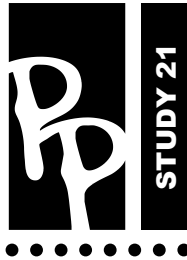


THESE PEOPLE ARE UP TO

NO GOOD!



Galatians 5:7-12

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Special note 1 on Galatians 5:11
- 📁 Special note 2 on Galatians 5:12
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The significance of leaven (yeast) in the Bible
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Introduction to the passage

In this study we come to the final part of the letter in which Paul has strongly defended the way of salvation through God's grace and not through the works of man. From verse 13 Paul moves to the practical outworking of God's grace in people's lives. He will contrast that with the sinful nature which dominates fallen man. Those who advocate the law of Moses as the way of pleasing God will not possess the ability to live a life that is harmonious with God's character. Before he begins this new section, Paul has a final word about the way the Galatians have been misled. He uses an illustration from the sport of athletics and how there are those who will try and stop the runner completing the race. They have a bad effect that can spread quickly. Paul concludes with some harsh words for these false teachers.

What these verses mean

Verse 7

You were running a good race.

In 2:2 Paul used the illustration of running a race to describe his own spiritual progress. Similarly, he used the same illustration of himself in Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 9:26; 2 Timothy 4:7. The Christian life, like running a race, requires discipline, training, patience, a goal to aim for and strenuous effort.

Who cut in on you

The idea in the original Greek was "to break up a road and so make it impassable". The false teaching they were listening to was not a minor deviation: it was so wrong as to break up the spiritual road they were running along. The phrase used in our more modern translations takes up the idea of someone getting in your way to make it difficult for you to finish the race. Paul uses the picture of a race to describe the Christian life. The starting line is where the person first puts their trust in Christ. The finishing line is the arrival in the presence of Christ in heaven. When a person becomes a Christian he or she sets off in this race, pressing on for the finishing line. The believer fixes his sight upon Christ (the finishing line), refusing to be diverted by all the tactics of Satan. So Paul is challenging the Galatian believers by making them think about what those who had been teaching the law of Moses were doing to them. The Galatians were being impeded not helped. Compare verse 4 above.

and kept you from obeying the truth?

Paul does not merely refer to their wrong thinking, but to the fact that their behaviour was not obedient to the truth of the gospel. Wrong beliefs result in wrong behaviour. In 2:5,14 Paul uses the phrase "the truth of the gospel". He means those facts about salvation through Christ which God has revealed. For example, salvation is God's gracious gift, not a thing obtained by our efforts. The Galatians were beginning to behave disobediently to that fact by insisting on the necessity of working to obtain their salvation.

Verse 8

That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.

In 1:6 Paul reminds them that God had called them to be believers. Not obeying the truth of the gospel (5:7) therefore means saying, "No!" to God. Because it is not God who is causing them to disobey, then it must be Satan who is behind their disobedience. That is what Paul is

suggesting. Paul used the present tense of the verb “call”: i.e. it was not only in the past that God called them to belief – God is calling them still!

How do we test whether a particular teaching comes from God?

God calls men and women through his grace and by no other means. Therefore if the teaching or doctrine in question does not stem from that source, but instead looks to human works, then it is not from God. It is the enemy of God, Satan, who is masquerading with teaching that may look attractive and sound pious, but is not God-glorifying.

The way we should test all teaching is by asking these two questions;

- Does the doctrine or teaching make Christ central and glorify him?
- Does it exalt the grace of God, over against the activity of man?

Verse 9

“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”

At the time of the Passover, the Jews were commanded to destroy all leaven (yeast) from their houses (Ex. 12:14-20). As there must be no leaven in the Jewish home at Passover, so there must be no disobedience to the truth among believers. Wrong ideas lead to disastrous consequences (e.g. 5:4) as surely as a little leaven spreads through the whole dough. See Focus Point at the end of this study on the significance of leaven in the Bible.

The loss of a nail meant the horseshoe came off;
The loss of the horseshoe meant the horse fell;
The fall of the horse meant the death of the rider;
The loss of that soldier meant the battle was lost;
The loss of that battle meant the kingdom was conquered by the enemy;
All this because a nail was lost!

Verse 10

I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view.

Paul was confident that the Galatian believers would not reject Christ because he knew they were “in Christ”, i.e. they were part of the spiritual body of Christ: Christ’s spiritual life was in them. His confidence was not in the Galatians but in the Lord. Compare 2 Thessalonians 3:4. Paul says they had been running well – i.e. rightly. Paul knew

that what he had seen in the Galatian believers was a good work begun by God. If that is so, they cannot finally go astray. Compare Philippians 1:6. Paul used a form of the verb “to persuade” which has the meaning that this conviction was something Paul had reached about them in the past, and his present opinion was still the same.

The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.

Anyone who deliberately teaches contrary to gospel truth will be punished. Compare Matthew 18:6. This punishment may take place in this life, but if not it will take place at the final judgement day. Compare Revelation 19:20. This truth is so important that James advises his readers to be very careful about becoming teachers (James 3:1). What a warning to all preachers to keep carefully to Bible truth! What a comfort to know that error will not always triumph but must eventually be exposed as wrong!

