

MESSAGE FOR OCTOBER 11, 2026, FROM GALATIANS 5:7-12

We return this week to our series of messages from Paul's letter to the churches he'd planted in the province of Galatia in what is now part of Turkey. False teachers from Jerusalem had come to these Galatian churches and corrupted the gospel that Paul had preached to them. And, as Paul repeatedly reveals, **a corrupted gospel is no gospel**. A corrupted gospel will not save sinners. Paul's gospel is that **God saves sinners through Christ alone, by grace alone through faith alone**.

The false teaching of the Judaizers wrongly held that in addition to their faith in Christ, **these Galatian believers must also obey the Jewish law of circumcision in order to be saved**. That is, that a sinner is saved as a result of *the combined efforts of Jesus dying on the cross and sinners keeping Jewish law*. This is not the gospel. It robs God of his unique glory by **wrongly adding to Christ's saving work on the cross**, our fallen human efforts to keep the law.

To give some context from last time, in the section before this one, **Paul is issuing threats and warnings to the Galatians** that if they accepted circumcision as a partial means of their salvation, then **"Christ would be of no advantage to them."** In fact, Paul says that **such a gross error in their belief system** would mean that they had been "severed from Christ" and had "fallen away from grace." Paul reassures the Galatian believers that **those who reject those lies and instead live by faith in Christ, have great peace and assurance. By the Holy Spirit, these believers "eagerly await" that moment in eternity when God will pronounce them "righteous by their faith."** I hope you are in that place of eager expectation today!

Paul adds that, in addition to all that, **the only way to faithfully live out the Christian life with love as its hallmark is... by faith**. We saw from Galatians but also other New Testament texts that the Holy Spirit and **the fruit he produces (like love) is *always and only* given through the conduit or channel of our faith**. Living by faith glorifies Christ because faith looks **totally** to him and his saving work. **The Christ-glorifying Holy Spirit loves that and works through our Christ-glorifying faith to produce love and other fruit of the Spirit**.

As we begin today's text that Chuck read, we see that both Paul's tone and content shift a bit here. He has finished, at least for now, his dire warnings about being severed from Christ and shifts **to a more encouraging tone toward the believers**. At the same time, **he uses what is arguably the harshest language in any of his 13 letters to express his utter disdain for the false teachers who were trying to lead the Galatian believers away from salvation by grace alone**. This section of the letter is not tightly argued like much of Paul. Its more loosely connected without the more structured, logical flow we see in other texts in Paul where he uses connective words like "therefore" and "in order that" to make reasoned arguments. That's not here.

Paul begins in verse seven with **a word of encouragement to the church**. "You were running well." Now, in chapter one, Paul says the Galatian believers, thanks to the influence of the false teachers, were "quickly deserting him who called you." But here, he clarifies that, though **their initial efforts at walking by faith were not long lived**, they had previously been thriving as they looked to Christ in faith. Paul uses this metaphor of running to characterize the Christian life that is also used elsewhere in the New Testament. He compares the Christian life to running a race. In his final letter written perhaps hours before his execution he pronounces that he had "finished the race" [2 Tim 4:7].

The Christian life is a race, a marathon, not a sprint and, by God's grace, we must keep running this race. The author of Hebrews calls believers to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." It's a long haul and arduous at times but **the God who fired the starting pistol for this race** has promised ⁶ "...that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Do we believe that? As it relates to the Galatians who were running this race, Paul asks, "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" That word translated "hindered" literally means "cut in." Paul is asking of their spiritual race, "Who cut in on you?" In ancient times it was a common tactic in a foot race to cut in on your opponent and perhaps even knock him down to eliminate him.¹

Paul pictures these false teachers as runners who have "cut in" on the Galatians. **They were seeking to hinder them in their race by cutting in front of them and tripping them up.** Notice **what** they were specifically trying to hinder. They were hindering these believers "from obeying the truth." The truth Paul refers to here is of course the truth of the gospel. **What does it mean to OBEY the gospel?** We don't often think about "obeying" the gospel, but this expression is found elsewhere in Paul. In Second Thessalonians, he speaks of the final judgment. He says in chapter one that Jesus will come from heaven with his mighty angels "⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." Not obeying the gospel carries with it an eternal penalty.

