

LOSING MY RELIGION

"CANCELING THE CROSS" GALATIANS 5:1-15

This Week's Core Competency

Salvation by Grace – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Paul refers to the law frequently in Galatians, so frequently that one can't help but ask the question: If we're neither justified nor sanctified by observing the law, what is the Christian's proper relationship to the Mosaic Law? Here's the answer to that question in a nutshell:

"Calvin and many reformed theologians have answered this question this way. They have said the ceremonial laws (e.g., animal sacrifices, dietary restrictions, feast days, etc.) are no longer binding on Christians because of the death of Christ. Nevertheless the moral laws (the Ten Commandments) are still binding. God has done away with the moral laws only in the sense that they no longer condemn us (Rom. 8:11). The problem with this explanation is that it makes a distinction between two parts of the Law that the text does not make. The text simply states that Christ is the end of 'the Law' (Rom. 10:4), not the ceremonial part of the Law. Furthermore, if the Ten Commandments are all

To go back to Law is to become entangled in a maze of "do's and don'ts" and to abandon spiritual adulthood for a "second childhood."

— Warren W. Wiersbe

still binding on us, why have Christians throughout history (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Cor. 16:2) met to worship on Sunday, rather than on the Sabbath (Saturday)? Some reformed theologians, following Calvin, believe that God abolished Sabbath worship along with the ceremonial laws. This seems somewhat inconsistent. Others, following the Westminster Confession, regard Sunday worship as a continuation of Sabbath worship. Nevertheless it is, of course, very different.

"Dispensational theologians have suggested another answer to this question that, to me, seems more consistent with what Scripture says. They say that God did away with the Mosaic Law completely: the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral parts. He terminated it as a code and has replaced it with a new code: 'the Law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2). Some commandments in the Law of Christ are the same as those in the Law of Moses (e.g., nine of the Ten Commandments, excluding the command to observe the Sabbath day). God-given codes of laws that governed people's behavior existed before God gave the Law of Moses (e.g., Gen. 1:28-30; 2:16-17 [pre-Fall]; 3:14-19 [post-Fall]; 9:1-17 [post-Flood]). God incorporated some specific commands from these former codes into the Law of Christ, even though they were not part of the Law of Moses (e.g., 1 Tim. 4:3; cf. Gen. 9:3). He also incorporated nine of the Ten Commandments from the Mosaic Code" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Galatians," 2015 ed., 63-64, www.soniclight.com).

I've said it before; I say it again—even though the analogy isn't perfect. I'm no longer obligated to obey the laws of Canada. When I lived there, I was, but I no longer live there. Murder is against the law in

cont. pg. 2

Canada. So if I'm no longer obligated to obey Canadian law, does that mean I'm free to commit murder? Absolutely not! The very thought is ridiculous. I live in the United States, and murder is also against the law in the United States. More importantly, I'm a Christian, and obviously murder is a violation of the law of Christ and contrary to the leading of his Spirit in me. Need I say more?

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Galatians 5:1-15

1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." 10 I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. 11 Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. 12 As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Cf., another translation

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. 11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. (ESV)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight v. 1.
- * Bracket "no value to you at all" in v. 2.
- * Bracket "alienated from Christ" and "fallen away from grace" in v. 4.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 5.
- * Circle "righteousness" in v. 5.
- * Bracket "expressing itself through love" in v. 6.
- * Circle "cut in" in v. 7.
- * Circle "persuasion" in v. 8.
- * Bracket "no other view" in v. 10.
- * Circle "penalty" in v. 10.
- * Circle "offense" in v. 11.
- * Circle "emasculate" in v. 12.
- * Underline "sinful nature" in v. 13.
- * Bracket "biting and devouring" in v. 15.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. "Freedom" is ours through faith in Christ. Freedom from what, and so what?
2. "Christ will be of *no value*" to those who let themselves be circumcised. How so, and why?
3. Put the *condition* of those "who are trying to be justified by law" in your own words.
4. Describe the *relationship* of "faith" to "love" in verse 6.
5. Explain Paul's use of athletic imagery in verse 7.
6. What's the point of the *proverb* in verse 9?
7. Clarify Paul's use of PG-13 language in verse 12.
8. Explain the *contrast* in verse 13.
9. How can Paul say what he says in verse 14?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about what you infer from verse 15 regarding the situation in the Galatian churches.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Warren W. Wiersbe is a pastor-teacher with a way with words. Here's what he has to say about Galatians 5:1-15: "Paul's doctrine of grace is dangerous!" cried the Judaizers. 'It replaces Law with license. Why, if we do away with our rules and abandon our high standards, the churches will fall apart.'

