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Galatians 5

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Galatians 5.

Topics.

- Christ has set us free; do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
- Whoever would be justified by the law is severed from Christ.
- We ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.
- Only faith working through love, counts for anything.
- A little leaven leavens the whole lump.
- If I still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?
- Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
- The fruit and works of the Spirit.
- Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh.

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter Paul was disheartened because false Jewish teachers were enticing the Galatians to add Jewish laws to their faith to be saved. He was astonished they even consider conforming to the elementary principles and spirit of the world?" He talked of Christ being formed in those who believe in in the Lord and explained how the promised children of Sarah though being barren would be far more than the children of Hagar who had Ishmael.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

GALATIANS 5:1-3

Christ has set us Free; do not Submit Again to a Yoke of Slavery.

- **Galatians 5:1-3:** For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ²Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

Freedom: in this context refers to the 'Good News' of the gospel which states that we are counted by God to be righteous not because of our self-effort, but because of our faith in the Lord Jesus. Though the Galatians believed in Christ Jewish teachers were enticing them to add Jewish religious laws, customs and traditions to their faith to be saved. Prior to Christ's death and resurrection, the Jews were under the bondage of the law which required religious performance and self-effort, whereas those in Christ are saved by God's grace and their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in contrast to self-effort and the performance of religious ceremonial rites, customs and traditions.

The yoke of slavery: refers to Moses laws of purification, Jewish religious customs, traditions and the act of circumcision, but it is not limited to keeping Jewish ceremonial practises and holy days etc. The yoke of slavery can apply to any religious practice we do by self-effort to make ourselves righteous and deserving of eternal life since the moment we depend on anything other than Christ alone to save us and begin to trust in what we do is the moment we place ourselves under the yoke of slavery, meaning the bondage of doing what we believe we must to make ourselves righteous and acceptable to God for eternal life. In some religions it might be going to church every Sunday, attending a Mass

service every week, knocking on a certain number of doors, giving 10% of one's income to the church or reading a certain amount of Scriptures every day and such like things. Those who are under the yoke of slavery believe that by faithfully doing religious acts they are righteous, but the moment they begin to fail in their effort to attain to what they believe they must do to be righteous is the moment they feel unrighteous. This is because they are depending on what they are doing for their righteousness and not in what Christ has achieved for them on the cross thus they like the Jews have not only placed themselves under the bondage of self-effort in keeping religious acts and performances to be saved rather than in God's grace and their faith in Christ, but they have also nullified what Christ has achieved for them on the cross and thereby make his cruel and brutal death serve no purpose.

Circumcision: in the Jewish mind circumcision was without doubt deemed to be one of the highest standards of righteousness since they believed that an uncircumcised person was separated from God and therefore unclean. The reason the Jewish nation held circumcision in such high regard was because God had made a covenant with Abraham and his offspring saying:

- Every male among you shall be circumcised and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised it shall be an everlasting covenant and any male who is not circumcised shall be cut off from Israel because he has broken my covenant" (Gen. 17:10-14) (Gen. 17:23-27).

Circumcision was a 'sign' they were God's people and not a guarantee of salvation. We know circumcision was a sign because Paul tells the Roman church that:

- Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness before he had been circumcised. Abraham received *the sign of circumcision* as a seal of the righteousness *that he already had by faith* while he was still uncircumcised so that God could make Abraham the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to the uncircumcised as well, to the circumcised who also walk in the footsteps of the faith Abraham had before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:9-12).

Though circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with Israel many in the Jewish faith had turned it into the means of salvation (i.e., as long as they were circumcised, they were right with God). This was a re-occurring problem for Paul amongst the Jewish brothers who believed in Christ. In Galatians chapter one Paul was shocked when he heard that Jewish brothers were distorting the gospel of Christ and of grace and leading brothers and sisters in the Galatian church astray by teaching that they could not be saved simply by believing in Christ, but must also keep the laws of Judaism especially circumcision that he said in stunned amazement:

- I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel (Gal 1:6-7).

