

*Avoiding Slothful Righteousness: Moral Leadership through the Lens of Galatians 5*

Daniel P. Rogers, DSL

Liberty University School of Business

Edited by Lisa Simmons

Author Note

Daniel P. Rogers is an officer in the United States Coast Guard and an adjunct professor at Liberty University's School of Business. He resides at 1117 N Sycamore St., Arlington, VA 22205 and can be reached via email at [dprogers3@liberty.edu](mailto:dprogers3@liberty.edu) or via phone at 202.821.2444.

**Abstract**

This paper provides an overview on the history of sloth, an analysis of Galatians 5, the solution provided by the cross, and the implications of these solutions on morality for Christian leaders. Throughout the history of the church, sloth has been associated with not caring, an unwillingness to work (especially if it might lead to suffering), a Biblical emphasis on God's sovereignty over man's responsibility, an unwillingness to fulfill one's duty, and boredom. Galatians 5 offers a solution to each of what constitutes slothful thinking as it relates to our Christian faith. These solutions are then applied in four arenas within the context of organizational leadership: personal introspection, critical mass of individuals, organizational control systems, and environment. Finally, three conclusions are reached on moral leadership. First, standards need to be justly enforced within organizations according to their intent and design. Second, we must think critically about righteousness, which differs from virtue in that it has an acknowledged source as God. Third, what we do as leaders really does matter. In total, moral leadership can only ever find its true definition in Christ's work on the cross.

### **Slothful Righteousness**

Immersed in the American culture, it is not hard to understand the concept of slothful righteousness. In general, Americans consider faith personal, private, and not for public discourse. This view, of course, flies in the face of the teaching of the New Testament. Today, where faith is most publicized, the goals are often identified with those reflected in the new “Tea Party Movement.” People want something, and use their beliefs to justify what they want. To “have Christ” is used to free people to pursue whatever they value. If so, then what freedom does Christ grant us?

Within this paper, we will use Galatians 5:13 to define slothful righteousness, “For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” Therefore, we will consider slothful righteousness as simply using our liberty as an occasion to the flesh. As we consider the concept of moral leadership, we must understand the context of morality within a Christian framework and turn to the cross as the source of our understanding.

This paper provides a cursory overview on the status of sloth as one of the seven deadly sins, an analysis of Galatians 5, the solution provided by the cross, and the implications of these solutions on morality for Christian leaders. Because this paper specifically deals in righteousness, the intended audience is Christian for an unbeliever would have no use for righteousness since it finds its very definition in God himself. As Calvin (1989) states, “the will, because inseparable from the nature of man, did not perish, but was so enslaved by depraved lusts as to be incapable of one righteous desire.”

### **Discussion of Sloth and its Origins**

According to Lyman (1989), “Sloth is but one medieval translation of the Latin word *acedia* (Middle English, *accidie*) and means ‘without care.’” It is broad in its application; Lyman (1989) goes on, “For Chaucer, man’s sin consists of languishing and holding back, refusing to undertake works of goodness because, he tells himself, the circumstances surrounding the establishment of good are too grievous and too difficult to suffer. *Acedia* in Chaucer’s view is thus the enemy of every source and motive for work.”

Incomplete theology took sloth in and out of the public conscience and moral view through the centuries as Lyman (1989) again explains,

“It is precisely in the development of deterministic or fatalistic theories and doctrines that sloth is made at least potentially less evil than it might be in a more humanistic world.

When the promise of messianic religion or the forces of historical destiny are regarded as set and immutable and where the pace of development is also governed by divine or superhuman controls, man’s day-to-day activities seem irrelevant to any future, dissociated from every past. Passivity, sloth, sluggishness, and melancholy are here not only a possibility but a reasonable course of inaction.”

Lyman (1989) effectively walks us through the origin of sloth as a sin during the first century of the Christian era and traces it through the Middle Ages and its “restoration” during the “Protestant era and its ethic.” Sloth, then, has been associated with not caring, an unwillingness to work (especially if it might lead to suffering), a Biblical emphasis on God’s sovereignty over man’s responsibility, an unwillingness to fulfill one’s duty, and boredom.

Within leadership, sloth can be viewed from two angles: the sloth of the leader or the dealings of the leader with followers struggling with sloth. These can be broken into the historical methods of teaching leadership into “leading self” and “leading others.” Let us

consider the five manifestations of sloth within leaders and followers, specifically as they pertain to our thinking about righteousness for Christians.

### **Not Caring**

Stott (2006) makes the following observation,

“The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone; God accepts penalties that belong to man alone.”

The nature of sin produces thoughts that run counter to the very design of man and intent of the creator. Therefore, even as we are given a new nature, the old nature persists within the flesh. It is not natural to care for the things of God. Phillipians 2:21 warns us, “For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” It is our nature, then, to mindlessly do whatever is most comfortable instead of what is right. O’Neil (1993) says, “like some aspects of hubris, mindless behavior is caused by reliance on rigid categories, unquestioned mind-sets, and a limited perspective on people and situations.” Pride places us with the rich man in Luke 12:19, who asserts, “I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” He finds his fulfillment in previous thinking, effort, work, achievement, and blessing.

