

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, April 4, 2018 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

freedom
THE GRACE OF CHRIST IN GALATIANS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS
Freedom, Faith, Love, and Truth
Galatians 5:1-12

“¹Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ²Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. ⁷You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. ¹¹And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. ¹²I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” –Galatians 5:1-12 (NKJV)

Theologians refer to the Galatian letter as a “polemical” epistle (letter). The term is from the Greek word “*polemikos*,” meaning “warlike,” “hostile.” When used with reference to theology, it has in mind the idea of being devoted to the refuting of error... more often than not, an aggressive attack on false teaching. That leads to a preliminary question that needs to be laid before us in Paul’s letter... “When is a matter worth fighting over?” or “When is it right to fight?”

WHEN IS A MATTER WORTH FIGHTING OVER?

What is worth fighting for in the Christian faith? Which differences among Christians really matter, and which ones don’t? A comedian named **Emo Phillips** tells this joke about religious differences among Christians:

I was walking across a bridge one day, and saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said "Stop! don't do it!" "Why shouldn't I?" he said. I said, "Well, there's so much to live for!" He said, "Like what?"

I said, "Well, are you religious or atheist?" He said, "Religious." I said... "Me too!"

"Are you Christian or Buddhist?" "Christian." ... "Me too!"

"Are you Catholic or Protestant?" "Protestant." ... "Me too!"

"Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?" "Baptist." ... "Me too!"

"Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?" "Baptist Church of God!" ... "Me too!"

"Are you original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?" "Reformed Baptist Church of God!" ... "Me too!"

"Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?" He said, "I'm Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915." ... I said, 'Die, heretic scum!' and pushed him off.

Several lessons could be taken from this short dialogue. **One is that heresy should never be the catalyst to violence!** So just to be clear when we say "some things are worth fighting for" we are not calling for violence (or pushing someone off the bridge so to speak) rather we are speaking of standing up and giving firm but tolerant disagreement and resultant cordial argument, not literal "fist-to-cuff" fighting! The joke / social commentary above is supposed to demonstrate triviality of religious differences – making a mountain out of a molehill. But, let's face it, some religious differences actually do matter! The difference in the joke between the "Reformation of 1879" and "Reformation of 1915" is assumed to be a trivial one, but how do we make that distinction? How do we know what is worth fight for and what isn't?

When can Christians have honest disagreements and yet still share fellowship together?

Everything that the Bible speaks about is true and relevant for our lives, as the apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." However, you may be surprised to learn that Paul did not hold all of his beliefs at the same level of importance.

In his book *Enjoying God* (formerly titled *What Christianity is All About*) Dr. Alan Kent Scholes describes three levels of belief:

* Dr. Scholes has been Campus Crusade staff for over 40 years and taught at the Campus Crusade International School of Theology.

3 Levels of Belief for Christians:

1. Convictions - On some issues, the Apostle Paul was not willing to compromise. In his letter to Galatia, Paul explains how, "When Peter came to Antioch, I [Paul] opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong." (Galatians 2:11) The matter in question was the way Peter, who was Jewish, separated himself from Gentile believers to eat his meals. Peter was also encouraging others to do so. Paul explains that the reason he opposed this practice so strongly was because of his concern that "man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." (v16) Paul was concerned that Peter was leading people

astray by giving the impression that we are somehow justified before God by observing the law rather than by faith alone. Paul was willing to risk a public confrontation (“*I opposed him to his face*”) over this matter. He held it at a conviction level, and was unwilling to compromise. Thankfully Peter recanted of his error and was able to continue to enjoy fellowship with Paul and the other early apostles and disciples. In this example, and many others elsewhere in his letters, Paul emphasizes that there are certain truths worth holding on to tightly. He was echoing Christ (Matthew 7:15-20, 24:19-11; Luke 6:43-45) as well as the other writers of scripture (ex 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1) about the importance of not straying from certain central truths.