"First-century Judaizers are not the only ones afraid to depend on God's grace. Legalists in our churches today warn that we dare not teach people about the liberty we have in Christ lest it result in religious anarchy. These people misunderstand Paul's teaching about grace, and it is to correct such misunderstanding that Paul wrote the final section of his letter (Gal. 5-6)" ("Galatians," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:712-13).

Then he goes on to set the legalists' argument on its head. He writes: "Paul's doctrine of Christian liberty through grace is not the dangerous doctrine. It is *legalism* that is the dangerous doctrine, because *legalism* attempts to do the impossible: change the old nature and make it obey the Laws of God. Legalism succeeds for a short time, and then the flesh begins to rebel. The surrendered Christian who depends on the power of the Spirit is not denying the Law of God, or rebelling against it. Rather, that Law is *being fulfilled in him* through the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4)" (713).

As far as the structure of 5:1-15 is concerned, modern translations divide it into paragraphs somewhat differently. In one translation, 5:1 concludes the previous paragraph that begins in 4:28, then it divides the following verses into three paragraphs at verses 2, 7, and 13 (NEB). Two translations divide it into three paragraphs at 5:1, 7, and 13 (NET, HCSB). And four divide it into four paragraphs either at 5:1, 2, 7, and 13 (NIV, NRSV) or at 5:1, 7, 11, and 13 (GNT, NKJV). These various paragraph divisions all make good sense after reading the passage. But it makes especially good sense to recognize 5:1 as *transitional* like the NIV does. The following quotes substantiate this thought. One commentator writes: "Before plunging into this third section of the letter, Paul interjects a verse that is at once a summary of all that has gone before and a transition to what follows. It is, in fact, the key verse of the entire Epistle" (James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible*

Commentary, 10:486). Another concurs, writing: "It seems best, therefore, to take the indicative statement of 5:1a as the summary of all that Paul has argued and exhorted regarding the judaizing threat from 1:6 through 4:31, with then 5:1b-12 being his concluding exhortation vis-a-vis that threat in which he urges his converts to hold fast to the freedom they have in Christ" (Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 41, *Galatians*, 224). So according to 5:1, Christ has set believers free to be free and not to be "burdened again by a yoke of slavery" either to "the whole law" (v. 3) or to the ABCs of any religion (4:3, 9). Consequently, the apostle commands them to "Stand firm" (where they are).

In verses 2-6, Paul warns his readers against letting themselves be circumcised because circumcision would obligate them "to obey the whole law" and thus leave them in slavery again—contrary to the purpose of Christ. On the one hand, physical circumcision, in and of itself, is a neutral thing. But on the other, the theology of circumcision isn't. As one commentator explains: "For a Gentile Christian to accept circumcision by choice, as a matter of religious duty, implied the acceptance of the whole way of life to which circumcision was the initiatory rite" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGNT, 229). Paul is concerned; he recognizes that the Galatians are on the verge of losing their *freedom*, not their *salvation*, even if they don't; they are on the verge of falling away from grace and falling into legalism. Of course, legalism makes no sense in Paul's eyes because it is through the Spirit by faith and not by works that believers await a favorable verdict in the last judgment (Ro 2:13, 16). For those who belong to Christ and are "in Christ Jesus" circumcision doesn't count. The only thing that counts for them is "faith expressing itself in love."

In verses 7-12 Paul reminds his readers that they were "running a good race" while he was with them, but after he left, someone tripped them up. Paul has a footrace in mind, but his words remind me of speed skating, one of the most exciting events in the Winter Olympics. Four or more racers, skating on long blades, in a tight pack barely an arm's length from one another, speeding around a short track—what could be more thrilling? Centrifugal force can send racers sprawling with the slightest touch of

their blades. The Galatians are lurching toward the side of the track, no longer headed toward the truth, victims of the Judaizers' contrived techniques. But Paul is convinced they will recover before it's too late. As one commentator explains: "He knows how the logic of the gospel works, and if they have really received the gospel (as he is convinced they have), they must accept the same logic and think no differently [*ouden allo phronesete*] from himself. Cf. RSV: 'that you will take no other view than mine'" (Bruce, 235). He is also confident that those who fouled the Galatians will not escape penalty.

