

## The Problem With Legalism

**Text:** Galatians 5.7–12

**Theme:** The law cannot save the unbeliever and when misapplied, harms the believer.

### Introduction — Text of Scripture under our consideration is Galatians 5.7–12

- pew Bibles page 1157
- let us pray as we take God's Word in hand
- now, let's hear the Word of the Lord: [read Galatians 5.7–12](#)

### Paul might just have been a sports fan

- he uses athletic analogies quite often
- he mentions ancient games such as boxing, wrestling, and especially track and field
- here, in Galatians 5.7, he likens the Christian life to a foot race
- he, himself, was determined to finish the race he was in
- [Acts 20:24—But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.](#)
- later, very near the end of his life he told Timothy...
- [2 Timothy 4:7—I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.](#)

### Christian life may very well be like a race, but not a sprint

- more like marathon
- as many have learned, the longer the race, the more things can go wrong
- some runners pull up with injuries
- others stumble, get knocked off stride
- some get dehydrated & collapse before ever cross the finish line
- one marathon last year saw the leader misread signs and go far afield only to lose the race

### Paul, like a good and well-trained runner, was concerned about his own race

- [Galatians 2:2—\[I needed to see for myself what was happening\], in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.](#)
- now, in chapter 5, he has the same fear for these believers
- they had started well
- heard the gospel, the cross and empty grave, Paul preaching Christ crucified
- gun had sounded and they were off and running
- like Eric Liddell, great Scottish runner: When I run, I feel His pleasure.

### But something had happened

- suddenly they were in danger of being disqualified
- [Galatians 5:7—You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?](#)
- someone cut them off, tripped up many, causing some to fall out of running

### So Paul, in v. 1, tried to call them back on track

- this is a course correction for these Galatians
- stay the course...and if you're nearly off course, come back to path laid out before you

- **For freedom Christ has set you free!**

- then, as we saw last Sunday, he begins laying out the consequences of falling out of race
- in vv. 2–6, we see first three consequences
- Christ will be of no value to you if you mix law and gospel
- trying to live out the law for God's acceptance obligates you to obey the whole law
- and thirdly, if you turn from Christ, you fall from only grace that can save you

**Now, in vv. 7–12, he gives three more consequences of turning back, giving up on Christ**

- you will be hindered greatly in your spiritual growth; seen in vv. 7–10
- in v. 11, we hear Paul tell us consequence of mixing in law is it removes the offense of cross
- and then, finally, in v. 12, those who seek to do such horrible things will have horrible things done
- they will be cut off from the people of God

*Let's examine this fourth consequence of mixing up the law and the gospel, as we see...*

**I. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS HINDERED, VV. 7-10**

- this is Paul's athletic metaphor: running a race
- and someone has cut in on them and indeed, about to cut them off

**1. Who hindered you?**

- someone, individual or group, matters not, has cut in on these runners
- this is another sporting term used by Paul
- races in Paul's day didn't have well manicured, laid-out tracks
- it was to post and back
- rules against tripping, but good amount of interference took place
- as got near post, turning point, much of this happened
- one strategy of some was simply to cut in on the leaders
- they were hindered from running full out
- Mary Decker Slaney & Zola Budd epitomized this in 1984 Olympics
- Budd inadvertently tripped Slaney, who fell, was injured and unable to finish race

**2. Not running for an actual medal**

- Galatians weren't competing for bronze, silver, or even gold medal around necks
- competing for eternal life
- **Paul says, "Who cut in on you, deflecting you from the true course of obedience?" (Message)**
- he meant the "truth of the gospel"—good news of salvation from sin & death
- God's gracious provision thru Jesus' work on cross and resurrection

**3. Truth to be obeyed**

- we stand before God, accepted, righteous, justified only by grace thru faith in Jesus alone
- however, once justified, we must be sanctified—made more holy each & every day
- this comes from obeying—living out the gospel's truth
- as some of us learned in study of James...
- what you believe and how you behave cannot be separated
- John Stott once said: *Our creed is expressed in our conduct and our conduct is derived from our creed*

**4. Trouble with troublemakers**

- Paul knew someone was to blame, whether an individual or an entire group

- guilty of poor sportsmanship; should have been yellow flags flying all over the place
- Paul wants Galatians to see where this legalism is coming from: **not from him who calls you**
- not God, not Jesus, certainly not Paul in his preaching of gospel
- God called them, according to Gal. 1.6, **“in the grace of Christ”**
- this grace wasn't earned or deserved, but given freely by God
- so what Galatians were hearing not from God; rather, comes from father of lies, devil himself
- and what was this doing to these poor Christians? Acting like yeast, v. 9
- bread wouldn't rise unless it had leaven in it
- only takes a little pinch, a little legalism goes a long way—thru whole lump of dough
- this is vital danger of mixing even a bit of law—circumcision—with the gospel: ruins it

