

Keep Running.  
Galatians 5:7-26

Romans 14  
Colossians 3:12-25

Last week we started in chapter 5 and covered the issue of Christian Liberty, Paul was warning the Galatians to Stand fast, do not be persuaded, or deceived into leaving the liberty that Christ had given them. This whole letter has pretty much built up to this point all the while arguing against the mosaic law and now he concludes that since we are not under the law we have liberty and are free from the law.

Paul throughout this book likens the Law to slavery, he says that those who put themselves under the old covenant are children of Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden and not the Children of the promise. They are not Abraham's heirs but rather they are cast out as Paul says in the end of Chapter 4, making the connection between Ishmael, Hagar's Son and anyone who seeks their own righteousness through the law.

Make no mistake here, Paul is saying that if you are not the spiritual children of Sarah, born of faith, by grace through Christ, Abraham's promised seed... then you are a slave, an outcast, an outsider, and will not inherit the Kingdom of God, to put simply you are lost, and outcast from God's family and your home is with your father, the devil.

One of the biggest dangers of the old covenant law and our understanding of it today is that people look to it for righteousness, but really it is a stumbling block and if you do not have the proper understanding of its purpose in scripture and how it applies to your life as a Christian you may fall into the trap of seeking your own righteousness instead of relying on God, and his imputed righteousness through his Son.

As Paul said in verse 4, If you seek to obey the old covenant laws, and put your trust in your own righteousness by your actions then you have become estranged, or separated from Christ. Friends, this is not a good place to be! In fact, I would argue that it is the worst places to be.

There are many people today, who just as the Judaizers in the churches in the bible did deceive themselves into believing that they are ok with God. This is a very dangerous place to be because these people see themselves as righteous. They attend Church, they talk of God, they pray, and from what we can see they seem to be very mature Christians who have everything together. But it ultimately does not matter what we can see, but all that really matter's is what God sees.

This should be a sobering thought, the possibility that many people sitting in our churches today, and many people claiming Christianity today are just as lost as anyone else. This is where the danger lies with teaching and promoting the old covenant laws for the Christian, for they believe themselves to be justified, righteous, and many very well maybe but we need to be careful that we do not fall into seeking out law, and tradition keeping for our righteousness as the Pharisee's did. Christ calls the Pharisee hypocrites, He said that outside they appear clean but inside, in their hearts they are full of sin.

Today we use the term pharisee to describe the way a person acts. Some one who is untrustworthy, 2 faced, dishonest. But we need to remember that was not the case in the time that the bible was written.

The Pharisees were a group of people, they were a sect of the Jews. Their name, actually means Separate ones in Greek. They were known to be the most pious of the Jews..the ones who kept the old covenant to the letter. When the other Jews were aligning themselves more with the what ever nation occupied them, the Pharisee's kept to the old traditions which is why they were known as the Separate Ones. They sought their justification through the law, through living what they believed was a a righteous life, but Christ called the hypocrites, brood of vipers, white washed tombs full of dead men's bones.

Of course people today won't identify as such, but there is a way where this mindset has crept in, and it is all centered around the Christians response to the law. As we talked about last week, we as people are always looking for a sign, for something to judge ourselves against, and the law is a convenient list for us to measure ourselves by. But the very people who look to this law as their guide for their Christian walk, may be just as the pharisees were....righteous in appearance, but dead inside. This is the danger of looking to the law, it creates a sense of piety, and if you are not careful will become the guide you use to judge others faith. How many times have we heard people say when confronted with the gospel, well I am a good person, I haven't stolen, or the easy one people like to use.. I haven't killed anyone. These are people who have deceived themselves... instead of looking to Christ, they look to their own list of morality and make a judgment, they deceive themselves that they are a good person, and God would never punish a good person. But they forget, who are they to determine what is right, good, and just? Often times we forget that we are the creature, the creating being and it is God who sets the standards and requirements not us.

So instead of trying to convince themselves of how good they are, they should admit that they are not good, and that nothing in them is good, and they need to be covered by Christs righteousness, for any they drum up themselves amounts to nothing before God.

I fear that this describes many people who sit in the church today. On Sunday, they put on their religious face but Monday through Saturday you couldn't tell them from anyone else in the world.

