

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GALATIANS 5 (PART 1)

WE JUST HEARD PAUL MAKE HIS CASE THAT FOLLOWERS OF THE MESSIAH ARE NOT SLAVES BUT CHILDREN AND NOT IN BONDAGE BUT FREE.

GALATIANS 5:1-6

CHRIST FREED US TO BE FREE. APPARENTLY, THOUGH WE ARE FREE, WE MUST BE ON GUARD AGAINST THE TEMPTATION TO GO BACK TO SLAVERY. THIS HAPPENS IN TWO WAYS: THROUGH TEMPTATIONS BY OUR OWN EVIL CRAVINGS/FLESH OR THROUGH DECEPTION FROM OUTSIDE. MORE ON THIS IN A MOMENT.

PAUL SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSES CIRCUMCISION AS PART OF THE PRACTICES OF SLAVERY IN CONTRAST TO FREEDOM. CIRCUMCISION WAS THE SYMBOL OF THE ABRAHAMIC AND LATER MOSAIC COVENANTS. IT WAS A PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION (FOR MALES) THAT YOU WERE A PART OF THE "CHOSEN PEOPLE." IT WAS A REMINDER OF THE PROMISES AND COVENANTS OF GOD. PAUL CHALLENGES THOSE PREACHING (AND THOSE ACCEPTING OF THIS PREACHING) THAT FOLLOWERS OF JESUS MUST BE CIRCUMCISED IN THE FOLLOWING WAY: IF YOU ARE ADVOCATING KEEPING *PART* OF THE LAW, YOU MUST KEEP *ALL* OF THE LAW.

FOR BELIEVERS, THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SYMBOL AND SIGN OF THE MESSIANIC COVENANT AND REMINDER OF THE PROMISES OF GOD. THIS SYMBOL IS INWARD RATHER THAN OUTWARD. FOR THE CHRISTIAN, OUTWARDS THINGS ARE NOT AS IMPORTANT AS INWARD THINGS OF THE HEART, IN OTHER WORDS "FAITH EXPRESSING ITSELF THROUGH LOVE (5:6, NLT)."

THIS ALL BRINGS TO MIND THE CONCEPT OF "RECIDIVISM." **RECIDIVISM** IS DEFINED AS "A TENDENCY TO RELAPSE INTO A PREVIOUS CONDITION OR MODE OF BEHAVIOR ESPECIALLY : RELAPSE INTO CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR" (MERRIAM-WEBSTER). WEBSTER'S ELABORATES WITH THE FOLLOWING:

"*RECIDIVISM* MEANS LITERALLY "A FALLING BACK" AND USUALLY IMPLIES "INTO BAD HABITS." IT COMES FROM THE LATIN WORD *RECIDIVUS*, WHICH MEANS "RECURRING." *RECIDIVUS* ITSELF COMES FROM THE LATIN VERB *RECIDERE*, WHICH IS A COMPOSITE OF THE PREFIX *RE-* AND THE VERB *CADERE* (MEANING "TO FALL") AND MEANS "TO FALL BACK." RECIDIVISTS TEND TO RELAPSE, OR "FALL BACK," INTO OLD HABITS AND PARTICULARLY CRIME." (VIA M-W.COM)

IN OUR CULTURE WE UNDERSTAND THIS WORD IN THE CONTEXT OF A PRISONER/CRIMINAL WHO IS FREED AND RETURNS TO CRIME. SOMETIMES THERE ARE SCORES TO SETTLE OR VENGEANCE TO SEEK THAT LEADS SOMEONE TO RETURN TO THIS LIFESTYLE. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME NOTED INSTANCES WHERE PART OF THE PSYCHOLOGY FOR GOING BACK TO CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IS BECAUSE THE INDIVIDUAL HAS LIVED AS A PRISONER FOR SO LONG THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW TO FUNCTION IN A SOCIETY THEY HAS CHANGED AND DEVELOPED SO MUCH WHILE THEY WERE BEHIND BARS.

THINK OF ALL THAT HAS CHANGED IN THE WORLD IN JUST THE LAST 20 YEARS. GMAIL LAUNCHED IN 2004. FACEBOOK ACCOUNTS WERE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC IN 2006. AND THE IPHONE WAS INTRODUCED IN 2007. IF YOU HAVE KNOWN LIFE A CERTAIN WAY, IT CAN BE HARD TO MAKE MAJOR CHANGES ALMOST OVERNIGHT. IN THE UNITED STATES THERE IS A MAJOR PUSH FOR REFORM AND REHABILITATION TO HELP MEN AND WOMEN ADAPT AND THRIVE THROUGH TRAINING, COUNSELING AND SUPPORT.

