

## Pitfalls – Gal 5:7-15

Before we get going, I want you to know about some travel Becky and I will be doing  
We're leaving for **Romania** this afternoon, to spend a week at the HTC in Europe  
The purpose for which, is to teach and download as much as we can about church  
planting, leadership, marriage, and ministry;

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of that training center, and there are **7 couples** from 7 different  
countries represented; From Cameroon and Greece, to Serbia and Ukraine  
And b/c the wives are there, Becky will be teaching as much as I am  
It's all a part of the work God is doing over there, and just to give you a glimpse of it,  
check out this short **video** (HU Europe) from Kirk Vanmaanen with our Fellowship

In addition to being at the Training Center, we'll also travel to **Harvest Targu Mures**  
where I'll be *preaching* next weekend; A church about 1½ years old  
So if you would pray for us, that'd be great; Certainly for health and safety, but  
especially for impact/connection; We want to be a blessing

➤ **Gal 5:7-15 (Title Slide)**; We're studying the book of Galatians, b/c the truths are  
absolutely foundational for our life and faith  
Including the truth, that pitfalls often *accompany* our faith; Snares, snags, dangers

We're planning on visiting the Grand Canyon this summer, and Becky has started to look  
at some of the ways to see it; And one of the riskier she found . . .  
Is on the back of *donkeys* as they take you down the *cliffs*

And I'm like, "Uh, no;" First of all, I'm a bit *scared* of heights, especially *unprotected*  
ones; And 2<sup>nd</sup>, there are too many potential *pitfalls*  
Like the donkey not being able to handle my weight; Or a rock giving way at just the  
wrong time; Or me being so nervous I lose my mind; Pitfalls abound

➤ And the same is true of our life in Christ  
Not that they should keep us from *experiencing* such a life, but that we need to preempt  
them and counter them when they arise; That's the point; V7

[7] *You were running well* [Paul says; *Were*]. *Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*  
[8] *This persuasion* [to disobey] is not from him who calls you. [9] *A little leaven*  
*leavens the whole lump*. [10] *I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other*  
*view*; Let's stop there

The first pitfall that Paul addresses here, is **disobedience**; And the implication is this . . .  
**If you've lost your stride, renew your commitment (v7-10a)**

If you've stumbled in your walk with Christ, if you're no longer running the race set  
before you – renew your commitment

[7] *You were running well* [Paul says]; You were living obediently  
So take my view and *renew* your commitment; That's the idea; That's the implication

➤ There are lots of good comeback stories in the world of running, but **Lassie Virén** takes  
the cake (<http://mensrunninguk.co.uk/news/six-best-comebacks/>)  
At the Munich Games in 1972, Virén was part of an elite group of runners from  
Finland, known as the "Flying Finns;" Who knew?

And while running in the 10,000m event (**fall photo**), he fell just before the midpoint of  
the race, after colliding with Emiel Puttemans; IOW he was *hindered* as Paul says it  
And for all intents and purposes, he was out; Done

But defying the odds, Virén got up, renewed his commitment, and started running  
And somehow, finding his stride, he began to catch up; And with a lap and a half to go,  
he went into a full sprint; After running *6 miles (win photo)*  
And not only won the gold, but set a new world record

➤ If that's you, or *when* that's you – b/c we all stumble, we all disobey – renew your  
commitment; When you've lost your stride in the race God has marked out for you . .  
Get up, find it, and renew your devotion; Your dedication to the Lord\*\*\*\*\*

Which is easier said than done, but Paul gives us 4 ways to do so right here; First . . .

### • **Embrace the truth (7b)**

[7] *You were running well*. *Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*

We don't obey the truth often times, b/c we don't embrace the truth

We *know* it's true, but we don't make it a part of our thinking; We don't accept it as  
true for *us*; Boy is *that* the spirit of the age; We don't adopt it as our own

Whether it's the truth of how we're *saved*, like it was for the Galatians; Or the truth of  
how to *live*, as *saved people*

Either way, if you've lost your stride, if you've fallen in disobedience, renew your  
commitment to embrace the truth; Right now

2<sup>nd</sup> . . .

### • **Do what's right (7b)**

No matter how hard, how painful, or how lonely – do what's right; Do what's best; Obey  
It would have done Lassie Viren no good if he only *thought* he could win, but did  
nothing about it

If you're going to renew your commitment to the Lord after stumbling and falling, you  
can't be a hearer *only*, you have to be a doer; You have to *do* what's right

3<sup>rd</sup> . . .

### • **Listen to the Lord (8)**

[8] *This persuasion* [v8; this adverse influence] is not from him who calls you.

It's *not* from the Lord; The one who calls you to a life of *truth*; A life of obedience

The persuasion to sin or the inclination to drift, is *never* from the Lord; It's from men  
and the powers of darkness behind them (Gal 4:8-9)

Which means you need to stop *listening* to them

If you've lost your stride and need to renew your commitment – stop listening to the  
world, and start listening to God

Stop listening to Satan, and start listening to the Spirit

Stop listening to people who *tickle* your ears, and start listening to those who fear the  
Lord; And hear from the Lord; That's how you renew your *commitment*

And then 4<sup>th</sup> . . .

