

## INTRODUCTION

Some of my fondest memories are road trips when my daughters were young. We had an Oldsmobile Delta 88 with a huge bench backseat. This was before child seats were the required, so they had plenty of room to play. But there was an imaginary line drawn down the middle of the bench and that was no-man's land. They had to stay on their side of the line, or the other one would scream, "Daddy—she's on my side!"

Most of the trips were pleasant, and we did a lot of singing. One of the songs the girls loved to sing was the old camp favorite entitled, "Oh, you can't get to heaven." It went something like this: "Oh you can't get to heaven; (repeat) on roller skates. Oh you can't get to heaven (repeat) on roller skates. Oh you can't get to heaven on roller skates, 'cause you'd roll right by those pearly gates; All my sins are washed away, I've been redeemed." Another verse said, "Oh you can't get to heaven (repeat) in a motor car; Oh you can't get to heaven (repeat) in a motor car; Oh you can't get to heaven in a motor car; 'cause a motor car can't got that far. All my sins are washed away I've been redeemed." This went on and on...and on and on. Many of the verses produced waves of giggling. They'd sing a verse about how you can't get to heaven in a Kleenex box 'cause God don't want no runny snots. Another verse said you can't get to heaven in a limousine 'cause the Lord don't sell no gasoline."

There are many ways you can't get to heaven, but there's only one way you can get to heaven, and that is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Today we're going to answer the question: Can you fall from grace? The phrase appears in our text today. But what does it mean? Does it mean that you can be lost, then be saved, and then be lost again, and that you need to be saved again? Is the Christian life nothing more than a vicious cycle of sinning, losing your salvation, repenting to be saved again, only to lose your salvation the next time you sin? What a terrible way to live! Yet there are millions who call themselves Christians who basically believe that. Let's see what God's says about this important issue.

Galatians 5:4-12. "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.' I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"

Paul has been exposing these false teachers since the beginning of his letter. He finally gets so frustrated that he targets them with a little off-color humor. There's no way to sugarcoat what he wrote. These Jewish teachers were so obsessed with having every male circumcised that Paul

suggests they turn the knife on themselves. Eugene Peterson’s Message paraphrase captures his intent: “Why don’t these agitators, obsessive as they are about circumcision, go all the way and castrate themselves!” (Galatians 5:12 *The Message*)

You may think that kind of statement isn’t politically correct in the church of all places, but Paul wasn’t trying to be polite. He had a good strong case of righteous indignation toward these false teachers. As we examine this passage, let’s dig a little deeper into three themes he introduces: Falling from grace; Running the race; and proving the case.

## **(1) FALLING FROM GRACE**

“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace.” (Galatians 5:4) Can you fall from grace? Absolutely. Paul was writing to Christians who had fallen from grace. However, they were still followers of Jesus Christ. So contrary to what some groups teach, falling from grace isn’t the same thing as losing your salvation.

**Spiritual Principle: You can’t fall away from salvation, but you can reject the truth of grace**

I’ll never forget the time John came to see me in my office. John was in his sixties and a faithful deacon in the church I was serving in Alabama. He was distraught. He said, “Pastor, I need to be saved again. I’ve done something that is so horrible that I know that I’ve fallen from grace.” I talked and listened to him over the next half hour as he poured out his heart. Yes, he had failed the Lord, but as we talked about his salvation experience and his powerful sense of remorse, I tried to convince him he hadn’t lost his salvation. I’m not sure he believed me. He believed he had to work harder to make up for his mistake. John passed away a few years later and I believe he’s in heaven. However, he spent the last few years of his life in a joyless kind of experience of trying to earn God’s acceptance. He hadn’t lost his salvation, but he had fallen from the glorious freedom of living under grace.

