

Galatians 5:7-12 “Called to Persevere in Freedom”

GAL 5:7-12 “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." 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. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!”

I don't know if you sense the frustration and heart-felt concern here on Paul's part for the Galatian church but he is truly incensed over the spiritual abuse these Judaizers are putting these people through in Galatia. He knows what these Judaizers are all about and where they want to take this church.

Keep in mind that Paul is a man who used to be one of the Judaizers, in one sense, in that he too was a zealot for the law and anyone who disagreed with him were not only suspect, but also in danger of being on the receiving end of his wrath.

You talk about a radical right wing religious zealot this is what Paul was as a supporter of the Mosaic Law as a means of righteousness before God. You need only look to the time in which he encouraged the stoning of Stephen as he held the garments of those who murdered him.

Now granted, Paul is no less zealous now than he was then, but his zealousness was turned completely around to where he was giving his life, not to the destruction of people, but to trying to pluck people out of the fire with the love of Christ through the gospel. He was now in the business of saving people from the wrath to come.

And so, Paul has been on both sides of the fence when it comes to zeal; one for the law and one for Christ. And in this way he knows the mindset of these zealot Jews who want to lead these Galatian Christians down a path which is not healthy for the church. And he knows how destructive it will be.

As an apostle he can't stand by and just let them bulldoze over the sheep for whom Christ died. He loves them and the Lord too much

to let that happen. And this, by the way, is a legitimate function of any shepherd of the flock of Jesus Christ.

The staff which a shepherd carried out in the fields was not used only for leading the sheep, but also as a weapon to ward off the wolves. And Paul has turned his staff on the wolves in Galatia.

In confronting the wolves Paul has made it clear that he will not back down and instead has every intention of exposing their falsehood as he teaches the truth of God's word regarding the law. This is why he summed up the section we saw last week the way he did.

GAL 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

When Paul lived and worked among the Galatian Christians as he tended them with the gospel and the word of God this was his message. And now he reminds them of that message of faith in the risen Christ. But then he goes on to remind them of their former disposition towards the gospel, prior to this letter.

GAL 5:7 "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?"

Paul acknowledges the fact that there was a time in which they were faithful to Christ and His teachings. Here he uses the imagery of a race. And the idea was that they were competitors, they were pursuing a goal. They had the finish line in view. But now, someone has cut in front of them and instead of pushing past them and continuing the race they simply stop running.

For those of you who have played sports at some of the higher levels this would simply have been unacceptable as far as the coaches were concerned. I remember playing high school football and having my coaches tell me and the rest of the team that until that whistle blows you go and knock someone else down.

If you block someone then you need to get back up off of the ground and block someone else. Simply because you get knocked down doesn't mean you quit. You never quit.

In fact, if you watch any of the NFL players on any given Sunday you'll see in the instant replays that the defensive linemen who make most of the sacks on the quarter back are the ones who were

knocked down once, twice or more but who kept pursuing the play until finally they made the tackle or the whistle blew.

If you've got a job to do then you give it your all. But what was happening in Galatia was that many of these Christians were either knocked down or distracted from their race and instead of getting back up and pursuing their goal they sat on the side of the road waiting for the other competitors to tell them what to do and where to go.

I remember some of the expressions my coaches used for any of us who wouldn't get back up and make a play. Aside from the tamer expressions like being called Sally, the intent was clear. Be a man and finish the play, or in a spiritual sense, don't give up the biggest game of your life so easily.

In other words, persevere. These Galatians were not persevering. As soon as doubts were placed in their minds they folded. Why? Because they forgot or simply chose to ignore their training which Paul faithfully gave them in the word of God.

And what they had done was to exchange the truth for a lie. This is why we need to be grounded in the word of God. Only as we are grounded will we recognize the falsehoods and reject them. Only as we are grounded in the truth will we be discerning as the Spirit of God reveals His will through His word.

"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?"

In other words, who got in your way? And when they got in your way, why didn't you go around them? Why did you fold like a deck of cards?

Now, the issue here is the truth. Who kept you from obeying the truth? What truth? Well, the truth that Jesus Christ alone is your salvation. And the truth that only as you trust in Him alone will you will be saved. But it also involved the truth that to walk in Christ one must do it according to the Spirit, in the truth of the word of God, inspired by the Spirit.

Therefore, it was not the Spirit of God who was leading these Christians in Galatia down this path since that would be contrary to God's will.

GAL 5:8 "That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you."

The word persuasion here in our text is a word which is not passive but active. In other words, the Judaizers were actively trying to convince these Galatians to give up the truth of the gospel for a different message; a message which added the law to the finished work of Christ.

God wouldn't divide Himself. And so, Paul is making it clear that it is the Judaizers who are trying to do this to you. And what they're doing is not something which pleases God.

