

Galatians

Chapter 5:1-15

February 19, 1995

Review

In the previous section, Paul used the allegory of the two women, Hagar and Sarah, to explain the difference between those who are seeking justification by works of the law versus those who are justified by faith alone. The purpose of the allegory was to instruct the Galatians that the men who were trying to lead them astray to a different gospel were really false brothers and that no one will be saved by observing the law. The entire letter serves as a good instruction manual for identifying and resisting heresy. He concluded the section by saying that we (true Christians) are children of the freewoman, Sarah.

Galatians 5:1-15

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

- Keeping the previous section in mind, Paul says that because we who are true Christians have been born of the freewoman, don't do things that place yourselves into slavery. Because we are free, don't become slaves. He says that Christ has made us free in the first verse and then in the second verse says that if they were to become circumcised that Christ would not profit them. I believe he is saying that the freedom which Christ provides would not apply to those who place themselves under bondage to the law. The practical instruction here is that if we were enslaved to something and then Christ made us free from it, don't willfully place yourselves back under bondage again.
- These verses give us a very clear understanding of what the specific temptation was for the Galatians. Here Paul tells them plainly that their desire to be circumcised will add nothing to the Christian walk and in fact will undermine their relationship with Christ.
- Notice that he tells them to stand fast in their liberty. If you want your liberty to erode or to evolve into a license for sin or to degenerate into legalism, you don't have to do a thing. But if you want your Christian liberty to be sweet and precious you must renew your minds and be instructed regularly by the word so that you don't misuse your liberty. You must tend the garden of your liberty or it will not bear fruit and will be overrun with weeds. Weeds can grow very subtly. Also notice that the instruction is to stand fast in liberty; he does not tell us to obtain and create liberty. This liberty was secured in Christ and given to us. We are just told to stand firmly in it.
- There are those who say that they are doing things for God. Whether it is evangelistic or sacrificial, we do not do things for God. God accomplishes things through us.

4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

- Paul has clearly laid out for them that the implications of their following the teaching of the Judaizers is that they are trying to be justified by observing the law. He has also clearly told them that there are none who will succeed in doing so. Here, he further explains that their actions will actually separate them from Christ. While they were thinking that this would perhaps put them closer to Christ, in fact they would be declaring the death, burial and resurrection of Christ to be unnecessary.
- He tells them that they have fallen from grace. The proper understanding of this verse is that Paul is contrasting this theology taught by the Judaizers with the instruction he gave them at his first visit. He is addressing a heresy in the church not that they have lost their salvation. He has said previously that he was concerned about them and that he had his doubts about whether they really were Christians but this verse is not talking about losing salvation. He is contrasting that at one time they embraced the doctrines of grace but they were now no longer embracing that doctrine but instead embracing a doctrine which could not save.

- People who try to obtain justification by the law are faced with the only solution available to them; lower the standard. If the law is too hard to follow then redefine the standard so that you can follow it. But the obvious problem is that we have no authority to alter the standard that God has established.
- We were justified by God at the moment that we became true Christians. We are being sanctified by the Lord and someday we will be completely conformed to the image of Christ.
- Notice that faith works through love. All of the law can be summed up in the phrase Love your neighbor as your self. Faith works through love when we treat each other lawfully. This is a positive indication that the faith which yields salvation is genuine as James said in James 2:24

7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

- Paul plainly identifies for the churches that the instruction that they are receiving from the Judaizers is not from God. He tells them that small things can have big consequences. These little things are not to be tolerated by the church. Today, many wave the tolerance banner and think that maturity comes through tolerance of sin. This heresy is taught against by Paul here because all it takes is a little sin for the whole batch to be sinful.

11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. 12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

- Using strong language, Paul again charges the Judaizers with not taking the law far enough. They weren't guilty of going too far, they were guilty of not keeping the entire law.
- Paul was not sure of the name of the person(s) who were troubling the Galatians but apparently they tried to teach that Paul still taught circumcision. This was probably done in an attempt to say that Paul agreed with their teaching on this point. But Paul denies it and asks why then is he being persecuted. If he was endorsing the teaching of the world wouldn't they have left him alone? But it is obvious by the presence of persecution that he is teaching some other message.

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! (NKJV)

- Unlike those who were troubling the Galatians, true Christians have been called to a life of liberty. This is truly paradoxical. We are slaves to Christ. Slaves to righteousness yet we are free through this liberty. Those who attempt to satisfy the righteous requirements of the law through obedience to the law will not succeed and those who follow the law by grace through faith will. This truth has the appearance of a paradox but is really a wonderful revealing of the wisdom of God.