

## **TRIPPED UP ON THE TRACK**

### **Galatians 5:7-12**

The Bible sometimes depicts the Christian life as a race. It is a race to be run and heaven is the finish line. In 2 Timothy 4:7, nearing the end of his life, Paul summed up his life by saying, “I’ve kept the faith and stayed on course; I’ve finished the race.” Would that we could all say that! And finish the race with joy! Races always have a course, a definite route that you are to take to get you from the start to the finish. It’s a race, but it’s more of a marathon than a sprint. And if you’ve ever run a marathon, 5k or 10k or whatever, you know that generally they give you a map that you are to study beforehand and then while you’re actually running the race there will be arrows and signs along the way that tell you where you turn and when. And that’s what the Lord does with us. He gives us His map, His Word, so that we know how to run this race and during the race, He’s always guiding us and directing us along the way, in accordance with His Word.

But let’s say you’re running a race and somehow your vision is impaired and you can’t see where you’re going. Someone blindfolds you or a dense fog set in. That certainly changes things. Or what if someone sneaks up behind you and ties some weights to your ankles and then another opponent starts setting up hurdles and obstacles in the way. With obscured vision, hurdles and obstacles, and weights tied to your ankles, the race would certainly get harder. And that’s what has just happened to these believers in Galatia. They were running the race and running it well, but some false teachers weaseled their way into the church and began to obscure their vision of what living the Christian life looked and started weighing them down with the works of the Law of Moses like circumcision and already they were observing different feasts and ceremonies. Paul says in the opening verse of our portion of Scripture for this morning, “You were running well; who hindered you?” What happened to your race? I like what the NIV says, “Who cut in on you?” Who came in and forced you out of your lane? Out of the lane of grace? It’s kind of driving on I-25 traffic around Denver – Who cut you off? That’s the idea here. Notice verse 10: “I have confidence in the Lord that you will adopt no other view.” Who changed your view? Who got you off course?

And as we’ve studied throughout this book and as we saw last week, especially, the way they’ve gotten off course was by listening to false teachers with their false teaching. They started out living the Christian life by faith and in dependence upon the Spirit of God, but now they had been sidetracked into living by works and depending upon themselves to try and live the Christian life and trying to be justified before God by works. So again, we have real believers here, already justified believers, trying to be justified all over again by works. They have been tripped up on the course, running the wrong way and now, with the weightiness of works tied to their ankles. And in order to help lay aside these weights and different obstacles and different encumbrances, Paul has reminded them of their past in Galatians 3:2-3, “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” And the answer to these rhetorical questions is obvious: They had been born again by the Spirit of God through their faith in Christ – for believing the gospel message, the good news, that Jesus Christ died for them to save them from sin. There were no works involved in that. They didn’t do anything to deserve salvation. They simply believed on Christ and had experienced the work of the Spirit of God in their lives. They believed God’s message and experienced salvation before these Judaizers even came around.

These false teachers that we have come to know as Judaizers, this Jewish group likely connected with the Pharisees, were all about Judaism – practicing the Law of Moses. They were a group insisting that believers

were to believe on Christ, yes, but also, if they were really going to be saved and really grow and be accepted by God, then they were to still keep the Law – that the works of the Law were still regulatory in their lives. They were creating, like John MacArthur said, some sort of hybrid form of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> A Christianity where Christ's name and sacrifice is mentioned but is muddled up and diluted by works. Christ's sacrifice was there but it was not sufficient to pay for sin in their religious system – sound like any religious systems we have around today. Believe on Christ, but also do this or do that if you want to be saved. So Christ's sacrifice is belittled. These men in particular were teaching that, "Unless a man be circumcised according to the Law of Moses, he cannot be saved," (Acts 15:1). And that, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses," (Acts 15:5).

So far, we've already looked at some of the characteristics that mark a false teacher. Paul revealed in 4:17 that false teachers will **distract from Christ** and that **they are in it for themselves**. In chapter 4:29 we saw how legalistic false teachers will also persecute grace believers. And in today's portion of verses 12-17, we're going to learn more about them. We actually learn more about these false teaching Judaizers here than we do anywhere else in the book of Galatians and learn how they get believers off course. It is necessary that every believer has a proper view or proper perspective on how to live and grow in the Christian life – how to be sanctified – and that is by grace through faith in Christ, just like salvation. **What view we adopt (whether it's by works or by faith) determines what our race looks like and whether or not we will produce the right kind of fruit** as we'll see in the rest of chapter 5. Producing the right fruit, running in right direction, starts with having a proper perspective on the Christian life and so we're going to look at a few ways today how false teachers try to interrupt our race and get us to run the wrong way.

