

A Curse Upon the False Teachers
Galatians 5:7-12
September 23, 2012

Paul has strongly encouraged the Galatians to stand fast in the liberty of Christ and not to become entangled in the bondage known as the Mosaic Law. And Paul has now warned the Galatians that they are dealing with a most serious issue. It is the issue of law versus grace. And of course, this is a life and death issue. We have already seen that the law brings a curse on fallen man.

For as many as are under the works of the law are under the curse.

Galatians 3:10

And so it is extremely critical that we understand the importance of clinging to the true doctrine of salvation by grace. Paul thought it was important enough to write the book of Hebrews and the book of Galatians to warn about going back under the Jewish Law. And in addition to those books, the book of Romans is largely a proposition of salvation by grace.

Virtually every epistle in the New Testament is instructive in the doctrine of salvation by grace. It is everywhere in the Bible. There is no other kind of salvation. God either saves by grace or He doesn't save at all.

Now we come to our text for this afternoon and we will see how harshly Paul refers to the false teachers who had come in to the Galatians and were advocating a return to the Law.

The Changed Condition of the Galatians

Ye did run well.

Galatians 5:7

It appears that as long as Paul was with them the Galatians were doing well under the doctrine of grace. They were running well.

You may remember in the book of Hebrews that the

writer used the metaphor of running a race to describe the Christian life. (Hebrews 12:1) And also in I Corinthians 9:24 Paul uses the same metaphor. And as far as he could tell, the Galatians were running the race well at first.

Now Paul doesn't explain exactly how they were running well. But it can be assumed that they were living by faith. They were living with a good understanding of the grace of Christ. And most importantly they were not being entangled with that old Jewish religion. It seems that they were casting their hope in the pure gospel of Christ. And they were running the race well. But look,

Who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?
Galatians 5:7

Somewhere along the line the Galatians deviated. They were running well and then they changed. And here it says that they stopped obeying the truth. It is apparent from Paul's arguments in the entire book that the Galatians had turned from the doctrines of grace to some other form of doctrine. They had turned to justification by the Law and in turning to the Law they had stopped running well.

Notice here that Paul claims they were "hindered." (anakopto) This word carries the idea of someone beating you back with a stick. Everytime you try to take a step forward someone is there to beat you back. In the context of a race, you are running quite well around the track; you are winning the race; and then someone jumps out of the stands and knocks you off course.

Example: In a close race all it takes is for a runner to be knocked off stride for a moment and the race is lost.

Example: There was a famous football game a few years ago when the runner had broken free down the sideline and he was obviously going for a touchdown, He was ahead of all the defenders. Suddenly one of the opposing coaches darted out from the sidelines and tackled the runner. It was a very odd play, but the runner was illegally hindered from running for a touchdown.

And this is sort of the idea here in Galatia. Someone has fouled the Galatians. They have come onto the track and hindered them from running properly. And Paul would like to take names.

Who did hinder you?
Galatians 5:7

It seems that Paul had his notepad out and he wanted to know who these men were who came in and knocked the Galatians off stride. I suspect that if Paul got names there was eventually a confrontation somewhere down the line. Remember how Paul marched to Jerusalem and confronted the elders there over the issue of circumcision. And remember how he confronted Peter in Antioch when Peter was acting like a hypocrite. And I am sure Paul would have loved to have gotten his hands on these teachers who were hindering the Galatians. He probably would have been tempted to twist their necks off – that is how strong his feelings were against these false teachers.

It is also interesting here that Paul is being somewhat generous to the Galatians. Paul is more prone to blame the false teachers than to blame the Galatians.

Ye did run well. Who did hinder you . . .

These are new converts in Galatia. If they are Christians at all they are baby Christians. And Paul extends a good bit of grace to them. Paul would rather blame the Jewish teachers than his new babies in the faith. So he extends grace to his new converts.

You will notice in verse eight that Paul assumes that they were called by God. And if they were actually called with a heavenly calling; (Hebrews 3:1) if they were drawn by God the Father to Christ; (John 6:44) then Paul will extend them grace and rather blame the false teachers.

Notice in verse 10 how Paul maintains some confidence in the Galatians but is ready to curse the Judaizers.

I have confidence in you through the Lord, that you will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whoever he be.

Galatians 5:10

The Source of the False Doctrine

This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

Galatians 5:8

Paul calls the error, "This persuasion." This persuasion was the teaching that said justification is by the law. It was the teaching that the Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved. It was the teaching that the Gentiles must become Jews. It is called "This persuasion."

Paul said that "This persuasion" does not come from God. This is a nice way of saying it comes from the devil, for whatever is not of God comes from the devil. The Devil has always been a cunning persuader, hasn't he? He comes in as an angel of light and he persuades and he deceives so that if it were possible even the elect would be deceived. And Paul says,

This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

Galatians 5:8

These false teachers came in not from God but from God's great Adversary. And they came in with great zeal and they "zealously affected" the Galatians. (Gal.4:17)

This would seem to suggest to us that anyone who opposes the grace of God in salvation is not from God. Anyone who would advocate that salvation is by works or by the law is not of God. Anyone who extends circumcision or baptism or ceremonies as the way of salvation is not of God. Anyone who teaches that heaven is gained by witnessing or by paying money to the church or by the mediation of human priests is not of God. Anyone who says that salvation is gained in any measure by the work of man is coming from some other source other than God. The gospel of sheer grace is the gospel that comes from God. The gospel that says man is helpless is the gospel that comes from God. The gospel that says man is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph.1:1) is the gospel that comes from God. The gospel

that says that man is not dead comes from another source.

