

Fallen From Grace: The Works of False Doctrine

Scripture: Galatians 5:1-6

Code: 1665

INTRODUCTION

There are only two religions in the world: the religion based on human achievement and the religion based on divine grace. There aren't any others, although there appear to be thousands. Throughout history, God's religion of divine grace has been opposed by Satan's religion of human achievement or self-righteousness. The book of Galatians jumps into the middle of this controversy and solves it for all time. It capably defends the doctrine of divine grace over the doctrine of human achievement. For every man who has lived, salvation boils down to this simple question: Do I magnify my own achievements, or do I humbly bow beneath the grace of God? That is the issue facing every man.

A. The Empowerment of the Spirit

In Galatians 5, Paul emphasizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit because it is the Spirit who makes the life of faith work. A life of faith wouldn't work any better than a life of legalism if it weren't for the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers us. Consequently, Paul calls us to yield to the Spirit's control through such statements as: "We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (v. 5); "Walk in the Spirit" (v. 16); "If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (v. 18); and "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (v. 25). It is necessary for those who have been justified by faith to implement a life of faith in the energy of the Holy Spirit.

B. The Exhortation to Stand Firm

Paul begins chapter 5 with a very potent exhortation to the Galatians not to surrender the freedom that they have in Jesus Christ, but to stand firm in it. They had been set free from their pagan legalism when they believed in Christ. However, legalistic individuals known as Judaizers had later come along and tried to put them back into the bondage of legalism by requiring them to keep Jewish law. In verse 1, Paul says, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Paul tells them that Christ set them free and that they're not to be in bondage again.

C. The Explanation of Freedom

1. Escape

Freedom, as expressed in Galatians, refers to freedom from the frustrating struggle to keep the law to gain God's favor. It is the freedom of knowing you are accepted by God because of what Christ has done. Such freedom is a tremendous kind of freedom, but it is more than just a deliverance from the oppression of legalism; it is also a positive endowment.

2. Endowment

Romans 6 and 7 pictures a man without Christ as a slave to sin. But in chapter 8, he is set free. Whereas man could never please God by fulfilling God's law on his own, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, man now has the capacity to please Him. Freedom is not just being out from under the condemnation of the law; it is being able to fulfill the law in the energy of the Holy Spirit.

From a positive standpoint, Paul views freedom as walking or living in the Spirit, which results in the production of spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-23), joy in doing the will of God (Rom. 15:32), and the fulfillment of the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Salvation gives us the freedom to obey the moral law out of internal power, not out of external constraint. The Spirit produces the ability in us to do what pressure from the outside could never do before we knew Christ. It is Christ who has made us free, not our own rituals or deeds. Galatians 3 says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (v. 13). Christ paid a high price in sacrificing Himself to set us free. That sacrifice would have been pointless if Christ were to set us free only to put us in bondage again. There are some Christians who live in terrible legalistic bondage. That isn't freedom; that's just a transfer of bondage. You've been freed. Under the law a Jew had no more liberty than a child has under a guardian. A child is not old enough to act independently; therefore, he is always under restrictions and must be given orders. But once a person comes to Christ, he becomes a mature son of God by faith (Gal. 3:25- 26). At that point he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:6), and is a free man no longer bound by external ceremonial restraints but able to exercise His liberty in the Spirit (Gal. 5:1). The Galatians had already been liberated from paganism, so there was no reason to put themselves under the ceremonial laws of Moses, which were no longer applicable under the New Covenant. In spite of that, they were on the verge of putting on the straitjacket of legalism.

When a person becomes a Christian, it doesn't mean he is free to be a criminal; it means he has the capacity to walk out of his cell and still live within the bounds of the law--not by being walled in, but by the internal restraints that are built in through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Christian liberty is not being bound by rules, but being free to obey God by walking in the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." In the Old Testament, the believers needed walls because the Spirit didn't permanently indwell believers then. In the New Testament, believers can be controlled by the Spirit of God. The morality that God established hasn't changed. However, it

can now be produced internally through the Holy Spirit.