Several Christian groups teach you can lose your salvation. These include the Nazarene, Methodist, Anglican, historical Lutheran, and many Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. But the main group that originated this belief is the Roman Catholic Church. Although it’s not in the Bible, the Catholic Church made a distinction between venial sins (minor sins like pride) and mortal sins (major sins like murder). Venial sins don’t cause you to lose your salvation, but if you willingly commit a mortal sin, you lose your salvation. The exact quote from the Catholic Catechism says, “Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God’s forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ’s kingdom and the eternal death of hell.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 3; Section One; Chapter One, Article 8; Paragraph IV; verse 1861)

Now, please understand I’m not criticizing any of these groups that say you can lose your salvation. I just don’t agree with them. I say, “You go your way, and I’ll go His way.” Seriously, one of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is to be able to sing, “Blessed assurance! Jesus

is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of heaven divine. Heir of salvation; purchase of God. Born of His Spirit. Washed in His blood.”

Baptists don’t really have a creed. To us the cross is our only creed. However, there is a statement of faith called the Baptist Faith and Message most Baptists embrace. It was first adopted in 1925. The section on assurance of salvation is identical to the 1646 Westminster Confession and the 1742 Philadelphia Confession. Concerning salvation, here’s what we believe: “Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” (Baptist Faith and Message, Article V)

But sometimes people say, “Well, I knew of a Christian who was living for God, and they renounced their faith and turned away from God. They lost their salvation.” Well, were they ever truly saved in the first place? One of my favorite seminary professors used to say: “The faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first.”

How many of you have ever seen a falling star, raise your hand. Really? I doubt what you saw was a star. Our sun is a star, and stars don’t “fall.” What you saw was a piece of space junk, a meteor. It wasn’t a star falling. If you see a star falling, we’re in trouble. And if you think you saw a Christian who fell from salvation, chances are they weren’t a Christian in the first place.

## **(2) RUNNING THE RACE**

Paul wrote, “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?” (Galatians 5:7) Nobody likes to have someone jump in line in front of them and cut them off. I’ve got to admit I’m pretty carnal when it comes to standing in lines. I’m not very good at it either. If you ever see several lines, and I’m standing in one, don’t get behind me because I always end up in the slow line. And I get a little stressed when there are lots of people, and no clear line.

The other day I went into Chick-fil-A on Troup Highway. I hardly ever use the drive-through because at any time of the day the cars in the drive through line are backed all the way back to Green Acres because the food’s so good! When I went inside to order, folks were standing around, but there didn’t seem to be a line. Some were waiting on their food, and some were waiting to order. I started to get stressed out because I didn’t want anyone to say the preacher cut in line! So I chose a register and got behind a guy who was ordering. I quickly figured out he was ordering for his entire office; they kept bringing sacks of food to him. Meanwhile, two or three people who came in after me were already ordering at the other registers before I could make a lateral move. And I wanted to scream, “Hey, I was here before her!!!!” But I bit my tongue because screaming in Chick-fil-A isn’t the best way to let my light shine for Jesus. I’m carnal enough that it still bothers me that they “cut” in front of me. (And hey—I know who you are and where you live. Just kidding. Maybe.)

Did you hear the story about the older lady in her Caddy who was in a parking lot waiting for someone to back out of a space? She had the blinker on. But when the car backed out, a young girl in a VW whipped in and got the parking place before her. She jumped out and smiled at the lady in the Caddy and said, “That’s what you can do when you’re young and fast, sister.” She kept walking toward the store when she heard a horrible crash. She turned around to see the lady in the Caddy slamming into the VW, backing up and slamming into it again. The young girl ran back and screamed, “What are you doing?” The older lady rolled down her window and smiled and said, “THAT’s what you can do when you’re old and rich, sister.” Nobody likes to have someone cut in front of them, which is the spiritual principle Paul was making.

