

Text: Galatians 5:7-12 – Opposition to the Christian Life

Exegetical Big Idea: Paul is convinced of the perseverance of the Galatians, and also the destruction of the false teachers.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Hardship is part of the Christian life, but God always picks his people back up.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Hindrances are frustrating! Painful, but also cause us to sin. So where is our confidence? Yourself? That won't work out. The Lord's finished work on the cross? That's more like it!

Background:

As we noted in a previous sermon, Paul is shifting his focus in these verses in chapter 5. He had spent the first 4 chapters laying out the reasoning from Scripture, and theology, and even simple logic, that the only way to be reconciled to God is through faith alone in Christ alone. In chapter 5 Paul starts to shift his focus to explain how genuine faith in Christ works itself out in life. These verses that we are looking at today finish off that thought. Paul finishes it off here with confidence in the Lord's sovereign keeping grace, not to mention a little fiery righteous anger as we'll see.

Intro:

I few months ago I finished a book, a true story, about a man named Louis Zamperini. He was born in 1917. He started to become locally famous when he began running and training for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. He was fast. He was very fast. In one race as he's training to go to the Olympics, he was against a team of opponents who knew they couldn't beat him. So instead, they ran very close to him on the track, and used the spikes on the bottom of their shoes to cut his ankles. Louis fell hard, and the group of runners continued on. But Louis got up. Not only did he catch up with them, he passed them and won the race. Louis would in fact qualify for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. He ran in the 1936 Olympics, along with fellow Olympian Jesse Owens. But Louis didn't win any medals. Knocked down again, but he got back up, went home and immediately began training for the 1940 Olympics. He became faster and was expected not only to go to the Olympics, but to win some medals this time. But due to the war, the Olympics were canceled and Louis missed out on that. Knocked back down. But he got back up and enlisted into the U.S. Air force. He was extremely skilled at his work, but on a rescue mission his plane went down into the ocean. Knocked down again. After months drifting at sea, he was picked up by some sailors. However, they were Japanese sailors and Louis, along with his surviving crewmates were knocked down yet again and sent to various concentration camps for almost 2 years. But he got back up! The war ended and he was freed to return to the U.S. where he got married. But his time in prison had taken a huge toll on him and he suffered from nightmares and substance abuse, and his marriage was in serious trouble. Knocked down again.

And then one day his wife heard about a man named Billy Graham, and convinced Louis to go hear him speak. Louis gave his life to the Lord. Looking back on his life Louis would see the gracious, sovereign, keeping hand of God all throughout his life. Louis died in 2014, and can see much better now how even in the times when he was knocked down, God's hand was on him.

In many ways, I can't help but see the life of this man as an illustration of the Christian life. The Christian life is full of many dangers, toils, and snares. Some of these are sneaky and intentionally misleading,

others are direct and obvious. But thought these must come, what is above it all and through it all is the sovereign keeping grace of God.

Hardship is part of the Christian life, but God always picks his people back up.

Vv. 7-9: Hardship comes when we fail to hear the voice of God.

We just talked about a man who was a runner, and Paul uses the sport of running as an analogy here of the Galatian Christian experience. He starts off these verses by telling them that they were running so well! What does that look like? Well in this context it looks like believing in, and walking according to the gospel of Christ. In fact one reason why they were running so well is because they started off well.

They started off this race firmly rooted in the gospel of Jesus. The gospel simply means “good news”, and the good news that the Galatian church believed and ran in was the reality that those who put their faith in him are completely forgiven of their sins (past, present, and future) and live a new life in Christ.

This new life is marked by love for God and others, and obedience to God’s Word. Paul himself started them off on this race by preaching the gospel to them. And this race they ran with confidence and boldness.

But something happened. They were tripped up. It’s interesting that multiple commentaries that I read while preparing for this sermon pointed out the racing illustration that Paul is talking about here. In particular they pointed out that foot races back then were not the same as we have today. Today runner compete on round tracks and each runner gets their own lane. This was not so back in those days. Runners would take off from a start line, and run towards a post in the ground. The runners would then have to run around the post to head back to the starting line. You can imagine that although there were rules against pushing and tripping, runners did just that! And the easiest place to push someone was around the pole. It was kind of like a choke point for the runners.

Such is the picture here. They had begun strong, without much hindrance and opposition, but then at the post, someone tripped them.

This tripping came in the form of deceit. Look at verse 8. It was a “persuasion”. They false teachers did not come and start tearing Paul down directly. They came with soft and persuasive words. Words that sound very good and godly.

Remember the snake in the garden. Satan attacked the Words of God in a sneaky way. Remember the temptation of Christ when Satan quoted Scripture.