We, today, encounter the risk of finding our fulfillment in the ease of life. Leaders risk viewing their positions with pride and entitlement and can forget the responsibility to the organization they serve and of those placed in their care. Followers have an equal temptation to

care more about themselves than others. It is the responsibility of every follower to participate in the hard work of leadership by providing feedback, challenging preconceptions, and supporting the purpose of the organization. No leader should enjoy their ease upon the backs of followers. Neither should the followers take their ease by assuming the infallibility of the leader. Bavinck (2008) tells us, “The truly spiritually good, the good in the highest sense as it can only exist in the eyes of God, can in the nature of the case be accomplished only by those who know and love God and, moved by that love, keep his commandments, that is, by those who truly believe.” The risk of slothful thinking that could result in a lack of care stems from thoughts that dethrone God, accept blessing as an entitlement, and see God not as an object of love and faith, but as removed from daily existence.

### **Unwilling to Work & Suffer**

The most prominent misunderstanding regarding work that I have found in the modern day is a belief that work is a result of The Fall. Even Galatians 5:19-21 labels the actions of the flesh as works, which are clearly the antithesis of righteousness. However, Bavinck (2008) seems to use works in a different sense as he discusses good works. He states, “Sanctification manifests itself in good works, which according to the Heidelberg Catechism arise from the principle of a true faith, conform to the law of God, and are done for his glory.” He goes on to say, “By faith working through love, therefore, good works are born that have their standard in the will of God as it is concisely expressed in the Ten Commandments.” Scripture itself never implies that following Christ will preclude either work or suffering. Titus 2:14 clearly states, “[Christ] gave himself up for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Philippians 1:29 joins in, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” The mistake with suffering

seems to stem from another false view of The Fall and espoused by Job's friend Zophar the Naamathite: that suffering only comes as a result of sin within one's life (Job 20). As a Christian, we can expect to work and suffer. The risk of slothful thinking that can result in an unwillingness to work and suffer can stem from thoughts that equate work with the flesh or sin with suffering.

A Christian who knows his or her standing before God completed at the Cross by the work of Christ knows their sin was judged by God in Christ's substitution and that Christ's work alone earns them justification. Therefore, the risk of misunderstanding work and suffering is very real to many believers. There is a difference between the righteous work assigned by God to man prior to the Fall and the misconception that works can lead to salvation. Calvin (1989) states, "Since it is manifest that men whom the Scriptures term natural, are so acute and clear-sighted in the investigation of inferior things, their example should teach us how many gifts the Lord has left in possession of human nature, notwithstanding of its having been despoiled of the true good." All people have been granted the capacity for work that ultimately brings glory to God.

For leaders, the grappling and balance of work and suffering is an interesting topic as the requirements of the job may produce many opportunities to confront misguided thinking and possibly suffer from that position. There is often a fine line between accomplishing marketplace, industry, or government missions and fulfilling our calling to share Christ. Stepping over that line may result in correction, discipline, or even a loss in position. Followers likewise must deal with the inevitable tension of working for individuals who may or may not have Christ as their Savior.

### **God's Sovereignty vs Man's Responsibility**

Alot of thinking does exactly as this sub-heading does. It pits God's sovereignty against man's responsibility as if the two were incapable of co-existing. Yet to do this requires equal

footing between the two parties. Equal footing, does not, in fact exist. God is sovereign by point of fact. His very name declaration to Moses testifies to that fact. In Exodus 3:14, “God said unto Moses, I AM that I AM, and he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” His existence simply is and he will do what he will do. Man, however, is made and measured against a standard—God. The entire concept of responsibility requires an object or standard against which one is responsible. God is that which man is measured against. Through the giving of the law, God provides a standard for man to measure against, with full acknowledgment that the law as given in Exodus is not complete. Bavinck (2008) does a good job differentiating between the good works prepared for Christians to walk in and the virtues of those without saving faith:

“Sanctification manifests itself in good works ... they are therefore distinct from the virtues of the pagans and the virtues of all who do not have such saving faith. The Reformers have always fully acknowledged the existence and moral value of such virtues. Since after the fall people have remained human and continue to share in the blessings of God’s common grace, they can inwardly possess many virtues and outwardly do many good deeds that, viewed through human eyes and measured by human standards, are greatly to be appreciated and of great value for human life. But this is not to say that they are good in the eyes of God and correspond to the full spiritual sense of his holy law. To the degree that human beings subject their own thoughts, attitudes, and actions to more precise scrutiny, they are all the more deeply convinced of their sinfulness.”

Any human being that stands with God as the full standard against which he or she is measured finds it impossible to measure up. The slothful risk of pitting God’s sovereignty against man’s

responsibility takes each to its inevitable result: God is sovereign and man's actions don't matter or man's actions do matter to such an extent that God takes action based on man's choice.

Looking to any action other than the initiative of God himself sending his son to the cross misses the supreme centrality of God in any and all action, which produces another risk for sloth in response to the truth of salvation.

