bad or against the salvation God has promised. Neither Paul nor I are saying that we can now ignore God's law. The point is simply this, if we could establish our own righteousness by keeping a law from God, then justification and being declared righteous would have come about by that Old Law. Paul was not

saying that the Law wouldn't work so a new set of legal stipulations was needed. Rather, Paul was saying that God used the Law as a demonstration to us that we cannot be justified by law...any law. Please remember what I mean by "law" in this lesson. Of course, we can be justified by God's New Covenant and God's New Covenant has legal stipulations or law. But we cannot be justified by keeping the legal stipulations. We've already blown that. This, by the way, is not the same as saying we can be justified while actively rebelling against God's legal stipulations.

- D. This blows to bits my old ideas about grace. You see, even though I have said for years that we are saved by grace and that grace means unmerited favor, my approach to Christianity wasn't really based on faith in that principle. The way I lived was that I knew I would never be perfect. That is why I needed God's grace. However, the only way to get God's grace was to be good enough. If I ever sinned, that meant I wasn't trying hard enough and if I hoped to get God's grace I had to try harder. Further, it meant I needed to spend all my time trying to make sure I was right about everything, because I never knew which things I had to be right about to get God's grace. If I was wrong about the wrong things, I may be abandoning God's grace. What this means is my view of God's grace was I needed to do my dead-level best to justify myself. I would fall short, of course. But if I tried hard enough and did well enough, on judgment, God's grace would cover the rest. But I had to remember that God's grace would only go so far and if I didn't measure up, I couldn't get God's grace. That is a very frightening place to be. Subconsciously, my salvation was based on my performance and I could never be sure my performance was good enough. In fact, I was pretty positive my performance wasn't. Of course, for those who think their performance makes them good enough, we go back to that story about the Pharisee and the publican in **Luke 18**. Here's the problem. What was I trying to do? I was trying to establish my own righteousness. Certainly, I wasn't trying to do it by going back to the Old Covenant Law. I wasn't establishing my righteousness by getting circumcised or keeping the Sabbath. I was trying to establish my own righteousness by keeping what I determined were the legal stipulations of the New Covenant. Paul explains that just doesn't work. It doesn't matter what set of legal stipulations I'm using to try to establish my own righteousness, if I'm trying to establish my own righteousness, then I will not submit to God's righteousness.
- E. **Matthew 5:3** says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (ESV). This is not blessed are those who don't have quite enough. This is blessed are those who are in abject poverty. We are not poor in spirit when we are trying to bring to God our own righteousness and saying we need just a little grace to get us the rest of the way. We are this poor in spirit when we come to God saying we have nothing to give Him. We need all that He has to give us. As long as we are trying to establish our own righteousness and offer that to God, we will never have the kingdom of heaven.

III. Seek God's righteousness by faith.

- A. We have a big problem. The only way to be justified by any law is to do it, all of it, without fail, without mistake, without sin. Let me ask, have you accomplished that? Neither have I. Where do we go from here? Is justification impossible? Are we simply lost, without hope? No. But, interestingly enough, we gain direction not from the Jews who pursued the law, but from the Gentiles who did not. In **Romans 9:30-33**, we learn the surprising path to justification and righteousness. The Jews pursued righteousness by law and were lost because they could not keep the law. The Gentiles did not pursue righteousness but pursued faith and attained righteousness.
- B. Are we stumbling over the exact same rock? What does the text say, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever impresses him with their own righteousness will not be put to shame"? No. It says "whoever believes in him will not be put to shame" (ESV). The Jews stumbled because they simply couldn't imagine being justified apart from their ability to keep God's will. What about us? Are we stumbling at the same point?
- C. Consider Paul in **Philippians 3:8-9**. Paul sacrificed everything not to prove how righteous he was. As far as the righteousness under the law was concerned, he was blameless (**Philippians 3:6**). Nobody could bring a charge against him (no one except God, that is). But that wasn't good enough to justify him and he knew it. Paul sacrificed everything to be in Christ because Christ is where salvation and justification are. He didn't want his own righteousness that comes from keeping law. He wanted the righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus. He wanted the righteousness that comes from God and depends on faith. Paul understood we cannot give righteousness to God. Rather, He gives righteousness to us. He does it through faith.
- D. Read **Romans 3:20-31**. No one can be justified by law. Rather, we are justified by grace. But how do we receive that grace? We receive it through faith. In that way, God is not only just but the justifier of those who put their faith in Jesus and not in themselves. Living by law means putting our faith, hope, and trust in our ability to save ourselves. Living by faith means putting our faith, hope, and trust in Jesus and His sacrifice to

