

January 5, 2020

"Christ has set us free..."

"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." Galatians 5:1

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is no gospel at all."

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing." Galatians 1:6-2:21

As we read the first few chapters of the Apostle Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia we might conclude that what he addresses in these verses has little to do with us. This might be especially so if we understand a bit about the churches of Galatia.

Galatia was a Roman province in what is today Turkey. On his first missionary journey with Barnabas, Paul toured this area planting churches in several communities.

At some point after these churches were established a group of Jewish Christians visited the area with a 'new' teaching. They held that Gentile believers must first become Jews before they could become Christians. Paul stood against this false teaching which eventually led to a major conference of Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem where this teaching was repudiated. (Acts 15)

This letter to the churches of Galatia is set against the background of this controversy and so seems to have little application to us today. But I am convinced it is as applicable now as it has ever been. While we no longer demand that would be Christians must first become Jews, we still demand in much of our teaching an adherence to a system of laws in order that the lost might be saved. We still struggle, I believe, with the entire concept of grace.

In this letter the Apostle points these young believers back to the grace they first accepted. Our choices are no different today than the choices faced by these early believers. On the one hand we can accept in faith the overwhelming grace of God created for us through the death of Jesus on the cross and respond to that great gift. Or, on the other hand, we can seek to build our own salvation through the perfect keeping of a system of 'laws' or rules.



Paul makes it clear that the latter approach is not a ***"...different gospel, but no gospel at all."*** We cannot be saved by keeping the rules; not ever. James explains this very well. He writes, ***"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*** (James 2:10)

If I am trying to be saved by my perfect rules-keeping I am lost because breaking just one rule condemns me. While living a life of obedience is essential, I am only saved by the grace of God, who satisfied the requirement of the ***"law of sin and death"*** once and for all. Like Paul, the Galatian believers had accepted this grace through their working faith, and they needed to stand firm in that faith.

So what is this working faith. Again and again Paul makes this point in his many letters. He summarizes it beautifully in this letter when he writes, ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no***

longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."



Our only reasonable response to the grace of God is not to attempt to create our own righteousness by rules-keeping, but to allow our selves to be "...*crucified with Christ*". In following Jesus to the cross we die to the self-seeking flesh that we are, and from that point forward Christ lives in us. This is the foundation of our salvation and what we have accepted in faith. Keeping the rules will never save us, but living by the standards that God sets will always be a natural outcome for those who have died to themselves.