But although sneaky and good sounding, it is intentional. Paul contrasts the “calling” of the false teachings with the “calling” of God. Paul is making it clear here that both arguments cannot co-exist. There is no middle ground between what the false teachers are saying, and the good news of the gospel.

Here why, because God’s calling to us in the form of the gospel bids us to take our eyes off of ourselves and onto Christ. All false teaching bids the exact opposite. False teaching bids take our eyes off of Christ, and onto ourselves.

That’s why words and definitions matter. We try very hard here at FBC to say exactly what we mean so that there is no confusion. For example, is there a difference between saying that Jesus is a god, and Jesus is God? Absolutely! Both may sound very Christian but they are opposite! Jesus is not simple “a”

God, he *is* God. God is one God in three persons. Jesus is not a separate God. This small one letter word is the divide between the false religion of Jehovah's Witnesses and Christians.

Or take for example a common phrase: "The Bible contains the Word of God." What's wrong with that statement? Is that different from saying the Bible *is* the Word of God? Absolutely. The first statement may sound Christian, but it means that somewhere hidden in the pages of Scripture is God's Word somewhere, and we have the job of figuring out what parts of the Bible are from God, and what parts are not. That's a huge problem if that were the case! Saying that puts a person in authority over God's Word because *they* get to decide what to obey and what they don't have to. That's not Christian. The whole thing is the Word of God. And since it all is, the Christian obeys *all* of it to the glory of God.

And we could think of many many more examples like that. That is why we strive very hard at FBC to be careful with our words and definitions.

But this was happening in the area of circumcision among the Galatian gentile believers. Was circumcision after all simply a way to please God? What's the big deal about it? Keep your faith in Jesus, just simply add a little obedience to it. Anything however, that causes a person to take their hope and eyes off of Jesus, and place it on themselves, is anti-gospel.

Paul gives us his own illustration to show the danger of this sneaky teaching in verse 9. He likens this false teaching, and the teachers too probably, to yeast in a lump of dough. It's not the first time likely you have heard of sin or evil likened to yeast. In fact it goes back to the first Passover, when the people of Israel were instructed to take out all the yeast in their houses when they celebrated Passover. The idea is that not even a hint of it should be found anywhere in their houses. They were in a sense, sweeping away all the sin from their lives.

[I can say I'm familiar with the use of yeast. A few years ago we got a bread machine and we've been making our own bread regularly. I can confirm, that for a loaf of bread that takes a cup and a half of milk, an four cups of flour, you only need one and half teaspoons of yeast. In fact in the warmer months of the year, often even that much yeast will cause the dough to rise so much that the lid of the bread machine starts to open and the top of the loaf expands out of the machine! The nature of yeast is that it gets mixed into the whole loaf, and has an effect everywhere.]

For bread, that's not bad, in fact the top of the bread as it first comes out of the machine when it's all done is the yummiest part. But it's very destructive when sin and false teaching is allowed to persist in the church. Sin and false teaching, left unchecked and ignored can creep into every nook and cranny.

It divides people, confuses people, and ultimately leads people away from the genuine gospel.

So if this is so sneaky, how do we know the genuine calling of God? The simple and yet reliable answer is to know God's Word. In verse 8 Paul says that the false teaching is not from the one "who calls you". That's a present reality! God hasn't just called you past tense, he calls still. You can still hear his voice today, and his voice is heard in the Scriptures. The best way to recognize sneaky false teaching is to know the voice of God.

Do you need to be reminded of that today? Do you get your theology from Youtube, or the Bible? Jesus said in John 10 that his sheep listen to his voice. He means that those who are genuinely his will hear, listen, and obey the voice of God. Have you fallen in this area today? Do you need to be reminded and

encouraged to hear God's voice in the pages of the Bible? Pray for ears, and God will be gracious to you, because...

Hardship is part of the Christian life, but God always picks his people back up.

Vv. 11-12: Hardship comes because the cross is offensive, but it's also the only way to be saved.

We will come back to verse 10 later, but for the moment I want to bring our attention to verses 11-12. Paul exposes another side of hindrance and opposition to the Christian life. Direct opposition.

Paul here is reminding us of the hardship of persecution that he has endured for the sake of the gospel. In Paul's life, he has been beaten and has had stone thrown at him. He's faced judges and guards. He's been ridiculed and threatened. Depending on when Galatians was written, some of that he has yet to endure, but some of it he has endured already. But the question of "why" he endured what he has is very clear. He has endured it because of the message of the gospel.

