

Life Application Notes

Galatians 5:1-15 - 25th April 2021

Welcome back! Hope you had a great Easter!

- **Read Galatians 5:1-15 together**

It should be clear to everyone here that Paul is not just talking about circumcision in this passage - but rather that circumcision is emblematic (or representative) of trusting in the Law for salvation.

- **If that is the case, why focus specifically on circumcision?**
 - It seemed to be the way that legalism was most obviously manifesting itself in Galatia. It was symbolic of the Galatians' attitude towards Christ and the Law. It was also the symbol of an old covenant. (Gen 17:11)
 - Circumcision also clearly serves no practical purpose - other parts of the Law (such as not eating shellfish in a desert with no refrigeration) are more easy to justify as being sensible, whereas the only reason the Galatians had to get circumcised was out of some sense of duty to the Law.

Verse 1

This is a classic example of Paul's common pattern "You are X, and therefore do Y" (called the indicative followed by the imperative, if you're feeling fancy). Paul is convinced that our actions are driven (or at least should be) by who God has decided we are, and we see this repeated later in this passage, as well as across his letters.

- **So in v.1 what is the truth Paul is reminding us of?**
 - Christ's grace has been given to us for a reason - freedom!
- **And how does that lead to his instruction?**
 - If we are supposed to be free, don't be so eager to go back to the way things were!

Verses 2-6

The structure of these verses evokes a common way preachers speak when they want to get their message across: "Listen to me when I say ... I am telling you that ..."

- **What is so important that Paul says it this way (four times in three sentences)?**
 - There is no version of the Gospel that includes Christ and works!
 - "Faith working through love" - as we'll get to when we discuss the fruits of the Spirit in a future week, love is one of the ways that faith manifests itself.
- **Should we, as Christians who live by faith, be concerned about Paul's warnings in these verses?**
 - That depends on how you define "concerned", I suppose. We know that nothing can separate us from God's love. At the same time, warnings like these are part of the way God keeps us focussed on him - we certainly shouldn't just skip over them!
- **v.6 is interesting - uncircumcision also counts for nothing?**

- Remember that some of the people in this church would already have been circumcised (either because they were Jewish, or because they were just a little too eager...) - Paul is saying here that neither group is better or worse than the other. The circumcised aren't better than the uncircumcised (because the Law doesn't benefit them) and the uncircumcised aren't better than the circumcised (because all are saved by faith).

Verses 7-12

In this section of the passage, Paul gives the Galatians specific actions they can take to help combat these false teachers, and get back to running well.

- **What does Paul encourage them to do?**
 - They need to return to the Gospel that Paul originally taught them, and has reiterated throughout this letter. They also need to ruthlessly avoid listening to the preaching of the Judaisers.
- **What's the symbolism of the leaven?**
 - A small amount of yeasty dough can be used to make a whole loaf of leavened bread. The point is that allowing the Judaisers to spread their false teachings unhindered will end up affecting the whole church in Galatia - it needs to be actively avoided.

Verses 13-15

There is a beautiful contrast here between v.1 and v.13 - "do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" vs. "through love serve one another" - both are considered the purpose of the freedom given to us by Jesus.

- **Is Paul giving us another law here, after tearing down the old one?**
 - No! This ties in with what we saw in v.6 and will see again when we get to the fruits of the Spirit in Chapter 6. If we have faith in Jesus, and if we love him as he deserves, then we will want to love and serve our neighbours as he has loved and served us.
 - Rather than giving us a 'licence' to continue in sin, our freedom is an opportunity for us to serve others out of love.

Wrap up

It is incredibly easy for us to fall back into old habits (and to be clear, I'm not talking about sin here - though that is also true) - the ones that make us feel good, like a success, like we matter. Paul is telling us that Jesus should be enough for us. We matter, because he says we matter, and was willing to give everything for us. We are righteous - a success - because he lived the life we never could.

Either pray for the group generally that we would avoid falling into these traps, or if people are brave enough to share, pray more specifically.

Love takes work - how are people in your group growing in serving one another through love? Perhaps you want to pray about how you can grow further in this area, and not fall into biting and devouring one another.