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# Galatians

**You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?** Galatians 5:7

The previous paragraph dealt with the Galatians receiving circumcision which would negate the freedom found in Christ. Now Paul abruptly puts forth this sentence. It comes from his pen almost in gasps, as if he is utterly confounded by what has transpired.

His first words are, "You ran well." This is a common metaphor in the New Testament; that of a runner in a race. We have a race set before us and the finish line should be our goal. In the case of the Christian race, our goal is to fix our eyes on Jesus and concentrate on Him as we continue with each step.

Unfortunately for the Galatians, this worthwhile and proper goal was impeded. And so he asks next, "Who hindered you from obeying the truth." The word translated as "hinder" is explained by HELPS Word Studies -

It means "...properly, cut *into* (like blocking off a road); *hinder* (A-S) by "introducing an obstacle that stands *sharply in the way of a moving object*" (Souter); (figuratively) *sharply impede*, by *cutting off* what is desired or needed; to block (hinder)."

They had been on the right course, they had been pursuing Christ, and then they were cut off; having their course redirected. Their eyes were no longer on Jesus,

but instead on observances which had been fulfilled by Him. They had lost their goal because they were pursuing not the end of the law, meaning Christ, but the law itself. By pursuing the law, there could never be a finish line. They had stopped obeying the truth of Christ, and they had been deceived into the lies of the devil.

Life application: If you are not pursuing Christ through His finished work, then you are not pursuing Christ. Seemingly pious words such as, "I am observing the Sabbath because the law says I should and Christ would be pleased with that" are utterly ridiculous. Christ is pleased with faith in what He did, not in what you do.

**This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you.** Galatians 5:8

"This persuasion" is referring to the words of the previous verse which noted that the Galatians had been hindered from obeying the truth. They were walking on the proper path and had been knocked off that path and onto a wayward one.

Paul notes that this was because they were persuaded to do so. In this, he uses a play on words. In the previous verse, he used the word *peithó* which is translated as "obeying." It means "persuade" or "urge." The Judaizers had actively persuaded the Galatians to leave the proper path.

In this verse, he uses the word *peismoné*. It comes from *peithó* and means "persuasion" or "conviction," but it is used only of self-produced persuasion. Rather than relying on "Him who calls you," they trusted the voice inside as a response to the aberrant teachings of the Judaizers. They had willingly rejected the leading of the Spirit in order to follow the lies of the devil.

The words, "from Him who calls you" are in the present tense. This is contrasted to that used in Galatians 1:6 which said, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." They had been called by the Spirit of God and had responded to His calling. Now they were responding to the false teaching of mere men.

And so we can learn a valuable lesson from this verse. In the words, "This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you," there is a note that anyone can be called by God and respond to the simple gospel, but it does not mean that they will continue down the proper path after that day. Instead, they need to listen to the Spirit. As the Bible is written, it is the words of Scripture which call out to us. As the Bible says that the law is fulfilled in Christ, then the law is done.

The Holy Spirit will never call one to be obedient to a law which is annulled. He will only call one to cling to the grace of Christ alone and any precept which follows after Christ's finished work. The Spirit is not confused, but anyone who observes any precept of the law fulfilled by Christ is. They have willingly deluded themselves and have turned from the truth.

Life application: Don't be confused. Hold to the grace of Christ alone for your salvation and for your continued walk towards your heavenly home.

### **A little leaven leavens the whole lump.** Galatians 5:9

As least three different major explanations for Paul's words here have been given. The first is that this is speaking of the doctrine of the Judaizers reinserting the law as a means of obtaining justification before God. The insertion of one small aberrant doctrine, such as circumcision, will lead to another and another until the whole congregation is corrupted.

The second is that there was already among the believers at Galatia a certain tendency to conform to rites and customs in their spiritual lives, and that they had simply substituted old rites and customs with something else according to the teachings of the Judaizers. This is what has happened throughout Christianity, particularly in the RCC with the merging of pagan customs with those of the true faith.

The third option is that the false teachers themselves were being compared to leaven. They had crept in and subtly pulled away the believers from Christ and towards themselves. This is not unusual in churches, and it quickly leads to aberrant branches of Christianity, like King James Onlyism, etc.

As Paul has been speaking consistently throughout the epistle about the introduction of false doctrine by the Judaizers, this is most probably what he is specifically referring to. But as a proverbial saying, the premise holds true for each of the three possibilities above. Once a little yeast is introduced into bread, it quickly permeates the entire loaf. So it is with false teachers and bad doctrine. Just a tad of either can lead to catastrophic results within a church body.

Life application: Stick to the word, and stick to proper context when evaluating the word. Don't get swayed by goofy doctrine, self-seeking teachers, or anyone who claims they have a special insight into Scripture that nobody else has. Further, stick to the grace of Jesus Christ alone. DO NOT insert precepts from the law into your walk. If you do, you will certainly be brought back into bondage, and you will have set aside the grace of God in Christ.

**I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. Galatians 5:10**

This verse begins with an emphasis on "I" in the Greek to show Paul's certainty in what he is proclaiming. The thought laid out here is based on what he just said concerning the fact that a "little leaven leavens the whole lump." They had turned from the truth and were faced with the introduction of sin. A verse before that, he had told them that "This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you."

And so his words, "I have confidence in you, in the Lord" show his certainty that they will turn and do the right thing towards the One who calls them. They will reunite with the truth and go no further down the destructive path they have been following. He honestly feels that the case he has laid out is sufficient to wake them up and redirect them towards proper doctrine.

On the other hand, he still must address the instigator of the apostasy. And so he says, "...but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment." This person will be dealt with according to God's judgment. It may be that such judgment is to be pronounced by the Galatians, such as in expulsion from the congregation. Or, he may mean that God will reserve this person's judgment for the bema seat of Christ (assuming he is saved). Either way, judgment is to be rendered for the flagrant abuses he has perpetrated against the doctrine of grace which is found in Christ's finished work.

Finally, he finishes this thought with, "...whoever he is." The person will go unnamed. It may be that Paul knew who he was, or it may be that he had no idea who it was, but his words bring in the contrast between that person and the Galatians.

Life application: Paul's optimism concerning the restoration of right doctrine to the Galatians should be a hopeful reminder to us that there is also a chance that those who have departed from right doctrine in their own lives will be restored as well. However, it won't happen all by itself. It requires someone to open the Bible and show them the error of their ways. That someone may be you.

**And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?  
Then the offense of the cross has ceased. Galatians 5:11**

There is an emphasis here intended to bring in a stark contrast to the false teachers with the words "And I." This is immediately followed up with "brethren." He is speaking to them as saved believers and those that he was in fellowship with. His contrast is to show them that he has their best interests in mind. If this is so, then those he is contrasting himself with do not. He is their brother in right doctrine; they are their enemy in false doctrine.

His next words, "...if I still preach circumcision," are taken by some that he once proclaimed that circumcision was a necessary part of the faith and that he had now changed his position on this matter. This is unlikely for several reasons. First,

the book of Acts shows no such change in position. Secondly, he was instructed by Christ on his doctrine and Christ does not change. Third, though he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3), it was for a special reason and not out of compulsion or as a necessary doctrine. There is no reason at all to assume that Paul ever proclaimed the necessity of circumcision in regards to salvation.

Rather, those who saw that he had circumcised Timothy may have thought he was setting a precedent for all others he preached to. Or, they may have seen that he lived as an observant Jew in order to win those under the law (1 Corinthians 9:20). It may also be that his early teachings before becoming a Christian concerning the law were being recalled by those who knew him then. Or, it might be that the false teachers may have simply maligned Paul by stating he once proclaimed circumcision, but now did not. Whatever is the case, the record supports Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace through faith - apart from circumcision - during all of his time as a believer in Christ.

In support of this, he asks "...if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?" Vincent's Word Studies notes that the first use of the word "still" refers to the time before his conversion. He then notes that the second "still" which is given "is not temporal but logical." One thing logically follows after another, but in this case the logic was skewed. Where could the Jews and the false teachers find fault in him and persecute him if he were teaching that circumcision (and thus adherence to the Law of Moses) was necessary? The answer is that they couldn't. But they did, thus confirming his stand against such things. As Charles Ellicott states, "The two things are alternatives. If one is taught there is no need for the other."

And this is exactly what his final point is. "If I were not being persecuted, 'Then the offence of the cross has ceased.'" His gospel presentation was that only the merits of the work of Christ, culminating in the cross of Calvary, were sufficient to save a person's soul. This was an offense to those who held that adherence to the Law of Moses was necessary. They were depending on their own works, under the law, to establish their righteousness before God. But the gospel says that God has rejected that approach. To the Jews, and to those who feel that their deeds can

please God more than the cross, this is the highest of offenses. It takes away their feelings of pride, and it takes away their ability to boast before God.

For Paul to change his mind about the all-sufficient nature of the work of Christ, and to claim that adherence to the law was necessary, would then take away any need to persecute him. But his persecution in this regard continued. Thus, it proved that he was being misrepresented concerning circumcision. Rather, he held completely and solely to the merits of Christ as a means of being justified before God.

Life application: The law is fulfilled in Christ. The law is nailed to the cross of Christ. The law is annulled through the work of Christ. If you can't understand this, then you may need to take remedial English. The Bible is rather clear on these things.

**I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!**

Galatians 5:12

The words of Paul here are as strong and direct as any which he writes anywhere else. They are also overflowing with irony. The words, "I could wish that those who trouble you" are written about the Judaizers who he has been speaking about all along. They are those who have insisted that the Galatians insert deeds of the law into their theology. As the benchmark for this corrupt teaching, Paul has used the rite of circumcision. It is the physically identifying factor of those who were under the law. Without it, then that person wasn't even considered as Israel, much less an obedient Israelite.

The word "trouble" (Greek: *anastatoó*) is an especially strong word which comes from a root meaning "driven from one's home." They were turning the Galatians doctrine upside down and driving them from the sure foundation of Christ. For this, Paul says that he wishes they would "even cut themselves off." The word is *apokoptó* and is found just six times in the New Testament. All six involve the actual cutting away of something, including body parts.

His reference here turns on the idea of the circumcision of which he has been speaking. In essence, he is saying that they shouldn't just stop at their foreskin, but that they should go ahead and emasculate themselves. The intent here is to show the utterly ludicrous nature of being circumcised in order to please God over and above what Christ had already done. "Gee, if you can make God happy by being circumcised, then keep on cutting. Maybe he will be more pleased with additional mutilation of the flesh." It is both ironic and sarcastic.

Versions such as the KJV, which apply this to the person as a whole, entirely miss what Paul is saying. They use "cut off" in the sense of the false teachers being "cut off from the Galatians." This is not the intent of the passage at all. Other scholars see the intent as "being cut off from God." Again, this is incorrect. Paul's words hinge on the surrounding context, all of which is dealing with the rite of circumcision. A similar thought is found in his words of Philippians 3:2 -

"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!"

In that verse, he uses a term for "mutilation" which refers to the false circumcision of such depraved people.

Life application: Circumcision is of the heart. It doesn't matter how much of your body you cut away, only reliance on Christ can bring us to a right standing with God. Put away your reliance on deeds of the flesh! Be reconciled to God through the work of Christ alone.