5-11-25

Galatians 5:1-12 (2)

We began considering this passage last Sunday and looked into the first five verses. Paul is reminding the Galatians that Jesus died to set us free from the bondage of working for our salvation. That is for the Jew who is trying to follow the Law of Moses; and it is for the Pagan who was trying to follow all the steps necessary to appease their false gods. Christ also set us free from the guilt and shame of sin and the death that comes from sin. All offered in mercy, all given by grace; all we have to do is accept it.

Paul then launches into some truly terrifying information; he lets them know that once they accepted Jesus, and then turn to trying to earn their own salvation by following the Law; they have severed themselves from Christ. They have cut themselves away from the only source of eternal life. And we must be careful because that is our natural tendency; we want to work for things so that we can take credit for earning it.

That’s what makes works-based religions so attractive. But what a works-based religion is actually claiming is that Jesus’ work on the cross was insufficient; and that we don’t need Him or God to obtain eternal life. A Christian should be able to consider those two things and quickly see how foolish they are.

Now, we who wouldn’t fall for another false religion must still watch our step; again, working for something is very natural for us and the tricks of satan are very subtle. It is easy to begin thinking that we need to pray more, that we need to study our Bibles more, that we need to fellowship more, that we need to do more good works. And we do! We all need to do all of these things more. But in the back of our minds lingers the little thought that if we do these things, it will help us get into heaven. No, but as a Christian, doing all these things becomes the evidence that we are true followers of Christ.

Paul brings this out clearly in verse 5: *For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.* We must be completely righteous in order to stand before the Father and be with Him forever. But we can’t be righteous on our own; which is why we need Jesus. While we are now covered in the righteousness of Jesus, it won’t be until we are actually in His presence that we become righteous like He is. That’s 1 John 3:2. So we are waiting, not working for our righteousness. We are hoping for it because we don’t have it yet; but it is a sure hope because the promises of God are true.

Our hope comes from faith. And that faith is in Christ alone. It is not faith in faith, faith in someone else or ourselves, it is not faith in fate. Any deep abiding faith placed anywhere but in Jesus is misplaced. But our faith in Jesus is not a blind faith. We have tremendous evidence in the created world and in God’s word. And the real blessing is that our faith isn’t something we just conjure up; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He gives us the ability to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour; we just need to be willing to accept that gift. God provides all we need; God is good.

Paul goes on to say: *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.* That phrase “*in Christ Jesus*” is terribly important. We have to be in Christ Jesus, in other words, a believer in Jesus, in order for anything we do to be acceptable to God. Anything done by someone outside of Christ, no matter how kind or benevolent, is unacceptable to God: because it is tainted with sin. But when we are in Christ and we follow His command to love one another, we are demonstrating our faith in Him. Physical marks on the body mean nothing, but to lovingly serve others due to our faith in Jesus means everything.

Paul says that “*neither circumcision nor uncircumcision mean anything*”. In 1 Corinthians 7:17-20 he expands on that a little. He says that if you’re already circumcised when you receive Jesus, stay that way; don’t try to change it. If you’re uncircumcised when you receive Jesus, stay that way. Either way makes no difference in salvation. The problem is when someone gets circumcised in order to try to attain heaven by their own merits.

Next comes a rhetorical question: *You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?* Throughout this letter, it would seem that Paul doesn’t know exactly who the Judaizers are, or even if there is just one or more than one. Or possibly, he is refusing to acknowledge them. These people are heretics and they are leading people away from eternal salvation. Paul loves the Galatian people and he doesn’t want to see that happen to them.

When Paul was run out of Galatia, the church was doing well. They were running the race and reaching for the prize. But that had changed. They had stumbled and were in danger of not finishing the race and losing the prize. In Hebrews 12:1 it says: *let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.* The Galatian church had become entangled in sin. To turn to a false gospel is sin. The Judaizers had hindered the church from *obeying the truth*. To disobey the truth of Christ is sin.