The Danger of the Doctrine of Justification by Law

Obviously, false teachers will start with a little error. I am sure that they didn't march into the churches and advocate an immediate rejection of Christ and a return to Judaism. Rather, they advocated that the Galatians adopt one rite of Judaism – circumcision. They didn't immediately tell the Galatians to start bringing animal sacrifices. They started with a little Judaism in hopes of alienating them from Paul and alienating them from Christ. But look,

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.
Galatians 5:9

The false teachers had introduced a little leaven into the Galatian lump. But I want you to notice that the whole lump was beginning to leaven. Circumcision was the initial issue. But soon the Galatians were observing the Jewish religious days.

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.
Galatians 4:10

The Galatians apparently saw no harm in deviating a little bit from the doctrine of justification by faith. They probably said, "What does it hurt if we placate the Jews in this matter? After all, it is good to keep everyone happy." You see the spirit of ecumenicalism here. "Let's compromise here and there so that we can all worship together as one."

But Paul says,

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

The gospel is not compromisable. As Paul said, a compromised gospel is not the gospel at all. (Gal.1:7) And it is apparent that the lump does not purify the leaven, but the leaven perverts the whole lump.

Our great duty as a church is to protect the gospel. God has granted us a small sphere of influence. And our duty is to take responsibility for that small sphere. Within our membership

and in our community one of our chief duties is to maintain the purity of the gospel because “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”

The Judgment Facing the False Teachers

But he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whoever he be.

Galatians 5:10

It seems that Paul is quick to have a forgiving spirit toward the Galatians, but is quick to judgment toward the false teachers. Paul is confident that the false teachers are trouble makers. Paul is confident that they are not from God. And he assures them that there is judgment waiting for them. Peter espoused a similar view toward false teachers.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

II Peter 2:1-3

Martin Luther, in his Commentary on Galatians, pointed out that Paul was often quite forgiving of the errors of life. But he was most unforgiving of errors in doctrine.

“I cannot say it often enough, that we must carefully differentiate between doctrine and life. Doctrine is a piece of heaven, life is a piece of earth. Life is sin, error, uncleanness, misery, and charity must forbear, believe, hope, and suffer all things. Forgiveness of sins must be continuous so that sin and error may not be defended and sustained. But with doctrine there must be no error, no need of pardon. There can be no comparison between doctrine and life. The least little point of doctrine is of greater importance than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot allow the least jot of doctrine to be corrupted. We may overlook the offenses and errors of life, for

we daily sin much. Even the saints sin, as they themselves confess in the Lord's Prayer and in the Creed. But our doctrine, God be praised, is pure, because all the articles of our faith are grounded on the Holy Scriptures.

Martin Luther

So, Paul says judgment is coming on the false teachers.

The Sign of the True Gospel Message – Persecution

And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased.

Galatians 5:11

Here is one of the signs of the true gospel - it results in offense and persecution. This was especially true as to the gospel in the early church. The gospel was highly offensive to the Jews because the gospel brought an end to Judaism. The gospel said, "Take down the temple. The gospel said, "Remove the altar." The gospel said, "Disengage the priesthood." The gospel said, "Bring in the Gentiles." This was as offensive as it could possibly be to the Jews. And therefore the preaching of the gospel resulted in great persecution from the Jews.

Paul himself had been a persecutor. Paul had dragged Christians from their homes and killed them. And now, Paul was the main target of the Jews. They would have killed him in an instant if they could have. I am sure that God must have supernaturally preserved Paul's life many times.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep . .

II Corinthians 11:24-25

Now Paul is saying that if he simply compromised a little and preached circumcision, then he would not be persecuted by the Jews. If he said, "Okay, we can keep on keeping the Jewish Law, we can add circumcision and we can all be happy," then all the Jews would have went home and everyone would be happy. There would have been no offense of the cross then.

But the gospel says, "It is Christ and nothing else." The cross of Christ does not allow for any other means of salvation. The cross of Christ does not allow Judaism to continue. And since Paul preached Christ and him crucified; since Paul preached Christ only; since Paul preached that the Jewish religion was abolished; Paul was persecuted.

A Little Sarcasm toward the False Teachers

I would they were even cut off which trouble you.
Galatians 5:12

The phrase "cut off" is the Greek word "apokopto." It means to amputate or to mutilate, especially with regard to bodily parts.

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off. (apokopto)
Mark 9:43

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: (apokopto)
Mark 9:45

Then Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear.
John 18:10

In this passage Paul is defending the true gospel against the doctrine of circumcision. The Jewish teachers are advocating that the Gentiles must cut off their foreskins in order to be saved. And Paul responds with a bit of crude sarcasm.

I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

Paul says, I wish they would just go ahead and castrate themselves. They want to use the knife on you. Let them go ahead and turn the blade on themselves. And don't stop with a mere circumcision, let them go ahead and mutilate themselves. Note the severity that is wished upon those who would pervert the gospel of Christ. Let them be castrated. Perhaps Paul was also suggesting, "Let them be cut off from the church. Let final judgment come upon them. Let them be counted among the damned." Such is the importance of the gospel of Christ.