This is a dangerous place to be, trusting in your own works, your own righteousness because as Paul says....you will become separated from Christ, and you have fallen from Grace. I think this is a very important thing that we need to think upon and examine for ourselves as Christians. So many people who claim Christ want to put upon others a list of do's and don'ts or dictate what they should do, how they should act, and oppress people just as the Judaizers were doing to the Galatians, and in doing so they cause many to fall away, or lead many into believing things that are not true.

So we need to be careful that we do not focus to much on the old covenant, things like keeping of the Sabbath as specific day, following church traditions. Because this can take our focus away from Christ, I have heard it put this way....Moses, and the law taught us of the Christ to come, but now that Christ has come he points us back to Moses and the law. I am sorry, but this is completely wrong, Christ is the center, and all things point to him!! He did not come so that we can now fulfill the law, he came to free us from it!

And it is in this freedom that Paul says.. to stand fast.

So picking up now in verse 7, Paul says, You ran well, Who hindered you from obeying the truth? Paul often uses the metaphor of a race in his various writings. He likens the Christian life as a race, to which we are all running., and he says to the Galatians...who hindered you, or tripped you up from running in this race? He reminds them, again, that these doctrines being taught by the false teachers do

not come from God. But rather they were on the right track, believing in Christ and resting in him for their salvation until the Judaizers came along and tripped them up bringing in their Jewish traditions and laws.

He says in verse 9, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. If you have ever made bread, you know that the amount of yeast you add to the other ingredients is an incredibly tiny amount compared to everything else...yet it is the yeast that causes the bread to rise and become bread instead of a crunchy, thick, hard cracker. The bible often uses the term leaven as a metaphor to sin. Something that seems to us to be small, yet effects every part of our life. Just as there is a very obvious effect of leaven in bread, there are effects of the sin's in our life. I think here though, Paul is not using this as a metaphor for sin this time, in the context of the letter I believe he is talking about the effect of false doctrine.

We need to be careful, always checking, and always watching that what we believe is from scripture and true. If we look at the implication of what a person believes we can see how the leaven metaphor is so true. A person who order's their life around obeying God's law will live a life of legalism, will demand a life of legalism to all those around them. The same can be true to the other extreme. One of the growing beliefs we see today is that God loves everyone and in the end as long as we did more good than bad we will all be in heaven. This is the same issue, while one person order's their life around regulations and law, the other lives their life paying hardly any mind toward God because in the end God will reward them for all the good they did. We can see how important it is to have correct doctrine and belief. Both of these ideas, while on completely opposite sides make the same mistake. It is a misunderstanding of scripture, they are both wrong doctrine, and leaven that effects the entire life of a person.

We all tend to put a grid over our understanding of the bible. And it is those grids as to why there are so many different churches who all identify as Christian. The Reformed use the old covenant as a grid, and try to make the whole bible fit into that covenant. The Dispensationalists use a literal understanding of scripture and it ends up changing completely how they interpret what they read and they draw a hard line between Israel and the church. Then we have those that are nothing more then motivational speakers trying to excite you to be faithful. We can see how it becomes so important to seek out what scripture says, instead of just following a system of belief or what a person tells us to believe. While some may have some things right, they do not have everything right and we need to be careful that the little leaven in their teaching does not change how we look at scripture.

The Jews saw everything through the old covenant, through Moses and Abraham. But Paul says that they have completely missed the point and he uses scripture to interpret scripture to point them in the right direction.

This is something that I have been learning and it has greatly changed my life. First and fore most is to let scripture interpret scripture. Test things, do not just believe something because you were told that is what scripture says. Study it out, see if it proves itself to be true, or if it proves itself to be leaven. Challenge your grid, if you read something that does not seem to align with what you believe study it out, challenge yourself to see if what you believe aligns with scripture or not.

After Paul warns us about the dangers of false doctrine and how just a little untruth can spread and effect our entire belief system he goes on to warn those who teach.. He tells the Galatians that who ever troubles them will bear his judgment. This should cause every person who teaches to tremble. We need to be sure that what we say, what we believe aligns with the truth of the gospel, and that we are not spreading false doctrines, creating false faith, for we will be judged for it. To use the metaphor here

in the verse, we need to be sure that there is no leaven in our teaching.

