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Freedom in Christ

“Be, therefore, firm in the freedom with which Christ set us free, and do not be again subject to the yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5: 1)

The Apostle Paul addressed the members of the Church in Galatia to correct various heretical practices that false teachers sought to introduce within the context of the Christian faith. The church in that place had heard the preaching and teaching related to Christ, but they were still besieged by those who wished to seduce them into a religious syncretism that would incline them to legalistic slavery instead of being firm in the freedom to which Christ had called them.

Through faith in Christ Jesus, we have been freed from the curse of the law, sin and death. We are truly incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church. By being crucified, dead and buried, Christ paid the price of our sins on the cross. His resurrection has released us to live in freedom, since we have been buried with him, and at the same time we have been resurrected with him to a new life.

The resurrection represents the anticipation of what will happen to all who believe in Him. As Christianity emerged from Judaism, most of the early Christians came from the nation of Israel. By not clearly understanding the atoning work of Jesus Christ, some of them mixed various aspects of Judaism with the Christian faith.

In the Gospels, Jesus says that everything written in the Scriptures speaks about him. It is not about Christ and whatever else that you want to add, even though Christianity has developed its own form of cultural and religious traditions in our Western civilization. The rites associated with Christianity, like the sacraments, form of worship, and ceremonies came from the founder of our faith. Some of the rituals and traditions may or may not be authentic Christianity, however, it is only through faith in Christ that we obtain eternal salvation.

For Paul, Christ set us free in order for us not to continue in slavery. In spite of this, many of us feel very comfortable with regulations, ceremonies, and observations developed by practitioners of the different traditions of the Christian faith that grew up in various countries. It is counterproductive for true Christianity to add another thing by which we seek out our own justification. If we do so, Paul says that we fall from the grace of God.

When my son Oscar was born in Santa Clara, California, the members of the church gave him a quilt of many colors for the cold weather, which we used to cover him while he was sleeping. He became so attached to the fabric no one could take it from him. As he grew up, he dragged the quilt with him everywhere. If we wanted to take the quilt away from him, he would cry bitterly. So, he learned to manipulate us from a very early age. We didn't know what to do, but as he grew older he started leaving the quilt behind and we came to realize that he had lost the desire to carry the quilt with him everywhere. No doubt about it, when he was younger he felt secure with his quilt next to him, but when he was older he was able to feel secure without it.

The traditions, rites, and practices of the faith many times become norms for us and, if we were born in that practice, we soon realize that the customs become law for us, like my son with that quilt and his wish to not release it. But as he grew up, he also left behind what tied him to his past. When we grow in Christ, we need to leave behind everything that binds us to the sinful past, for Christ delivered us to be truly free.

The Jews in Paul's time believed that Christians should keep the Sabbath, that men should be circumcised, and everyone should keep the rites and ceremonies of the law, such as handwashing before eating, refraining from eating meat of drowned animals, not eating meat sacrifices to idols, etc., etc. Paul reminded the church of Galatia that anyone who tries to justify by the works of the law has fallen from the grace of God. (Galatians 5: 4). He added that anything else but faith in Christ is like trying to justify oneself by doing or believing in other things rather than in Christ alone as our salvation. If we do that, Paul says that we automatically dissociate ourselves from Christ, return to slavery, and thus fall from the divine grace. If Christ has set us free, why return to the enslaving dogmas and beliefs that seek to impose new elements other than faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul clearly summarizes this issue in another of his letters when he says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God-not because of works, lest any man should boast." (See Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ brings us salvation and frees us from boasting with false merit of our own, rather than in the sacrifice of Jesus. It leads us into Christ's freedom, so that we may become more involved in the ministry of love, service, word, sacraments and order God is calling us to.

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