

A Detour to Disaster

Galatians 5:7-12

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
www.branchofhope.org
branchofhope@juno.com
12/1/2002*

A Detour to Disaster

Galatians 5:7-12

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸ This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰ I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. ¹¹ And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. ¹² I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Three subjects within this passage to which we will pay particular attention this morning are false guidance, the offense of the cross, and Paul's imprecatory wish.

False Guidance

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸ This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump. (Galatians 5:7-9).

There'd be a Sign

I remember seeing a cartoon where two people were slowly sinking in quicksand. The one said, "I think this is quicksand." The other replied, "No, there would be a sign if this were quicksand." To which the other replied, "It seems like quicksand." Again, the other said, "I can't believe they wouldn't have put up a sign." This went on until all that was left were their hats.

There is often no sign. At times the signs are unclear. And occasionally the signs are just wrong. Some young men were recently convicted of manslaughter for the prank of altering traffic signs which resulted in a fatal accident.

A Redirection

The Christians in Galatia started out strong and fast. But they came to a fork in the road which hindered them from continuing in the truth. The *Greek* of this passage means, literally, "hinder by breaking up a road."¹ We all know how

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. 1997. *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ga 5:7). Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

annoying and inconvenient it can be to run into a detour, especially if, after following the new signs we find we have not arrived at our desired destination.

We make the assumption that the same authority that built the streets in the first place also placed the proper detour signs for our benefit. Such was not the case in the churches of Galatia. Their redirection was not according to the will of God but someone else – false teachers in the church.

Beware the Leaven

Let us not think that simply because someone bears the name of Christ, he is to be trusted. Children can be easily fooled by someone impressing them with honorable motives. The kindly beseeching a child to help find a lost puppy has had tragic consequences. The enemy of the church does not always appear with horns and a tail; he writes Christian books and speaks at Christian conferences.

The most dog-eared Bible in my library is a study Bible which I have come to believe to be laden with error. I remember in a Bible study a person referring to the commentary in their study Bible and resting as if the comments made by the author were the end of the discussion. They didn't make much of a distinction between the text of the Holy Scripture and the comments of the editor.

As much as we cry *sola scriptura*, we tend to *de facto* embrace a very Romish view of Christianity when we allow the comments of Christian leaders to reach a position where they are coordinate, rather than subordinate to the text. Rome not only tells us what the text *is* with infallible authority, but what it *means* with infallible authority. Heaven forbid!

It Only Takes a Little

The leaven is the leaven of false doctrine (Matthew 16:12). And it only takes a little bit of leaven to affect an entire loaf. We pray for wisdom to see the influence of worldly thinking in the church. For even the smallest lie can have devastating consequences. "For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the rider was lost; for want of a rider the battle was lost; and for want of a battle the kingdom was lost. All this for want of a horseshoe nail" (Benjamin Franklin, according to one version).

Confidence and Judgment

The Apostle has been warning and chastising the Galatians. He now shifts his disposition to one of approbation (approval) to the members of the church and threat to the false teachers.

I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is (Galatians 5:9, 10).

Genuine love is a combination of both conflict and confidence; we must be willing to argue and encourage. Any relationship destitute of quarrel is destitute of depth and growth. And any relationship destitute of love, encouragement, and restitution is destitute of the Spirit of Christ. Mere docile and peaceful coexistence was not the methodology of Paul.

Sometimes I am this way with my kids. I give short, pat answers designed to quickly end the present dilemma. My six year old, with keen insight, cut me to the quick when she said, "Daddy, when you answer like that it seems like you just don't care."

The Mind

Notice an appeal to the mind. We are to think right thoughts about God. When we know the truth, we know the mind of Christ. The way we feel about things can change from moment to moment. The way we think is much more foundational.

The Offense of the Cross

And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased (Galatians 5:11)!

Preaching Circumcision?

It is here that I feel a bit of Paul's pastoral pain. He had circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) so was undoubtedly accused of adhering to the practice of circumcision. Yet throughout this entire epistle he is adamantly opposed to circumcision. He is accused of duplicity. To a much lesser degree I have had hurled at me the accusation of seeking to place the congregation under the law; this because I believe the Ten Commandments ought to be obeyed.

Circumcision itself was a benign practice unless it was preached as a means of justification. It's at this point that hell is attached to it. The Ten Commandments are God's good laws which we ought to seek to obey. The moment we preach the keeping of the Ten Commandments as a means of justification before God, we have become legalistic. I am quite flummoxed as to why this is such a difficult concept for Christians.

The Testimony of the Cross

Why do you suppose the cross is so offensive? Most will agree that the cross is the central point of history. Our very date is based upon the periods of time before and after the cross – B.C. and A.D. The cross, however, is not merely the central focus of history, but of eternity. The Lamb that was slain will be worshiped forever (Revelation 5:8, 9). The cross is offensive because of all it says – because of its testimony.

The cross, which represents the gospel here, lays absolute claim above all things. It testifies to the sin of man, the righteousness of God, and man's only hope. The gospel requires that every man admit that he is wrong – that he has sinned against God and needs a redemption which is found only in Christ. It's a pretty big pill to swallow. This is why it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Only by the grace of God is this change of disposition possible. Until God grants repentance (2 Timothy 2:25), men will be offended by the right presentation of the cross.

Imprecatory Wish

I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off (Galatians 5:12)!

Cut Off

The offense of the gospel is often followed by persecution or, in this case, perversion of the gospel. Paul does not mince words here. Though Paul may have been speaking of excommunication, one can hardly miss the play on words. They were saying you men are not right with God till the foreskin is cut off; Paul wishes they would go all the way with themselves.

You might wonder why Paul didn't merely wish for the false apostles to repent. I have little doubt that he preferred repentance, even for false teachers (1 Timothy 1:20). But here Paul is much more concerned with the protection of the flock than with the repentance of the wolves.

How unpopular would it be today to wish that the Romish drown in their own fonts; or that the word-faith prosperity teachers be buried in their riches (Exodus 16:13)? As offensive as this might sound to us, it was the course of the apostle to seek to pull down and lay waste every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). What an adjustment even the Christian must make to recognize that in the gospel, the glory of God takes precedent over the salvation of men.

Questions for Study

1. In what respect were the members of the churches in Galatia hindered from obeying the truth (pages 1, 2)? Do you see this as a danger in churches today? How so?
2. What does the leaven represent in verse nine (page 2)?
3. In what ways does leaven permeate the church (page 2)?
4. What are some aspects of genuine love we see in the apostle Paul's writing (page 3)?
5. Why does Paul mention the "mind" in verse nine (page 3)?
6. In what ways was Paul against circumcision (page 3)?
7. Discuss the testimony of the cross. What does it say (page 4)? Why do you suppose this would be offensive?
8. Was Paul out of line with his comments about wishing the troublemakers would "cut themselves off" (page 4)?