It is so easy for us to fall into sin; and while as Christians we won’t lose our salvation because Christ died for all our sins; sin will interfere with our relationship with our holy God. Fortunately our merciful God has made a way to deal with that. 1 John 1:9, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.” By confessing our sins to God and repenting of our evil acts, our fellowship with our Father is restored.

We cannot take sin lightly and I think that we often tend to do that; we presume on the grace of God in Christ. But sin is deadly serious; consider what our sin did to Jesus on the cross. The Puritans used to say to keep short accounts with sin. Don’t let a moral failure linger; confess it and get rid of it. Not only does sin interfere with our relationship with God, but it will multiply. Sin breeds sin. Any sin left unchecked will become entrenched and lead to actually living in sin. Then it is much harder to get rid of. And to live in sin is a strong indication that you haven’t truly accepted Christ as Lord. Make it a habit, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to confess sin as soon as you recognize it. You won’t be telling God anything He doesn’t already know and you will be cleansed.

Paul lets the church know that what they are being persuaded of did not come from God. God is the One who called them in the truth of Christ; God called them to salvation. What they are being called to now is not truth, so it can’t be from God. There is a subtle indication here that the persuasion is from satan. And indeed it is. Satan is using the Judaizers to get the Christians off track. That’s what he does. Satan and his demons do not rest; they are driven to do as much as possible to thwart God’s purposes. Now, they will never succeed in that but they can do a lot of damage to people along the way. We cannot let down our guard and we must be vigilant in prayer to be protected from the schemes of the devil.

A false teaching is manifesting in the Galatian church. Workers of satan have come in to proclaim a false gospel. The church has been hindered from obeying the truth; they have been persuaded by good sounding arguments. These teachings have come from just a few people; and one by one the Galtian members begin to accept it. Paul turns to a proverbial type saying: *A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.*

Leaven shows up quite a bit in the Bible, mainly because its properties make for a good metaphor. We usually think of leaven as being yeast and that’s generally close enough. Really, once a woman had readied a lump of dough to make bread, she would pinch off a piece of the dough and set it aside. This piece contained yeast and whatever else was needed to make the bread rise. This piece of dough is what is called leaven.

Leaven gets a bad rap because it is often used to demonstrate how evil spreads and it was not acceptable in many of the Old Testament sacrifices. But leaven itself is not evil. During the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, bread baked with leaven was to be part of the offering to the Lord. (Lev 23:15-21) Also in Matthew 13:33, Jesus tells a parable likening the Kingdom of Heaven to the leavening of dough. Bread was a huge part of the diet of the Hebrew people and leaven was important to the quality of the bread.

But here in the letter to the Galatians, Paul is using it as a metaphor for the bad way in which something can spread. The Judaizers have come in with their smooth teaching and a couple members of the church have been taken in by it. They in turn start to repeat these teachings and it spread through the church. This sounds very much like the warning of Jesus to His disciples in Matthew 16:6, *“And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”* Of course, the disciples didn’t get Jesus’ point; but He was warning them of their incorrect teaching. Teaching that would spread throughout any group that followed them.

So Paul is warning the Galatians that the teaching of the Judaizers is something that will spread. And these kinds of things will often spread undetected until it has done damage. That is why each of us needs to be vigilant in our church to recognize any false teaching that might sneak in. At the same time we must be careful not to go to far in the other direction; like the church in Ephesus had done by the time the book of Revelation was written. The church was very good at seeking out false teachers and getting rid of them, but they had forgotten their first love; which is loving Christ by loving others.

We are a nondenominational Christian church. There are certain things in the Bible that are absolutely clear. There are certain things about Jesus that are not negotiable. We stand firmly on these things. But we have room for differing points of view on the things that are not clear. The timing of the rapture, predestination or free-will, the operation of the gifts of the Spirit; all these things invite discussion without arguing and proof of the unity of Christ’s church. Unity doesn’t mean that we agree on every little detail; it means we get along and love each other in spite of differences. That is a sneak peak at the Kingdom of Christ.

