

SEVERED FROM CHRIST

Galatians 5:1-12

Key Truth

Legalism shorts out the power for spiritual transformation.

A few weeks ago I was informed the toaster wasn't working. Mom (and Willie, the dog) have toast every morning for breakfast. Not simple, straight ahead wheat toast but sweet, gooey cinnamon toast. This was a mini crisis. I took the toaster apart and found icing on the magnetic switches. The contacts couldn't close because of the icing. In other words, the icing was cutting off the flow of power!

This is exactly what Paul addresses in Galatians 5:1-12 – not the toaster, but cutting the flow of power. Paul warns that if the Galatians give in to legalism they will cut the flow of power for spiritual transformation; they will not go on to become like Christ (4:19). Paul's concern was their lack of sanctification, not loss of salvation.

STAND FIRM AGAINST LEGALISM (5:1-6)

Legalism Cuts Off the Power for Spiritual Transformation (5:1-4)

Galatians 5:1-4 (ESV)

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ² Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

Faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ frees us from any and all obligation to the Law of Moses. Contrary to the false teaching of the Judaizers, the Law of Moses is neither the means of justification nor sanctification.¹ The Apostle Paul admonishes the Galatian believers to stand firm in resisting the Judaizers' heresy.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, circumcision was the means of submission to the Law of Moses and it was mandatory for all Jews, but also for Gentiles who wished to become part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Accordingly, the Judaizers urged the Gentile men to be circumcised in order to come under the Law of Moses. Circumcision was a concrete commitment to the Law of Moses and a repudiation of faith as God's means of justification and sanctification.

Paul warns of four dire consequences if the Galatian believers accept circumcision:

1. *Christ will be of no advantage to you.* The term *advantage* means "assistance that brings benefit."² They will forfeit Christ's help in their spiritual transformation.
2. *Every man accepting circumcision is obligated to keep the whole law.* If circumcised, these men will be rejecting the way of faith for the way of works. But there is only one basis of justification and sanctification in God's economy – faith. They will be leaving the winning team and joining the losing team.
3. *You are severed from Christ.* Employing graphic word play, Paul drives home that to embrace circumcision and works is to break fellowship with Jesus. They will be opposing Christ and the Spirit. They will be embracing the lie that they can re-form themselves by their effort in keeping the Law of Moses.

¹ *Justification* refers to gaining a right standing before God. *Sanctification* refers to becoming like Christ.

² Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996. (35.2)

4. *You have fallen from grace.* They will be relating to God on the basis of their works rather than on the basis of His grace.

These are born again believers the Apostle Paul is warning. Some of the consequences require they be believers; one cannot be severed from Christ without having been connected to Him. Similarly, one cannot fall from grace who has not first been in the state of grace. Enslaving themselves once again to the Law will not reverse their justification, but it will bring their sanctification to a halt. They will cut themselves off from God's resources for spiritual transformation. Spiritual transformation cannot come by external conformity to the Law.

God's goal is not simply that we go to heaven when we die.

Galatians 1:3-4 (ESV)

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins **to deliver us from the present evil age**, according to the will of our God and Father,

God's purpose is both to save us and to spiritually transform us into Christlikeness. If the Galatians accept the teachings of the Judaizers and shift from faith to works, they will not become like Christ. Remember what Paul wrote in 4:18-19.

Galatians 4:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, ¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you!**

If the Galatian believers accept circumcision and obligate themselves to the Law, they will be like slaves who had been adopted as sons. Their father is excited to give them a new life. He has all the resources they need to get an education, to travel, to pursue their interests, to have families of their own and so on. But after being adopted and enjoying the blessings of sonship in their father's house, the sons return to the slaves' quarters, put the shackles back on and live once again as slaves. They remain sons. The father's resources remain available to them. By choosing to relate to their father as slaves they forfeit the new lives they could have had.

The Galatians are saved, but if they go back under the Law as symbolized by circumcision they will lack sanctification for the practical reason they are cutting themselves off from Christ and His resources necessary for spiritual transformation.

In verses 5 & 6 Paul makes the point that believers who walk by faith and the Spirit are the ones who are transformed.

Faith Connects Us to the Power for Spiritual Transformation (5:5-6)

Galatians 5:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

What is the *hope of righteousness*?

We might assume it is heaven. But Paul hasn't spoken about heaven in the surrounding context.

In the very next verse he writes about *faith working through love* as the important thing in life, not circumcision or uncircumcision. The *hope of righteousness* and *faith working through love* are related. *Faith working through love* describes the way God wants us to live. It is the right way to live; it is God's will for us. *Faith working through love* is the righteous life we are to live. It is something for which we must *hope* because it is not natural to us. We must be transformed; set free from our self-love. It is a legitimate hope because the Spirit has the power to transform us. Those who go back under legalism have no such hope of transformation; they cut themselves off from Christ and the Spirit.

So we see that in Galatians 5:1-6 Paul pleads with the Galatians to stand firm against the legalism of the Judaizers. He warns those contemplating circumcision they will be cutting themselves off from Christ and sanctification. Those who continue in faith will, however, through the power of the Spirit, be transformed to love as Christ loves.

In Galatians 5:7-12, Paul encourages the Galatians to be done with the Judaizers.

BE DONE WITH THOSE WHO TEACH LEGALISM (5:7-12)

Galatians 5:7-12 (ESV)

⁷ You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸ This persuasion is not from him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰ I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. ¹¹ But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. ¹² I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

Paul points out four reasons to be done with the Judaizers.

1. *This persuasion is not from him who calls you.* The legalism of the Judaizers is not from God. Paul's gospel was direct revelation from Jesus.
2. *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.* The legalism of the Judaizers is dangerous because it is so potent. It has the potential of infecting the entire church.
3. *...the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty....* Teaching legalism is sin and the Judaizers will bear the penalty of their sin.
4. *But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision...* The Judaizers deliberately misrepresent Paul and diminish the significance of the cross by promoting circumcision.

Previously, Paul admonished the Galatian churches to remove the Judaizers from fellowship (4:30). Here he gives four more reasons to be done with them. But in the midst of his argument he makes a fascinating statement:

¹⁰*I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view.* In the Greek it is stronger: *I am persuaded concerning you in the Lord that you will take no other view.* This does not seem to be wishful thinking. What is the basis of this confidence? Is it possible that as Paul arrived at this point in his letter the Spirit spoke to Paul assuring him He would take what Paul had written and persuade the Galatians of the truth? He's been perplexed. He's wanted to be with them to figure out what's happened. He's in anguish concerning their spiritual growth. But now, with this assurance from the Spirit, Paul is comforted and turns his attention to family life within the churches (5:13-6:10).

Paul's concern is that the Galatians would not go on to spiritual maturity. What is at the heart of spiritual transformation?

Our faith in Christ manifesting itself in loving others.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, what is God's will for our lives?

That we love.

Our Lord says to us:

John 13:34-35 (ESV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Are you building relationships with others in the church family? Are you taking time to talk with a brother or sister to get to know them and care for them? When you see the opportunity, are you meeting others' needs? Home Groups are a great way to build loving relationships with your brothers and sisters here at Grace.

May we realize now that it is all about love.

May we continue to walk by faith in Jesus and in the power of the Spirit Who will transform us to love like our Lord Jesus.