#### **I. FALSE TEACHERS HINDER BELIEVERS. (V. 7)**

Paul says, "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" The whole mantra of the Judaizers, or the statement that was being repeated left and right by them, was that if you want to be saved and if you want to grow in your justification (which is not possible – once justified, always justified) and do things right, and if you want to earn some sort of brownie points with God, then you've got to keep the Law and observe the Law. You've got to be circumcised and observe rituals and traditions and ceremonies. *Their whole message was a message of progressing in justification by works.* **LEGALISM DENIES IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS – Justification by faith.** But in reality, that message has the exact opposite effect upon them. Instead of helping them progress in their spiritual walk – it was going to put them in the ditch spiritually, like we saw last week. It was taking them off of the highway of grace and into the ditch of works and flesh and self-effort where they're trying to earn their justification again – a justification that they had already been given them and obtained by grace through faith in Christ and the evidence was the Spirit of God in their lives already. He seals believers with eternal life. The message of works did anything but help them progress. It worked against progress and against God's desire for their lives. It severed them from Christ and made Christ of no benefit to them in regard to sanctification. It caused them to fall from grace. It hindered them from obeying the truth. Legalists hinder believers by putting up unnecessary obstacles in their way, like placing hurdles on the course that you have to jump over or hoops you have to jump through.

This is the thing about legalism that is so deceptive. *It can look really spiritual.* People are drawn to it. People look at **monks** and think, "My, those guys are spiritual." They dress different than everyone else with their robes. They have a unique diet and hairstyle and they deprive themselves of basic human needs. They suffer severe treatment of the body. They pray a lot and they have these special rituals and chants. They live secluded from the world (though not secluded from the

flesh). For some reason that sort of **ascetic living** where you deprive and deny yourself of natural human enjoyments and basic is seen as spiritual. 1 Timothy 4:1-5 warns about this breed of false teachers that advocate ascetic living – abstaining from marriage and certain food that God created to be enjoyed and received with thanksgiving. Colossians 2:20-23 says, “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to *decrees*, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”... in accordance with the commandments and *teachings of men*? These are matters which have... *the appearance of wisdom* in *self-made religion* and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” [emphasis mine]. In other words, it’s all man-made religion that doesn’t do a lick of good for you before God. It’s all works – self-made, worthless. I like what Ray Stedman wrote on this strange religious error: “There’s a difference between self-denial and denying self. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Luke 9:23). That is denying self. But that is easily confused with self-denial, which says, “I will give up this thing or that thing. I want to gain a special mark of favor before God, and I want to influence God to do something for me in return.” When our motivation ultimately is to achieve something for ourselves by our actions, we are no longer denying self but practicing self-denial. How subtle the differences are!... Self-denial is an attempt to earn favor.”<sup>2</sup> People look at a religions like Islam and think, my they take their faith seriously. They pray five times a day, they tithe, they fast, they do that pilgrimage to Mecca where they run around the cube however many times. It’s a legalistic religious systems are attractive to people.

And to **genuine Christian believers, the most dangerous and attractive Satanic systems of legalism are those that have the name of Christ attached to them like these Judaizers**. Those church systems that are just like these Judaizers who say you need to believe in Christ BUT ALSO start placing works upon people, saying that Christ is not enough and faith is not enough. It’s like some hybrid form Christianity that keeps people so close and yet, so far away. That’s what these Judaizers were doing: they weren’t totally denying the name of Christ. They said believe in Christ, but also, keep the works of the Law if you want to be justified. They were adding to Christ. So many of those who call themselves “Christians” in this world are caught up in those kinds of systems. Systems that turn things like church attendance, monetary giving, witnessing or missions, baptism and the Lord’s supper into religious works to be done to earn salvation.

And if Satan can’t get us to buy into that totally works-based system, he will try to get the genuine Christian believers to buy into a more subtle form of legalism that is tied to the gray areas of Christian life we’ve talked about: dancing, movies, makeup, music style, dress style, hairstyles, teaching style, order of service, postures for praying, Bible translations. We can get caught up in making some form of religious code out of all those styles and judging people based upon whether or not they meet that code we’ve made up, that they don’t even know about.

