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# Warning from the Gospel

## Galatians 5:1-14

**Introduction** Warning labels are interesting things:

Microwave warning – do not use to dry a wet cat.

Hair curler warning – hot, will burn if placed on skin.

Dog food warning – not for human consumption.

Router warning – this wood router is not to be used as a dental drill.

Baby stroller warning – remove baby before folding.

Finally, on a bottle of drain cleaner, the label reads: "If you do not understand, or cannot read, all directions, cautions and warnings, do not use this product." Do the warnings of the Bible sometimes sound like this to us? Do we get to the point that we don't even hear them any more?

What is the greatest danger you face?

A health danger? Is cancer your greatest danger?

A financial danger? Is losing your job, your savings or retirement frighten you?

A political danger? Does the current crop of politicians or liberals frighten you?

Danger from Muslims? Is Islam our greatest threat? Iraq? Iran?

From our text this morning, our greatest danger is none of these. The warning from the gospel is of something entirely different and for many, wholly surprising.

Two important commands form the backdrop for the rising alarm of our text this morning:

Stand firm in the freedom Christ gives. You must believe and long for the freedom Christ has saved you to. You must believe His promises and receive His grace as sons to live freed from the power and slavery of sin.

Do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. Do not return to the seeming safety and sure slavery of legalism or religion.

Now many will say and possibly some are thinking:

Your teaching on freedom from the law is dangerous; it will lead to license. Paul's response: your teaching on the law is deadly; it severs people from the grace in Christ.

Paul's teaching is of a whole. What we are learning in relation to the old and new realms will have huge impact, not only on our salvation, but, as we will see at the end of the message today, on how we are to live as Christians.

A grace warning from the gospel over a soul damning danger...

**Realize What is at Stake****(v. 2-6)**

The issue for them, the error they were moving towards was accepting circumcision in order to be justified. They bought into the error that you had to have a right standing with the Jews, be connected to them through the rite of circumcision.

**The Purpose of Real Warnings**

As we work through this paragraph, we first must ask ourselves a question. What is being warned of? What do we do with the whole cluster of verses here in Galatians and in Hebrews warning us of eternal consequences for turning back from faith and turning to trusting in works?

The function of these texts is not to tell us that it is possible for Christians to lose their salvation. We know that the Scriptures tell us that we are born into God's family and placed into God's hand. There is no one or nothing that "unborn" us or remove us from God's hand. We are kept by the power of God until the last day.

The function of these texts is not to tell us how we can know if we are truly Christians. In other words, these are designed to say, "If you never go back to works, then you will know that you are truly a Christian." While this may be an effect of the text, it is not its intent or purpose.

Forcing these texts to answer questions they are not asking will almost certainly twist them and ruin them. These Scriptures are intended to be screwdrivers to fasten your faith tightly to Christ – do not use them to try to pound in the nails of a doctrine. They are not telling whether you can lose your salvation. They are warning people of something.

The function of these texts is to *warn those who profess faith of the grave dangers of returning to works* in the Mosaic System (or any works system, for that matter) so that we will not attempt to be justified by works but by faith. In other words, God has designed that we will hold fast to the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone by hearing grave warnings about eternal consequences of embracing the error of salvation by works. The function of these texts is to cause you to hear them, to be fearful of the results of listening to error and returning to works so that you hold fast to truth by faith all the way till you die. Then you will arrive safely in heaven having been saved by grace alone and persevere by faith.

So, do not twist these scriptures lest in the very twisting them to say what they do not intend they no longer function the way they were designed. Hear with faith and heed by grace the warning. Persevere because the Bible warns you to persevere and because the Bible tells you God will enable you to persevere.

Notice also how emphatic Paul is. "I, Paul, say to you..." (v. 2). "I testify again to every one who..." (v. 3) You can almost hear him pounding on the pulpit. If this were an email it would be shouted in ALL CAPTIAL LETTERS! So, when the Apostle is raising his voice and pounding the pulpit, we had better pay attention.