Likewise in Romans 10, speaking of unbelievers, he says, "¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has *believed* what he has heard from us?" Notice that Paul equates **obeying** the gospel with **believing** the gospel in that verse. To obey the gospel is to believe the gospel. To disobey the gospel is to reject it in unbelief. Verse eight may be the central truth in this section when Paul, referring to the lies of the false teachers says, "⁸ This persuasion is not from him who calls you."

This is just **the first of three words of judgment in this section that Paul has for the false teachers.** God had called these believers to himself and this "persuasion"—**this false gospel rooted in human performance—is NOT from him.** He condemns the Judaizers as not being from God. "⁸ This persuasion is not from him who calls you." Paul could have said that this persuasion is not from **the Lord**, but he instead says, "him who calls you." Why? Whenever Paul uses this word "call" related to the gospel, he is stressing the fact that **our salvation is not fundamentally our idea, but God's. If God doesn't supernaturally call a sinner to himself through the gospel, he will never believe the gospel.** GOD takes the initiative in salvation, not sinners. Paul says in First Corinthians chapter one, "⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." God actively and decisively saves sinners by calling them to Christ through the gospel. The false gospel preached by the false teachers was NOT that call.

In verse nine, Paul speaks of **the infectious nature of the false teaching of trusting in BOTH grace and our works for salvation in the church** when he cites a well-known proverb, "⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump." We see Paul use this same expression in **First Corinthians chapter five.** There he's speaking of **the presence of unrepentant sexual immorality in the Corinthian church that was being allowed to continue without any word of correction or discipline.** In fact, the Corinthians were boasting (probably about their "broad-minded tolerance") of

¹ Ryken, P.G. (2005). *Galatians* (R.D. Phillips, P.G. Ryken, & D.M. Doriani, Eds.; pp. 20-215). P&R Publishing.

this sin. In response to their godless response to this sin, Paul says, “⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that *a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*”

Both of Paul’s uses of this proverb reveal the same reality within the church. That is, **when a local church does not actively correct either unrepentant sin (in the case of the Corinthian church) or the false teaching not being addressed by the Galatians, they both metastasize like cancer.** I saw this kind of spiritual metastasis in the church I attended while in seminary. I was a seminary intern in the church and was allowed to attend leadership meetings, so I had a chance to witness how this played out. A married man and woman, both of whom were in church leadership positions, became involved in a sinful, inappropriate relationship.

This matter was raised at a church board meeting I attended, and the church leadership chose to gloss over it without exercising appropriate church discipline. **They were warned in that meeting that if persisted with this abdication of their responsibility, it could result in this sexual sin spreading to others in the church.** They ignored that warning and within several months, not one, but two of the pastoral staff also became involved in inappropriate sexual relationships and were forced to resign.

That outbreak of sexual sin in that church was NOT a coincidence! That is simply how the body of Christ responds when unrepentant sin or false teaching is injected into the body without proper counter-measures. We must never forget that the body of Christ is NOT essentially an organization, **it is a living organism.** And unrepentant sin and false teaching are cancers within the body that can spread if left unchecked. If Paul had known about cancer in the first century, I’m convinced he would have used that as an illustration instead of leaven which stands for sin in Scripture and also spreads.