D. The Entanglement of Bondage

The Galatians had acknowledged that salvation was by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was guiding them internally to change their behavior. But they wanted to turn around and walk back into the cell, thus confining the Holy Spirit to their cell. Paul warned them, "Christ set you free. Don't be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. He didn't go through all that trouble to turn you loose so you could go back into another cell. All you've done is stifle the Holy Spirit." The particular yoke of bondage that the Gentiles were being influenced to accept was the rite of circumcision. The Judaizers in Galatia were telling them they had to be circumcised to be fully accepted by God since they thought God accepted only those who had that sign of the covenant. Having escaped the ritualism of paganism, they were about to accept Jewish ritualism.

The Challenge of Freedom

It is easier to live in a prison cell than it is to make right use of your Spirit-directed freedoms. If you were in a cell, you would probably be a pretty good person. If you were walled in, there wouldn't be many things you could do. For example, Israel in the wilderness wanted to forget the Promised Land and return to Egypt. They felt it would be much easier to be slaves in Egypt than to exercise their freedom. There are some people who are more comfortable when someone lays down all the rules. They are not sensitive enough to the Holy Spirit to live apart from someone else's external guidelines.

The theme of Galatians 5 is that Christianity is freedom, not bondage. It's not freedom to do evil; it's freedom to do good by internal divine power, not external restraints. Paul makes his appeal in verse 1, and supports it in verses 2 to 12 by attacking the false doctrine of the Judaizers (vv. 2-6), and then the Judaizers themselves (vv. 7-12). First he discusses the nature of the false doctrine, then he discusses the character of false teachers.

I. THE WORK OF FALSE DOCTRINE (vv. 2-6)

The false doctrine that the Judaizers were teaching was salvation by good deeds. They believed Christians had to be circumcised to be accepted by God. You may ask, "Why did Paul make such a fuss over a minor surgical task?" He did it in the case of the Gentiles because false teachers were advocating circumcision as a necessary requirement for salvation. Although Paul tolerated that ceremonial ritual in the case of Timothy for maintaining an open channel of communication with Jewish people (Acts 16:3), he despised the system of works that it represented. The Judaizers were saying that faith in Christ was insufficient to redeem the Galatians. They believed Moses started the

process of salvation, Christ continued it, but that it was up to the individual to finish it. That's legalism.

Paul suggests four consequences of abiding by the doctrine of salvation by works.

A. You Are Not Profited by Christ (v. 2)

"Behold, I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."

By using his name, Paul is introducing a section with a strong statement of apostolic authority. He may also be emphasizing his Jewishness, saying in effect, "Even I, a circumcised Jew, who is proud of his heritage and traditions, am telling you that circumcision is useless; it makes Christ of no benefit to you."

1. The dilemma

Beginning in verse 2, Paul puts his readers in a dilemma: You can choose circumcision or Christ, but not both. A man's faith rests on Christ entirely or not at all. He presents a hypothetical situation in verses 2 to 4, set off with the word if. He is not talking to people who have been circumcised yet. Evidently, the Galatians already were following the Judaizers' advice to the extent that they were observing "days, and months, and times, and years" (Gal. 4:10). Many of them had already accepted the Judaistic calendar as being relevant for them. But they had not yet gone beyond that into being circumcised.

2. The danger

The danger was that they would then yield to circumcision and reduce their religion to a religion based on human achievement. If they accepted circumcision, thinking it was necessary for salvation, they would forfeit the benefits provided by Christ. Romans 11:6 says, "If [salvation is] by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace." If they added any works to grace--even if they were trusting ninety-nine percent in Christ and only one percent in circumcision--they would be trusting in a system of works and not grace. Commentator William Hendriksen said, "A Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted" (New Testament Commentary, Galatians and Ephesians, [Grand Rapids: Baker], 1968, p. 195). Paul wants to show that as far as justification is concerned, faith and works don't go together.

The Galatians had heard about Christ. Although many of them had believed in Christ, some of them were on the verge of believing. Accepting circumcision in any sense as part of their salvation would render Christ of no value to them. That is basic to the doctrine of salvation. It is impossible to receive Christ, acknowledging you can't save yourself, and then turn around and be circumcised, acknowledging that you can save yourself. You can't mix the two. You must choose between

salvation by law and salvation by grace--between Christ and circumcision.

Salvation is through faith in Christ alone. Any person who believes that circumcision--or any other work, such as keeping the Sabbath or serving as a missionary--is necessary for salvation is showing that he disbelieves in the all-sufficiency of grace, and will never be saved on his own merits. Christ's provision of salvation can't be worth anything if you don't fully trust Him.