Now in this chapter he tells them:

- If they accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to them because everyone who accepts circumcision that they might be saved is obligated to keep the whole law (v2-3).

The problem: Paul faced was not that these Jewish brothers didn't believe in Christ, but that they denied grace to be saved. This is why these Jewish brothers were so deceptive, it is most likely they taught the promises of Abraham, that Jesus was the Son of God and the death and resurrection of Christ, but lacked insight into God's saving grace and that it is our faith that God counts as righteousness and not our self-effort in keeping religious holy days, ceremonial practices or religious habits and traditions.

Whoever would be Justified by the Law is Severed from Christ.

- **Galatians 5:4-8:** You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. ⁷You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion is not from him who calls you.

These verses of Paul are at one level majestically awe-inspiring and on another level horrifically tragic since anyone of us can believe in Christ, his death, and resurrection, his second coming and even have all our Bible knowledge correctly interpreted, but if we are trusting and depending on our own self-effort for righteousness instead of God's grace and our faith in Christ it all counts for nothing since Paul clearly states the moment we believe we can be justified by keeping holy days, ceremonial practices, religious laws, customs and traditions we have separated ourselves from Christ. The majestic and awe-inspiring beauty of these verses that Paul is gloriously shining a floodlight on is the beauty that every brother and sister in Christ is delivered from the struggle and futile effort of attaining to God's perfect standard of righteous that leads to eternal life by their faith in Christ and by God's grace. This is the wonder and glory of the Good News of the gospel of Christ, God counts our faith in his Son as our righteousness and not our own self-effort.

We ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness: Paul's statement, "Through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (v5), means that at this present time we are righteousness by our faith in Christ which is not yet manifested, thus the words, "We eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" refers to the following awe-inspiring words Paul wrote to the Corinthian brothers and sisters:

- What is sown in dishonour and weakness is raised in glory and in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. Just as we have borne the image of Adam the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of Christ the man of heaven because we will all be changed in that mysterious moment in the twinkling of an eye when the last trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ are raised imperishable, and this perishable body puts on the imperishable, and this mortal body puts on immortality (1 Cor. 15:42-53).

Then will the glory of God's perfect righteousness abiding within be manifest in all its holy splendour for the world to clearly see.

NOTE: the word hope in this context does not mean that it is uncertain it is called hope because it is unseen and not yet fulfilled, but the hope itself is guaranteed since it is based on the promise of God and He cannot lie.

To show us all that righteousness is a gift apart from the law Paul wrote:

- The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law (Rom. 3:21).
- Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness (Rom. 4:9).
- Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith (Rom. 4:11).
- Death reigned through that one man's trespass much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17) (See also Rom. 5:15-16).
- The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23).
- By grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

Paul is saying that God at this present moment God counts those in Christ as being righteous because of their faith in Christ, but as we all know this perfect standard of righteousness is not yet manifest nevertheless there is in the heart of every faithful Christian the eager desire for it to be manifested.

A personal observation: throughout my Christian life I have seen faithful brothers and sisters in Christ being enormously harsh on themselves even to the extent of mentally condemning themselves because they could not attain to the standard of righteousness, they deeply desired. On the positive side this attitude shows that they have that Spirit of righteous that God imputes to the spirit of all who are in Christ, but on the negative side it clearly shows that they do not understand that they are saved by grace and faith and not by achieving a certain standard they consciously or unconsciously set for themselves.

Only faith working through love, counts for anything: Paul's words, "Only faith working through love counts for anything" (v6) is not referring to earning our righteousness for salvation to eternal life, but rather that it is not the keeping of holy days, religious laws, habits, rules, traditions etc., that will bring any reward from God but only those things we do from love, i.e., whenever we show kindness, mercy, grace, compassion, forgiveness and justice to another person especially a brother or sister in Christ God notices and stores rewards in the vaults of heaven for those who show love in this manner to others in contrast to simply keeping and performing religious acts and rites.

