

GALATIANS AND YOU

Studies in the Epistle of Paul
to the Galatians

by

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Chapter Eight

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Galatians 5:1-6:17

Preservation of Freedom in CHRIST (5:1-12)

Faith in CHRIST precludes trust in works (verses 1-6)

With this chapter we enter upon the third main division of Galatians, which deals with the practical bearing of justification upon the daily life of the believer. For Paul there was nothing incongruous in the coupling of theology and ethics. Nor should there be for us. The loftiest doctrines may be harnessed to the lowliest duties. Particularly is this the case with the great truths of salvation. The very fact that men are saved by grace, justified by faith alone, lays upon the Christian an imperative and inescapable obligation to live in such a way as to justify the faith that justifies the soul.

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." An understanding of what it cost GOD to make available for us that freedom which we enjoy in CHRIST should result in a higher evaluation of it. We shall prize it too highly to sell it for a song at the bidding of those who offer us a substitute gospel of works. Furthermore, the fuller use we make of it, the greater worth shall we find in it. Enjoyment of freedom stiffens resistance to bondage and sharpens perception of the subtlest infringements upon it. Keeping communion with JESUS will make us increasingly intolerant of hindrances to such blessed fellowship.

"Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." The righteousness of works and justification by faith cannot coexist. We must choose one or the other. CHRIST brooks no rival loyalties. Divided dependence forfeits claim to His enabling grace. He is of benefit only to those who rely upon Him alone for their standing with GOD. Paul is speaking in this verse, however, not of his readers' standing in grace, but of the method of living the Christian life and of growth in that life (K.S. Wuest). And how we need to keep in mind that legalism is a short-circuiting of spiritual power that paralyzes service for CHRIST! We nullify in our lives the grace we seek to amplify by our works. Because of its severing of fellowship with CHRIST and its quenching of the SPIRIT, dependence on works as an aid to

salvation means the destruction of works as a fruit of salvation. The grace in which we rest measures the grace by which we live. We must lean on our SAVIOUR to live for Him. Motive governs outgo for GOD. The only works GOD values in the believer are those which spring out of love and gratitude for His divine grace that is freely bestowed and wholly unearned.

"For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law." We put ourselves under the government of the state in which we choose to live. We submit ourselves to the course of the ship on which we embark. To depend on works is to subject ourselves to the penalty of the law. To seek to add to what CHRIST has done for us throws grave doubt upon whether we have really understood and appropriated the grace made manifest and available for sinners on the Cross of Calvary.

"Ye are fallen from grace." Probably few statements in Scripture have been more misunderstood and twisted than this one. These words do not, as so many seem to think, militate against the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer. Paul is warning the Galatians that they have slipped from the doctrine of grace. To lose our hold upon the precious truths of grace entails, of course, the most serious consequences in our Christian living. While nothing can destroy the believer's relationship with GOD, if he has truly been born again - once a son, always a son - much can injure his fellowship with GOD and cripple his usefulness for GOD.

The doctrine we adopt governs the practice we pursue.

If a believer has temporarily lost his hold upon the doctrine of grace, his progress for the LORD and in the LORD come to a dead stop. The car will not move an inch until the operator puts the trolley on the electric wire again. To fall from the truth of CHRIST is to fail in a life for CHRIST. Increased productiveness for GOD will follow upon a renewed grasp of the great truth of salvation by grace alone.

"For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." It is hardly needful to remind the student that this verse is woefully misconstrued if it is made the basis of a "hope-so" rather than a "know-so" salvation. The "hope" referred to is not a hope that sometime in the future we may be made the recipients of a righteousness from GOD that will serve us as a passport into heaven. On the contrary, it is a hope for the future resident in the grace possessed in the present, just as the sign "Seeded Ground" is indicative of the hope that will find fulfillment in the garden abloom with flowers of variegated color and fragrance. How careful we ought to be to let nothing encroach and trample upon the seed plot of the SPIRIT in our hearts and lives! While the righteousness obtained through justification by faith is a present possession, its future fruition is an object of energizing and directive hope: **"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"** (II Timothy 4:8); **"For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel"** (Colossians 1:5); **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"** (I Peter 1:3); **"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear"** (Matthew 13:43). It is to be feared that not a few of us fall short in our present work for CHRIST

through failure to draw upon our future hope in CHRIST. The righteousness of faith bestowed will be evidenced by faith in righteousness fulfilled. It will be noted that it is "**through the Spirit**" that we wait for the fulfillment of this hope of righteousness by faith. We must put our trust in the SPIRIT if we would bring forth fruit for the SPIRIT rather than for self. What men see of the SPIRIT in us depends upon what we sow in the SPIRIT. Can it be doubted that we shall labor more fruitfully when we fasten our hopes upon the eternal harvest of what we let the SPIRIT work in and through us?

