

Title: Paul’s Application of Justification in the Life of the Believer:
The Insidious Nature of Theological Error

Text: Galatians 5:2-12

Theme: Not only is Jesus necessary, but He is Enough!

Introduction: This passage begins the third section of the letter. After defending his apostleship (chaps. 1-2) and his message of justification by faith (chaps. 3-4), Paul now applies that doctrine to practical Christian living (chaps. 5-6).

Paul’s opposition to circumcision is based on what circumcision symbolizes. Those who would enter the Jewish community of faith came through circumcision. Earlier Paul spoke of how faith in Christ brought the individual into a new “Christ” community of faith. To go back to circumcision was to say you were embracing the Jewish community of faith and not the Christian community of faith. The two are set in dramatic and stark contrast. It is either the one or the other, but not both.

THE BIG PICTURE:

In considering the book of Galatians we can note a three-fold division.

- Chapters 1-2 = Personal/Biographical/ Authorization/Vindication
- Chapters 3-4 = Doctrinal/Biblical/Presentation/Exposition
- Chapters 5-6 = Practical/Behavioral/ Application

Its Eternal Value:

Just as Paul places every aspect of the Law together so also does he place every aspect of “salvation” together. Paul links one’s justification with their sanctification. He places perseverance as the outworking of preservation. You cannot have one without the other.

The Problem:

If justification does not produce sanctification (i.e. perseverance), then Paul says, Christ will be of no benefit to you, you will have been severed from Christ and you have fallen from grace. I find such thinking unfortunate that would make sanctification something other than what it is, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

“It was Paul’s position that the way of grace and the way of law were mutually exclusive. The way of law makes salvation dependent on human achievement; the man who takes the way of grace simply casts himself and his sin upon the mercy of God.” (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 43).

The Storyline:

Paul continues to drive home the sufficiency of Christ for everything. Not only is Christ necessary, He is enough.

Questions:

1. What does Paul bring out as perhaps the key issue with the false brethren?
2. What do you think Paul meant when he said, “Christ will be of no benefit to you?”

3. What point does Paul bring out concerning the law in verse 3?
4. What kind of language does Paul use to describe those who seek justification by the Law?
5. What are your thoughts concerning the following statements: “deserting Christ” (1:6), “severed from Christ” and “fallen from grace”?
6. Once you are justified by grace through faith in Christ, what are you now to be “doing?” (v. 5)
7. What do you think Paul meant when he said, “Faith working through love?”
8. Verse 7 suggests those to whom Paul spoke had already begun the race. What was his concern?
9. Who are those hinder them from obeying the truth?
10. What do you think Paul meant when he said, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” Do you think this has anything to do with 4:30?
11. In all of Paul’s challenges what is his conclusion in verse 10?
12. Notice again the strong language Paul uses for those who would pervert the gospel/Christ (v. 12).

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the full sufficiency of Christ and that anything other than Him is lacking..

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Him for our preservation and our perseverance.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy resting in His finished work.

Outline:

- I. The dark consequence of human autonomy (vv. 2-4)

How black is human autonomy? Listen carefully to the words found within the *Humanist Manifesto*.

“We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.” (Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifestos I and II* [Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1973], p. 16)

He begins with an attention getter, “Behold, I Paul.” It is very emphatic, emphasizing his authority. I have used the word “dark” because sometimes we do not see just how “dark” error is. Think about what Paul is saying. Circumcision is not wrong neither is Law-obedience. But they do become wrong when kept for the wrong reasons. **Legalism is not what you do, it is why you do what you do that makes you a legalist.** “It is not wrong to have standards in a church, but we should never think that the standards will make anybody spiritual, or that the keeping of the standards is an evidence of spirituality.” (Wiersbe, *Galatians*, 122). Paul begins with a stern warning.

He is transitioning from the theological to the personal. Paul is exhorting them not to return back to their former state of law obedience. Notice the four warnings.

A. Christ will be of no benefit to you (v. 2)

The problem with the text is that it is grammatically clear. We know what it is saying. We have trouble, however, with its meaning.

What does Paul mean when he says, “If you receive circumcision?” I am making the assumption that Paul is speaking to people who claim to be Christians. These “Christians” are going back to circumcision because they believe that without it something is lacking. Lacking in what? They are saying, “Salvation (and all this entails) is to believe on Jesus Christ plus [circumcision, obedience to the Law, water baptism, church attendance, living an obedient life style].” Through their actions they are saying what Christ has done is not enough. Paul’s point is clear, “if we add anything to the finished work of Christ for our salvation, Christ will not benefit us.” Is church attendance a condition needed to complete one’s salvation? What about baptism or even good works? Do these activities in any way complete what Christ has begun? No.