A personal observation: during my Christian life I have sadly seen certain religious teachers develop a mindset in their followers that every teaching of the Bible is linked to salvation therefore all doctrines must be perfectly interpreted for one to be saved and should someone hold a different view they will lose their salvation, such a mindset produces a response of argument, attack and defence when a brother and sister with different views talk about the Christian faith rather than being able to sit in unity together and reason in the spirit of peace. Certainly we must know the message of the cross and the Gospel that leads us to Christ and to salvation in him, but outside of that knowledge is just knowledge to help us understand our life in Christ in a brighter light, to strengthen our faith and teach us how we should behave while we wait for his glorious return. Once we are established in Christ it is the behaviour of those who belong to Christ that will either bring reward or loss when Christ returns, but even though we may suffer loss we will still be saved because our righteousness is determined by our faith in Christ and God's grace. Paul in his letter to the Corinthian brothers and sisters stated the same thing in the following words:

- No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ whoever builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's *work* will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of *work* each one has done. If the *work* that anyone has built on the foundation survives, they will receive a reward, but if anyone's *work* is burned up, they will suffer loss, though they themselves will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Clearly showing two things firstly not everything is a matter of salvation to eternal life, and secondly that everything we do is a matter of reward or loss.

GALATIANS 5:9-10

A little Leaven Leavens the whole Lump.

- **Galatians 5:9-10:** A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

The words, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (v9) are in the context of being saved by grace and faith contrasted to being saved by the LAW. Specifically it is referring to adding circumcision to the Galatians faith in Christ to be saved, Paul is telling the Galatian brothers and sisters once they add a little of the law to their faith it won't be long before they are adding many more laws to their faith because if they are going to depend on one part of the law to save them they have to keep the entire law. Paul's statement, "I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine (v10) means that Paul is confident they will return to trusting in their faith and God's grace for their righteousness as he does rather than depending on Jewish laws such as circumcision etc., while the words, "The one who is troubling them" refers to the chief Jewish leader (no-doubt he as other associates) and the words, "He will bear the penalty," refers to the judgment he will receive when Christ returns.

GALATIANS 5:11-13

If I, still Preach Circumcision, why am I still being Persecuted?

- **Galatians 5:11-13:** But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been removed. ¹²I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate (Cut off in KJV) themselves! ¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

To convince the Galatians that Paul considers circumcision (and by extension any religious act or deed) worthless for adding anything to salvation he is shining a spotlight on two facts:

1. If he taught that circumcision was important for justification the Jews would not be persecuting him as they do.
2. If taught that circumcision had greater power to save than the death and resurrection of Christ, he would not be an offence to the Jews.

The cross was an offence to the Jews because gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ teaches that Christ's death and resurrection did away with the LORD'S everlasting covenant of circumcision God made with Abraham and his offspring. (See notes on circumcision following verse three).

NOTICE: even though the Galatian brothers and sisters were esteeming the false Jewish leaders above Paul and being led astray Paul still has a tender love for them, his antagonism was not toward those being deceived, but toward those who were leading them away from Christ. His earnest heartfelt desire toward those who were leading the Galatian brothers and sisters away from Christ was that they would emasculate themselves, meaning they would lose their corrupting influence over the Galatians and be totally cut off from them.

