

Message #17**Galatians 5:7-15**

Just recently someone came to our home and asked about hunting in the Rocky Mountains. That enabled me to think back over the many years that we spent in those Rocky Mountains. There were at least 3-4 times when I did not know where I was. One of the times fog came in, two times were in the dark and one time I got so turned around I spent the night out in the mountains miles away in another camp.

Now having been off track a time or two, I can tell you that you must keep a steady mind because your emotions surge and if you don't keep your mental wits about you, you can emotionally go berserk and end up in serious trouble. The best thing to do is simply admit you are lost and try to calmly formulate a plan concerning your next step.

Now I did not come up with that idea. I took some survival courses out west and that is exactly what they said you are to do. The teachers warned us that if you lose your head, you can get so far off track you can die. But they also said if you stay steady and focused, you can survive.

The Galatians were losing their heads about the grace of God. They were getting lost in their theology. Paul needed to warn these people to keep their wits about them. There were people who were trying to convince others to wander around in the O.T. Law. They were teaching people that the grace of God was not enough to really make them right with God, but they needed to obey a few rules, traditions and a few laws. So when Paul writes this section of Scripture, he communicates this idea:

GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO BE WARNED THAT THOSE WHO TRY TO PUT YOU INTO A WORKS SYSTEM OR LAW SYSTEM ARE VERY DANGEROUS AND THEY ARE DISTURBING YOUR FAITH AND WILL HINDER YOUR GROWTH, AND WILL LEAD YOU FAR AWAY FROM YOUR FREEDOM AND FROM A LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND WITH OTHERS.

Many years ago we were attending a church that had a woman in it who was a hard core legalist. She had her own codes and rules and she judged everyone based on those rules—cards, makeup, clothing, movies, music, even posture in prayer. We eventually left that church. This woman never made one positive impact on anyone. In fact, people got away from her. She tried to weasel her way into people's lives with her own arrogant and diabolical agenda and she devastated many people. That is exactly what was happening in the churches of Galatia. All kinds of people were doing that kind of thing.

So when Paul writes this part of the book he gives a series of **9 confrontational realities**:

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #1 – Your spiritual life is being hindered. **5:7**

There was a time when the Galatians believed right and lived right. Paul often uses a metaphor of running a race of the Christian life (Gal. 2:2; I Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 3:13-14; II Tim. 4:7). The Christian life is not sitting around; it is moving forward in a long distance race. It is tough and tedious.

Now the verb “hinder” is a very interesting verb. It pictures a runner who is running along nicely and smoothly and someone cuts into the flow and causes the runner to break stride and inhibits forward movement (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 155).

Back in the 80's, Mary Dekker Slaney was the top woman runner in the world. She set 17 world records. She was known for running the 1500 and the 3000 meter race. She was favored to win the 3000 in the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984. She was running a perfect race and then Zola Budd cut in front of her and she caught her heel, which tripped her up and she lost.

That same thing can happen in one's spiritual life. You are flowing along nicely with a focus on God's grace and then someone cuts into your world and starts propagating the infusion of law or traditions into your spirituality and it begins to slow your progress. If you are not careful, it can trip you up and you can end up losing rewards. Do not let anyone hinder your growth in grace.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #2 – Your legalism or works beliefs do not come from God. **5:8**

Here is the theological irony of all of this. Legalistic people actually think their legalism and rules comes from God. Legalistic people appear to be so sincere, so concerned, so pious, so impressive and so showy. But know this, those people who teach you that you are really right with God by obeying some O.T. law or by obeying their man-made traditions or rules, are not from God. **Legalism does not come from God.**

God called you and saved you by His grace. Your works and religious laws had nothing to do with it. It was all of God's grace. Now if you are moving away from a focus on grace into religious laws or merit works, you are not being led by God.

Paul wanted these Galatians to know that God leads people out of law and out of religious traditions to a grace freedom. So, any who are moving away from grace are not being led by God.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #3 – Your entire spiritual life can be negatively affected by a little false teaching. **5:9**

Legalism typically does not start fast; it moves in gradually. It begins to take over until works causes grace to disappear. It doesn't take much leaven to affect an entire loaf of bread; all it takes is a little. It doesn't take much to leaven your entire spiritual life.

Start adding a little law-keeping into grace or focus on your own works and you will drift from grace and end up devastating your spiritual life and stunting your growth.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth He specifically called the legalism of the Pharisees a leaven that needed to be carefully guarded against (Matt. 16:6). Paul called an immoral man in the church a leaven that needed to be removed (I Cor. 5:6). Legalism does not instantly dominate the church or a life; it starts small.

Legalism undermines the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. What legalism does is say to us and to God that Jesus Christ did not really accomplish the full package of your salvation or sanctification so you must add something to it. You must add law-keeping or works or circumcision or baptism or day observances or dietary things. All of this is a leavened lie that comes from hell.

One small cell of cancer can metastasize into a malignant tumor that can eventually destroy a body. One small spark from a match can start a fire that can eventually destroy a whole forest.

Benjamin Franklin was credited with a very famous statement—For want of a nail, the horseshoe was lost. For want of a horseshoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the battle was lost.

