

Galatians 5: 7-10; “You Ran Well. Who Hindered You?”, Message # 34 in the series – “Christ has Set us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 16th, 2023, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

The Christian life is compared here to running a race. The Galatians had begun well in this race by believing in the truth of the gospel which the Apostle Paul had preached to them. He had shown them the absolute necessity of their believing the gospel of Jesus Christ, but then a false teacher or a number of false teachers, had come along later, and they began to introduce to them the false notion that circumcision and keeping the law was necessary to be added to the gospel for them to be saved. So in this message I would like us to think about these things apply to us living at this time in New Testament Church history. What will hinder us from running the race of the Christian life well?

1st of all – Letting someone who is a legalist speak to you about what the gospel and the Christian life are; this will most certainly hinder you.

Verse 7 – “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” There have always been many legalists who have tried to infiltrate and join with the true people of God, ever since the first century. It no doubt will be a problem until Christ returns. These men must have come in very stealthily in terms of their speaking with the believers in the churches of Galatia. They had been able to persuade these young believers in the churches of Galatia that they needed to keep the law of Moses, both in its precepts and its ceremonies, in order to be saved. But this is not the purpose of the Law, either to justify or sanctify.

Look with me over at 1st Timothy 1, verse 8. “But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexual and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.”

You can see here that the Law is good if one uses it lawfully. Its purpose is to bring conviction of sin. Its purpose is to point sin out to people who are breaking God’s law, that they are a transgressor. If a person either Christian or non-Christian tries to promote the keeping of the law as that by which they will justify themselves before God, or even sanctify themselves in the sight of God as being holy and righteous people, they have become a legalist. Why is this? Because all of this supposed spiritual activity that they are engaging in, is based upon what they see that they are capable of doing, or are actually doing themselves, rather than their looking outside of themselves to God for the righteousness which He alone can impute to them through the grace of Christ.

That person, God cannot save or bless on that basis, because they ignore or are hostile to, the righteousness of God which is received by faith, and not by works. The Law shows us God’s standard in righteousness, and because of this, it is inherently good. The Law defines for us what sin is, but it has no power to save us. But the Christian doesn’t need to let the legalist speak to him his false gospel, or let him try to persuade him of the merit that he can supposedly earn in trying to keep the law. You only need to remember who it is who has kept the law perfectly and who died for your sins. You only need to believe in the One whom God raised from the dead.

Legalists are people who think that they are pleasing to God because they observe certain ceremonies and think of themselves as very moral persons. We must remember, however, that the spirit of self-righteousness is a legalistic spirit. That person is saying – “I am able to please God acceptably by what I do for God, and God accepts me because I am a faithful church-goer.” It is saying: I am a better Christian, and a better person than other people, because I think that I am keeping God’s law from righteous motives.

No, a Christian needs to remember who they are to fix their eyes upon, as they run the race of living the Christian life. They are not to fix their eyes upon themselves. They are to fix their eyes on Jesus. Turn with me over to Hebrews 12, verses 1-3. “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance (every weight) and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” If you fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus by faith, you will be able to run with endurance the race that is set before you because you are looking to Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of your faith.

2nd – Letting someone with a different spirit, other than an apostle filled with the Holy Spirit, persuade you of what truth is; this will most certainly hinder you.

Verse 8 says: “This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.” This being persuaded by false teachers to believe that circumcision and the observation of the Mosaic law was necessary for salvation, this did not come from Him, that is God, who calls you. When a person is called by God, they are called into fellowship with the Father and the Son through the true gospel.

Look over at 1st John 1, verses 3-7. “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” “And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Here is the apostle John telling us what we have been called into. We have been called into fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. This is a tangible spiritual reality for the person who has believed in Jesus. In your thoughts you hold sweet communion together with your God. You think together with Him of what you should be doing to glorify Him in the way that you live your life. Someone else comes to you and says that you need more than faith in Jesus. You need to observe the ceremonies of the law, or You need to go Mass or You need to observe Lent. What are you to do? You are to tell them that you have been persuaded by the Holy Spirit concerning the truth of the Bible being that which you will live your life by.

And the truth of the Bible will also be the same truth according to which you will worship God, and do all that you will do for Him. You are learning to live by faith; not trusting in ceremonies or sacraments to give you confidence that you are a true Christian. Turn with me over to 1st John 2, verses 18-21 – “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.”

