

Introduction:

Do you know what **Galatians 5:4** says? Even if just hearing the reference doesn't spark your memory, I'm sure you've heard the verse over and over again. "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace." We've had classes on this verse; heard sermons on this verse. We want to make sure everyone knows they can indeed fall from grace. And to be sure, that is exactly what this verse says. No matter how you cut it, no matter how you try to explain it away, at the end of the day, this verse warns us that we can fall from the grace God has given us. We can turn our backs on the salvation God has offered. If we, God's children, surrender our lives to sin, we will become slaves of sin. We will once again earn death because of our sins (**Romans 6:16, 23**).

The bigger question is do you know **I Peter 5:12**? Peter said, "I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it." I have spent so much time in my preaching figuring out what it means to fall from grace, that I'm not sure I've spent any time figuring out what it means to stand firm in God's grace. **Romans 5:2** speaks of the grace in which we stand and through that the rejoicing we can have in the hope of the glory of God. In **Acts 13:43**, Paul urged those who had listened to his teaching to continue in the grace of God. Certainly, we need to give attention to falling from God's grace, but perhaps if we spend more time learning to stand firmly and continue in God's grace, we won't have to worry so much about falling from it. Certainly, we need to heed the warnings about falling from the mountaintop. But if we would avoid such a fall, what we really need to hear is how we can plant our feet firmly on God's plateau, hanging on to His grace as a lifeline. If we stand firm in His grace and continue in His grace then we will never fall from His grace.

So how do we do that? How do we stand firm in God's grace? How do we continue in God's grace? Let us not see how close we can get to the edge of God's grace and try to keep ourselves from falling, but rather, let us learn how we can rest ourselves securely in the middle of God's grace.

Discussion:

- I. Listen to God's gospel.
 - A. Standing firm in God's grace begins with listening to the message of God's grace, the call of God's grace. In **Galatians 1:6-10**, Paul registers his surprise that the Galatians are quickly turning from God's gospel of grace to another gospel, that really is not good news at all. Listening to any other supposed good news will only bring us under a curse.
 - B. In **Hebrews 13:9**, we are encouraged to be strengthened by God's grace rather than being led away by diverse and strange teachings. Being strengthened by God's grace comes by being wrapped up in God's teaching. No wonder Paul urged Timothy to charge folks not to teach any other doctrine and not to get caught up in speculations, endless genealogies, and myths (**I Timothy 1:3-4**). He further warned Timothy against teaching or heeding any doctrine other than that which accords with Jesus Christ (**I Timothy 6:3-5**).
 - C. By contrast, we see the very first Christians devoting themselves to the apostles teaching in **Acts 2:42**. If we want to stand firmly in God's grace, we need to get firmly into God's word and gospel. Don't let a day go by that you don't devote yourself to God's gospel.
- II. Hope fully in God's grace.
 - A. **I Peter 1:13** says we must set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus. This is powerful. How many times have we heard Christians say things like, "When I die, I just hope I've done enough to serve God"? Or "When I die, I just hope I've overcome sin enough to go to heaven"? When we make those statements, our hope is in the wrong place. We are putting our hope in ourselves. We need to rest our hope fully on the grace of Jesus and the work of God through Him. If we enter heaven, it will not be because we've done enough. It will be because of Jesus' sacrifice.
 - B. Remember the debate regarding circumcision in **Acts 15**. Peter made it clear in **Acts 15:10-11**, that we are putting God to the test when we place the yoke on us that we simply cannot bear. If we are going to try to earn salvation by being good enough or keeping enough laws, we'll never make it. We are saved by grace. That is where our hope needs to be, in the grace of God. As **Romans 3:24** says, we are justified by grace as a gift. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it.

- C. Consider another aspect of this reliance on God's grace. In **II Corinthians 12:7-10**, we see Paul's struggle with his thorn in the flesh. When he asked God to remove it three times, God's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you." Thus, Paul said he was content with his weaknesses, distresses, calamities, etc. He learned that he was right where God wanted him to be. He was able to see even the thorn, a messenger of Satan, as God's grace to help save him.
- D. Putting our hope in God's grace is not simply about relying on Him to let us into heaven in the end, but rather accepting that what is happening right now will be used by Him to save us in the end. We don't need to be stronger on our own; we need to trust His strength and grace. As **Romans 8:28-30** says, He will get us there if we will simply love Him and put our hope in His grace instead of our strength.