Some Examples:

- (1) **Mathew 7:15-20** - *“15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”*
- (2) **Matthew 24:11** – *“¹¹ Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”*
- (3) **Luke 6:43-45** – *“⁴³ “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart⁴⁵ brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”*
- (4) **2 Peter 2:1** – *“¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.”*
- (5) **1 John 4:1** – *“¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

2. **Persuasions** - However, Paul did not hold all of his beliefs so tenaciously. In **Romans 14:5**, Paul says, *“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”* **Although Paul himself is fully persuaded on this issue, he allows others to differ with him.** He is not ready to break fellowship over these issues. You can explore Romans 14 on your own to see how Paul was willing to differ on issues he nevertheless felt strongly about. These issues could be called “persuasions,” because while your mind may be entirely persuaded on the issue based on evidence, another Christian may be persuaded differently, and that’s okay. There are some issues that we have become “fully persuaded of” in our own walk with Christ, through our own personal prayer and study, but these issues may not be fully developed in Scripture and difficult to be absolutely “dogmatic” about.

What persuasions are not:

- (1) **These are not doctrinal issues** –
- (2) **These do not affect the basic tenets of the Christian faith** –
- (3) **Christian theology is not affected by these** -
- (4) **These should not be used as tests of the genuineness of one’s salvation/faith** –
- (5) **These should never be used to destroy another** -

3. **Opinions.** – There is still another category of belief in Paul’s letters... opinion. In 1 Corinthians 7:39-40 Paul says, “A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” The Greek word translated here as “judgment” refers to a person’s opinion, or advice. **Paul is here giving what he believes is wise counsel, yet he distinguishes it from a direct command.** To demonstrate the difference, earlier in the same chapter, Paul prefaces one of his statements by saying “*To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord):*” (v12, emphasis mine) This statement is of a different kind, and carries more importance and authority than merely Paul’s own personal opinion, which demonstrates the differences in how tightly he holds certain beliefs.

How can you tell the difference between a conviction, a persuasion and an opinion?:

Unfortunately not many *conviction* level beliefs are prefaced in the Bible with obvious statements like “*I give this command.*” How do we know whether a disagreement between Christians is a *conviction* level of belief (which is worth breaking fellowship over and fighting for) or a *persuasion* or *opinion* level of belief (which is not)? The following may at least give us some help in making that determination, and perhaps serve as some helpful guides.

1. **The strength with which a person holds a particular belief itself should not be the determining factor for what level the beliefs are (conviction, persuasion or opinion) -** A person may feel very strongly about something, but that does not determine whether it is a conviction level of belief, and therefore worth fighting over. I may feel very strongly that a preacher’s sermons should be a maximum of 30 minutes long no longer, but that doesn’t make it a conviction level belief. On person may feel that all church carpet should be red and the walls white, but that does not rise to the basic Christian conviction level belief and therefore is not worth fighting over and making a church splitting stand over.
2. **A strong and basic determining factor should be whether or not the issue is crucial to salvation -** A conviction level belief is one where the central teachings of the gospel and most critical truths about God are distorted. As Dr. Scholes says in *Enjoying God*, “A conviction is a belief that is central to the Christian gospel itself. A good test to see if a belief should be classed as a conviction is to ask, ‘If I remove this belief from my system, could I still consistently believe the rest of the gospel?’ If the answer is ‘yes’ then that belief, no matter how firmly you believe it, or how strongly you feel about it, probably should be classed as a persuasion.”
3. **Basic Christian beliefs that are always conviction level beliefs will always include some things** – Conviction level beliefs include the Deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone through faith, and the infallibility of the Bible, etc. basic doctrines/tenets of the Christian faith. Beliefs you hold at the conviction level should be subjects you understand fully and be well grounded in. You should verify the truth of conviction level beliefs for yourself; if we are ever called upon to be persecuted for our beliefs (“*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” 2 Timothy 3:12) we should be quite sure which beliefs we are willing to suffer for and which ones we may willingly disagree about!
4. **It should always be remembered that persuasion level beliefs are not crucial for salvation -** Although we may feel strongly about them and even argue about them among

other believers, it is not necessary to break fellowship with those who differ. Examples of persuasion level beliefs might include the age of the universe, millennial views, and the role of speaking in tongues in the church and other important but what some consider peripheral (outlying, marginal, fringe) issues.

5. It should be remembered that opinions level beliefs should be held even looser than persuasions - Often because we simply lack the necessary information to be too sure of our beliefs about them, and other times because they represent subjective preferences. For example, what kind of worship music should your church play? What is appropriate and edifying for one congregation may not be for another.