Both leaders and followers often confront the difficulties of accountability and standards. Titus 3:1-2 gives a great example of the importance of humility in the application of these standards and the actions of accountability. We are to be ready for every good work. The only way to remain ready is to not take actions that despoil future opportunities for good works. In other words, remain humble in correcting others. We can stand up when we know we're right, but we need to do it with respect and, ultimately, love. That way, when we're told to sit down, we haven't undermined our ability to stand again.

### **Unwilling to Fulfill One's Duty**

Lyman (1989) provides a good point of reference with respect to fulfilling one's duty. He states, "*Acedia* constitutes a withdrawal of one's self, one's thoughts, one's talents, and one's endeavors from society, or from service to God." This ability of man to withdraw in those very areas in which he has received gifts for use constitutes sloth. However, the thinking that takes an individual to this point is more subtle. Lyman (1989) depicts this blur as he states, "Sloth falls along the invisible line that separates the sins of commission from those of omission." The slothful risk in thinking comes from a belief that if a Christian is saved from works for justification, then that same Christian has no particular duty to fulfill other than acceptance of Christ. The American concept is often called fire insurance in which Christians are saved from Hell, but not saved to anything.

Within leadership, we must walk a fine line when it comes to duty because leadership exists within context. A CEO may not be a soccer coach and pre-empting that role in the midst of a game is more likely to create havoc than game winning goals. Duty is required within role and role defines duty. In other words, we don't get to pick our duty. We fulfill our duty in the positions in which we find ourselves—our role. If we have no role, we have no duty. For example, the role of a grip in a movie is to make sure the lighting is correct. Therefore, the grip does not concern himself with the script; his duty is lighting. Similarly, leaders are called within specific settings, which may or may not carry over into others.

### **Boredom**

The final manifestation of sloth originates in dissatisfaction with the status quo. If we believe the American myth, satisfaction can be gained in possessions, status, and pleasure. As we spend our energies attempting to gain what we're told will bring us delight, we become disenfranchised with our efforts. Without a legitimate alternative to pursue, it is easy to slip into boredom. Lyman (1989) says, "Boredom begets aggression, and aggression releases the victim of acedia from its prison house of torments." The alternative to boredom is thoughtlessness. Portman (1986) takes it so far as to say that "form excludes content," and that we fill our lives with amusement instead of genuine contribution to society. For Christians, the slothful risk in thinking often comes from expectations in sanctification progress. When we think that we should be "further along" spiritually and experience the same sin yet again, it's easy to grow tired and bored with the Christian life and seek after those sinful desires that promise more immediate gratification. Once boredom sets in, Lyman (1989) says,

"Everything that makes life worth living has been removed from the scene of sloth: challenge, stress, endeavor, initiative, and the joys that come from using one's own

talents to counteract obdurate forces. Humans ... sentenced to an eternity of sloth will eventually struggle to break out of its strangle hold on their unspent energies. In that liberation struggle there will be released an awesome aggression whose objects and limits cannot be predicted.”

Man is not designed to remain idle, and there is some validity to the concept that “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.”

### **An Analysis of Galatians 5**

Galatians 5 provides some excellent insights and practical application into the discussion of moral leadership. Using Robbins (1996) approach of socio-rhetorical criticism, I have conducted an inner texture analysis of Galatians 5, which “concerns features like the repetition of particular words, the creation of beginnings and endings, alternation of speech and storytelling, particular ways in which the words present arguments, and the particular ‘feel’ or aesthetic of the text.” Through this method, we can find Paul providing a Christ-centered view of the law and morality, which will serve to provide solutions to the thoughts that can lead to sloth addressed in the preceding section.

#### **The Analysis**

Galatians is essentially Paul’s refute to the Judaizing teachers, who were “seeking to circumvent the preaching of a free Gospel and teaching the need of circumcision and other observances of the Mosaic law in order to [achieve] salvation” (Gray, 1999). According to English (2006), it was written sometime between 48 and 55AD. Galatians can be divided into three parts: Chapters 1-2, Paul’s defense of his authority; Chapters 3-4, justification by faith; and Chapters 5-6, practical application (Gray, 1999). Therefore, this analysis starts at the practical ramifications of justification by faith. Within Galatians 5, there are five components to Paul’s

message: the introduction (v. 1-6), the beginning (v. 7-9), the middle (v. 10-18), the ending (v. 19-24), and the conclusion (v. 25-26). The themes of chapter 5 carry on into chapter six, but for the purposes of this analysis, we will only consider the content of chapter 5.

**Introduction.** Within the first six verses of Galatians 5, Paul focuses heavily on the identity of his audience. The focus of the introduction is to make the position personal; *you* is used six times, *we* or *us* twice, *every man* or *whosoever* twice, and *he* once. The verbs are heavily weighted to the present with only one reference to the past and one to the future. The action verbs include *stand*, *behold*, *say*, *testify*, *do*, and *wait*. *Stand*, *behold*, and *wait* are directed to the Galatians. *Say* and *testify* are actions taken by Paul. *Do* is required of the *circumcised* for salvation with its object as the *law*. The passive verbs, of which there are 7, have *Christ* and his work as their object.