### • **Get rid of bad influences (9)**

All of them; B/c *a little leaven* [v9; just a little] *leavens the whole lump*.

A little yeast works itself through the entire dough; A little sin infects the whole person

➤ Becky and I have some friends who run an outdoor expedition ministry, and more than any other person in the world, Steve Higgins used to stir me up . . .  
And get me to do things I'd *never* do on my own  
Climbing boulders; Body surfing among rocks; Nearly drowning doing so; Driving through sugar cane to get to a beach; Cliff jumping; And the list goes on

Fortunately, Steve's a believer; B/c if he wasn't, he'd be a *very* bad influence on me  
Somebody I'd have to get rid of; Somebody I couldn't hang around

➤ Anyone like that in *your* life? Somebody who influences you to *sin*? Brings you down?  
Gets you to do things or think things you *shouldn't*?  
Boyfriend? Girlfriend? Co-worker? Family member?  
If so, you need to get rid of them; You need to *divest* yourself of adverse influences  
Even small ones; B/c whether you want to admit it or not, they *have* an effect; A cumulative effect

So let me just say it straight:

- (A) Stop associating with people who lead you astray; Whether by unbiblical *teaching*, or ungodly living
- (B) Stop exposing yourself to marginal media; *Those* kinds of influences
- (C) Stop rationalizing that you can handle it; B/c all it takes is *a little* leaven, and your whole life is soiled

That's the *first* pitfall Paul addresses – disobedience (**Summary**)  
And if you've lost your stride b/c of it – renew your commitment

➤ The 2<sup>nd</sup> pitfall, is **false teaching**; V10-12  
[10] *I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. [11] But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. [12] I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!*  
Whoa! If you thought false teaching wasn't an *issue*, think again

And if you want to avoid it . . .

**Be careful what you teach, and practice what you preach (v10b-12)**

In *any* setting; Whether it's your family as a parent, your friends as a peer, your Small Group as a leader, or your church as a pastor  
Be careful that what *you* think and say, is what *God* thinks and says  
Be careful that the worldview you pass on, is God's view; A *biblical* worldview  
Referring to the lens or grid through which you view and assess the world  
Make sure it's Christ-centered and biblically-based; Otherwise you'll *inadvertently* teach falsehoods, and practice them *unknowingly*; The worst of *both* worlds

➤ Like when parents elevate *education*, more than *sanctification*  
Emphasizing good grades and a good degree, more than love for the Lord and a passion for his church  
Will it help me get a good grade? A good degree? A good job? Advancement?  
It's an *education*-based worldview, instead of a *Bible*-based worldview  
So that pretty soon, the student desires *grades* more than *God*  
Happens all the time; We *inadvertently* teach *falsehoods*, & practice them *unknowingly*

➤ How about you? What do *your* priorities teach?  
Not what do you *say*, but what do you *do*? What do you practice? Emphasize; Celebrate  
Is it education, or sanctification? Sports, or Jesus? Conservatism, or the mind of Christ?  
Politics, or the church?  
Not that those things are mutually exclusive; But that they're wrongly stressed at times, by what we practice and preach

➤ And we need to be careful of that, b/c there are consequences; Including the discipline and disdain of God; Something Paul expresses in no uncertain terms  
V12 – *I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!*  
I wish those who lead you astray, those who teach you wrongly, those who influence you poorly – would *castrate* themselves; Not literally of course, but figuratively  
It's a play on words; Think about it

Given the topic of *circumcision*, Paul *extends* the imagery to say he wishes they'd go all the way; Rendering themselves impotent and *powerless* as teachers  
Just like a castrated man is impotent to have children; And powerless to act on his impulses

The point being – be careful what you teach; In any setting  
B/c the consequences are real; Including the discipline and disdain of God

➤ And by all means, literally, practice what you preach; Like Paul did; V11  
*But if I, brothers* [as opposed to the *false* teachers], *still preach circumcision* [like I did before I came to Christ], *why am I still being persecuted?*  
*In that case* [preaching circumcision; a works-based salvation] *the offense of the cross has been removed.* (11)  
It's Paul's way of saying that he practices what he preaches; He *does* what he's telling *us* to do; Namely, preach the truth  
And he *proves* that he's doing it, by citing the *persecution* he endures

Which *wouldn't* have been the case, he *wouldn't* have been persecuted, if he were preaching justification by *works*; Like the *false* teachers among them  
B/c there's no *offense* in that  
There's no offense when people aren't convicted to humble themselves, and admit that *their* work and *their* life, is *insufficient* in God's eyes  
And only Christ's work on the *cross*, is

➤ *That's* when people take offense; *That's* when people scoff; *That's* when people take their ball and bat; And if they do, so be it  
Not that we *want* them to; Not that we *want* to offend them  
But that preaching and practicing the truth is more important

