

## Review Questions (Lesson #13)

### Answer T for true, F for false

1. Becoming circumcised obligated one to keep every requirement of the Law of Moses.
2. As long as we have faith, works are not necessary.
3. Being circumcised as a matter of national custom was still sinful.
4. It is not possible for one who is saved to fall from grace.
5. The Law of Moses could not provide freedom from the bondage of sin.

### Give short answers:

- Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised?
2. What happened to the Galatians who tried to be justified by the Law?
  3. What is the right motive for a faith that is working?
  4. Rather than return to bondage, what did Paul urge the Galatians to do?
  5. What did the Judaizers teach about circumcision?

### Fill in the blanks:

- Our \_\_\_\_\_ is based on the fact that we are \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_, not by \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Peter called the Law “a \_\_\_\_\_ . . . . which neither our \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_ were able to \_\_\_\_\_.”
  3. Trying to be \_\_\_\_\_ (made \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ ) by being \_\_\_\_\_ and keeping the \_\_\_\_\_ will \_\_\_\_\_.
  4. Being \_\_\_\_\_ in order to be \_\_\_\_\_ was a \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.
  5. Paul not only indicates that it is \_\_\_\_\_ for one to \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_, he states emphatically that some of the \_\_\_\_\_ had done so.

## Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

### Lesson #13 Liberty or Legalism? (Galatians 5:1-6)

Imagine a prison inmate who is released, spends a few days in freedom, and then reoffends and returns to prison. Or think of a slave who is set free when a total stranger pays for his liberation. But the freed slave goes back and subjects himself to his old master. In both cases our heart breaks and we ask, “Why would he do that?” Such examples give us some idea of what Paul was up against as he wrote Galatians. Having made several arguments regarding the Law and the Gospel, Paul now returns to his main theme, exhorting the Christians not to return to the Law of Moses, but to stay with the Gospel of Christ. He warns them what it will mean if they continue on their present course, and urges them to stay true to what he had taught them.

By returning to the Law, they were entangling themselves again in a yoke of bondage (5:1). In Acts 15:10, Peter called the Law “a yoke . . . which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.” By obeying the Gospel and becoming Christians, the Jews were acknowledging that they could not be saved by Mosaic Law-keeping. Here in Galatians, Paul had just finished showing how being under the Law was a type of bondage (see 3:23-24 & 4:1; also see the allegory of Hagar and Isaac in lesson 12). Returning to the Law, then, was as foolish as a released inmate deliberately going back to prison, or a freed slave willingly subjecting himself to his old master.

The Judaizers strenuously insisted that Gentile converts to Christ undergo circumcision as well as keeping other aspects of the Law. But Paul wrote in Galatians 5:2, “If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” He referred, of course, to being circumcised in order to be saved (compare Acts 15:1). Motive was everything! Being circumcised in order to be saved was a denial of the Gospel. By contrast, circumcision as a matter of national custom was harmless. Paul himself had Timothy circumcised, not because Timothy needed it in order to be right with God, but so that Timothy could evangelize effectively among Jews. Timothy was half Jew, half Gentile – his circumcision was in keeping with his Jewish heritage, but had nothing to do with salvation. The Judaizers, however, claimed that it was necessary for salvation, and in so doing turned their backs on Christ and His gospel.

Treating circumcision as a condition of salvation obligated them to

keep the entire Mosaic Law (Galatians 5:3). Circumcision was the sign of entrance into the Old Covenant, thus to receive it was a pledge to keep the whole Law. In fact, the Law itself placed everyone under a curse if they didn't "continue in all the things which are written in the book of the Law, to do them" (Galatians 3:10, see Deuteronomy 27:26). Jesus died to redeem us from that curse; thus, to embrace the Law by being circumcised was to forfeit all the benefits of Christ's death and obligate oneself to keep every single aspect of the Law (a virtually impossible task which no one ever did except Jesus).

Paul has now warned that following the Judaizers results in a return to bondage; that Christ will profit them nothing; and that they obligate themselves to keep every single thing the Law required. In Galatians 5:4 he concludes His warning and drives it home: "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by Law; you have fallen from grace." Estranged is the same word Paul used in Ephesians 2:15 where he said Jesus had "abolished" (rendered inactive) the Law of commandments contained in ordinances. He also used that word in Romans 7:6, saying that Christians are "released" from the Law through the body of Christ. So, to go back under the Law was to render Christ inactive and to annul all that He had done for them. What a terrible thought! Whereas He had released them from the Law, they were, in effect, releasing themselves from Him!

Obviously, Paul was not a Calvinist. A fundamental teaching of John Calvin (16th-century reformer) and his followers is that once Jesus has saved someone, that person can never fall away and be lost eternally. The technical name for the doctrine is "perseverance of the saints"; it is commonly known as "once saved, always saved." However, Paul not only indicates that it is possible for one to fall from grace, he states emphatically that some of the Galatians had done so! He did not even hint that these people had never been saved in the first place, as Calvinists routinely teach. How unreasonable would it be to say that a man who fell off of his roof was never really on the roof? Likewise, it defies sound reasoning to say that one who has fallen from grace was never really in a state of grace at all. Scripture is packed with warnings against falling and with examples of people who fell, but Galatians 5:4 would be enough to make the case all by itself.

Rather than entangle themselves with a yoke of bondage, obligate themselves to keep the entire law, and fall from grace, Paul exhorted the

Galatians to "stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free" (5:1). That liberty is the freedom Christ gave us through the gospel, even as He said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free . . . if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:32, 36). This freedom from the slavery of sin could never be provided by the Law of Moses, for it was a "yoke of bondage" (5:1b). Only by staying with Christ and the Gospel could they remain free.

In stark contrast to the Galatians' vain attempt to be justified (made right with God) by Law (5:4), Paul wrote in the very next sentence, "For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness (justification) by faith" (5:5). Our hope is based on the fact that we are justified by faith, not by Law. Specifically, our hope is that we will be raised from the dead to live with the Lord eternally. In Romans 8:23-25 Paul refers to this as "the redemption of our body." Further, he says that "we were saved in this hope" and that "if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (8:24, 25). Such perseverance is exactly what the Galatians needed to keep them from surrendering their hope by returning to bondage.

As noted previously from Acts 15:1, the Judaizers insisted that circumcision was essential for salvation. Paul rejected their contention. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). We have already seen that trying to be justified (made right with God) by being circumcised and keeping the Law will backfire; rather than being justified, one will fall from grace! Circumcision, in and of itself, has no bearing on one's relationship with God, nor does the lack of circumcision. It is simply irrelevant!

God's concern is not whether we are circumcised, but that we have faith – a confident, obedient trust in Jesus Christ. Such a faith must not be unfruitful, but one that works. "Faith, without works, is dead" (James 2:20), and a dead faith will never please God. And not only must our faith work, but it must do so from the right motive: love. Certainly this would include love for God as well as love for other people. Paul told the Corinthians that even he had such strong faith as to move mountains, but did not have love, he was nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).

The Galatians had a clear choice, as do we. They could entangle themselves in a yoke of bondage and fall from grace; or they could keep their trust in Christ, enjoying liberty and eagerly anticipating an eternal home with the Lord in heaven. Which will you choose?