

“The Perils of Legalism”

(Galatians 5:2-12)

Introduction

- Legalism is an attempt to be saved – either attain or maintain, earn or secure salvation – by one’s own personal goodness or good works. Note this imperative distinction: legalism is not the pursuit of holiness or righteousness, but the pursuit of holiness or righteousness as a means of salvation – the attempt to complete/finish, by religious merit or effort, the completed/finished work of Christ. This “means” can take the form of many different things – e.g. guilt/sorrow for sin, a degree of faith, biblical/doctrinal knowledge, sin spiritual performance/devotion, church attendance, adhering to man-made (religious) laws, impassioned worship, and many other works-based things.
- ✓ Illust: “The tendency to legalism – to obey laws that have already been fulfilled, or to obey laws that are man-made laws (and to obey them out of conscience) – is a denial of our Christian liberty for which Jesus died. ... We are hard-wired to legalism. We have an instinct to want to contribute something to our salvation. And it may be a certain style of repentance, a certain quality of faith, that we make the marker of our right standing with God. And all of it is works based, and when Paul deals with it in Galatians he is actually dealing with a perennial problem that affects the church in all ages” (Derek Thomas; “Legalism Denies What Christ Died For”).
- Specifically, in the book of Galatians, the issue of legalism was surrounding the Jewish laws – circumcision (5:2; 6:12-15), eating kosher foods (2:11-14), religious calendar days (4:10). As we have seen, even as Paul often quoted from the Old Testament in this letter, the Bible consistently and repeatedly declares that true salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is how it has always been, and how it will continue to be until the end of time. Old Testament saints were saved by God’s grace through their faith in the Christ who was to come, and New Testaments saints are saved by God’s grace through their faith in the Christ who has come.
- Gal 2:16** ~ “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”
- Gal 3:10** ~ “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’”
- Rom 3:20 ~ “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
- Rom 3:28 ~ “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”
- Eph 2:8-9** ~ “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
- Titus 3:5** ~ “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”
- 2 Tim 1:9** ~ “who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”
- The truth is, any attempt at a works-based salvation/righteous is foolish and futile – and can reveal a person’s true motive and faith. The perils of legalism are numerous and dangerous. This is why the apostle Paul wrote this strongly and sharply worded letter (e.g. “*foolish...bewitched*”; (3:1). He was warning the Galatians that they were being deceived by false teachers, who were teaching a false gospel (1:6-7), and that this deception was spiritually dangerous and even deadly.

This deception is so serious, so spiritually deadly. Specifically, regarding the those who falsely taught that circumcision was required for salvation, Paul exclaimed: “**I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!**” (vs.12). Obviously, perhaps shockingly, these are strong words from the apostle. Paul was (perhaps sarcastically) suggesting that if the act of circumcision can save, then castration would be even better.

The reason again for such strong words is that these false teachers had “*unsettl[ed]*” the true faith of the naïve/undiscerning Galatians [“unsettle” vs.12; *anastatoō*; to disturb, revolt (“*turned the world upside down*”; Acts 17:6)].

- In Galatians 5:2-12, after methodically and logically arguing against it throughout this letter, Paul outlined the perils of legalism. This passage of Scripture unveils three types of people with regard to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A. Those who reject the true Gospel (vs.2-4)

- To embrace the doctrine of legalism is to reject the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Legalism is a false gospel, which cannot save. In fact, legalism works to insulate a person against the true Gospel. Paul described this reality in vivid, sobering, terms:

Gal 5:2-4 ~ “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”

- In these verses, Paul gives four scathing indictments of those who reject the true Gospel – salvation by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

1. “Christ will be of no advantage” to them (vs.2)

- The Greek word translated “*advantage*” (vs.2; *ōphelēō*) can refer to profit, gain, or benefit. What is of “*no advantage*” to the legalist? Jesus Christ! This is because, at its core, legalism affirms that a person can become righteous before God by their own efforts in religious/spiritual works. It teaches that a person can be saved apart from the Savior. It renders Jesus’ sinless life and substitutionary death as pointless and/or worthless.
- Simply put, a person cannot reject the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and benefit from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When a person thinks they can be saved – either in part or in whole – by their own goodness or good works, they have declared the redemptive work of Jesus Christ to be of no benefit.
- Jesus will not be one of many saviors; He will not be a part of someone’s collection of idols; He will not save those who reject Him as the one and only Savior from God.

2. They are “obligated to keep the whole law” (vs.3)

- Since God’s standard of righteousness and holiness is absolutely perfection (see Matt.5:20, 48; 1Pet.1:15-16), those who seek to be justified by their own righteousness – specifically “*circumcision*” – are “*obligated to keep the whole law*” (vs.3). Without Jesus Christ as their Savior, legalists are relegated to living a perfect, sinless, righteous life on their own – not according to human standards, but according to God’s divine standard of perfect righteousness.