You were called to freedom: Paul's eternal, glorious and majestic words, "You were called to freedom" refers to the grace Christ achieved for us through his death and resurrection, it means we are saved to eternal life and everlasting glory not by any merit of our own but because of God's abundant grace which is without walls and without boundaries for those who faithfully follow Christ. This is why Paul says, "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh," meaning an opportunity for self, ego, pride, lust and greed etc. The statement does not only refer to sensual acts, but also embraces the desires of self, pride and ego, i.e. craving importance, prominence and power and using others to attain them, gossiping and backbiting to degrade and demean another and thereby exalt oneself and causing division (v15) it primarily it refers to putting self before others thus the reason Paul adds the words, "But through love serve one another" (v13) meaning speak well of each other and do-good in contrast to serving self, ego and pride etc. Paul is telling the Galatian brothers and sisters and by extension all of us since we are

saved by grace and faith and not our own self-effort don't deliberately abuse God's majestic and holy gift, don't take advantage of God's abundant goodness and the grace that Christ through great suffering achieved for us on the cross, but rather endeavour to do-good not only to those within the Kingdom of God, but also to those outside of its eternal glory.

GALATIANS 5:14-15

You shall Love your Neighbour as Yourself.

- **Galatians 5:14-15:** For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

The command, "Love your neighbour as yourself," means do not deliberately do harm to other humans. No sane person deliberately does things to inflict pain on themselves, loving others as you love yourself is not about feeling some warm and fuzzy emotion towards others, it is about not hurting others as you would not hurt yourself. The thing God hates the most is when we do harm to another person, physically, financially, sexually, verbally, mentally, emotionally or spiritually and the thing God loves the most is when we do-good to others. The Galatians had fallen from the grace of the Gospel which meant that Christ no longer dwelt in their hearts by faith and therefore it is certain they were ruled by self, ego, pride, and all kinds of uncharitable attitudes, thus the word bite in this context is used in the sense of contending and striving (as dogs and wild beasts).

Devour: the word devour carries the idea that by their contentions they will destroy the spirituality and happiness of each other; their characters would be ruined; and the church brought to ruin (as wild beasts contend sometimes until both are slain). Since love is the cement of a church the quickest way to destroy the spirituality and peace of it and annihilate the influence of the Spirit of Christ is to cause religious contention and strife.

GALATIANS 5:16-21

Walk by the Spirit, and you will Not Gratify the Desires of the Flesh.

- **Galatians 5:16-21:** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW CONTRASTING THE FLESH (THE OLD NATURE) AND THE SPIRIT (THE NEW NATURE)

The flesh: is attracted to sin

The Spirit: is attracted to righteousness.

The flesh: is not with Christ

The Spirit: is with Christ always.

The flesh: is condemned already

The Spirit: is justified already.

The flesh: is sinful always

The Spirit: is righteous always (by faith).

The flesh: is fed by the power of the flesh

The Spirit: is fed by the power of Christ.

The flesh: will die forever

The Spirit: will live forever.

The character of the flesh: is carnally minded meaning, it is always minded and motivated to satisfy the demands of self, ego and pride and fulfill their desires, it is sensuous with cravings inciting to sin and never satisfied. It is opposed to God and the higher divine nature within it and will therefore never subject itself to God's law.

The fruit or works of the flesh: refer to unlawful sex, adulteries, rivalries quarrels, contentions, strife division, uprising, controversies, arguments, quarrels, discord, strife, contention, rebellion and riots.

Living in the flesh: means living a lifestyle that involves sexual immorality, orgies, idolatry, envy, jealousy, anger, rivalries, quarrelling, rebellion, taking drugs, drunkenness, and causing arguments, quarrels and strife.

Setting the mind on the flesh: is to be solely focused on the things self, ego and pride crave it is to be mentally consumed by the things of the world and all it has to offer (i.e., riches, wealth and material possessions, power, importance, parting, drinking and sexual freedom).

GALATIANS 5:22-24

The Fruit and Works of the Spirit.

- **Galatians 5:22-24:** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The fruit or works of the Spirit: embraces every action and deed that stems from love which means the works of the Spirit are everything we do that benefits or enhances another person's life in some manner this is why there is no law against the fruits of the Spirit, not one of them will ever bring harm to another human.

The character of the Spirit: is humble, modest, respectful, giving, kind, gracious, polite, courteous and well-mannered.