The Galatians hadn't accepted circumcision yet, but there were many Jews who were hung up on that ritual. In Romans 9, Paul drew a portrait of Israel struggling with legalism: "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith" (v. 30). Although the Jews had been seeking righteousness, it was the Gentiles who found it in Christ. Verses 31-32 say, "Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they sought it not by faith but, as it were, by the works of the law." Many Jews never found true righteousness because they were really searching for self- righteousness. But many Gentiles who were wandering around got invited to the banquet (cf. Matt. 8:11-12).

So Paul says that the false doctrine of human achievement renders Christ's death worthless to you if you accept that doctrine. His sacrifice on the cross would not profit you at all. His death would be meaningless if you counted on something you had done to save you. You would be ignoring the gracious work of Christ.

B. You Are Required to Keep the Whole Law (v. 3)

"I testify again to every man that is circumcised [lit. `who lets himself be circumcised'], that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

1. Stated

If you want to live by law, you must follow every one of them. The word "testify" (Gk. marturomai) should be translated "I protest" to adequately convey the intensity of Paul's statement. That Paul is protesting "again" may mean he is either repeating the warning of verse 2, or is repeating a warning he gave on a previous occasion. He makes it known that everyone who lets himself be circumcised is obligated to keep the whole law. If a person refuses to accept God's grace, the only other way he can be justified is by keeping the whole law--and that's impossible.

I accept the fact that God loves me and that He redeemed me by His pure grace. I didn't do one thing to add to my salvation. In fact, I'm scared of trying to add to my salvation because then I'm required to keep the whole law. Those who try to keep the law on their own are in trouble because they can't.

2. Supported

a

) James 2:10--"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Can you imagine a Jew who had struggled all his life to keep the law to secure his salvation, yet broke one of the laws at the end of his life? What a horrible thing that would be! (Of course he never could of made it that far without breaking some of God's laws.)

b

) Galatians 3:10--"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." Everyone under the law is cursed because no one can keep it completely. If you want to do good works to get to God, you are under a works system, and must make sure that you do nothing but good works. If you ever do anything else, you are cursed. If you want to trade in grace for that kind of a life, that's your privilege--and your biggest mistake.

So Paul warns that false doctrine renders Christ profitless and puts a person under the bondage of the entire legal system. You can't break one command and still expect to be saved by law. Paul then gives the Galatians a third result of following the false doctrine of salvation by works:

C. You Are Fallen from Grace (v. 4)

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

1. The principle analyzed

Some people have read this verse and have panicked because they believe the concept of falling from grace contradicts the doctrine of security, which simply states that a person can't lose his salvation. However, the passage here has nothing to do with the security of salvation. It is dealing with the contrast between law and grace: If you include good works as part of the requirements for salvation, you have lost hold of grace and its meaning. If a man believes in salvation by works, Christ is rendered "of no effect." That phrase could be translated: "severed from" (NASB), or "cut off from" Christ. It is a similar statement to the one at the close of verse 2. If a man tries to combine law and grace as a means of salvation, he makes Christ of no benefit because he puts himself under the law. If he is going to live under the law alone, Christ can't do anything for him.

2. The principle applied

a

) To apostates

I don't think Paul is necessarily applying the concept of being severed from Christ to anyone in particular. He is just showing that law and grace don't mix as means of salvation. Being severed from Christ could apply to an apostate: someone who understands what Christ has done, but turns away, counting on his works to save him. He has fallen from grace into the pit of legalism.

b

) To Christians

It is also possible to apply the concept of being severed from Christ to a Christian. You may ask, "Could a Christian fall from grace?" Yes, in a sense. You were saved by grace, and you are to live by grace--God's free favor on your behalf. God's blessing comes when you yield to the Spirit. When you operate in the flesh, you close the door to God's blessing. When a Christian lives in the flesh, he forfeits the blessing he would receive if he were living in the Spirit. Second Corinthians 9:8 says that "God is able to make all grace abound toward you." That's a tremendous promise. God's wants to unload blessings on us, but the condition is our Spirit-led service. In that particular passage it was the condition of Spirit-led giving. If the Corinthians responded to the Spirit in the matter of giving, God would pour His grace on them in return.