## **The Problem with Turning to Works**

**(v. 2-4)**

“So, what is the big deal? I mean, in order to be identified as the people of God from Abraham to the cross, you had to be circumcised. Why can’t we be circumcised, just in case?” This is the kind of talk going on Skyline or Greeter’s after services in Galatia. Now in our day, no one is teaching that you have to be circumcised to be justified. But many are teaching you have to be baptized. You have to take the sacraments including mass and last rites. What’s the big deal? If a person goes back to that, as long as they have made a decision for Jesus, then what does it matter? Paul raises a fire alarm warning of the eternal consequences for embracing any error concerning your salvation.

Now, as we read through this, I want you to hear what the text says. Don’t dismiss the warning here, just because here in our church we don’t have a sterile room with a scalpel and anesthesia. There are all kinds of non-Jewish, non-Catholic works that are commonly relied on. People integrate them in or add them to grace. For example, if I ask you, “How were you saved?” and you answer me, “By going down an aisle, by saying a prayer, by making a decision, by being baptized, by being good,” you have to stop and evaluate carefully if any of these actually saved you. These are all works you did. Did any of them save you? No. If you trust in them or rely on them or even bank on their reality as the grounds of your salvation, listen carefully to what Paul is saying here. Brother and sisters, there is not one thing we do which has anything to do with our justification, our right standing with God.

So what is the problem if you begin to lean on works to be accepted by God? Four warnings here are designed to cause you to hold fast to faith and rest only on the saving work of Christ alone.

### **Nullifies Your Benefit in Christ**

**(v. 2)**

You will not receive the benefits or the advantages of Christ. If you rely on works you are not relying on Christ. It is that stark. If you return to any works system of any kind, if you are relying on any works system of any kind now, you are not the recipient of the saving benefits of Christ. Do not accept any works system to have a right standing before God otherwise the only way you do stand right before God is not yours.

### **Makes You Accountable to the Whole Law**

**(v. 3)**

If you do any work ordered by the Law or any work in addition to the Law, you are then responsible to everything single thing the Law demands in attitude and action every moment of your life, past and present. The Mosaic Law, the Old Covenant and the system of works cannot be parsed out or broken up in such a way that if you just do one piece you don’t have to do the rest. If the Galatian believers accept circumcision in order to be right with God, they have to do every bit of the law. If you try to do anything, any work in order to be right with God, you have to do everything right thing and you have to avoid every wrong thing. You cannot even desire what is wrong or not desire what right. You either accept by faith through grace the righteousness of Christ put to your account and rest on that alone or you have to keep every single bit of the Law. You have to be as good as God. Period.

**Are Severed from Christ****(v. 4a)**

Now the tense and voice have changed. I have captured that in the heading. This is a clever play on the act of circumcision. Those who seek to have their foreskin cut away to be justified with God have in fact been cut away from Christ. The tense of the verb now shifts to evidentiary mode. In other words, those who rely on works only do so because they are in this condition. They are in fact not in Christ and their relying on the Law is because they are in fact in the realm of the Law. There, under the Law, they do not have life, are not saved and therefore are severed from Christ.

**Have Fallen from Grace****(v. 4b)**

Finally, we have this concluding and summarizing sentence as a final and fearsome warning. If you rely on works you have fallen from grace. Now, I know that to many that phrase means, "you have lost your salvation." That is not what it says and not what it means. It means exactly what it says. There are only two possible schemes of salvation. One is the narrow way through faith in Christ. This is grace. The other is the broad way of all works and religion. If you profess faith in Christ and then turn to works or religion, you will not be saved. You are not in the realm of the Spirit. You are still in the realm of the flesh.

Now, if you are more worried about whether we are teaching that you can lose your salvation than whether you are relying on works you are not listening to Paul nor to this message rightly. We are not teaching that you can lose your salvation. We are warning you to hold fast to faith and rely solely on the work of Christ alone so that you will continue in faith and not turn back to works.

**The Proof by New Covenant Truths****(v. 5-6)**

Now, how does Paul prove that this is true? In verses 5-6 he shows the essential expectant nature of saving faith. Saving faith is primarily believing in what Christ has done for us on the cross in view of, in the assurance of, standing before God righteous on the last day. This is the point of verse 5. What the Spirit does in those who are the sons of God is to so focus their faith that it expectantly hopes at the final judgment we are declared righteous before God based on His righteousness alone.

