

CONCERNING THE WAY

October 23, 2012

LESSON 145: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS



Chapter 5

In the last chapter Paul described the doctrine of justification by faith. Now he's going to explain the idea of Christian freedom. The Christian life is described as a life apart from Law, a life apart from excess, a life according to the Spirit, and a life of service.

Galatians 5:1 The Messiah has set us free so that we may enjoy the benefits of freedom. So keep on standing firm in it, and stop putting yourselves under the yoke of slavery again.

- This verse summarizes chapter 4 and introduces the theme of this chapter, which is freedom. Paul was warning the Galatians that, even though they had been delivered from the slavery of pagan religions, they were allowing themselves to be enslaved by the Mosaic Law.

Galatians 5:2-3 Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, the Messiah will be of no benefit to you. (3) Again, I insist that everyone who allows himself to be circumcised is obligated to obey the entire Law.

- This is a good example of the fact that when we read the Bible, we have to think about the context first to interpret what is being said. Paul was speaking to the Galatians who were being told by the Judaizers that they had to be circumcised to be saved. So they were thinking that circumcision would make them righteous.
- This does not mean that circumcision in itself is wrong – Paul had Timothy circumcised (in Galatia) so that he would have a wider ministry (Acts 16:1-3). But being circumcised because you think that will gain you favor with God is adding works to faith and shows that you do not have saving faith in Christ.
- Not only that, but because the law is a unit – you can't choose to obey one and ignore the others, if you are circumcised then you've obligated yourself to obey the whole law, which no one can do.

Galatians 5:4 Those of you who are trying to be justified by the Law have been cut off from the Messiah. You have fallen away from grace.

- Arminian (Holiness) churches use this verse to supposedly prove that you can lose your salvation, but they ignore the fact that "grace" is not salvation itself, but a means to salvation. This is not about the security of your salvation, but about the two proposed ways of salvation (the true and the false) that Paul has been discussing. He is saying if you choose to put yourself under the Law, then you're rejecting the grace we have in Christ. You're choosing to leave the system of grace and putting yourself under the system of Law.
- This same mistake happens today when a believer leaves a church that teaches salvation by grace through faith and joins one which teaches salvation that depends on repentance, confession, faith, baptism, and church membership.

Galatians 5:5-6 Through the Spirit by faith we confidently await the fulfillment of our righteous hope, (6) for in union with the Messiah Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters. What matters is faith expressed through love.

- True believers by faith confidently, eagerly wait for the return of Christ (also Romans 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 9:28). At the coming of Christ believers will be completely conformed to the entire will of God. The legal righteousness of Christ which we received when we were saved will be transformed into an outward righteousness when we are glorified.
- Paul makes an important comment in verse 6 – faith expressed through love is what matters. This is how we show that we have true saving faith (Ephesians 2:10; James 2:14-18).

Galatians 5:7-10 You were running the race beautifully. Who cut in on you and stopped you from obeying the truth? (8) Such influence does not come from the one who calls you. (9) A little yeast spreads through the whole batch of dough. (10) I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view of this. However, the one who is troubling you will suffer God's judgment, whoever he is.

- Paul liked to use the metaphor of a race to describe the Christian life (1 Corinthians 9:24-26, 2 Timothy 4:7). They had gotten off to a great start, but someone (the leader of the Judaizers) had “cut in on them”, making them break stride and stumble. They were trying to finish the race by legalistic self-effort instead of by faith (“obeying the truth”). This false teaching did not come from God (verse 8).
- Verse 9 is a little proverb (yeast represents sin or false doctrine) that means that it doesn't take very many people believing in false theology to affect a whole church. Also, a small error can ruin a whole system. For example if a Galatian church were to start believing that they needed to be circumcised to be saved, then the whole system of grace by faith in that church would be destroyed.

Galatians 5:11 As for me, brothers, if I am still preaching the necessity of circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

- Apparently Paul was being accused of preaching circumcision, which he certainly would have before his conversion. But that was the very reason why the Judaizers were criticizing him, because he was not. The teaching of grace, the idea that we can't contribute anything to our salvation, and Jesus' death on the cross paid for it all is offensive to most of the world, including many so-called Christians. Preaching people to obey the law would not have been offensive to anyone.