However, a person can be saved and not grow in grace. Peter said, "Grow in grace" (2 Pet. 3:18), which implies not every Christian does that automatically. However, just because a Christian refuses the grace of sanctification does not mean he forfeits the grace of justification. If a Christian loses his grip on grace as a way of life, that doesn't mean God has lost His grip on him in terms of saving grace. The process of sanctification can be retarded by the flesh. A Christian can live in the flesh, hoping to earn God's favor, but that only cuts him off from the flow of daily blessing. If justifying grace were interrupted every time sanctifying grace was interrupted, it wouldn't be worth anything; you would need to retain your salvation by works. If every time you sinned you lost justifying grace, how would you keep it except by working for it? Salvation would no longer be the result of grace but of works. If you try to add works to grace, you destroy grace. Everyone would be required to be a legalist to keep saved.

D. You Are Excluded from Righteousness (vv. 5-6)

If you try to live by law, you forfeit the righteousness you are looking for. Romans 9:30-32 says that the Jews sought to become righteous, but they missed out because they sought to attain that by the works demanded in the law.

1. The expectation of the future (v. 5)

"For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."

a

) The promise of glorification

We accept righteousness not by works but by faith. Judaizers and any other adherents to the religion of human achievement are hoping to attain righteousness through their works. Paul contrasts them with Christians, who wait for righteousness through the Spirit by faith. Although righteousness is ours right now, there is an aspect of it that is hoped for. When we are ushered into the presence of Christ, "we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). There will be a fullness of righteousness that will be ours when we see Jesus Christ face-to-face. Paul says in Romans 8, "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.... the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (vv. 19, 21). There is a future aspect of righteousness that we still wait for. Although we as Christians presently possess the righteousness of Christ, which was imputed to us when we believed, there is a sense in which we are waiting for a greater fulfillment of that righteousness.

b

) The Proof of Grace

Verse 5 has three words that seal the argument that righteousness does not come by working to earn it.

(1) "Spirit"

Those who seek to attain righteousness by the law do so through their flesh, not through the Spirit. But the righteousness Christians hope for comes through the Spirit.

(2) "Wait"

The text doesn't say we're to work for righteousness; it says we're to wait for it. You may hear someone say, "I was saved and now I am working to be one of the 144,000 in Revelation 7." I'm not working for righteousness; I'm waiting to receive it. It will be as free a gift to me as my salvation was. When I die and go to be with the Lord, I will be made completely righteous. I do good works, but I don't work for righteousness. I work because my heart is filled with love for Christ. Such love issues in good deeds. I'm not trying to earn anything. My service is merely my response to what God has done for me.

(3) "Faith"

Glorification will be mine by faith, not by works. I wait in faith for that divine gift and God will respond by bestowing completed righteousness to me.

2. The effectiveness of faith (v. 6)

a

) The external shortcoming (v. 6a)

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision"

Circumcision isn't even an issue in Christ. A Gentile boasting about his lack of circumcision or a Jew boasting about his circumcision as the sign of the covenant are both irrelevant. Only grace and faith matter.

The trouble the Corinthians were having illustrates that external rituals have no effect on a person's spirituality. When the Corinthians bought meat at the market place, it was likely that it had already been offered to idols. After people gave their meat offering to the priests, the priest would sell the meat in the market to make money. Christians who wanted to buy meat experienced an ethical struggle, wondering if the meat had already been offered to idols. Paul reassured the Corinthian Christians that an idol is nothing (1 Cor. 8:4). He says, "But food commendeth us not to God; for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse" (v. 8). Who cares whether we eat or don't eat? It doesn't make any difference. External rituals and ceremonies don't mean anything to a person who is in Christ.

b

) The internal solution (v. 6b)

"But faith which worketh by love."

(1) Explained

If Paul hadn't added that last phrase, someone could complain, "You Christians just get saved, then you sit around and don't do anything!" Sure we work. However, we don't work to gain righteousness; we work because of love. The whole law is fulfilled when faith works by love. Instead of working by external rules, I work out of love, which internally motivates me.