### **Spiritual Principle: You can be on the right track, but legalism can sidetrack you**

The Bible compares the Christian life to running a race...but it’s not a sprint; it’s a marathon. In Hebrews 11 we are introduced to all the heroes of the faith who have gone on to heaven. In Hebrews 12:1, we read, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Through the years, I’ve seen people who got so excited about Jesus that they started sprinting toward the finish line, not realizing the race is long. Many of them dropped by the wayside with spiritual fatigue. They didn’t lose their salvation, they just lost their enthusiasm and their joy.

Legalism can trip up a Christian who is running a good race. I’ve always enjoyed watching the Summer Olympics, and I’m excited about the London Olympics, which start in less than 90 days. The 1984 Olympics were held in Los Angeles and I remember watching one of the most tragic events in Olympic history. The American runner, Mary Decker, was expected to win the gold medal in the Women’s 3000-meter run. Her closest rival was Zola Budd from South Africa who ran barefoot. Because of apartheid, South Africa had been banned from the Los Angeles game. But Zola Budd used a loophole and obtained British citizenship at the last minute, so there was already a controversy surrounding her. About halfway through the race, Decker and Budd were leading the race running side by side, with Decker on the inside lane. Suddenly, Budd surged in front of Decker, and moved into the inside lane. It appeared that she cut in too close and the runners’ legs got tangled. Budd kept running, but Decker crashed to the ground.

She was unable to continue, and as she lay there, she saw her dreams of Olympic gold come crashing down with her. One of the most famous sports pictures ever to appear in *Sports Illustrated* was the one where Decker is seen holding her thigh and staring toward the finish line with disappointment and anger because Zola Budd had cut into her. Mary Decker would eventually set 17 world records, but she never won a gold medal because someone cut in on her and she fell out of the race. Zola Budd is like legalism. If you don’t avoid it, legalism can trip you up. And you’ll end up with the same expression Mary Decker had!

Last week I talked about “Give me liberty...or give me legalism.” I received this message from one of my Facebook friends, who gave me her permission to share it: I have so enjoyed your series on legalism. I too was raised in a church with much legalism. I loved God at a very young age, but always felt like a hypocrite because I couldn’t keep all the laws. It pushed me away from God instead of drawing me to him. Something on the inside told me that God didn’t care if you

wore makeup or pants or went to a Disney movie. However, the people in my church told me that I was surely bound for hell. In my late 20's I began to seek God's Word on these subjects myself and asked God would show me truth. He eventually moved me to a different church where I was taught the grace of God. Oh, what freedom and liberty it brought. I am excited every week as I hear you teach the "Grace Way." I know there are people being set free from legalism. I am thankful to be a part of GABC. Grace to you, Tresa

Don't let legalism get in your way!

### **(3) PROVING THE CASE**

How do you KNOW that you're saved? Paul answered that question by writing, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Galatians 5:6)

I'm not talking about proving the case for Christianity. If you want to read a good book about that, then get Lee Stroble's book, *The Case for Faith*. I'm talking about proving the case of your own personal faith.

I took Caroline and Lizzie to see "The Lorax" a few weeks ago and during the previews they kept asked, "Where is the Lorax, Dee Dee?" When previews come on I sometimes point my thumb up if I want to see what's previewed, or thumbs down if I don't want to see it. So I taught them to do that, so after every preview you could see us pointing up or pointing down. Next Sunday, the entire message is on this subject of how love is best evidence of your faith. So I hope you give me a thumbs-up as I give you a preview.

### **Spiritual Principle: The only evidence of saving faith is love**

In John 13:35 Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." He didn't say, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you wear a cross, or have a fish or your car or a bumper sticker with a Christian message or carry a big black Bible." He said the only true mark is if you love one another.

In one of the most beautiful chapters in the Bible Paul wrote: "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2-3)

Americans are obsessed with courtroom drama. Millions tuned into the O.J. trial, the Michael Jackson trial, the Casey Anthony trial, and now, they'll get their fix with the George Zimmerman trial. Two important American values we cherish are (1) The presumption of innocence and (2) The right to a trial by one's peers. In the court of human opinion, it appears as if George Zimmerman has already been convicted as guilty. He may be guilty, but that's not for us to decide. A judge will seat a jury and they will decide his guilt or innocence. It is incumbent upon the prosecutor to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he is guilty.

