

*Studies in Galatians (17/22)***Faith Which Works by Love.***Galatians 5:1-13*

Since the last two lessons have included quite a general review of what has been passed over, we will proceed at once with

The Lesson for the Week

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubles you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offense of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” Gal. 5:1-13.

There is nothing in this portion of Scripture that is difficult for one who has followed the study of the Epistle closely from the beginning. Therefore the whole of this study will really be little more than a review. Let us consider some of the supposedly difficult expressions.

Circumcision Opposed to Christ.

When the apostle says that Christ is no profit to those who are circumcised, it is easy to understand that he is not referring to the mere fact that one had been circumcised, for he himself had undergone that rite. Moreover, he preached Christ to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles. We must recall the circumstances which called out this Epistle. There were those who were persuading the new converts that belief in Christ was not sufficient for salvation, but that they could not be saved if they were not also circumcised. This, it will be seen, was in reality a rejection of Christ; for if Christ be not accepted as a complete Redeemer, He is not accepted at all. That is to say, if Christ be not accepted for what He is, He is rejected. He cannot be other than what He is. Christ is not divided; and He does not share with any other person or thing the honor of being Saviour. Therefore it is easy to see that if any one were circumcised with a view to receiving salvation thereby, that would show absence of faith in Christ as the only and the all-sufficient Saviour of mankind.

From the statement that Christ is of no profit to those who are circumcised, we see that it means a rejection of Him; for Christ is always the same, and is always a perfect Saviour. The only ones in the world to whom He is nothing are those who do not accept Him. So, then, what the apostle really says is this: If you are circumcised for salvation, you reject Christ and His salvation.

What Circumcision Means.

This has been stated in the language of the Scripture so many times that we will do no more here than merely to refer to the passages. Read again Rom. 2:25-29; 4:11, where it appears very plainly that circumcision means the righteousness of the law. As God gave it to Abraham, it was a sign that he already had righteousness through faith in Christ; but as it became perverted by the Jews, it came to signify in their minds the fact that they themselves were doers of the law. And finally it came to be considered as a substitute for the doing of the law, or as conferring the righteousness of the law. God gave it as a sign of faith in Christ; they perverted it into a substitute for faith. So when a Jew boasted in his circumcision, he was boasting of his own righteousness. This is shown by Gal. 5:4: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." This is no disparagement of the law, but of man's ability to keep the law. It is the glory of the law that it is so holy, and its requirements are so great, that no man is able to attain to the perfection of it. Only in Christ is the righteousness of the law ours; and true circumcision is to worship God in Spirit, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to put no confidence in the flesh. Phil. 3:3.

A Debtor to the Law.

"For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

"There!" exclaims some one, "that shows that the law is a thing to be avoided; for Paul says that those who are circumcised have got to do the whole law; and he warns them not to be circumcised."

Not quite so hasty, my friend. Stick a little more closely to the text. Read it again, and you will see that the bad thing is not the law, nor the doing of the law, but that the thing to be avoided is being a *debtor* to the law. Is there not a vast difference? It is a good thing to have food to eat and clothes to wear, but it is a sorrowful thing to be in debt for these necessary things. Sadder yet is it to be in debt for them, and yet to lack them.

"The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Rom. 7:12.

What does one understand by "a debtor"?—One who owes something. Then one who is in debt to the law, owes the law righteousness and holiness. But what one owes is what he ought to pay. Therefore this scripture teaches us that one ought to do the law. No one ought to be in debt to it, but the only way we can avoid being in debt to it is to do it.

If one is debtor to do *the whole law*, that shows that while he ought to do it all, he has not done any portion of it. So then we are forcibly taught by this scripture that whoever seeks righteousness by his own efforts, and not by Christ, has no righteousness at all. But the fact that by rejection of Christ one is a debtor to do the whole law, shows that by acceptance of Christ one yields to the law all that it demands, and satisfies it in very particular.

"The Hope of Righteousness."

"For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."

Don't pass this verse by without reading it more than once, or you will think that it says something that it does not say. And as you read it, think of what you have already learned about the promise of the Spirit.

Don't imagine that this verse teaches that, having the Spirit, we must wait for righteousness. Not by any means; the Spirit brings righteousness. When He is come, He will convince the world of sin and of righteousness. John 16:8. Whoever therefore receives the Spirit, has the conviction of sin, and has also the righteousness which the Spirit shows him that he lacks, and which the Spirit alone can bring.

What is the righteousness which the Spirit brings?—It is the righteousness of the law; this we know, "for we know that the law is spiritual." Rom. 7:14.

What, then, about the "hope of righteousness," for which we wait through the Spirit? Notice that it does not say that we through the Spirit hope *for* righteousness, but that we wait for the hope *of* righteousness by faith, that is, the hope which the possession of righteousness brings. Let us briefly go over this matter in detail. It will not take long, for we have already studied it, and all that we have to do is to refresh our minds.

1. The Spirit of God is "the Holy Spirit of promise"—not the Spirit promised, but the Spirit the possession of which insures to us the promise of God.
2. That which God has promised to us, as children of Abraham, is an inheritance. The Holy Spirit is the earnest or pledge, of this inheritance until the purchased possession is redeemed and bestowed upon us. Eph. 1:13, 14.
3. This inheritance that is promised is the new heavens and the new earth, "wherein dwelleth righteousness." 2 Peter 3:13.
4. The Spirit brings righteousness; for the Spirit is Christ's representative, the means by which Christ Himself, who is our righteousness, comes to dwell in our hearts. John 14:16-18.
5. Therefore the hope which the Spirit brings is the hope which the possession of righteousness brings, namely, the hope of an inheritance in the kingdom of God, the earth made new.

6. The righteousness which the Spirit brings to us is the righteousness of the law of God, which by the Spirit is written in our hearts, instead of on tables of stone. Rom. 2:29; 2 Cor. 3:3.

7. The sum of the whole matter, therefore, is this, that if we will wholly distrust ourselves, and will acknowledge that in us there dwelleth no good thing, and that consequently no good thing can come from us; and so, instead of thinking ourselves so powerful that we can do the law, will allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, that thus we may be filled with the righteousness of the law, we shall have living hope dwelling in us. The hope of the Spirit—the hope of righteousness by faith—has no element of uncertainty in it; it is positive assurance.

Working Faith.

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”

The word here rendered “availeth” is the same word that is rendered “able” in Luke 13:24; Acts 15:10; 6:10. In Phil. 4:13 it is rendered “can do.” The statement, therefore, amounts to this: Circumcision is not able to do anything, neither is uncircumcision; but faith alone, which works by love, can do anything. This faith which works by love is found only in Christ Jesus.

But what is it that there is talk about doing?—Nothing else than the law of God. No man can do it, whatever his state or condition. One may boast of his circumcision, and another may boast of his uncircumcision, but both are alike vain. By the law of faith boasting is excluded (Rom. 3:27); for since the faith of Christ alone can keep the righteousness of the law, there is no chance for us to tell what we have done.

“All to Christ I owe.”

Liberty to Serve, Not to Sin.

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh; but by love serve one another.”

The two preceding chapters tell about bondage, imprisonment. Before faith comes, we are shut up under sin, debtors to the law. The faith of Christ sets us free, but as we are set at liberty, the admonition is given us, “Go, and sin no more.” We have been set at liberty from sin, not at liberty to sin. How many make a mistake here! Many sincere people imagine that in Christ we are at liberty to ignore the law, and to set it at defiance, forgetting that the transgression of the law is sin. 1 John 3:4. To serve the flesh is to commit sin, “because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Rom. 8:7. So when the apostle exhorts us not to use our liberty for an occasion of the

flesh, he simply warns us not to misuse the liberty which Christ gives us, and to bring ourselves into bondage again by transgressing the law. Instead of this, we should by love serve one another; for, as we shall learn in our next lesson, "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The substance of the whole exhortation is, Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. Not dead in sin, but dead to sin and alive unto righteousness.

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