



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 5:1-12

Galatians 5

"Stand Free or Fall"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're in the scriptures this morning, and that's Galatians chapter 5, and we're going to look at verses 1-12. Paul has given his allegory from Abraham's life, and specifically from the two women in Abraham's life, Hagar and Sarah.

Hagar, the slave woman, signifies life under the law, the attempt to be saved by lawkeeping. And Hagar the slave could only produce slave children, and so it is with people who live under the law. They're slaves. They can't be justified by the law. They can't be sanctified by the law. The mother of those who are in Christ who have put their faith in Him, who are justified by faith alone, is Sarah. And he concludes, "So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman." And the implication of that statement is, "Therefore, live as the children of the free woman." That's the statement, really, that he makes in 5:1.

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

"Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in

Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

"You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. 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. But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together, this hour in which we gather on this Lord's day, and we pray that You'd bless it. Bless the hymns that we sing and bless the scriptures that have been read and that will be expounded. We pray that You would guide us in our thinking and bless us.

We pray, Lord, for the many needs that we have – the material needs, as well as the spiritual, and we have many needs. In fact, we are totally dependent upon You for everything. Even when we feel that we don't have needs, it's only because You're blessing us and prospering us and providing for us at every moment of our life.

We pray for those who are sick, those who are in need of physical healing. We pray for those who are recovering from surgery, those who are facing surgeries. We pray that You'd give them healing. We know that Your will is not always to do that and we know that Your will is perfect, and so we pray that those who are undergoing great distress and trials at this time would come to understand that and appreciate that and see a hand of grace in the midst of affliction.

But we pray for healing. We pray for employment for those that are without it. We pray for the various difficulties that people have, and You know far better than we know. And we pray that Your will would be worked out in their life and that they would be blessed.

So Lord, we pray for our material needs, but in this moment we think of our spiritual needs in this place, the beginning of this service. We pray that You would bless us with the hymns that we sang and the teaching that is given. We pray that the Spirit of God would use all of this in our life and that He would open our hearts to receive the ministry that's given and that You would build us up in the faith through our time together.

And we would not only come to know more about Your grace and more about what Christ has done for us at the Christ, and more about how we're to live in light of that, and not only that we'd have a greater understanding of our freedom and what means, but that we'd go out of this place well equipped to live in the world and be lights in the midst of a dark and evil generation.

So teach us, Lord, not simply for the purpose of having greater knowledge, but so that through that knowledge we become more like Christ. We'd walk in obedience and we'd be servants of Yours, equipped for the ministry. Prepare our hearts now for a time of study and worship together, and we pray this in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] The book of Galatians has been called the Magna Carta of spiritual emancipation, and with justification, because in verse 1 of chapter 5, Paul writes, "It was for freedom that Christ has set us free." That is one of the key verses in the book and it begins a new section in the book, the third and final section.

Paul defended his apostleship in chapters 1 and 2. He defended the gospel of justification by faith alone in chapters 3 and 4. Now in chapters 5 and 6 he defends the Christian life. It is a life of liberty, lived through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Freedom is one of the great themes of Paul's teaching. You see it all through his writings. He told the Corinthians, for example, in 2 Corinthians 3:17, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there the heart is free." There is freedom from sin, freedom from sin's power and penalty. That is one of Paul's great themes.

But what Paul has in mind primarily in the book of Galatians is freedom from the law, freedom from the false idea that the Law is a way of salvation, freedom from the Law's condemnation and freedom from the Law as a rule of life.

Believers in Jesus Christ are no longer under the Law of Moses. Now, of course, free from the Law doesn't mean free to sin. Paul answered that error in Romans 6:2, where he said, "God forbid, may it never be!" And to be free from the Law does not mean that the Law is of no use to us.

The Law is a revelation of God's holiness. It is God's word and it still teaches us much about His character. We are to study it. And as we study it, we learn much from it. And in the sense that we can learn about His holiness and His character and His ways with men – and we learn much about the ways of God with men from the Law, from the whole Old Testament to that degree – we can measure our conduct by it.