As much as it pains us, that *has* to be our mindset  
B/c the *truth*, is far more important than their presence, their comfort, their "likes"  
It was for Paul, and it should be for us

➤ So be careful – careful what you teach, and careful what you model  
B/c false teaching is subtle a pitfall, that has very real consequences  
*I have confidence* [Paul says] *that the one who's troubling you will bear the penalty* (10)

➤ And then last, the *last* pitfall Paul addresses, is **license** – doing whatever you want; V13 After condemning those who tried to impose undue constraints, Paul gives the reason [13] *For you were called to freedom, brothers* [you were saved for the purpose of being free]. *Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh* [your sin nature; your tendency to indulge in what’s wrong], *but through love serve one another.* [14] *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* [15] *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

The pitfall is license, and the principle is that . . .

**We’re free to serve, not sin (v13-15)**

The *freedom* to which we’re called, in v13, is release from doing good *works* to be saved, in order to trust *Jesus* to be saved; We’re free

But *not* to do whatever we want; And certainly not to satisfy the desires of our flesh That’s license; And we shouldn’t even give those tendencies an *opportunity* Paul says; An *opportunity* to do something wrong (13); An *opportunity* to sin We’re free to *serve*, not *sin*

➤ And notice that word *opportunity*; V13; It translates a Greek word that was originally used in a military sense, to denote a *beachhead* or base of operations Like the **US military landings** in WWII, at Normandy, and Iwo Jima, and Okinawa Massive operations on our part, to take advantage of an opportunity, gain a foothold, and expand inland

All of which were met by massive *defenses*, on the part of the enemy; From bulwarks and fortifications, to artillery and mines; Which is why the toll of *lives* was so high It’s a classic example that the best offense, is often a good defense And though the Axis powers failed, thankfully, we can’t\*\*\*\*\*

We’re *free* in Christ, but not in the sense of allowing our sinful desires to establish a *beachhead* in our lives; We *must* hold the high ground B/c if we fail, the sin will spread like an enemy invader, and rule our lives So **vigilance is paramount**; The 1<sup>st</sup> of 6 truths here regarding this principle Vigilance is paramount

➤ As is, *serving*; Serving one another through love; That’s the rest of the verse *Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh* [to indulge in what’s wrong], *but through love serve one another.* We’re not *saved* to be selfish or self-absorbed; Nor to be purely *defensive* in life

**We’re saved to serve**; That’s #2; We’re saved to *give* of ourselves We’re saved to *minister* to one another; And build one another up; Teaching, admonishing, encouraging, and sharpening each other *That’s* what our freedom is for; To serve

➤ And **you have to be intentional**; #3

You won’t *have* those opportunities to teach, encourage, and bless – unless you put yourself in *situations* of serving; *Regularly*; As in every week Like in Harvest Kids; Or Harvest Students; Service Teams; Mid-week ministries

You have to be intentional about it

And if you don’t want to – you don’t *want* to serve the church, you don’t *want* minister to your brother or sister in Christ – you better take a look at your heart B/c it’s either void of love in the first place, the love of God, or you’ve given sin an *opportunity*; A beachhead right under your nose

➤ 4<sup>th</sup>, **love is the law**; *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word* [v14]: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” You shall treat others as you would tend to treat yourself Frist spoken in the *Old* Testament, and reiterated in the New To say that love is the law no matter *what* the covenant

But here, under the New Covenant, we’re actually *empowered* to love; Love is the law, and **we’re empowered to keep it** B/c the love of Christ has been poured into our hearts, so that we overflow to others His love becomes our love, and we actually *desire* to love one another Which is #6 – **we want to**; Love is the law, we’re empowered to keep it, and we actually want to

➤ You know what that spells? Freedom; When you’re *empowered* to do something, and you *want* to do it, you’re free Like an employee who’s empowered to do their *job*, the very way they *want* to That’s freedom; Freedom to serve, through love

➤ If we’re going to avoid the pitfall of license, we have to have that mindset B/c the alternative, the default, is **Mutually Assured Destruction**; Which spells MAD V15 – “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” [15] *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.* If you’re mad at each other, be careful you don’t destroy one another Which is mad-ness; The *worst* of license

It happens in families; It happens in friendships; Marriages; Churches; Even countries Where people express hatred instead of love; Selfishness instead of service It’s the epitome of *license*, and the antithesis of *freedom*; The freedom to which we’re called (**Summary**)

➤ So no matter how you slice it, pitfalls abound – from disobedience and false teaching, to license and hatred; Which means we *must* beware The cliffs are steep, the race is on, the consequences real, and the attacks constant

**Pray** – Lord, in your presence there is freedom; And all we want and all we need, is found in you; We know that; So forgive us when we fall; And hear our prayers now to renew our commitment; Reveal our errors in what we teach and model; And give us a greater glimpse of a greater love; That we might serve others for their joy, and your glory The same reasons we give now of our tithes