Let me ask you a simple question. If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be

enough evidence to convict you? The only evidence that really matters is whether you love others. Exhibit A is how you love your own family. Exhibit B is how you love other Christians. Exhibit C is how you love people who don’t know the Lord. Is there any proof, any evidence, in your life?

## CONCLUSION

I’ve got a new verse for the little song my girls used to sing. “Oh you can’t get to heaven; By keeping the law; Oh you can’t get to heaven; By keeping the law; Oh you can’t get to heaven by keeping the law; ‘cause all of us got at least one flaw. All my sins are washed away, I’ve been redeemed.”

Actually, I supposed you CAN go to heaven by keeping God’s laws. But you would have to be perfect. You’d have to keep all of God’s laws every minute of your life. It’s pretty hard to be perfect. There may be moments of time when we live perfectly, but we just can’t maintain that perfection.

Since 1900 there have been about 350,000 major league baseball games played. During that time, there have been 273 no-hitters pitched. A no-hitter is rare, but the rarest feat of all is to pitch a perfect game. Not every no-hitter is a perfect game, because hitters may reach base and even score due to errors or walks. Nolan Ryan pitched seven no-hitters, more than any other pitcher in history, but he never pitched a perfect game. A perfect game is when 27 batters come to the plate and not one of them reaches first base. In the span of these 350,000 major league games there have only been 21 perfect games pitched. A week from last night (April 21), White Sox pitcher Philip Humber pitched a perfect game. 27 batters up and 27 batters down. Only one ball was hit out of the infield. They were playing in Seattle and by the last inning, even the Mariner fans were on their feet cheering for Philip.

There are a couple of things about Philip Humber you might not know. First, he is a committed follower of Jesus Christ. He has Colossians 3:23 inscribed on his baseball glove. You may be surprised to learn that he and his wife Kristan, who is expecting their first child, are members here at Green Acres. They live in Tyler and during the off- season they are active members of Jamy Skagg’s SMBS class.

In his Twitter bio he has this message: “If you’re looking for answers, you’ve come to the wrong place. But Jesus has them!” So our own Philip Humber is a perfect pitcher, right? Think again. He pitched again this past Thursday against the Red Sox, and guess what happened? He only pitched five innings and he gave up a career-high nine runs, including a grand slam. So after five innings, a reliever came in to take his place and Philip handed him the ball. When a reliever wins a game it’s called a save, but the White Sox lost to Boston. After that game Philip said, “This game will humble you, man.” We’re still proud of you, Philip, even if you aren’t perfect; you have a relationship with a perfect Savior, Jesus.

Let’s use baseball as an analogy for salvation. By the way, did you know that the Bible mentions baseball? Genesis 1:1 says, “In the big inning.” In order to go to heaven based upon your performance, you’d have to pitch a perfect game every time you took the mound.

But the truth is, that we’re on the mound and we’re in a mess. But the beautiful truth about Jesus is that He stepped on the mound called Calvary, and He became our reliever. He came in to take our place when we left the bases loaded, no outs. The question is will you hand him the ball and say, “Jesus, I’ve made a mess of things. Will you take over for me? Will you take my place?” When you do, He retires the side. He got the save.

You can’t lose your salvation, but if you’re trying to throw every pitch yourself, then you have fallen from grace. Surrender to Jesus and get back on the grace-way! You’re not perfect, but He is!

## OUTLINE

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"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace."  
*Galatians 5:4*

You can't fall away from salvation, but you can reject the truth of grace

"Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (Baptist Faith and Message, Article V)

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"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." *Galatians 5:6*

The only evidence of saving faith is love

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." *1 Corinthians 13:2-3*

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David O. Dykes, Pastor  
Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes