

UNTANGLING THE TANGLED WEB

Sir Walter Scott wrote, “Oh! what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!” Satan is the master of deceit. His goal is to keep people from Jesus and to corrupt the message of the Gospel. In explaining one of His parables, our Lord said in Luke 8:11 and 12, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” Satan’s methods may change from time to time, but his motives have never. Jesus said in John 8:44, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

Let us enter into this tangled web illustrated in Galatians 5 and see if we can untangle it.

I. THE ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE FINISHED WORK UNFINISHED

Galatians 5:1-4

A. Free, But Not Indeed

Look at Galatians 5:1. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said this verse means, “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand therefore and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage.” Freedom is on everyone’s lips today. We long for it. We all cry for it. But only in Christ is true and lasting freedom found.

Jesus said in John 8:36, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” The deceiver would have you believe that you are not justified by faith alone, that you must add your own works to make atonement complete. Romans 11:6 says, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”

B. Adding, But Taking Away

Galatians 5:2 tells us that if we attempt to add circumcision to salvation’s plan, we have neutralized the effect of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. To add anything to God’s plan of salvation is actually taking away the effectiveness. Colossians 2:14 says, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

The law cannot be separated into its component parts.

C. One Part Equals the Whole

Galatians 5:3 says, "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." What a statement! God is informing us that you cannot be justified by the law, but should you choose to go that route, you must keep every bit of it. Let us take a windowpane for example. If you break a window, it is never just partially broken; the whole pane must be replaced. If we break even one part of the law, we are as guilty as though we broke it all. James 2:10, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

D. The Doctrine Found in the Word "From"

Galatians 5:4: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." This verse has become one of the most debated verses in the whole Bible. There are some who use this verse as a proof text to prove that a person may lose their salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth! And as is often the case, the very Bible verses that are used to attempt to teach error often are great verses that prove the very opposite of the error that is being purported. Let's unpack this verse. "Christ is become of no effect unto you..." The Bible says in Romans 4:4, 5, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." These two verses are saying, if we try to work for our salvation, we do not find grace, but rather indebtedness. Then the truth is affirmed that grace in salvation is granted not to the one who works for his salvation, but believes on Christ alone for salvation. Therefore, this salvation by Christ alone has not effected the one that chooses another route other than the grace of God. It is the grace of God that brings salvation, not works! "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

"...Whosoever of you are justified by the law..." In the Greek tense, it is present tense, in other words saying, those of you who are attempting to be justified by the law, not that the law justified, but you who are attempting to be justified by this method. To go to the law for justification is frustrating the grace of God. Paul said in Galatians 2:21, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

"...Ye are fallen from grace." It did not say you were fallen out of grace. You fell from it. Galatians 1:6: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." If you attempt to save yourself by your own works through the law, you fall away from salvation, meaning you never had it. It never said you are fallen from salvation, but rather you are fallen from the grace of God. Once in grace; always in grace. There is a principle here. Even for those who have been saved, if you go about to establish your own righteousness, you have fallen from the principle as Romans 10:3 teaches, "For they being ignorant

of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

II. THE CROSS MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Galatians 5:5-9

A. Difference in Motivation

Galatians 5:5, 6 shows us that the Holy Spirit brings forth righteousness. Prisons are for people who have no governing principle within themselves to live right, therefore, the external incarceration takes place. A saved person by nature does not murder, because he is given supernatural ability to love. By nature he doesn't steal, he covets no man's possessions because of contentedness that comes through Christ as our source. It would be ridiculous for a law-abiding person to say, "To keep me from murdering or stealing, I am going to go ahead and lock myself up." Even as ridiculous as this sounds, the point should be made, that Christians have the inward motivation, not from the law without, but from Christ within. Romans 6:17: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." Ephesians 6:6: "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

B. Difference in Performance

Galatians 5:7

In Galatians 5:7 the picture is someone who violates their lane in a race, and crosses over and knocks the opposing runner out of his lane. Paul was saying, you were running fine; why did you let that Judaizer runner knock you out of the winning?

C. Difference in the Message

Galatians 5:8, 9

To add leaven is to change the whole loaf. To add works of the law is to pollute the pure message of the Gospel. Ecclesiastes 10:1a: "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour...."

III. THE CORRECTION ANTICIPATED

A. Faith in Those Who Have Faith

Galatians 5:10

B. The Controversy of the Cross

Galatians 5:11

C. The Disempowering of the False Teachers

Galatians 5:12

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.