

WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

Galatians 5:1-15

In 1521, young Martin Luther was brought to trial before the most powerful ecclesiastical officials on earth. He was charged with writing and preaching things that contradicted the current Catholic doctrine of salvation. After carefully considering his response (which he knew would probably result in his death), he said, "Here I stand. God help me."

We enjoy many spiritual freedoms today because of what Martin Luther did. He probably would have said that he was merely echoing the same convictions that had Paul expressed 1500 years earlier, here in Galatians chapter 5.

¹ 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. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. ⁷ You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." ¹⁰ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. ¹¹ Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹² As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

¹³ You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Paul's anger against the Judaizers brings up an interesting question - do we ever get that angry when we see someone trying to take away another person's spiritual freedom?

What exactly is "the offense of the cross"?
 ("Offense" literally means scandal; it comes from the Greek word "skandalon".)

Have you ever met anyone who was offended by the cross of Christ?

What Paul says in verse 12 is rather crude way of saying what?

In the first century, the Galatians would have known of a religious group called the Cult of Cybele, which had castrated priests. To be initiated into this cult, a person was placed in a pit in the ground while bull was killed on a grate above them. Emerging later from the pit, covered with blood, the initiate was greeted with a celebration and cries of, "You've been born again!"

Paul's anger was what we would call "righteous indignation". In other words, he had a good reason to be mad! Can you think of any other Scriptural examples of righteous anger?

It is ironic that the Judaizers, who themselves celebrated Passover and the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, were the same ones who tried to reintroduce spiritual slavery to Christianity. (Although this is typical human nature. Remember that just a few days after the incredible miracle of the Exodus, they wanted to go back to Egypt.)

In **verse 13**, Paul's attention turns to those who might misunderstand the message of grace. Paraphrase verse 13.

Has there been a time in your life when you've misused your spiritual freedom?

What happened, and how did you get back on track (if you did)?

How does Jesus' statement in Matthew 11:28-30 relate to this passage in Galatians?

Discuss the following two statements and what they say about the difference grace makes in a person's life:

Justin Martyr the Apologist (from Shechem in Samaria, A.D. 150):

"We who formerly delighted in fornication now embrace chastity alone; we who formerly used magical arts, dedicate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God; we who valued above all the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock and share with everyone who is in need; we who hated and destroyed one another and on account of their different customs would not live with men of a different race, now since the coming of Christ, live on excellent terms with them and pray for our enemies..."

Mike Singletary (linebacker for the Chicago Bears football team, A.D. 1990):

"Many people have asked me about my intensity - as a football player as well as a husband and a father. Basically, it boils down to God's grace. I'm simply trying to give back God what He has given me."

LIFE RESPONSE:

LEGALISM: Are you strong enough in your faith to realize when you're being intimidated into believing that you must work for God's acceptance?

Is there something that you're doing right now out of pressure to conform and not out of a loving desire to please God and glorify Him.

LICENSE: Do you tend to flaunt your freedom in such a way that you don't really care if it hurts other people?

Is there something in your life that you constantly feel defensive about before God, but stubbornly refuse to address?

REMEMBER: Walking a tightrope is easier if you focus ahead (at Christ) "...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith..." (Heb 12:1,2)