

Falling from Grace

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“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

Many times I have come into contact with spiritual bullies who try to scare new believers out of the wonderful security that we have in Jesus Christ. They might say something like this: You had better be careful not to (fill in the blank) or you had better (fill in the blank), or you just might “fall from grace.” Of course, by “falling from grace” they mean that the believer in Jesus Christ might lose his or her salvation.

Paul had led a number of Galatians to Jesus Christ. At the moment that they believed in Him, God freed them from the bondage of the Mosaic Law and, in its place, gave them a wonderfully free relationship with the person of the risen Lord.

“For I through the law am dead to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Gal. 2:21-22)

Cultivating a daily personal relationship with Christ by growing in His Word and learning to love Him and serve Him is the essence of the Christian life. Paul pled with the Galatian Christians to stand fast in this truth. What in the world does it mean to “stand fast”? One might walk fast or run fast, but I’ve never known anybody who could stand fast. “Stand fast” is just another way of saying, “Take a stand,” or “Hold your ground.” Take a stand about what? Take a stand in the liberty or spiritual freedom that we receive in Christ Jesus. Take a stand in this new-found, law-free relationship with the wonderful person of Christ. Take a stand in the realm of grace.

Christians are not to retreat or fall back under the bondage of religious traditionalism, instructions, rules, regulations, orders, ordinances, codes or commands from Mosaic legislation, or any human being or organization, as a substitute for their relationship with Christ.

“Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.” (Gal. 5:2-3)

The Judaizers had told the Galatians (probably with flattering, religious-sounding words) that if they really wanted to serve God they would have to go back under the Law and signify that they were willing to do this by submitting to physical circumcision. They had already given in to the

pressure from these legalists to observe days, months, times and years (Gal. 4:10). They were on the verge of taking a huge step backward in their Christian life by submitting to the Old Testament sign of circumcision.

Paul must have felt desperate, so he shouted to them with his pen. He pled with them not to submit to an Old Testament ritual that was never designed by God for their Christian lives. “If you submit to circumcision,” Paul says, “Christ shall profit you zero.” Remember, if we submit to just one law to give us the power to live a right life-style, we become a debtor to God to do the whole law.

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.’” (Gal. 3:10)

Paul brought into clear focus two great Bible truths: law and grace. On the one hand there is the Law, the whole Mosaic religious system with its commands and temple ceremonies and sacrifices. To produce righteousness necessary for life, the Law demands perfect obedience. It says to all “be right” or face God’s justice, yet it cannot give anyone the power to be right.

The system that vividly contrasts the Law is the system of grace. Grace is that which God gives to us. Grace means that God has finished all the work necessary in Jesus Christ to provide life and righteousness to all who will trust Him. Grace is the work of God on our behalf.

“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” (Gal. 5:4)

This verse is not teaching that anyone can lose eternal salvation by sinning and falling from grace. Paul does not say that whosoever falls into sin will fall from grace, but rather that if these Galatians go back and try to be justified by keeping the Law, they will fall from grace. Falling from grace means to fall back into an entire system of legalistic activity that was never designed by God to justify anyone.

Let’s give ourselves a little test. Let’s assume that our Christian life is based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and that we are happy and free in that relationship alone. We are constantly aware of His presence in our lives and are growing to know Him, to love Him, and to submit to Him.

But then we leave that relationship and substitute for it a system of self-reforming rules or religious traditions that are not even biblical. For instance, we base our spirituality on the fact that we don’t smoke, drink, chew, dance, gamble, or gossip. Neither do we lie, cheat, steal, go to movies, or wear makeup. And we always go to church; we have been baptized; we give regularly; we sing in the choir; we teach Sunday School; we serve on committees; we pray audibly; we serve on the board of deacons. . .and the list could go on and on.

If these become a substitute for walking in fellowship with Jesus Christ, then we have fallen from the grace system back into a self-righteous, legalistic system and have “fallen from grace.” Even non-Christians, through self-discipline and good moral judgment, can do all the good things mentioned, including those activities involving the church.

Now, this has only been a test. The Galatians were not in danger of losing their salvation; they were in danger of losing their source of real love, joy, peace, and power by fellowship with the person of Christ. If the Galatians went back to circumcision (and the system that it represented) their personal relationship with Jesus Christ would be of no use to them. They would fall into a position where grace could not give them the power and love necessary to live the Christian life.

We cannot effectively serve our Lord by living by a list of do's and don'ts (legalism). We could live a legalistic life-style and yet never study our Bible, never have private fellowship with Christ, never pray, never share the gospel with anyone, never grow in grace and knowledge of Him, and never know the freedom and spiritual power that comes because of a private relationship with Him. Are we in danger of falling from grace?