You can see here that there were certain people who had come into the church that John was writing to; and they were not united with them about the doctrine of Christ; His Person and His work. And as a result of that they went out from them. They went out from them because they “were not of them”. Of them in the sense of having believed in Jesus only for salvation. Of them in the sense that they who had truly believed had received an anointing from the Holy One. (Christ) That anointing was the gift of the Holy Spirit to work in their heart and to convince them of the truth.

Beloved, if anyone comes to you not bringing the doctrine of Christ; that He is God made manifest in the flesh, that He has kept the law of God perfectly, fulfilling it on your behalf, and dying as a sacrifice for your sins, then you do not need to think that you can have real fellowship with them. They do not have the Spirit, and because of that, they are deceived in relation to the major doctrines of our faith. Look at 1st John 4: 1-6. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.” “And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”

Is Jesus Christ the Son of God? Is He God made manifest in the flesh? Can the person that you are talking to, freely confess to you that Christ is God? The legalist cannot say that Jesus Christ is the Righteous One, or that He is his righteousness. Neither can he really say that through the Spirit, by faith, he is waiting for the hope of righteousness as it says in verse 5 of Galatians 5. No, he is content with his own church and his own righteousness. He is interested in establishing his own righteousness, not God’s.

3rd – Letting a little leaven into the whole lump of dough will most certainly hinder you. (verse 9 and 10)

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.” “I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.” Leaven is a substance, typically yeast, that is added to dough to make it ferment and rise. Leaven is very good in making bread. Leaven is very bad in the living of your Christian life.

Turn with me over to Matthew 16, verses 5-12. “Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.” “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.’” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread.” “But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, ‘O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread?’” “Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up?” “Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?” “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?” –but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” “Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

This is what the apostle Paul is speaking of in the verse that we are studying. A little false doctrine undermines the gospel. A little false doctrine permeates the thinking of the whole church if it goes unchecked. Charles Spurgeon says: “One false doctrine very soon sours all your belief; the whole lump is leavened with it.” “If you have a wrong ground of confidence, you are wrong altogether.”

Matthew Henry says: “It is dangerous for Christian churches to encourage those among them who entertain, especially who set themselves to propagate, destructive errors. This was the case here. The doctrine which the false teachers were industrious to spread, and which some in these churches had been drawn into, was subversive of Christianity itself, as the apostle had before shown; and therefore, though the number either of the one or the other of these might be but small, yet, considering the fatal tendency of it, and the corruption of human nature, whereby others were too much disposed to be infected with it, he would not have them on that account to be easy and unconcerned, but remember that a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” “If these were indulged the contagion might soon spread further and wider; and, if they suffered themselves to be imposed upon in this instance, it might soon issue in the utter ruin of the truth and liberty of the gospel.”

Let us remember the importance of holding to sound doctrine. (Definitive statements of what is true) We have the Bible; let us read it, and see that the New Testament is full of doctrine. We have the 1689 London Baptist Confession. Let us hold the truth of the Bible which this confession faithfully portrays, and meditate upon it in our mind so that we might grow in respect our faith and knowledge. Let us see also, in closing, that the Apostle Paul could even have a confidence in these believers that he was writing to, that they would adopt no other view but the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

This being justified (declared righteous in God's sight) comes not by the works of the law. Paul knew that God was faithful, and that He would keep them from the evil one. The false teacher who was disturbing them would bear his judgment, whoever he was. The reason that Paul could have this confidence was because He knew that they had received the Spirit when they had first believed. And although he was at points afraid for them lest he had labored over them in vain, yet he knew that God would be faithful to keep them.

God would see to it that the one who was disturbing them would bear his judgment. Let us remember that Christ watches over the souls of all of God's elect people. 2nd Thessalonians 3: 1-5. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for not all have faith." "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." "And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you."

In conclusion, let us understand that our obedience to the truth of the gospel is all the obedience that we need to be saved from our sins. If you add anything to the finished work of Christ, as the basis for your being saved, it will place you on the ground of legalism, and you will lose your soul. But let us also understand that it is also possible for a true Christian to be deceived by a false teacher, at least for a time. It is possible, even as a believer, to have false notions of how you should live the Christian life. Do not be trusting in sacraments or ceremonies to be that which gives you life. See Christ as the only One who gives you grace and life to live uprightly before God and to be joyful and faithful in your walk with God.

Do not live your Christian life trusting in your own righteousness. Yes, you should pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness, as it says in 1st Timothy 6: 11. But in all of your pursuit of these things, see Christ as your both your imputed righteousness and your imparted righteous by His giving you all that you need to live the Christian life. May you see Him as the One who gives you grace to make progress in righteousness, and then 5 you will be safe from the false doctrine of legalists.