To go into to some kind of works-based system is to go backwards. It doesn’t make any sense for a believer to try seek to be justified by works because he’s already been justified. It’s working for something that you already have. It’s not doing any good. It’s not living according to the truth and obeying the truth. It’s running in vain, with the hamster wheel or treadmill effect – lots of activity but you’re not going anywhere. It causes that treadmill effect – you’re running, but you’re not going anywhere. The truth is that believers are justified and declared perfectly righteous with the righteousness of Christ the moment you put your faith in Christ and received the Spirit of God. Legalism denies imputed righteousness and hinders the believer from growing.

The second way false teachers try to interrupt our race is by opposing grace.

## II. FALSE TEACHERS OPPOSE GRACE. (VV. 8, 11)

I get this from verse 8. “This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.” And I say that because if you remember Galatians 1:6, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ.” These Judaizers were calling them by works, while God the Father had called them by the grace of Christ. Their *new perspective* on how to run this race by works did not find its source in God because God calls us by grace and not by works. Paul’s saying, “I don’t care how holy they look or how religious they are, they’re not from God because God calls us by grace.” They’re actually diametrically opposed to God and His grace. They’re workers of darkness, disguising themselves as angels of light (2 Cor. 11:3).

And apparently, the Judaizers were so arrogant that they claimed that Paul was also preaching circumcision, contrary to pure grace. He asks the question, “If I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?” Maybe they were gathering this from his previous life as a religious Pharisee or thought this because he had Timothy circumcised so he could reach the Jews in the synagogues, but that didn’t mean he preached works at all. He simply wanted Timothy to be able to reach the Jews in the synagogue with the message of grace. If Paul preached the cross plus the Law, he wouldn’t have been persecuted – their major disagreement was whether or not the works of the Law were still in effect – but since he preached the cross and that we’re not under the works of the Law, he was persecuted. In 6:15 he says these guys are actually preaching the Law so that they won’t be persecuted! “But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.”

**The cross that reveals God’s great grace is a stumbling block to man, especially to the religious man, because it offends his pride. Works are more popular because they feed man’s pride, who think** they can earn grace. Every belief system other than authentic Christianity is works-based. Every religious book in the world, except the Bible, teaches a works-based message. The works-message permeates the world because it’s rooted in pride. It was pride that caused Satan to rebel against God and pride that keeps man from God. Satan tempted Eve, saying in essence, “You don’t need God. You can be like God or be your own God.” Satan’s wicked message was one that created a mindset of **independence from God** – that man can do without God.

And well, God has designed the gospel in such a way that it roots out that message of independence and extracts it. The gospel pinpoints man’s pride deep down and extracts that gross idea that man can do without God because the gospel says we are all completely and utterly helpless to save ourselves, except by His grace, and we were created for a relationship with God where we’re dependent on Him. The gospel says, “You cannot earn salvation. You cannot be saved without humbling yourself and accepting God’s gracious gift of salvation. You must come to God on His terms and depend completely upon Him, trusting His sacrifice. It’s by faith alone.” It’s the gospel of God’s grace that softens our hearts so that we become obedient from the heart. We are motivated to live for Him out of our deep appreciation for what He’s done for us. Like we saw last week. The gospel produces a faith that works through love, being motivated by His love for us. He who is forgiven much loves much and we’ve all been forgiven much.

You would think that the message of grace would be more appealing than the message of works but it isn’t because it goes against man’s pride. Works are typically **more appealing**. Roman 9:30-33 says, “What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.’” We will not be disappointed for trusting Christ. That is God’s will. To not trust Christ, however, is

devastating. Jesus basically said everyone who trips over the idea of the cross and doesn't accept it will be broken to pieces or if it falls on them, will scatter them like dust (Mt. 21:44). So there is only one way to the Father, and it's not by works, but by faith in Christ. What I love about Romans and the way that it opens in chapters 1 and 2 is that it makes it clear – **it doesn't matter how awful of a sinner you are, how good of moral person you are, or how religious you are – we all get in the same way and it's all by undeserved grace.**

The next reason we want to watch out for false teachers in our race is because...