The big issue that he is battling these false teachers on is circumcision. And as we have already learned a few times in this sermon series, the false teachers were claiming that circumcision (and by extension obeying the Law of Moses) was necessary for salvation, but Paul is adamant that this is false. Paul knows that circumcision means nothing in and of itself. But, when circumcision is taught as a way to be saved, Paul has issue with that.

And Paul uses his persecution as proof that his gospel is not the same as what the false teachers are teaching.

Now, it's a little unclear what Paul means here when he says that if he is "still" preaching circumcision. Is this a reference to his legalistic Pharisee days when he would certainly have declared that being righteous before God had to do with how well you obeyed? Possibly. Alternatively, some hold a view that Paul maybe preached that faith in Jesus as well as obedience was something that Paul preached when he was first converted, but now knows better. I really don't think that's the case. I think the most likely situation is that in some way the false teachers were saying that even Paul was ok with circumcision. And they would be half right. Paul is actually ok with circumcision if it's simply a physical choice. But as soon as circumcision becomes a way to be right with God Paul is adamantly against it.

And that's why I think Paul uses the word "preaching" here. The word has the meaning of declaring something. Paul is communicating that he in no way "declares" circumcision as a way to be right with God.

And as evidence of that, Paul reminds us that if was preaching such nonsense, then he would not be persecuted! It's the exact opposite that is true. Since Paul does *not* preach that circumcision is a way to be right with God, they hate him, and actually want him dead.

Paul's preaching has always been that faith alone in the death and resurrection alone of Christ alone is the only way be forgiven and be right with God. Adding anything to that removes the power of the cross. Paul says so in the second part of verse 11. Adding anything to the message of the cross removes the offense of the cross. The word used for "offense" here has the sense of being a "stumbling block" So Paul describes the cross as a "stumbling block", but what does he mean by this?

The cross by its very nature hurts. It's offensive. The cross declares that we are sinful. We are not enough. We are not good. We are evil. That hurts. But it's also true and necessary. And it's only when we are hurt by the reality of the cross that we can be truly saved.

[We have 3 kids, and all of them at some point in their lives have had to go get needles. Sometimes it was a vaccine, and other times it was for getting blood taken for a test. But in every instance. It wasn't fun. Actually it's interesting that as young baby's the first time the needle comes out they don't know what it is and don't know what to expect. But even at a young age, they remember! The next time they go to the doctor and the needle come out, even as a baby, they know what's coming. And even as they are older none of them get excited to get a needle! We have to bribe them with donuts afterwards. And probably many of you are not fond of needles as well. Well what if I decide that as a father, I don't want my kids to have to undergo the pain of a needle. And so we go to the doctor's office and I ask the doctor to use a pretend needle that doesn't actually hurt. Well my kids would be happy wouldn't they, but the doctor will look at me like I'm a fool. Why? Because though the needle causes pain, it's necessary and for their good. A pretend needle would feel better, but would do absolutely nothing.]

That's Paul's argument here. He can't change the message of the cross! Yes, it offends people. Yes, it hurts my pride and ego. But it's what I need! Giving a pretend gospel does absolutely nothing. Taking the cross out of the gospel makes it much more pleasing to the world. The world would love Christianity if not for the message of the cross. Think about it. Love people, be kind, be generous, those are all good things that nobody gets mad at. But that's not the gospel. It's pleasing for sure, but it's not Christianity.

The cross declares that are dirty and sinful and must die to ourselves. The cross proclaims that we are not our own gods and masters, and that God determines what is right and wrong. You proclaim that message, and you will be persecuted. Persecution seems like an alien thing to us in our culture. And certainly we have not felt the kind of things that Paul or many others in history have felt. But it does come in many forms. Ridicule, alienation, being passed over for promotions or opportunities, being censured and not allowed to speak about your faith at work or school. The threat of being fired for speaking about Christ. More and more the governing authorities in our country are certainly moving towards more active and overt opposition towards genuine Christianity. And this shouldn't surprise us.

But whatever the opposition, the temptation is the same. The temptation when faced with persecution is always the same: just take out the cross and you will be accepted! Paul is saying this exact thing! If he would just remove the offense of the cross by teaching we have a part to play in our salvation, then he and those who are persecuting him would be best friends!

But Paul can't do that. And so he endures. But his enduring of persecution is declaring something glorious. Suffering for the sake of Christ, declares that he is worth it.

The message of the cross is an invitation to die, but not to remain dead. The hope of the resurrection of Christ is new life and eternal life! It's only through repentance and acceptance of Jesus dying for our sins does a person gain the hope of resurrection onto eternal life. And suffering for this message, declares that life eternal with Jesus is worth more than life and comfort on this earth. Paul is willing to suffer for the offensive message of the gospel, because it's the only gospel that saves.