The thing that started the loss of the battle was one horseshoe nail. It does not take much. You let anything filter into grace and your spiritual life will become a disaster. It won't take much and it won't take long.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #4 – You need to make a judgment. 5:10

Each believer must judge himself to make certain he is presenting and believing true Biblical grace. James says that a person who teaches had better know what he is teaching because he will be held highly accountable (James 3:1). Jesus gave a warning against the Pharisees and said if they caused a little child to stumble, it would be better for a millstone to be hung on his neck and cast into a sea rather than face the judgment of God (Matt. 18:6).

Every believer must make a judgment to either grow in grace or adopt some wrong view of spirituality. Paul had a confidence that these people would choose grace.

Listen, there are people and there are churches that will hinder your growth by telling you that your works and your law-keeping can make you right with God. You need to get away from those people and those churches because they are stifling the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #5 – You know that preaching the pure grace of the cross causes suffering and stumbling. 5:11

Adding something to the Gospel is acceptable to most people, but not to God and not to grace.

The pure teaching of God's grace will antagonize many people and many religions. It smashes pride. Most people want to do what they themselves can do in order to be right with God. Very few want to humble themselves to rely totally on Jesus Christ for salvation and rely totally on the Holy Spirit for sanctification. The cross is an offense to many things:

- 1) It is an offense to the morality of man because it says you cannot be moral enough.
- 2) It is an offense to the reason of man because it says you cannot be smart enough.
- 3) It is an offense to the culture of man because it says you cannot be sophisticated enough.
- 4) It is an offense to the will of man because it says you cannot choose good enough.
- 5) It is an offense to the religions of man because it says you cannot be spiritual enough.

The cross of Jesus Christ is an offense. Paul's point is I am suffering for preaching grace; but if I were preaching circumcision I would not be suffering, because I would be agreeing with the very people who are persecuting me.

There is an ecumenical fellowship of a bunch of churches and religions that all preach works and if you agree with them you will get along just fine. But take a stand for grace and you will offend them all.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #6 – You need to know that I hope legalists mutilate themselves. **5:12**

Paul did not speak kindly or think kindly about false teachers. Paul had a great compassion and great patience with broken down hurting sinners, but he had nothing but rebuke and a holy hatred against those who taught things contrary to grace.

Now one of the things the legalists were propagating was that in order to really enhance your relationship with God, you needed to be circumcised. Faith in Jesus Christ was not enough to give you a complete relationship with God, but you still needed to be circumcised. **Paul says I hope they castrate themselves.**

Paul did not mince words when it came to false religion. After all, Jesus called legalists "whited sepulchers." Paul says I hope the people who are teaching you this end up castrating themselves.

Now most people think all religions should just get along. Well that politically correct opinion is a bunch of nonsense. Biblically speaking, that mindset is heretical. Paul hoped that false religious teachers would cut themselves to shreds.

Many people have been taught that they can enhance their relationship with God by their works. Paul would say to such people:

- 1) I hope the one who said you must be baptized in water drowns himself.
- 2) I hope the one who said you must eat or not eat certain things chokes himself.
- 3) I hope the one who says you must wear certain clothing hangs himself.

These people are mutilating the grace Gospel and Paul says I wish they would mutilate themselves.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #7 – Your salvation is a calling to freedom. **5:13**

Do you see **verse 13**? You have been saved out from under the Law and you have been called into freedom. Do not let someone tell you otherwise. Now Paul says in **verse 13**, don't use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature, but that is actually how free you are.

There are three ways to approach the Christian life and only one is right. The three ways use a noun that begins with the letter "L."

- 1) You may live a life of rigid legalism—think your laws and rules will make you spiritual.
- 2) You may live a life of loose license—live your life free from any self-discipline and you will end up enslaved to something.
- 3) You may live a life of liberty—use your liberty to live for God and serve others. The pronoun "another" means another of the same kind.

Christian liberty does not ever promote freedom to sin, but freedom to serve. We are free from fear, from failure, from sin, and from the Law.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #8 – Your real test concerning the Law. **5:14**

A rigid legalist cannot possibly love his neighbor as himself. A legalist cannot love right because he is too judgmental. Now Paul had just talked about the fact that he hoped these legalists would mutilate themselves, now he brings up a theme "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The whole law is fulfilled in that rule. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not covet what he has, you will not steal from him, you will not lie to him, and you will not commit adultery with his mate. This is what the Holy Spirit does; it produces within a Grace Age believer a true love for the neighbor.

Now let me ask three questions to see whether you measure up to the Law:

- 1) If you see your neighbor in need of something, would you be willing to take out a loan to meet the need like you would for yourself?
- 2) Would you be willing to work an extra job so your neighbor's children could go to college like you might do for your own family?
- 3) When you go to the grocery store to get your groceries, do you check with your neighbor every time so you can buy their groceries?

The truth is if this is the summation of the O.T. Law, we have not measured up. We have missed the mark.

CONFRONTATIONAL REALITY #9 – Legalistic law-keeping will make you a cannibal.

5:15

A legalist will verbally devour anyone who does not measure up to their code of spirituality. A rigid legalist is judge and jury of everyone. These people will tell you they really are disciplined and present their bodies to the Lord, except for their tongues.

Law-keepers have a wagging tongue problem. They strut around so pious, but they are verbal cannibals who will eat you alive.

Well let's see where we are in this. I have a challenge for each of us. Let's see you go one week without saying one negative, judgmental, harsh, critical, gossipy thing about anyone. You will probably discover this is one tough assignment.