

EXPERIENCING GOD'S GRACE

PART 8: TRUE AND FALSE RELIGION

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John Stott writes "the false teachers in the Galatian churches, as we have already seen, we're saying that Christian converts had to be circumcised. You might think this is a very trivial matter. Why did Paul make so much fuss and bother about it? Because of its doctrinal implications. As the false teachers were pressing it circumcision was neither a physical operation nor a ceremonial right but a theological symbol. It stood for a particular type of religion namely salvation by good works and obedience to the law."

In this passage, Paul points out the downside of accepting this false religion and the dangers of listening to false messengers (Judaizers).

→ False religions: "You are justified by keeping the law."

→ False messengers: Those who distort or deny the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. GALATIANS 5:1-15

A. The yoke of slavery (5:1)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

B. The only thing that counts is faith (5:2-6)

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

C. Their false gospel is like yeast (5:7-12)

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." ¹⁰ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. ¹¹ Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹² As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

D. Liberty is not license (5:13-15)

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

II. COMMENTS



(5:1) Paul now says stay where you are because of the benefit of being free from the law and the flesh as a way of salvation and consider the fullness of blessing by grace

(5:2-6) Paul had no objection to circumcision itself. But he objected to the notion that it had some spiritual benefit or merit with God and was a prerequisite or necessary component of salvation. The atoning sacrifice of Christ cannot benefit anyone who trusts in law and ceremony for salvation.



(5:7-12) Paul now compares the Galatian life of faith with a race a figure he used frequently. These Galatian Christians had a good beginning--they had received the gospel message by faith and had begun to live their Christian lives by faith as well. The legalistic influence of the Judaizers prevented the unsaved from responding in faith to the gospel of grace and true believers from living by faith.

(5:13-15) In this context, flesh refers to the sinful inclinations of fallen man. The freedom Christians have is not a cause from which they can sin freely and without consequence. Christian freedom is not for selfish fulfillment but for serving others. The phrase "bite and devour each other" is the imagery of wild animals savagely attacking and killing each other-- a graphic picture of what happens in the spiritual realm when believers do not love and serve one another.



III. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. (5:1) What do you suppose Paul meant by "the yoke of slavery"?
2. (5:2) What did Paul mean by "Christ has no value to you at all"?
3. (5:4) Does the phrase "fallen away from grace" mean that Christians can lose their salvation? Why or why not?
4. (5:5) If Christians are declared righteous at the time of their conversion, why then is Paul saying we "await by faith the righteousness for which we hope"?
5. (5:6) Why do you suppose Paul said faith expresses itself through love rather than through trust?
6. (5:7) What evidence did Paul give to show that these messengers were false?

7. (5:8) Why do you suppose Paul used “yeast” as a metaphor to describe their false message?

8. (5:10) What ultimately will happen to these fake messengers?

9. If these Galatian Christians were accepting the fake message of the Judaizers, how can Christians today prevent the same thing from happening to them?

10. Leader's questions (optional).

IV. APPLICATION

E_____ the Scriptures to make sure what you hear is true (Acts 17:11).

E_____ any self-efforts to gain righteousness before God (2 Cor. 5:21).

E_____ your thankfulness to the Lord for the freedom from a works-based religion he brings (Gal. 5:1).

Sources used in this study

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