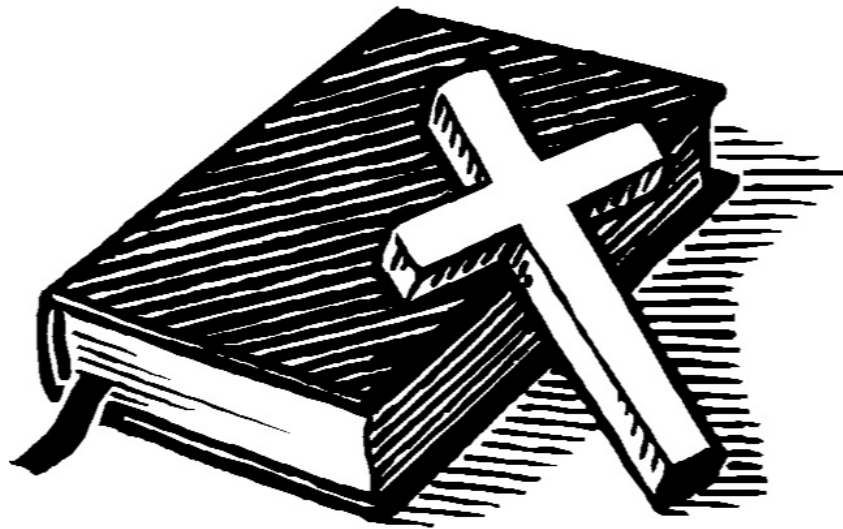


GALATIANS: THE ONE TRUE GOSPEL



WEEK 20 NO OFFENSE: CIRCUMCISION AND THE CROSS GALATIANS 5:2-12

Van Nuys Bible Study
Doulos Fellowship Group
Grace Community Church

Prepared by Hans Kaufman
2015

Galatians 5:2-12 – No Offense: Circumcision and the Cross

The Text

Look:

I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision,
Christ will be of no advantage to you.

I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision
that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

You are severed from Christ,
you who would be justified by the law;
you have fallen away from grace.

For through the Spirit, by faith,
we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.
For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything,
but only faith working through love.

You were running well.
Who hindered you from obeying the truth?
This persuasion is not from Him who calls you.
A little leaven leavens the whole lump.
I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view,
and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?
In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.
I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

Introduction

- “False brothers” (the Judaizers) have infiltrated the churches in Galatia.
- Paul is astonished that some of the Galatians are abandoning the gospel freedom to be justified by obedience to the law.

- He has stressed the superiority of the promise God made to Abraham and the inferiority of the law to bring salvation.
- The law was not given to replace the promise, but to increase transgressions and show how important the promise really is.
- Paul has pleaded with them to not return in slavery to the law.
- He now turns his attention to one of the greatest symbolic requirements of the Old Testament, circumcision.

Principal Proposition

Ritualism is worthless and counter-productive to the salvation found in a functioning faith of Jesus' work on the cross. We are not under the law, but under grace.

Literary Context

- A. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (1:11-2:21)
 - B. Paul's Explanation of the Gospel (3:1-4:11)
 - C. Paul's Application of the Gospel (4:12-6:10)
 - 1. The Plea not to Return to Bondage (4:12-31)
 - 2. The Appeal to Stand Firm in Freedom (5:1)
 - 3. **The Call to Freedom (5:2-6:10)**
 - a. **Freedom through Resistance to Circumcision (5:2-12)**
-

Literary Structure

No Offense: Circumcision and the Cross

The Stipulation	(v. 2-3)
The Severed	(v. 4)
The Spirit	(v. 5-6)
The Spoiler	(v. 7-10)
The Stumbling Block	(v. 11-12)

Interpretive Comments

No Offense: Circumcision and the Cross

The Stipulation

- v. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.
- “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision”
 - Paul begins this verse with an interjection. Listen up!
 - “Christ will be of no advantage to you”
 - To regard both Christ and circumcision as being necessary for salvation is to deny the sufficiency of Christ’s death for salvation.
 - This is a futile attempt to do what can never be done (as Paul has already stated in Galatians 2:21). Salvation is only found in Christ’s work, not ours.
- v. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.
- “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision”
 - Sorry ladies. Here, Paul addresses the men directly... but the principle of faith over ritual applies to everyone.
 - “that he is obligated to keep the whole law”
 - By requiring obedience to one part of the Mosaic Law for justification, the Galatians are committed to obeying all of it perfectly (James 2:10).
 - With salvation, it’s all or nothing; all of the law or all of Christ.



The Severed

v. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

➤ “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law”

- Paul drops the hypothetical “if” to make a much stronger statement.
- To rely on the law is to reject Christ.

