

Christ alone

Galatians 5:2-5

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After Paul and his coworkers had started the churches in Galatia, the churches were infiltrated by Jewish false teachers. As always, the false teaching resembled the true teaching enough that those who were ignorant of God's truth or indecisive in their belief were prime prospects of being led away from the truth of the gospel. These false teachers did not deny Christ, but they demanded additional requirements to truly be a follower of Christ. Their false teachings included obeying the Jewish laws as prerequisites to salvation in Christ. It was the idea of "Christ. . .plus", as if Christ's death and resurrection were not enough to bring forgiveness and to make us holy. We know some of the Galatians were already giving into the false teachers' arguments, because we see in Galatians 4:10 that some of them had already begun to observe the ceremonial Jewish calendar. One of the Jewish laws that was being required was that of circumcision. Those who were completely believing the false teaching, were even submitting to this process.

Circumcision was an outward sign that one was set apart for God. It set the Jews apart from their neighboring nations. It was to be an outward symbol of being set apart for God that pointed to a heart that was set apart for God. Because of this, if a person had been physically circumcised but their heart was not set apart for God, the physical circumcision was meaningless. On the other hand, if one's heart was "circumcised" and set apart for God and he had not been physically circumcised, he was still right with God. Ultimately, the focus was on the heart that was set apart for God, not the physical circumcision.

Obeying the law cannot make one right with God, only faith in Christ can do that. That was Paul's argument with these Jewish false teachers. Don't trust in the law and your own obedience for salvation. Trust in Christ.

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Galatians 5:2-3 – *“Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.”*

The literal translation says, “If you should get yourselves circumcised” you will receive no benefit from Christ.

Paul is saying that if you trust in your own good deeds, such as circumcision, for your salvation, then the free grace that comes only through trusting in Christ will be of no benefit to you. You will have no access to the grace of Christ, because it is only available for those who have trusted in Christ instead of trusting in self. You cannot trust in both Christ and yourself. Every person who trusts in themselves and seeks to earn salvation through obeying the law has to obey the law perfectly, and no one can do that. You cannot trust in both your own good deeds and the finished work of Christ. You must trust one or the other. They are mutually exclusive.

The false teachers in Galatia believed the lie that we can earn our salvation by good deeds. That is why they demanded that to be made right with God the Galatians must believe in Jesus, plus obey all the religious laws (circumcision). But this idea of belief in Jesus, plus having to be good enough is a lie. One either trusts in Jesus or trusts in himself (good deeds). One is either freed from bondage or in bondage. There is no middle ground. Salvation is not “Christ plus. . .” it is through “Christ alone.” As Christ said in John 14:6, *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by me.”*

Now one may argue, “But didn’t God give us His law to show us how to be right with Him?” No, scripture shows us that God gave us His law to show us our sin, our helplessness against sin, our personal offense against God, and that we were destined for condemnation in hell. All of this is to show us our spiritual helplessness and to drive us towards grace through faith in Christ.”

Galatians 3:10-13 says this, *“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”*

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul writes, *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

It is impossible to have put one’s faith in Christ, submitting to the fact that we cannot save ourselves, and then turn around and be circumcised declaring that by doing it we are saving ourselves. You cannot have it both ways. You must choose between a religion of works or a religion of faith.

Galatians 5:4-5 – “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

If you trust in self and your own good deeds, then you have cut yourself off from Christ. Even though you heard the truth, you have shown by your “turning away” that you never truly trusted Christ. It does cause many to question the meaning of the phrase “fallen away from grace.” Can one lose their salvation? Let’s briefly try to think about this question biblically.

In Matthew 13:18-23 Jesus tells a parable about seeds that are sown on four different types of soil. The following verses is Jesus explanation of this parable:

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

This parable is a description of people who are exposed to the gospel and may even draw near to it for a while, but in the end it is revealed that they had not truly ever been born again and the Holy Spirit does not live in them. This would be the type of person amongst the Galatians who had fallen away from grace.

A “man-centered, obedience -based” gospel not only keeps one in bondage to sin, but it also offers no security of salvation. Some believe that salvation has been brought about by nothing more than their own knowledge, good deeds, and choice. With this erroneous perspective of the gospel they believe that it depends only on the works of man and not on God through Christ.

If one was brought into salvation by a choice and good deeds, then what will happen when one’s good deeds falter and he no longer feels like trusting Christ? There is no security in this faulty theology.

In scripture we see a different picture. We see that we are spiritually dead, lost, slaves of sin, blind, enemies of God, living under the curse, children of wrath, not good, not seeking God, and wicked. In this fallen state there is nothing we can do to reach out to God, much less understand the beautiful truth of the Gospel. It is only God who can draw us to Himself (John 6:44), reveal the truth of Christ (Matthew 16:17), and bring conviction of sin (John 16:8). No one can come to Christ, unless it has been granted him from the Father (John 6:65). The Lord opens our hearts to respond to the gospel (Acts 16:14). By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we

have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy (Titus 3:5). Christ is the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Although the “bad news” of our sin condemns us, it leaves our salvation firmly in the hands of Christ, our Savior. In His words, *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”* (John 10:28). His hands are the only ones who are able to draw us into salvation and hold us securely throughout this lifetime and into eternity.

As believers we have all received the Holy Spirit as a deposit (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:22). We have been accredited with the righteousness of Christ. We are counted righteous, but are in constant waiting for the righteousness that we will know in heaven. As “we wait for the hope of righteousness,” we continue to grasp the truths of the gospel and learn how to walk in the reality of God, but righteousness has already been granted. Righteousness is secure because it is the righteousness of Christ. We are clothed with righteousness. May we continue to wait on Christ trusting Him for an ever increasing righteousness in our lives and an eternal righteousness that awaits us.

Deep in the human heart is the conviction that if our fall from grace was our own fault, so too must be the remedy. This is why it is all too easy to forsake the fount of living waters that is Christ, for our broken cisterns of good deeds that hold no water. We naturally believe we can and must be made right with God by our own efforts. Grace that pays for all is foreign to us and is why the message of the gospel is foolishness to those who don’t believe.

Even believers are drawn back into this way of thinking at times. This is precisely why we are told in the New Testament to keep on believing. This is also why in Hebrews we are warned not to drift from the gospel with these words: *“Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, [concerning the gospel], lest we drift away from it”* (Hebrews 2:1). It is a great salvation, but that is why we must remember as often as possible what Christ has done for us and think on his goodness, kindness and mercy towards us.

The distractions of this world put themselves before us constantly. They turn our attention towards the stresses, empty promises, and vanity that are useless to the believer. That is why we must sit before the gospel on a daily basis so that we may be reminded whose we are and what that glorious truth means to us. Faith in Christ alone is the basis for salvation and the means of our becoming like Christ.