This verse totally does away with any mixing of the righteousness of Christ and our own as in some way or in some fashion being the grounds of my right standing before God. Faith in the finished work of Christ alone that is sustained until the day of judgment is the only vindication needed on that day. Not one thing that I do gives me hope for my final salvation. Only in who Jesus is and only by what Jesus has done will I ever, now, or then, stand accepted by God.

Those who bank on their works or add the Mosaic works of the Law or even the works of faith (Roman Catholicism and New Perspective) will be judged in the final day by that standard. And they will fall. They will come up short. They will be condemned. Their faith mixed with works will not save them. Their hope is futile. So be of those who by faith are assured to stand accepted by God through the righteousness of Christ alone!

The only thing that matters now, is faith working [ESV] or expressing itself [NLT] through love (v.6). This is the heart of the gospel in its affect on people. Saving faith expresses itself through all that love is. This is Paul's balance. While there is no work, even works of faith, that are the grounds of salvation, real faith will express itself, will work through the love. Faith is the mother and love is the child. Faith is the cause of what is done through love.

### **Reject Error's Destructive Persuasion (v. 7-12)**

Destructive errors do not appear out of nowhere. They are taught by people. Those people and the errors they teach need to be exposed. But Paul recognized what is often true. Those who teach the errors have won the affection and even admiration of those being misled. Thus we have the language and the tone of this paragraph.

### **The Affect of their Teaching (v.7-9)**

Paul describes the affect of their false teaching in three ways with three metaphors.

As in sports, they have stumbled in their race over the road block put in their path (v.7). The spiritual race we are all running is like cross-country, not like indoor track. The false teachers have cut in causing the runners to stumble. They have impeded their progress and hindered them from finishing well. They are getting in the way.

As in rhetoric or debate, they have been persuaded by voices other than those authorized by God (v.8). The false teachers are retraining the ears of the church and thus their ability to discern truth. They are arguing for a competing position. The false teachers are not speaking for God. Yet the church is being persuaded of error. Both the process of persuading and the ideas being persuaded of do not come from God, from the one who has called them to salvation.

As in a household, they have allowed a little bit of error to expand to where it now threatens the whole (v.9). What might appear to be small compromises to error will later grow and permeate the whole. Any error in the doctrine of salvation will contaminate and corrupt a whole system. Once leaven is in the bread, how will you remove it?

### **The Affirmation of their Judgment (v.10)**

Having warned them of being persuaded by the false teachers, Paul expresses his confidence that they will be persuaded by him. His confidence is in the Lord. It is the Lord who will hold them to the truth. But the truth he teaches is what they must be persuaded of. He is confident that they will take no other view than his. This is not arrogance; this is an affirmation of his apostleship and their accountability to it.

His confidence in the Lord includes an assertion of impending judgment. While he has generally up to this point spoken of false teachers in the plural, he now speaks of "one" and "his" in the singular. So there was probably one primary teacher of this error surrounded and supported by many others who followed and taught the same errors. For all who persuade people to a soul damning view of

works and religion, their own penalty is sure. They will suffer the same judgment.

Here is that word, “troubling”. There is a “penalty” for the one doing so. The word here is *krima*. It means a sentence pronounced, a verdict, a decision resulting from an investigation. So a guilty verdict and sentence has been issued against this one. It is temporal in that the churches in Galatia should cast out the false leader and his cadre of teachers. It is eternal in that the view being taught is not that of the Apostles nor is its persuasion from the Lord. This is a clear warning of the responsibility of the church in this case. It is also a clear warning to those who were being persuaded and were vulnerable to defecting from Christ.

### **The Attack on their Influence**

**(v.11-12)**

Paul attacks their influence on the Galatians by distancing himself from them and their views. He does this by declaring that he is not teaching what they are. That is evident not only from the content of his teaching, but its consequence. If Paul was in agreement with the Judiazers, then why did they continue to harass him and persecute him? Furthermore, preaching circumcision (works, religion, reliance on Law) removes or nullifies the scandal of the cross. The preaching of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews, as well as foolishness to the Gentiles. If he was preaching circumcision, then that indignity would be removed.