The focus of the argument recaps the position of the previous two chapters, and argues that there is no use for the law in justification. The themes pit freedom against slavery and the law against grace, hope, righteousness, faith, and love. Stott (2006) sums it up well; Paul is essentially presenting the cross as the only “ground of our justification” within the introduction because “Christ has rescued us from the present evil age (Gal 1:4) and redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13). And the reason why he has delivered us from this double bondage is that we may stand boldly before God as his sons and daughters, declared righteous and indwelt by his Spirit.”

**Beginning.** In verses seven to nine, there are no passive or future verbs. This gives a feel to the passage that there is no future and no identity for those taken asunder by the false teachers. The two past tense verbs regard the change that Paul has seen in the Galatians from *running* to *being hindered*. The false teachers are called out for consideration and the language pits the false

teachers against the individual Galatians (*you*), which is used four times. It begins by asking *who* they are that would keep you from obeying the truth. Then they are equated to *leaven*. Probably most interesting in this section is the word *persuasion*, which did not come from the *Spirit* (referenced only here in this section). The false teachers did not use coercion. The sin nature that remains present with man makes him susceptible to false teaching, which if not removed—as with leavening—will eventually undermine the entire group. Remember, it only takes a little leavening—a small distortion of truth.

**Middle.** The middle section can be further subdivided into three parts. In general, Paul shifts from personal address to the relationship of the individual to the group in this section. *You*, *ye*, *thou*, and *thy* now lies beside the words *brethren* and *one another*. Also within this section is the only reference in this text to the *cross*. In Stott's (2006) words, "Paul's whole world was in orbit around the cross. It filled his vision, illumined his life, warmed his spirit. He 'gloried' in it. It meant more to him than anything else. Our perspective should be the same." The location of the cross and its relationship to *liberty* in the center of this passage shows it to be the hinge upon which Paul swings his argument.

**Part One.** In the first part (v. 10-11), Paul shifts initially to using the future tense for his verbs, which include *will be*, *shall bear*, *yet preach*, and *yet suffer*. He provides personal accountability, using the word *I* four times and *you* three times. Paul predicts *judgment* and *persecution* because of the *offense* of the *cross*, yet later in the text, says "God forbid that we should boast in anything else" (Stott, 2006).

**Part Two.** In the second part (v. 12-14), Paul uses incredibly harsh and adversarial language against the false teachers. Then he returns to the subject of *liberty*. *We have been called*

*unto* liberty, but we are to *use not* liberty. Verse 1 says we are to *stand fast* in liberty. We were called to it, told not to misuse it, and then stand in it. Liberty has a purpose.

Finally, Paul gives us a different view of the *law* than he did in the introduction. The law in verse fourteen is *fulfilled* in *one word*—*love*. The object of that love is the *neighbor*. Liberty therefore is a state and not an opportunity or occasion for anything except service. Liberty may come with the persecution and the judgment in part one because of the cross, but it now allows us to fulfill the law by lovingly serving our neighbor. Therefore, “we are to placard Christ crucified publicly before people’s eyes, so that they may see and believe (Gal 3:1). In doing so, we must not bowdlerize the gospel, extracting from it its offense to human pride. No, whatever the price may be, we preach the cross (the merit of Christ), not circumcision (the merit of man); it is the only way of salvation” (Stott, 2006).

**Part Three.** In the third part (v. 15-18), Paul pits the Spirit against the flesh. *Ye* is used 5 times, *Spirit* is used 4 times, *flesh* is used three times, and *lust* is used once. *Law* takes another turn within this section. Whereas in the introduction it is not useful for justification, and in part two of the middle it is fulfilled in love, in verse 18, those led by the Spirit are said to be *not under the law*. This additional shift in the view of the law shows that the law adds nothing when the originator and interpreter of the law—the Spirit—is in control.

**Ending.** Verses 19-24 constitute the ending of this passage. In these verses, the *works of the flesh* are shown beside the *fruit of the Spirit*. It is in these verses that we can most clearly see the links to morality most often found in lists of virtues and vices. Yet there are marked differences between the lists. First, the evils of verses 19-21 are entitled works. There is no identity within them. Sin, by definition, is the antithesis of righteousness. Either as sinner or saint, we still find our definition in God. To seek any other definition precludes identity. Calvin

(1989) says it this way, “as the human mind is unable, from dullness, to pursue the right path of investigation, and, after various wanderings, stumbling every now and then like one groping in darkness, at length gets completely bewildered, so its whole procedure proves how unfit it is to search the truth and find it.” Man is capable of reason and has been gifted with thoughts and intelligence. But without God, man has no identity and works according to the inclinations of his heart. Owen (2006) explains the heart, “First, for the seat and subject of this law of sin, the Scripture everywhere assigns it to be the heart. There indwelling sin keeps its special residence. It has invaded and possessed the throne of God himself.” Owen (2006) continues,

“The ‘heart’ in the Scripture is variously used; sometimes for the mind and understanding, sometimes for the will, sometimes for the affections, sometimes for the conscience, sometimes for the whole soul. Generally, it denotes the whole soul of man and all the faculties of it, not absolutely, but as they are all one principle of moral operations, as they all concur in our doing good or evil.”