You cannot take the principle of law and the principle of grace and blend those two together. They are like oil and water—they will never mix. If salvation be of works, it is not of grace; and if it be of grace, it is not of works. You cannot go upon the two contrary principles of merit and of favor. – Charles Spurgeon

➤ “you have fallen away from grace”

- This is the only time this phrase appears in the New Testament, but it has assumed an importance far greater than Paul’s use or intention of it.
- What does it mean to “fall from grace?”
- The Greek reads, “the grace you have fallen.”



The Spirit

v. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

➤ “For through the Spirit, by faith”

- A person can only be justified by faith through the Spirit.

➤ “we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness”

- As, Christians we do not try to make perfect righteousness in our lives by our own efforts because our hope is not in ourselves. Rather, we wait for God to complete righteousness within us – at death or Christ’s return.

v. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

➤ “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything”

- To circumcise or not to circumcise? It doesn't really matter (1 Corinthians 7:17-20). Paul is not opposed to circumcision in and of itself... but the false belief that the rite is required for justification.

- What are a few of the rituals people rely on for justification today?

➤ “but only faith working through love”

- True faith is living and active. The person who believes in Jesus Christ will demonstrate the reality of that belief through a sanctified life.

We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.
– Martin Luther

The Spoiler

v. 7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

➤ “You were running well”

- Paul frequently used the imagery of a race in his letters (Romans 9:16; 1 Corinthians 9:24; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:7).
- Now, he is refers to the time he ministered with them; when they had no trouble living the Christian life by faith.

➤ “Who hindered you from obeying the truth”

- This is rhetorical question that puts the false teachers in their place.
- Obeying the truth might refer to the true gospel (the way men are saved) or the obedient way those who are truly saved live their redeemed lives before God. Which do you think Paul is referring to here?



v. 8 This persuasion is not from Him who calls you.

- Legalistic persuasions do not come from God.
- He calls us, He saves us; He doesn't make mistakes and He doesn't lose anyone.

The work of salvation is entirely God's doing and none of man's (Romans 8:28-30), and any teaching that says the gracious work of God in saving men is insufficient is false. – John MacArthur

v. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

- According to the American Heritage Dictionary, leaven is: 1) an agent, such as yeast, that causes batter or dough to rise or 2) an element, influence, or agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven, or modify a whole.
- Similarly, false teachers are a cancer in the body of the church. It does not take a lot of heresy to do a lot of damage.

*For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the rider was lost; and for want of a rider the battle was lost.
– Benjamin Franklin*



v. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

➤ “I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view”

- Paul is certain that they will ultimately fall into step with the gospel despite the dangerous influences around them, because that's what true believers do. This is similar to the exhortation found in Philippians 1:6-7.

➤ “and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is”

- Just as sure as Paul is that God's people will remain faithful, he is also certain that false teachers will eventually get what's coming to them.
- Peter makes this truth extremely clear (2 Peter 2-3, 9).

The Stumbling Block

v. 11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

➤ “But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted”

- The true gospel fosters opposition. No one would have minded if Paul preached a diluted gospel.

➤ “In that case the offense of the cross has been removed”

- The New American Standard Bible says, “Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.”
- The Greek word, *skandalon*, typically means a trap, snare, or temptation. This is where our word *scandal* originated from: Greek (*skandalon*), Latin (*skandalum*), French (*scandale*), English (*scandal*).



- In this case, *skandalon* means “that which causes offense or revulsion and results in opposition, disapproval, or hostility, fault, stain.”¹
- Make no mistake, the message of the cross is offensive (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5).
- If Paul starting preaching circumcision instead of the gospel of the cross, his message would no longer be offensive... because there would once again be room for human pride in human effort.

v. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

- Paul wishes the troublemakers would go the whole way with the knife and finish the job.
- Philippians 3:2 also dismisses circumcision as mutilation.

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 926.

- This startling statement was even more shocking when the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write it – in the ancient world – for at least three reasons:

1. Sacral castration was a well-known ritual of the Attis-Cybele cult priesthood. Cybele was recognized as the goddess of nature throughout Asia Minor. With this statement, Paul puts the covenantal rite of circumcision on the same level as pagan cutting.
2. This statement also links the desire for circumcision to that which disqualified a Jew from entering the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:1).
3. Regardless, the language is extreme and downright terrifying.



- Jesus had some equally strong words for those who lead others into error (Luke 17:1-2).

Summary Observations

- What are some of the characteristics we see of false teachers in verses 7-12?
- Salvation is not dependent on what human beings do, but what Christ has done. Nothing is equal to that; even the law.
- A working faith is essential to the Christian life.
- The church faces dangers from within and without.
- False teaching that points to anything other than the gospel of grace is big deal and needs to be dealt with.
- Our confidence is not in ourselves, but in the Lord.

