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Galatians

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Galatians 5:1

Paul begins chapter 5 with a summary thought concerning the allegory he used concerning the law and grace. The words, "Stand fast therefore" are an appeal to not be consumed by the false teachings of the Judaizers, but to adhere solely to the grace of Christ who has freed us from the law. They believed in Him, they were sealed with the Spirit because of their belief and without regard to deeds of the law, and he was imploring them to stand fast "in the liberty by which Christ has made us free."

He uses the term "us" to show that he (and all Jews who had come to Christ) had been freed from the bondage of the law. The Gentiles, who never had the law, went straight from not having it to the more exalted status of being bestowed the grace of Christ. Together, both Jew and Gentile were granted a state of liberty because of His work.

As a heartfelt petition, he finishes the verse with, "...and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." The Gentiles were never under the law, but they were not without law. Paul discusses this in Romans. Despite not having the Law of Moses, they still had conscience, a law all its own, to show them that they were in bondage to sin. The Law of Moses increased sin, it highlighted sin, and it showed how utterly sinful sin is. In this, it brought an even greater yoke of bondage upon those under it.

Instead of going to a law which did this, he has petitioned them to "not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." In Christ, they were freed from sin's penalty, and through sanctification they would be ever more freed from sin's power. In going back to the law, sin would again gain power over them. The Holy Spirit will not work through those who stand contrary to the finished work of Christ.

Life application: The Holy Spirit is the One who testifies of the work of Christ. As Christ fulfilled (and thus annulled) the law, then those who desire to be under the law and follow its precepts, will not receive the power of the Spirit for sanctification. If they have never come to Christ in the first place, they have not even been freed from sin's penalty. For them, there is no justification before God and no imputed righteousness from Christ.

Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. Galatians 5:2

In the previous verse, Paul implored the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom by which Christ had made them free. He further warned them to not allow themselves to be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. He was specifically speaking of adhering to deeds of the law as a means of being pleasing to God. Now he says, "Indeed I, Paul..."

He dogmatically asserts, under the authority of his apostleship, that what he is about to say is to be held to as absolutely assured, and it is to be taken as the strictest of doctrine for the New Covenant believer. It was he who first preached to the Galatians, bringing them the message of Christ whom he had personally encountered. He was a circumcised Jew and a meticulous adherer to the Law of Moses before that day. But now he had come to realize what faith in Christ involved. With that knowledge, and with his divinely appointed commission, he now will give words of warning.

They are words which resound throughout the ages in this precious epistle - "...if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." Paul uses circumcision as the standard for his argument against adhering to the Law of Moses. It was so intricately tied up with the law that it was comparable to baptism for the New Covenant believer. If one were to say, "I will be circumcised in order to please God as the Law of Moses says," then it would indicate that the work of Christ, in fulfillment of the law, was of no value at all to that person.

Circumcision was a sign which only pointed to the coming Christ. Eventually, it became a mandate of the law itself. As He fulfilled the picture which circumcision formed, and as He fulfilled the mandate of circumcision found in the law, then there was no need for the rite any longer. Its purpose was fulfilled. As this is so, then it is a rite which was to no longer be practiced for earning points with God. It was no longer a sign of covenant life.

Having said this, Paul's mentioning of circumcision is given *in relation to the law*. He is not saying that someone couldn't get circumcised as a cultural aspect of life, nor is he saying that a person couldn't get circumcised as a standard of health as is practiced today. For such reasons, there is no limitation or warning. Paul is speaking of being circumcised as a means of obtaining justification in addition to the work of Christ.

Life application: If someone tells you that your uncircumcision needs to be corrected in order for you to be pleasing to God, tell them, "Circumcision... we don't need no circumcision! We have Christ!"

And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. Galatians 5:3

Paul now gives a second proclamation as an avowed testimony to the precept he just stated. Taken together, they read -

"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."

Some scholars see the word "again" as referring to a time when he preached this word to them, recalling it to mind now. Others see this as a second form of solemn witness. The second seems the most likely:

1) Indeed I, Paul, say to you...

2) And I testify again...

The Pulpit commentary further defines the thought -

"The word 'again' points, not to the substance of the subsequent affirmation, as if it were a repetition of that made in the preceding verse, which in fact it does not appear to be, but to the solemnity with which he makes this fresh affirmation."

In other words, he is making two distinct affirmations:

1) If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

2) Every man who becomes circumcised is a debtor to keep the whole law.

The two thoughts complement one another. In the act of being circumcised according to the Law of Moses, Christ and the work He accomplished is set aside. In setting aside His work, one then becomes a debtor to the entire law. It is a self-condemning act. First, man is born with a sin debt (Psalm 51:5). This is something the law could never remove. But even more, James 2:10 says -

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all."

The fact is that no-one can keep the whole law. The need for a Day of Atonement within the law itself proved this. Paul has already shown that no one can be justified by the law in Galatians 3:10. Therefore, Paul's repeated statements are given to emphatically show that falling back on the law, demonstrated by the outward act of allowing oneself to be circumcised, is a self-condemning act. Christ is of no value to such a soul. They will be judged accordingly.

Bible scholar Bengel notes that, "The use of the present tense intimates that the warning is not aimed at isolated acts, but at the introduction of a systematic practice involving a virtual transfer of allegiance from Christ to the Law." In other words, Paul's note about circumcision, as was seen in the commentary on verse 2, is speaking about being circumcised for the specific purpose of attempting to be justified by deeds of the law. This then would be an external sign, like baptism is for the follower in Christ. Being so circumcised then would have the intent of showing allegiance to the system of the law.

Life application: Align yourself with the law, and you are bound to the entire law (the dim choice). Align yourself with Christ, and you are granted the fullness of His grace (the smart choice). Which choice interests you?

You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be justified by law*; you have fallen from grace. Galatians 5:4

The words of Paul in today's verse expand on the thoughts of the previous two verses. If one attempts to be justified by acts of the law, then the result is:

- 1) Christ will profit you nothing
- 2) You are a debtor to keep the whole law

Explaining it, so that even the dull can understand, he says that such an attempt to be justified by the law causes a person to "become estranged from Christ." This

means that His fulfilled work, and thus the grace of Christ, is voided in such a person. Works and grace are mutually exclusive. If someone is working in order to please God, then God's grace has no meaning to them. The relationship of grace is voided by the works and a separation (an estrangement) between the parties is the result.

As this is so, then it shows that this pursuer of the law has "fallen from grace." The word translated here for "have fallen from" is used in various ways. As a nautical term, it means, "to wander off course," or to be "cast ashore." One is no longer on the right route or even in the right ship. They are completely separated from the truth.

Understanding this, one would think that Christians would cling to the cross of Christ. It would seem that all followers of Jesus would be so grateful of God's grace that they would write about it, sing about it, and cling to it. And yet, how many people simply forget what happened when they called out to Him at the beginning? Instead of trusting in grace, they trust in the lies of the devil. In so doing, they reject the only path to God which can bring about peace and harmony.

Life application: Whatever you add to the work of Christ will be counted as an offense against God. One cannot merit grace, and they cannot earn their place in heaven.