Therefore, within these verses, we find the non-identity of sinful works. The *Kingdom of God* is mentioned once in the entire text. It is used here in the passage to provide repercussion to those that engage in the works of the flesh. They *shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*.

The foil for these works is not a different kind of works, but a *fruit*. This fruit, of course, has a source. It is produced within a Christian, and as the term is singular (referring to one fruit) it contains all of the elements included in verses 22-23. It emerges much like any other fruit, as a product of the source. In keeping with the tree metaphor, Christians must look to their roots to determine their identity. If we have been crucified with Christ, then we find our identity in him and his righteousness. By contrast, if you are looking at your fruit to evaluate your righteousness, it will likely result in either pride or misery because your expectations for what you would find

are either met or not. Remember, fruit adds little value to an existing tree. The value of fruit is for others.

Returning again to the discussion of identity, Paul finishes this section in verse 24 by a past tense verb; *we have crucified the flesh*. Our previous works of the flesh have given way to a new identity both as belonging to Christ and having the mind of Christ. In the language of verse 24, we simply *are Christ's*.

In addition, we find another reference to the law in verse 23. Like in part three of the middle section, the Spirit is the screenwriter of this production, so the law doesn't produce a better Christian. Instead, a Christian is born of the Spirit.

**Conclusion.** The conclusion of Galatians 5 contains verses 25 and 26. In this section, Paul uses only present tense verbs. He also shifts to include himself in the audience, saying *we*, *us*, and *one another*. The main object of the discussion is the *Spirit*, which follows from the emphasis of the ending of the passage.

### **Addressing the Thoughts that Lead to Sloth**

Galatians 5 is ultimately all about identity. It starts with a focus on our state in the introduction, goes on to discuss a lack of identity apart from Christ in the beginning, centralizes the cross in the middle, describes the difference between fruit and works based on the crucifixion of the flesh in the endings, and finishes in the conclusion with Paul identifying with and including himself within the audience. As such, the cross provides the ground of our justification and our identity with it enables us to stand with Stott (2006), "delivered ... from this double bondage ... that we may stand boldly before God as his sons and daughters, declared righteous and indwelt by his Spirit."

Galatians 5 directly confronts the wrongful thinking that leads to sloth. Since sloth within Christians most likely stems from a misunderstanding of either law or our liberty, Paul's analysis clearly corrects our misaligned thoughts.

**Not Caring.** We stated earlier that the risk in slothful thinking that could result in a lack of care stems from thoughts that dethrone God, accept blessing as an entitlement, and see God not as an object of love, but as removed from daily existence. The origin of this kind of thinking is not hard to find. Owen (2006) states, "We know not the hearts of one another; we know not our own hearts as we ought ... In this unsearchable heart dwells the law of sin; and much of its security, and consequently its strength, lies in this, that it is past our finding it out." Paul's solution to this problem is found in his focus on identity and ultimately in the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot know ourselves, yet the Spirit has no problems discerning and destroying the sin which ensnares us. Owen (2006) says, "the Holy Ghost comes with his axe to the very root; neither is there anything in an unsearchable heart that is not 'naked and open unto him' (Heb. 4:13)."

**Unwilling to Work & Suffer.** The risk of slothful thinking that leads to an unwillingness to work and suffer either stems from thoughts that equate work with the flesh or sin with suffering. Paul does a good job building out these themes in Galatians 5. Paul shows us that liberty is actually our identification with Christ and freedom to NOT SIN. Works of the flesh are differentiated from fruit to show the difference between earning grace—which is impossible—and a life lived connected to the source—the Spirit—who produces fruit within our lives. Of course, knowing the Spirit will produce fruit does not free us from our obligations to one another. In fact, our newfound freedom provides an opportunity to, through love, serve. In summary, the law is fulfilled in love by service to neighbor granted by the Spirit and produced as

fruit in the Christian's life. But remember, the fruit is for others and not the tree which produced it. With fruit, we can also expect suffering, judgment, and trouble to come given the indictment the cross makes of us.

**God's Sovereignty vs Man's Responsibility.** Paul's analysis of the law corrects the risk of slothful thinking that may result in pitting God's sovereignty against man's responsibility. Because the law originates with God and can be summed up in one word, love, we can clearly see God's sovereignty. Using the law for anything other than its intended purpose of drawing us to the cross only increases our bondage and responsibility to the entirety of the law. Freedom from the law comes with the gift of the Spirit. The law adds nothing when the believer is led by the Spirit and produces fruit that will be condemned by no law. Man's responsibility, then, is subject to God's sovereignty. As such, the law is not removed, but restored. Man is then given the necessary ingredient to fulfill his responsibility.

