

Study 6: Galatians Chapter 5

Introduction

There is a danger that after having severely criticising (and even humiliating) the Galatians, that what Paul has written might turn the away from the faith. So, in the last 1/3 of the letter Paul now build a positive response, and leaves them very focussed on serving God.

But before he does that, he concludes his arguments on the Law and Christ.

Body of the Study

How does Paul address the Galatians?

What does Paul say about circumcision?

What are the consequences of keeping the Law?

What is Paul's expectation of the Galatians?

What self-example does Paul use?

How does Paul say that we should treat others?

How does Paul contrast the Spiritual life with the Fleshly life?

How do we display the Spiritual characteristics?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What are some of the works of the flesh that might be included in his expression "...and such like..."? Make up your own list of what you think should be there.*
- *Look at the list of "works of the flesh", and do a self test. How do you rate yourself against each one of them?*
- *Look at the list of the "fruit of the Spirit", and do a self test. How do you rate your self against each one of them?*
- *Work out a self plan to improve.*

- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 6 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 6: Chapter 5

Introduction

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Body of the Study

How does Paul address the Galatians?

In contrast to chapter 3 where he strongly rebukes the Galatians, this time he gives them positive encouragement and instruction “*Stand fast therefore....*” But his encouragement is quite specific “*...in the liberty by which Christ has made us free...*” Paul has just spent the last two chapters describing what they ought to do and why. His rebuke is positive, but it is also specific “*...and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage...*” (5:1, all quotes from NKJV)

What does Paul say about circumcision?

Paul says that if we become circumcised, then Christ will be of no value to us. He is quite specifically talking about the Gentiles becoming circumcised, not Jews (for a fuller discussion on this, see my notes on Acts study 22, Circumcision). Paul quite explicitly circumcised Timothy himself (Acts 16:1-3), but steadfastly refused to have Titus circumcised (Gal 2:3). So, Paul is specifically talking about circumcision for Gentiles rather than circumcision per se. And he is not talking about the specific act of circumcision, but rather the spiritual implications of a *Gentile* adopting (“converting to”) the Jewish religion. If as christians we turn to the Jewish religion (or any other religion for that matter) we have abandoned our relationship with Christ.

The Jews are a bit of a special case, because they were a people who had a special relationship with God. It is not a strong comparison to say that we have abandoned Christ and become (say) a Buddhist, for the Jews recognise the true and living God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

If we decide that we are going to become Jews, then the only way that we can have any standing with God is to keep the Law perfectly (Paul has already dealt with this, and I don’t propose to go over it again). But the Law requires total commitment. You cannot just sign up for part of the deal. You have to take on all of it.

What are the consequences of keeping the Law?

Well, Paul doesn’t actually say “keeping the Law”, but note that he says “*...you who are seeking to be justified by the Law...*” (5:4) And that is really the heart of the issue. The Jewish christians were *keeping* the Law (as a National issue), but there were not seeking *justification* by the Law!

The consequences are that:

- *They have become estranged from Christ,*
- *They have fallen from Grace,*

If we are christians, then it doesn’t matter the slightest if we are Gentiles or Jews, whether we are masters or slaves, or even if we are Aussies or Kiwi’s!!! What matters, is that we are *in Christ*.

Paul reminds them of the fact that they started well, but they have been deceived (vs 7). The Judaisers had (apparently) been teaching that becoming Jews was what Jesus had in mind all along – but Paul reminds them of the fact that this teaching *did not* come from Christ. They

should have known better, because Paul had given to them the decree from the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 16:4).

What is Paul's expectation of the Galatians?

Paul's clear expectation *with confidence* is that they will *have no other view* other than what he himself has written to them about. His clear expectation is that they will return to the Lord.

The *state of the Galatians* is interesting to observe. Paul has told them that they *have fallen from grace* (5:4), and they *have become estranged from Christ*. Paul's expectation is that they *will return*. They need to turn back – to repent. They cannot remain where they are and still have a right relationship with God. Their seeking justification through the Law has been to turn their back on God – even though the Jews worship the true and living God, His eternal purpose was to have salvation through Jesus and only through Jesus. Jesus was God's way, and the Jewish Law was only a step along that path. To abandon Christ and go back to the Law is to abandon God.

What self-example does Paul use?

Paul says that if I were aligned to those who preach circumcision, why do you think that I myself am being persecuted? If he did what the Judaisers were saying, then the Jews would have no issue with Paul. But that isn't what is happening. Paul continues to be persecuted for the sake of the cross by the Jews.

Paul appears to be defending himself somewhat against the fact that he had not only circumcised Timothy (of note, in the Galatian city of Lystra!) but also observed the rituals of the Law. Whilst some people (the Judaisers) might misconstrue this as Paul supporting circumcision – and hence the keeping of the Law – Paul says that quite the opposite is true. The Jews were the real people who knew what Paul taught and practiced, and they continually persecuted him. They did it when he was in Galatia in the first place, and were continuing to do it.