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Note the statement that in CHRIST "**neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision.**" There is such a thing as bondage to freedom from form. We are saved, not by our freedom from form, but by our freedom in CHRIST. It will do us no good not to put trust in our works, whether moral or ceremonial, if we do not put trust in our LORD. It is only in JESUS that we find salvation from enslavement to sin.

". . . but faith which worketh by love." Love is the principle of the works that follow justification. And let it be observed that works of righteousness are as *consequent on* justification as righteousness of works is *impotent for* justification. Furthermore, the law of love is a much more powerful incentive to holy living than the love of law. Faith-motivated love - do we grasp the full significance of this challenging phrase? Just as steam-propelled machinery is operated by steam produced in boilers subjected to the terrific heat of fires that must be constantly stoked, so the productiveness of our lives is conditioned by the motivation of our love for CHRIST, which in turn is largely governed by the intensity of our faith in Him.

Therefore let us continually feed the fires of faith with the fuel of prayer and meditation upon His marvelous grace.

Warning Against Judaizers (Verses 7-12)

Having shown his readers in the six opening verses of chapter 5 how legalism will deprive them of the unspeakable resources for Christian living that are theirs in CHRIST, Paul now exhorts them to withstand the Judaizers who seek to rob them of their liberty in JESUS.

"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" This, of course, is a rhetorical question, the answer to which is perfectly evident. The apostle probably had in mind the illustration of a race in which a competitor deliberately tries to crowd an opponent off the course. Do not let these legalists defraud you of your rights and blessings in the LORD. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by accepting the counterfeit substitute they offer you. The need for such exhortations to preserve our freedom is no less urgent in many quarters today than it was in those Galatian churches. Beware the man who pries you loose from your prize. Legalism ever hampers progress in spirituality. Resist those who seek to rob you of your freedom in JESUS. Think of what CHRIST has meant to you, of what you have found in Him; and evaluation of your gains in CHRIST should serve to offset and counteract treacherous temptations to fall away from your LORD. And yet so many of us are more prone to feel resentment at what stops our having our own way than at what blocks our progress in the liberty for service that is ours in JESUS CHRIST.

". . . that ye should not obey the truth." How readily we seem to overlook the fact that acceptance of the Gospel involves submission to the Gospel! Advancement in any field of worthwhile endeavor calls for a mastering of and an obedience to its governing principles. This holds true in art, in music, in literature, in science, in business. Just so, we must live in obedience to the truth of CHRIST, "**the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 8:2), if we would make progress in that most glorious of all creative arts, living the CHRIST we love.

"This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you." This is a most effective bit of understatement, a brilliant use of the figure of speech known as litotes, that is to say, the affirming of a fact by denying its opposite. Far from being the will of the LORD who has called them out of darkness into light, their present drift into legalism, Paul in a solemn fashion implies, owes its origin to satanic motivation. Therefore, flee your impending captivity before it is too late. Why do Christians in our day respond so gullibly to siren voices that would lure them away from the One to whom they owe everything in time and eternity? A keener discernment of what is involved in our vocation as Christians will post warning signs at deceptive bypaths. There would be less falling from the work to which we have been called if there were more calling on the One by whom we have been called. Gratitude to GOD for our privileges in CHRIST will lead us to make a sacrifice for them rather than a sacrifice of them.

"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." This very likely was a common proverb in Paul's day expressive of the rapid spread and corruption of evil and error. The apostle has reference not to the number of false teachers, but to the fermenting and pervasive power of their false doctrine. A little legalism, he says in effect, when mixed with the Gospel, will spread rapidly and contaminate the truth beyond recognition. Therefore, give it a wide berth; have absolutely nothing to do with it. And we need to be more mindful than many of us are of the expansiveness of expansiveness when it comes to the corruptive power of false teaching. Too many otherwise intelligent Christians seem to have a blind spot when it comes to recognizing false teaching. They overlook the fact that truth and error will not mix. What would happen if chemists were as ignorant of the possibility of harm from an improper mixture of chemical ingredients, as if druggists were as careless in the compounding of prescriptions written by a competent physician? We need to wake up to the leavening power of false teaching. In matters where the understanding and acceptance of eternal truth are concerned, an ignorance of tolerance is preferable to the tolerance of ignorance.

