

## Galatians | The Grace Manifesto

### *Standing Firm In Freedom*

5.1-15

8.4.19

*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*

*<sup>2</sup> Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. <sup>4</sup> You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. <sup>5</sup> For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.*

*<sup>7</sup> You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. <sup>9</sup> A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. <sup>10</sup> I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. <sup>11</sup> But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. <sup>12</sup> I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.*

*<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*

We've been looking at St. Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia... and we're nearing the end.

And we're thinking about results. What are the results of studying this book? We've called it a revolutionary document so what has changed in your life (as we've looked at this letter)...OR what will change in your life as you continue to think it through and build on this new foundation/paradigm?

Today's section is the start of what we might think of as the practical part of the letter and we're wondering ...what now? If we adopt this new way of thinking about God and religion/spirituality and people and the Bible and ourselves...if we GET the paradigm-shift what should we expect to be different about our lives...how will this grace-revolution affect us?

And what are we to do... to respond... to this main idea (this Person) at the center of this letter? Is this all just a theory/idea/concept OR does it actually change our thinking, our words, deeds, desires? What do we expect to happen?

And what role (if ANY) do we play in this process of change and revolution? How to practice Galatian Spirituality?

Let's look at Paul's summary of the Big Idea and the bridge to change: 1) Ritual and Results 2) Failing Into Love and 3) The "Unbligations" of Freedom

St Paul brings everything to a very sharp point when he says (2) (and note the gravity), "LOOK! I, Paul, say to you that IF you receive circumcision, Christ will be of NO benefit to you."

In other words, if you undergo this ritual as an attempt to get God to save you, bless you, accept you – if you endure this surgical procedure because you think it'll make you right with God – then you have returned to that old logic (this-for-that, causality) and the New Logic doesn't apply to you.

And let me remind you that IF you want to USE that old logic to make yourself right with God, you can't stop at that ritual – circumcision is only the beginning and after that you are obligated to keep ALL God's Law perfectly – and ONLY if you DO IT ALL will you be able to go to God and say, "Look, Lord, I never, ever broke any of Your commands – I did everything You commanded – I am righteous!"

And IF you undergo this ritual and then do everything God commands AND do it all from the heart ONLY because you totally love God and totally love others, THEN you can say that you are a truly righteous person. V. 3 "Every man who receives circumcision is obligated to keep the whole Law..."

But if you GO that way – you have no need for Jesus Christ – you have been severed from Christ. If YOU cut off flesh in order to be right with God – then YOU are cut off – because if you can fix yourself then why do you need Jesus Christ?

v. 4 – "You who are seeking to be justified by Law have fallen from grace." i.e. you're back in the old logic. You THOUGHT the ritual would result in your being right with God but instead YOU are cut off.

So, what are people to do? Well, you have to trip, you have to stumble and fall. It's what the Apostle calls (11) the great scandal, the stumbling block.

See, the legalists who had infiltrated those Turkish churches... maybe led by ONE charismatic leader (10) they were trying to say, “Paul basically agrees with us, Paul is basically a legalist but you poor, dumb sheep just misunderstood Paul... he preaches circumcision for the Gentiles!”

And Paul says, “If I preach circumcision...then the scandal of the cross is erased...BUT I DON'T PREACH circumcision and the scandal of the cross is NOT erased...in FACT it's the answer!”

We are all running through life picking up evidence wherever we can find it that we're good people, the kind who deserve to be blessed by God...We pick up all these packages of proof – we're very good and successful at work (that's a big box of evidence).

I'm well-read and well travelled (that's another sign that I'm good in the sight of God). My ancestors were on the Mayflower (another signal I carry around), and I keep my garage very neat (another bag of righteousness) and I've been badly treated and terribly misunderstood (that's a box God will appreciate) I once visited a sacred site (another indicator another bag of goodness), I was baptized (another container), I recycle and don't use plastic straws (there's a big carton of green holiness God will dig)... I was circumcised...or I refused to be circumcised – and God will be VERY proud of me!

And Paul says, “As we're amassing all this evidence that we're good people...all these parcels, packages and boxes I hold on to and that prove my worthiness I then come upon a Sight... a hideous, horrible vision of a truly good Man...hanging, bloody, pierced and distorted so badly He doesn't even look like a man...

