

What is in view

We are turning back to where we were a few weeks ago in Galatians and picking up a thought from that study. Paul insists that if we adopt a rule-based formula for maintaining our life with God, we *lose out!* He isn't saying that we will lose our salvation, but we will surely undercut our experience of a life that was built on grace and faith.

What is helpful to note

As we have noted previously, for Paul any submission to any kind of "moral reformation" plan undermines the life of freedom that Jesus offers to those who believe. In the first few verses of chapter 5, he spells out the tragic consequences that we bring upon ourselves by turning to such a plan for life with God.

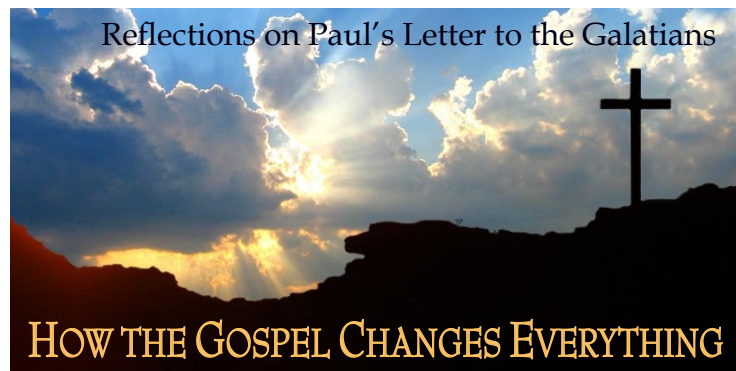
Circumcision is the "act" in view; but it isn't that single act that is at issue. By submitting to circumcision (which was a defining mark of the Old Testament covenant), the believers were declaring their submission to rules-based approach to life with God. That act represents any and all approaches to life with God based on "following specific rules."

As we noted a few weeks ago, Paul goes on to describe a number of consequences to moving from a life rooted in grace and embraced through faith to a life anchored in "doing stuff" for God to secure and ensure His approval.

He says that for those who adopt the rule-based approach "Christ will be of no advantage to you."¹ This doesn't mean that the one who resorts to rule-based living loses his or her salvation; only that you can't experience the "advantage" that Christ offers you if you try to get life on your terms through what you do!

"Christ has set us free and this act of liberation has consequences. Because of it, believers should resist any attempt to bring them into bondage of any sort. A great price has been paid to bring about their freedom; let them then live in the freedom into which Christ has brought them."

Leon Morris



Paul also argues that to adopt the Judaizers approach results in one being "severed" from Christ and is a departure from grace (5:4).³ Paul's language of being "severed" from Christ is the same language he used to speak of a covenant being "annulled" in 3:17. The idea is "to render ineffective." *If you choose to live by rules, you detach yourself from the experience of living by grace through faith in Jesus.*

The rule keepers admitted that faith in Jesus *was part of a godly life*; they were simply insisting that *keeping specific "holy rules" was what was needed to secure such a life.* They sought "the hope of righteousness" (5:5) but thought that such final and complete acceptance was to be secured by their efforts.

Consistent with Paul's language in Galatians 3:1-3, the full experience of the future fulfillment of all of God's promise of righteousness is ours on the same basis as our initial justification before Him: by grace and through faith.

The Judaizers were pursuing the right end by the wrong means. That would be like filing for taxes (that is the right thing), but using the wrong forms and following the wrong guidelines (that would be the wrong way to pursue it). And, we know what happens when we "file" wrongly! We can end up paying for it. And for Paul, what it costs the believer to pursue their ongoing relationship with Jesus the wrong way is a loss of the experience of grace. You no longer let Jesus carry you into ever-deepening experiences of life with God but trust yourself to make it happen.

Talking to your group

You are revisiting a topic that may seem already familiar to your group, but we want to make sure that we are clear on what Paul is seeking to drive home. We are not trying to belabor the point, but before we get to the practical outworking of this life (through "walking in the Spirit" in Galatians 5:16-26) we want to make sure that we have well-established Paul's grounds for calling us away from any kind of self-based living and to a fully grace-based life.

What we want to hold out to our people is the glorious picture that the life that is ours through what Jesus has done is one that overflows with and is rooted in grace, that is carried along by on-going experiences with Jesus, and "tastes like" freedom.

"The Old Way [rules-based living] misses out on the chief blessing of God. We wipe our own noses, wash our faces, and sew the rip in our clothes—we make ourselves presentable. Then we say to God, Look what I've done. I've got it right. My nose is clean."
Larry Crabb

¹ESV; "no benefit to you," NASB; "no value to you," NIV; "will profit you nothing," NKJV.

²F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

³ESV, NASB; "alienated," NIV; "estranged," NKJV.

Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

Thinking . . .

Tax time will soon be upon us! Everyone will have to decide which forms to fill out, when and how to file, and settle on what they owe (or are due) from the government. How important will it be to get the right forms and the right advice? What might be the result if you *don't* get the right forms and the right advice?

Reflecting . . .

The Galatian believers were getting some advice from some "rule keepers" about their lives with God. If they end up following *that* advice, what does Paul tell them they are at risk of losing in Galatians 5:1-6?

If someone decided that he or she was going to "go forward" in his or her relationship with Jesus on the basis of some "basic rules" (like circumcision), what does Paul say they will be obligated to do? Why is this so critical to notice?

The "rule keepers" were arguing that the fulfillment of righteousness (holy living) in the lives of the believers was dependent on keeping certain regulations. What does Paul offer in contrast to that?

Responding . . .

If you don't file your taxes properly, you could end up paying for it . . . in tangible ways. If you don't walk out this life with Jesus that He offers you in the proper way, how might you end up "paying for it"?

"The Galatian Christians had lost their hold on grace for daily living which up until then had been ministered to them by the Holy Spirit . . . grace here must be interpreted as the daily grace for living of which the Galatian Christians were depriving themselves."
Kenneth Wuest

Reflections on Paul's Letter to the Galatians

