



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

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“Fallen From Grace”

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It has been among the most hotly debated topics. Some argue that it cannot happen, that if it appears to, then the person who does it was not really a Christian to start with. What I’m talking about, of course, is the possibility of apostasy. Or, to use the phrase we hear most often, “falling from grace.”

That it is possible for one to forfeit his or her salvation is apparent in more than one New Testament passage. Peter wrote, “For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘A dog returns to its own vomit,’ and, ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:20-22). The Hebrew writer penned a similar warning. “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

But it is from Galatians 5:4 that we get the expression, “fallen from grace” — the only time in Scripture the phrase appears. There, Paul is explicit that some “have fallen away from grace.” It is possible for such a thing to happen and the expression is indeed a biblical one! What we have not stressed as much, however, is how Galatians 5 defines falling from grace.

Notice carefully the context of the epistle and 5:2-6 in particular. In Galatians, Paul takes issue with those who said that in order for one be accepted as a faithful Christian, he/she had to become a faithful Jew. He charges that this was desertion of the Christian’s calling (1:6), a perversion of the gospel (1:7), that the Galatians were pursuing this course because they had been “bewitched” (3:1), and that if they or anyone else persisted in such a course change for the gospel, they would be under God’s curse (1:8-9). In Galatians 5:2-6, he argues that, if the Galatians choose to follow the lead of the Judaizers and submit to circumcision and the practice of the Mosaic law, then they will have “fallen from grace.”

Here's what is of interest in light of the way we commonly use the expression. In context, Paul does not use the phrase "fallen from grace" to describe one who ceases the practice of pure and undefiled religion, the way we most commonly use it, but to describe *one who adds to that practice by binding something on God's people that God Himself has not bound*.

Now, we do not face the same exact situation today. I know of no one in the church who argues that we must practice the tenets of Judaism as a part of our commitment to Christ. But we do well to question whether some are not guilty of the same thing in *principle* as that condemned by Paul. It is as disrespectful to biblical authority to bind where God has not bound as it is to loose where God has not loosed (note Matt. 16:18-19; 18:18). And it is a fundamental denial of the trust in God's grace that lies at the heart of Christian faith. Paul says that to do such a thing is to fall from grace.

That makes it more than a little serious.

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