False teaching usually comes into the church in little bite sized pieces. This is how the enemy works. And it usually comes in coated in the truth.

Again, keep in mind that the Judaizers were not denying the cross of Christ. They were not even denying His resurrection. What they were denying is that, in practice, faith in His finished work on the cross wasn't enough for you to be righteous and therefore reconciled back to God.

You also needed to work out your salvation in a literal way as you obeyed the Law of Moses in conjunction with the cross of Christ. That kind of teaching, though partially correct, will only permeate its way through the body of Christ in a destructive way.

GAL 5:9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

If you've ever made bread you know that in a pound or two of dough it only takes a very little bit of yeast to effect the whole loaf. And what Paul is saying here is that in a similar way if you let even a little yeast, or a little bad teaching, to infect your life and the life of the church, you will find that it will eventually get out of control unless you put it in check by rejecting it.

And the way it will infect your life and the life of the church is to actually promote the very thing it is supposed to avoid; ungodliness. And by ungodliness I mean anything which is not of God. Anything which takes us away from God and growing in Christ and His love.

Paul points out to Timothy how bad teaching, bad behavior, actually infects the body like yeast. But instead of yeast he uses a more repulsive analogy.

2TI 2:15-17 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because

those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,..."

When Paul tells Timothy to teach the church to avoid godless chatter. (And by the way some of your translations put it avoid, worldly and empty chatter or babbling), he uses the word chatter as that which is ineffectual.

It doesn't mean unintelligible, but rather useless. It's like trying to talk to someone who thinks they know everything. Remember Cliff on the sit-com Cheers? Cliff was one of those guys who knew it all and yet for all his apparent wisdom it never made any sense or made any impact on the conversation other than showing everyone what an idiot he was.

Who cares about the mating habits of the Mediterranean fruit fly when the issue is how do we keep this land mine from blowing up in our faces?

And in a similar way, who cares about the IN's and OUT's of your perspective on the law and how you think it's important when the issue is how do we teach people how to be saved?

The same can be said of churches today who spend so much time on their distinctives when the issue is the soul's of people and where they will spend eternity. I've heard arguments from people who name the name of Christ who will come just short of popping someone because they are insistent that unless you baptize Christians by dunking them they aren't truly baptized.

And you can't just dunk them up to their chins or eyes, the top of their head must be entirely submerged. And of course you need to make sure they are dunked backwards, no dunking forward. Forward dunking is out. Backwards dunking is the best because when they come up the first thing they do is look up to the heavens.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that such issues as baptism are unimportant, but when we become so obsessed with things like the mode of baptism, which really should allow a little more leeway, than we can lose sight of the more weightier issues. And in those cases it can become so much babbling, so much noise.

And it's then when the pitch of the noise becomes so high we can't hear from God. And the issue becomes pushing my issue rather

than the truth of God's word which is designed to always promote peace and unity and godliness in that truth.

But it can become more serious than a pet doctrine. As Paul tells Timothy, and as he's been addressing in Galatia, there are teachings which are out and out blasphemous. And we need to be aware of the false teachers who are promoting such things and encourage the body of Christ in such a way as to flee and forsake such destructive teachings.

I'm reminded of the recent movement which swept this country and in some areas is still active, where the alleged movement of the Spirit was manifest in ways where otherwise normal people were transformed into barking dogs, where they were found writhing on the floor for hours at a time, where the experience became more important than the word of God, which each experience is to be measured by.

This "movement of the Spirit" did more to divide the body of Christ where leaders in many of these churches reprimanded their congregations for daring to question such odd behavior, rather than allowing the people in the pew to be like the Bereans Paul praised as they went to the word of God to see if these things were so.

We always need to be on guard without being paranoid. But to allow teachers to come into our midst, whether by radio, television, taped messages and the Internet, and not be discerning according to the word of God, is to invite trouble. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

But as Paul points out in our next verse it is no small thing for God as it relates to the accountability of these false teachers in the church.

GAL 5:10 "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."

First Paul commends these Galatians in advance knowing that the Spirit of God will take the truth and encourage them to flee from these false teachings. But then he goes on to point blank make a statement to the false teachers and to warn them of God's displeasure.

"The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be."

In other translations it says, “the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment.” (NASB)

In other words, there is no escape for those who will hurt the children of God. We usually think of our gracious God in terms of love and well we should, but God is also a just God and will not tolerate people trying to destroy His people, especially the young in the faith as is implied in the words of Jesus who addressed children who come to Him.

MAT 18:6-7 “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”

Jesus here speaks of judgment on such people. And Paul is simply echoing the teachings of Jesus as did Peter.

2PE 2:2-3;9 “Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment, while continuing their punishment.”