But the Law is not the rule of our life. It is not the code by which we live. Believers in Jesus Christ are under a higher principle, the guidance of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to obey and leads us into a life of holiness. That is Christian freedom, and of Christian freedom, Calvin said that it is an inestimable blessing for which we should fight even to the death."

Paul was ready to do that, because there were enemies of freedom in Galatia, who were troubling the believers there, confusing them about the Law and trying to bring them under it. So Paul must defend our freedom in these last chapters of the book. He has been doing that all through the book. Galatians is, as it has been called, a fighting epistle from beginning to end. And Paul takes up the fight for our freedom here at the beginning of chapter 5 by first declaring the fact of our freedom and then commanding the Galatians to stand firmly in it.

He begins with a declaration of our independence. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." And that means that the believer in

Jesus Christ has in fact been set free. Now, again, freedom here is freedom from the Law. That is the great emphasis of this book. Christ has set our conscience free from the guilt of sin. We are free from the Law's condemnation in Jesus Christ. The condemnation of the Law cannot touch us. Christian freedom is freedom from the great struggle to keep the Law in an effort to win God's favor.

John Stott defines this freedom as the freedom of acceptance with God and of access to God through Christ. That is a great blessing. To be accepted by God and to have free access to Him is a great blessing. To be fully accepted and not have to labor and fight for God's approval and still, were one to do that, would never know that he or she had that approval. You cannot know that if you live under a system of law in which by doing the things of the law, whether it's the Law of Moses or some other system that one has, can never come to that point where they realize or they have the conviction that they're finally, once and for all, accepted by God. You can never know that if it depends on your works, because if you were to reach that point and feel accepted, you may not be accepted tomorrow, because you may do something that is completely out of character with the law of God and you can be sure that you will do that. You will do that before the sun sets today, so there's never any assurance under that kind of system.

But we are free and we are accepted, not because of the things we do, but because of the things that Christ has done. He has settled the issue for us. And being in Him, we are completely and forever acceptable to God. That is freedom. That is great freedom. So do you feel free? Are you living free? That is what Christ gained for you if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. It is what He wants for you and it is what Paul commands of you. "Therefore," he says, since Christ has set us free, since He has accomplished this for us, "keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Don't lapse into a life of bondage.

That's what life under Law is. It is bondage. It is what Paul calls a yoke. That's how the rabbis refer to the Law, and Paul probably

knew that from his own experience as a rabbi. Back in the days when he was Pharisee, he probably spoke frequently of the Law as a yoke. But when the rabbis used it, they meant yoke in a very favorable way, in the sense of a system that gives guidance and stability, much as a yoke would do for an ox when it's plowing a field.

Paul used it here not in a favorable way, in an unfavorable way, much as Peter did in Acts 15:10, where he spoke of the Law as a yoke that "neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear." Paul called it a yoke of slavery. It's a heavy burden. It results in a restricted life with hard demands that no one can ultimately bear. So Peter makes the point that the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, "Why is it that you want to put this yoke upon the Gentiles, to whom it was never given in the first place, when we and our fathers to whom this yoke was given were not able to bear it in the first place?"

You can think of this yoke of slavery, the Law, as a great, heavy yoke the neck of an ox, and that ox is bowed down with the weight of this yoke, staggering along. And finally the yoke is broken off its back and it stands erect and it's free. That was the experience of Peter and Paul, and all of the apostles, the experience of all Jewish believers.

They had lived under the Law with all of its hard demands. They knew from experience that it was impossible to keep that Law. And now they were free. Now the Galatians were free. And so they and we must not fall back under that yoke and into the idea that we have to win within God's acceptance by our own obedience. Christ has done that for us. He has broken the yoke of the Law from off our necks with its impossible demands and its dreadful condemnation for our disobedience. Christ met the demands of the Law for us in our place when He died for our disobedience and experienced the punishment that we deserved in our place, as our substitute.