**Unwilling to Fulfill One's Duty.** Paul's solution to the risk of slothful thinking that may result in a belief that if a Christian is saved from works for justification, then that same Christian has no particular duty to fulfill other than acceptance of Christ is to recognize our newfound position in Christ. Motivating a Christian to work by teaching a gospel of grace plus works misses the fact that Christians bear fruit by their very design. An oak tree will produce acorns, a fig tree will produce figs, a Christian will produce good works. The good works may prove to others the genuineness of the Christian, but will do nothing for the Christian in self-identification. The Christian finds his or her identity in Christ, not the works. Therefore, the counter-intuitive result of the gospel is that duty fulfilled isn't for merit, but is instead an outgrowth of our newfound freedom to **NOT SIN**. This, of course, frees up all sorts of time to bear out the good works prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Eph 2:10).

**Boredom.** For Christians, the risk of slothful thinking that may result in boredom often comes from expectations in sanctification progress. The solution provided by Paul for this faulty thinking is one of exultant expectancy. It is exultant because it defines its identity in Christ. It is expectant because fruit is promised. Willard (2002) presents this thought process, “If I do evil, I am the kind of person who does evil; if I do good, I am the kind of person who does good (1 John 3:7-10). Actions are not impositions on who we are, but are expressions of who we are. They come out of our heart and the inner realities it supervises and interacts with.” Paul presents a different view in verse 24; “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Christians may be sinners, but they are redeemed sinners no longer defined by their sin. He takes this theme even further in Gal 2:15-21, saying in verses 20-21, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness [come] by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” Here’s the dichotomy: Christians are sinners saved by grace. Recognition of the presence of sin in our lives sends the Christian running back to the cross to understand his or her identity: for how can a Christian sin if we are no longer defined by our sin? Ah, yes, because Jesus died for our sin and I am now declared righteous. Therefore, I should “go and sin no more” (John 8:11) because, like Christ, my life is “not mine own” (John 5:30) and I have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20, 1 Cor 7:23). It is in my very identity that I can understand my condition, not by looking to myself, but by looking to the cross.

The question with boredom is always one of either being unable to do that which I would do or not knowing what I should do. Exultant expectancy can be treated like an illustration I heard the other day—waiting at a busy highway to turn left. Your car is not in motion, but it will

be when you get the chance. The same can be said about opportunities for service or the production of fruit in our lives by the Spirit. That fruit is either being created, standing ready, or falling from your branches. Paying attention to the development of the fruit upon your branches should produce not anxiety, rather joy in the process. Of course, you don't know how long each one will take, how big it will grow, when it will fall, or whom it will serve.

Not knowing what to do is addressed by Paul in much the same way. If the law is fulfilled in love, then the world is full of opportunities to love our neighbor. Like turning left on that busy highway, boredom can give way to watchfulness for the countless opportunities for service. And amazingly enough, in the most unexpected ways, the perfect fruit will fall just as we find a neighbor in need.

### **The Themes**

Paul presents a robust argument in Galatians 5 against the law for justification and against works of the flesh. Therefore, as we consider the virtues and vices within the people of our organizations and its leaders, we now have a framework with which to understand some unique risks for a Christian in the world. According to Stott's (2006) language, if we struggle with "self-righteousness (instead of looking to the cross for justification), self-indulgence (instead of taking up the cross to follow Christ), self-advertisement (instead of preaching Christ crucified), and self-glorification (instead of glorying in the cross)—these are the distortions which make us 'enemies' of Christ's cross."

**Self-righteousness.** In Titus 3:3, Paul takes a list of vices similar to that found in Galatians 5:19-21 and says, "we ourselves also were sometimes." There is a distinct difference between being declared righteous and walking in righteousness. Since the source of both is the cross of Christ, we mustn't forget that the same grace that justifies us also sanctifies us. There is

nothing we can add to this process other than, by the Spirit, using our newfound freedom to simply NOT SIN, which has its origin outside ourselves and completely undermines the concept of self-righteousness.

**Self-indulgence.** Willard (2002) says that a “mark of the children of the light ... is that they do not feel they are missing out on something good by not sinning. They are not disappointed and do not feel deprived.” The desire to not suffer, not work, and not be judged provides a sinful avenue to give up on the freedom that we have been given; that is, again, to NOT SIN.

**Self-advertisement.** The call of leadership provides an interesting conundrum for Christians because the very message of a Christian runs counter to the upward climb so often found in the world’s leaders. We exalt Christ, not ourselves. If, by that exaltation, we find our calling shifted that others would follow, all the better to point them toward Christ. Christ didn’t just die for us, he also lived on this earth, preparing and serving others entrusted to his care and leadership. He was fully human and engaged in no self-advertisement. He engaged only the work his Father placed before him. Our lives should be no different.

**Self-glorification.** Galatians 5 strikes at the root of self-glorification. We have no basis to glory in ourselves. By God’s work in Christ on the cross we can NOT SIN by the Spirit’s presence and leading in our lives. Fruit is produced to which we have no claim and love is emitted as a fulfillment of the same law under which we deserve punishment as soon as we claim our own merit.