Living in the Spirit: means living in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Setting the mind on the Spirit: is to focus the mind on the things of God and on Christ, it means when we plan our lives and what we do our minds are always conscious that what we do can either honouring God or offend God. It means we are always consciously aware that our behaviour, speech and lifestyle will either honour or dishonour the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is about being mentally conscious that we are a reflection of the Lord on earth and being alertly aware that we can be a good or bad reflection, thus setting the mind on the Spirit is about being determined

to be a good reflection of Christ in whatever career path we take and in all we do and say. Simply put, 'Setting the mind on the Spirit' is being determined to 'Live in the Spirit' (as explained above).

Those who belong to Christ Jesus, have crucified the flesh: the words, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24) does not refer to the natural physical body, nor does it mean we should starve or afflict our bodies with lashings as a certain few do in some religions. The word flesh in this context refers to the corruption of the old nature, the old man and carnal heart (the world calls it the lower nature). The phrase, "Crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" means that the power of the flesh to dominate and control our lives has been broken, since the supreme desire of the faithful who are in Christ is to honour God and the name of their Lord, thus all the affections, passions, and lusts, disorderly wishes and desires that we may feel and desire contrary to love and moderation have lost the governing and controlling dominating power that they once had. But it does not mean that we are totally free from the flesh (the corrupt nature) with its sinful dysfunctions and aberrations since it is still alive, but it's alive as a person fastened to a cross may be alive, though they cannot act and move as before, being under restraints, so the flesh though crucified and under the restraints of God's love and grace cannot dominate, reign and govern as before, yet it is alive, and acts, and operates, and oftentimes has great sway and influence thus it is in the sense that the flesh is deprived of its reigning power that it is said to be crucified. Paul being fully aware of this principle wrote earlier in this letter to the Galatians:

- I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Gal. 2:19-21).

Meaning when the flesh did get the victory over Paul, he did not condemn himself or mentally beat himself up, but rather embraced the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Paul's deepest desire was to live perfectly before God, but he knew because of the flesh this noble and high desire of the heart was unattainable, so he chose to trust in the Good News of the Gospel of Christ that states that those in Christ are counted righteous by God because of their faith in His Son who laid his life down for them and therefore Paul's trust and dependence for righteous was not in his own self-effort to attain to it, but in his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Paul means when he said:

- I do not nullify the grace of God (Gal 2:21).

Paul the perfect example for all who faithfully followed Christ is gloriously shining a floodlight on the fact that he does not condemn himself in those moments the flesh gains a victory and thereby make the grace of God that Christ achieved for him on the cross serve no purpose. Paul statement:

- If justification was attainable through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (Galatians 2:21).

Means that if any one of us could attain to the high standard of the law then Christ death was pointless since there would be no need for it which clearly shows that the flesh though crucified in that it has lost its reigning power and governing control over us will in certain circumstances and weak moment still seize the opportunity to raise its ugly head. This is the reason Paul lives his life by faith and in God's grace as we all should.

GALATIANS 5:25-26

If we Live by the Spirit let us also Walk by the Spirit.

- **Galatians 5:25-26:** If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited (Vain glory in KJV) provoking one another, envying one another.

Living by the Spirit: means that we live by faith and in God's grace in those moments that the FLESH raises its ugly head, it means we trust and depend on our FAITH in Christ to be counted righteous by God and not in our own self-effort or any religious rites, practises and habits we may do no-matter how good they maybe.

Let us also walk by the Spirit: in the context of this verse means if we are going to live by faith and grace to be counted righteous then also make it our supreme desire to live a lifestyle in the Spirit which means living in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-24) it is about doing-good to others and treating people whether in Christ or not with decency, respect and showing justice to all in contrast to living a lifestyle in the flesh and following its passions and desires to satisfy self, ego, pride, greed and lust etc. Simply put, walking by the Spirit means: Let your outward lifestyle reflect your inward faith.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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