

## Galatians 5 pt. 2 v.7-15 Fulfilling the Law in Love

Continuing in Galatians we see that this letter remains focused on correcting the errant belief that people could improve upon their righteousness by observing the Old Testament Law.

What this meant practically for these new Christians was that they were adopting the religious customs of the Jewish people.

The men were even committing to the rite of circumcision as a way to demonstrate their devotion.

This is all quite disturbing to Paul because he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to them that they are justified in God's eyes by faith alone, and that they are made righteous by Christ's righteousness alone.

This is what we call alien righteousness, or imputed righteousness. These terms describe how it is that we are viewed as holy or righteous in God's eyes as we are robed in a righteousness that is not intrinsic to our own nature - it is something that is outside of us, foreign to us, alien to us.

Paul sums this up in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he writes that Jesus Christ, the righteous one, who knew no sin, was made sin for our sake that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This applies to all who believe. Our righteousness is not found by works, or from within ourselves. Our righteousness is awarded to us by God. We cannot improve upon it, we cannot earn it.

The problem in the Galatian churches was that they were being deceived into believing that they could earn their own righteousness - that they could take what they started with, the gospel, and mature away from it.

This is still a very real and pervasive temptation today. BUT! The more we wrongly attempt to improve upon the gospel the further apart we move from Jesus.

V.7-9 Paul addresses the unseen hand that has been disrupting the Galatians race of faith.

He also addresses the Galatians themselves, indicating that when they started out things were going well!

They had received the gospel of salvation by faith, they were running rather than crawling or walking.

What a joyful declaration! What a joyful thought to know that the people that Paul preached the gospel to were actually running beautifully! They were going for it! They were vibrant and active.

But something happened. They were hindered by another party on the track, so to speak. Somebody or a group of people were slowing down progress.

These deceivers, in their minds and potentially sincerely in their hearts, were teaching that in order to go faster, go further, be stronger these runners (the Galatians) had to adopt their methodology.

They were teaching that religious observance would make one a better runner, while in fact the opposite was true - they were just being weighed down with heavy burdens.

Jesus addresses this type of bad discipleship, bad instruction in Matt 23.

[Mat 23:4-5 NKJV] 4 "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay [them] on men's shoulders; but they [themselves] will not move

them with one of their fingers. 5 "But all their works they do to be seen by men...

This is all too common. Many Christians begin the race well, fired up, motivated, just blown away by God's grace toward them - relieved that all of their guilt and shame can be laid down because Jesus Christ has born their burden.

But then, after a short time, some other christian comes along (perhaps deeply sincere) and loads another burden right on to their back - full of things to do in order to "please Jesus."

[Mat 23:15 NLT] 15 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!

That is not how this is supposed to be. When people find Christ, and freedom far be it from us to load them down with extra requirements!

Furthermore, Paul tells them in no uncertain terms that this persuasion, this doctrine of extra works to improve upon righteousness, does not come from Jesus at all! It is contrived, man-made.

Then he uses a phrase to describe the situation in Galatians that he has used before and that would be abundantly clear to the Judaizers among them: “A little leaven, leavens the whole lump.”

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon remarks on this adage: “a slight inclination to error (respecting the necessity of circumcision) easily perverts the whole conception of faith, Gal. 5:9; but many interpreters explain the passage ‘even a few false teachers lead the whole church into error.’”<sup>\*</sup> Thayer, J. H. (1889). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti (p. 273). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Symbolically, leaven (yeast), represented sin in Jewish religious life.

It was for this reason that during the Passover Week that Jewish families were required to remove from their homes any and all leaven - and so they were to observe and learn this symbol of the removal of sin.

[Exo 12:15 NKJV] 15 'Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

This was very clearly and consistently related to the corruption of the spiritual condition. So much so that Jesus instructed on this topic saying:

[Luk 12:1 NKJV] ..."Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

This teaching is captured in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as well.

The warning for us is that small insidious deviations from sound doctrine can corrupt the entirety of the Body.

Paul warns the Corinthian church of this same thing! [1Co 5:6 NKJV] 6  
Your glorying [is] not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Paul categorizes this tiny amount of pharisaical behavior found in the Galatian churches as the leavening agent that if unchecked would spread to the whole body.

Incidentally, it is leaven/yeast that puffs up! We could draw a defensible connection between the leaven of hypocrisy, pharisaical

behavior, and arrogance, pretense, ostentation and pride - which are not marks of Christ.

V.10 - There's hope! The Galatians can rebound, they can come back from this, they are not completely lost or abandoned by Christ.

In Paul's writings to the churches he teaches some difficult things. He corrects bad doctrine, bad relationships, and outright vile sin within the churches. These things are difficult for anybody but Paul did so with the wisdom of Christ as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And while we are challenged by his writings at times, what we see is that Paul is never dismissive of these churches. He never writes them off or abandons them.

He contends earnestly for them in the face of unsound doctrine, false teachers, and their intrinsic sin nature. Why? Because of his confidence in Jesus Christ.

He knows that Jesus Christ is able to bring the proper correction and spirit to the churches because after all the local expression of the churches comprise the universal Bride of Christ.

That's why Paul could write that he is confident that the Galatians would have no other mind relative to doctrine and faith - because it is in the hands of Jesus.

He also makes allowance for those who would distort good doctrine and deceive God's people that they shall bear the fullness of the judgment that they earn.

The reality is that those people who are peddling lies, poison, hypocrisy, to God's people will have to answer for it - regardless of their level of sincerity.