save us. God will justify all men by faith. Please note, that Paul claimed this did not destroy the law but upheld it. Notice also that **Romans 5:1-2** says we are justified by faith because it is through faith that we have access to God's grace.

E. Paul also taught this in **Galatians**.

1. **Galatians 2:16**—"Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law" (ESV).
2. **Galatians 3:11**—"Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith" (ESV).
3. **Galatians 3:24**—"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith" (ESV).

F. The big question right now about your justification is do you believe Jesus? Do you believe He was the Son of God, the Messiah, the blessing promised through Abraham? Do you believe He died to save you from your sins? Do you believe His promises? Do you believe His Word? If you desire to be justified, **Romans 9:30-10:4** provides an astonishing plan. Don't pursue righteousness by law, pursue faith.

IV. So, live by faith, not by law.

- A. What's the take away? You need to live by faith, not by law. But please notice exactly what that statement says. **Habakkuk 2:4** said, "...the righteous shall live by his faith" (ESV). That is quoted three times in the New Testament—**Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38**. Notice the double entendre. In one statement God's point is that we live by faith. That is, through our faith we are given life. At the same time, we live by faith. That is, our lives are run based on faith. In other words, by faith we will live, if we live by faith.
- B. Living by faith does not mean ignoring Jesus's will. It means believing Jesus died for you and what He tells you is best. Living by faith means letting Jesus be in charge. **Galatians 2:20** explains what living by faith means. Living by law means telling Christ, "Look at me. Look at how well I can live for you." Living by faith means asking Christ, "Live through me. Live in me. You take charge; I believe You will lead me right."
- C. Consider the great chapter on faith—**Hebrews 11**. Why did Noah build an ark? Because it was God's law? No. Because he believed God's promise of life. Why did Abraham travel wherever the Lord led and why did he go to offer Isaac? Because it was God's law? No. Because he believed the promises of God and he wanted them. Why did Moses's parents protect Moses? Because they believed God. Why did Moses choose to be mistreated with the Hebrews rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin with the Egyptians? Because he believed God's promises and he believed God's way was best. Why do you do what you do to serve God? Is it because you think you have to so you can be good enough to get God's grace and go to heaven? Or is it because you believe in Jesus, want to be in Jesus and near Jesus, and you believe His way works?

Conclusion:

So, the question for our lives today is why are we here in this congregational assembly? Are we here to establish our own righteousness? "Look at me God, I went to church a lot. I obeyed your legal stipulation about not forsaking the assemblies. Aren't I good? Don't you love me for that? Shouldn't I get to go to heaven? I've kept your law." If so, we are in dire danger of falling from God's grace and being severed from Christ. Or are we here because we know we've violated God's law but we believe in God's righteousness, demonstrated through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus. Believing in His way, we've gathered here to glorify Him and build each other up in our faith that we might all live by faith.

The other question is whether or not you have believed Jesus enough to enter Him? Notice what Paul said in **Galatians 3:21-29**. Law cannot justify us or give us life. Only Jesus can do that. Do you believe Jesus will do that for those who are in Him? If so, then believe what He said and do it. Be baptized into Christ today. You cannot be saved without it. Put Him on, receive His promises, then live by faith in Him and His promises.