6. Various creeds of the churches throughout the centuries have tried to define essential beliefs - C. S. Lewis in his popular book *Mere Christianity* attempted to do the same. One of the earliest creeds is known as the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

Born of the virgin Mary

Suffered under Pontius Pilate

Was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell

On the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty

From there he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic [universal] church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen

Note: The term "catholic" above means the entire church of God, not the Roman Catholic Church in particular.

Note too that conviction-level disagreements can also involve additions to the gospel. If a person believes the apostles creed, but also adds other unnecessary teachings to it which are not biblical and thus not God honoring, this also could be a conviction level error worthy of correction.

2 Important Reminders When Something is Worth Fighting Over:

1. Speaking the truth in love - Although Christians should do all we can to worship God *"in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24) and thus seek to "in the right way" correct conviction-level error wherever it is found, we should also seek unity. Paul says it in *Ephesians 4:3*, *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* Mean spirited, red-faced, angry yelling and shouting Christians never ever help to promote the cause of Christ even when they are right! You can disagree... even strongly without being devilish!

2. So keep this in mind before starting a fight - Recognize that there are issues which are not so central that we must break fellowship with other believers, and have a spirit of charity when it comes to discussing such issues. *Dr. Scholes* make this very important statement in his book *Enjoying God*, *"I believe we all, as Christians, have a responsibility to distinguish between those central points about which the Bible is clear and nearly all Christians agree and those concepts which are peripheral or questionable. If we are going to love God with our minds as well as our hearts, if we are going to worship Him "in spirit and truth," then*

we must have some way to sort out what is crucial to our Christian faith from what is helpful but secondary or even optional or questionable. I have personally found the convictions, persuasions, opinions paradigm gives me confidence that I am listening intently to those things God Himself deems most important without becoming overly distracted by peripheral issues.” This, I think, is wise advice for us all.

Theologians refer to the Galatian letter as a “polemical” epistle (letter). The term is from the Greek word “*polemikos*,” meaning “warlike,” “hostile.” When used with reference to theology, it has in mind the idea of being devoted to the refuting of error... more often than not, an aggressive attack on false teaching. That certainly describes Galatians! In this letter (as in no other by the Apostle Paul), the false teaching of legalism is openly exposed and boldly assaulted by the apostle grace. If ever we Christians need ammunition for the defense of our liberty or freedom, all we need to do is to return to the arsenal of Galatians. Continuing our study into the fifth (5th) chapter only deepens our conviction that Christ set us free. In the first twelve verses of chapter 5 we find an opening command (v.1) that introduces a contrast which is developed through verse 12... a religion of “circumcision” (law, or works) versus a relationship with Christ (grace). To claim both as one’s personal philosophy of life is to straddle the fence that leads to confusion. These “polemical” (warlike) verses are saying, “Get off the fence!”

STATEMENT OF OUR LIBERTY (Galatians 5:1)

“¹Stand 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 these word. *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty (freedom) by which Christ has made us free...”* The NIV reads this way, *“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.”* That is a strong assertion, and these words may sound odd (*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free...”*) but they really aren’t redundant. Paul wanted those believes reading his letter to know the benefits of their salvation without guilt or reservation. Christ set us free (delivered us) to be free. As Jesus said in **John 8:36**, *“³⁶Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”*

READ: Romans 5:1-11

2 Benefits that Are Ours in Christ as Believers:

(1) **He has delivered us** – Paul says we have been delivered from the entanglement of the law/works. Think of the “deliverance” that is our in Christ as believers. Here is a list of some of what deliverance means for the believers.

What we as believers have been delivered from:

- **We have been delivered from the wrath of God**
- **We have been delivered from the power of sin**
- **We have been delivered from the curse of the Law**
- **We have been delivered from the tyranny of Satan and his demons**

- **We have been delivered from the fear of judgment**
- **We have been delivered from an accusing conscience**

(2) **He has set us free** - On the positive side of Paul's word in the first verse, these would also include freedom or liberty.

