

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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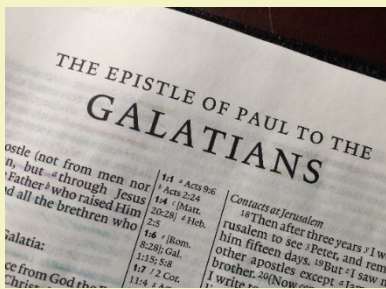
~ All articles written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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Galatianism



I have encountered a great deal of confusion surrounding something that is commonly labeled "Galatianism". Although this term has been defined in various ways, the essence of it is that we are saved initially by grace, but then we remain saved by works or law keeping of some sort. This doctrinal error takes its name from the book of Galatians. In that short letter, Paul, is addressing the error of the Judaizers who taught that it was necessary for all Christians to be circumcised and keep the law.

Most of the confusion that I have observed develops from certain statements or phrases being labeled as Galatianism. Statements such as after baptism you must "live a Christian life", "remain faithful", or "live the life" are labeled as Galatianism. In some cases, these phrases are not actually equated with Galatianism but are suspected of leading to Galatianism.

From there, these phrases are equated with any number of theological errors like progressive justification or ongoing works contributing to our salvation, a concept of constant losing and regaining of a Christian's status as a saved individual, etc. In response to these errors, alternatives are proposed such as the idea that baptism forgives us of even future sins. This idea is called hyper-grace, and I have addressed that error in an article by that name which was published in the Gospel Unashamed in the Fall of 2018.

Oftentimes, the idea seems to be that somehow it is wrong to tell people that they need to "remain faithful", "live the Christian life", or "live the life". The implication is that doing so is to fall into the error of Galatianism. At least some of those who oppose these phrases are guilty of misunderstanding and/or misrepresenting their meaning.

I read one article that began by warning about such phrases but ended by discussing the need for ongoing sanctification which the author called "living a life of holiness". This leaves me confused. It is incorrect to say we must "live the life" but alright to say, "live a life of holiness"? This kind of thing is why I

say that there is a great deal of confusion on this issue.

There are a few things that need to be considered here:

First, the only real alternative to a need to "live the life" or "remain faithful" is that we do not need to "live the life" or "remain faithful". How is that any different than the doctrine of "once saved always saved"? Some people who attack these phrases certainly do not believe in that erroneous doctrine. But how do they avoid that conclusion logically? Either you need to remain faithful, or you do not. There really is not a third alternative.

Second, the actual meaning of the phrases "live the life" and "remain faithful" are too often lost in the whole discussion. These are just ways of speaking about the ongoing process of sanctification or living a life of holiness. They mean to walk in the Spirit, not the flesh. To read the idea of earning salvation by works or progressive justification into such phrases is simply not warranted. These phrases do not state, nor do they necessarily imply, that our works contribute to our salvation or that we must live by or keep the Law of Moses or some other system of law.

Further, to equate such phrases with the idea of our salvation being lost with every sin we commit and regained only once we confess that sin to God is to read something into them that is simply not there. Are there people who attempt to be justified by works who use these phrases? Probably, but that does not make the phrases themselves incorrect, nor does it change what they really mean.

Third, the question of whether a Christian needs to “remain faithful” or “live the life” was never in dispute in Galatia. The question was whether this was to be done by law or grace. Paul never argues in Galatians that sanctification is not necessary. In fact, he spends quite a bit of time discussing that very thing. Paul simply argues that we accomplish this by “walking in the Spirit”, “living by faith”, “living to God”, etc., not by keeping the Law. This is often lost in the discussion of Galatianism. Consider just a few statements from Galatians.

“19 For I through the law died to the law **that I might live to God**. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by faith** in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” **Galatians 2:19-20 (NKJV)**

“But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for **“the just shall live by faith.” Galatians 3:11 (NKJV)**

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only **do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh**, but through love serve one another.” **Galatians 5:13 (NKJV)**

“I say then: **Walk in the Spirit**, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” **Galatians 5:16 (NKJV)**

“But if you are **led by the Spirit**, you are not under the law.” **Galatians 5:18 (NKJV)**

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Galatians 5:25 (NKJV)

Does it sound at all like Paul is saying that we do not need to “live the life” or “remain faithful”? Clearly, Paul believed in living a sanctified life. However, he believed that we did this through the Spirit, not the law.

In **Galatians 5:19-23**, Paul lists the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. He says that the works of the flesh are evident. That is, we do not need the law to tell us that those things are wicked. However, there is no law against the fruit of the Spirit. The point he is making is that the Spirit is far more effective than the law at restraining sin and promoting Godliness. He certainly is not teaching that there is no need to “remain faithful” or “live the life”.

Both Paul and the Judaizers believed that Christians needed to “remain faithful” or “live the life”. They very much disagreed as to what that meant specifically, but they agreed that it was necessary. The Judaizers thought that meant keeping the law. Paul said it meant living by faith.

Marriage is a covenant relationship much like our covenant relationship with the Lord as Christians. In fact, the Scriptures often use marriage as an analogy for God’s relationship with His people. Who would suggest that telling married people to “remain faithful” or “live a married life” is somehow leading people into a legalistic approach to keeping their marriage together?

There are certainly things to do if you want to keep your marriage strong. That is far from suggesting that you are continually in danger of losing

your marriage. Nor does it suggest that the marriage is broken every time you fail to be the perfect spouse. Similarly, there are things to do if you want to keep your relationship with the Lord strong. That does not suggest that you are in continual danger of losing your salvation. Nor does it suggest that you are lost every time you fail to be the perfect servant of God.

Finally, there are other passages in the New Testament that plainly teach that we need to remain faithful, continue in the faith, hold fast to the word, stand fast, etc. Consider the passages below:

“1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 **by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain.” I Corinthians 15:1-2 (NKJV)**

“Watch, **stand fast in the faith**, be brave, be strong.” **I Corinthians 26:13 (NKJV)**

“Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, **so stand fast in the Lord**, beloved.” **Philippians 4:1 (NKJV)**

“21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight-- 23 **if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard**, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” **Colossians 1:21-23 (NKJV)**

“Therefore, brethren, **stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught**, whether by word or our

epistle.” **II Thessalonians 2:15**
(NKJV)

While these passages may not use the specific phrases, “remain faithful” or “live the life”, their message is clear. There is an obligation and expectation that we continue in the faith and stand fast in it. That is really what those specific phrases actually mean when used by most Christians.

As Paul states in the book of Romans, we have been set free from sin and become slaves of righteousness.

“And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” Romans 6:18
(NKJV)

As such, we need to serve our new master rather than the old one. In other words, remain faithful or live the life.

It seems to me that what people are really trying to defend against is legalism. That is, they are trying to prevent people from getting the idea that their salvation is based on keeping a system of law. That is a noble goal. However, villainizing perfectly good and Biblical phrases like “remain faithful” and “live the life” leads to confusion instead of clarity. I am afraid too many people are running so far from Galatia that they are running past Jerusalem.

Note: The previous article is an excerpt from *Galatians* by Terry Carter which will be available for purchase on Amazon soon.