As Paul said in 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us." There's no greater blessing in life than that. It is, as Calvin said, one worth dying for. And so Paul was asking the Galatians how it is how that they are free, that they would

want to put their necks in the heavy yoke of the Law? They had been freed through the gospel from their former slavery. They were not originally under the Law of Moses. They were under what Paul called back in chapter 4 the elemental things.

And the elemental things are the basic rules of religion. They're universal – the dos and the don'ts and sacrifices and the ceremonies that you find in religion. Man realizes innately that there's a separation between him and God, and he seeks to bridge the gap by the things that he does or the ceremonies that he engages in. And that was true of Judaism. It was true of paganism. Very different from one another, but the fundamental connection was these elemental principles. And they had been freed from that, as he said, from these basic rules of religion. Having been freed from that, why is it that they want to be enslaved all over again with this law of Judaism? They'd been freed from one yoke to put their necks in another yoke, the yoke from which the Jewish believers had been freed and rejoiced in their freedom.

Why would they want to do it? Well, there are reasons for that. Paul said earlier that they had been bewitched. These clever teachers of the Law, these Judaizers had come in to Galatia and they brought the Galatians under the spell of their false teaching. They were clever men. They were bright men. False teachers are bright individuals. You may hear something someday that sounds quite different from what you've been taught and what seems to be correct in the Bible, from what you know from the scriptures, and yet this person who says it is such a bright person, such a clever person, such a humorous person, and so knowledgeable – knowledgeable about the Bible, about history, about philosophy, about all these things, and he makes some sense and so you're drawn away into that it.

Or you can be. Well, don't be surprised if the person's bright and clever and intelligent. Satan doesn't use ignoramuses to propagate his lie. He finds the finest minds to do that – clever people, effective people – and that's what these were. These men, with their words,

were able to bewitch the Galatians. That explains it in part, but also it's understandable, because the Law appeals to human nature. It appeals to human pride. It tells that we have a part to play in our salvation, and men like that. It gives them something to hold onto, gives them something to boast about.

But Paul calls that slavery. Christianity is freedom, not slavery, and as Paul says, we must stand firm in our freedom. Failure to do that, failure to believe in Christ as the all-sufficient Savior and trust instead in lawkeeping, would result in serious consequences. Paul identifies them in verses 2-4. First, Christ will be of no profit to them. He will profit you nothing. Secondly, they will be obligated to the whole Law. And thirdly, they fall from grace.

Paul warns them of this with the full force of his apostolic authority, and for the first time in the letter, mentions by name the precise issue that was threatening this great danger of which he's been warning them. And that issue is the issue of circumcision.

"Behold," he says, meaning, "Mark my words; underline this; pay very careful attention to what I'm about to say." "Behold I, Paul," meaning "I, the apostle Paul, I speak to you with all of the authority of an apostle." "I say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you."

Now we might wonder why this is so crucial an issue, this issue of circumcision, so crucial that Paul would write a letter, but such a heated, vigorous letter as this, and give such dire warnings about it. After all, circumcision is a simple surgical operation performed only once and performed only on males.

Why did Paul consider it so dangerous that if they received it, Christ would be of no benefit to them? The reason is because circumcision was more than a surgical operation. It was a theological symbol. It's always been a theological symbol. First of all, in a good sense, because it was a symbol given to Abraham, that he was to pass on to his descendants. He was to circumcise himself and his servants

and all of his children, because it was a symbol of the covenant God had made with Him.

But the meaning of that symbol had been twisted into something else, perverted. The theological symbol now with these Judaizers was that salvation is by ceremonies; it is by lawkeeping. And those who come under circumcision are devoting themselves to that idea. So men can be circumcised; women cannot. But a woman could come to believe that circumcision was necessary and a part of the gospel, and she too would come under this devotion to lawkeeping as a way of salvation.

Now circumcision itself is not the issue. It's a matter of indifference. The old theologians spoke of things that were adiaphora, matters of indifference – neutral actions. And that's true of circumcision. Paul didn't criticize people for being circumcised. He had been circumcised as a Jew, and he wasn't ashamed of his circumcision. And he would later circumcise Timothy, at least later from the standpoint historically of this book. Before he goes on his first missionary journey, he goes to southern Asia Minor. And there we read in Acts 16:3 that he circumcised Timothy. And the reason he circumcised Timothy was because Timothy would travel with him on this missionary journey and they'd be going into synagogues and he didn't want to give any offense to those to whom he preached.