We must understand that **sin and false teaching are spiritual malignancies.** They invade the body of Christ and if they are not promptly treated, they spread. To extend the metaphor, it’s also true that **when a local church is consistently receiving the faithfully preached and taught word of God, that acts in the body as a spiritual vaccine of sorts to help strengthen the church’s spiritual immune system to ward off spiritual disease.**

In verse 10, Paul makes two statements, one **to bring assurance to the believers**, and a second one that serves as **a chilling warning to the false teachers.** He says, “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.” Notice that Paul does NOT make his word of assurance to these Galatians, *“I am confident that you will see through these charlatans.”* Neither does he say, *“I have confidence that you will overcome this bump in the road.”*

That would have been foolish because **the Galatians had already demonstrated their lack of discernment in not warding off false teachers.** No, Paul’s confidence is NOT in the vulnerable Galatian believers, it was in their Lord and Protector, Jesus. **Paul places no confidence in any alleged ability within the Galatian believers to escape from this pit of deception they had very nearly fallen into.** No. Paul’s confidence is “in the Lord that you will take no other view.”

Paul’s confidence is in the Lord of the church because **it is Jesus who keeps us from being lethally led astray.** It is the LORD who keeps us saved. Psalm 121 says, “³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” Later in verse seven he says, “⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.” God **saves us** and God **keeps us saved** and Paul’s confidence was in GOD, not the Galatians. His

promise in Philippians 1:6 says much the same thing when he says, “⁶ And I am *sure* of this, that he who began a good work in you *will* bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Paul was SURE that the same Lord who **began** his saving work in believers would “bring it to completion” and in this case, that meant **sovereignly working to keep the Galatians from ultimately falling for the lies of the false teachers.**

As reassuring as it is that **God is worthy of our confidence because he keeps us from being hopelessly trapped by sin and false teaching, Paul is *equally confident* of the horrible and eternal fate awaiting the false teachers.** He says, “...and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.” This word translated “penalty” here means judgment. Paul is not saying that the false teachers will be spanked or undergo some other temporary discipline from the Lord. He is confident that “the one”—perhaps the ringleader—who is “troubling” them with the false teaching, **will be condemned to hell.**

False teachers may, for a while, do quite well in this world. Many of them today in the west live in mansions and own their own private jets, but know this, they will suffer the eternal wrath of a holy God. Because of **God’s love for the truth and his giving his Son as a sacrifice to establish a gospel of grace alone**, if there is a white-hot section in hell, the false teachers will be occupying it, among others. Based on this verse, one of the church fathers was right when he said, “the road to hell is paved with errant priests’ bones.”² You don’t want to be a false teacher. Jesus says in Mathew 18, “⁷ “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!” “Woe” is a pronouncement of divine judgment on those who lead believers astray.

Verse 11 is curious because *it seems disconnected from the rest of the passage*. Paul says, “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.” That seems to come out of the blue. Whenever we see that in the Bible, the most likely explanation is that **there was something going on that the readers knew about but we don’t know**. Here, Paul appears to be **responding to a false charge made against him by these Judaizers**. That would explain why he feels compelled to speak of him not preaching circumcision.

Paul is explaining **why its patently obvious that he DOESN’T preach circumcision as necessary for salvation as he had apparently been accused**. The question is—***“what was it about Paul’s ministry that could be distorted by the false teachers in a way that could lead to this accusation that he preached circumcision?”*** Two verses might give us a clue. First, in Acts 16:3 where we read that when he was accompanied by Timothy to Lystra and Iconium, Paul circumcised him before they arrived. **Paul did this NOT because he believed Timothy needed to be circumcised in order to be saved**. It was done to prevent any unnecessary stumbling blocks in his mission to the Jews in those cities. Timothy’s mother was a Jew.

Another truth about Paul that could have been twisted was **his missionary strategy that he states in First Corinthians 9:20**. That is, “²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.” When Paul was trying to reach Jews with the gospel, he ate kosher, celebrated

² This saying has been expressed in many different ways and is frequently attributed to St. John Chrysostom.
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/11833484-the-road-to-hell-is-paved-with-the-bones-of>

the Jewish festivals and observed Jewish traditions. He followed these *cultural traditions* NOT because he believed any of them were necessary for salvation.