"I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be." Paul is confident in the LORD that the Galatians will be enabled to break through the meshes of legalism in which they are being ensnared. But he pronounces judgment upon their deceivers, the Judaizing teachers. And spiritual teachers today, like Paul, to treat tenderly those who are being led astray, but to rebuke with severity those who are poisoning their minds against the Gospel of grace. Beware the sentimental tolerance of the false that constitutes a fundamental compromise of the true.

"And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution?" In these words the apostle indignantly answers the charge of his opponents that he preached circumcision elsewhere when it suited his purpose. And yet the very policy of conciliation that Paul so scorns to pursue is the common practice of not a few professing Christians in our day. They are chameleons wonderfully skilled in changing their color to fit their surroundings, that they may

not be conspicuous targets for ridicule and persecution.

In this interest of freedom from adverse comment and attack, they pretend to approve what deep down in their hearts they know to be wrong and false. But since when has danger dissolved the duty of witnessing for the right? How long since has the policy of protective blending received sanction from above? The silly smile of tolerance is a poor substitute for the righteous wrath of loyalty, **"I would they were even cut off which trouble you."** But while Paul feels intense concern for the Galatians converts, he feels that the sternest measures should be adopted toward their seducers from the Gospel of grace. We need to guard against such a tender regard for the feelings and good will of false teachers that we leave babes in CHRIST exposed to dire moral and spiritual peril. Perversions of Gospel truth call for drastic measures. External applications of glycerin and rosewater are of no avail when a major surgical operation is necessary. The coddling of adders is a perilous pastime. Pet lions revert to savagery at a moment's notice.

Love - The Fulfillment of the Law (5:13-15)

"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." The blessing of freedom in JESUS is not an incentive to indulgence of the flesh. How prone we are to forget this! Our calling into the freedom of CHRIST precludes falling into the bondage of sin. The care we take of our liberty in Him shows the wealth we find in it. The goal of grace is not freedom to sin but freedom from sin. We are saved from death to live for GOD. The proof of our calling for the LORD. We are justified on the basis of the Saviour's finished work for us, which, in turn, is the basis of the Spirit's finished work in us, which, in turn, is the basis of the Spirit's finished work through us. We may even go so far as to say that he who makes grace an excuse for sin has not found release from sin through grace. Let us never forget the fourfold aspect of the righteousness of GOD as (1) revealed to us, (2) required of us, (3) bestowed on us, and (4) fulfilled in us. Freedom from the guilt of sin will be marked by a hatred of the stain of sin. How can one claim to be free from a bondage to which his whole life shows that he is fondly devoted? GOD never issues a license for license. The very fact that justification comes by faith makes it imperative for us to justify the faith that justifies. Alas, if others remain in bondage to sin through our misuse of freedom in CHRIST!

". . . but by love serve one another." The apostle would have his readers replace the love of bondage with the bondage of love, the love of legalistic rites with the rights of Christian love. Love is an ever flowing river for the transportation of cargoes of service. True love, like the gift of painting or poetry or music, ever seeks creative expression. He who writes the love of CHRIST in hearts may be no less deserving of honour than he who writes the truth of CHRIST in books. Or, putting it in still another way, we may think of love as the garden plot for the fulfillment of God's commandment, the perfecting of God's perfect love in the hearts and lives of His children: **"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us"** (I John 4:12).

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It is hardly necessary to enlarge upon the truth enshrined in the enunciation of this great and comprehensive principle. Love makes us want to do what once we felt we had to do. Outward compulsion yields to inward impulsion. After falling in love the boy no longer has to be forced by parental pressure to comb his hair and wash his hands and shine his shoes. Practice on

the piano ceases to be a form of cruel servitude after the pupil has come into a real love for music with the out-flowering of his inborn gifts. The law of love is a far more potent deterrent from sin than the love of law - in the sense of enslavement to legalism. Furthermore, love injects that something which, by purifying the motives, alone insures the sort of obedience that finds acceptance with GOD.

"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."

What a contrast between the fruitage of love and the wreckage of wrath! The love of law as fostered among the Galatians by the legalists was evidently fomenting dissension and strife in their midst, a result at the farthest pole from the devotion and harmony flowing from the law of love. That backbiting and bickering in a church are destructive of peace and disruptive of unity goes without saying. It is a pouring of vinegar into cream, the unleashing of a hurricane, the kindling of a fast-spreading fire. Backbiting provokes biting back. Mutual depreciation is as destructive as mutual appreciation is constructive. The church that does not keep the peace will go to pieces. Alas, when the members of any church prey on one another and do not pray for one another! Praying and preying cannot coexist. Of necessity one must yield to the other. Which shall it be?

~ end of chapter 8~

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