In summary, Paul presents freedom and liberty as the ability of Christians to NOT SIN, an ability that non-Christians simply do not have. Using Bavinck (2008), we have differentiated between the good works of Christians and the virtues and good deeds of unbelievers; the works

of believers “arise from the principle of true faith, conform to the law of God, and are done for his glory.” Calvin (1989) says it this way,

“Since man is by nature a social animal, he is disposed, from natural instinct, to cherish and preserve society; and accordingly we see that the minds of all men have impressions of civil order and honesty. Hence it is that every individual understands how human societies must be regulated by laws, and also is able to comprehend the principles of those laws. Hence the universal agreement in regard to such subjects, both among nations and individuals, the seeds of them being implanted in the breasts of all without a teacher or lawgiver.”

Therefore, it is only the Christian that can separate himself or herself from the works of the flesh and have fruit produced from the Spirit within.

### **The Implications for Organizational Leadership**

In this paper, we have engaged the vice of sloth in Christian thinking about righteousness. To appropriately understand the nature of virtue and vice within organizations, we had to first understand what is actually required of a Christian with respect to virtue and vice. Righteousness in Christ is simply different than a “do this” and “don’t do this” list of works or actions in which we should or should not engage. It’s not more difficult, just different: the Christian gains an identity and the Spirit produces change. Yet the thinking that revolves around the subject and the influence of sin within our hearts—being rooted out by the Spirit, I’ll grant you—often dilutes the cross in favor of a human system. Willard (2002) relates,

“T. S. Eliot once described the current human endeavor as that of finding a system of order so perfect that we will not have to be good. The Way of Jesus tells us, by contrast, that any number of systems—not all, to be sure—will work well if we are genuinely good

... This impotence of ‘systems’ is a main reason why Jesus did not send his students out to start governments or even churches as we know them today, which always strongly convey some elements of a human system.”

Therefore, the “real spiritual need and change ... is on the inside, in the hidden area of life that God sees and that we cannot even see in ourselves without his help” (Willard, 2002).

To analyze the concept of slothful righteousness within leadership requires a framework. For this paper, we will use Tichy & Devanna’s (1990) “four arenas.” They are “personal introspection, ... analysis and introspection among a critical mass of individuals ... to ensure that they work together, ... organizational control systems, ... [and] scan of the environment.” And within these arenas, we need to consider the role of the leader since

“the challenge [leaders] face is to take ... beliefs and implement them through human resource systems that give people responsibility, hold them accountable for its execution, reward them equitably based on the ability to do so, and provide the lifelong learning that enables an organization to renew itself constantly through the ideas and actions of its human resources” (Tichy & Devanna, 1990).

### **Personal Introspection**

After conducting my analysis on Galatians 5 to address the concept of slothful righteousness, I found it promising that Blackaby (2001) listed “mental laziness” and “spiritual lethargy” as two of his “leader’s pitfalls.” He states, “Spiritual leaders regularly test what they read against the eternal wisdom found in Scripture.” In fact, that has been the goal of this paper: to bring to bear the wisdom of scripture as we consider the role of virtue and vice within organizations. Laziness is easily equated with sloth and the most dangerous kind of sloth is in our thinking. Remember Romans 12:2, we are “transformed by the renewing of [our] minds.”

Blackaby (2001) goes on to say, “Nurturing a strong relationship with Almighty God allows leaders the freedom to follow their God-given convictions and to bring glory to God through their efforts.”

### **Critical Mass of Individuals**

To move from personal introspection to the ability to influence a group of people requires credibility. According to Hackman & Johnson (2004), “the most significant elements or dimensions of credibility are competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism.” Galatians 5 speaks to credibility. As others view the Christian’s fruit, the leader gains credibility as that which she sees herself as, identified with the cross of Christ. Slothful thinking leads to slothful action, which then results in a loss of credibility within a group. If we don’t use our Christian liberty to NOT SIN, we have little to offer a world caught up in its own sin.

### **Organizational Control Systems**

Organizational control systems are not the means by which the leader keeps the organization under his thumb, but the combination of task and relationship that every leader must consider. Blackaby (2001) states, “while leaders are constantly delegating tasks to their people, they are also regularly monitoring the attitudes, effectiveness, and concerns of their people to ensure the organization is functioning at its optimal potential.” In the words of Guinness (2000), “morals are vital to morale.” As such, “It falls on the leader to clearly delineate the values of the organization and to identify behaviors that are consistent with those beliefs. If leaders fail in this regard, the people who work with them cannot be faulted for inadvertently diverting the organization from its purpose” (Blackaby, 2001). Blackaby (2001) provides these statements within his consideration of the “leader pitfall” of “administrative carelessness.” Of course, there is a marked difference between a leader’s lack of care and carelessness, but that makes little

difference to the follower on the other side of the equation. This slothful tendency often allows a leader to miss out on opportunities to express the merit of the law through love to neighbor and to bear fruit within the role in which the leader is called.

