

Galatians

Overview

Introduction

The gospel of Jesus Christ has been rightfully called the gospel of grace:

You are *saved* by God's grace:

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith...

You are *supplied* by God's grace:

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

You are to *serve* by God's grace:

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

God's grace is *sufficient* for you:

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

God's grace is the principle upon which you both *enter* and *experience* the Christian life. You enter the Christian life when you are saved by grace through faith. You experience the Christian life when you are supplied by, and when you serve by, God's sufficient grace through faith.

Something was wrong with the believers in Galatia. They had *entered* the Christian life by grace but they were no longer *experiencing* the Christian life by grace. They had come under the influence of false teachers who told them that, once entered by grace, the Christian life was experienced by keeping certain rules, rites, and regulations. Rather than experience the blessings of God's grace,

Paul described their experience of the Christian life as "bewitched" (3:1) and "bondage" (5:1).

Something is wrong with many believers today! They *entered* the Christian life by grace but are no longer *experiencing* the Christian life by grace. They have come under the false teaching that, once entered by grace, the Christian life is experienced by keeping certain rules, rites, and regulations. Rather than being blessed, they walk around bewitched and in bondage.

How does it happen? As you read through Galatians you encounter three very sobering expressions regarding grace. They are found in 1:6, 2:21, and 5:4.

Galatians 1:6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

Galatians 2:21 "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

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

The believers at Galatia had "turned away" from grace; they had "set aside" grace; and they had "fallen from grace." I think you can put those together and say,

If you "turn away" from grace you will "set aside" grace and find yourself "fallen from grace."

As we introduce the Book of Galatians we want to look at these three sobering realities so that, having **entered** the Christian life by grace, we will go on **experiencing** the Christian life by grace.

Looking at what it means to "turn away" from grace, we would say,

#1 What You *Believe* Indicates Whether Or Not You Have "Turned Away" From Grace
(1:6)

Paul's statement about turning away from grace is set in the context of verses dealing with what you believe about the gospel:

Galatians 1:6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

Galatians 1:7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

You enter the Christian life by grace - by the gospel of God's grace. There is no rule you can keep, no rite you can perform, no regulations that can transform you. You are a sinner thrice condemned: You inherit a sin nature; you have sin imputed to you because of what Adam did in the Garden of Eden; and you commit individual acts of sin. God's standard is absolute perfection, and you fall hopelessly short of it and cannot enter heaven on your own merit.

But grace is God's **un**merited favor! Jesus was perfect; He took your sins upon Him and offers you His perfect righteousness - a favor you do not and cannot merit. When you simply *believe* God for your salvation, you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. You enter the Christian life by grace.

The Galatians had entered the Christian life by grace. But they were no longer experiencing the Christian life by grace. This is an important, a critical, distinction for you to realize if you are to understand the Book of Galatians. When Paul tells them they have turned away from, or set aside, or fallen from grace, he is not saying that they have forfeited their eternal salvation. He is not talking about their salvation; he is talking about their daily experience of the Christian life. They were and remained saved by grace; but they were no longer experiencing the supply and sufficiency of grace in their service to God because they were living under rules and rites and regulations as the principle of life.

That happens still today! Saved by grace, Christians go on to put themselves under rules, rites, and regulations as a means of experiencing the Christian life. Rather than blessing, they experience

bondage. They *believe* that there is something more that they must do to become spiritual.

Paul puts it this way, in Galatians 3:3,

Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

You "began in the Spirit"; you entered the Christian life by grace through faith. You must go on to experience growth and progress in your Christian life by the same principle - *by grace through faith*. Your self-effort to keep rules, rites and regulations cannot accomplish spiritual growth. Your self-effort to keep rules, rites, and regulations is what we call legalism.

So you won't think I am a heretic by what I am going to say next, let me quote someone else. Jon Courson is pastor of Applegate Christian Fellowship in Oregon, a Calvary Chapel affiliate Church. Here is what he says:

Dear saint, get rid of the burden of trying to be spiritual. Get rid of the notion that since you had morning devotions ten times in a row, God owes you a blessing. It doesn't work that way...

"Then I don't have to have morning devotions?" you ask.

No, you don't.

"I can sleep in?"

