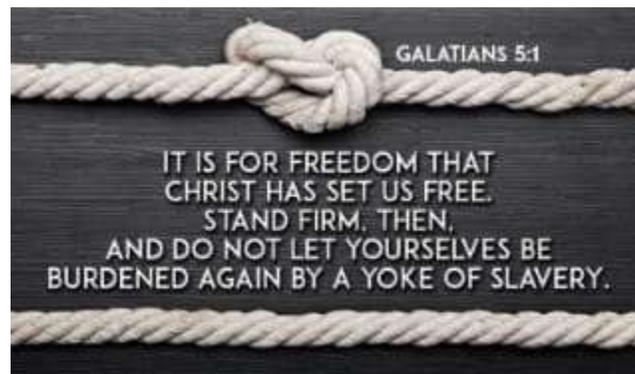


## LESSON ON GALATIANS May 22, 2019

### Galatians 5:2-12

For the first time, Paul named the specific issue that caused such a strong response from him. Galatians were considering circumcision (Paul just referred to it in Chapter 2). Paul believed it would negate any benefit the Galatians might have received from Christ. For Paul it was a step that would lead them back into slavery. Here Paul states that our allegiance must be with the Law or with the Gospel. To choose circumcision voluntarily was to deem Christ insufficient. Circumcision created an obligation to obey the whole Law.



In contrast, Paul seeks the hope of righteousness through faith (also found in Romans 8:18-25). Capacity to wait in eager anticipation is sustained by the Spirit and by faith. Faith working through love is what Jesus did on the cross. Faith working through love is the only thing that matters in the new creation. Church is called to embody this faith working through love and through the story of the cross. Demand for circumcision was completely irrelevant to this calling.

Vs. 5-6 portray his positive vision of the community of faith.

In vs. 7 his thoughts return to the Galatians who have stumbled and are losing their vision. Galatians were like runners thrown off stride by another runner cutting into their path. Effect of the interferences has been to divert the Galatians from obeying the truth. Church should take action to preserve its integrity by removing the cancer before it spreads. Such teachings were not from God and they must be rooted out before they corrupt all of them. Paul was confident that the Galatians would take his side on the matter and act accordingly.

In vs. 11 Paul rebuts the insinuation that he has advocated circumcision in other churches. His continued harassment demonstrates that the accusation is false. In any case if he started advocating circumcision it would be a repudiation of the gospel. The very thought that the missionaries misrepresented him caused Paul to be angry. Paul went to a rhetorical extreme to attack his opponents. It showed how strongly he felt about the issues under debate.

### **Galatians 5:13-15**

Up to this point in the letter, the Law was depicted as the instrument of slavery.  
Now the Law assumes a positive goodness in that *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*.  
Paul has proposed a new and different reading of the Law in light of the gospel.  
Law has gone through a transformation so that it now becomes a witness to the gospel.  
Christ came to fulfill the Law in his teachings and through his death.  
Galatians were invited to participate in the fulfilling of this new Law through loving service.  
They were to mirror the love of Jesus.  
Theological logic for this teaching is also found in Romans 8:3-4.  
Being conformed to Christ meant becoming slaves to one another.

Paul returned to the reality they faced in the Galatian churches.  
New indication is that the church is struggling with internal problems of rivalry and dissension.  
He returned to this struggle in vs. 26.  
Image is one of a vicious dogfight in which the Galatians are snapping at one another.  
It portrays a scenario of an escalating conflict that could end in their destruction.  
Paul feared that the *flesh* would gain the upper hand in Galatia.

### **Galatians 5:16-26**

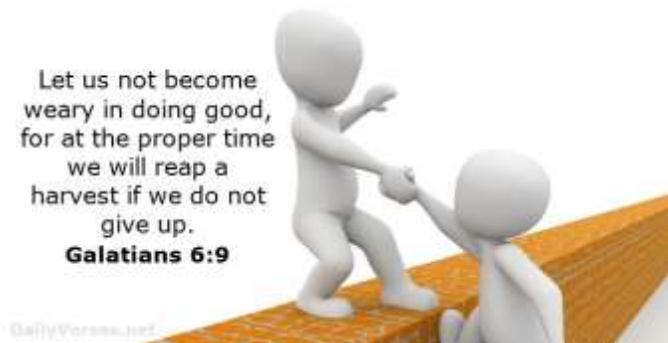
Paul now talks about how the community can receive moral guidance in the absence of the Law.  
One complies with the Law by walking by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.  
For Paul the Spirit and the flesh are fundamentally opposed.  
Those who walk by the Spirit will receive the empowerment necessary to subdue the flesh.  
Galatians are not free to follow their own whims and do whatever they want.  
As they walk in the Spirit they have clarity of purpose.  
Spirit provides strong leadership and direction in the world that is an eschatological war zone.

