

AM Galatians 5 "The only thing that counts"

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[0:00] I think the page number is on the notice sheet there. Galatians and chapter 5. Chapter 5. Let's begin reading there. It's on page 1172 if you have one of the church Bibles. Galatians chapter 5.

And we'll read the whole chapter together. Verse 1 says, For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Look, I Paul say to you that if you accept circumcision Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he's obligated to keep the whole law.

You're severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law. You've fallen away from grace.

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

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. You were running well.

[1:24] Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you'll take no other view than mine.

And the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the offence of the cross has been removed.

I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves. You who were called to freedom. You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you're not consumed by one another.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you'll not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.

[2:33] For these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you're led by the Spirit, you're not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident.

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

[3:46] Amen. This is God's word. Amen. Well, turn back with me please to Galatians chapter 5.

This morning we're going to be focusing on what Galatians chapter 5 says. And especially focusing our attention on verse 6. And in fact, really just the second part of verse 6.

Verse 6 says, For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

This verse is saying the only thing that counts is faith working through love. I want to ask you to imagine with me for a moment that for some strange reason, you've become the proud owner of a beautiful boat.

And you've decided to go to a boat show and see some of the things you might need, now that you're the proud owner of this beautiful boat.

[5:03] And you go to the show and you think, Oh, I could get a captain's hat or I could get a shiny new anchor. And there's a row of stalls selling life jackets.

And you come to understand, I need to have a life jacket. And you go to the first stall and the man there says, You should buy my life jacket.

It's the cheapest life jacket at the show. You'll have more money left to buy. I saw you looking at that nice hat. You'll have loads of money left over if you just buy my cheap life jacket.

And somebody else says, You should buy my life jacket. Mine is the best colours. It's orange and yellow and red. And it's a beautiful pattern on it. It's really striking.

And the next man says, Well, my life jackets are more expensive, but they're made to measure. And you'll hardly know you're wearing it. It'd be great. Well, if you fall off the side of your boat, which of those life jackets would be the best one to have?

[6:13] Well, if you fall off the side of your boat, it won't matter if it was cheap or expensive or comfortable or uncomfortable or with a beautiful pattern on it.

The only thing that matters with a life jacket is, does it float? Will it hold you up so that you don't drown when you fall off the side of your boat?

And that's a little bit like what's happening here with Paul when he writes to the Galatians. He writes to this church in Galatia they've been distracted and they've been put wrong and they've forgotten something that's actually the only thing that counts.

They've gone wrong. And for that reason, Paul has to write this letter to the Galatians and he writes it in a very stern way. He actually says in this letter, basically I wish I didn't have to have this tone of voice with you.

I wish I could change the way I've written this letter because I'm having to say to them, he has to say in chapter 1, I'm astonished so quickly.

[7:33] You've deserted this. You've gone wrong. You've forgotten the thing that counts. And in chapter 3, he's even stronger in his language.

He says, you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? He says it's like you're under some sort of spell. He's really, actually, almost, I would say, angry.

Some people say that what he says there in verse 12, he's making a wee bit of a joke. I don't think it's a joke. I think he's deadly serious. He's got a kind of righteous anger.

And the reason is because some doctrines are so vital that they're actually the only thing that counts. All of us, anyone who's been a Christian for any length of time knows that Christians have different opinions about all sorts of things.

And some of those things, you know, you can still, almost my best friend is a Baptist. Others have different views about all sorts of things in the church.

[8:43] And these things, we can hold these things in an appropriate way. But there are some doctrines that we can't because they're in the category of absolutely vital.

It's not life or death. It's the day of judgment. You will be condemned. You will still be in your sins. And you will have no hope.

You'll be one of those, if you've missed this doctrine, you'll be one of those who terrifyingly will be in the category of those who say, Lord, Lord, didn't we do miracles? Didn't we do this?

Weren't we at church every Sunday? And you say, I never knew you. So it's really, really serious. It's the only thing that counts.

And that's what we want to focus on this morning. And yet, this language is so strong, it's the only thing, he's probably saying it's the only thing that counts.

[9:44] Faith working through love. But we've got another problem that we need to address. And that is, what do these words really mean?

Now, if those words were words you'd never come across in your life before, you could have a goal. You could make up a word. You could just say, the only thing that counts is crabulation, working through bugnitude.