And I think it's this passion that helps us see verse 12 a little better. Paul wishes that those who are advocating for circumcision would go all the way! Is Paul being crude? Is he being rude? I think instead

he has some genuine righteous anger. Paul knows that the message that is being proclaimed by them is a message that does not lead to life, but only to death and separation from God for all of eternity!

He has some righteous anger, but he's also pointing to the ultimate result of such teaching. I don't think it's a coincidence that he is using the picture of cutting off. In fact Paul would have been well aware that Old Testament law dictated that those who had damage in that area were not allowed into the temple, which was to say not allowed into the presence of God. Is Paul illustrating here that the result of their teaching is actually cutting them off from the presence of God? I think so.

If a person will not come to the cross of Christ, and come with nothing in and of themselves, then they will be cut off from the presence of God forever in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Without the true message of the cross, there is no presence of God.

Have you come to the cross this morning? Do you come to the cross empty handed? If you come with all your good deeds and all your hard work, you cannot receive what Christ has to offer. It's only those who come and declare that they have nothing to offer, but will instead humbly receive forgiveness, that will inherit eternal life. Will you be offended by the cross this morning, in order to be saved?

And for those of us who have already accepted Christ, when we fall down and sin again and again, we need the reminder to come again and be reminded of the price that was paid for our sins and the infinite grace that is ours because,

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Vv. 10: God knows who his people are, and he will keep them.

I think now we're in a better position to see the encouragement of verse 10. In the middle of these two difficult realities, that hardship often comes from within ourselves as we fail to hear the voice of God, but also that hardship comes from outside as the true gospel is attacked, right in the middle is a reminder of the sovereignty and grace of God.

I think Paul, with a pastoral heart, knows the difficulties that the Galatians are in, and before he goes on to give them commands and instructions for living the Christian life, he needs first to remind them of God's saving and keeping grace.

So it's in verse 10 that Paul reveals his confidence, despite all that is going on. He writes that he "has confidence in the Lord that they will take no other view..."

What does Paul mean by "take no other view"? He means that he is confident that the Galatians will take Paul's words seriously, return to the saving gospel of Christ by faith. He is confident that they will reject the teaching of the false teachers and cast them out. He has confidence that though they have been knocked down, God will pick them up and they will keep running.

But how can Paul be so confident in this? Are the Galatians not in trouble? They are! Is Paul not worried about them and warning them that if they don't turn back they will be cut off from Christ and lost to eternal damnation? He is. Does Paul know the hearts and minds of ever one of the Galatians and can know if they will make it to the end? He does not. So how on earth can Paul be so audacious as to make a claim that he is so confident that they will take no other view?

Let's read the verse again: "I have confidence *in the Lord...*" Paul's confidence is not in the strength of the Galatians. It's not in the weakness of the false teachers even. Paul's confidence is in the goodness and grace of the Lord.

Paul knows that God has ordained those whom he has ordained to eternal life, and absolutely nothing can or will take those children from God's hand. God knows who are his, and he will bring every one of them into eternal life. God hasn't lost a single one yet, and he's not about to now.

We sing in the song Amazing Grace "Thro many dangers toils and snares we have already come. Twas grace that brought us here thus far, and grace will bring us home."

Do you need that reminder today? Have you felt the drift of sin in your life? Have you listened to voices that are in conflict with the voice of the One who is calling you? Do you need to be reminded that when ridicule or threat comes your way because you believe and proclaim the gospel, that God is holding you with his grace? If Paul can make that bold statement about the Galatians, then we can boldly cling to the grace of God to keep us.

But that's not the end of Paul's confidence! Paul is also confident that God will judge those whose aim and goal it is to hinder his people.

When Paul says that he is confident that the one who is troubling the Galatians will "bear the penalty", he's using language of a trial. The picture here is of two parties standing before the judge. On one side are those who aim to destroy the gospel and God's Church, and on the other side are the ones who have been knocked down and beaten by them. But then the verdict comes down, and justice is served. God's people are vindicated, and God's enemies bear the penalty.

The Galatians needed reminding of that. They had been tripped up, lied to, led astray, and were in war with their own sin. But none of those win. For those who are in Christ Jesus by faith alone, will be carried by God unto eternal life.

We need reminding of that. I don't know what kind of hardships have struck you, but know this morning that God knows who are his, he picks them up, and safely delivers them unto eternal life.

So if you are running the race that is the Christian life, you will be tripped. Hardships will come and you will fall flat on your face at times. At times it will be your own fault, and at times it will be because of the evil of others. But take confidence in the Lord, that he is gracious to pick you up and bring you into his presence. Because:

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