Galatians 5:12 I wish that those who are upsetting you would castrate themselves!

- This sounds like a horrendous thing to say by Paul, but think about the context (preaching of circumcision for salvation). Paul was sarcastically saying he would rather the Judaizers just go all the way and finish the job as priests of some pagan religions did, rather than corrupt the message of grace that had been so effective in reaching these Gentiles.

Galatians 5:13-14 For you, brothers, were called to freedom. Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity to gratify your flesh, but through love make it your habit to serve one another. (14) For the whole Law is summarized in a single statement: "You must love your neighbor as yourself."

- Here's a verse to underline and memorize! This is how we are to live our lives. We have freedom in Christ, but we shouldn't misuse that freedom, turning it into an excuse to wallow in self-gratification. The "flesh" is defined as our sinful nature. Freedom in Christ is not license to sin. We should use that freedom to serve each other in unselfish love.
- Christian love is the fulfillment of the law (also Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:25-28, Romans 13:8-10)

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, be careful that you are not destroyed by each other.

- There must have been fights going on in the church between those who were listening to the Judaizers and those were trying to be faithful to the message of grace preached by Paul. They were "biting and devouring one another". I've seen this happen in churches and it is ugly.

Galatians 5:16-18 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will never fulfill the desires of the flesh. (17) For what the flesh wants is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to the flesh. They are opposed to each other, and so you do not do what you want to do. (18) But if you are being led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

- The verb "live" in verse 16 is literally translated, "keep on walking." As a believer walks through life he should depend on the indwelling Holy Spirit for guidance and power. But the Spirit does not control believer's thoughts and actions automatically. He waits to be depended on. When a Christian does give in to the Spirit's control, the promise (in verse 16) is that he will not indulge the desires of the sinful nature. So, while we will never be completely free in this life from the evil desires that come from our fallen human nature, we don't have to give in to them, but can have victory by the Spirit's help.
- Verse 17 speaks about the fact that each Christian believer has two natures:
 - We have the sinful nature we were born with, inherited from our parents all the way back to Adam. This nature is crucified with Christ but is never completely eradicated in this life (Romans 6). In the Bible death is never eradication, but judgment or separation. Just like Christ was not eradicated on the cross, but judged by the Father, so our sin nature was judged at the cross, but it was not destroyed. It still tends to rear its ugly head through the desires of our fleshly body.
 - We have a new nature given to us at the time we are saved, one that wants to obey God. Both natures have desires – one for sin and one for holiness. So they are in conflict with each other, and this sometimes keeps a believer from doing what he would normally be doing with that new nature that wants to obey God. In other words, the Holy Spirit will block (if He is allowed to) the evil desires of the flesh.
- So we must allow the Spirit to lead us. We don't need the threat of the penalties of the Law to keep us from sinning, but we have, through our new nature, a love for Christ that compels us to live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:14). It is the Spirit, not the Law that sanctifies (perfects) us.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the actions of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, promiscuity, (20) idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of anger, quarrels, conflicts, factions, (21) envy, murder, drunkenness, wild partying, and things like that. I am telling you now, as I have told you in the past, that people who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- Paul says we don't have to even ask what the actions of the flesh are, they are obvious. These things have nothing to do with our new nature, but are part of our old sinful nature. The first three are sexual:
 - Sexual immorality – this is from the Greek word “porneia” which means “harlotry (including adultery and incest)” - any kind of illegitimate sexual act.
 - Impurity – a broad term, covers any kind of moral uncleanness in thoughts, words, or actions
 - Promiscuity – an open and shameless display of these things
- The next two are religious sins – Idolatry is the worship of false pagan gods by bowing to idols, and witchcraft is worshipping evil powers. Witchcraft (or sorcery) is the translation of the Greek word “pharmakeia” from where we get the term “pharmacy”. In ancient times and today the worship of evil powers included the use of drugs to create trances.
- Then you have seven evils in society, most are pretty self-explanatory. “Rivalry” is selfish ambition, trying to get ahead at other's expense. “Factions” refers to the divisions that are caused when people quarrel over issues, like what was happening in the Galatian church. Envy is a desire to have what belongs to someone else.
- The last two have to do with abuse of alcohol. Wild partying can also be translated orgies and probably refers to the drunken partying which was in those days associated with such things as the worship of Bacchus, the god of wine.
- Then Paul lets us know that this is not a complete list, by saying “and things like that.” Then he says that those who live like this, who regularly practice these fleshly sins, will not inherit the future kingdom of God. This does not say that a Christian loses his salvation if he lapses into a sin, but that a person who lives continually on that level of moral corruption shows they are not really a child of God.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