No reason to be confused because the works of the flesh are obvious.  
We do not need the Law to identify them.  
Paul lists fifteen works of the flesh which is not meant to be comprehensive.  
In the middle are eight words that highlight dissension against the unity of the community.  
Primary concern is for the unity and peace of the Galatian churches.  
It emphasizes that the works of the flesh are not just sensual vices.  
List is not about how to develop a virtuous character and avoid bad habits.  
It has an eschatological warning:  
Those who practice in the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In contrast to the works of the flesh the Spirit produces the singular *fruit* of a community.  
It is the way the work of the Spirit is made manifest in community.  
It is illustrative and not meant to be comprehensive.  
It is not an exhortation to cultivate these qualities.  
Emphasis is on the peaceful and community-bearing character of the work of the Spirit.  
Paul is painting a picture of the harvest the Spirit produces.  
Also note that fruit grows as God gives the growth.  
List begins with *love* and ends with *self-control*.  
Love (produced by the Spirit) sets the tone for all that occurs in the community life.

Self-control is a word that appears only in the letters of Paul.  
It is set in deliberate contrast to the drunken revelry that concludes the works of the flesh.

The Spirit is the power that gives life.  
Paul exhorts the Galatians to keep in step with the Spirit.  
Paul urgently calls them to recover their humility and unity under the guidance of the Spirit.



### **Galatians 6:1-10**

In the final section of Paul's pastoral counsel to the Galatians he offered brief directives. Specific practices included mutual correction, self-examination, and financial support. Paul considered the church to be an extended family. Because they bear responsibility for one another they cannot allow others to go astray. They have an obligation to hold one another accountable to live as faithful followers of Christ. At the same time correcting sinning members must be exercised with gentleness and humility. Discipline is to reflect the character of God. Church must have guidelines for how to respond to such situations.

To be spiritual means to act for the mending of the community, the recovery of peace and order. Verb used to restore (katartizō) is the same Greek word used for mending fishing nets. Paul is concerned not only that the word of correction be spoken but *how* it is spoken. Mutual correction could lead to prideful abuse. We may be most condemning of those failings to which we ourselves are most susceptible. To bear the burden of another is to share the stresses and sorrows of others. If the Galatians bear the burdens of others then they will fulfill the Law of Christ. Christ took possession of the Law and transformed it.

Paul warned the Galatians against boasting.  
They were not to compare themselves with each other and/or boast to each other.  
They were to conduct a sober self-assessment and keep their boasting to themselves.  
Person who corrected another must scrutinize his or her own motivations carefully.  
We are to remember that it is God we are dealing with here.  
We are not to think that we can get away with anything for God judges everything in the end.  
We are to place our confidence and our hope in the working of the Spirit.  
In light of the promise that we will reap eternal life from the Spirit, we are not to give up.  
Emphasis on *good works* shows that Paul is not opposed to human efforts to do the right thing.

Earlier points against the works of the Law were against the Mosaic Law. However, our efforts to do good are to point to God working in us. Paul also expands the sphere of moral concern to the world at large. Reconciling work had to begin at home within the community of believers. As long as rivalry and envy prevailed the work of God was hindered.

### **Galatians 6:11-18**

To conclude the letter, Paul added a postscript written in his own hand. It was a common practice in Hellenistic letters. In this case it functioned as a means to drive home the central points one more time. He wrote with urgency and passion. Absent were the normal good wishes to various individuals in the community. Remember that in the opening the words of thanksgiving were also absent.

Paul launched an immediate attack on the rival missionaries. He alleged they were urging the Galatians to be circumcised to make themselves look good. Of course the missionaries would have a very different account of their motives. Galatians would have to decide who is to be trusted. Contrasting himself to these boastful missionaries, Paul only boasts of the cross of Jesus Christ. Cross ended the old order of things. It is the world that has been crucified, not just our perception of the world. A new reality has been brought into existence that determines the destiny of the whole creation. The God who created the world has come to reclaim and transform it.



Paul not only proclaimed the salvation of souls but the redemption of all of creation. In this new creation, the pressure from the missionaries made no sense. It was their attempt to reenter a symbolic world that had been obliterated by the cross. Paul began the letter with a curse on those who perverted the gospel. Paul ended with a blessing on those who were reading his letter. However, he formulated the blessing on conditional terms. Blessing was for those who followed the Spirit and were guided by the Spirit. Blessing was deeply traditional and Jewish in character (peace and mercy). Word for rule (kanōn) referred to a measuring stick. Paul used it metaphorically to speak of the measure of truth and conduct.

Paul's battle scars showed his integrity and the truth of his message. Paul had undergone persecution gladly and repeatedly for the sake of the gospel. Before he signed off Paul did offer the Galatians a simple benediction. However, Paul adds one word that does not appear in other letters (adelphoi). He addressed his readers as brothers and sisters. He affirmed a continuing hope that they would not turn away from the gospel. He wanted them to remain his brothers and sisters within the family of faith.

### **New Bible Study Series**

#### **Book of Psalms**

Lessons will be based on Hebrew Bible

June 5	Psalm 1-20	Book 1
June 12	Psalm 21-41	Book 1
June 19	Psalm 42-57	Book 2
June 26		
July 3	Psalm 57-72	Book 2
July 10	Psalm 73-81	Book 3
July 17	Psalm 82-89	Book 3