It's also important to note that although these were uncomfortable letters, that resulted in uncomfortable conversations, that did not make Paul their enemy. They were still part of the family!

Even though the Galatians had given up so much ground to the legalists, Paul could still truthfully say that he was confident in their ability to reason and persevere in Christ. And that is an incredibly hopeful message.

V.11-12

Paul had been a strict Pharisee in his former life before Christ.

[Phi 3:5-6 NKJV] 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Now, years later, he was being accused by some in the Galatian churches of being an advocate for circumcision, of being one of the very people that he is writing to correct!

That is not an entirely unfounded challenge, but it is an incomplete mischaracterization of who Paul was and his commitment to the gospel.

Here's where these accusations potentially came from.

Number one, Paul was circumcised himself.

Number two, Paul had one of his young disciples, Timothy, circumcised in Acts 16.

[Act 16:1-3 NLT] 1 Paul went first to Derbe and then to Lystra, where there was a young disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek. 2 Timothy was well thought of by

the believers in Lystra and Iconium, 3 so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek.

So some could take that information, twist it, and make it seem like Paul was trying to exclude the Galatians and that he was inconsistent in his preaching and treatment of other new believers since he had Timothy circumcised.

On the other hand a very different situation happened with another of Paul's travelling companions, a Greek by the name of Titus.

[Gal 2:1, 3 NKJV] 1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with [me]. ... 3 Yet not even Titus who [was] with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

But in order to fully understand how this applies to Paul's ministry we have to know the full story and what is going on here culturally.

With Timothy, he had Jewish heritage, it was appropriate for him to participate in his own heritage if he felt the need to do so.

For Titus, he was a Greek, a gentile, with no requirement to conform to the Jewish Law but rather to be conformed into the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Paul dealt with both of these men according to their own conviction and heritage under the common thread of the cross.

He did ministry with both of these men. He preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles and understood that the New Covenant of Jesus Christ abolished the requirement of the Law.

He succinctly presents this idea of deferring to the personal convictions of others for the sake of the gospel while keeping the cross the main focus.

[1Co 9:22 NKJV] ...I have become all things to all [men], that I might by all means save some.

He goes on to say in our text that if he had continued to preach circumcision as part of salvation then the offense of the cross has ceased - meaning that if he were to soften this message towards the Jewish people whom he had longed for to know Jesus, then he wouldn't have any more problems.

But the cross was offensive to those that adhered to the law. It offended them to believe that one was made righteous in God's eyes apart from any religious rite, or ceremony but strictly through faith in Christ.

Again to the Corinthians Paul writes:

[1Co 1:22-23 NKJV] 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness

Not much has changed over the millenia. Men, especially religious men, still trip over the cross as a point of stumbling because the cross ignores our contrived righteousness/works.

AND, those who are considered wise by the world's standards believe that the cross is foolishness, fables, myths to make men behave.

The point Paul is driving at here is that if he were to adopt the accepted method of righteousness and stopped preaching the cross then life would be a lot easier for him.

Unfortunately this is a method that has been adopted by people in pulpits today.

Then, in some clever word play relative to circumcision, Paul says that he could wish that they would cut themselves off! Paul gets quite passionate about the gospel and liberty in Jesus. His heart is on fire for God's truth.

V.13-15

He reminds the Galatians that God called them to freedom in Christ, not bondage. But he also warns them not to use that liberty to cater to their own sin nature - which some will do.

That is equally dangerous as adhering to the Law - to have such a disregard for God's holiness and love for us that we would willfully disrespect Him by continuing to operate in our sin because it scratches our sinful itch.

We should be sensitive to the cost of our liberty and be sure that we do not trample it under foot.

AND, Paul instructs the Galatians that in their liberty, grasping ahold of God's great love that has grasped them, they should take the opportunity to love and serve each other, rather than loading one

another down with rules, and needless burdens, serve the other rather than serve the flesh, the self.

This is what the love of God, His grace, and freedom in Christ manifests itself in - love and service to others. So simple, yet so profound in our world where self-care is of the highest priority.

And the thing about this is - you can't fake it for long. Eventually we burn out, get grumpy, etc if we are faking love and service.

But when we are grasped by Christ, living in His grace, freely moving as directed by the Spirit then the fruit of our liberty is found to be loving and serving others.

Paul skillfully ties this into the Law by reminding them in v.14 that fulfilling the law is summed up in loving your neighbor as yourself.

So much of his teaching has been in response to a bad representation of the Law.

But Paul reminds them of our Lord's words and teaching on what it means to fulfill the Law - loving others fully. AND, - we know too, to love God completely with every fiber of our being. (Matt 22:36-40)

That's how we fulfill God's Law truthfully.

Finally we end with a warning fit for the Galatians who were at a crossroads in their churches - the Law v. Liberty.

Paul illustrates the division they were experiencing as biting one another that would end in them being consumed, devoured; wounding one another deeply until there was nothing left.

**δᾱκνω**; *to bite*; a. prop. with the teeth. b. metaph. *to wound the soul, cut, lacerate, rend with reproaches*: Gal. 5:15. So even in Hom. Il. 5, 493 μῦθος δᾱκε φρένας, Menand. ap. Athen. 12, 77 p. 552 e., and times without number in other auth.\* Thayer, J. H. (1889). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti](#) (p. 124). New York: Harper & Brothers.

And hasn't this happened to so many of us, and haven't we been the attacker, and haven't we seen churches torn apart, families torn apart, friendships torn apart, by this? Certainly.

But to love and serve one another in liberty - that is where the saints are found doing the work of Jesus, because that is what He has done for us.