

“Beware of Ungodly Influences”  
(Galatians 5:7-12)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw Paul remind the Galatians of the serious consequences of receiving circumcision as a part of their justification or acceptance with God:
  - a. If they received circumcision, all that Christ did will not help them at all.
    - (i) His righteousness will not cover their nakedness.
    - (ii) His death will not atone for their sins.
    - (iii) His acceptance with the Father will not be theirs.
    - (iv) His intercession will not be for them.
    - (v) He will not give them of His Spirit.
    - (vi) He will inherit the kingdom, but they won't.
    - (vii) They will receive nothing from Him.
  - b. If they received circumcision, they were also committing themselves to keep the rest of the Law.
    - (i) They would have to keep up the sacrifices.
    - (ii) They would have to observe the separation laws.
    - (iii) Most importantly, they would have to be morally perfect on their own.
    - (iv) If they failed in the slightest, they would be condemned.
    - (v) Of course, they're condemned already through Adam and their own sins up to this point: they would be without hope.
  - c. Why? Because if they sought to be justified by Law, they would be cutting themselves off from Christ:
    - (i) They would have fallen from grace: they would no longer be looking to Christ's obedience, but to their own obedience.
    - (ii) Paul's not saying that they would lose their salvation: they never had it to begin with if they could go this direction.
2. Those who are Christ's are completely different:
  - a. They're not looking to their works, but to Christ:
    - (i) The Spirit causes us to look away from ourselves to Jesus Christ.
    - (ii) He does this by giving us faith – faith is the looking to Christ to receive His grace, His righteousness.
    - (iii) He gives us the hope of a glorious future by giving us the confidence that one day we will be with Him in glory because of His righteousness and not our own.
  - b. The evidence of this hope is not in an external sign applied to our bodies: whether circumcision or baptism:
    - (i) It is the evidence of faith in Christ.

- (ii) Not just the belief or conviction that the things of the Bible are true.
- (iii) But the love that we have for the things we believe: love for the Father, for Christ, for the Spirit, for worship, for prayer, for His people, for fellowship, for doing the Father's will and seeking the glory of Christ in His kingdom.

## B. Preview.

1. This week, we see Paul putting a mirror in their faces, as it were, to give them a good look at themselves.
  - a. They had started well; they had been going the right direction, but someone had turned them out of the way.
  - b. What they were following now was not the teaching of *Christ*; Paul has already made that perfectly clear. If this isn't from Christ, can it possibly be a safe way to travel?
  - c. Even though it may seem like a small deviation, a small addition to the Gospel, Paul reminds them that it will eventually affect everything they believe, and probably the whole congregation.
  - d. He had a strong hope that they would listen, see their error and turn back into the truth.
  - e. He also hoped that the fact that the Judaizers had misrepresented him would be an encouragement to them that not everything they said was true.
  - f. Finally, he expresses the desire for God's judgment to come on those who were troubling them, for all the danger they brought the Galatians into.
2. This morning, we'll consider each part of Paul's appeal to them separately, considering what we might learn from each, but remembering the overall purpose of Paul's plea is to get them to stop listening to these false teachers and begin listening again to the truth.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, they shouldn't listen to these who are teaching them false doctrine because they had led them out of the way. "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (v. 7).
  1. They had been living the life to which Jesus had called them.
    - a. The Christian life is often represented as a race.
      - (i) One we are to run with all our might.
      - (ii) One in which we are to strive to win (1 Cor. 9:24).
      - (iii) Sometimes we get confused, thinking that because we don't work for our justification that there isn't any work to do.
      - (iv) If we think this, we're wrong: there is a great deal of work to do.
        - (a) We must kill our sins and put on Christ.
        - (b) We are to grow in holiness, obedience, love to Christ.
        - (c) We are to do what we can – with our gifts, time, resources and opportunities – to advance God's kingdom.
        - (d) The Christian life isn't a passive life, but an active one.

- b. The Galatians had been running the race well.
    - (i) But now they were off course. They had turned out of the way.
    - (ii) They were no longer serving Christ on His terms.
    - (iii) They were in danger of losing the race altogether.
2. Why? Someone had hindered them.
- a. Paul knew who they were.
    - (i) He already named them.
    - (ii) It was these Jewish Christians who had not let go of Judaism and gone all the way to Christ.
    - (iii) Paul just wanted the Galatians to step back and take a good look at what these teachers had done to them, and whether or not they really had a good reason to turn away from Christ alone.
- b. There are so many who begin to follow Christ, continue for a while, and then turn aside.
- (i) They look like they know Him; they seem to want to serve Him; they appear to love Him; but they really don't, and after a while it shows.
    - (a) They leave off following Him.
    - (b) And they end up losing the prize.
  - (ii) If this happens to us, if we begin to slow down and turn out of the way, we should be asking ourselves why.
    - (a) What's the problem?
    - (b) Of course the answer can be complicated:
      - (1) Satan has many snares, specifically designed for each of us.
      - (2) He know the weakness of our flesh, tempts us in those areas from his arsenal drawn from the world.
      - (3) But along with these, he seeks to deceive us with false doctrine.
      - (4) He tells us the things we want to hear, mixes some truth into it to cover over the lie.
      - (5) We must be aware of our weaknesses and guard those areas.
      - (6) But we must also keep ourselves immersed in the truth so we won't be deceived by a lie.
      - (7) And we must love the truth, so we won't want to turn aside from it.
- B. Second, they shouldn't listen to those teaching them false doctrine because what they were being taught did not come from Christ. "This persuasion *did* not *come* from Him who calls you" (v. 8).
- 1. Christ had called Paul and commissioned Him to preach His Word.
    - a. The Gospel he preached required faith in Christ and repentance towards their sins for their justification.
    - b. Christ gave them His Spirit as evidence that this was the truth (Gal. 3:2).
    - c. He did not require them to be circumcised or to keep the Law of Moses.
2. Since it didn't come from God, where did it come from?