And so to keep that from hindering the gospel, he had Timothy circumcised. But that had nothing to do with the gospel itself. Circumcision is, in and of itself, a non-issue. The issue here is the importance a person gives to circumcision. It is the theology of circumcision and salvation by works that is the issue.

The person who accepts circumcision as legal obligation or any ceremony – the Lord's supper or baptism – a person that accepts one of the ordinances, the sacraments, as necessary for salvation is indicating that lawkeeping is necessary for achieving righteous standing before God. That is a rejection of God's grace.

Christ gives full help to those who look to Him alone. He gives no help to those who rely on their works. Christ is all to a person or He is nothing. He is either all sufficient or He is not sufficient at all. He is not half a Savior or part Savior. He is the Savior. There's no middle ground. As Calvin put it, whoever wants to have a half-Christ loses the whole. Christ will be of no benefit to such people.

Now the Galatians had not yet taken that fatal step. Paul says, "If you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you." Well, that "if" is critical here. It indicates that they had not yet done it. They were moving in that direction, but they had not yet done it. They were still considering it. So there was still hope and Paul was seeking to rescue them from the wrong decision.

So in verse 3, he repeats the warning and reinforces it. "And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law." This is the second consequence or danger. Choosing circumcision is choosing legalism, which involves taking on the burden of the whole Law.

Earlier, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26, where Moses writes, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law to perform them." Now it's doubtful that these legalistic teachers had come to Galatia and told them that, that you have to be under the whole Law. They were just telling them about circumcision. They needed to be circumcised. So that's it. What they were doing was trying to draw these Galatians into their influence very gradually and subtly, draw them into this error bit by bit.

But Paul tells them the whole truth here. He tells them that if salvation is by works, then one work is not enough. Circumcision alone won't do. The whole legal system must be obeyed and kept perfectly, which of course is impossible.

But people don't realize that. They assume that God judges us by the same relative kind of standard that we judge each other by. Men have this tendency to imagine God in their own image. Pagans do that. We see that in the idols that they have. Their gods look like creatures.

Some of them look like men. The Greeks and the Romans made the statues of Zeus and Apollo and Hera, and all of the gods and goddesses like people. Their minds didn't rise above themselves. And really, what idolatry is, it's self worship. It's the worship of man.

But people who would say they worship the God of the Bible very often do that. We fall prey to that. When we think of God, we tend to think of Him in our own image, and so people think of God acting and dealing with men the way we deal with one another. And so they reason in their minds of how God will treat them and look upon them and say, "Well, after all, God knows that nobody's perfect. We all know that. And so He's lenient. After all, if I'm lenient, surely God's lenient. He's one who not only will take into account our successes of obedience, and basically my life is full of success in that way. But He'll also take in to the fact that when I fail, generally I've given it a good effort and I've tried, and so He'll look at me the way I look at other people."

But God says, no, no, if you are going to be saved by lawkeeping, circumcision alone or baptism alone is not enough. The whole Law, all 613 rules, are to be kept and to be kept perfectly, both in deed and thought. Your thoughts must be pure. Your motives must be pure. All of your deeds must be pure, correct, perfect. Absolute perfection is what the Law demands.

That should have concerned the Galatians. But if it didn't, then the third consequence would have. Paul says in verse 4, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

Back in 3:10, Paul said that those who seek justification by Law bring down on themselves the Law's curse, not God's blessing. Here he is saying that pursuing righteousness by means of the Law separates a person from Christ, separates a person from the Lord's influence and the benefits of His atonement. Then he adds the ominous words, "You have fallen from grace."

What does Paul mean by "fallen from grace"? It's a statement that's confused a lot of people. Many have interpreted those words to mean fallen from salvation, as if a person can be saved actually possess eternal life and then lose it and be lost forever. If the word "eternal life" means anything, then that's an impossibility. It's not eternal if it can be lost.