### 5. **Everything about spiritual growth thrown off by just a mixing of law & gospel**

- law cannot save you if you do not know Christ
- cannot make you acceptable in God's eyes; in fact, it only shows how unacceptable you are
- but, when you come to Christ, when justified freely by His grace, law still in effect
- only now, it guides you, guards you on the path
- **Psalm 119:105-106—Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules.**
- we obey now out of gratitude and love for what Christ has done and who He is to us
- not to be accepted—remember, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!
- but misapplying the law, misusing as Christian, binds you up, trips you up, cuts in on your race

### 6. **Penalty is called, v. 10**

- Paul had confidence in the God who had called them and would bring them back on track
- he also knew God would take care of punishing the guilty party or parties
- should Paul have prayed for repentance for these false teachers?
- perhaps, but such heresy is so damning and dangerous, he will leave them in God's hands

### 7. **So keep running**

- God's final judgment will come to all false teachers, liberal teachers, gospel perverters
- we may or may not see it in our lifetime: not the issue
- God will deal with them and it will not end well if they fail to repent
- as for you and me, we must keep running
- you get knocked around, off course a bit: get up, repent & throw off what tripped you up
- look to Christ, Author and Finisher of our faith
- keep your eyes fixed on Him, He is the prize, after all

*Another terrible consequence of mixing & misapplying law and gospel is...*

### **II. THE CROSS'S OFFENSE IS REMOVED, v. 11**

- Paul brings in personal testimony once again to support this point
- before Paul was converted, he was Jew among Jews, Pharisee among Pharisees
- preaching absolute necessity of circumcision to be accepted by God what he did best
- as such, never received any pushback from Jews
- even Gentile converts to Judaism knew this was the one requirement for justification
- but after his Damascus road incident, all that changed
- Paul was taught to see the free grace of God brought through faith in Jesus
- circumcision no longer entered into the equation

- he said this in v. 6: **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything**
- this was not popular among his fellow Jews: countered everything they had believed
- as such, Paul suffered greatly for preaching the cross: the life, work, death, and resurrection
- **2 Corinthians 4:8-11—We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.**
- **2 Corinthians 6:4-8—... as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise.**
- if Paul were preaching to please crowds, he would never have suffered
- as it was, the offense of the cross is this: you cannot save yourself!
- if the law could save you it would and the cross would not have been necessary
- Paul has said this, most recently in verse 2: **“if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.”**
- so, look to grace, call out for grace, fall hard upon God's grace in Christ Jesus
- both to save and to enable you to live your Christian life

*As Paul brings out the sixth negative consequence to his readers, he tells them that misusing the law will cause them to be...*

### III. CUT OFF FROM THE PEOPLE OF GOD

- Paul's words seem unkind and ungracious
- but that is only because we so often think too little of sin and error and heresy
- we've nearly bought into lie that only heresy today is there's such a thing as heresy
- polluting the gospel of God's grace is damnable heresy, according the apostle
- and we must remember: he is writing under the inspiration of God & the Holy Spirit here

#### 1. Go ahead...and go even further!

- if these judaizers were so in love with circumcision, Paul wishes they wouldn't stop there
- he uses sanctified sarcasm here and wishes that they'd cut everything off, not just foreskin
- it would do no more to make them acceptable
- in fact, it would prove the absurdity of their convictions

#### 2. Physical or spiritual violence?

- but many have wondered if Paul is being literal here or if brings a spiritual meaning
- John Calvin, for one, believed Paul had a spiritual point behind the literal castigation
- OT law forbid eunuchs—no matter how they got that way—from entering the temple
- **Deuteronomy 23:1—“No eunuch is to enter the congregation of God” (Message)**
- in other words, they are literally and spiritually cut off
- they cannot worship God, serve God, or even truly be part of people of God
- Paul is telling Galatians: these false teachers need to be cut off in every sense of the word
- they have no part of the true covenant of God
- they wish to save themselves but only cut themselves off from that which truly saves
- these words may seem hard, but sometimes saying something outrageous is needful

- such vile sinners need to be awakened to spiritual stupor they are in

**Conclusion – Psalm 19.7–11 says**

- **Psalm 19:7-11—The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.**
- the law is good; it is a gift from God
- but it has a divinely intended purpose
- Do this and live, God says, and we usually think that somehow, we can
- but we cannot, and so that perfect obedience fails us and we stand condemned
- yet God has provided One who obeyed perfectly
- He fulfilled all righteousness—Jesus Christ the Righteous
- trying by our own means to be acceptable to God only leads to our eternal destruction
- only thru God's gracious provision can we live
- and once we are in Christ, now, as we'll see over the next few Sundays in Galatians...
- the law is once again good, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes and much to be desired
- for freedom Christ has set us free...let us live and rejoice in that liberty in Christ