What we as believers have been set free to:

- **We have been set free to live and walk in a new kind of power**
- **We have been set free to obey with joy and delight**
- **We have been set free to love and give oneself to others**
- **We have been set free to have immediate access to God the Father**
- **We have been set free to relax in God's presence, knowing that all it took to please the Father and make us acceptable has been fully accomplished by the Savior at the cross.**

Command – Listen to Paul's words again in Galatians 5:1, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”* The idea of the command is one of active resistance toward any attempt made against the Christian to rob him of his freedom in Christ. If ever the Christian has a right to become indignant and stubborn, it is when he or she knows that liberty/freedom is being taken away and law is being put in its place. Perhaps a reminder is in order at this point.. “Liberty (freedom), though it may be taken away by another, may also be lost through forfeiture by the one who willfully slips back under the burden (yoke) of the Law (slavery). “

WARNING TO THOSE WHO EMBRACE LEGALISM (Galatians 5:2-6)

“² 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. ⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” – Galatians 5:2-6

Consequences (vv.2-4) – Paul, in speaking of “circumcision,” here refers not to a surgical procedure, but to a theological position... a type of religion claiming salvation by works of obedience to the Law. Paul identified four consequences suffered by the one receiving circumcision as a means of salvation or salvation by works:

4 Consequences of Trying to be Justified/Saved by Works (Circumcision or the Law):

1. **Christ was of no benefit to him (v.2) –**
2. **He was obligated to keep the whole law (v.3) -**
3. **He was alienated from Christ (v.4) –**
4. **He had fallen away from grace (v.4) –** In other words, fallen out of line with the grace message

Helpful thought: When we take up the torch of the flesh, we scorch the work of the Holy Spirit.

Contrast (vv.5-6) – In verses 5-6 Paul contrast what the flesh does for us as opposed to what faith does for us... flesh verses faith is the contrast here. He gives us 2 contrasting views:

2 Contrasting Views of Flesh verses Faith:

- 1. In the flesh we work hard for a righteousness we earn... and all that matters is works (we have done).**
- 2. In faith we wait for the fulfillment of righteousness in Christ... all that matter is faith, all for His glory.**

Now let's attempt to lay into this passage of Scripture a little deeper. Within the context of Paul's argument he uses this phrase that has caused many a lot of consternation (dismay, anxiety, bewilderment and alarm) and trouble. It appears in **verse 4** where Paul writes, **"*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*"** You see the words there, "fallen from grace." Many professing Christians have gotten hung up on Paul's words here and whole denomination have built a doctrinal stance on those words. We must consider Paul's words because they are there. We may ask, "Is it possible to fall from grace." We must answer "yes," because Scripture says in Galatians 5:4 that someone is falling from grace. The question is who is falling from grace and what is Paul talking about. What does that mean? Let me from the beginning make a couple of faith statements/declaration that I think are absolutely essential to carry in our back pocket (or in our heart) as we wade into this discussion with Paul.

Some Important Biblical Faith Declaration on Salvation:"

- 1. I believe firmly in the doctrine of the Eternal Security of the Believer –**
- 2. I believe that once one is genuinely saved, it is forever and cannot be lost –**
- 3. I do not believe that our salvation depends on what we (man) has done or will do –**
- 4. I believe that we are saved only by the finished work of Christ on our behalf –**
- 5. I believe that we are saved by God's grace extended to us as a free gift that He will not revoke or take back –**
- 6. I believe that when we are saved, He gives us eternal life and if it could be lost it would not be eternal but temporary –**
- 7. I believe that if God is big enough to save us, He is big enough to keep us saved.**
- 8. I believe that if I have earned salvation myself it can be lost, but since it was earned for me by Jesus Christ at the cross, fully satisfying God's demands it cannot be lost.**
- 9. I believe that Scripture clearly and consistently teaching the eternal security of the genuine believer.**
- 10. I believe that if I can lost my salvation, Scripture has lied to me and is therefore not trustworthy.**

Now, let's get into some basics for understanding Paul's complicated passage by laying a little more ground work for interpreting a passage like this. ..

Some Things to Remember When Interpreting a Passage:

- 1. Always interpret a passage within its context –** A verse or passage of Scripture must be interpreted in context... both immediate and broader context. (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 seems to be*

saying that is possible to “fall from grace”, but what does it say when it is read in the context of verses 1-6 and in the broader context of the book of Galatians?)

