

Galatians 5 pt. 1 v.1-6 Estrangement v. Expectation

V.1 - Since you are children of promise stand firm, or remain steadfast, in the freedom for which Christ has made you free.

Christ has freed us from the yoke of bondage.

A yoke is a wooden beam designed to harness two animals together, normally oxen, so that they can pull together in their shared labor.

We are no longer, as farm animals, tethered to the law. Rather we are tethered to Jesus and the yoke of Jesus Christ isn't characterized by soul crushing weight and rigid complications.

[Mat 11:28-30 NKJV] 28 "Come to Me, all [you] who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke [is] easy and My burden is light."

By way of application we are not to return to the law in any of the forms it has taken over the generations!

We cannot claim to be free from the Old Levitical Law while attempting to build again a new unnamed Law that also enslaves people that is all too common in society and in the church today.

We must beware of the slow drift toward legalism. This can happen by those with an orthodox faith - those with right doctrine.

What happens is that we acknowledge that Christ has fulfilled the Law for us completely, having become a curse for us. But then we systematically emplace an unwritten/unspoken law that states, "If you are a good Christian then you will not touch, will not taste, will not wear, etc."

[Col 2:20-23 NKJV] 20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as [though] living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, [false] humility, and neglect of the body, [but are] of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

We need to beware of creating our own yoke that we are placing onto people whom Christ brings into His kingdom and has placed under His yoke.

That is dangerous ground, when we remove the light, easy yoke of Christ and replace it with our own; when we tether people to our systems rather than to our Lord.

V.2-4 Estrangement from Christ

V.2 The first fact that Paul delivers to us here is: if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

Circumcision was that covenant instituted by God with Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. It was an extreme covenant that required the actual physical cutting away of flesh from the body - symbolically representing the removal of the flesh nature from God's covenant people.

But remember - Ishmael, the child of the slave, Hagar, also participated in this covenant - and Paul writes to the Galatians in 4:21-31 that Christians are not children of slavery, but are children of promise.

That promise is represented through Isaac, the child of the free woman, who was unable to conceive. Therein we see that the children of promise are not born out of the clever devisings of the flesh but by the promise of God.

Nevertheless, the rite of circumcision, carried out on all men of Israel at the age of 8 days old - was a point of pride for the Israelites.

This affected the early church severely! The church in Antioch struggled with this:

[Act 15:1 NKJV] 1 And certain [men] came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

The temptation for the men in the Galatian church was to do this extreme thing to prove their sincerity and their dedication.

This would have been an attractive option because by this ceremony men could signal their righteousness. This appealed to their pride, as legalism appeals to our pride. They could claim to have been so singularly devoted to God that they would go under the knife.

Paul tells them that if they do that, they are throwing away any benefit they have found in Jesus Christ.

Why does participating in circumcision eliminate the benefit and riches of knowing Christ? Because now these men are trusting in their own works - not the work of Christ.

If we start a work in our flesh, then we are responsible for completing it and so they, and many others today, find themselves working, working, working with no rest in sight, no peace of spirit, and no unity with Christ.

Interestingly, the implication then, is that for those who appear to be hyper-religious (externally speaking); they are the furthest away, actually separated, from Christ by their own works, no matter how well-intentioned or sincere they may be.

The righteousness they are building in their own strength is the thing that stands in the way of knowing Christ.

V.3 Paul continues to repeat himself (I testify again), it sure seems that way to us, but he does so because this is SO important! And so common.

We are not unfamiliar with the idea that people need to hear things more than once based on retention, attention, and comprehension.

The message that bears repeating is: If they wanted to participate in one point of the Law, namely circumcision, then they were required to keep the whole thing - they incurred for themselves a debt.

One of the things plaguing our generation, though not new at all to mankind, is crushing debt. Debt weighs on people mightily.

In 2019 the total combined amount of consumer debt in the US was around \$14T - a number that is nearly incomprehensible.

Forbes.com reported last month that a 20 year old college student committed suicide after misunderstanding some features of an online securities trading platform. The young man reportedly believed (wrongly!) he had incurred nearly \$730K of unintended debt which led to his untimely suicide. (<https://tinyurl.com/y82acdnc>)

Debt hurts people. It's not fun.

Incidentally, that's why so many prosperity preachers are so popular; because they are exploiting people's longing to be relieved of their debts.

Relative to our text we learn that once we take up one point of the law we are responsible for the whole bill. That is a debt that we simply cannot pay. Our spiritual assets will never be enough to cover the expense.

As Paul wrote in chapter 3:

[Gal 3:10 NKJV] 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed [is] everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

This is confirmed by James as well: [Jas 2:10 NKJV] 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one [point], he is guilty of all.

