

**Sermon – “What it takes to be a real Christian?”
(Galatians 5:22 – 6:6)**

What do we have to do to be real Christians? What makes real Christians stand out from the crowd? Ever since Christ walked the earth, people have been debating just what makes you one of his followers.

What do people think of us? Christians often get a bad press in the media – stories about Christians who have fallen short of the ideal quickly make headlines!

In this world if you want to join a club, you have to pay a membership fee. If you want to be considered useful in any area, you have to work at it. So what do you have to do to be a Christian?

- some say you must belong to a particular church,
- or give a certain amount of money,
- or live your life in a certain way,
- or do a certain number of good and God-pleasing works.

But the Bible gives a different answer to the question, "what do you have to do to be a Christian." The Bible's answer is: **absolutely nothing!**

- We don't make ourselves Christians - Christ makes us Christians.
- We don't do certain things to become followers of Christ. God does everything to make us followers.
- We aren't bound to obey certain requirements to be a real Christian. Jesus has set us free from sin and death, and from any requirements to earn God's favour.

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian Christians for a specific purpose--because someone was trying to make them slaves. Paul had visited Galatia during his first missionary journey, somewhere around 55AD. Galatia wasn't a specific city, but a whole region in the south part of Asia Minor, which today is the country of Turkey. Paul visited various towns in Galatia and started Christian churches there.

But after Paul had left Galatia, someone else had come into the area and had started stirring up trouble. (What's new? That still goes on today!) Christians will be going along nicely, faithfully trusting in God and his good news and believing his Word – but then someone comes along and starts planting doubt in their minds.

The doubt which the Galatians had is a common one among Christians:

- Doesn't God really require us to do something for his forgiveness?
- Doesn't God have some requirements for us to fulfil?
- God can't really forgive our sins for free, can he?

The Galatians knew God's Word. Paul had told them God's promise that

"it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and that not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works."

God tells us that our forgiveness and our place in heaven is simply a free gift through Christ, our Saviour. Yet as human beings we can find this difficult. After all, in this world, if you want anything worthwhile, you have to pay for it. Heaven is the best thing there is, so how can it possibly be free?

Martin Luther once said that ***"This evil is planted in all human beings by nature: If God were willing to sell his grace, we would accept it more quickly and gladly than when he offers it for nothing."***

The most common kind of false teaching in the world makes God's love and forgiveness and heaven dependent on us doing something, no matter how small that something may be.

That might not seem like a big deal - so what if someone else understands Christianity to mean something a little different from you? But according to Paul, adding requirements to Christianity is a big deal.

Paul says that ***"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."***

Paul isn't simply setting up some test of true faith here. It isn't a difference between whose requirements for Christianity are correct. It's a difference between NO requirement and EVERY requirement.

It's the difference between freedom from God's Law and slavery to God's Law. Christ has set you free. Don't become a slave again!

As God's creatures, we were created to obey God's law and to follow his commands - all of them, every command he ever gave, every one of the

ten commandments, everything. God's law showed us God's will. How to be perfect and holy, and that's how we had to be if we wanted to see heaven - perfect, sinless, completely obedient to God's law.

Yet no human being can live up to that requirement. We have all sinned and broken God's law, and disobeyed his commands.

We cannot ever earn God's forgiveness, his favour or his good will through our own attempts at obeying his law. It just won't work - but we need not be disheartened – there is hope in Christ!

Christ sets us free from our slavery to sin - and to a law we could never keep.

Jesus said, ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."***

We don't find rest in God's law and in our own good works. We find true rest and peace in Christ. Jesus is the one who gave us true freedom by offering his own sinless life as a sacrifice to pay for our sins, to get us out from under the burden of our guilt and our imperfection.

- God's law demanded that we were perfect, but Jesus was perfect for us.
- God's law demanded payment for our sins, but Jesus made that payment for us when he gave up his own life on the cross.
- With his death and resurrection, Jesus took away our slavery, and our obligation to obey God's law or die - Jesus has set us free from all that.
- He has rescued us from God's judgment and has promised us heaven instead. Thanks to Jesus, we are freed from God's law and all our sins are forgiven.

So what do you have to do to get that forgiveness? **Absolutely nothing!** God simply gives it to us out of grace, as a gift, through his Holy Spirit, Word and Sacraments. Thanks to God, we are follower of his Son, our Saviour; and thanks to God, we have Christian faith, and we trust in Jesus for our forgiveness.

And through that faith God makes us his own, free children of God - not because of anything we do or ever could do, but simply because of God's great love for us.

This is the Good News of the Gospel – which we must share with others. It's just too good not to share! And it's what God has commissioned us to share!