Despite how others may try to exploit the body of Christ our Lord Jesus sees what’s going on and is very concerned to the point where He will make the way of escape, and it’s usually in the form of faithful leaders and teachers who hold the truth in high esteem and teach it as well as live it unto the glory of God.

And that’s who Paul is. He is a faithful leader and teacher who loves the Lord and His sheep who would, and did, give his life for them. And so, he will not be accused of doing anything that would be seen as being unfaithful to his work including the idea of adding the law to the gospel of grace.

GAL 5:11 “Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.”

What Paul is implying here is that the Judaizers were accusing Paul of also preaching circumcision, but only as it was convenient. And for this reason the Judaizers took the pious approach that Paul

was being soft on the law and they therefore were going to persecute him for this position.

Remember, it was Paul who encouraged Timothy, who was half Jew and half Gentile, to become circumcised. And the Judaizers reasoned that if he thought so highly of circumcision for believers then why not now?

But Paul never used circumcision as a way to attain righteousness as did the Judaizers. For Paul, to circumcise Timothy was simply a tactical position to allow both himself and Timothy to be able to minister to Jews in the temple; nothing more.

And that's why he asks the question, "if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" The point is he's not preaching circumcision which is precisely why the false teachers are persecuting him.

And quite honestly every teacher of the word of God who remains faithful to that word should expect opposition. It doesn't mean we should be looking for persecution like some masochist but we should not be surprised, anymore than any believer who remains faithful to Christ and His word, should be surprised. This is what Peter tells us.

1PE 4:12-16 "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

But getting back to our text. Notice that after Paul says, if he is preaching circumcision why is he being persecuted?, he then goes on to say, "In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished."

In other words, "the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews partly because they could not accept the idea of a suffering, much less crucified, Messiah. But it was even more an offense to them because it robbed them of their most distinctive outward signs of Jewishness, the Mosaic Law and circumcision." (John MacArthur)

But in addition to that it also robbed them of something more sinister and that is the traditions of the Jews which went beyond the word of God. The Jewish leaders and Rabbis had a tendency to add all sorts of extra laws which were referred to in some cases as traditions.

In fact, even Paul pursued such things with zeal in his opposition to the church. This is what he admits here in this letter to the Galatians.

GAL 1:13-14 “For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”

This included, but was not limited to, the teachings of the word of God. And so it included any tradition which was associated with the Jews, and this is what Paul was zealous to pursue to the exclusion of the truth on many occasions.

But now that he is in Christ, now that he has met the risen Savior, there is no more room to advance any tradition which undermines the cross, which infers the atonement of Christ on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins.

And by extension anyone who tries to undermine the cross of Christ, or who tries to undermine the only way of salvation, needs to consider how God views such a thing. And this takes us back to the judgment Paul spoke of earlier.

GAL 5:12 “As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!”

The NASB puts it this way. “I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.”

The NKJV says, “I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off.”

Keep in mind that Paul has been addressing circumcision. And at first glance it might look as though Paul is simply lashing out in anger and wishing them harm. Now, I don't doubt for a moment that Paul may be feeling a sort of righteous indignation here because these Judaizers are trying to harm the sheep, but it goes much deeper than that.

Paul is actually making a theological statement here. He is saying that if you are going to try and earn salvation then don't go half way. If circumcision is your ticket to heaven then it would be better to make sure that ticket is sealed with your own blood.

During the time of Paul there was a sect which he may be referring to. It was the cult of Cybele, "a popular pagan nature goddess in Asia Minor. Many devout male worshippers in the cult castrated themselves, and all its priests were self-made eunuchs." (MacArthur)

Now Paul was not wishing these Judaizers to suffer some cruel form of punishment. He knew God would deal with them in judgment. But his point was, "if the Judaizers are so insistent on circumcision as a means of pleasing God why don't they go all the way and castrate themselves as the supreme act of religious devotion?.....

..... If, like the pagans, they believe human achievement can earn divine favor, why don't they go to the pagan extremes of self-mutilation, like the Cybelene priests?" (MacArthur)

The world seems to believe that mere devotion or sincerity expressed through their good works will earn them heaven, as they understand it. The analogy is for example, if you give your money to the church to earn God's favor, then why not give every penny you have?

If simply feeding the poor to earn righteous status before God is your approach to salvation then why not give the poor all the money you have. And the point is no matter how much you give it will never be enough, because there are not enough good works in this world combined to earn God's righteousness.

That's why Christ came into the world. And so we come full circle once again. And what Paul is driving home here is that for the Galatians to get on with the work of Christ they must reject the work of the law as a means of salvation or sanctification. This is what Jesus meant in Matthew 5.

MAT 5:20 "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Again, we are called to freedom and no amount of self-righteousness will accomplish that. All the glory goes to God and all our righteousness comes from Christ by faith in Him alone.

ROM 3:21-24 “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”