Next Paul uses *a play on words* when he says that his wish is for the Judaisers to cut themselves off. They were requiring the male Christians (the men – he is not talking about “female circumcision”) to have their foreskins cut off. He says that his wish is for them to be cut off, which can be taken in several ways. It could mean that they should be cut off from the church (and given the comments that he has already made above, there is no doubt that God has already cut them off), but they were apparently still in fellowship – at least with the brethren in Galatia. But Paul also alludes to going further with the *cutting off*, probably indicating castration. He cannot mean that they would become circumcised, for they must have already done that or they could not be Jews!

How does Paul say that we should treat others?

Specifically, we should treat others with love, and serving one another. The implication that Paul is driving towards is how the Judaisers should be treated. There must have been some division within the churches – with some of the brethren siding with Paul, and some with the Judaisers.

It was time to patch up the problems and get on with the work. This could not happen if they kept niggling at one another. They needed to love and respect one another. The consequences of continuing to attack others was that they themselves would be attacked and devoured.

Paul here makes a transition between the *doctrinal issues* that he has been dealing with and the life issues that he wants them to focus on.

How does Paul contrast the Spiritual life with the Fleshly life?

The passage concerning the fruit of the Spirit must not be taken out of context with the whole of the Galatian letter (as it often is). That is not to say that the teaching used by taking it out of

context is not appropriate. But in studying the Galatian letter we need to understand what Paul is saying to the Galatians *in context*.

Paul has already introduced where he is heading in verse 15, about biting and devouring one another. There must have been a specific problem with the brethren in Galatia. The verses on the fruit of the Spirit does not relate exactly to the major issue of salvation by keeping the Law of Moses rather than the keeping of the Law of Christ – yet it appears that the issues that Paul is about to address might be *a consequence of* that issue. An issue had come up within the church (actually within a group of churches), and *how* the brethren had reacted to the issue was that there was factions and infighting, causing division amongst the brethren. This must have resulted in fighting, backbiting, and devouring of one another.

Paul calls for them to be focussed on Spiritual things, not on fleshly things, and gives a clear division and differentiation between the two types of behaviours.

In the letter to the church at Rome, Paul gives a long discourse on the role of Law and faith (Rom chapters 4 through 7). The similarities are such that there is wide acceptance that the Roman letter and the Galatian letter were both written about the same time.

There is “war” going on between the *Spiritual* realm and the *fleshly* realm (5:17). In the context of the Galatian letter, it must have been because of the issues that had developed between the brethren. Paul then draws these thoughts together in 5:18 “...*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law...*” (5:18 NIV).

If we think that our freedom in Christ (freedom from the Law of Moses) gives us license to sin, then we need to think again. Sin is contrary to the gospel of Christ, and comes from the lusts of the flesh – our failure to control our bodies and our desires.

The works of the Flesh		The fruit of the Spirit
Sins against our own bodies	Adultery	Love
	Fornication	Joy
	Uncleanness	Peace
	Licentiousness	Patience
Sins against God	Idolatory	Kindness
	Sorcery	Goodness
Sins against others	Hatred	Faithfulness
	Contentions	Gentleness
	Jealousies	Self-Control
	Outbursts of wrath	
	Selfish ambitions	
	Dissensions	
	Heresies	
	Envy	
	Murders	
	Drunkenness	
	Revelries	
	<i>And such like</i>	

We should note that Paul does not say the *fruits* of the Spirit, but the *fruit* of the Spirit. It is what develops in us because we have the (Holy) Spirit dwelling in us.

It is also interesting to note that Paul adds the words “...and such like...” at the end. The list of fleshly characteristics seems to go on forever, so much so that it is difficult to list them all. But the list of Spiritual characteristics is succinct and well defined. In contrast to *such like*, Paul says, “...there is no law...” against these characteristics.

How do we display the Spiritual characteristics?

When we belong to Christ, we *put to death our old (sinful) man* (Rom 6:6), and we now walk with Christ. It is as if we have been crucified with Him (compare Gal 2:20) and started our life again. We might have the fleshly passions and desires, but we no longer let them rule and control our bodies. Instead, we control them.

Because we are Christ’s, we need to walk in a way that is appropriate. We mustn’t *say* that we are Christ’s if we do not show the *characteristics* that go with it – all that is doing is just putting on a false show. Our Spiritual characteristics will show what we are truly like.

That doesn’t mean that we don’t sin. But it does mean that we try to live the way that God wants us to.

The chapter closes with the admonition from Paul to not become conceited, nor provoke one another, nor envy one another. It has a direct application to the Galatian situation. Some of the fleshly characteristics would be obnoxious to almost anyone (murder, drunkenness, adultery (and idolatry would be to the Jews)). But Paul puts a whole lot of other sins equally on the list with them – envy, jealousy, outbursts of anger etc. So, even although the Galatians might not be committing the “*horrific sins*”, what they were doing was just as bad as if they were!

In the next chapter, Paul is about to get them focused on working with and helping each other.