Verse 11

Brothers,

Even though Paul has spoken sternly to the Galatian believers (3:1; 4:9; 5:4), he insists on reminding them that they are his brothers in Christ, sharing the same salvation. Compare 5:13.

if I am still preaching circumcision,

Some people accused Paul of being inconsistent, and they tried to discredit him. Paul had circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) even after the church had agreed that circumcision was not necessary to make a person a Christian (Acts 15:24). Paul’s enemies were saying that he was double-minded (see 1:10) and therefore he was not a reliable teacher. Paul had never advocated circumcision as a means of salvation, though it would have made life easier for him with the religious leaders if he had. See special note 1 below.

why am I still being persecuted?

Everywhere Paul went preaching the gospel, he suffered persecution. Therefore, says Paul, “I cannot be preaching that circumcision is the way to please God. People would receive me happily if I did preach in that way.” Paul was not taking the easy option by telling people what they wanted to hear. If he had taught the necessity of circumcision (an external, physical ritual that did not involve commitment and submission, but gave the person the idea of being in a privileged position) then he would have been readily accepted and not faced opposition. Instead of circumcision he taught something else that caused offence and brought him trouble.

In that case the offence of the cross has been abolished.

Central to Paul's teaching was the cross and Christ's death upon it. To be put to death on a cross was to be cursed by God, according to Jewish belief; see note on 3:13 (Study 12, pages 101-102, Book 2). No Jew would be willing to believe that Jesus who died on a cross could be a Saviour. To a Jew Christ's cross was offensive. If Paul had preached circumcision, as some had alleged he did, then no-one would be offended because the subject that caused the Jews such great offence had been omitted. Their hostile reaction to Paul's teaching showed that that was not the case. Moreover, to argue as Paul did that salvation is only by Christ's death on the cross and never by any ceremony like circumcision would make Jewish hearers doubly angry and offended. This was the "offence of the cross".

Verse 12

As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Greek = make themselves eunuchs

Because the false teachers who were worrying the believers taught that a little cutting of the flesh (i.e. circumcision) gains salvation, Paul remarks that they should go further and castrate themselves! Perhaps to cut more flesh will mean even better salvation? Paul is deliberately exposing the stupidity of the teaching that physical acts can earn spiritual benefits! See special note 2 on page 6.

 **Special note 1**
Galatians 5:11

It was true that Paul did agree to have Timothy circumcised, and equally true that Titus – another of Paul's fellow-workers – was not circumcised (2:3). Because of this apparently contradictory behaviour, some people have criticised Paul.


Paul was not, in fact, contradicting himself. Paul did not argue against circumcision as a simple medical, or Jewish, practice. He only argued against circumcision as a religious ceremony whereby anyone could think that they thereby earned God's favour. Only Christ has earned God's favour, which he now shares with all who believe in him.

Therefore Timothy was circumcised because he had Jewish relatives. That circumcision was a cultural act, not a religious one. Having been

circumcised, Timothy would be accepted as a Jew by Jews and so could preach the gospel to them.

Titus was not circumcised. He was a Greek who became a Christian. It was important to make it very clear that Titus was a Christian because he simply believed in Christ, and not because he fulfilled any Jewish ceremonies. Therefore Paul would not allow him to be circumcised.

Paul was not inconsistent. He was following his practice as described in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22. Paul would never do anything which could give the impression that the blessings of the Christian gospel were to be earned by some human effort. Everything Paul did was designed to show that salvation is possible only because of God's gracious gift. See 1 Corinthians 9:18. We must never do anything that would contradict the freeness of the gospel.

 **Special note 2**
Galatians 5:12

Some people have been surprised that Paul could speak so sarcastically as he seems to speak in this verse. Can Christians ever wish that other people would harm themselves? Ought we not to love our enemies?

Paul describes the false teachers as "those who trouble you". The Greek word means "to cause an uprising". These teachers were "perverting the gospel of Christ" (1:7). They were the cause of a major upset among the Galatian believers, which could have led them into a completely false gospel. Such spiritual treachery is the greatest of sins.

Jesus pronounced a fierce condemnation of those who lead Christian believers astray. See Matthew 18:6. The purity of Bible teaching is so important. What could be a greater sin than to misrepresent God's words and teach others that error? See Matthew 5:19; James 3:1.

Paul did not hate his enemies as people; he would pray for them to be saved. But he would vigorously oppose the errors taught by the false teachers. So must we all defend the truth from error (Jude 3).