This paragraph closes with one of the most shocking statements from Paul. He wishes that those who are unsettling the Galatians by teaching circumcision would go all the way and just emasculate themselves. Of course, if they did so, they would be disqualified from serving under the Law. They would become a shame in their culture. This does challenge our sensibilities doesn't it? But, here is how deeply Paul felt about the gospel and hated the dire threat to it from false teaching. Do we have anywhere near this sort of love for the gospel? As Hendriksen wrote on this text, “Accordingly, instead of saying, ‘Shame on you, Paul, for wishing such a thing!’ should we not rather say, ‘Shame *on ourselves*, that when in our own day and age the soundness of the gospel is being sacrificed upon the altar of ecumenicism, and when ever so many people are being led astray by a so-called gospel that recognizes no contrast between saved and unsaved, but only “the brotherhood of all men” our own cheeks have lost the ability to glow with righteous indignation!”<sup>13</sup>

### **Respond by Lovingly Serve One Another**

**(v. 13-14)**

What do we do then if those who are in Christ are no longer under the law? Are we then allowed to simply live anyway we want. Since we are free then are we free to do anything? Isn't this the response from many even today? “O, Paul cannot be talking about how we live as Christians, but only about how we become Christians. He is talking about justification, not sanctification (*sic.*)” Except, if that were true, then this paragraph is useless. All he has to do is say, “Now since you are justified, you know how to live by faith by keeping the Law.” But that isn't even close to how he talks. This morning, I am going to briefly enter this paragraph, screw it to your hearts, then start here next week in our message, the Lord willing.

### **The Problem that Freedom Poses (v.13)**

Ah, how easy it is to take our freedom and use it to justify our sin. Do not use our freedom from the Law as an opportunity to commit sin. Romans 5-8 are crucial to expanding on this simple problem and its necessary correction. [We will be working through that this summer as a part of our summer Adult Bible Study at 9:15am. Just because there is no law requiring you to be here don't allow your freedom to indulge the flesh in sleeping in!]. So this is the challenge. Any truth can be twisted and perverted to serve sinful aims and agendas. We do not then try to undermine that truth; rather, we seek to know what other truths put the curbs in the road.

### **The Principle that Limits Sin (v.13-14)**

Since we are free then we must use that in love to serve one another. This is the principle that limits sin. All holy conduct is built on two commands, love God and love neighbor. Our freedom from sin and the law releases us to extravagant acts and deeds of self-sacrifice and love for others. It does not free us to serve ourselves. Why? Because when we through love serve one another, this is faith expressing itself. A claim to faith that does not produce love for others is a false and feigned faith. But true faith looks away from the realm of flesh and self-seeking avenues of expression for the good of others and the glory of God.

### **The Practice that Destroys Relationships (v.15)**

Why does he say this now? While returning to works and Law for salvation damns souls, legalism destroys relationships. Sadly, legalism tends to foster just what Paul describes here. Reliance on law and legalism yields harshness and hardness.<sup>14</sup> So here is the ironic warning. Watch out you who bite and devour one another with error and words lest you end up destroying one another.

So how will we respond this morning? Let me call you to these heart changes.

## Conclusion

- ☐ Do you believe the gospel?
  - Do you come to Christ by grace through faith alone?
  - Have you rejected all works and religion?
- ☐ Do you love the gospel?
  - Do you realize what is at stake?
  - Do you reject error's destructive persuasion?
  - Do you respond by lovingly serving one another?
- ☐ Do you live the gospel?
  - Does the gospel shape your relationships?

Does the gospel cause you to serve others?

May God be pleased to grant us saving faith so that we will hold fast to the gospel. May God grant that we love truth so much that we will resist all who may teach contrary to it. May God grant us, in the midst of strong faith and tightly held truth to love people for the glory of God.

## Notes

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<sup>13</sup>William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 8, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of Galatians*, Accompanying Biblical Text Is Author's Translation., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 206.

<sup>14</sup> Paul harshness with the Judaizers means he is treating them as "not a neighbor." They are outside the family of God attempting to destroy the truth binding the family of God together and so are enemies of the gospel, of God and of God's people. It is very interesting that Paul can go seamlessly in his own mind and writing from a dreadful statement against the Judaizers and then right away warn Christians about the tendency of legalism that he appears to have just violated!