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GALATIANS 5:1-15

When we first began our study of the book of *Galatians*, we said that this book is divided into three sections.

We said that **chapters 1 and 2** are biographical...they set forth how Paul was saved and called and taught to be the great teacher and preacher and evangelist and church planter and apostle that he became. Paul wrote these chapters to establish his authority.

Chapters 3 and 4 are doctrinal. And we've seen Paul present in these chapters the truth that sinners are saved by grace through faith, not by works through Law.

Chapters 5 and 6, which we'll see this week and the next two weeks, are practical. Paul turns from argument to application. Paul shows these folks and us how we can live by grace and how it brings us freedom not bondage.

So, having established his authority in the first two chapters and having set forth the doctrine of salvation by grace in the next two chapters, Paul turns from doctrine to living that doctrine out in our everyday lives.

It's so important for you and me to know doctrine. But, we can know doctrine...we can know the truths of the Bible inside out and upside down...but if we don't know how to live that doctrine out in our own lives, it really doesn't do us much good to know it, does it?

Knowing **how** to walk a pure and holy walk before God should result in **walking** a pure and holy walk before God, shouldn't it? **I think we should never forget that God holds us accountable for what we know...and if we know right doctrine, then this should result in right living.**

And the final two chapters of Galatians emphasize how the believer should live a life that is Spirit filled and Spirit led.

Verses 1...

We touched on this verse last week. Paul is simply stating in a nutshell in this verse what he's been expounding on for four chapters. He says, "Folks, Christ set you free...don't be a slave."

Doesn't this sound like a no-brainer? I mean, if you were given the choice of freedom or slavery, which would you choose?

Of course, you would choose freedom!

I believe that's the answer all Americans would give! But, you know, there are some people who insecure with freedom. They **want** someone to tell them what to do and when and how to do it!

Some years ago, when Helen and John Floyd were serving in Europe, we went and spent a month with them. Wherever they traveled, we tagged along.

Well, on one of our trips, we were in Moscow, and we had a guide and a driver who were from Moscow. They picked us up at our hotel and took us to the places we needed to be and pointed out the sights along the way.

One day, we were having lunch, and we asked them how it felt to finally be free from the oppression of the communist policies of

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the old Soviet government. Remember, their government had come under severe change and they now had freedom to do things they had not had in a long, long time.

We were so shocked and disappointed to hear their response. They told us they **missed** being under the rule of the government. They **missed** being told what to do and when to do it. They were taken care of by the government and now, they must take care of themselves. Somehow, they felt they had more security in the old Soviet Union than they did in the new Russia.

We see the same thing in Iraq today. I read a quote by one of our soldiers just yesterday: "We're here to help these people and some are killing us."

We don't know **why** these Galatians were so easily being persuaded to leave their freedom in Christ to go under the Law of Moses. **It probably had less to do with finding security in the Law and more to do with believing somehow they could make themselves more pleasing to God by keeping rules and regulations.**

But, Paul reminds them again that **Christ had set them free** from the bondage of sin and **they were putting themselves under bondage again!**

Verse 2-6...

I think we need to establish here that Paul didn't have anything against circumcision itself. Paul was a Jew. Paul had been circumcised as an infant. He didn't even object to a **believer** being circumcised under certain conditions.

Remember, Paul had Timothy circumcised. Why? He had him circumcised because Timothy was half Jewish. Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father.

And Paul knew if he took Timothy with him on his mission trips and went to one synagogue after another, as Paul always did, then Timothy, because he was half Jewish, **would be better received if he were circumcised.**

So, Paul didn't object to circumcision across the board! Paul objected to circumcision when it was used as the Judaizers were using it. The Judaizers were saying that faith in Jesus was important but it was not sufficient for salvation! They were saying that Jesus is good as far as He goes, but He doesn't go far enough!

And they were imposing circumcision on these Galatian believers as an essential part of their salvation, and this is what Paul is opposing!