Gal 3:10 ~ “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’”

James 2:10 ~ “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

- Scripture adamantly, repeatedly, declares that apart from Christ no one is sinless, no one is righteous:
 - Rom 3:10-12** ~ “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’”
 - Rom 3:23** ~ “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”
- The word translated “*obligated*” (vs.3; *opheiletēs*) could also be translated “indebted” (cf. Matt.6:12, “as we also have forgiven our *debtors*”). The person who rejects the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, by embracing legalism, remains enslaved to the law of God. And, being unable to repay the debt of their sin, they remain under God’s just wrath and eternal condemnation.
 - Rom 6:23** ~ “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - John 3:36** ~ “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
- Any attempt at self-justification (self-righteousness) is futile and antithetical to the grace of God in the gospel.

3. They are “severed from Christ” (vs.4a)

- Any attempt to be “justified by works of the law” (2:16), and not “justified by faith in Christ” alone (2:16), is tantamount to rejecting Jesus Christ. Legalism is essentially declaring an autonomy from Christ, an ability to be saved apart from Christ. The consequences, as we have seen, are monumental. Another, perhaps shocking, peril of legalism is being “*severed from Christ*” (vs.4). The word “*severed*” (vs.4; *katargeō*) is as strong in the original Greek as it is in our English. It is a word that can also be translated “pass away”, “bring to an end”, “abolish”, “destroy”.
 - Gal 3:17** ~ “This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void [*katargeō*].”
 - Gal 5:11** ~ “But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed [*katargeō*].”
- Again, to think that you can be saved – either in part or in whole – by your own goodness or good works is essentially proclaiming Christ null and void in your life. This simply stands to reason. If we can earn or secure our salvation by our own righteousness, we have no need of Christ or His redemptive work on the cross.
 - ✓ **Illust:** “But when it comes to justification, I say, we must concentrate upon Christ alone, or else we make Him non-effective. You must choose between Christ and the righteousness of the Law. If you choose Christ, you are righteous before God. If you stick to the Law, Christ is of no use to you” (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Commentary on Galatians*; 5:4).

Gal 2:21 ~ “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

- When we make our guilt or performance – anything other than the substitutionary work of Christ – the measure of our justification, we jeopardize the true freedom we have in Christ. We become enslaved to sin and cursed by the law.

4. They have “fallen away from grace” (vs.4b)

- The truth is, a person is either saved by God’s grace or not. It simply cannot be both. If it is by grace then it is not by works, and if it is by works then it is not by grace. To pursue a salvation by works – either in part or in whole – is to reject the Gospel of God’s grace.

Rom 4:1-5 ~ “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness”

Rom 11:5-6 ~ “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

➤ Paul stated emphatically that the legalist has *“fallen away”* (vs.4; *ekpiptō*; fall away/off; to lose; “run aground”, Acts 27:17, 26, 29). That is, having discarded the only true Gospel, in seeking to *“be justified by the law”* (vs.4), they have abandoned God’s saving grace.

Paul is not suggesting that they have lost, or were in danger of losing, their salvation. For true believers cannot lose their salvation (see Jn.10:28-29; Eph.1:13-14; Phil.1:6; 1Pet.1:4-5). Those who commit apostasy – abandoning the faith they once professed – were never true disciples of Christ (1Jn.2:19). While it can appear (from a human perspective) that someone has lost their salvation, God knows those who are truly His (2Tim.2:19), He knows those whose names are truly/eternally written in *“the book of life”* (He is not erasing, and rewriting, names as humans ebb and Rev.3:5; 13:8; 20:15; 21:27). God knows the difference between those who truly possess Christ, and those who merely profess Christ (Matt.7:21-23).

Paul’s concern for the Galatians was not that they lost their salvation, but by not persevering they were showing that they were never truly saved (Mk.13:13). In that sense, he feared that they had *“fallen away from grace”* (vs.4).

B. Those who receive the true Gospel (vs.5-6)

➤ In contrast, Paul briefly turns his attention to those who truly receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; those who believe the true Gospel – salvation by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

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

➤ Contrary to how some perceive and present the Gospel, being free in Christ does not mean that the Christian is free to live a lawless, sinful, or immoral life. The true Gospel does not promote antinomianism (lit. anti-law [*nomos*]). Rather, the Gospel declares that a person who is in Christ can – now for the first time – truly live a life that is acceptable and pleasing to God.

Isa 64:6 ~ “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

Rom 8:7-8 ~ “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

➤ Those who understand the freedom they have in Christ live consecrated lives of obedience to God. Not out of a sense of earning or securing their salvation, but out of the Spirit-led desire to be pleasing to God.