Nevertheless, that is what many people believe can happen and what they think "fallen from grace" means. But it is very important to pay attention to both the words and the context. Paul does not say, "You have fallen from salvation." He says fallen from grace, and there is a difference.

In fact, there is a sense in which to sin, to fall into sin, is to fall into grace. The Bible is filled with examples of saints who committed gross sins – murder, adultery, even denying the Lord. Moses, David, Peter are examples of that. Those people were not cast off by God – just the opposite. Grace rescued them. It saves the lost sinner and disciplines and restores the sinning saint. Grace is unconditional. It preserves the saint in salvation so that that salvation can never be lost.

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, or better, the perseverance of the savior and the preservation of the saints is a great doctrine of the Bible. It was especially dear to the apostle Paul. He stated his firm conviction of it in Romans 8:38, 39, that nothing at all can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. And that's just one example of where Paul makes that point very clearly and our Lord made the point clearly. John chapter 10, "No one can pluck us out of His hand."

But he does say here that a person can fall from grace. What does that mean? It means that a person can fall away from the principle of grace as the method of salvation. Grace itself is not salvation. It is the means or the way to salvation. So a person falls from grace by falling into legalism by adopting the way of works for salvation and abandoning the way of grace.

This is the danger that Paul warns of all through this book. Deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, the way of grace for a different gospel. That's how he begins 1:6. Now, ultimately a true believer cannot do that, and the Galatians had not yet done that. Paul believed they were true believers and would respond to his warnings. He had not given up on the Galatians.

So in these verses, verses 2-4, he was giving them a wake-up call to renounce legalism for the gospel before they took that fatal step. He then gives the essence of the gospel in verse 5 in order to support all that he has said. It is his last full statement of the principle of justification by faith in this letter. He writes in verse 5, "For we" – that is, we Christians, "through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."

In other words, we are waiting by faith for the future glory when full righteousness will be realized and we will be perfect, actually perfect. Not only positionally perfect before God, but it will be our experience. It will be the reality of our life. That's what we're waiting for.

But we wait for it. We don't work for it. It's not a matter of human effort, of striving to earn God's favor by our good deeds. We don't have to strive and we cannot strive successfully. We don't have the ability, so we can't do it. But we don't have to do it, because Christ has already done it. He's done everything that needs to be done. He's finished the work of salvation.

And so glorification is something we receive as a gift, just as justification is a gift. In fact, glorification is the natural outcome and result of justification. And the gift of it is indicated by the fact that our faith is, Paul says, through the Holy Spirit. It is through His life-giving power.

We don't generate our own faith. We don't generate our own faithfulness. It is supernaturally given. The Law can't do that. It works death. The Spirit gives life. He gives faith, and in giving faith, joins us to Christ and keeps us alive and waiting for the glorious promise of

the future. That's what happens through the Spirit. That preposition "through" signifies the grace of God.

So our hope has nothing to do with lawkeeping, with circumcision or ceremonies of any kind, or with uncircumcision. We might think as we read through this, "Well, it's really bad to be circumcised, and that means it's good to be uncircumcised." No, Paul's not saying that either.

Uncircumcision doesn't matter. That's Paul's point in verse 6. You're not better off without circumcision. The issue doesn't matter. What is important, what is essential, is faith. And not just faith, but Paul says faith working through love – faith that is alive, faith that bears fruit, bears the fruit of love.

When Paul rejects the Law as the basis of our justification and salvation and the means of our sanctification, he's not denouncing godly moral conduct. He's not suggesting that saving faith is belief and no works need to follow that faith or be involved in it – not at all. For Paul, for all of the apostles, true faith is a faith that works, and it can't be otherwise. It cannot be otherwise, because Christ is a Savior who works. His work of redemption for His people is the greatest work that has even been done and it is the greatest act of love that has ever been done, and it evokes love in us for Him and for others.