Remember several weeks ago when we looked at the Jerusalem Council in **Acts 15**, we saw that these Judaizers were not sanctioned by the church in Jerusalem...they had no instruction from the Jerusalem church, nor did they have any authority to teach.

And Paul goes on to point out four consequences of believing the Judaizers:

- 1) They rendered the Lord Jesus Christ of no benefit...verse 2...**

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All the people in this church of Galatia had made a public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, or they would not have been a part of the church there. As in most churches, some may **not** have been saved.

But many, probably **most** of these folks had genuinely trusted Him for salvation. And Paul is addressing the unsaved church members **and** the saved church members.

He's telling the unsaved that they better not trust in circumcision to save them. And he's telling the saved they better not trust in circumcision or any other part of the Law to keep them saved.

Paul is telling these folks that when they trust in the Law...they render the Lord Jesus Christ of no advantage...of no benefit... They actually render Him helpless and useless to save them and sanctify them.

Listen, if men were able to keep the Law and this saved them, God would never have sent His Son to die!

A second consequence that results from believing this teaching is

2) They were obligated to keep all the Law...verse 3...

James said, "**Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of all...**"

Why? Because God's standard is **perfection!** He expects **perfect** righteousness! He expects **perfect** holiness and He expects **perfect** fulfillment of the Law!

Now, think about this! We can't pick and choose which laws we'll keep. It isn't like a cafeteria line where we choose this and that. I mean, if **this** one doesn't appeal to me, but **that** one does, we can't choose to abide by **this** one and **forget** about that one. No! **We are obligated to keep them all!**

Remember when we were in the book of **Deuteronomy**? Remember there was a time when God told Moses of blessings and cursings that would be upon the people? He listed so many ways the people would be blessed if they kept the commandments of the Lord...

He said they would be blessed in the city and they would be blessed in the country. He said they would be blessed in times of conflict and in times of peace. He said He would give them a good harvest and rain and He would bless the work of their hands, just to mention a few.

But, He also told them of cursings that would be upon them if they failed to keep His commandments. He said their baskets and their kneading bowls would be cursed. He said their offspring and their flocks and their harvest would be cursed. He said they would be cursed when they came in and when they went out, again just to mention a few.

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And wouldn't you think that since the Judaizers knew this...in fact, they had the Law of Moses plus some 600 or more rules and laws that that they and their forefathers had tacked on...wouldn't you think then the Judaizers, of all people, had plenty reason to make them **want** to bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, and **not** have to abide by the letter of the law?

But, NO! They didn't want to be free, nor did they want the Galatian believers or any other believers to be free! They couldn't keep the whole Law, so they wanted to impose it on others who couldn't keep it either! They also wanted to use the Law as power and leverage over believers!

Well, a third consequence of this legalism was

3) They had severed themselves from Christ...verse 4...

Now, let me say before we go on that this verse has been used by some to justify their belief and teaching that a believer can be lost after salvation. This is not what this means.

To understand a passage in the Bible, you must understand first the context of a passage. **“A text without a context is a pretext.”**

I hear folks say... “Well, what does it mean to **me**?” Before we find out what a passage of Scripture means to you and me, we must first find out what it meant to the folks to whom it was first written.

A passage of Scripture **can never mean what it never meant**. If it didn't mean a certain thing **when it was written**, it doesn't mean that **now**. To understand a passage of Scripture, we must understand **to whom** it was written, **why** it was written and **by whom** it was written.

And the truth Paul is teaching these believers isn't the doctrine of eternal security...or lack thereof. The truth Paul is teaching these believers is that salvation is by grace through faith...not by works through the Law.

Law and grace cannot be mixed together. You must either live by the Law, which you really cannot do. Or you must live by grace. You cannot do both. You must either be attached to Christ and severed from the Law, or you must be attached to the Law and severed from Christ.

4) They had fallen from grace...verse 4...

If you're severed from Christ, then you've fallen from grace.