III. Walk by faith not by law.

- A. **Romans 4:13-16** explains that since the promise rests on grace, we must walk by faith and not by law. If we are walking by law, then we are putting our hope in ourselves. If we are walking by faith, we are putting our trust in Him in whom we have rested our faith. Law doesn't bring justification, it only brings wrath. **Romans 3:20** already said that no one will be justified by law. In fact, oddly enough, when Paul actually talked about falling from grace, he didn't talk about someone who had decided to ignore God's law, but rather someone who was trying to be justified by law.
- B. **Galatians 3:21-22** explains if we could be saved by law, then the law God gave in the Old Testament would have done it. Instead, all it accomplished was locking us all up under sin. It prepared the way for faith as we learned that walking by law won't help us. Paul highlighted this in **Galatians 2:15-19**, saying that the law won't help us at all. Instead, we need to walk by faith. No one will be justified by law-keeping. We will only be justified by faith in Jesus.
- C. Understand what this means on a practical level. This doesn't mean I live however I want as long as I believe Jesus is the Christ. This means I live the way Jesus wants me to because I believe Him. As **Galatians 2:20** says, when we live by faith, we are crucifying ourselves and letting Jesus take control. The difference between walking by faith and law, is not necessarily seen in the outward acts. Someone walking by law may be baptized, attend assemblies, avoid sins, read the Bible, etc., just as the person walking by faith does. The difference is in the motivation. Those walking by law are trusting in their own ability to be righteous. Those walking by faith are trusting in Christ's way to save them, so they follow it. That will make all the difference when it comes to standing firm in God's grace.

IV. Keep God's grace pure.

- A. Sadly, there is no point of good news that Satan won't try to pervert to his own ends. There is no good and wholesome doctrine of Christ that Satan won't twist in order to overthrow the salvation of some and even make us afraid to teach what Jesus has said. Some have heard the good news of God's grace and decided that standing firm in God's grace means not worrying about how they live, but just believing God will save them no matter what. Because of that perversion, many of us are scared to talk too much about God's grace lest people get the wrong idea. Standing firm in God's grace means keeping God's grace pure.
- B. **Jude 1:4** warns against those who would pervert the grace of God into sensuality. Some would use the grace of God as a license to sin. This may come in the form of confession or absolution offered by a priest, even before the sin is committed. This may come in the form of cherishing some iniquity in our heart (cf. **Psalms 66:18**) and thinking God's grace means the sin doesn't matter. This may come in the form of thinking, "I got baptized, I can do whatever I want now." That is perverting God's grace. Yes, God's grace means if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins (**I John 1:8-9**). Yes, God's grace means if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father who is a propitiation for our sins, Jesus Christ the righteous (**I John 2:1-2**). But grace is not a license to sin. Grace is not an excuse to sin. Grace is not a justification for sin. Grace does not mean our sins don't matter.
- C. **Romans 6:1-4** demonstrates that the purpose of God's grace is not to let us sin. The purpose of grace was to make us die to sin and set us free from our sins. God's grace is given to us that we may have progressive victory over sin, not so we can sink progressively lower into it. God's

grace sets us free from sin, but enslaves us to Him and His righteousness. That may sound bad to our modern ears, but notice **Romans 6:20-23** explains how glorious it is. God's grace, having loosed us from the bonds of sin, has freed us to bear the fruit of sanctification and eternal life.

D. Therefore, standing firm in God's grace does not mean continuing in sin, but rather overcoming sin. As **Titus 2:11-14** explains, the grace of God doesn't train us to sin however we want believing we'll just be forgiven. God's grace trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives as we await the grace that will be revealed to us through Jesus in the end because we've put our hope fully in that grace.

V. Turn to God when you are struggling.

A. But there are tough times as Christians. While grace has set us free to pursue righteousness and walk in newness of life, temptation still rears its ugly head. We are naïve to think Satan will give us up without a fight. We like to think that being a Christian means we have put temptation behind us; the bottle that lured us, the greed that called to us, the lust that piqued us will never cause us to turn our heads again. That is simply not true.

B. Standing firm in God's grace does not mean nothing will ever entice us to sin again. It doesn't mean we'll never have a desire for wrong again. Standing firm in God's grace means when the temptation hits, we turn to God for help. **Hebrews 4:14-16** makes it clear that we can find grace to help in our time of need and temptation. Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted. Jesus was tempted, as we are. He faced the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life as we do (cf. **1 John 2:16**). He overcame; therefore when we put our faith in Him, He can lead us to overcome as well.

C. Sadly, too many of us don't stand in God's grace when we are struggling. Instead of doing what He says, like confessing our struggles to each other (**James 5:16**) we try to face them on our own. We have marriage problems and we keep them hidden. We have doubts and we cover them up. We have a private sin and we think we can conquer it on our own. We don't take it to God. We don't share it with others and take it to God with them. Then our lives fall apart. We somehow think if we take our struggle to God's people and to God that we'll lose. Absolutely not. That is exactly how we stand firm and continue in God's grace by going to God and His people in our time of need. That is how His grace works. That is how we continue in it.

