

Stand Firm in Liberty!

"It was for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

Jesus Christ died to set us free from sin – not only from the penalty of sin but also from the power of sin. When Christ died, God included us in His Son's death. Because our sinful nature died with Christ, we have been eternally freed from bondage to sin. "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that our sinful nature might be done away, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:6-7)." This is our glorious victory over sin in Christ!

After we have experienced this great salvation, what's next? We must be careful to avoid the mistake of the Galatian Christians, whom the apostle Paul chastised, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now trying to perfect yourselves by your human effort? (Galatians 3:3)." The Galatians experienced this miraculous born again experience but were then deceived into thinking they must sanctify themselves by their own effort. Paul reminded them that all their effort would never set them free from sin. Only Christ's death on the cross sets us free from sin. We could not crucify ourselves and we cannot sanctify ourselves. Because of Christ's death on the cross, we no longer have an old Adam nature; however, if we still have an unrenewed mind (the old Adam way of thinking), we will have a natural tendency to think we can be righteous because of our own merit and that we can resist sin by our own strength. Even after the Holy Spirit gives us divine revelation that only Christ's death on the cross gave us freedom from the power of sin, our natural habit (especially under stress) will be to fall back on our own strength to try to master sin.

Trying to sanctify ourselves this way is not only burdensome; it is impossible. We need to stand firm by faith in the liberty we have in Christ and

resist the inclination to do anything by our own self-effort, knowing it would be fruitless. The work of God never changes – it is always the work of faith. Jesus said, "This is the work of God – that you believe in Him whom He has sent (John 6:29)." Now that Christ has completely delivered us from our sinful nature and the power of sin, our work of faith is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and His finished work on the cross. This is how we live the Christian life. Many Christians think now that Jesus has saved us, we should try hard to sanctify ourselves. But we must remember that Jesus is not only the author of our faith (*our salvation*); He is also the perfecter of our faith (*our sanctification*) (Hebrews 12:2).

Whenever we step out of God's work of faith and enter into our own effort, we take the burden for our sanctification out of God's hands and put it in our own hands. This prevents God from doing the sanctifying work of the Spirit in us that comes only from faith. It also produces ungodly anxiety and stress since we have decided (in unbelief) that the work of God now depends on our own effort. This yoke of unbelief is an awful burden to bear. The Bible calls it "the yoke of slavery." This man-made yoke is in marked contrast to Jesus' yoke. He said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you... My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30)."

Now that we are saved, we can "count ourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11)." The Greek word used here for count is *logizomai*, which is an accounting term meaning "credit to the account." The language of mathematics is precise and certain. All over the world, one plus one equals two. This Scripture means we can count on the fact that we are dead to sin with absolute certainty just as we can count on the fact that one plus one equals two. Now that we have died with Christ and we no longer have a sinful nature, we should present ourselves each day as a living and holy sacrifice to God. As we do this, God will renew our minds and transform our

souls by His Word (Romans 12:1-2; see also Ephesians 4:23)."

It is important to remember that faith is always active – not passive. We cannot just forget about what Jesus has done on the cross and then expect God to transform us. Many Christians have drifted away from the faith because they unwisely practiced this kind of "passive faith," which is really not faith at all. True faith actively believes and acts on the divine facts. If we never actively believed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for *our* sins, we would never be saved. In the same way, if we do not actively believe that Jesus Christ included *us* in His death to remove our sinful nature and free us from sin's bondage, we will never experience freedom from chronic and entangling sins.

We need to stand firm by faith in the spiritual freedom Christ has purchased for us on the cross. Whenever we find ourselves afraid and overcome by sin, it is a sign that we have stepped out of this place of faith. At that point, we should repent and return to fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has done for us on the cross. Whenever we are overwhelmed by a sense of failure, it reveals we are trying to sanctify ourselves in our own strength instead of fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ. Whenever we become religiously merciless with ourselves and with others around us, it is an indication that we have stepped out of that place of faith in Christ. Christ's burden is easy and His yoke is light and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is spiritual liberty and mercy; not carnal severity. We cannot sanctify ourselves and we cannot sanctify others; only Christ can accomplish His sanctification in each one of us. Therefore, we must remember to always stand firm on the sure foundation of faith in Christ and His completed work on the cross, by which He has given us spiritual liberty and rest.

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." 2 Corinthians 3:17 "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." John 8:36