The question confronting us is simple, “Is Jesus enough or do we need more?” Friend, Jesus is enough in this life and in the life that is to come.

All that you need you already received and will forever have. This is the truth of Ephesians 1:3 and 2 Peter 1:3. **One of our failures as believers is to recognize and rest in all that He is for us.** “The Judaizers want us to believe that we are ‘missing something,’ that we would be more ‘spiritual’ if we practiced the law with its demands and disciplines. But Paul makes it clear that the law adds nothing – because nothing can be added. Instead, the law comes in as a thief and robs the believer of the spiritual riches he has in Christ. It puts him back into bankruptcy, responsible for a debt he is unable to pay.” (Wiersbe, *Galatians*, 117).

Was it possible for a Galatian believer to be saved and receive circumcision? Absolutely, but it is terribly wrong. Is it serious? It is serious enough for Paul to say, “Christ will be of no benefit to you.” **When is the line crossed between whether or not the individual is saved? I do not know, but I do know that such a situation is dreadfully wide of the mark. It is inappropriate.**

B. [You are] under obligation to keep the whole Law (v. 3)

This is the same theology of Galatians 3:10. No one can obligate themselves to keeping sections or portions of the Law. The Law is either kept entirely or not at all. (I’m for, “not at all”). This same principle is true concerning Christ. There is no part that He is not the whole.

C. You have been severed from Christ (v. 4a)

Is this the language of John 15? Is it possible for a true believer to be cut off from Christ? The idea is “separated, to become of no effect.” For the branch to be separated from the vine is inevitable death.

“The aorist, or ‘point’ tense marks the moment of decision to accept the teaching of the Judaizers; when they did that, then and there they were separated from Christ as a branch is separated from a tree; henceforth Christ would profit them nothing at all. The Apostle’s claim is nothing less than this, that **Christ must be everything or nothing to a man**; no limited trust or divided allegiance is acceptable to Him. **The man who is justified by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is a Christian; the man who seeks to be justified by the works of the law is not.**” ([emphasis added] C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 241).

D. You have fallen from grace (v. 4b).

Is it possible for grace to fail? How does one fall from grace? Is it possible to put oneself outside of the sphere of grace? Can I undo what Christ has done?

- To fall from grace as an unbeliever is to reject the only way for salvation.
- To fall from grace as a believer is to reject the only way for sanctification.

Law and grace are mutually exclusive. The two stand in opposition to each other. You cannot have it both ways. “A person cannot live by both law and grace. To attempt to be justified by law is to reject the way of grace.” (MacArthur, *Galatians*, 135).

Illustration: Most of us are comfortable in our padded seats. How many of us would be willing to sit on a tack for the duration of the morning service? What if someone came along and said, “If you sit on the tack, your sense experience will be heightened and you will leave here with a greater feeling of being awake.” You know what they’re right. Your sense experience would be heightened and you probably would leave here with a greater feeling of being awake, but I do not think you would give up your comfortable padded seat for the opportunity to sit on a tack! Whether you sit on the tack or not does not change who you are. It will change how you think and behave, but it will not change who you are. Sitting on a tack is like legalism. It cannot change who you are. It will change how you think and behave. But will it be to your benefit? No. Friend, let’s remove the tack of legalism from our seat and rest in the padded comfort of God’s grace.

“Contrary to the teaching of the Judaizers, to add circumcision and other works of the law to what Christ accomplished by grace **is not to raise one’s spiritual level but to severely lower it. Legalism does not please God but offends Him. It does not bring a person closer to God but rather drives him away.**” ([emphasis added] MacArthur, *Galatians*, 135).

“These expressions must be understood as explicit denials of salvation to those who, in the face of the Apostle’s statements of what was involved, persisted in acknowledging circumcision, and so committed themselves to the works of the law as necessary to justification.” (C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 243).

II. The confident hope of divine capability (vv. 5-6)

What is the hope of righteousness? It is the confidence we enjoy as believers that we are presently clothed in the righteousness of Christ and that God the Father will complete the work that He alone had begun.

A. The utter certainty of a future work (v. 5 [“the hope of righteousness”])

“The phrase ‘hope of righteousness’ refers to the believer’s complete conformity to all the requirements of the will of God at the coming of Christ. God, who knows the end from the beginning, needs not to wait the final issue of man’s life before pronouncing His verdict, but accounts him righteous when he trusts in Christ.” (C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 247).