For a man to keep the whole law would be to fulfill all 613 written requirements contained in the Old Testament continually and forever. This is an impossible task for the average human (hence God's allowance for sacrifice/atonement in the Law to cover transgressions).

That is why humanity needs a savior who is tempted in all points as we are tempted yet without sin. That's why we need a perfect

High-Priest who became our perfect sacrifice - because without it we would be obliterated by our indebtedness to God's law and our constant failings.

This is the state of those who seek to bind themselves under the yoke of the Law, you are now responsible for the payment required.

Almost as if (forgive the imperfect analogy) Jesus is paying our bill and we say, "No, No, Jesus, I got this."

Even though Paul explains the danger - people were and are still deceived into adopting this legalistic position because by doing so they can adopt the appearance of drawing closer to God.

V.4 By adopting this legalistic position the Galatians have ACTUALLY lost touch with Jesus in the severest sense rather than drawing close to Him.

Paul's language could also indicate that for those who went under the knife in order to share in the covenant of circumcision - more than their flesh was cut off. In the realest terms they themselves are severed or cut off from Christ altogether.

Estranged = “κατηργήθητε//κατ-αργέω...to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, loosed from, any one; to terminate all intercourse with...”Thayer, J. H. (1889). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti*](#) (p. 336). New York: Harper & Brothers.

You will notice that this estrangement, this severance of relationship, applies to those who merely attempt to be justified by the law, for there can be no justification by the Law itself as executed by human hands.

The original language used by Paul here indicates that an action is being attempted unsuccessfully.

One scholar writes, “Paul is not declaring that they *are* being justified by the Law, but that they *think* they are (or they are trying to be), though their attempt can only end in failure. Wallace, D. B. (1996). [*Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*](#) (p. 535). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

By this attempt you have fallen from grace - is that possible? Yes.

How? Attempting justification via any other means than by faith.

This is interesting because we generally think of “falling from grace,” or “apostasy” as somebody who is ultra-worldly, which is not necessarily untrue. But Paul frames the notion of falling from grace via self-righteousness. So it’s possible for somebody to be super self-righteous, wearing the label christian, but to be totally divorced from Christ.

To espouse that we are relying on God’s grace but in reality relying on our own righteousness is certainly retreating or falling away from that unearned/unearnable favor and relying on our own merits instead.

The end result of our fabricated righteousness is alienation from Christ - neither knowing Him or being known by Him.

We may feel justified, even smug, by our deeds and contrived self-righteousness, but in reality we have fallen from His favor because to attempt to be justified apart from the cross is shunning the grace of God, denying the cross, and declaring I can do better than God/Christ.

V.5 - Those who are continually reliant on grace live in a state of EXPECTATION through the Spirit that dwells in us.

There is an expectation for those that cling to justification by faith - the hope, the expectation of righteousness.

This is not hoping in an uncertain, fifty-fifty, sense but faithfully knowing that this shall come to be (that is where our hope is derived), that we are seen as righteous, and we shall be seen as righteous by the Father because of Jesus Christ.

By the Spirit we are empowered to patiently endure with hope, not trusting in our own inadequacies, but trusting in the sufficiency of Christ.

V.6 - It's not about doing, it's not about the works of the flesh.

We who believe do not find our identity in those external markers of holiness, nor do we boast in our flesh nature.

Rather, we find our identity, our personhood immersed in, engulfed by, the person and work of Jesus Christ. This relation with Christ is what changes us, moves us, works both in us and outwardly.

For the Galatians to potentially adopt a hard line against circumcision based on Paul's correction would be equally as wrong as glorying in circumcision. Doing so would mean dividing into camps, picking an

issue to champion, focusing on the wrong thing, anything other than Jesus Christ is the wrong thing.

Counter to the Legalists who adopted and pushed adherence to the Law others may say, "I will see just how far I can go in the opposite direction!" That is equally contrived, and equally, separated from Christ.

We who believe are to find ourselves IN Christ, positionally speaking.

What we find in that position, in Christ, is that those attributes that profit us as are: faith working through love.

Not faith working through fear, faith working through compulsion, faith working through guilt, faith working through commitment, faith working through work. It is faith working, being made real, exercised fully through LOVE that is gain.

"Whose love?" is the next question and it finds its answer reciprocally.

We may be tempted to say it is our love! The love we have for God is the thing that draws us close to Him, that awards us our position in Christ. But the Bible teaches us the opposite.

It is His love for us that won us to Him while we were His enemies (Romans 5:8-10) and His love for us which births our faith and our love toward Him.

[1Jo 4:17-19 NKJV] 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

He, Jesus Christ, loved us first before we adopted any of our religiousness or tradition; before we were smart enough to rebel against religion and tradition - Jesus loved us first, in our wretchedness, when we cursed His name - He loved us first.

Let that be our meditation.