So...what does Paul mean by this phrase... “fallen from grace”?

Let's look at it first in relation to an unbeliever. When this phrase is used in reference to an unbeliever it has to do with that unbeliever being made **well aware** of the truth of the gospel...even **understanding** that the way of salvation is by grace through faith...and **then turning his back on that truth**.

John MacArthur calls such a person an apostate.

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And there were many of these folks around during the first century. They had seen the **miracles** of the apostles. The gospel **appealed** to them, and they **may have even made a profession of faith...but it was not real. They never fully trusted in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.**

John MacArthur said, **“They came to the very doorway of grace and then fell away back into their works religion.”**

But, Paul was writing primarily to believers, wasn't he? So, this phrase applied to them. It means that a believer begins his Christian walk well. He knows he's a sinner. He knows he needs a Savior. He knows he cannot save himself. He believes that the Lord Jesus died for his sins...and that He was buried...and that He was raised from the dead.

And he puts his faith and trust in Christ and Christ alone to save his soul.

But, then, somewhere along the line, he begins to trust in something else.

He trusts in works.

He trusts in rules, rituals, regulations, rites. He must dot all the “i's” and he must cross all the “t's”.

The word “fallen” comes from the Greek word that means “to lose one's grasp on something”...and when a person loses his grasp on grace and grabs hold instead to works, he has turned his back on grace.

This doesn't mean he has lost his salvation.

But, it **does** mean his life is consumed with **trying his best...doing all he can...making certain** that his life is pleasing to God when in reality he is *making certain that his life pleases those who can see his good works.*

I'm so glad my being kept saved doesn't depend on my holding onto Christ, but on His holding onto me! Hallelujah!

So, the results of following the teaching of the Judaizers were

They had rendered the Lord Jesus Christ of no benefit...

They were under obligation to keep all the Law...

They had severed themselves from Christ...

They had fallen from grace...and also

5) They were excluded from righteousness...verse 5...

Paul goes on in this passage to say that righteousness is manifested in a believer's life through the Spirit. All of your righteousness and all of mine in just dirty, dirty rags in the sight of God! And if all of the **good** things we do are dirty in His sight, just think how He must look at our **sin!**

Listen, when we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us, then the things we do for the Lord are acceptable in His sight.

All He wants us to do is walk by faith through the Holy Spirit.

And if the Holy Spirit of God does not guide our steps and govern our thoughts, then the righteousness that we have as believers isn't any different from the righteousness we had as unbelievers. **It's not about us and our righteousness folks...it's about Him and His righteousness!**

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Paul says in **verse 6** that circumcision isn't anything...and **uncircumcision** isn't anything either. What is **everything** is faith working through love.

Four characteristics of a godly life of the believer are found in these verses:

- A godly life is lived by the Holy Spirit, not by the flesh.
- A godly life is lived by faith, not by works.
- A godly life is lived in freedom, not in bondage.
- A godly life is faith working through love
not legalism working through Law.

Verses 7-12...

We find in these verses that Paul has a few choice words to say about the false teachers. In fact, I believe we see several things these false teachers, specifically, these Judaizers were doing...

1) They hindered the truth...verse 7...

This is a picture of a person running a race and someone cuts into his lane and causes him to stumble.

These believers had just begun their Christian walk and someone came along and dangled a lie in front of their eyes and they took their eyes off the truth of the Gospel and they stumbled in their walk with Christ.

Do you know folks like that? I have friends who have been hindered in their walk with Christ. I have relatives who have been hindered in their walk with Christ. Some folks begin their walk knowing the truth, but they don't know it well enough...and when someone comes along with "a different Gospel", then they are hindered!

Not only do we see that false teachers hinder the truth, we also see

2) They are not of God...verse 8

Salvation is **completely** and **absolutely** the work of God and any teaching that says it isn't is not of God.

False teachers hinder the truth. False teachers are not of God. But also...

3) They contaminate the church...verse 9...