The love of Christ for us constrains us to love Him in return and love others as He did with the same kind of self-denying love. It cannot be otherwise, since by faith we are joined to Him, we are placed in Him. We thereby partake of His life, which is a life of love, and that life of Christ transforms us. Because we're in Him, we receive His life and it's a supernatural transformation that takes place.

So salvation is by faith, but genuine faith is living faith. It's faith that expresses itself in love, which is the expression of Christian freedom. We act in obedience because we want to, not because we have to.

Grace does not preclude works. It promotes works. You might think that, well, the legalist has this advantage on the man of grace.

He works harder. That's not the case at all. People who understand grace work harder than legalists, but work for them is not labor. It's service. It's service to God, it's service to men, it's what we want to do. It's what we need to do. It's within us to do that. So grace promotes works.

Now all of this anticipates the subject of the rest of the letter, the ethical section. Christian life is a life of grace. It is lived in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, who produces faith working in love. The Law does not work. The Lord does. He produces both the power and the motivation to live obediently.

And Paul will develop all of that in these last chapters, but He was not ready to go there yet. He first expresses His concern and hope for the Galatians and his condemnation of the Judaizers. In verse 7, he compares the Galatians' past progress with their present confusion. "You were running well," he says. "Who hindered you from observing the truth?"

Paul was fond of athletic metaphors, and if you read through the New Testament, read through his letters, you read of his statements about running and wrestling and boxing. He mentions these aggressive kinds of athletic endeavors to bring out the fact that the Christian life is an active life. In fact, it's combative in its nature – not in a bad sense; in a good sense. It calls for vigor. It calls for a life of discipline if it's going to be lived properly and well, of concentration and adherence to the rules and to the life of Christ.

And early on the Galatians showed all of that. They were like runners who began the race well. The gun went off, they heard the gospel, they believed it, and they began to run the race with vigor and they were running straight. They were running well. They not only believed the gospel, but they living it.

Then someone cut into their lane and forced them off the track, off their course. Now when we see that happen during a sporting event – and occasionally you see in a track meet, runners will collide. It's a

violent collision. They fall down, they're sprawled out on the track, they're skinned up, they're hurt, they're dizzy.

Well, that's what Paul is describing here, but he doesn't describe it as having happen violently as it might have in a race, but persuasively. It's how he describes this in verse 8. He describes this interference as a persuasion.

But it wasn't a persuasion from God. It wasn't from Him who calls you, he says. It was false. And to make his point, he quotes a proverb in verse 9. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." In other words, even a little bit of error spreads. It grows and infects everything, and it grows insidiously. It grows imperceptibly at first, until it completely takes over, just like yeast does in a lump of dough.

A little yeast does that, and little error does that. So really, there's no such thing as a little error. Oh, he just has a little heresy. There's no such thing as that. A small amount can do great damage, just as a spark can set off a forest fire. So the church, the church as a whole, the church in its individual parts – Christians personally must be on guard constantly for error in all of its forms. It is often persuasive. It's a persuasion, Paul says. It's persuasive and it begins small, but the consequences are not small. The consequences are catastrophic.

Benjamin Franklin put it this way: For want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe, the writer was lost; for want of a writer, the battle was lost; and for want of a battle, the kingdom was lost. All this for want of horseshoe nail.

Circumcision seems like a small thing, and it's persuasive. It's Biblical. Abraham was circumcised. The word of God commanded circumcision for those in Abraham's family and for the Jewish people. But wrongly taught, it is deadly. It brings a person under obligation to the whole Law and severs him from Christ.

Neglecting small errors results in big problems. Paul warns of that. But Paul didn't believe that error would triumph in the church or over the Galatians. And in verse 10 he states his confidence in them.

He believed that they would come to their senses and the false teachers would come to nothing and suffer judgment. "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."

Paul didn't seem to have any good reason in these Galatians. The Galatians were a weak vacillating people, under the spell of false teachers. They'd been swept away early on. He was amazed that they were so quickly deceived by all of this, he says at the beginning of the letter. There's little reason for him to have confidence in them.

