

GALATIANS

Lesson 16

The True and the False Galatians 5:7-12

INTRODUCTION

False teaching is very tricky and it often creeps into the life of a Christian or a congregation in a very subtle way. False teachers rarely declare themselves openly and only come out boldly with their doctrinal poison after they have thoroughly entrenched themselves and indoctrinated their victims.

The Christians in Galatia had come under the false teaching of the Judaizers who taught that a person had to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved or be spiritual. The one part of the law they stressed most was circumcision. These Judaizers, with their diabolical doctrine, had professed Christ as Messiah but they were adding works and law to the finished work of Christ for salvation and sanctification. In their deceitful way, they had cast a spell over these Galatian Christians and they were moving away from the whole concept of grace in the Christian life. They were substituting law for grace and stressing works rather than faith. The specific error of these Galatians was legalism.

A WORD OF ASSURANCE TO GENUINE CHRISTIANS 5:7-10a

“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and keep you from obeying the truth?”

These Galatians had been taken in or fooled by the Judaizers and their false teaching. The Galatian Christians began their Christian lives right, experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives through faith, but the false teachers caused them to go astray. The word for “cut in” is an athletic term referring to track and means “to break stride.” In the Greek athletic games, dash runners would often run towards a goal which was a large pole. The runner would run towards this goal, keeping his eyes fixed on it. However, all his concentration would be lost if someone cut in front of him to break his stride. These Galatians had been running towards a right goal but their stride had been broken because of the false teaching of the Judaizers. They had been thrown off course, slowed down and were running for the wrong goal. They were sincere about it all but were sincerely wrong.

These Galatians were sincere in their move into false teaching, but they were sincerely wrong. It is possible to pursue the wrong goal with all sincerity in spiritual matters.

Back in 1928, Georgia Tech and the University of California were playing a football game in the Rose Bowl. In the fourth quarter, the score was zero to zero and California was out-playing Tech. Cal had the ball deep in Tech territory, and on the third down, Cal fumbled the ball. An all-conference center from California picked up the fumble and in the excitement took off for his own goal, in the wrong direction. He was tackled on the five yard line by his own team mate. California kicked on the fourth down. The kick was blocked and Tech won the game. No one could say that the all-conference center from Cal was insincere when he picked up the ball and ran in the wrong direction. He was very sincere, running towards the wrong goal, but he was sincerely wrong.

So, too, the Galatians were sincere in going after false doctrine, but they were sincerely wrong!

Notice what their problem was—they did not obey the truth. They knew the truth but definitely turned from it. They were disobedient children. Christianity is not just knowing the truth but it is obeying the truth. These Christians went astray because they were not allowing the Holy Spirit to control them. They were not placing themselves in submission to the Holy Spirit. Consequently they became open targets for false teaching.

Christian, look at your own life. Where are you spiritually? Have you broken your stride? Have you grown indifferent to Christ so that you believe the bare minimum and do the bare minimum? Have you stopped learning? Have you stopped obeying? What sin or sins is keeping you from obeying the truth? Is it legalism, indifference, worldliness, laziness, materialism? Whatever it is, find it and deal with it, because there is nothing more important than growing in grace and obeying the Lord.

“That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.”

God had effectively called these Galatians to salvation so they could experience a life of liberty and freedom in Christ. The Galatians fall into the false teaching of legalism did not originate with God. God is not the author of sin. It was not the directive will that they should be falling from grace, for it was God who called them in grace to live a life by grace (Gal. 1:6 **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all.”**). They were willingly being led astray by these false teachers and this was contrary to God’s revealed will for them.

Sin never originates from God but is always the direct product of man, for God is not the author of evil, although no sin can throw God’s sovereign plan into a tailspin.

“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”

Yeast (leaven) is a symbol of evil in the Bible. Leaven was a substance much like yeast, added to the bread to make it rise. Just a small amount of leaven would permeate the entire bread dough. Just a small amount of false teaching does a whole lot of damage. Legalism takes its toll on a congregation of believers and soon kills the spirit of Christ in the church. Legalism must never get a foothold in any church or that church will soon lose the blessing of God. Legalism or any false teaching must be stopped before it gets started or it will soon contaminate all.

So often I hear people say, “What is all the fuss about when it comes to doctrinal accuracy. It doesn’t make any difference if a man holds a little error.” The Apostle Paul would get angry at that statement, for he knew that a little leaven leavens the whole lump, and that any doctrinal disease is contagious and can cause a whole congregation to go astray as it did in the case of the Galatians. It is far more important to be true to God and His word than it is to pamper man and his whims.

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 forebear, 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. (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*).

“I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view.”

Paul had confidence that since they were true believers that the Galatians would come out of the error of legalism and accept the doctrine of grace as they had first been taught it. Paul is quite sure the error is not going to triumph and the Galatians were going to change their minds and turn to the truth again.