IN PAUL'S CONTEXT WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT FREED LAW BREAKERS FALLING BACK INTO LAW BREAKING, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT FREED LAW-KEEPERS FALLING BACK INTO LAW-KEEPING.

AND BEFORE US GENTILE CHRISTIANS JUDGE THESE GALATIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS AS FOOLISH AND THINK "HOW OBVIOUS IS IT TO NOT KEEP THE MOSAIC LAW!?" REMEMBER, WE ARE TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE WHO FORMERLY LIVED THIS WAY, EVERY DAY, FOR THEIR ENTIRE LIVES. YOU AND I DON'T "FALL BACK" TO KEEPING THE LAW BUT ARE LIKELY JUST AS AT RISK TO RETURN TO OLD BEHAVIORS OF OUR TRADITIONS FROM THE PAST.

WHEN STRESS COMES IN YOUR LIFE, DO YOU RESPOND THE WAY YOUR PARENTS AND FAMILY OF ORIGIN DID? WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY OR IN PERSONAL CONFLICT, DO YOU ACT LIKE YOUR MOM OR DAD DID? WHEN YOU ARE ANXIOUS, SAD OR OVERWHELMED DO YOU LOOK TO FOOD, ALCOHOL, DRUGS OR SOCIAL MEDIA TO NUMB OR MINIMIZE THE PAIN? WHEN CONFRONTED WITH TRUTH OR CONFRONTED BY SIN, DO YOU MAKE EXCUSES, BLAME OTHERS, COVER UP, LIE OR THE LIKE? WHEN PRESSURE IS ON DO YOU LIE, EXAGGERATE, SAY YES TO PLEASE OTHERS OR GET OUT OF TROUBLE?

THESE (AND MORE) ARE GOOD QUESTIONS AND OUR ANSWERS REVEAL OUR OWN RECIDIVISM, NOT TO THE MOSAIC LAW, BUT OUR OWN OLD PATTERNS OF LIVING AND OUTDATED MINDSETS. IT WAS FOR FREEDOM THAT CHRIST SET US FREE, THEREFORE WE (TOO) ARE CALLED TO STAND FIRM AND NOT BE SUBJECT AGAIN TO A YOKE OF SLAVERY.

GALATIANS 5:7-12

AGAIN PAUL IS DIRECT. HE WONDERS ALOUD: "SO WHAT HAPPENED? YOU WERE "RUNNING WELL", AKA ON THE RIGHT TRACK, HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, WHERE YOU NEEDED TO BE, DOING THE RIGHT THING, WHAT HAPPENED? OR MORE DIRECTLY, WHO WAS IT THAT STOPPED YOU FROM RUNNING WELL?!" PAUL WILL SUGGEST ONE PERSON WHO WASN'T INVOLVED IN TRIPPING UP THE GALATIANS - JESUS CHRIST!?

PAUL HAS BEEN DIRECT AND HONEST THROUGHOUT HIS LETTER. HE HAS CONCERN FOR HOW THE CHURCH STARTED AND WHERE THEY ARE NOW. MOST OF WHAT HE SAID SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT THIS SHIFT WAS DRAMATIC, QUICK AND OBVIOUS TO THE OUTSIDE EYE. BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THESE DECEPTIONS WERE NOT SUBTLE. BY DEFINITION, DECEPTIONS ARE DECEPTIVE. PAUL WARNS THE CHURCH AS HE IS LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE THAT "A LITTLE LEAVEN LEAVENS THE WHOLE LUMP" - MEANING TOLERATION OR ACCEPTANCE OF EVEN A SMALL ELEMENT OF FALSEHOOD OR DECEPTION CAN HAVE A LARGE IMPACT. HE'S WARNING US OF THIS TOO.

