

Unlocking Freedom: A Study in Galatians

Galatians 5:2-12

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

July 14, 2019

Introduction

As we continue in our journey through the book of Galatians we come to another shift of focus in the book which springs off of verse 1 of chapter 5 (“*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery*”) – chapters 5 and 6 from there speak about the freedom we are to walk in as the Holy Spirit wonderfully ministers in and through the lives of each believer. These chapters are filled with wonderful truths reflecting the fact that right doctrine leads to right behavior. But before we get to that rich text, we must remember where we have come from (context is everything)... For 4 chapters Paul has been defending the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ while at the same time shining a light upon the heresy that was creeping into the Church. He attacked this false doctrine of salvation from every angle imaginable - from an intellectual logical perspective, a legal perspective, a lovingly emotional perspective, and a historical perspective – these are not hard truths to understand, and as we have made our way through each verse up until today, you may have felt that the CD was stuck playing the same song. If you were to go back and listen to each sermon, there is much similarity between these passages and therefore sermons. It is after all a letter, and not a book. We have broken down each verse and looked at each word carefully, but let us not forget that we are dealing with a letter written in paragraph form. So with that mindset, let us close out one paragraph of focus in order to open another next week. If you have your Bible with you, please open them to **Galatians 5**, read with me **verses 1-12**. *Prayer.*

What we have just seen in the verses today is that Paul is giving two last warnings to the Church on the seriousness of the dangers associated with false doctrine and false teachers. He is making an appeal for living the Spirit-filled life of freedom that he will talk about in the upcoming paragraphs, rather than reverting to the works-bound self-righteousness of slavery. So let us begin with Paul’s first warning.

1. A Warning concerning the Dangers of False Doctrine (vv. 2-7)

Verse 2 – “*Behold, I Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.*” It would seem that Paul is wasting no time jumping in the middle of this debate for the hearts of the Galatians, and he does not mix words. But what does ‘circumcision’ have to do with Christ? To us Americans, it is not connected whatsoever, but I want to show you what Paul really means in this verse as we look at it from a Hebrew/Jewish perspective. **Circumcision** understood in this context deals with ‘an external action seeking right standing with God.’ Every obedient Jew knew that if they desired to be obedient to the Law of Moses, they had to get their newborn son circumcised, as it was a mark of their covenantal relationship with God (first commanded by God to Abraham in Genesis 17:10). For us circumcision is mostly based upon the preference of the parents and health of the baby. For Jews it was a way that God set them

apart as His chosen nation, and therefore it was a crucial mark and command to follow. The problem arose when a certain sect of the Pharisees taught that circumcision equated to salvation. And that false teaching is what followed Paul around in many of the Churches he planted. So, what Paul is saying here in **verse 2** is that if you equate circumcision or any other external act to salvation then you have no need for Christ. *He is of no benefit to you.* Paul is pointing out a rather logical observation. If the Law saves then there's no need for Christ.

He continues on in **Verse 3**, *“And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.”* If the Law saves you then there's no need for Christ, but remember...if you break one of the 613 commandments, you break them all. Because only perfect obedience to the Law will put you in right standing with God. **James 2:10** says, *“For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”* You break one, you break them all. Let me read for you a few laws, that to me would be very easily broken...“Thou shall not eat a limb removed from a living beast...”; “Thou shall not eat with milk”...“Thou shall not eat fat...”; “Thou shall not take inaccurate measures and weights...”; “Thou shall not break a vow...”; “Thou shall not till the ground in the Sabbatical year.” And the list goes on for another 606 commandments regarding religious days and holidays, dietary laws, and so on – In all actuality if there were only 10 commandments, I would be guilty of at least one of them at some point in my lifetime. There is no human way that any one, a part from Jesus Himself, is able to keep the whole law, therefore they are guilty of breaking the whole law. Paul is giving these Gentile believers an education in this truth concerning the Law. Do not find freedom in Christ from your pagan bondage to only trade it with slavery to the Law!

His language gets even more aggressive...**verse 4**, *“You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”* This does not mean that you are able to lose your salvation, too much of Scripture would be in contradiction to that understanding of this verse. Paul is simply telling those who are beginning to align themselves with this false doctrine that to do so will sever (or literally to declare useless or render inactive) their relationship with Christ resulting in a fall from grace. To declare a relationship with Christ useless or inactive, means that their was only a shadow or mirage of this relationship. These seeking to be justified by the self-righteousness of the Law are not believers. For if they were truly saved followers of Christ they would not be able to be cut off from a relationship with the Savior – losing their salvation status – *“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”* (1 Jn. 5:12-13); *“My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand”* (John 10:29); *“Therefore He is able to also save forever those who draw near to God through Him...”* (Heb. 7:25). Therefore, those who so easily fall away from their commitment to faith in Christ alone and seek to add self justification through good works, are not believers and therefore *have been severed from Christ.*

Verse 5, “For we through the Spirit, by faith are waiting for the hope of righteousness.” In contrast to those placing their faith in themselves and their ability to live perfect lives (which is a burden that will both crush you and rob you of joy and hope), are those who are saved through faith, through the perfect and gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit, and are waiting in confidence for that day where we will be fully set free from the battle of the flesh – it is an exchange or trade that takes the burden and hopelessness in our ability to bring about our own salvation and trades it with the work of Christ, by the grace of God and conviction of the Holy Spirit, and delivers hope. That is quite the exchange! ***I was a slave and now I am free. I was blind and now I see. I was dead to trespasses and now I am newly alive in Christ.*** And none of that was of my own doing.