It doesn't take much yeast to make dough rise, does it? And it doesn't take much false teaching to contaminate the church. That's why I'm so glad our pastor doesn't let just anybody preach...or anybody teach.

What if I came in here next Sunday and said,

"Well, you know, I **used** to believe God's Word,
but I've decided **some** of it is true, but **a lot** of it isn't."

I know what would happen! You would go to Bro. Bob or Bro. Casey that afternoon and I'd get a phone call asking me please not to come back before I had a chance to even get home from lunch. And that's exactly as it should be!

Another thing about false teachers is

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4) They will be judged...verse 10...

Jesus said if a person led His little ones astray that it would be better if a heavy millstone were tied around that person's neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.

James said not many should be teachers because teachers incur stricter judgment.

Well, lastly what we see is that

5) They persecute true teachers...verse 11...

Apparently the false teachers were saying one thing **about** Paul and doing another thing **to** Paul.

Apparently the false teachers were saying that even Paul condoned circumcision because he had had Timothy circumcised. However, the fact of the matter was that Paul was being **persecuted** by the false teachers because he was preaching that salvation had nothing to do with circumcision.

And Paul is saying, "If I preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted by the Judaizers? If I preach circumcision, I would be one of them!"

Paul called the cross an offense because of what it stood for.

What happened at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ took away the demands of the Law.

What happened at the cross rent the veil of the temple in two and made it possible for common man to enter into the holy of holies.

What happened at the cross breached the great gulf that existed between man and God.

And if the cross did away with the **true Judaism** of the Old Covenant, how much more did it do away with the **false, man-made Judaism** represented by the Judaizers?

These Judaizers couldn't stand this! The cross offended them because it took away their authority to "lord it over people"!

The cross still offends today. The blood spilled at the cross still offends today.

And Paul slipped in a little sarcasm...he said if these folks are so intent on having Gentiles circumcised, then they should "mutilate themselves" (NAS); "cut themselves off" (KJV).

The consensus of the commentators that I read this week says that this means Paul was expressing the desire that the knife of these Judaizers would slip and this would result in their castration.

John Stott: "We may be quite sure that it was due neither to an intemperate spirit, nor to a thirst for revenge, but to his deep love for the people of God and gospel of God. I venture to say that if we were as concerned for God's church and God's Word as Paul was, we too would wish that false teachers might cease from the land."

Well, in the time that we have left to us, let's quickly look at

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Verses 13-15...

I believe what Paul is saying in this chapter is that there are dangers at all extremes. If we go too far with rules and regulations, we are in the dangerous territory of *legalism*. **Legalism is expressed in doing some things and not doing other things and believing that all this makes you more spiritual.**

But, if we go too far the other way, where there are **no** rules and **no** laws and **no** boundaries and it's "anything goes" we are in the dangerous territory of *license*. **License is expressed in doing anything you want to and believing that because you're saved, God will overlook it.**

But, there is a balance...and it's called freedom, or *liberty*...and **it's expressed through love**. If we love God, we'll want to please Him. If we love God, we'll love His Word. If we love God, we'll love other believers. If we love God, we'll serve Him and each other.

Paul said the Law is fulfilled when we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Jesus said folks would know we are His disciples when we love each other. Legalism doesn't promote love. Legalism promotes a self-righteous and holier-than-thou spirit that criticizes others and attacks others who aren't living up to the standards you think they should and it puts on you and others a burden they cannot carry.

I read this week, "*The yoke of the Lord Jesus will never fit on a stiff neck.*"

These Judaizers were stiff necked.

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am
gentle and humble in heart; and you shall
find rest for your souls.

For My yoke is easy and My load is light."

Yet, **verse 1** of this chapter says the Judaizers were **putting a yoke of slavery on these Galatians!**

My prayer is that the book of **Galatians** is beginning to find deep lodging in our hearts. I pray if we've ever been tempted to apply legalism to our lives or the lives of others then we're learning why it is so deadly!