

THURSDAY 29 September 2022 "Defiled Grace?"

(Gal. 5:1-4)

Hello, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

I'm delighted to tell you that "Walking with Jesus" is received by people all over the world! In fact, as of last month, 160 different countries and more than 4200 cities! We are especially excited that many people, in very restrictive places in our world, are finding ways to connect with us and join us in God's Word as we 'walk with Jesus'! *The privacy of technology and the power of God's Word can provide amazing freedom for people who live in bondage situations,* and maybe you are one of those dear folks. I am praying that today, you experience a new sense of **FREEDOM in Jesus Christ!**

Welcome again into the little house in Syrian Antioch, about 48ad, where we have been gathering the past several days, watching and listening to the apostle Paul as he receives from God the words he then speaks as he writes them on the parchment which will soon be rolled up into a scroll and sent hundreds of miles west to little towns in what is today Turkey. Specifically, those towns then were known as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Why would Paul's scrolls be taken there? *Because those are the towns Paul and Barnabas had visited on their first journey and as they shared the story and message of Jesus Christ there, many people trusted in Jesus and became the first Christians in that part of the world!*

But word had since come to Paul that false teachers had followed him to those towns and brought contrary teachings which led those new Christians into great confusion. In some cases, they were abandoning their faith in Jesus and returning to their old traditions and false religions which had held them in bondage.

Paul is praying, preparing to write, wanting to be sure his mind and heart are clear for the Spirit to speak just the right words to Paul which then when written, will convict and encourage those Gentiles to return to Jesus. Paul picks up his stylus... ***"It is for FREEDOM that Christ has set us free! Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*** (Gal. 5:1) Slavery was widespread in the Roman Empire in which Paul was living in the first century. Some people had sold themselves into slavery simply to survive. They had such financial debt they had no other means by which they could repay their accumulated debts. Some people were refugees from other countries who had come in desperation to try and survive starvation or warfare or brutality in their homeland. Some had no education, no marketable skill, so all they could do was to offer themselves as a slave.

But then, as today, there were other less visible forms of bondage all around in Paul's day. Bondage to anger or dishonesty or unforgiveness or lust or greed or fear or shame or worry or envy. While Jesus had not come as an economic Savior for the world, nor had Jesus set slaves free from their slaveowners, *Jesus had come to offer freedom*

from all forms of bondage in the kingdom of darkness! Addiction bondage, emotional bondage, sin bondage of every type. The types of bondage that flow out of a wicked mind, an evil heart, or a broken heart.

As these Gentiles in those four towns had trusted in Jesus, they had experienced deliverance and freedom from all types of bondage. But now the reports coming to Paul suggested they were returning again to some of the bondage from which they had been set free. *Religious traditions and rituals and practices from which Jesus had delivered them were so familiar they were beckoning these people back into their attempts to earn God's favor.* Paul's words are strong words aren't they, my friends? **"It is for FREEDOM that Christ has set us free! Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."**

May I ask, my friends, how do you and I live this in 2022? *How do we STAND FIRM when all around us public opinion and powerful voices are rejecting Jesus and His truth and mocking anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus?* How do we prevent ourselves from being drawn back into the things which held us in bondage in the past, especially if those things are very popular in our society or perhaps have become part of the laws of our land? What does STAND FIRM on God's truth and as a follower of Jesus look like for you, in the city where you live? *How are we teaching our children and grandchildren to STAND FIRM in the FREEDOM Jesus has earned for us?*

In the case of these Gentiles in the region of Galatia Paul addresses a very specific problem of bondage as he writes: **"I Paul tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all! Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."** (Gal. 5:2-4) Paul was writing to Gentiles and for Gentile men circumcision, as an adult man, would be an extremely painful and risky experience as the risk of infection was high.

But evidently some Jewish Christians were insisting that Gentile men could only be considered legitimate Christians if they submitted themselves to the Jewish procedure of circumcision. Paul's warning is clear: **"...if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all!"** Paul was saying that the physical act of circumcision, if undertaken for the spiritual reason of seeking to become acceptable by God, was in fact denying the legitimacy and the value of the atonement death of Jesus Christ! Further, Paul insisted that if Gentile men set aside the atonement death of Jesus in favor of submitting to Jewish circumcision, then they were also obligating themselves to try and earn God's favor by attempting to live in obedience to all the Jewish laws and commandments in the Old Testament, more than 600 of them!

And if that all wasn't warning enough, Paul adds one final, powerful statement: **"You, who are trying to be justified by the law, have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."** (Gal. 5:4) Paul does not mean God has pushed these people away from Jesus Christ, but rather by their efforts to enslave themselves to

rituals and laws *they have alienated themselves, they have actually pulled away from their reliance upon and their relationship of love with Jesus!* Further, Paul says they have **"fallen away from grace."** The only thing we human beings can do with God's Grace is RECEIVE it, live in it, celebrate it, welcome the Holy Spirit's work of Grace in us as He transforms us by His Grace power! *But when we attempt to earn God's love, or God's forgiveness, we then deny the ultimate value, the full saving power of Jesus' atonement death and we reject God's free grace which He is offering us!*

Now I ask you a simple question... do we all understand this fundamental spiritual principle which God had made clear? *When we work to earn what God is offering to us free, we devalue God's gift! We make a mockery of God's kind offer, and we elevate our efforts to a place of higher value than God's grace! **God will not force His grace upon us*** my friends. If we turn instead to trusting in our own efforts rather than receiving God's grace to save us, we are denying Jesus' death and rejecting God's grace! Now we need to ponder that my friends, because it is a widespread disaster, ravaging the loving grace relationship God is offering millions of people today. Are you defiling God's grace with your determined efforts to earn God's love or God's forgiveness? Look closely my friends, and here's a song to help us...

Today's Scripture is Galatians 5:1-4.