Yeah, you can.

"I don't have to pray, or study the Word?"

Nope.

You don't *have* to do any of those things. You *get* to. You *get* to check in with God morning by morning, moment by moment. You *get* to spend time late at night or before the sun rises, seeking the face of the Lord. It's not *got* to, it's *get* to - and that makes all the difference in the world, for once you're free from the 'got to's,' you invariably do more than you ever did before.

¹

What do you believe? Do you believe that there are things that you've *got* to do? Or do you believe that there are things you *get* to do? Beloved, you don't **got** to do anything; you **get** to! That is the difference between bondage and blessing in your experience of the Christian life.

¹Galatians, p 55.

You *get* to worship the Lord with other believers; you *get* to start your day with morning devotions; you *get* to give your resources to God; you *get* to share your faith.

When you believe there are things you've got to do, you "turn away" from grace as the principle by which you live the Christian life. When you believe that there are things you get to do, you stand fast in grace as the principle by which you live the Christian life.

#2 How You *Behave* Indicates Whether Or Not You Have Set Aside Grace (2:21)

Paul says, in verse twenty-one of chapter two,

Galatians 2:21 "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

How do you "set aside" grace? Again the context in which you find the verse decides for you.

Earlier in chapter two Paul told this story:

Galatians 2:11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;

Galatians 2:12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

Galatians 2:13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

The Church at Antioch was a Gentile Church. They never kept the Jewish dietary laws, and they never ate separated from Jews. Peter experienced the wonderful freedom of God's grace in Antioch - until some Jews from Jerusalem came and frowned upon his liberty. He separated from the Gentile Christians and maintained the old Jewish dietary regulations. Others with Jewish heritage followed his hypocritical example.

Peter had "set aside grace" as his principle for living the Christian life and had exchanged it for rules, rites, and regulations that he thought would make him more spiritual.

By the way, if you still think that turning away from and setting aside and falling from grace mean that you forfeit your eternal salvation, look at Peter. He did these things in Antioch, but didn't forfeit his salvation. He is an example of exactly how a born-again believer can remain saved but cease to experience grace in his or her daily walk.

Peter's behavior indicated that he had set aside grace as the principle by which he sought to experience God's blessings. For a time, because of fear of the false teachers, he set aside grace and sought to experience God's blessings by behaving according to external rules, rites, and regulations. Instead he was brought into bondage and he badly stumbled other believers.

Each of us has a Peter tendency in our hearts. We are drawn to methods, to programs, that promise to make us more spiritual. "One of the greatest barriers to growth in the Christian life is the notion that we can live a life that pleases God by our own efforts... It is only when we admit our utter powerlessness... that we find hope. When we... turn to the grace of God, the Lord intervenes and does a work that we could not do for ourselves. It is not until we find ourselves driven by desperation to a cry of helplessness and hopelessness that we begin to enjoy real victory in Christ."²

Chuck Smith puts it like this:

The biblical prescription... is not personal discipline or self-control. [Victory] comes only through a Spirit-controlled life... God provides us with the resources for spiritual victory. When we allow the Spirit of God to take over and work strongly in our lives, we can triumph over our fallen nature.³

How glorious it is to come to the end of our resources and to see God change our lives by grace!⁴

Which image would you say more accurately described your Christian life - a factory or a garden?

²Chuck Smith, *Why Grace Changes Everything*, p127-128.

³Ibid., p. 32.

⁴Ibid., p. 137.

A factory suggest work with its pressures, deadlines, and stresses. A garden suggests fruit with its peace, tranquillity, and beauty.

You are not to behave like a factory worker! Instead, let the fruit of the Christian life blossom from you naturally as you abide in Jesus.

#3 Who You Are Bound To Indicates Whether Or Not You Have Fallen From Grace (5:4)

In chapter five you read,

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.

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

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

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

Keeping rules, rites, and regulations is called a "yoke of bondage." Circumcision is one example. It is an external rite that can have no spiritual benefit in your life in helping you to experience the blessings of God. Putting yourself under bondage to some set of rules, rites, or regulations is contrary to the gospel by which you were justified and entered the Christian life. The result will be that you will fall away from the blessings you could experience in the Christian life.⁵

Let me address something that might be troubling you. Whenever we talk about grace versus rules, rites, and regulations, people fear that the grace of God will lead to sinful living unless it is accompanied by some set of laws. Without rules, rites, and regulations - won't people just do whatever they please, trusting in grace?

