

Galatians – Lesson 30

Galatians 5:2-6

March 9, 2025

Introduction/Review

- Recall: the letter of Galatians has been a polemic (critical argument) against the idea and practice of requiring circumcision to be justified before God
- Last time, we looked at a number of scriptures that teach the permanence of salvation as a helpful foundation for today's passage
- In this passage, after giving many illustrations, Paul pulls no more punches in giving the clearest statements yet of the importance of believing the correct gospel

Justification by following the law or by faith in Christ—it can't be both (Gal. 5:2-3)

- “Look!” (5:2)
 - Another translation might be, “Listen!”
 - It's time to pay attention. Paul doesn't want us to miss what he's about to say
- “[I]f you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.” (5:2)
 - This is similar to what Paul has argued before in Gal. 2:21 –
“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”
 - And again in Gal. 4:9 –
“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”
- “[E]very man who accepts circumcision... is obligated to keep the whole law.” (5:3)
 - After all, those relying on the works of the law are cursed, as he argued in 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.’”

- This idea is explained even a little more directly in James 2:10-11 –
“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”
- Paul is saying here, which do you want? Grace or Law? Which is it!?

Severed from Christ!? (Gal. 5:4)

- “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law” (5:4a)
 - Greek *katargeo* = severed, alienated, estranged, cut off
 - To drive the point home to the Jews, he is probably alluding to Gen. 17:14 –
“Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”
 - Paul is speaking in the strongest terms possible here
- “You have fallen away from grace” (5:4b)
 - He doesn’t mean they had obtained salvation and then fell away from it.
 - He’s saying that they were trying to attain grace by merit, which is impossible.
 - Compare Paul’s later warning in Rom 11:6 –
“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

Faith... Hope... Love... In Christ (Gal. 5:5-6)

- “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.” (5:5)
 - Paul explains this hope of righteousness in 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. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

- In Acts 24:14-15, in giving a defense before the governor Felix, Paul said:
“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.”
 - If both the righteous and the unrighteous will be facing the resurrection, it is only the righteous who wait expectantly for that moment with joyous hope, just as it says in Prov. 10:28:
“The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.”
 - And who are the righteous?
- “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything” (5:6)
 - Note: Why did Paul refuse to have Titus circumcised (Gal. 2:3) and yet he had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3)?
 - Different persons:
Titus –

Timothy –
 - Different circumstances
Titus –

Timothy –
 - Paul probably didn’t want Timothy’s identity as an uncircumcised Jew to become a stumbling block for the Jews whom he hoped also to reach with the Gospel. See 1 Cor. 9:19-22
 - The key, again, is the phrase *“In Christ.”*

- “But only faith working through love. (5:6b)
 - Paul only used the word love once before in this letter (2:20), and now, he introduces it and uses the word four times throughout Ch. 5
 - What is faith without love? 1 Cor. 13:2:
“And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”