Col 1:10 ~ “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Heb 13:20-21 ~ “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

John 15:4-5 ~ “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

➤ In these verses, Paul quickly listed off four marks of those who believe the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and therefore have truly received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

1. They live “*through the Spirit*” (vs.5)

➤ The Christian is not enslaved to the law, but led by the Spirit of God. That is, Christians do not operate in their own strength. They have not declared autonomy from God. They are not trying to be righteous on their own, or for their own glory. Rather, the true Christian is walking in the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit. In doing so, they are living “*through the Spirit*” of God (vs.5) and not through their own (sinful) flesh.

Gal 5:16-18 ~ “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

Gal 5:25-26 ~ “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Gal 2:20 ~ “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

1 John 4:13 ~ “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”

➤ Through the enabling power and indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit, the true believer is compelled to live a godly life. The Christian is no longer trying to abide by the external law, but through the internal leading of the Holy Spirit. Again, living “*through the Spirit*” (vs.5) does not promote lawless (unrighteous) living, but rather progressive sanctification (see Rom.6:19, 22; 2Thes.2:13; 1Pet.1:2).

Gal 5:13-14 ~ “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (cf. Lev.19:18)

Rom 5:20-6:2 ~ “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

2. They live “*by faith*” (vs.5)

➤ The Christian lives “*by faith*” (vs.5) and not through works. True faith is not a bizarre feeling, or out-of-body experience. It is not “jumping off buildings for Jesus”, or have a “mystical encounter” with God. Saving faith is an objective, rational, belief in God and in the Word of God. This is the faith that Christians are called to live by.

Heb 11:1-3 ~ “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

Heb 11:6 ~ “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

➤ The Christian’s obedience does not earn or secure God’s love. The Christian’s obedience is an expression of their faith in and love for God. It is the grateful response to God’s saving grace.

Gal 2:16 ~ “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

➤ The life that is pleasing to God is life that is lived *“through the Spirit, by faith”* (vs.5). This is the life that has received Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior, not trusting in own’s own righteousness or righteous works, and is characterized by a trust in and love for God.

3. They *“eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness”* (vs.5)

➤ This refers to the absolute and eternal righteousness that awaits every true follower of Christ. Christians already possess the imputed righteousness of Christ, but they still await the completed and perfected righteousness that is yet to come at glorification.

2 Cor 5:21 ~ “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

➤ In writing that *“the eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness”* (vs.5), it seems as though Paul was referring to the anticipation true believers have in knowing that Christ will perfect/complete their righteousness for all eternity.

Rom 8:28-30 ~ “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (see Rom.8:18-21)

Rom 8:23-25 ~ “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

➤ Believers do not base their hope on their own self-righteousness, or keeping of the law, but cling to the assurance of God’s promised salvation through faith. Their hope is in Christ, and in His redemptive work (substitutionary death) on the cross (Is.53:4-6; 1Pet.3:18).

Col 1:27 ~ “To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Rom 5:1-2 ~ “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

4. They live by *“faith working through love”* (vs.6)

➤ Paul further made the point of the futility of legalism by stating emphatically: *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything”* (vs.6). As a means of salvation, circumcision (or uncircumcision) counts for nothing and accomplishing nothing. It is valueless and useless (see Rom.2:25-29; 3:29-31).

Gal 6:15 ~ “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”

Col 3:11 ~ “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

➤ The life that pleases God is not one of self-righteousness, but one of true faith (in Him) and love (for Him): *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love”* (vs.6). We must be careful not to make “love” the means of our salvation. Love is not basis of our justification, but the expression of it. Love is the fruit of faith, the result of being saved.

Gal 5:13-14 ~ “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (cf. Lev.19:18)

2 Cor 5:14-15 ~ “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

1 John 4:19 ~ “We love because he first loved us.”

1 John 4:7-8 ~ “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

➤ God’s love, our love for God, leads us to live a life (in His Son, and through His Spirit) that is holy and pleasing to Him. The person who truly loves God, will seek to obey God (Jn.14:15) and glorify God (1Pet.1:8).

C. Those who teach a false gospel (vs.7-10)

➤ Next, Paul described those who teach a false gospel. He desperately wanted the Galatians to know what they were dealing with in the Judaizers. They were false believers, who were teaching a false doctrine (a false gospel).

Gal 5:7-10 ~ “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion is not from him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I 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.”

➤ In these verses, Paul listed four characteristics of those who teach a false gospel.