B. The complete sufficiency of a finished work (v.6a [“means nothing”])

“To be effective, to be capable of producing results.” It is only the person and work of Jesus Christ that is effectual in the redeeming of His people. Only what He has done can produce the necessary results.

C. The total suitability of faith’s work (v. 6b [“working through love”])

Nothing else matters but faith’s expression which is love. I do not think we put enough emphasis on this truth. Love matters. It is not a truth-less love where sentimentality reigns nor is it an emotionless love where dogmatism reigns. It is a love that is informed by the head, but expresses itself through the heart. **The essence of Christianity is not obedience to the laws in a book, but the outworking of one’s love for Christ.**

“To Paul all that mattered was faith which works through love. That is just another way of saying that the essence of Christianity is not law but a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The Christian’s faith is founded not on a book but on a person; its dynamic is not obedience to any law but love to Jesus Christ.” (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 43).

Paul shifts gears and really begins to put it to the false teachers.

III. The heavy sentence against false spirituality (vv. 7-12)

Again, I have used the word “heavy” to communicate the thought that Paul is not playing.

A. It hinders the truth (v. 7)

The word “hinder” means “to cut in.” “The word suggests a breaking into or obstruction of the Galatian Christians in their course of following the truth. The picture is that of the runner who has allowed his progress to be blocked or who is still running, but on the wrong course.” (*Rogers & Rogers, 430*).

Paul asks, “Who is holding you back?” Paul is asking about a person not a thing. We always have to be careful as to who we call our friends. First Corinthians 15:33 tells us a timeless truth, “Bad company corrupts good behavior.” **We must guard ourselves against falling prey to sparkling personalities and smooth words when it is in the absence of truth.** I will say to my dying day, “Do not believe a word I say, believe the Bible and focus on Jesus Christ who is the author and finisher of your faith.”

B. It is not of God (v. 8)

God does not want you in a place of perplexity and unrest. **This is not His declared will.**

C. It contaminate the truth (v. 9)

How much poison does it take to destroy the food? “The spirit of legalism does not suddenly overpower a church. Like leaven, it is introduced secretly; it rows, and before long poisons the whole assembly.” (*Wiersbe, Galatians, 122*).

“Just as one plague infected person may bring devastation upon a city, so may one teacher of doctrine subversive of the gospel corrupt a whole community of believers. Doctrines in the Scriptures are not dissociated from the persons who maintain them.” (*C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, The Epistle to the Galatians, 256*).

How successful were the Galatians in their fight against the leaven of legalism? We are testaments to the insidious nature of legalism.

D. It will be judged (vv. 10-12)

The cross forms a stumbling block to those who wish to boast in themselves. The cross is offensive. It tells you, you cannot, only Jesus can. Again, the false teaching did not say Jesus was not necessary, only that He was not enough and the cross says Jesus alone and only is enough for this life and for the life to come.

Paul had no love lost on the false teachers. Paul was not simply calling for their excommunication from the fellowship, but rather a full castration of the false teachers.

“Paul ends with a very blunt saying. Galatia was near Phrygia and the great worship of that part of the world was of Cybele. It was the practice that priests and really devout worshippers of Cybele mutilated themselves by castration. It is a grim illustration at which a polite society raises its eyebrows, but it would be intensely real to the Galatians who knew all about the priests of Cybele.” (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 44).

“Cybele's most ecstatic followers were males who ritually castrated themselves, after which they were given women's clothing and assumed ‘female’ identities.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybele>

In the midst of this dark passage Paul gives them a word of encouragement found in verse 10. Paul was confident that the true believer would persevere in the truth. “Paul’s confidence is not in them, it is in the Lord for all things, their spiritual welfare included.” (C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 257). How this is to encourage our hearts as we encounter professing brothers and sisters who seem to be swerving from the truth of grace.

Shepherding the Sheep: (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

1. “The believer who abandons grace for law is a slave, a pauper, and a runner on a detour. In short, he is a loser. And the only way to become a winner is to ‘purge out the leaven,’ the false doctrine that mixes law and grace, and yield to the Spirit of God.” (Wiersbe, *Galatians*, 123).
2. We must purge from ourselves any confidence we have in our flesh.
3. We must rest with confidence in the ability of God.
4. We must guard ourselves against a false spirituality.
5. We must learn not to tolerate error in our midst.
6. The church is unsinkable though a church can go down. God uses the daily attentiveness of His people to theological detail to sustain a church. May God keep us alert and focused. May we always strive to be a Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, Grace-Based Fellowship.