2. **Always interpret a passage with an understanding of its background** – Historical background, literary understanding (type of literature... remember Scripture is filled with historical narratives, poetry, letters, prophetic and apocalyptic literature, etc.), grammatical background and understanding (remember Scripture was originally written in three languages; Hebrews, Greek and Aramaic, also grammatical issues, sentence structure, etc. are important in getting at a correct interpretation). (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 seems to be saying that it is possible to “fall from grace,” but understanding the type of literature that the book of Galatians, the historical background about what was going on and what Paul was dealing with, and looking at grammatical issues in the passage may reveal something quite different*)
3. **Always read the passage in light of what the rest of Scripture says** – Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. No text of Scripture (properly interpreted in its context) will contradict another text of Scripture. When contradictions seem to exist, it is the task of the interpreter to explain the seeming contradiction. He must never seek to do so by ignoring or denying any part of the truth that is revealed in Scripture. (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 may indicate that it is possible to “fall from grace” but Jude 24 says He (Jesus) is about to “keep you from falling”... an apparent contradiction that can only be cleared up through careful interpretation of the whole of Scripture... remember Scripture does not contradict itself*)
4. **Remember that there is really only one proper interpretation of Scripture, and that is God’s** – The Apostle Paul told us, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...”** (2 Timothy 3:16). The word translated in that verse as “*inspiration*” means “*God-breathed*.” So literally the Greek translates this way, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God...*” In other words it comes from Him, therefore, you cannot hope to arrive at a correct understanding of Scripture independent of God, through the person of the Holy Spirit. The illumination of Scripture can only come from the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 says, **“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. That is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”** Because the author of Scripture – God the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21, “*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*”) – resides within the child of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, “*Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you.*”), he or she is in a position to receive God’s illumination (1 Corinthians 2:10-11, “*... God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*”). And, indeed, the Spirit of truth not only provides insight that permeate the mind, but also provides illumination that can penetrate the heart. This is why when we go to trying to understand and correctly interpret Scripture we must ask for the Holy Spirit to teach us, show us, guide us, direct us, guard us, in understanding the truth. We are not the final say on His Word, God is!
5. **Use available tools and resources** – This may be the most simplistic yet practical help in interpreting a passage. Use good tools are resources that are readily available to a student of Scripture. Good and reliable Bible Concordances, Bible Dictionaries, Biblical Commentaries, Biblical language helps, varying reliable translations, etc. are extremely helpful in getting at a right interpretation of Scripture. A word of caution here... be sure that

you are using a “good” and “reliable” source. There are many Bible helps out there that are not theologically and doctrinally sound. Also remember that, there are just man made tools and should not be substituted for Scripture itself. They are helps! Scripture should still be interpreted using the above mentioned criteria.

NOTE: With these basic rules for interpretation and ideas (helps) for understanding Scripture, let’s look at what these three controversial passages are saying concerning “falling from grace” or “losing one’s salvation.”

A Closer Examination Galatians 5:1-6 and Falling from Grace: Galatians 5:1-6 – The focus seems to be on **verse 4** where Paul says, **“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”** The question is, “Who is falling from grace or fallen away from grace in this passage?” The Greek word of “alienated” means “to be separated,” or “to be severed.” The word for “fallen” means “to lose one’s grasp on something.” Paul’s clear meaning is that any attempt to be justified by the law is to reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Those once exposed to the gracious truth of the gospel, who turn their backs on Christ (Hebrews 6:4-6) and seek to be justified by the law are separated from Christ and lose all prospect of God’s gracious salvation. Their desertion of Christ and the gospel only proves that their faith was never genuine. This is a context issue. Galatians 5:4 seems to be saying that is possible to “fall from grace”, but what does it say when it is read in the context of verses 1-6 and in the broader context of the book of Galatians? Is the issue “falling from grace” or is the issue how a person is “justified” or “saved.” The context of the passage and the book give us a better understanding of what is being addressed in verse 4. The book Galatians is about being justified by faith through grace. Historically, Galatians was a circular letter written to churches in the region of Asia Minor known as Galatia. It would be in the area of present day Turkey. Paul had helped to establish these churches probably in his first missionary journey. After his departure, false prophets and teachers known as Judaizers had come into these areas and begun to spread their false teaching, mainly that a person was saved by particular words and not just by grace. The works they emphasized were Jewish works. In other words they taught that in order to become a Christian, you must first become a Jew and obey Jewish laws, rites and custom. You must be “circumcised” and begin to obey all Jewish laws. It was the Judaizers and Galatians who were following them that were falling further and further away from God grace and thus, salvation. So the passage is not even talking about believers, but rather unbelievers and how they are trying to get to God. Their methods were leading them further away from Him, rather than to Him. Grammatical issues in the passage help us to better understand who is being addressed. Notice the change of pronouns between verse 2-4 and verse 5-6. Paul includes himself, as a believer, in the later among those who are being saved, justified by faith. And he addresses the unbelieving Galatians who were buying into the Judaizers works-righteousness method of salvation... namely circumcision.

