

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FALL FROM GRACE?

TEXT: GALATIANS 5:1-15

INTRODUCTION:

1. One of the most misunderstood phrases in the Bible is found in Galatians 5:4 – "fallen from grace."
2. This Scriptural phrase is often taken out of context. For example, when high profile preachers like Jimmy Swaggart get caught in adultery, the media reports that they had "fallen from grace."
3. They certainly fell into sin, but they did not fall from grace.
4. Some churches teach that a man can be saved for a period of time, get into sin and backslide, and then "fall from grace" and be lost. Though many sincere Christians hold this view, in my opinion it is unscriptural.
5. John Wesley wrote, "I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly."
6. The context of Galatians 5:4 has nothing to do with losing one's salvation.
7. On the contrary, this passage is talking about religious people who are trying to please God by keeping the law.
8. If this Scripture taught that a person could lose his salvation, it would contradict many other Scriptures (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:27-29).

I. FALLING FROM GRACE MEANS BEING ENTANGLED WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE (5:1-6).

1. Galatians chapter 5 picks up where chapter 4 leaves off. Those of us that are saved are "free" (4:31). Therefore, if we are free, we should "stand fast therefore..." (5:1).
2. This entire epistle deals with the vindication of the pure gospel of salvation by grace. We are saved by grace, not by keeping the law.
3. "Run, man, and live," the law commands,
But gives me neither legs nor hands;
Far better news the Gospel brings,
It bids me fly and gives me wings.
4. We no longer need the external force of the law to keep us in God's will because we now have the internal leading of the Holy Spirit (cf. 5:5, 16).
5. Grace supplies the indwelling filling of the Spirit to enable us to live on a higher plane than the law demanded.
6. Putting oneself under the law means being entangled "in the yoke of bondage" (5:1; cf. 4:9, 24, 25; Acts 15:1, 10).

7. Circumcision is not wrong, but teaching one is saved by getting circumcised is wrong (Acts 15:1; Gal. 5:2).
8. If a person attempts to please God by being circumcised, then he is under obligation "to do the whole law" (Gal. 5:3). People tend to have a "pick and choose" attitude toward the law but that is inconsistent and contrary to Scripture (cf. James 2:10; Gal. 3:10).
9. Over and over in this epistle, Paul is saying that legalism eliminates the need for the cross (Gal. 5:3, 4; cf. 2:21). "Christ shall profit you nothing" (5:2).
10. Grace is a higher standard than the law (5:4). I know people who are trying to live under the law (Orthodox Jews, SDA, other cults, et al) and I know Christians that are living by God's grace. Grace is a much higher plane.
11. Some interpret 5:4 to mean, "ye are fallen from the sphere of grace." In other words, law and grace are two different spheres and cannot be confused.
12. "You cannot mix grace and law. If you decide to live in the sphere of law, then you cannot live in the sphere of grace" (Warren Wiersbe).
13. When one lives by grace, he depends upon the power of the Holy Spirit. But if he is under the law, he must depend upon himself and his own efforts. And these efforts can never accomplish what faith can accomplish "through the Spirit" (5:5).
14. We are living by faith, waiting "for the hope of righteousness," i.e. the second coming of Christ.
15. Again, this is not through law-keeping ("circumcision" – 5:6), "but faith which worketh by love" (5:6; cf. vss. 13, 14).
16. Faith is complete dependence on God and it manifests itself in service to God. The motive of all our service is love. Therefore, it is "faith which worketh by love," i.e. our faith is prompted by love, not by circumcision or any other rituals.
17. It is our love for God and love for others. There are many laws on the books which insist that parents treat their children properly, see to it that they go to school, feed them, clothe them, etc. My wife and I do not do these things out of fear of getting in trouble with the authorities. We do it because we love our children.