And just make up words that have no meaning. And if I just went on and on and on about that this morning, you guys would, you're a very polite congregation, you'd probably smile. And you'd go home and say, we didn't learn anything this morning.

He kept saying something was really important, but it was a word I'd never heard of and I didn't know what it meant. But actually, worse than that can be when there's a word you think you know what it means, but you don't really.

And if you'll allow me one more silly illustration, imagine this scenario. Imagine if I was in a terrible rush.

[10:51] Tomorrow, maybe I'd borrowed a lot of money from the bank and tomorrow was the last day I could pay it back. Five o'clock, the bank would close and I happened to be outside on the street there and then something else came up that was also an emergency.

I had to take my daughter to hospital. And imagine a small boy is walking past the street there with a fishing rod in his hand. And I said, I just don't know what I'm going to do here.

How can I be in two places at once? And I say to the boy, could you take this bag of money, drop it off at the bank and say, this is to repay Cameron's loan. And the boy looks a bit confused and says, yeah, I'll do that.

And he walks straight off up there to the bank of the river Nith. And he holds it out over the bank and drops it off. Splash. And he says, this is to repay Cameron's loan.

What a terrible disaster for me. There was a word, I used words, but he didn't, he thought I meant something different by that word and it ended in disaster for me.

[12:04] Well, that's what it can be like if we don't understand what the word faith and the word love mean. And the problem is that the word faith is used in, all around us by people who have a different idea of what faith means.

Some people talk about taking a leap of faith. And what they mean when they say, I just took a leap of faith. They mean, I just, I just had no evidence to think that this would be right or wrong.

I just did it without any, anything. It was just a leap of faith. It was just a random act like jumping off a cliff and hoping for a soft landing without any real basis.

But that's not at all what faith is like in the Bible. And that's what we must understand. Faith is like the throw rope example I was explaining to the young folks.

faith It's vitally important that we know what this faith is. It's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:12] Faith in a person. Look at, looking through Galatians, Paul is clear, crystal clear. Look at chapter 2 if you've got your Bible open, verses 15 there.

He's saying that there's hope for us poor sinners who even after putting our faith in Christ we know we still struggle with indwelling sin. But look at 17 to 21 there.

You'll see that we're neither saved by being good enough to get to heaven nor is our future confidence based on continuing to be good enough now that our past sins are forgiven.

And what was confusing the church and the Galatian Christians was the law. How did the law apply?

And there's nothing wrong with the law but Paul spends almost the whole of chapter 3 explaining that the main purpose of the law, the Ten Commandments, all of these things is to show us our need of Christ, is to drive us to our knees.

[14:20] And when we see the whole of Scripture, everything that God's accomplished in all of redemptive history from Genesis all the way through, we can see as he shows in chapter 4 that those who are saved are not saved by their own righteousness, they're those who are saved by trusting in the promises.

They're trusting in God's promises, not in their own goodness, not in their own observance of the law. They have faith in God's promises. And as we get the glorious light of the Gospel in the New Testament, that becomes faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

Faith is not a thing that you can put in a box. It has to have an object that has to be connected to something in order to work. And it's the Lord Jesus Christ if we have faith in Jesus.

that's what can save us. The truth is actually we use faith in the biblical sense, we exercise faith in the biblical sense all the time in different ways.

Over right now in the skies above us, there are thousands of people who have put their faith in aircraft pilots. What they've done is they've believed believed that it's true that the person at the controls of that plane has the skills and experience and the route plan and all of the things they need to get that person from one place to another place.

[16:02] And so they exercise faith when they get on the plane. They haven't exercised faith if you say to them do you believe this pilot could fly to Australia?

You might say yes, well that's, you've got, you know, you've got knowledge and you've got a scent but you still haven't put your trust in that pilot. Or think about surgeons. Some people have operations performed on them and when you have an operation performed on you by a surgeon,

you exercise faith in that surgeon.

You believe that the surgeon has the skills and experience and all of the rest of it to perform an operation. He tells you what's wrong with you and you believe that to be true.

But you actually exercise faith when you willingly lie down on that operating table and allow that surgeon to perform an operation on you. And one of the problems is that in the church we sometimes talk about faith and actually this verse could be a, some people could take this verse out of context and say what we need is faith.