Some important keys to understanding this passage:

- (1) This passage is dealing unbelievers.**
- (2) This passage is not dealing with the subject of eternal security.**
- (3) This passage is not teaching that a believer can lose his or her salvation.**
- (4) This passage is teaching that a lost person who is trying to be saved by works is moving farther and farther away from saving grace.**

CONCERNS FOR THOSE WHO “FALL FROM GRACE” (Galatians 5:7-12)

“⁷You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. ¹¹And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. ¹²I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” –Galatians 5:7-12

In these six verses, Paul deals with four questions in one way or another. Each has relevance today, just as it did in the first century.

4 Questions of Relevance to Consider:

1. **Who hindered you? (v.7)** – In using the analogy of running, Paul asked the question, *“You ran well, who hindered you...”* Who cut in on you? Who cut in on your stride? Who broke your rhythm? Who took away the joy of your faith? Of course, it was the legalist... the Judaizers.
2. **What effect is it having? (vv.8-9)** – In Galatians 1:6 the apostle wrote of the Galatian Christians, that God had “called” them “by the grace of Christ.” Here in verse 8 Paul says that their *“persuasion”* to live by the Law didn’t *“come from Him who calls you.”* The term “persuade” carries the idea of causing someone to do something by reasoning, urging, or inducement. The legalistic Judaizers had peddled influence to cut in on the liberty/freedom of the Galatians. Paul wrote in *verse 9, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”* There’s no such thing as a little legalism... a little ‘works.’ A little is as damaging to freedom/liberty as a lot.
3. **Where will it lead? (v.10)** – Paul was determined not to give up on his brothers and sisters in Christ in Galatia. Rather, he thought in positive terms as communicated in *verse 10, “¹⁰I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.”* Turning attention to those disturbing the Galatians, Paul spelled out the penalty for their actions, *“...he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.”* Whoa! That judgment is not clearly defined; however, it may mean judgment before the throne, or some kind of judgment in life. Perhaps both.
4. **Why am I persecuted? (v.11)** – It appears that rumor was circulating that Paul himself was preaching circumcision... speaking from both sides of his mouth. He made the point that the mere presence of persecution in his life was evidence enough that such a charge was untrue. Paul says in *verse 11, “¹¹And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.”* If the charge would have been true, the , the “skandalon” or “stumbling block” or “offense” of the Gospel would have been eliminated and the legalists would have instead given him their approval.

COMMENT ABOUT LEGALISM (Galatians 5:12)

“¹² I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” – Galatians 5:12

Appearing here is some of the strongest language to come from the pen of Paul. The term “cut themselves off” is better translated “mutilate themselves.” The Greek word was often used of “castration, such as in the cult of Cybele, whose priests were self-made eunuchs. Paul’s ironic point is that since the Judaizers were so insistent on circumcision as a means of pleasing God, they should go to the extreme of religious devotion and fully mutilate themselves.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING TODAY

Often we don’t get angry enough about the right things. We use strong language about wrong or incidental issues. We’re kind to those who would drag us into legalism, and at the same time ugly to those in our own family. You and I need to come to terms with at least three concerns and need to reflect upon them frequently.

3 Important Questions Worth Asking:

- 1. How highly do I value my freedom in Christ?**
- 2. How strongly do I resist having it stolen from me?**
- 3. How fully do I enjoy its benefits?**