He observed them to eliminate any unnecessary source of friction with the Jews. He already preached a **crucified** Messiah. That was hard enough for the Jews to swallow. He didn't want to make his mission any harder than it had to be **by flaunting his freedom from Jewish laws in their presence. His observance of Jewish laws and holidays when ministering to Jews was part of his evangelistic strategy**, not a way to gain favor with God. When he preached to Gentiles, he probably ate catfish and pork rinds.

Those truths would have been easy for the Judaizers to distort into an accusation that Paul was inconsistent in his application of Jewish law. *"Here in these Galatian churches, he seems to think obedience to the law is optional to God, but when he's in other cities, he forces Timothy to be circumcised and lives just like the rest of us Jews."* That's probably something like what Paul is responding to in verse 11. **His conclusive proof that these charges of inconsistency about circumcision were false was to ask, "if I brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed."** The proof that Paul was not preaching circumcision is that **he was still being persecuted**.

There were many possible reasons for sinners to be offended by Paul's preaching of the cross. As we mentioned, **a crucified Messiah was clearly NOT something the Jews found easy to swallow**. Paul adds in First Corinthians chapter one, "²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." BOTH Jews and Greeks found the message of the cross objectionable. The MAIN, OVERRIDING offense of the message of the cross (then and now) and **the one that is doubtless the chief reason Paul was persecuted for preaching it is—the message of the cross is an absolute affront to human pride.**³

The preaching of the cross condemns as **hopelessly inadequate and defiled** all human efforts, all human "goodness," all fallen religion and spiritual pursuit--any attempt to be good enough for God. It's not surprising that **sinners don't like hearing that all the good works that they are so earnestly offering to God are completely unacceptable to him because they're hopelessly tainted by their sin**. Their soiled fingers leave a wretched stain on anything they could offer to God because any fallen sinner, in God's sight, is covered in spiritual filth.

Unredeemed sinners don't like hearing that the very good works they're presenting to God as tokens of their so-called worship, do nothing to please God. In fact, their offerings to him are not only NOT acceptable to God, he condemns them as fallen expressions of their sinfulness. One of humanity's fallen assumptions is that humanity is basically good and can therefore be acceptable to God through their religious efforts to come to him.

The world hates the biblical doctrine of total depravity. That is the doctrine that describes **the human condition as one where sin has touched and defiled every dimension of human existence—where no area of our spiritual lives has not been corrupted by sin—that our sin *penetrates* "to the very core of our being."**⁴ The world detests that pride-crushing truth because it means that

³ This wording is from Schreiner, Galatians, ECNT, electronic edition.

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), [103–104](#).

there is **NOTHING** that we can do to earn God's favor or apprehend God on our own. Human pride hates being defined as totally, absolutely, utterly dependent upon God's grace and mercy in order to come to him. Our pride detests the fact that *only on GOD's initiative, not our own, can we be rescued from, not only the penalty and power of our sin, but also rescued from our own fallen attempts to earn salvation.*

Now, if you DO preach circumcision or that adherence to any law, code, tradition or religion can make you acceptable to God, **THAT message stokes human pride.** The world **affirms that man-centered message** and those who preach that are never persecuted. Paul however, preached humanity's **complete inability** to be acceptable to God—that **salvation from sin comes ONLY through the gracious work of Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross.** God gets **ALL the glory as he saves spiritual beggars who look to Christ in faith.** Paul's preaching very much included this offense of the cross and he had the scars across his back to prove it.

He ends this section in verse 12 with this shocking statement. "¹² I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!" "Emasculate themselves" here means just what you think it means. It means **the self-inflicted removal of their male genitalia.** Why would Paul make such a crude, even vulgar statement? Several things need to be said here. First, we must remember that **Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, so this is NOT gratuitous or inappropriate.**

Second, this is Paul's way of indicating how passionately he and the Spirit of God feel about this. **When you want to shock people like these sleepy Galatian believers into reality, sharp language is often the best way to do that and that is what Paul is doing here.** Nothing less than **the gospel that Jesus was slaughtered to establish is at stake here and these false teachers were attacking the sufficiency of the cross.**

