

Exegetical Notes – Galatians 5:1-15

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Galatians 5:1-15

Verse 1

¹ 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.

- The word “freedom” is the first word in this sentence. Greek allows one to prioritize/emphasize the noun of greatest importance in a sentence or in a passage by placing that word first in the sentence. That is what Paul does here. In Christ, we are set free from the burden of keeping the Law of Moses. Keeping the Law was a burden because it required perfection. If you break the Law in one minor part, you have broken the entire Law. Since we all fall short of perfection, the Law enslaved us to an impossible task. We cannot save ourselves by keeping the Law because we cannot keep the Law.
- Christ set us free of any obligation to the Law. After living a sinless life by keeping the Law perfectly, he died on the cross. Since death is the reward, or wages, of sin, he should not have had to die. But he paid the cost, bore the consequences, of our sin. By so doing, he set us free from any obligations to the Law. We are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. We cannot save ourselves.
- Since Christ has set us free, we should not enslave ourselves again. We do good works to honor God. We keep the moral law because it pleases God. But we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We should not think that we save ourselves, or that good works contribute to our salvation.

Verses 2-6

² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away

from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

- Anyone who bases his salvation on works, like circumcision or keeping the feasts of Judaism, has made Christ of no value in the matter of their salvation. To be saved by the Law you must obey the Law in every part, not just the parts you choose.
- If you choose salvation by works of the Law, which no one except Christ has ever been able to achieve, you make what Christ did for you unnecessary. You have rejected the grace of God in Christ for your own pitiful attempt to save yourself by keeping the Law.
- While we await our salvation through grace, the Holy Spirit gives us hope. If we trust Jesus to save us, we will be saved. This is ALL that matters. We must put our hope for salvation in Jesus alone, not in Jesus and our own ability to keep the Law.

Verses 7-12

⁷ You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” ¹⁰ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. ¹¹ Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹² As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

- Paul says that the Galatians had understood all this. They were “running a good clean race,” trusting Jesus alone for their salvation. But someone stepped in front of them and cut them off from the truth. This person(s) have thrown them into confusion. This false teaching has worked its way through the Galatian Church as yeast works its way through bread dough.
- This teaching is a lie! It did not come from him, as their pastor, nor from God through the Holy Spirit. This is why false teaching must be stopped. If left undealt with, it will work its way through the church just as we see happening in the church today.
- If Paul would join in teaching this lie, persecution would stop. But he is persecuted by the Jews because he will not agree that salvation comes by God’s grace and by works of the Law.

- He wishes that those who are teaching these lies to the Galatians would harm themselves rather than the people of God. His words here are quite sharp and drip with sarcasm.

Verses 13-15

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

- See Matthew 7:12, 5:17 and Mark 12:31. Jesus agrees with Paul that the whole law is summed up in this one command, “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”
- See Romans 6:1-14. Our freedom in Christ is not an excuse to sin.
- Teaching each other wrong things in the name of God is a great sin against the body of Christ, the Church. By doing so, false teachers cause the Church to self-destruct.

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