Why could Paul have such confidence when they were so deeply in error? His confidence was in the Lord Himself, for he was persuaded that the great majority of the Galatians were true believers and had the Holy Spirit indwelling them. He felt that the Lord would bring them back to the truth. Only God can bring men from error into the truth. If professing Christians are confronted with the truth and continue to turn from it, there is reason to believe that they do not have the Holy Spirit and are not saved.

It is possible for a Christian to fall into error but it is quite impossible for him to stay in error when he is confronted with the truth. The Holy Spirit is constantly working in true Christians to bring them to the truth of the scriptures.

This was a note of assurance to these Galatians who had gone astray, for the way they would know they were true Christians was that they would come around to the truth that salvation and sanctification are by grace through faith in Christ. Paul was confident that most were believers and those who were true believers would come around to the truth when confronted.

A SCOURGING OF FALSE TEACHERS 5:10b-12

“The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty (shall bear judgment), whoever he may be.”

These false teachers kept disturbing and harassing the Galatians with their legalism. Their false teaching, however, would not go unnoticed by God, for those who cause the true saints to go astray must bear the judgment of God. Unbelieving legalists will be judged with eternal wrath if they do not turn from their conviction of salvation by law and good works and turn to Jesus Christ who alone can grant them grace to be saved.

Even true Christians who have legalistic attitudes shall meet with the stern discipline of God if they continue with a negative, critical spirit about everyone who does not conform to their man-made rules for spirituality. God hates the whole spirit of legalism because it is diametrically opposed to grace, and God loves to manifest grace.

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

The Judaizers were saying Paul preached circumcision when it suited his purpose. This rumor probably got started when Paul had Timothy, a Gentile, circumcised so that Timothy would not be a stumblingblock to the Jews when seeking to win them to Christ (Acts 16:1-3). Paul had Timothy circumcised in order not to offend the conscience of the Jews when witnessing to them, but this act had nothing to do with salvation or spirituality. Timothy’s circumcision was to avoid being a stumblingblock.

The Judaizers circumcised to gain righteousness before God and to get God’s approval. Their motive for circumcision was salvation by works. Paul makes it clear that he was still suffering persecution from the Judaizers because he was preaching that salvation was by grace through faith in Christ alone, and that it was impossible for circumcision or any other human work or act to save a person. The Judaizers persecuted Paul because the preaching of the Cross was an offense to the Jew. The offense was that true believers in Christ are free from the Mosaic Law, and that circumcision or any other part of the law cannot save or sanctify a person. Paul preached against good works to obtain salvation and the Judaizers preached good works to gain God’s approval. They preached circumcision; Paul preached Christ and the Cross.

Good works flatter man’s pride and is quite inoffensive to the natural, unsaved man. The message of Christ crucified is, however, offensive to the human pride and says a man must submit to Christ alone as the only way of salvation (1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24 **“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**).

The cross is offensive because men hate to be told they can only be saved at the foot of the Cross, and they oppose any preacher or Christian who teaches salvation by grace through faith apart from any human works, acts or merits. The truth of the gospel is always in conflict with man’s human pride that wants to save himself by his won works.

Briefly, as long as the Church proclaims the doctrine (gospel) she must suffer persecution, because the Gospel declares the mercy and glory of God. This in turn stirs up the devil, because the Gospel shows him up for what he is, the devil, and not God. Therefore as long as the Gospel holds sway persecution plays the accompaniment, or else there is something the matter with the devil. When he is hit you will know it by the havoc he raises everywhere.

So do not be surprised or offended when hell breaks loose. Look upon it as a happy indication that all is well with the Gospel of the Cross. God forbid that the offense of the Cross should ever be removed. This would be the case if we were to preach what the prince of this world and his followers would be only too glad to hear, the righteousness of works. You would never know the devil could be so gentle, the world so sweet, the Pope so gracious, and the princes so charming. But because we seek the advantage and honor of Christ, they persecute us all around. (Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*)

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

Paul now makes one of the strongest statements in all of scripture about these false teachers who taught circumcision as necessary for justification and sanctification. Paul gets tough and almost sarcastic. He is saying “I wish those who taught this nonsense of salvation by circumcision would have themselves emasculated (castrated), making eunuchs of themselves.”

Paul, at times, gets rather earthy, but he speaks his mind and makes his point as to how he feels about false teachers. Paul had no sympathy with men who were preaching false doctrine and leading the saints astray (Rom. 16:17-18 **“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”**).

CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, I want you to understand that the greatest false teaching on this earth is that a man or a woman can obtain salvation by good works. The Bible teaches that all men are sinners and separated from God. A holy God must judge sin and sinners, but God has provided a way of escape through Jesus Christ who died for sinners that all who trust in Christ might have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

A man cannot be saved by works because all his works are as filthy rags when placed in the shadow of a righteous God. Only Christ can give a sinner a righteousness that will make him acceptable before God. Christ is God’s answer to the sin problem, and a person can only be saved when he abandons all confidence in his own human works and righteousness and casts himself solely upon Christ to give him a righteousness that will make him acceptable to God.