- a. On the surface, this persuasion came from the Judaizers.
  - b. But a little below the surface, it ultimately came from Satan.
    - (i) Satan was trying to overthrow their faith.
    - (ii) He wanted to destroy them.
    - (iii) Therefore the Galatians must reject his doctrine.
3. How can we know whether the doctrine is from God or from the devil?
- a. There's really only one way: the Word.
  - b. We must always examine our opinions and those of others by the Word.
  - c. If we can't find it in Scripture, we must not submit to it as God's rule, no matter how persuasive, how knowledgeable, how charismatic these false teachers are, and no matter how much they seem to be convinced of it themselves or seem to care for us.
  - d. God's Word is the only safe rule and guide for our journey.
- C. Third, they shouldn't listen to false teachers because it doesn't take much to corrupt them and those around them. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" (v. 9).
1. There was the danger of this infection spreading to others, which is another argument to keep them from listening to these false teachers.
- a. They might have argued there were only a few among them who held this opinion.
  - b. Or that the deviation from Paul's Gospel was small: only circumcision, a few rites to be observed, only a little of their works to add to faith in Christ.
  - c. They hadn't rejected Christ; they've only added a little to His work.
2. But Paul replies, a little leaven leavens the whole lump.
- a. The whole of their understanding would be corrupted by this deviation from the truth.
    - (i) Sometimes even small errors cause huge problems.
    - (ii) It depends how close to the central doctrines regarding salvation they are.
    - (iii) In this case, it was very close: to add any works was to destroy grace.
  - b. But not only this, the whole congregation would eventually be corrupted by that teaching.
    - (i) False doctrine spreads like a cancer, affecting all the vital systems of the body.
    - (ii) Therefore, they must not yield to it, both for their own well-being as well as those around them.
    - (iii) Where they have, it needed to be purged out.
    - (iv) We must never encourage those who believe and especially those who spread false doctrine.
    - (v) If we do support them, the false doctrine will spread and affect or destroy many.

- D. Fourth, they shouldn't listen to false teachers because they and those who listen to them will suffer the consequences of their errors. "I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. . . . I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves" (vv. 10, 12).
1. First, Paul expresses his hope that through Christ this false teaching would not overcome them.
    - a. Paul was concerned and had many doubts and fears regarding them, but he hoped through the Lord's blessing that what he had written to them would persuade them of the truth and that they would continue in the freedom of the Gospel.
    - b. We should always hope for the best in those we have cause to fear the worst.
  2. Perhaps, so they would be less offended by his warnings and rebukes, he lays more blame on those teaching the doctrine, rather than those listening to it.
    - a. He almost seems to single one of them out.
    - b. Perhaps there was one who stood out above the rest who was the driving force behind this false teaching.
    - c. This reminds us that when we reprove our brethren who are involved in some sin, we should always make a distinction between those who are leading and those who are being led.
    - d. Paul brings in these extenuating circumstances to soften his rebuke toward them, so that he might persuade them to return.
  3. But as for those who are spreading this doctrine, whoever he or they were, Paul says they would bear their judgment.
    - a. God would deal with them as they deserved.
    - b. Paul's desire is that God would, either by:
      - (i) Cutting them off from the church via excommunication.
      - (ii) Or by cutting them off from the land of the living, through death.
    - c. When an error is this serious, it must not be allowed to remain in the church.
- E. Finally, Paul says they shouldn't listen to false teachers because they are deceivers. "But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished" (v. 11).
1. It appears that the Judaizers were telling the Galatians that Paul was teaching their doctrine in order to get them to follow their teaching.
    - a. They may have done this because they heard that Paul had circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3).
    - b. It's true that Paul did this, but not for Timothy's justification.
    - c. Rather, he had him circumcised for his acceptance among the Jewish community, since his father was a Greek.
    - d. Paul did not preach circumcision.
  2. If he had, he might have avoided persecution, which he obviously did not avoid.

- a. If he had, then the offense of the cross would have been avoided, since the doctrine of justification and salvation only by faith in Christ crucified was a stumbling block to the Jews.
- b. The Jews were most offended that Christianity taught that circumcision and the whole Mosaic covenant was set aside and no longer in force.
- c. If Paul had taught what the Judaizers taught, the Jews wouldn't have been so nearly offended.
- d. But he and others were willing to risk their lives to teach the truth of the Gospel, showing that Paul did not preach what the Judaizers had charged him with.

F. Final application.

1. Paul gives us several good reasons here not to listen to false teachers and so fall under their ungodly influence.
  - a. If we listen to them, they will lead us out of the way, away from the race Christ calls us to.
  - b. If we listen to them, we'll end up turning a deaf ear to Christ and to His truth, which we love, if we are Christians here this morning.
  - c. If we listen to them, we will not only put ourselves in danger of corrupting all we believe, but also of corrupting those around us with false doctrine.
  - d. If we listen to them, we will suffer the consequences of their errors.
  - e. And finally, we need to realize that false teachers are deceived and try to deceive others. If we listen to them, we may become as deceived as they are.
2. Here are several good reasons to keep ourselves immersed in God's truth.
  - a. The Lord said through Jeremiah to His people in Judah, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16).
  - b. There are many new ideas and ways to view the Bible and the way of justification. But the old paths – those inherited from our spiritual forefathers, as expressed in such documents as the Westminster Confession of Faith – are still the truest and best.
  - c. Hold fast to the truth and don't let anyone take it away from you. Amen.