II. FALLEN FROM GRACE MEANS NOT OBEYING THE TRUTH (5:7).

1. The Judaizers considered themselves obedient to God because they were diligent in keeping certain aspects of the law, such as circumcision. However, Paul rebukes them for not obeying the truth (5:7).
2. Legalism is disobedience because God has stated very clearly that we are saved by grace and we are kept by grace.

3. Paul frequently used athletic illustrations (5:7a). We do not run the race to win salvation. We run because we are already saved. We run to win the prize (rewards, not salvation).
4. The Galatians had started out alright but they were now being hindered by the false teachings of the Judaizers. By listening to them and accepting their errors, they were disobeying the truth.
5. Anytime this sort of thing happens, and Christians are being "hindered," you can be sure it is not of God. "This persuasion" (these errors) are from the devil (5:8).
6. "Leaven" (5:9) in the Bible always represents evil, usually false doctrine (Matt. 16:6, 11), and sometimes immorality (I Cor. 5:1-8).
7. Here in Galatians 5:9, it represents legalism, the false doctrine of the Judaizers, who mixed together law and grace.
8. The natural tendency of leaven (yeast) is to permeate all the meal and spread. Therefore, a little leaven (error) in the church inevitably leads to more error and begins to spread, etc.
9. It has to be dealt with or else it will ruin a church. It cannot be ignored or left alone. False teaching and false teachers bring the judgment of God (5:10). Paul was confident that the Galatians would wise up and reject them (5:10).

III. FALLING FROM GRACE MEANS AVOIDING THE CROSS (5:11).

1. Legalism avoids "the offence of the cross" (5:11). Preaching good works or law-keeping appeals to the flesh. Telling people they need to be born again annoys them.
2. If Paul preached circumcision, the Jews would not hate him and he would not be persecuted (5:11). But he preached the cross and so he was persecuted and eventually executed.
3. The cross is an offence to man. Go out and knock on some doors and some people get upset (especially Roman Catholics!) The cross is a reminder of man's awful sin. The cross tells proud sinners that they cannot get to heaven by their good works. The cross gives no place to the flesh.
4. The preaching of the cross offends people but we should try not to offend people.
5. Paul appears to be using sarcasm (5:12).
6. Christian liberty is not license to sin (5:13). Those who take it that way probably are not saved. We love Jesus, so we hate sin. Christian liberty is not license to sin but an opportunity to serve (5:13b).
7. On the one extreme is license; on the other extreme is legalism. The Christian life is not either one – it is liberty in Christ (5:13).

8. A.T. Pierson said, "True freedom is found only in obedience to proper restraint. A river finds liberty to flow, only between banks: without these it would only spread out into a slimy, stagnant pool. Planets, uncontrolled by law, would only bring wreck to themselves and to the universe. The same law which fences us in, fences others out; the restraints which regulate our liberty also insure and protect it. It is not control, but the right kind of control, and a cheerful obedience which makes the free man."
9. We are saved by grace. We are kept by grace. And we serve by grace (5:13; cf. I Cor. 15:9, 10).
10. Love is the motive for Christian service (5:13, 14; cf. vs. 6).
11. The law of God can be summarized in one word – "love" (5:14). If I love God, I will not take His name in vain. If I love God, I will not worship idols. If I love God, I will keep the Lord's Day holy. If I love God, I will honor and obey my parents.
12. If I love my parents, I will obey them. If I love my neighbor, I will not lie to him or steal from him, etc.
13. If I love my neighbor I will try and win him to Christ.
14. If I love my pastor and I love my church, I will give generously to support them.
15. Trying to be saved by keeping the law gives place to the flesh and this results in strife and hatred (5:15). The picture here is of wild animals attacking each other. This Scripture proves that the law cannot force people to get along with each other. No matter how many rules are set up, there is no guarantee of spirituality.

CONCLUSION:

1. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to live for Christ (5:5, 16).
2. There are at least 14 references to the Holy Spirit in this epistle. Lord willing, we will pick up on that next time (5:22-24).