But faith here is a shorthand. It's like a little, he's assuming you've read the rest of the letter and you know what he means when he's speaking about faith. He's speaking about faith in Christ for freedom.

[17 : 26] Christ has set us free. So he's not putting faith in isolation. But sometimes Christians are tempted to speak about faith in that way and it makes no sense.

Let's go back to the plain example. Imagine for a moment that somebody is standing in Australia and they say to you, the reason I can see these kangaroos all around me or whatever it is, is because of my strong, strong faith.

It doesn't really make sense, does it? It's like, your faith? You say, ah, you mean you put faith in the aircraft pilot to take you to Australia.

That's the reason you're in Australia. And in fact, some people on the plane might have had terribly weak faith. There could be somebody who's flown on a plane every day and they say, ah, this is great, I'm on a plane again.

And somebody else has never flown before and they're grabbing the side of the plane's armrests and they're, I don't know if this, will this work or not?

[18 : 44] They have weak faith, they're terrified. But they still got on the plane and that's what made the difference. They had enough faith to get on the plane and believe that the person would probably take them to Australia.

Or the same with surgeons, isn't it? some people think nothing of getting an operation. Other people, you know, maybe have to sign a consent form and their hand will be shaking.

They're terrified of having an operation performed on them. It doesn't matter whether your faith is weak or strong. It matters whether you exercise the faith by putting the faith in the person.

And that's really what Paul is saying here in this verse. That's the only thing that counts is whether or not you've put your faith in Christ.

Galatians 2.20 says, I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[20 : 02] Jesus says that we are his friends if we do what he commands, if we love him. He says he lays down his life for his friends as a ransom for many.

If you believe what the Bible teaches about Jesus, you will be saved. Romans 5.8 says God shows his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Corinthians 15.3 says for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.

Jesus came to give his life a ransom for many. And so to have faith, as it's described in our verse here, in verse 6, to have faith in Christ is to believe that he died for your sins and for that to be the basis of your hope.

It's like choosing the right plane to get on, like choosing the right surgeon to perform. an operation on you. But it's much, much more important.

[21 : 26] Choosing to believe the truth about Christ as it's presented to us in the Bible. To put our hope in him for the forgiveness of our sins. Maybe you think this is a very basic message.

Maybe you say, I already know this. I make no apology for repeating these things. Because if you truly believe these things to be true, you'll know that it's good to be reminded of them, good to hear them repeated, because for some reason we need to be reminded of them.

Every week. We tend to forget them. We tend to be like the Galatians who were almost under a spell. someone cuts in on you, as it were.

You were running well and somehow the temptation is to be diverted from these main plain things in the scriptures.

believers. And so that's what we're doing this week and every week. It's got to be the main practical point of application from any sermon.

[22 : 41] It's to urge people to believe this message and unless we grasp it, there is, as I say, no hope for you. You'll die in your sins. But there's more to this verse.

It says that the only thing that counts is faith working through love. Time's against us in a way because if faith is a word that's misunderstood by most people, love is even worse, isn't it?

Let's be honest. It's a really, really misunderstood or misapplied word.

in our culture and all around us. But let's step back from that for a moment and think, how can you tell if somebody put their faith in a pilot?

It's because they're actually in the place that the pilot took them, isn't it? How can you tell if someone put their faith in the surgeon? It's because, say it's a heart transplant. That would be the most ridiculous thing, wouldn't it?

[23 : 54] Imagine someone's had a heart transplant and they say the reason I'm alive today is because of my faith. See, your faith, you need to go a bit more than that.

The faith I placed in this heart transplant surgeon to put a new heart inside me and set it going in the right way and connect it to the right thing so that I would have a new heart.

heart transplant so we can tell, how can you tell then if someone has put their faith in Christ?

That's the question. And of course there's a cheat's answer to that. You can say well if I put my faith in Christ, I'll wait until I get to heaven and I'll just look around and I'll be able to see who the people were who had real saving faith in Christ.

But that's kind of too late then isn't it? It's not going to be relevant then in one sense. And what Paul is saying here is what counts as faith working through love.

[24 : 57] The problem is that some people's faith is not genuine. It's not real. And when it's not real it does not express itself. It does not work through love.

It doesn't accomplish anything. And as I say the word love is very misunderstood in our culture today.

Most people think of it as something to do with boyfriends and girlfriends but that's not really what is spoken of here. In fact it's got almost nothing to do with that really.