- By living in the Spirit, these are the things we should be practicing in our lives instead of the sins of the flesh that Paul listed in verse 16. All these things describe the nature of Christ Himself, which means that if we practice them, people will actually be able to see Christ in us! We can't produce any of them consistently on our own, but only by the Holy Spirit working through us because of our union with Christ.
- **Love** is listed first because it is the foundation of all the others, and it is the self-sacrificing kind of love, the kind of love that God has for us.
- **Joy** is not the same as happiness, like how we feel when we get something we want, but a deep and lasting delight that is promised to those who trust in Christ (John 15:11). It does not depend on our circumstances because it rests in the sovereignty of God over everything (Romans 8:28).
- **Peace** is another gift we have in Christ. It is an inner calm and quietness, even during difficult circumstances; and it defies human understanding (see Philippians 4:7).
- **Patience** is the ability to control ourselves in any situation, and not retaliate when we are treated badly. This kind of patience trusts that God will act on our behalf in His way and timing.
- **Kindness** is treating people, not just as you would want to be treated, but treating them as God treats

people. Since God is kind toward sinners (Romans 2:4; Ephesians 2:7) a Christian should show the same quality (see 2 Corinthians 6:6; Colossians 3:12).

- **Goodness** is both doing the right thing and also reaching out to do good for others even when they don't deserve it.
- **Faithfulness** is being trustworthy and reliable, like the faithful servant in Luke 16:10-12.
- **Gentleness** is both being submissive to God's Word, and being considerate to those that need correction or discipline (Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:25).
- **Self-control** is the ability to control your desires, passions, and emotions, especially when it comes to your sin nature, as we discussed earlier.
- As Paul says, obviously there are no laws against practicing these kinds of things.

Galatians 5:24-26 Now those who belong to the Messiah Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. (25) Since we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also be guided. (26) Let's stop being arrogant, provoking one another and envying one another.

- Paul is saying we don't have to respond to our sinful nature anymore because we have crucified it. This is possible because at our conversion we are identified with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-6; Colossians 2:11; 3:9). As we said before, this doesn't mean that our sin nature is gone or inactive, but that it has been judged, a fact that we are told to realize the truth of (read Romans 6:11-12).
- We have to continually remind ourselves of this fact or else we will struggle and try to live by self-effort instead of walking in the Spirit. Living an effective sanctified Christian life is a process. Crucifixion is a very slow and painful death, and the death of a Christian to sin does not happen all at once, but can also be painful and slow.

Chapter 6

A believer is free from the Law of Moses and has freedom in the Spirit, but must fulfill the law of Christ, and this can be done in the power of the Spirit. **What is the law of Christ?**

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if a person is caught doing something wrong, those of you who are spiritual should restore that person gently. Watch out for yourself so that you are not tempted as well.

- Here is how a body of believers should react to someone caught doing something wrong. They should be restored gently. And it shouldn't be done by an immature or baby Christian, but by those who are "spiritual". In other words, someone who is mature in the faith, who walks by the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:15; Hebrews 5:13-14). And there should always be the realization that any of us can fall into sin (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Galatians 6:2 Practice carrying each other's burdens. In this way you will fulfill the law of the Messiah.

- This can be applied to helping each other with all kinds of difficulties, but the context would be helping

each other with temptation and spiritual failures. Even though the mature Christians are to help restore the believer that is in sin, other believers can always help by praying for them and encouraging them. This fulfills the law of Christ (5:14, John 13:34).

Galatians 6:3-5 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is really nothing, he is only fooling himself. (4) Each person must examine his own actions, and then he can boast about his own accomplishments and not about someone else. (5) For everyone must carry his own load.

