

Studies in Galatians
Chapter Five
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Gal 5:1 “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Gal 5:2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

Gal 5:3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.

Gal 5:4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Gal 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.”

As former slaves to sin we all have to be involved in the renewing of our conscience so that we will completely be free of sin’s hold on us. As Christians we still have human-based tendencies that want to give us some credit for working our way to freedom. We are then very susceptible to the false teachers who want to attract us to them and to add something to our freedom that is based upon our works. We can substitute any works for the word “circumcision” and if we depend upon that works to earn us any righteousness before God then we have stepped away from Christ. Paul’s words here are very firm and bold. He says that if we are seeking any way other than totally from the work of Jesus Christ for our justification we have fallen from grace. He is not saying that we have lost our salvation. He is saying that we never received salvation if we are adding anything else to our justification.

Many acts that we do as Christians can fold over into being works for our justification. Work that we do in church is certainly good when viewed as logical acts of being a Christian. But when we start comparing our church works with others or thinking that God will bless us more in our justification because of those works then we have added something to the work of Jesus. It is good to have personal devotions but not if we add them to our justification deeds. We can become carried away with our frequency of devotions and such can become works that we are adding to our justification. If we think of our baptism as an act required for justification then we have become involved in a works-based religion. If we think that we must give a certain amount to the local church to be a Christian then we are involved in using works to augment our justification. Whenever we add any of our works to our justification then we are saying that the work of Jesus Christ was not sufficient for our salvation. Whenever we add anything to our works that is needed for justification we have put ourselves away from Christ and under the Law and that means under all of the Law:

Gal 3:10 "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.""

What a slippery slope it is for us to be tempted by someone that we must add anything to our case for justification! If our mindset is such that we are convinced that the works of Jesus are not enough for our justification then we do not have access to His grace. We must come to the Cross alone for our salvation.

Verses five and six emphasize faith. First we must, by faith, wait for the hope of righteousness. We do not work for it and we do not anxiously try to earn it in any way. The hope of righteousness is the hope of a life in Heaven where we will be perfectly righteous before God. Secondly Paul tells us that the faith that we are given is a faith that produces love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and our neighbors. We do not try to develop love but love pours forth from our given faith. True faith produces works and love. We must always be careful to differentiate between cause and effect in the Christian life.

Gal 5:7 "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?"

Gal 5:8 This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.

Gal 5:9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

Gal 5:10 I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Gal 5:11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.

Gal 5:12 Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves."

Being a Christian is not just about knowing the truth or obeying some rules and regulations. A Christian is an integrated person whose faith permeates his entire being so that his actions reflect his faith. These people began the Christian life well but were so easily sidetracked into disobeying the truth. Paul is quick to point out that this imperfection did not come from Jesus but from the false teacher. He uses a word from running events in the sport of track and field when he asks "who has hindered you". The ancients did not run in ovals but down and back a certain distance. There were rules and one rule involved the situation of the person turning from running in one direction to run back in the reverse direction. Anyone who hindered a person in that turn was disqualified because the person reduced the speed of the person turning and so reduced the possibility of the person winning the event. This hindering was also stated as being a "stumbling block" to the other person. Now works are not involved in our justification but they are involved in our sanctification. This hindering certainly did not come from God but it had to come from someone opposed to the person developing a more complete sanctification. In the beginning of this letter Paul tells them that it was God's call to them that put them into the race:

Gal 1:6 "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;"

This hindering then ultimately originated from Satan.

He then tells them that even a small evil influence (leaven) can quickly spread throughout the dough (the church) and ruin it. We must all be very careful to not allow any false teaching in the church. Today false teachers are spreading the leaven of works in the church again by teaching that God wants us to be happy and wealthy and that victory in Jesus means a life full of materialistic blessings. Paul used the same teaching in a letter to the Corinthians:

1Cor 5:6 "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?"

Evil and error are extremely important to catch early in the church for they spread rapidly throughout the entire church. Paul tells them that he still has confidence in them that they will reject these false teachings and cling to the pure truth. He wants the false teachers to receive the full judgment for their false teachings rather than any of the Galatians.

The Cross is a stumbling block to people because they do not want to be told that they cannot do something to earn their justification. To preach the Cross only is to invite persecution because people hate to hear that truth. People want to hear that they can have a part in their justification. Only if we preach that people can add to their justification will we be accepted in the community of man. But we do not want to seek approval from man. "Circumcision" stands for any human achievement and the pride of man wants to add something to the Cross. Paul was persecuted because of his pure teaching and so today are people who only teach the Cross. It is only by being humble and submitting to the work of Jesus that we can divert attention from ourselves and point totally toward Him. Paul's confidence was in the Lord and not in the people.

The false teachers were even saying that Paul was teaching circumcision. But Paul said that if he were teaching that works were involved in justification then he would not still be receiving persecution. It is the teaching that salvation is totally and only by the Cross that brings persecution to the teachers. It is the same today also that we who teach that justification is totally and only achieved by the work of Jesus receive persecution of various kinds from other teachers and from the world.