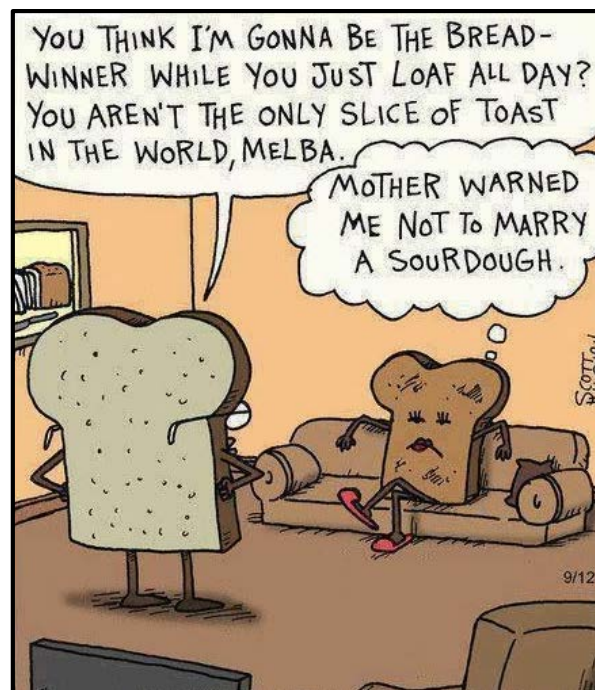
Summary Quote

By declaring the clear plain gospel of salvation by grace through faith, Paul lays the axe at the root of all ritualism, as he elsewhere does at the root of all rationalism. He might have decorated the gospel with learning and made it palatable to the Greeks, or he might have cramped it with tradition and made it agreeable to the Jews, but he scorned to do either.

– Charles Spurgeon

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean to “fall from grace?” (pg. 4)
- What are a few of the rituals people rely on for justification today? (pg. 5)
- Obeying the truth might refer to the true gospel (the way men are saved) or the obedient way those who are truly saved live their redeemed lives before God. Which do you think Paul is referring to here? (pg. 5)



Bad Bread

Faith and Works

Faith is the means or instrument by which a person is saved. Christians are justified before God by faith (Rom. 3:26; 4:1–5; Gal. 2:16), and by faith they live their lives (2 Cor. 5:7) and sustain their hope (Heb. 10:35–12:3).

Faith cannot be defined in subjective terms, as a feeling or optimistic decision. Neither is it a passive orthodoxy. Faith is a response, directed toward an object and defined by what is believed. Christian faith is trust in the eternal God and His promises secured by Jesus Christ. It is called forth by the gospel as the gospel is made understandable through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. Christian faith is a personal act, involving the mind, heart, and will, just as it is directed to a personal God, and not an idol or an idea.

It is usual to analyze faith as involving three steps: knowledge, agreement, and trust. First is knowledge, or acquaintance with the content of the gospel; second is agreement, or recognition that the gospel is true; and third is trust, the essential step of committing the self to God. These steps go together in the sense that there can be Christian faith only when the gospel is known and its truth is accepted (Rom. 10:14). Calvin defined faith as “a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor towards us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Calvin, *Institutes* III.2.7).

Through faith we receive Christ, who satisfied the law on our behalf. In this way we are justified through faith alone, without doing the works of the law. But since faith unites us with Christ, it cannot be lifeless. Directed toward God and resting in Him, it is active, “working through love” (Gal. 5:6), seeking to do all the “good works, which God prepared beforehand” for us (Eph. 2:10). Justification is by faith alone, but justifying faith can never be alone.

When James says that faith without works is dead, he is describing a faith that knows the gospel and even agrees with it, but has fallen short of trust in God. Failure to grow, develop, and bear the fruits of righteousness shows that the free gift of God in Christ has never been received. The answer for those with such a faith is not to save themselves by establishing a righteousness of their own, as if they could create faith by their own efforts, but to call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13). God alone can save those for whom it is otherwise impossible (Mark 10:27). Paul shows that good works cannot break this impossibility; James shows that the faith required is faith that rests in the living God.

Even when we have believed, the good works we do are never perfect. They are acceptable to God only because of the mercy of Christ (Rom. 7:13–20; Gal. 5:17). We express our love for God through doing what pleases Him, and He in His kindness promises to reward us for what we do (Phil. 3:12–14; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8). In this we are not making God our debtor, any more than when we first believed in Him. As Augustine noted, God in rewarding us is graciously crowning His own gracious gifts.²

² R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1804.