All this to say that we must be careful to differentiate between different Biblical points of view and heresy.

In verse 10, Paul is offering them a little encouragement. He firmly believes that they will come to see the errors in the teachings of the Judaizers and return to the straight and narrow way of Jesus. But notice also that his confidence in them is in the Lord. Left to themselves, they would mess it up. But, under the guidance of the Lord, helping them to understand what Paul is saying, he believes that they will come around. That’s what he wants; again, he cares deeply for these people; and so does the Lord.

Nothing escapes the Lord’s notice. He may let these Judaizers run loose for a while, as they serve His purposes; but the time will come when they will stand before Him and have to answer for leading God’s people astray. God is merciful, but He is perfectly just.

Verse 11 is a little confusing. It would seem that along with the accusations the Judaizers made against Paul was that he still taught circumcision. Remember that satan’s arguments don’t really have to make sense, just keep people confused and off guard. Hypocrisy is no problem to him.

Paul answers this accusation by asking then why is he still persecuted. The Jewish religion was accepted in the Roman empire. They were allowed to practice their religion as prescribed by Moses. Also the Jews who rejected Christ would still adhere to the law. If Paul still advocated circumcision, they would have had no problem with him. However, Paul was persecuted because he did not teach circumcision.

Paul taught complete dependance on a man who was crucified on a cross. This was the man who could save us from our sins; the man by whom we come to the Father; this man who was brutally killed is the one we as Christians worship and place all our hope and trust in. That doesn’t make sense. Thus, the cross is a stumbling block. But it is only a stumbling block to those who are perishing.

Here is where the Holy Spirit will offer us the gift of seeing things spiritually through faith. 1 Corinthians 2:14 tells us: *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.* When we consider the perfect sacrifice of the perfect Son of God as being the substitutionary atonement for all our own sins, to satisfy God’s righteous wrath, so that we may receive His mercy; it makes perfect sense. But not in the natural; only in the spiritual. Which is the important place because that is where God dwells.

Finally, Paul says *“I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.”* Now different translations use different words there but just to clarify, Paul means that he wishes that they would castrate themselves. That’s rough, but Paul has a point to what he is saying here, it is not just an angry vindictive rant.

There were at that time priests that served certain idols, certain false gods. A requirement for these men to serve as priests was that they had to make themselves eunuchs. Paul was pointing to two things here. First, the Law of Moses stated that anyone of the priestly line of Aaron who was a eunuch was not allowed to serve in the priestly capacity. He was saying that these Judaizers were not fit to serve Jesus. Secondly, Paul was likening them to Pagan priests. Hopefully, the Galatian church would get the clear message that these men were not to be followed.

How precious it is, that Jesus calls us to true freedom. In Him we are free from vain works that will ultimately do us no good; and we are free to serve our Lord Christ, which is not a burden but a joy.

Prayer

Oh Lord, our pathway is strewn with so many stumbling blocks. The world tells us we don’t need Jesus, we can do things ourselves. Satan tells us that God is holding us back and doesn’t have our best interest in mind. Our own hearts tell us that our works will make us good and lead to glory. All lies. And yet, we still fall for them sometimes.

Stand by us, indwelling Holy Spirit. Point out the places where we might fall. Guide us only in paths of righteousness for the sake of Christ. Give us sight that we may see and avoid the pitfalls and traps hidden so well by the accuser. And hold on tight to us, so that when we do stumble, we are able to catch our footing and continue to run our course.

Thank You Lord Jesus, for You have paid a heavy price for the freedom we have. We offer You praise and thanksgiving and worship now. But we look forward to that time after we are called to our true home in Your Kingdom, when we can praise You properly, in purity, as You so richly deserve.

It is in Jesus’ name we pray

Amen