But then Paul's confidence really was not in them. His confidence is in the Lord. "I have confidence in you in the Lord." And the Lord is faithful, even when we are not. We are all like sheep. We go astray. He is the good shepherd who goes out after His sheep and finds them. And those who are truly His will be found and they will be brought back into the fold. "My sheep, hear my voice. And they know Me and they follow Me."

Well, He goes out and gets the lost sheep through the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit does that through us. Later in 6:1, Paul will say, "You who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." The Lord works through us and Paul was confident that the Spirit of God would work through him to restore the Galatians to the truth, because he was confident that they were true believers.

God works through us to restore one another to the truth by the warnings that we give against error by alerting people to the error that they are in and that they are flirting with. And He does that by answering the issues that are raised and the challenges that are raised. And in verse 11, Paul does that. He responds to the false charges made by the Judaizers, because they accused Paul, and this is one way they tried to undermine or subvert his authority as an apostle.

They said that Paul preached circumcision when it suited him. Well, he'd go when he was preaching in the synagogue or to a Jewish group. He'd say, "Yeah, you've got to be circumcised." But when it

came to the Gentiles, he changed his message and cut out the part about circumcision in order to make the gospel easier to accept.

The charge was false, as Paul shows. He asks the question in verse 11. "If I still preach circumcision" as these false teachers claim, "then why am I still persecuted?" He suffered a lot for preaching a Law-free gospel. If he really did preach circumcision, then he would have gone along with what the Judaizers were saying and avoided all the trouble that he was experiencing.

Then he says, "The stumbling block of the cross has been abolished." He would have nothing to fear from men. He would have made is peace with the world. He would be giving them a gospel that they can accept, because preaching circumcision or lawkeeping tells men that they can save themselves and that they have personal merit and people want to hear that.

What men hate about the gospel is that they have nothing to offer God, that Christ alone saves, and that we must come to the foot of the cross with nothing but our sins and come humbly. In fact, if we add our works to Christ's work, we lose His work. Christ is of no benefit to us.

That's the scandal of the cross and that alone is what Paul preached. And the fact that he was persecuted is the proof of it. Paul has a final word for his persecutors who troubled the Galatians and tried to please men with their gospel, their man-pleasing gospel of faith plus works. He writes in verse 12, "I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves."

The word "mutilate" probably means emasculate, castrate, and that seems crude and shocking to our ears, but it clearly shows Paul's feeling toward false teaching and what he wanted for false teaching. Now Paul was saying in effect that since the Judaizers, these teachers of the Law, were so enamored of circumcision, they should go all the way and make eunuchs of themselves.

Is that disturbing? Does that disturb you to hear that Paul would say that? Well, maybe it is a little bit, but it makes the point.

Spiritually, circumcision adds nothing to salvation. In fact, it takes away. It emasculates.

Paul probably had in mind the Law's penalty for self-mutilation, which was excommunication. A person who was in that condition could not be a part of the congregation of Israel, couldn't come into the tabernacle area or the temple.

So he was wishing that these false teachers would be shut out from the Galatians. They'd lose their influence. It's rough language, but it puts circumcision in the right place. Now that the Law is ended and the old covenant is finished, circumcision is no more valuable than castration – rituals, ceremonies, works of any kind, add nothing to salvation. They cut people off from it.

The only way to be saved, and the only way to advance in salvation, in holiness and obedience and love, is through grace, in Christ and through the Spirit. And so we must avoid legalism and look to Christ. Salvation is only through Him. Sanctification is only through Him. Have you believed in Him? If not, look to Christ who died for sinners. Believe in Him and be saved. May God help you to do that and help all of us to understand the grace of God and appreciate that work in our lives and stand firm in the freedom that it gives us and to rejoice in it. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for that freedom with which Christ has set us free. We thank You for His work. We thank You for Your love for us that sent Your Son into the world to die for us, to bear all of our disobedience, to bear all of our sins, to fulfill all of the righteousness that we could not fulfill on our own works and efforts, to accomplish the whole work of salvation for us. We thank You for Him and thank You for giving us the faith to come to Him and giving us the faithfulness that keeps us in Him, give You all the credit, all the glory, and we pray these things in Christ name. Amen.