If you cannot feel passionately about that, then you have no business feeling passionately about anything! Third, **Paul is also using this crude statement as a rhetorical device.** By that I mean, he doesn't just *randomly select* emasculation here—he chooses this intentionally to make a specific point. His point is that if the Judaizers, in their requirement for circumcision, **are so committed to cutting off "male flesh" in order to be made right with God, why don't they just go the whole way and cut off everything.** If a *small* amount of surgically-removed flesh will please God, then a *larger amputation* would certainly please him more. The sarcasm here has a point behind it. And that is to show *the futility of trying to please God in the flesh.* *You could never cut enough off, even if you totally removed your sexual organs.*

Finally, there's **a theological point** being made here. Deuteronomy 23 in Jewish law tells us that if a male had been made a eunuch or his testicles had been crushed, he could not be admitted into the assembly of the Lord. Paul is saying that the Judaizers—these experts in Jewish law—in their false teaching about circumcision, rather than gaining anything from God, they are in fact, excommunicated from God and his people.

And that leads to our main point of application. That is—***Are we scandalized when we or others begin to see our spiritual performance as a way to be acceptable to God?*** Paul uses scandalous, crude language here to shock the Galatians and us into seeing ***just what a wretched thing it is to rely on our performance, our religious efforts in order to be acceptable to God.***

Do we feel this same level of intensity about this? If we do, **we will walk with God in ways that God can use to keep us from our fallen tendency to drift into this place of believing that we can do**

anything to make ourselves right before him. Just as we do things to keep us from scandalous sins like adultery (we draw boundaries in our relationships and other things,) **we must also practice those kinds of disciplines to keep us from falling into a works or performance mentality.**

What are we doing to fight off the impulse we all have as fallen sinners to seek to be righteous before God by what we can do for him? Are we spending time **meditating on the wonders of God's gracious work in giving his Son Jesus as our righteousness.** Are we spending time contemplating **the miracle that believers can, by faith, claim Jesus' perfect life—his pristine record of righteousness as our own** and that his righteous life and his cleansing blood alone make us acceptable to God.

Do we delight, celebrate, exult in the glories of the free grace of God that is ours in the gospel? **What are you doing to fight against your inherent fallen tendency to seek to be good enough for God?** If we don't work against that fallen tendency, we can fall into that pattern of working to be acceptable to God and it always ends the same; in shame, confusion and in weakening our assurance of salvation by grace.

Oh, beloved, we must be reading books on God's grace—talking with our believing friends about the wonders of divine grace in Christ—listening to gospel-based songs—memorizing them AND gospel-saturated verses from Scripture. Are we, by God's grace, living consciously as grateful people who **regularly, through each day** praise God for his goodness to us in Jesus? These are not just good ways to ward off our twisted tendency toward works righteousness, they're also very good ways to live with the joy of the Lord as our strength. If, by God's grace, you are **much occupied with God's grace** and what he has done for you in Jesus, you will be **far less occupied with yourself** and that always results in a happier, holier life.

As we close, perhaps you're here this morning as one of those **people who has taken offense at the fact that your own personal righteousness before God, as Isaiah 64 says, are as menstrual rags before God when offered to him as attempt to be right with him.** If that is you, please **think about this.** If we could contribute anything to our salvation, why would God have to take the grievous, eternally egregious measure of taking his perfect, divine Son and offering him for torture by sinners as a bloodied mass, stuck to a cross of wood?

Why would God require that **uniquely horrific act in order for a sinner to be admitted into heaven?** If we could contribute anything to our salvation, why would he require that all sinners, in order to be admitted into heaven, **must first be united to his perfect Son so that they would possess HIS righteousness to be fit for heaven?**

I urge you to give up on any kind of self-salvation project and look to Christ alone to save you from your sin. Trust in him alone and what God has done for you in him at Calvary and you will be saved. May God give us all the grace to embrace that word of the cross for his glory and our joy.