EVEN SO, PAUL IS HOPEFUL THAT THE GALATIAN CHURCH WILL GET BACK ON TRACK. HOWEVER, IN PERHAPS HIS FIRST SHOT TAKEN AT THE PERSON OR PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN "BEWITCHING" AND DISTURBING THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST, PAUL EXPECTS THAT THERE WILL BE JUDGEMENT UPON THEM (V. 10). IN FACT PAUL HAS ANOTHER WISH FOR THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO UPSET AND TROUBLE IN VERSE 12

ESV - I WISH THOSE WHO UNSETTLE YOU WOULD EMASCULATE THEMSELVES!

NLT - I JUST WISH THAT THOSE TROUBLEMAKERS WHO WANT TO MUTILATE YOU BY CIRCUMCISION WOULD MUTILATE THEMSELVES.

NET - I WISH THOSE AGITATORS WOULD GO SO FAR AS TO CASTRATE THEMSELVES!

NIV - AS FOR THOSE AGITATORS, I WISH THEY WOULD GO THE WHOLE WAY AND EMASCULATE THEMSELVES!

OH, YES HE SAID THAT.

GALATIANS 5:13-15

IF YOU HAVEN'T GOTTEN IT BY NOW, PAUL REMINDS US THAT WE WERE CALLED TO FREEDOM - BUT WHAT SHOULD WE USE THIS FREEDOM FOR? TO LIVE FOR CHRIST AND OTHERS! AS WE DISCUSSED ABOVE, WHY WOULD WE GO BACK TO OUR OLD WAYS OF LIVING WHEN CHRIST HAS PAID THE PRICE FOR OUR FREEDOM. WE WERE FORMERLY TRAPPED TO **ONLY** LIVE FOR OURSELVES AND OUR EVIL DESIRES - BUT WE HAVE FREEDOM AND THE DOORS TO ETERNAL LIFE OPENED! THIS IS SIMILAR TO WHAT PAUL RHETORICALLY ASKS THE ROMAN CHURCH:

ROMANS 6:1-2 - WHAT SHALL WE SAY THEN? ARE WE TO CONTINUE IN SIN SO THAT GRACE MAY INCREASE? 2 MAY IT NEVER BE! HOW SHALL WE WHO DIED TO SIN STILL LIVE IN IT?

SO HOW SHOULD WE LIVE? WE'RE FREE, SO HOW SHOULD WE BE? PAUL DOESN'T LEAVE US HANGING. YOU WANT TO LIVE THE LIFE OF A FREE PERSON? LOVE. YOU WANT TO LIVE A NEW WAY? LOVE. YOU WANT TO FULFILL THE LAW? HERE'S HOW → LOVE.

PAUL, THE FORMER PHARISEE AND LAW EXPERT IS QUOTING HIS OWN RABBI HERE:

MATTHEW 7:12 - "IN EVERYTHING, THEREFORE, TREAT PEOPLE THE SAME WAY YOU WANT THEM TO TREAT YOU, FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.

MATTHEW 22:35-40 - ONE OF THEM, A LAWYER, ASKED HIM A QUESTION, TESTING HIM, 36 "TEACHER, WHICH IS THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW?" 37 AND HE SAID TO HIM, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 "THIS IS THE GREAT AND FOREMOST COMMANDMENT. 39 "THE SECOND IS LIKE IT, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 "ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS DEPEND THE WHOLE LAW AND THE PROPHETS."

WHAT PAUL IS DOING HERE (MODELING JESUS BEFORE HIM) IS HE IS SPEAKING TO THE HEART AND PURPOSE OF THE LAW AND A LIFE LIVED FOR GOD IN GENERAL - LOVE. AND THOUGH THIS IS A SIMPLE AND CLEAR SOLUTION, IT'S NOT EASY.

SO HOW DO WE STAY IN GRACE, REMAIN FREE AND PRIORITIZE LOVE? PAUL IS GOING TO INTRODUCE A NEW CONCEPT IN THE NEXT (AND CRITICALLY IMPORTANT) SECTION. IT'S CALLED "WALKING BY THE SPIRIT" A PHRASE THAT WE WILL UNPACK WHEN WE GATHER NEXT.

BUT AS WE CONCLUDE THIS PORTION OF THE LETTER, LET'S NOT MISS PAUL'S AIM. IF THE END RESULT OF YOUR FAITH IS NOT THAT YOU ARE MORE LOVING, SOMETHING IS WRONG. IF YOUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST IS NOT PRODUCING LOVE FOR GOD AND OTHERS, YOU HAVEN'T WALKED FAR ENOUGH AWAY FROM THE PRISON YARD YET.