1. They hinder others *“from obeying the truth”* (vs.7)

➤ Paul knew the Galatians had been *“running well”* (vs.7), because they were saved under his preaching of the true Gospel. In their running of the Christian race (1Cor.9:24; 2Tim.4:7; Heb.12:1), they were off to a great start. Something, or rather someone (vs.10) or some people (vs.12), had *“hindered”* (vs.7; *enkoptō*; detain, impede). That is, the Judaizers had knocked the Galatians off course. The result was hindering the Galatians *“from obeying the truth”* (vs.7).

➤ This is true of all false teachers, and true of Satan himself. Satan loves/longs to counterfeit God’s truth. Satan does not care what you believe as long as it is not the truth; he does not care how moral or religious you are as long as you are not a follower of Christ; he does not care what god you worship as long as it is not the one true God.

2 Peter 2:1-3 ~ “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ... and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.”

2. They are “not from [God]” (vs.8)

- False teachers are not from God, because they teach/preach that which is contrary to God’s word. Paul wrote: *“This persuasion is not from him who calls you”* (vs.8). It is clear that these false teachers were not from God because they were teaching a false gospel (see Gal.1:6-7). Their false message revealed that they were false teachers (see Matt.7:15-20; 24:11; 2Cor.11:13; Gal.2:4).

2 Peter 2:1-3 ~ “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them ...”

- As Christians, we must be discerning (Matt.10:16) and knowledgeable enough to examine all “Christian” teaching/preaching to see if it really comes from God (Acts 17:11).

3. They negatively “leaven” others (vs.9)

- Using both the noun and verb of the same Greek word, *“leaven leavens”* (vs.9; *zyme zymoō*), Paul illustrates the destructive influence of false teachers. Leaven is an influencing (fermenting) agent of yeast in dough. Paul used this analogously to refer to the negative influence of legalism.

1 Cor 5:6-8 ~ “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven [*zymē*] leavens [*zymoō*] the whole lump? ⁷Cleanse out the old leaven [*zymē*] that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened [*azymos*]. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven [*zymē*], the leaven [*zymē*] of malice and evil, but with the unleavened [*azymos*] bread of sincerity and truth.”

Matt 16:6, 12 ~ “Jesus said to them, ‘Watch and beware of the leaven [*zymē*] of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ ... ¹²Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven [*zymē*] of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

✓ **Illust:** “In Scripture, leaven often represents sin directly, as in Jesus’ warning about ‘the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,’ which referred to their false teaching (Matt.16:6, 12). But the figure of leaven is generally used simply to indicate permeating power, whether of something good or evil. In this passage, as in his reference to the gross immorality of the Corinthians, Paul used the figure of leaven in both ways, as representing the actuality of sin as well as its power to infect and permeate that which is good (see 1Cor.5:6)” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*; 5:9).

- False teachers, and false teachings, are not benign. A false gospel negatively permeates and defiles many, and therefore must not be accepted or tolerated (See Gal.2:13).

2 Peter 2:1-3 ~ “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you... ²And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³And in their greed they will exploit you ...”

4. They “will bear the penalty” for their sin (vs.10)

- Make no mistake, those who teach a false gospel will be punished. They are in the crosshairs of God’s divine judgment.

Gal 1:8-9 ~ “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

- Paul was still believing for the sincere/true faith of the Galatians: *“I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view”* (vs.10). He was also confident that the false teachers (i.e. the Judaizers) would be punished for *“troubling”* (vs.10; *tarassō*; to stir up, disturb; Jn.5:7) the Galatians true faith in Christ. The word *“penalty”* (vs.10; *krima*) is a strong word which could be translated “judgment” or

even “condemnation”; see Jms.3:1). God takes seriously the truth of His Word, and will punish all those who are false teachers.

2 Peter 2:1-3 ~ “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you ... bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ... Their condemnation [*krima*] from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

2 Peter 2:17 ~ “These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.”

Conclusion

➤ Paul then reminded the Galatians that he was being persecuted for preaching the true Gospel (see 4:29; 6:12, 17). If the Gospel Paul preached was the same as the Judaizers taught, he would not be suffering persecution. Paul wrote: *“But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?”* (vs.11). If he (like the Judaizers) preached that circumcision was required for salvation, he would suffer no persecution because there would be no offense: *“In that case the offense of the cross has been removed”* (vs.11).

What is *“the offense of the cross”* (vs.11)? It is the heart of the Gospel – salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The true Gospel offense one’s spiritual pride, one’s ego or self-esteem, one’s own innate sense of self-worth. In our flesh we are hardwired for legalism – to boast in our self-righteousness and salvation. The *“offense of the cross”* is that we can do nothing to earn, deserve or secure God’s salvation – it is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This indeed is offensive to our sinful flesh, but it is to the glory of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Cor 1:18-25, 28-31 ~ “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ... ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”