

Route 66

Galatians: Outlawing Legalism

Part 48 – January 16, 2011



With passages like:

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (3:1) and, “I fear for you, that somehow I’ve wasted my efforts on you”, (4:11) and Paul’s infamous *castration* insult, (5:12) ... Galatians is by far Paul’s *angriest* letter!



Paul confronts and tackles the heresy of his arch adversaries, the Judaizers! These were *Christian Pharisees* (Acts 15:5) who convinced gentile converts that they must abide by Old Testament laws and customs (*especially circumcision*) in order to complete the *legal requirements* of their salvation in Christ! The incident is recorded in the book of Acts:

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” – Acts 15:1 NIV



Notice that they came to “Antioch” (a.k.a. Pisidian Antioch). Galatia was located in modern day Turkey. But, Galatia wasn’t a city – it was a Roman province. It included several towns and cities mentioned in the book of Acts, such as: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. This is why Paul addresses this letter (a.k.a. epistle) ...

... To the **churches** in Galatia. – Galatians 1:2b NIV



The Via Sebaste, built in 6 B.C.

This would’ve been passed around all the Galatian churches, traveling on this *very* road running through Pisidian Antioch. But, it was *first* sent to a special congregation Paul had established (somewhere in Galatia), who had come to his aid on his 2nd missionary journey. A medical condition (probably an eye disorder) had held him up ... but it sure hadn’t held him *back*!

As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. ... I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. – Galatians 4:13-15 NIV

Some think poor eyesight was Paul's "thorn in the flesh" that God refused to heal (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Paul may be insinuating bad eyesight in his signoff to the Galatians.

See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! - Galatians 6:11 NIV

So, these Judaizers trigger a Council in Jerusalem, wherein the Apostles join Paul to denounce this *anti-grace* practice. (Acts 15:1-35) But, the Judaizers are such a scary bunch that even Peter caves in when they're around. Something Paul would not put up with!

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.
- Galatians 2:11-12 NIV

This enraged Paul, because two-faced Peter (a nickname meaning: *rock*), had become near legendary and was *incredibly* influential.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. - Galatians 2:13 NIV

Paul demonstrates his authority, to condemn the Judaizers, by relating how he had openly challenged and humbled the "rock".

... I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? ... I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" - Galatians 2:14b;21 NIV



Has an officer of the law ever pulled you over to reward you for *following* the speed limit? No? The law doesn't offer a reward to those who obey it, only punishment to those who violate it.

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." - Galatians 3:10 NIV

You could be the best law-keeper in the whole world; but, it wouldn't keep you from being incarcerated once you break it.

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. - Galatians 3:23-24 NIV

So, how does the *law* lead us to the grace Jesus offers? By revealing our hopelessly lost in rebellion and sin we are.

I'm quite satisfied going 65mph ... as long as the limit is 55mph! If your faith is based on rules instead of a relationship with the Lord, you will be relentlessly tempted to press the limits. The law was given to reveal, not to remove sin. In fact, whenever the law encounters the sinful nature, the law *itself* becomes an instrument for defeating its own demands.



Put a hole in a fence by a sidewalk, and a few curious people will peek through it. But, hang some police tape and a sign that reads, "Do Not Look in Hole" and there'll be a line! Restrictions provoke our desire for sovereignty. We want the control! We *hate* that word, *restriction!* "You're on RESTRICTION!" We're law *haters* because we're self-rule *lovers*.

That's why we have such an instant, knee-jerk reflex to view every restriction as a deprivation rather than a protection. How do you feel when a police car drives along behind you? Do you think: this is nice; I am as *protected* as I can be? Or, do you think: Turn! Go away! Why are you following me? Have you ever turned, just to "shake" one off your "tail"?

Do you know how to be followed by a cop without getting nervous? Let someone else drive! When Jesus takes the wheel, He takes the curse of that scrutinizing, punishment-only law with it.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written [Deut. 21:23]: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." - *Galatians 3:13 NIV*



Because of grace, we're no longer scrutinized and threatened and condemned by the Law.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. - *Galatians 5:1 NIV*

Paul spends *five verses* correcting the sexual sin of a man and his stepmom (*1 Cor. 5:1-5*) and an *entire book* correcting legalists. Which do you think Paul sees as a *greater* threat?

Both are condemned and *both* are destructive. But, indulgency and immorality are like dying of cancer. You can see it coming and prepare for it; maybe even and take steps to correct it. As detrimental as indulgent sins are, at least they compel their sufferers to examine themselves at the bottom of the barrel.

But legalism insidiously creeps into our faith like plaque in an artery. It's like dying of a heart attack you never see coming. I'll subtly restrict the "flow" of the Gospel if I begin thinking of salvation as Jesus *plus* Bible reading, or Jesus *plus* tithing, or Jesus *plus* not drinking or smoking or swearing, etc.

It takes effort to “stand firm” against this temptation; because, just like those Judaizers, we want some kind of a *marker* that we can use to reassure ourselves that we’re in good standing with God. So we have to stand *firm* against our good-for-nothing markers, and put our total trust only in Christ for our salvation.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. – *Galatians 5:6 NIV*

We’ve been set free to focus not on *sinning less* but on *loving more*. As we yield to this, the Spirit empowers us to resist the allure of sin, by showing us how it blocks that which we desire most: to learn to love as our Father-Creator-Redeemer loves!



That’s why the only *true* mark and measure of a person’s fullness of God’s Spirit is the God-reflecting “fruit of the Spirit”.

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, **peace**, **patience**, **kindness**, **goodness**, **faithfulness**, **gentleness** and **self-control**. Against such things there is no law. – *Galatians 5:22-23 NIV*

The Spirit’s internal work produces an external crop. But sadly, many believers vainly grasp for quicker, easier, more tangible ways to “certify” the Spirit’s presence in one another: The legalist turns to the Law; the hyper-spiritualist turns to experiences; the activist turns to voting records; and the intellectualist will turn to doctrinal purity.

But Paul turns us to the “fruit”. We think of fruit as health food; Paul’s readers would’ve thought of it as *dessert* food.

He was inspired to call them *fruit*; if he hadn’t, this list could be interpreted as just another form of willpower-driven legalism. But no amount of human effort can make *fruit* grow. Our only part is to faithfully, patiently, and tenderly care for and protect the plant ... and wait for the fruit to grow.

- The law says, “Do!”
- The Gospel says, “Done!”

There are no *degrees* of justification. What’s done is done!

Legalism is all about changing *God’s* attitude toward me. But, as Paul is trying to help the Galatians understand:

- Jesus is only concerned with changing *my* attitude toward God.