⁵See Wiersbe on 5:4 for a perspective that this verse is dealing with believers leaving the sphere of God's grace.

The Christian who lives by grace is **not** going to do whatever he or she pleases, but, rather, *they are going to do whatever pleases God!* It is a relationship based on love, not on law. You are bound with Jesus; He is your yokefellow; He is your Bridegroom. The bondage of love is stronger than the bondage of law.

"When you first fell in love with your husband or wife, you didn't have to be told to call him or her; you didn't have to be reminded to hold their hand; you didn't have to be urged to communicate. When you're in love you long to be in touch - and that's what the Father wants from you and me. 'Love Me,' He says. And the more I realize that He loves Me... the more I have no choice but to love Him in return... I do more under love than I ever would do under law."⁶

Jon Courson writes,

Think about that first letter your girlfriend [or boyfriend] wrote you... As you stuck it in your pocket, did you say, "Boy, one of these days I really need to read this letter. I'll set my alarm fifteen minutes earlier and read it first thing in the morning." And then as you rolled out of bed half an hour after the alarm went off, did you say, "I really want to read this letter, but I don't have time now. Maybe tonight. No, [my favorite TV show] is on. Can't miss that. I'll get to it tomorrow."

No, it doesn't work that way. When you got that letter, you ripped it open, read it, analyzed it, parsed the verbs, researched it, read between the lines - you couldn't put it down!⁷

You don't need to be bound by any external laws; you are bound by love! The more you experience God's love, the more He Himself becomes the primary desire and focus of your life. Law is unnecessary; you long to please God simply because you love Him.

And love will protect you from abusing grace through license. Grace doesn't give you the right to do anything you like, any way you like.

If you feel more like a factory than a garden, the answer isn't to be found by seeking another set of external rules, rites, and regulations - no matter how biblical or biblically based they may be. The answer is to be found in falling in love again with Jesus! If you have to force yourself to read the Word, pray, and serve God, then you have left your first love. Forcing yourself to love Him by keeping laws is not going to help; forced love is not first love. God never forces love.

⁶Courson, *Galatians*, p 56.

⁷Ibid., p. 56.

Conclusion

Chuck Smith writes,

"One of the most tragic errors the church can make is to emphasize the work that believers should be doing for God. How many times have you heard heavy, condemning sermons that tell you, "You ought to be praying more! You ought to be giving more! You ought to be witnessing more, or reading your Bible more..." How often do you go to church looking for encouragement only to hear about your failure and how disappointed God must be with you?... [Instead, the New Testament] highlights not what we ought to be doing for God, but what God has already done for us."⁸

Ray Stedman writes,

"The danger is that we think we can deliver ourselves... by setting up Christian programs, by filling our time with activity - teaching in the Sunday School, playing the organ, leading young people's groups, joining Christian clubs and taking part in meetings. We think that is what keeps us free, but that is Galatianism. It's the same kind of bondage that [Paul] wrote about and it will deaden and dampen the spirit of an individual and bring him into bondage..."⁹

What you do for God can never be enough. Your best efforts will be marred by imperfections. But what God has done for you is perfect, beautiful, and complete. You need grace - *not guilt!*

"God has given you one simply responsibility: To believe His promise[s]. You can enjoy the blessing of a relationship with God even though you may not pray enough, or give enough, or sacrifice enough because of your faith in what God has already done [for you]."¹⁰

Beloved, if you "turn away" from grace you will "set aside" grace and find yourself "fallen from grace." Having begun in the Spirit, you will be trying by your own self-effort to be made perfect in the flesh.

The Book of Galatians will challenge you to "stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free."¹¹ Your liberty must not be lost through legalism nor abused through license. It must be maintained through love - love for Jesus, and love for one another.

⁸*Why Grace Changes Everything*, p. 215-216.

⁹*Don't Submit Again to the Slaves Yoke*, from the Ray C. Stedman Memorial Page (World Wide Web).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 216-217

¹¹Galatians 5:1