### **Environment**

Leaders find themselves enmeshed in a variety of relationships and, much as organizations engage in environmental scans to develop strategies for success, leaders need to consider the breadth of their calling. Within their organizations, they must understand the source, substance, and limitations of their power. Guinness (2000) says, “Power—the ability to carry out one’s will despite resistance—has always been essential to leadership. But traditionally, power has been held in harmony with two other components: purpose and partnership.” Every leader must engage his or her organization according to the standards by which they are called to serve it. Tichy and Devanna (1990) state, “An organization’s culture defines that which people perceive as possible.” A leader must work within the realm of the possible both within and without. Blackaby (2001) warns, “wise leaders strive to preserve their families in the midst of the pressures of their professional lives.” This product of our times, which so cleanly divides the two, misses the profound connection between them. Our thinking will drive our actions and our identity in Christ produces the ability to NOT SIN regardless of the role in which we find ourselves. If you find yourself in a position at home or abroad that undermines this concept or pits two potential “rights” against one another, the Spirit provides direction which will never result in sin. Otherwise, we must recall Romans 8: “there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Therefore, don’t be slothful in your righteousness, but “make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

### **Conclusions on Moral Leadership**

Now that we have considered the role of the leader at an individual, group, organizational, and environmental setting, we are closer to understanding moral leadership in the avoidance of slothful righteousness and can draw the following conclusions.

First, standards need not be relaxed, but justly enforced within organizations according to their intent and design. This presentation of the law should have multiplying effects within our organizations. It proves the bondage that non-Christians are in under the law and offers love to our neighbors as we—lovingly—hold people accountable for their behavior. It capitalizes on the “natural instinct [of man] to cherish and preserve society” (Calvin, 1989). And it holds no negative consequence for Christians living by the Spirit, for the fruit that will emerge from them will never run contrary to the laws of our organizations.

Second, we must think critically about righteousness, which differs from virtue in that it has an acknowledged source as God. A man may be termed virtuous, but only God can ultimately be called righteous (Rom 3:10). We need to take care not to make moral leadership attainable by human effort. In the words of Calvin (1989), “we cannot call a mind sound and entire which is both weak and immersed in darkness.” Slothful thinking and analysis for how to deal with a world full of fallen people, some of which have been redeemed, but still suffer with a persistently sinful flesh, will lead to slothful actions. We cannot deal with that which we don’t understand.

Third, what we do as leaders really does matter. If we are unwilling to accept the trouble, judgment, and persecution that come with the testimony of the cross, then we are no leaders at all. Oh, we may be caught up with others “under the influence of a vain curiosity, [where the human mind] torments itself with superfluous and useless discussions, either not adverting at all to the things necessary to be known, or casting only a cursory and contemptuous glance at them”

(Calvin, 1989). We may even be leading the discussion, but without the cross we will ultimately assess them as Solomon did, as “vain and frivolous.”

Moral leadership can only ever find its true definition in Christ’s work on the cross. If we are called to lead, we are called to think, to understand our purpose, to serve as an example, to engage others, and to use our liberty and encourage other believers to use theirs to NOT SIN. We have to care, be willing to work and suffer, fulfill our responsibility in the light of the sovereign work of God, fulfill our duty as we live by the Spirit, and avoid boredom by not growing weary in doing good (2 Thes 3:13). We must fill our sights with Christ’s work and find our identity in him. Only then will we begin to have a Biblical understanding of morality and be able to avoid those vices that threaten to ensnare us and in which we ourselves were once caught up. Praise God for the immeasurable love which he poured forth in the person and work of Jesus Christ, our hope and Savior.

### References

- Bavinck, H. (2008) *Reformed dogmatics*. Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation. J. Bolt (Ed). J. Vriend (Tr.) Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Blackaby, H. & Blackaby, R. (2001) *Spiritual leadership: Moving people on to God's agenda*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers
- Blue Letter Bible. "Paul's Epistle – Galatians 5 – (KJV – King James Version)." *Blue letter Bible*. 1996-2010. 31 Oct 2010.  
<http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Gal&c=5&t=KJV>
- Calvin, J. (1989) *Institutes of the christian religion*. Translated by H. Beveridge. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- English Standard Version. *Introductions to the books of the Bible*. Blue Letter Bible. 5 Feb 2006. 27 Oct 2010. [http://blueletterbible.org/study/intros/esv\\_intros.cfm](http://blueletterbible.org/study/intros/esv_intros.cfm)
- Gray, J. M. (1999) *The concise Bible commentary: A clear and understandable overview of the Old and New Testaments complete in one volume*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.
- Guinness, O. (2000) *When no one sees: The importance of character in an age of image*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Hackman, M. Z. & Johnson, C. E. (2004) *Leadership: A communication perspective*. Fourth ed. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Lyman, S. M. (1989) *The seven deadly sins: Society and evil*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Lanham, MD: General Hall.
- O'Neil, J. R. (1993) *The paradox of success: When winning at work means losing at life*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Owen, J. (2006) *Overcoming Sin & Temptation*. K. M. Kavic and J. Taylor (Ed). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Portman, N. (1985) *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. USA: Penguin.

Robbins, V. K. (1996) *Exploring the texture of texts: A guide to socio-rhetorical interpretation*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

Stott, J. R. W. (2006) *The cross of Christ*. 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.

Tichy, N. M. & Devanna, M. A. (1990) *The transformational leader; The key to global competitiveness*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Willard, D. (2002) *Renovation of the heart: Putting on the character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.