### III. **FALSE TEACHERS' TEACHING IS CONTAGIOUS. (V. 9)**

"A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." This leaven illustration is familiar to those of you who are students of the Word. False teaching is comparable to leaven in the way it works on the inside of a lump of dough and affects the whole lump. All it takes is just a little bit of it for it to spread all throughout. Jesus warned his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Watch out for the hypocritical false teachings of works that the Pharisees and Sadducees are teaching. The thing about leaven that stands out here is how it works and spreads on the inside. False teachers desire to sneak in. In chapter 2:4 we saw how they were secretly brought in, they snuck in. In Acts 20:29-31, Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will **come in among you**, not sparing the flock; and **from among your own selves** men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." They like to be among the sheep and according to Jesus, they look like sheep too. "They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Mt. 7:15). 2 Peter 2:1 says, "But [as] false prophets also arose **among the people** [of Israel], [so] there will also be false teachers **among you**, who secretly introduce destructive heresies, even **denying the Master who bought them.**" So just as false prophets arose among Israel, so there will false prophets among the Church who deny Christ's sufficiency, even the Master who paid for their very sin. Israel was supposed to stone the false prophets to death and in the Church, we are commanded to cast them out – "Cast out the bondwoman and her son" (Gal. 4:30) – because their teaching is contagious and spreads like leaven. The Israelites didn't take care of the false prophets the way they were supposed to and it had a devastating effect on them spiritually. And if as the Church, we allow the false teachers to remain among us, with their false gospel of works, it's going to be devastating on us too. They're to be cast out and we need have the will to do it, unlike Israel.

In a similar situation in the Corinthian church, Paul said, "Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump." Cut out the leaven. It's like rust on a car body or cancer in the human body. You have to go in a cut it out before it continues to spread. False teaching is contagious and because of that, it must be dealt with swiftly. The purity of the gospel must be maintained even above the closest relationships, which is a hard thing in a small church and small town. But I would say this, that there's a difference between a believer simply stuck in legalism and a teacher teaching legalism. We definitely need to have discernment in this regard and first, try to correct them with gentleness – for perhaps God may grant them repentance (2 Tim. 2:25).

The fourth reason we must beware of them is because...

### IV. **FALSE TEACHERS WILL BE CONDEMNED. (VV. 10, 12)**

You don't want to associate or take part in the wrath that they are storing up for themselves. Paul says they who are disturbing you **will bear their judgment**. He actually uses the singular "he" – "he will bear his judgment, whoever he is," likely referring to the main heretical teacher, even

though the whole group was troublesome.<sup>3</sup> They'll receive their penalty in due time. The book of Jude describes the false teachers who crept in unnoticed and turned the grace of God into licentiousness (a license to sin) as *marked out for condemnation* (Jude 1:4). If you go back to Galatians 1:6-9 we are reminded that if anyone preachers another gospel, another way to be saved, other than by faith in Christ – he is to be accursed – anathema – let him be damned to hell. Jesus, describing the end of the age in Matthew 13, said that's exactly what's going to happen to them. He likened false teachers to weeds among wheat that were sown by the evil one. At the end of the age, they will be gathered up and thrown into the furnace of fire (lake of fire) where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. God will not deal very kindly with them.

And as you can tell from verse 12, the apostle Paul doesn't take very kindly to them either. The Bible at times is very graphic like this. He says that since these guys are so insistent that men be circumcised in order to be saved, I wish they would go so far as to emasculate themselves like some of the pagan priests did back in that day, becoming eunuchs. The NIV says, "I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves." You get the sense that he doesn't want these guys reproducing or propagating their false gospel. If they think they can earn divine favor through some work of the literal flesh, some outward act and severe treatment of the body, then they might as well go to the extreme and do what some of the pagan priests did in nearby Phrygia, who worshiped this goddess figure named Cybele. That's how much he hates it when the gospel of Jesus Christ is distorted. He wants them cut off. It's a righteous anger, like Jesus' righteous anger. Jesus' most dreadful words, including the series of woe judgments and whenever he spoke of hell, it was always aimed at false teachers.

Romans 16:17 says, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances (obstacles) contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them." We've got to watch out for the religious men in the world out there putting obstacles in front of us while we race, complicating the race. Don't let any men distract you from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3). If you've got any weights of legalism tying you down, time to throw them off too. Cast them out, for we were called to freedom in grace. We're saved by grace through faith in Christ and we grow that way. Everything we do, like baptism and communion (which we celebrate now) – they're supposed to be reminders of that grace gospel – they're to remind us and teach that Christ is enough and that by His sacrifice we are saved and that because of His sacrifice and having been born again, we are now to walk with Him. Communion, which we'll celebrate now, is a time of self-examination. We can ask ourselves, "How am I running? Am I running well?" Is my faith still totally in Christ grace and am I walking in light of that? Because grace teaches us to live righteously.

---

<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Galatians 5:7-12: The Wickedness of Gospel Distorters*, accessed 31 May 2019, [www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org)

<sup>2</sup> Ray Stedman, *The Power of His Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2006), 348.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Gromacki, *Stand Fast in Liberty: An Exposition of Galatians* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2002), 155.