Summary

Paul concludes his defence of the gospel of grace with a picture of the Christian life being like a race. There are obstacles and diversionary tactics being used to try and stop the believer from finishing the race. Those who have come amongst the Galatians and have been telling them that they have to become Jews first by following the law of Moses are impeding them in this race. They are getting in the way making it difficult to finish the race. Despite these setbacks Paul is confident in God that when the Galatians first heard the gospel of grace from his lips and believed, it was the work of God. If so, they will not fall away by following the false teachers but will trust in Christ alone for salvation. They will run the race well by obeying the truth and submitting to Christ's teaching. The central point of this is submitting to the one who was crucified on a cross. This is what Paul preached. It caused great offence, especially to the Jews. He would have been readily accepted had he taught that circumcision was the way of salvation. That was not the way and in telling the people that Jesus dying on the cross was their only hope, Paul suffered much persecution. The teaching of circumcision was so alien to God's designed way that Paul wished any who advocated that way to have their masculinity fully cut off and not just to have a small snick. This showed how corrupt Paul considered their teaching to be.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

New Testament religion defined: Galatians 5:5,6

1. There is such a thing as a distinct New Testament religion. Many teach that all religions are the same. They teach that what one believes is not important so long as those beliefs are sincerely held. The New Testament, however, constantly urges us to seek out the true religion and to test every doctrine to make sure it agrees with Bible truth. We must reject what is not biblical. To follow a non-biblical religion (whether nominal Christianity or some other religion) is to be outside of Christ. See Galatians 5:2; John 14:6.

Paul urges the Galatian believers to reject the wrong teaching they were receiving.

2. Paul defines what is the New Testament experience of true religion.
 - a. True believers are in a certain spiritual condition (verse 5). They can have a sense of rest in their souls because of the hope of being accepted by God as righteous ones for Christ's sake.
 - b. True believers have a special spiritual occupation (verse 6). The believer's faith works – i.e. expresses itself by continual acts of love. See James 2:20. We need all three – hope, faith and love for a complete New Testament religious experience. There is something wrong about our experience if any one virtue is missing.
3. All three of these virtues make up a complete spiritual experience.
 - a. Faith gives us the reason to persevere in loving behaviour; hope will prevent despair and give us calmness. Faith is the root, hope the flower, love the fruit.
 - b. Faith looks back to Christ the Saviour; hope looks on to future glory and Christ the King; love looks around in the present and spreads the teaching of Christ the Prophet.
 - c. Hope is obtained by faith; love is produced by faith and hope. And all three are produced in believers "by the Spirit" (verse 5) – not by any human effort (see 5:22). The Spirit uses the Scripture to affect us. See Romans 10:17.

Not to know by personal experience these three virtues is not to be a New Testament Christian. Nothing else but these three show us to be Christian. Having these three, nothing else matters much (verse 6)!



Focus Point:

The significance of leaven (yeast) in the Bible

In Hebrew life leaven was not only something used in bread making; it was also used as a symbol in religious and social ceremonies. The process of making it began with fine white bran mixed with grape juice and allowed to ferment. Barley flour was also used, mixed with water and allowed to go sour. In bread making, the leaven would be a piece of dough kept from the previous batch of baking, allowed to ferment, and then mixed with the flour for the new baking.

The Jews were forbidden to use leaven during the Passover meal (Ex. 12:34), or during the seven days before (Ex. 12:15). This was because

their exodus from Egypt had to be hurried. There could be no waiting for leaven to spread throughout the dough. Wandering tribes in Arabia still use unleavened bread today for the same reason.

Leaven was also strictly forbidden in most of the tabernacle offerings (Lev. 2:11, 6:17, 10:12). This was because the fermenting of leaven suggests the idea of disintegration and corruption. Decay was always regarded as unclean in Hebrew thought and therefore anything decaying was looked upon as being offensive to a holy God.

However, there were two occasions when leaven could be offered (Lev. 7:13; Amos 4:5). In these two instances the bread was eaten by the offerer and not burnt with the offering. No offering that was burnt (i.e. dedicated to God) could contain leaven or honey.

In the New Testament leaven is often used as a symbol of erroneous teaching that causes the corruption of people's knowledge and behaviour (Matt. 16:6, 22:16-29, 23:14; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Co. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

In one of his parables, however, Jesus used leaven as a symbol of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:21). Jesus was teaching that just as leaven quietly and secretly spreads its influence in the dough, so the kingdom of heaven (i.e. believers whose lives are governed by the rule of Christ) can have an influence which spreads and affects the situations where they are.

Note: It is always important to look at the context of the passage to understand its meaning. We have seen in the case of leaven that it is not always used in a negative way. Leaven is used in Scripture to illustrate truth because of its characteristic; a small amount influences all that it comes into contact with. It is used to illustrate the effect of bad teaching, but also the positive effect of the kingdom of heaven. If leaven were just interpreted as a negative influence, then the parable in Luke 13:20-21 would not make sense.



Over to you

Are your preaching and teaching a hindrance or a help to the believers in your congregation as they run the Christian race? (Think carefully of what you bring to your people; is it God-honouring and Christ-centred or is it about human effort and success?)

How important is it for church leaders to be aware of what is being said and taught around their people? Think of the effect of leaven.

What do you do if you come across a passage in the Bible that you know some of the people in the congregation will not like?