Continuing on in verse 10 I find Paul's statement here interesting. He says, I have confidence in you, in the Lord that you will have no other mind. I find it interesting because up until this point he says he worries for them, he says he worries that he has labored for them in vain. That in the end their faith will prove out to be false. And now here he says he has confidence in them. But I think the key part of this phrase is , in Christ. For Paul knows that all who are in Christ have the holy spirit and are able to discern the truth from false teaching. He has confidence that now they have been taught correctly that they will turn from the false doctrines and beliefs of these false teachers and will once again be back in the race, and the false teachers will face judgment for what they were teaching, Continuing Paul's metaphor of a race here, he is saying that just as a person who trips others that are running in a race will be disqualified, it is the same for those who teach falsely and trip up God's people, they will be disqualified and not gain the prize.

He continues this idea in verse 12. Paul says that he wishes these men who are teaching the Galatians that they must become Jews through circumcision would cut themselves off. This is a very harsh statement by Paul, and I think points to how important it is to not be caught up in false doctrines. One commentator I read said that Paul was likely referring to an old testament law that Eunuchs were not allowed to enter the temple, so what Paul really was saying here was that he wished that they would be cut off from the church. While I think there is a way that it could be understood as being cut from the church I think to not take what he says at face value and trying to smooth it over loses the impact, and his purpose here.

Throughout this entire book Paul has been hammering home 1 thing. Salvation is by God's free grace, through faith in his son, who was promised to Abraham. If someone seeks to be justified any other way, they are cut off from God. To understand this point, helps us to understand why Paul would use such harsh words. It would be better that these men would cut themselves off, and live by faith then to rely on their tradition and heritage and works for their salvation.

Moving on to verse 13, Paul says that we have been called to liberty, but do not use this liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. It is the idea that since we are not under the law, we can live like we want. It is this idea that creates the idea I mentioned earlier. In the end, God will just weigh our good from our bad and we will all enter heaven. But Paul is warning us against that, do not use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh in other words.. sin. So how do we do that? How do we live our lives as Christians then. He answers that in the last part of this verse...do not use your liberty to sin, but rather serve each other in love.

The idea here is expanded in Paul's teaching to the Roman's. It is what we read this morning. Paul says in verse 14 of chapter 14.. I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love, Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

This is the answer for the Christian as to what is their guide. Paul says that all of the law is fulfilled in one word, love your neighbor as yourself. Does your neighbor hold Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, but you understand that Christ is our Sabbath rest... do not let your liberty on that day grieve him because you decide to go and mow your lawn. Paul instructs us to put aside our liberty for others, for in doing so we live out a life in love. The important fact of this, is this type of sacrificial love is not of ourselves. It can only be through Christ and his love toward us which was shown on the cross.

This type of love goes against our nature. By nature we seek our own good, we seek our own desires and rarely will we let someone else's life, or someone else's needs hinder us from what we want.

We are to look to Christ for everything, for our salvation, for our righteousness, for our justification, and for how we are to live our life as Christians. The love of Christ through us is our mark, our measure of our faith and should be flowing out of us.

If we look at the 10 commandments we can see how love fulfills these requirements Love the Lord your God, honor your mother and father, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet. If you love your parents, you will honor them, if you love those around you, you will not murder, you will not steal, you will not bear false witness and you will not covet for you will be seeking the best for those you love instead of your own interest. And in this way, as Paul says the law is fulfilled.

It is important to note, just as we can not drum up our own righteousness through the law, we can't be justified by our love. Our justification before God comes only through Christ, and faith in him. The love that we show, is Christ's love flowing out of us. It does not justify us, it does not make us holy but rather is just the out flowing of what we are.

Paul says in verse 16, Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh, for the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh and these are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish but if you are led by the spirit you are not under the law.

This is just another way of saying the same thing he said in Romans. If you are led by the spirit you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. Our flesh desires to serve ourselves, but the spirit desires to serve Christ. Through the spirit we will love our neighbors, we will not seek our own selfish desires but we will seek what God wants for our lives.

Paul lists what the works of the flesh are, and contrasts them with the works of the Spirit. He says the works of the flesh are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like and those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the works of the spirit is Love, Joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control against such there is no law. And those who are Christs have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, if we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit.

If you are Christs, the holy spirit will work all these things through you. But once again, it is of Christ, not of ourselves, these are just the signs, or the outflow of a person who is living a life in Christ. And if Christ is in you, and his love is working through you in this way, then you truly are free, you are free to serve him because you understand that nothing you have is yours. He has given you life, faith, the holy spirit, love, peace, joy, understanding. He is our father, and we are his children. We should run the race, as such.