- In order to bear each other's burdens we have to get rid of conceit in ourselves and realize that we are not above failure. Someone who is prideful and feels superior to the Christian caught in sin is only fooling themselves. Paul says the answer to that is to examine our own actions, which means to stop comparing ourselves with others and take a good hard look at ourselves and what we've done. Then we can take pride in what God has done through us and in us. That kind of pride is not a sinful selfish pride.
- We test ourselves by carrying our own load. This load is a different Greek word than "burden" in verse 2, which refers to a heavy crushing load that we cannot carry ourselves. This refers to a load you would carry in your backpack, like what a soldier would carry. These are responsibilities or burdens that can't be shared with anyone, but we have to carry ourselves. Jesus said that those burdens would be light (Matthew 11:28-30).

Galatians 6:6 The person who is taught the word should share all his goods with his teacher.

- One responsibility of the believer is to help support the pastors and teachers in the church. Voluntary giving was a new idea in the Christian church, because Jews were taxed for the support of their priests. The idea is since the teacher shares the good things of the Word of God, the believer should also share "his goods with his teacher".

Galatians 6:7-8 Stop being deceived; God is not to be ridiculed. A person harvests whatever he plants: (8) The person who sows through human means will harvest decay from human means, but the person who sows in the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit.

- This kind of goes with the last verse. If you spend your time and money on things that please your sinful nature, then you will reap a harvest that won't last – the pleasure from that will fade away. But if you use your time and money to support the work of God, and promoting things of the Spirit, you will reap a harvest that will last forever. That's called building up treasure in Heaven.

Galatians 6:9-10 Let's not get tired of doing what is good, for at the right time we will reap a harvest—if we do not give up. (10) So then, whenever we have the opportunity, let's practice doing good to everyone, especially to the family of faith.

- Sometimes we get tired of sowing in the Spirit, because it is hard and we don't see results right away, but Paul says the harvest is sure to come if we don't give up, and that may not even be in this life.
What are some of the things you can do to "sow in the Spirit"?

Galatians 6:11 Look at how large these letters are because I am writing with my own hand!

- This tells us that Paul must have had a pretty severe eye condition, to the point he may have been almost blind. This is why he usually dictated his letters to a secretary. But here he must not have had anyone to help him write the letter, and had to do it himself. This must have been very difficult and even painful for him, but he was so worried about the spiritual problems of the Galatians, that he did it anyway.

Galatians 6:12-13 **These people who want to impress others by their external appearance are trying to force you to be circumcised, simply to avoid being persecuted for the cross of the Messiah. (13) Why, not even those who are circumcised obey the Law! They simply want you to be circumcised so that they can boast about your external appearance.**

- By insisting that the Galatians be circumcised, the Judaizers hoped to make Christianity more popular. People love to have religious rules they can follow so they can look good to the other religious people they want to impress. And it is always the outward rules that they harp on, because then they can boast that they do or don't do those things. Never mind that there are many other laws they don't obey!

Galatians 6:14-15 **But may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world! (15) For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters. Rather, what matters is being a new creation.**

- Paul would only boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross was an object of shame to the Judaizers; for Paul it was the object of glory. They gloried in the flesh; he gloried in the Savior.
- "The world has been crucified to me" - the world system with all its attractions, material enticements, and religions of human effort became nothing to Paul. He looked at the world as if it was on a cross—and the world looked at Paul as though he were on a cross.
- Wearing an outward religious symbol (in this case, circumcision) or not wearing an outward religious symbol has nothing to do with salvation. The only thing that matters is to be a new creation by being born again (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Galatians 6:16-18 **Now may peace be on all those who live by this principle, and may mercy be on the Israel of God. (17) Let no one make any more trouble for me, because I carry the scars of Jesus on my own body. (18) May the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be with your spirit, brothers! Amen.**

- Some believe that the "Israel of God" refers to the Church. There is no reason or evidence to support this! EVERY time in the New Testament the name Israel is used it refers to the nation of Israel. He is speaking to the Galatian gentiles and then mentions the believing Jews out of a concern for them. These are Christian Jews, those who are both the physical and spiritual seed of Abraham.
- Paul referred to the scars on his body, which were caused by persecution for Christ's sake (see 1 Corinthians 4:11; 2 Corinthians 4:10-11; 6:5, 9; 11:24-25), because they proved he was a slave of Christ and not just a people-pleaser.