And looking at Him...I realize that He, the Fairest of them all – He is taking my place... He is become sin for me – He is taking the justice that I deserve... and looking at Him, I trip and fall... and all of my boxes and packages and evidences of my goodness spill out of my arms and it turns out they're all empty and I'm not as righteous as I thought I was...I'm not righteous at all... I'm exposed, I'm fallen, I've failed, a sinner.

But HE WAS CUT OFF for me... and I have to stumble on that – the scandal of grace. God has done for me what I could NOT do for myself – God loves me and God has freed me from what I deserve... and freed me from the demands of a society that send me constant signals of what I must do to be enough.

I heard someone say, “You don't so much FALL in love as FAIL in love...and when you see your failings and you face up to the fact that you deserve to be cut off but Jesus Christ was cut off FOR YOU – you fail right into His nail-scarred hands and you give up; you stumble into the fierce love of God and you trust.

And then you begin to live by this New Logic – acceptance with God that’s received NOT achieved. It’s not the result of some sacrifice I made or anything I cut off – but only by His being cut off for me.

Now, what, as we move into this practical section of the letter...Paul summarizing his whole argument and then telling us how we can expect it all to play out in our lives and relationships, WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

And this is the phrase I’ve coined, “The UNbligations of Freedom.” We’re ready for Paul to say, “Therefore, since God did this for you, show Him how much you appreciate it by being good and keeping His commands...” But that’s NOT exactly Paul’s approach – to give us standard obligations.

Instead, the first imperative in today’s text is: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free SO keep standing firm and don’t submit to a yoke of slavery.” Keep standing firm in FREEDOM.

It’s like an UNbligation – people will try to tell you ways you can prove your worthiness. Advertisers will take a shot. Your family and friends will have plenty of ideas. Your church or religious community will show you ways to prove your worth and how to pick up boxes of evidence to demonstrate that you are a good person, a cool person, a hip person, a socially conscious person and you must look them in the eye and say, “NO! My only proof is the empty tomb of Jesus. That’s how I know God accepts me.”

“And beware”, says Paul, “when virtue-signaling is allowed into a church and we start making people PROVE their worthiness by looking the right way, talking and DEMONSTRATING that they’re OUR kinda’ people – beware! That leaven (v. 9 that yeast, virus) will spread quickly. Soon you’ll be comparing, competing and checking circumcision cards at the door.”

Someone called it Christian Cannibalism, “But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.” (15) I think this is what Paul has in mind when he says, “Don’t use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” i.e. be very careful about competition in the church. If freedom leads to strife, and jealousy it’s MISUSED FREEDOM.

Learn what really IS THĒ issue of the truly Christian life AND also what are non-issues – (6) “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.” You wanna get circumcised – go ahead.

You want NOT to be circumcised – fine. Just don’t make either of these choices a religious/spiritual requirement or a way to prove yourself to God and to others. Conservative or Liberal. Rock or Classical. Neat garage or Well-used garage (did you see what I did there?) Toilet-paper over the top or the other way – you’re free to develop a conscience on these issues and make the best decision you can – JUST DON’T IMPOSE THOSE choices on others.

So, what, are we just mushy, hippy-type people with no convictions or values? No!

But when it comes to our life with God, when it comes to ultimate things and our being forgiven and accepted before God – i.e. being IN Christ (HE being our representative and WE finding our core-identity by belonging to Him) when it comes to that, SEE WHERE YOU'RE GOING – two crucial ideas:

First, (v. 5) “we are, through the Spirit, by faith eagerly waiting for the hope of righteousness.” As I look in the mirror and complain, “Uh-oh! It’s NOT working! I belong to Jesus but I don’t look like Jesus! I should be a much better person by now...but I still don’t like so-and-so...and I’m still worrying a lot... and still angry and reliant of comforts to make me happy...” Then, the Spirit of God directs me to Jesus Christ and I put my trust/faith in Him. I come to see that because of Jesus Christ God accepts me (not because of the progress I’ve made or failed to make!) and one day the righteousness that’s declared will be mine in practice. Now, I hope, I live believing that God will complete the work and make me glorious.

Second, when I say that neither circumcision nor circumcision means anything it’s not because I have no convictions – I just see that what really matters is faith working through love. I’m actually trusting that God likes me...He delights in me...He is totally pleased with me because of Jesus Christ.

And as I receive that status and as I continue to trust and rely on that, God’s grace (received by faith – the organ or reception) God’s grace received by faith will show up in love... and that’s what I can expect...and THAT’S WHAT REALLY MATTERS!