Because the love that Paul is speaking about here is the most noble practical distinctive thing that marks out a true Christian in a way that's evident to everybody around.

And I just in the time that's left I want to mention three things in connection with this biblical love that is the kind of love that's spoken of in verse six here.

[26 : 03] The only thing either circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything but only faith working through love. The first thing to mention about this love is that in the Bible the connection between love and obedience is impossible to miss.

And actually it's impossible to miss in real life isn't it? If you love someone you won't do things that you know offend them deeply you just won't do those things.

And we see in chapter five itself give me a minute I've lost the verse but I'm sure somewhere in this chapter it says that to love our neighbor as ourself.

Verse 14 the whole law is fulfilled in one word you shall love your neighbor as yourself. And when Jesus himself in Matthew 22 says that the greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Not everyone realizes probably you guys do know this but that's not a new commandment. It's from Deuteronomy, it's from Leviticus. Jesus is describing that love as a summary of the Ten Commandments actually.

[27 : 48] The first four commandments, the duty that is on us to love the Lord with all our heart and soul and strength and the last six to love our neighbor as ourself.

love. And when faith works through love as we have it in this verse here then in every example of faith working through love it will be a practical outworking of one of the Ten Commandments.

It will be some way in which the Ten Commandments are being put into practice in real life to be truthful or faithful or to, you know, whatever the action is, whatever the thing that the Christian person is doing, it will be connected.

You'll be able to draw a direct line of connection between that love and these commandments. We have choices. We know that we can do what pleases a person or what offends them.

And when we choose to do what pleases the Lord Jesus Christ, that is expressing love for him and love for one another. He says, doesn't he, if you love me you'll obey my commands.

[29:15] But then there's also the character of that love. love for him. You'll know, I'm sure, 1 Corinthians 13, the great description of love there.

And if you don't, I'd urge you to read 1 Corinthians chapter 13 this afternoon. When we read this list of spiritual gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, that's in verse 22 and 23, you see that that's a practical outworking of love.

There's an objective set of rules that we follow, but we don't follow those rules like robots. There's a way in which we follow them, a character, a manner of living that's connected with the actual rules themselves.

There's a way that is expressive of love, a deeper thing than a simple compliance with a rule, a heartfelt desire to do what pleases the Lord and what shows his sacrificial love to others in practical ways.

And lastly, and most importantly, we've thought about the connection between love and obedience, we've thought about the character of the love briefly, and now also the object of that love.

[30:50] Go back again to my example of the aircraft pilot or the surgeon. I was trying to explain how absurd it would be for a person to just talk about faith as an abstract thing, isolated from that surgeon or that pilot.

Let's try adding something to that illustration. imagine if the surgeon missed out on his favorite music concert, which he'd been looking forward to for months and months.

He'd had it in his diary, but then your operation and the heart that you needed came up and the timing was such that he decided, I'll miss that.

I've been looking forward to that all year. my favorite, I don't know, surgeons are usually like, you know, I don't know, maybe a concert pianist is coming to Glasgow for the first time ever or something, and he misses it.

Maybe the pilot was away over his daughter's birthday in order to fly you to Australia or wherever you were going. if you knew those details, wouldn't you be just a little bit more grateful to the surgeon or the pilot who was willing to forgo these things in order to take you on holiday or give you a new heart?

[32:16] Or maybe you can see where this is going. If you know the details, if you've read the scriptures and you know the cost, what was involved in the sacrifice that Christ has offered on your behalf, then the depth of that gratefulness, the response of love when faith is genuine is something extraordinary, it's something that cannot be, we can't ever plumb the full depths of that ourselves, this side of eternity and perhaps even in eternity.

But as we begin to grasp something of what it has cost in order for us to be able to put our faith in Christ, then that will influence how we live our lives.

It will be much more visible to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are after all the body of Christ on earth. And it will have these outward circles that will have this love for Christ which will overflow into love for his people and those who profess faith in Christ.

And out to extend to the others who are shown as priority in the scriptures to have a concern for the poor, for each person made in God's image.

It will be something beautiful, it will be something striking. So that's what love is. And if we have faith working through love, then that is literally, according to the scriptures, the only thing that counts.

[34:06] Amen. May God bless to us these thoughts from his word.