His last statement sounds rather crude for he is saying that he wished that those teaching such blasphemy would just slip a bit and castrate themselves. He was not wishing some violence for them but he was saying that if they are teaching such blasphemy to the true Gospel then they may as well become one of the priests of a religion of Galatia called Cybele who were made eunuchs at an annual festival. They were not teaching the true Gospel so they should not represent themselves as being teachers of Christianity. Paul was also condemning them to not being allowed in the Christian church at all according to ancient teaching. He was exposing them for what they really were.

Deut 23:1 "No one who is emasculated, or has his male organ cut off, shall enter the assembly of the Lord."

There is a basic principal at work here: “circumcision” means the law, works, and bondage. “Christ” means grace, faith, and freedom. People find terrible offensive the Gospel teaching of the exclusive claim of the crucified Christ for salvation.

Gal 5:13 “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Gal 5:14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Gal 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.”

Our freedom is a freedom from our false conscience. We were set free from our sin and from our desire to free ourselves when we fell at the foot of the cross. Our freedom did not begin with our decision to follow Jesus but with the call from God that allowed us to do so. This freedom is not a freedom from all controls in our life but is a freedom from the wrong conclusion that we can earn freedom. There are two “gutter balls” associated with this freedom: legalism and license. This freedom is accompanied by responsibility. “The flesh” means any aspect of us that does not want exactly what God wants and includes my corrupt human nature with all of its associated weaknesses and depravity. When Paul tells us to not turn our freedom into an opportunity to serve the flesh he is pointing out that since we are now children of God we should be living as His children. The Law is still of use for us in giving us a guideline for life here and it is fulfilled as we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. If we find ourselves biting and devouring each other then what is issuing forth from our mouth is not love but prideful hate and certainly an indication that we might really not be children of God. In the next few verses Paul clarifies this statement regarding how we live the true Christian life.

Gal 5:16 “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Gal 5:17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

Gal 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”

There will always be a war within us as we walk in the world. Our fleshly nature will always be present and it will be at war with our spiritual nature. When we truly walk by the leading of the Spirit we will put down the desire of the flesh. Being led by the Spirit does not mean that we are under the Law. When Paul says “under the Law” he means that we are trying to obey it for our justification. He is saying that the Law is still of use in our life as a guide to Godly living as children of God and not a way for becoming a child of God. Paul clearly talks about this battle we will have for as long as we live in Romans 7:14-25. In our process of sanctification the Holy Spirit is our pedagogue and guide. He leads us into a life that is totally free from the flesh and totally in subjection to Jesus Christ as our Lord. The Holy Spirit will also lead us into a life that is free to serve other Christians. We are then not under the Law but led to lead a life that reflects perfect obedience to God’s way of life as His children.

Gal 5:19 “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

Gal 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

Gal 5:21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Paul now clearly shows how the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are so much in conflict. Paul warns us in verse 21 that anyone who constantly practices the deeds of the flesh will not be in the kingdom of God. Any of us could fall into one or more of such awful deeds but true children of God do not practice such deeds. As we walk in this world we should see more of the fruit of the Spirit emerging from our walk. He again warns that we should not try to force such fruit as though they were a law leading us to righteousness but that the fruit should begin to easily flow from us as we walk in the world. Note that the word “fruit” is singular so these nine virtues are not nine fruits but nine aspects of the fruit much like a gem might have nine different beautiful facets.

Gal 5:24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Gal 5:25 “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Gal 5:26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”

We who have been joined to Christ are in the three-fold nature of removing the sinful desires of our flesh. We crucified them in the past, we are still crucifying them, and we will continue to crucify them as long as we live in this flesh. Crucifixion is a bloody process that results in suffering and shame. It also always results in death but it is a gradual path to death. The shame and suffering comes as we expose ourselves to more and more of our sinful nature and even though we recognize them as evil our sinful nature still wants them to remain and there is pain as we crucify them. Our mindset has to be continually set on the fact that one day all of our sinful aspects will die and as we become more sanctified we become aware of how much we want all of them to go away forever. Jesus told us to take up our cross daily because we have to always be involved in this process of eliminating our sinful desires and passions from our being.

Luke 9:23 “And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

If we state that we are alive by virtue of the actions of the Holy Spirit then we have to also walk according to the directions of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our drill master in life. Again we must emphasize that we are not consciously making ourselves do the work directed by the Holy Spirit as a means of self-justification. We have been justified and now we are involved in the process of sanctification that is led by Him in all

areas of our life. Our real pain in life began when we were justified. Before our justification we did not have the Holy Spirit in our life leading us into mortifying processes of ridding ourselves of our sin nature. Rather before justification we were perfectly happy to live according to our sinful nature. Now we have Satan as our personal enemy and the Holy Spirit as our loving Director of the reformation process as I am converted from a person of sin into a person of love. But we have a goal before us of being in the presence of the Holy God and all of His children forever.

The three attitudes of verse 26 are the three sins that Christians often use against each other when we wander into a walk according to the flesh. We should be especially careful to put down such awful actions against fellow Christians. We might feel envious of someone who has a gift of the Spirit that we covet and that would be very wrong. We might become boastful of how well we teach or preach or give or whatever gift we exercise for God and that is wrong. We may even challenge one another as we think that the other person should submit to our leadership. All three of these deeds are easily aroused within us by our flesh and we must be constantly aware to put them off and not feed them in any way. So we see that freedom from the Law does not mean that we are without any controls on our behavior. We must constantly submit to Him and not grieve the Holy Spirit.

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