This is what **verse 6** implies. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.” Praise the Lord! I could have been born cursing and swearing on the table of a bar, or I could have been born praising the Lord in the pew of a church, and it does not matter. Because my faith and hope lie solely in God’s grace understood in the saving the work of Jesus Christ, ministered to my heart and soul by the Holy Spirit. My friends, this freedom! **Faith working through love.** These 4 words not only highlight the basis of our salvation, a collision of faith and love, but it speaks of our motivation of behavior.

That is why Paul continues on in **verse 7**, saying, “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” Our faith, motivated by our love for God because of His love for us seen in the salvation offered through Jesus Christ, causes us to run well in obedience to the truth. This is the course the Galatian believes were on, and then something happened...their path of obedience to the truth motivated by faith and love was hindered. This word “hindered” means to “cut down or strike.” Picture with me an individual running quickly and with grace upon a paved path, taking each stride with confidence, and then that paved path being ripped up and the runner being prevented from continuing. This is the word image Paul gives us. *You were running well...*but then your path of obedience to the truth motivated by faith and love of God and others was ripped out from underneath you and has swallowed you up...*Who hindered you?*

Verse 8, “This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.”

It is here where Paul shifts his warning from the false doctrine being taught to the false teachers. And in this warning, his language becomes even more aggressive, like a parent staring down a bully.

2. A Warning against False Teachers (vv. 8-12)

Who hindered you? (v. 7) It most certainly was not God! (v. 8)

Verse 9 – “A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.” Here Paul speaks of these false teachers, being few, yet have the ability to contaminate the whole Church. We must be careful what gets taught in our Small Groups, in our Sunday schools, in our children’s church, in our worship services. We must be careful what gets taught in our 1-on-1 Bible studies and what gets shared in our times of fellowship, because the simple beginnings of false doctrine can lead many to a false understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And there is no other Gospel which leads to eternal life; therefore, all other gospels lead to an eternity in Hell. This is a serious call to arms – we must be like the

Bereans who sought the Scriptures to make certain Paul was teaching accurately from God's Word. For *a little leaven permeates or causes the entire lump of dough to ferment and spoil*. That's all it takes – a spark to cause a fire. Let us be warned of those who look and act like a Christian, but whose doctrine and theology are from the pits of Hell.

Verse 10 – *“I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view, but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.”* Paul gives a sharp warning to the false teacher among them, speaking of their future judgment. He is speaking loud enough that the perpetrators would be able to hear and understand the seriousness of their actions. ‘I may not know who you are, but I know you’re listening. God will judge greatly your mishandling of His Word and the lies you are spreading.’ I shudder thinking of what these false teachers must have felt when they heard these words strongly penned by the Apostle Paul under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I am certain that at this point, the individual reading aloud this letter to the Church peered directly in to the soul of the guilty. Jesus said in **Matthew 18:6** – *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.”* And we know from the teaching of Scripture in Revelation 20, that judgment for those who actively lead others astray, and those who have been lead astray, will be eternity in the lake of fire. What a strong warning Paul gives the Judaizers and any one of us who teach or believe in this false gospel. You do not want to bear this judgment.

Verse 11, *“But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.”* Paul here is vindicating himself from the false reports of these false teachers that even he secretly advocated circumcision for salvation. If I truly did do this, like I used to when I was a Pharisee, than why am I still being persecuted by these Judaizers? I am not one of them, and I would never align myself up with them declaring that Christ died needlessly (Gal. 2:21). For if I did align myself with them than there would be no stumbling block of the cross for the Jew to fall over. You see again, Paul highlights the fact that the symbol of the Cross signifying faith based freedom and salvation in Christ is in direct conflict or opposition to the self-righteous works based gospel. Salvation equals A or B, not A + B. You are either saved by Grace through Faith in the finished work of the Savior or you are an unbeliever who will be judged and found guilty of your sinfulness and failure to save yourself.

Paul then ends this portion of our study in Galatians by saying in **Verse 12**, *“I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.”* Yikes! Paul is not giving credence or instruction for these Galatian believers to physically harm these false teachers, but he is saying that their sin of seeking to contaminate the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ angers him greatly. “You speak of circumcision, why not go all the way and castrate yourself like the pagans of the day.” **John MacArthur**: ‘To add any human effort or act to God’s gracious provision of His Son is to exchange the saving gospel of Jesus Christ for the damning lies of paganism.’ And when Paul sees the very families of those he lead to Christ question their salvation because of the lies of false teachers he passionately responds.

Conclusion

Are we passionate about standing up to the lies of the false teachers today?
Are we passionate about the eternal status of those being deceived?

What Gospel have we believed? It is clear that we cannot have it both ways. We are either slaves bound for judgment or heirs saved for freedom. What you believe matters in this life and the life to come. There is no greater battle than the one for the souls of mankind. Whose side are you on?

Let's pray.