(2) Exemplified

For example, the law says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). Let's suppose I'm living under law without the indwelling Holy Spirit producing love in my life. If someone had done something to me and I

decided to kill him, perhaps the only thing that would restrain me would be that external prohibition. But if I love that individual, I will not kill him. The law says, "Thou shalt not steal." But if I love people, I'm not going to steal from them. The power to do what's right is motivated internally, not externally. Devoted love, which springs from the Holy Spirit, operates in the life of faith and precludes the necessity of law.

(3) Expressed

(a) Galatians 5:14--"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." If you love people, you aren't going to kill them, steal from them, covet their wives, or lie to them.

(b) Romans 13:8-9--"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Love is the fulfilling of the law. So instead of having to keep the law by external restraint, I can keep the law from the inside out because the Spirit is producing love in me.

(c) Romans 8:4--Paul knew Christ was crucified "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (v. 4). I fulfill the law by the Spirit dwelling within me. It could never be fulfilled by relying on externals.

So my faith produces works of love, but my working is not to obtain righteousness. I already have been declared righteous in Christ. My works are the result of His righteousness.

CONCLUSION

One who listens to false doctrine on salvation by works finds that Christ profits him nothing, he is debtor to the whole law, he is fallen from grace, and is excluded from righteousness--righteousness belongs only to those who come to God in faith. There was an artist who dreamed of sculpting a masterpiece of multiple characters. Finally receiving a commission from a donor to do a work that was to be placed in a museum, the artist began the work he was sure would bring him honor and fame. After spending a lifetime toiling at his masterpiece, it was finished and ready to win the acclaim of the world. Unfortunately, there was no way to get the massive sculpture out of the room he had built it in. His masterpiece was held captive in the room in which he had worked on it. That's a good illustration of a man trying to earn his way to heaven: Everything he does in this world to merit acclaim from God will be left in this world. There will never be any applause from God for acts of self-righteousness. Whatever you do to earn salvation by works will perish with this earth. Salvation is by

grace through faith alone.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Identify the two basic kinds of religions.
2. What makes the life of faith work?
3. From what had the Galatian Christians been set free by believing in Christ? What would the Judaizers have put them in bondage to?
4. Explain the negative and positive aspects of a Christian's freedom.
5. What was the particular yoke of bondage that the Gentiles were being influenced to accept?
6. Why did Paul tolerate circumcision in the case of Timothy, but not in that of the Galatians?
7. What is ironic about the search for righteousness according to Romans 9:30-32?
8. Why would it be necessary for the Galatians to keep the whole law if they chose to be circumcised? Support your answer with Scripture.
9. What does it mean for a Christian to be severed from Christ and fall from grace?
10. If a Christian lost justifying grace when he sinned, how would he be obligated to retain his salvation?
11. What are Christians waiting for, according to verse 5?
12. What three words in verse 5 lend support to the fact that our righteousness is not earned by working for it? Explain the concepts behind them.
13. What did Paul assure the Corinthian Christians about in 1 Corinthians 8?
14. Why do Christians do good works?
15. How is the law fulfilled by Christians?

Pondering the Principles

1. How disciplined are you as a Christian? Since you have been set free from your previous pattern of life, have you consistently depended upon the Holy Spirit to lead you in your life of freedom?

Whereas a prisoner would have a very regimented life while in jail, he would have the freedom to do most anything he wanted when released. The question is: Would he use his freedom in a profitable way, or would he fall back into the self-destructive patterns that sent him to jail? As Christians, we should be using our freedom to nurture our spiritual growth and bring glory to God. How are you stimulating yourself spiritually on a daily basis? What are you doing to bring honor to the God who created you and saved you? Memorize 1 Corinthians 6:20 and Galatians 5:13 as you consider the answer to those questions.

2. Galatians 5:5 says Christians are waiting "for the hope of righteousness by faith." Although we were declared righteousness when we believed in Christ, there is still a fuller righteousness that we will receive when we are glorified as we enter heaven. That fact ought to motivate us to live godly lives now. Read Colossians 3:1-17. Are you seeking "those things which are above" (v. 1)? Are your goals, plans, and activities structured around how they relate to Christ and His Kingdom? Reevaluate your life. Determine if you are still on course, pressing "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14), or whether you have wandered off course. Praise God for the grace by which He has saved, empowered, and preserved us for His glory as you meditate on Ephesians 2:1-10 and Romans 8:28-30.

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