VI. Give God the glory.

A. There is a great paradox that we must accept if we will stand firm in God's grace. Sadly, I think there are some who simply cannot handle this paradox and this alone causes them to fall from God's grace. **Philippians 2:12-13** presents the paradox. In the same sentence we are told to work out our own salvation but to do so because God is the one working in us. Which is it? Are we to work out our salvation or to rely on God working in us? It is both.

B. **1 Corinthians 15:10** shows how this paradox fits with standing firm in God's grace. Do you see the paradox here? Paul says he is what he is by God's grace. However, the grace wasn't in vain because he worked harder than anyone. But, he only worked harder than anyone because of God's grace in his life. Here is the mixture. We are working. But we are doing so because God is working. When we trust in the working of God, then we can work and we are not working in vain. However, God's work is not in vain because we are working. Both go together.

C. We stand in God's grace when we work hard and give God the glory. We need to acknowledge God in all our ways (**Proverbs 3:6**). We need to understand that it is by God's grace that we live and move and have our very being (**Acts 17:28**). He gives us life, breath, and all things (**Acts 17:25**). When we look with the eyes of the flesh, all we can see is our own effort. But we are standing firmly in God's grace when we look with the eyes of the Spirit and of faith and give Him the glory, acknowledging Him in all we do. We may not be able to quantify God's working, we may not be able to test it in a laboratory, we may not be able to measure it with our manmade instruments, but we are standing firmly in God's grace only when we work our hardest but give God the glory for what we accomplish.

VII. Offer God's grace to others.

- A. If you want to stand firmly in God's grace, you must share the message of God's grace with others. Paul testified of God's grace in **Acts 20:24**. He commended the Ephesians to God and the word of His grace in **Acts 20:32**. He told others about the grace God had for them.
- B. Sadly, all too often we don't offer God's grace to others. We offer His law to them. Someone falls short and we respond with "How dare you?" How dare we who have all sinned take that message to our fellow failures? Sadly, too often we come to those who have fallen, especially those who were already in Christ, like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal in **Luke 15:28-30**. We wrongly act as if we have never needed God's grace, as if we ourselves are not standing firm in God's grace but rather within our own personal strength and righteousness. We roll out the law and beat them with it. That is, if we'll get close to them. They are the ones we don't want here. They are the ones who make us look bad. Somehow, that is not the image Jesus conveyed. It wasn't the religious and personally righteous that flocked to Jesus, it was the sinful and despicable.
- C. In his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew* and then again in *What's So Amazing about Grace*, Philip Yancey tells the story of a friend who works with the down-and-out in Chicago. A prostitute came to the man with a story of despair. She told of drug abuse and renting out her own daughter. She didn't know what to do. The fellow didn't know what to tell her. He finally asked if she'd ever thought of going to a church for help. "I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. 'Church!' she cried. 'Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse'" (*What's So Amazing about Grace*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1997, p 11; *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995, pp 147-148). It was the prostitutes and sinners that came to Jesus. Why? Because He brought them a message of grace and it changed their lives. Think of the sinful woman in **Luke 7:36-50**. Jesus didn't pelt her with the law about fornication; He offered her grace to become free from fornication. She accepted it and loved Him and apparently overcame her fornication. That is the message we need to take to others. When we do, we are standing in God's grace.
- D. Please, don't misunderstand. We certainly need to rebuke sin. Jesus taught that too (**Luke 17:3**). We do not turn a blind eye to sin as if grace means it doesn't matter. Didn't we already establish that a few points back? But even when we've had to discipline a brother or sister, we still don't treat them like enemies, but admonish them like brethren, offering them grace and love (**II Thessalonians 3:14-15**). Then we are standing in God's grace.
- E. Please understand what this point means. Taking the gospel to others is not something on a checklist of Christian homework. We need to take that message for our own sakes as much as others need to hear. It is by sharing that message of grace that we can stand firmly in God's grace. We need to tell that story for our benefit whether or not anyone ever listens.

Conclusion:

Sadly, we can fall from grace. Perhaps so many brethren do fall from grace because we spend so much time talking about when, why and how that happens. Maybe if we spent more time talking about how to stand firmly and continue in God's grace, fewer of us would fall. I encourage you, quit worrying about falling from grace. Start focusing on standing firm in it. When you focus on standing firm in God's grace, then you can realize the promise Peter offered in **I Peter 5:10**, "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." Stand firm in His grace. He will take care of you.