These are the same ones who continue to accuse Paul of preaching circumcision, which makes no sense at all. In his own words, "If I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" (v. 11). Preaching circumcision would eliminate what both Jews and Gentiles found offensive about the cross. One commentator explains how: "The preaching of the cross

provokes offense, or the cross itself is a stumbling-block, not merely because (as in 1 Cor. 1:23) a crucified Messiah was an object of aversion and a contradiction in terms, but rather because it stands for the way of salvation by grace through faith in the atoning death of the crucified One, apart from circumcision and the law, over against the way of salvation by legal works" (Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT, 240-41). Paul's only wish for his detractors, sarcastically stated, is "shut yourselves out of, and cease to trouble, the company of God's people" (242).

In verses 13-15, Paul makes it perfectly clear that freedom from the law is not freedom to indulge one's sinful desires. In other words, liberty is not license. The Galatians are divided over circumcision; they need to know they are to "serve one another in love" (v. 13). The Galatians are concerned about observing the law; they need to know, "The entire law is summed up in a single command; 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The Message of the Passage

Christians, who are called to be free, should neither let themselves be enslaved again to the ABCs of religious observance, nor use their freedom as an excuse to indulge their sinful desires.

day **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 3 **alienated . . . fallen** "Certainly he is not suggesting that the Galatians had 'lost their salvation,' because throughout this letter he deals with them as believers. At least nine times he calls them brethren, and he also uses the pronoun we (Gal. 4:28, 31). This Paul would never do if his readers were lost. He boldly states, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father"' (Gal 4:6). If his readers were unsaved, Paul could never write those words" (Wiersbe, 1:715). "The Judaizers must have assured the Galatians that in accepting supervision for their lives from the prescriptions of the Mosaic law they were not forsaking Christ or renouncing grace, but rather were completing their commitment to both. Paul, however tells them just the opposite: commitment to Christ and commitment to legal prescriptions for righteousness, whether that righteousness is understood in forensic terms (i.e., 'justification') or ethical terms (i.e., 'lifestyle' and expression), are mutually exclusive; *experientially*, the one destroys the other" (Longenecker, 228, italics added). "To fall from grace, as seen by this context, is to fall into legalism" (Boice, 10:488).

v. 5 **righteousness** Lit., "the hope of righteousness" (ESV, NET, NRSV, NKJV). Commentators are divided on the sense of this phrase (see Fung, 224-27). According to one, "The 'hope of righteousness' is the hope of a favourable verdict in the last judgment (Rom. 2:5-16)" (Bruce, 231-32). To another, it is 'the realization of the hoped for things pertaining to the state of righteousness conferred in justification' or more simply, 'the hope to which the justification of believers points them forward'" (Fung, 226); "this 'hope' includes our ultimate glorification (cf. Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Pet. 1:3-4, 13). We do not work for this, but we wait for it" (Constable, 66).

v. 6 **through love** "True, we are saved through faith rather than by works; but faith is no mere intellectual conviction, as if a Christian could do as he wishes so long as he believes properly. This is a horrible idea, as Paul writes elsewhere (Rom 6:1, 2)" (Boice, 489). Nevertheless, one commentator warns: "We must guard against the misunderstanding current especially in Catholic theology (though Protestantism is far from exempt) that only faith made perfect in love leads to justification. This represents a serious distortion of the relationship between faith, love, and justification. In speaking of justification Paul never talks of faith and love, but only of faith as receiving. Love is not therefore an additional prerequisite for receiving salvation, nor is it properly an essential trait of faith; on the contrary, faith animates the love in which it works" (Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul*, 153).

v. 7 **cut in** "The verb was used in this kind of context originally of breaking up a road so as to prevent progress [*prokoptein*], but then came to mean 'hinder' or 'delay', originally with the dative of disadvantage (cf. Rom. 15:22; 1 Thes. 2:18 for other Pauline occurrences). C. E. DeVries takes [*enokopto*] here to be an athletic term, 'cutting in' in front of a runner so as to trip him up ('Paul's "Cutting" Remarks about a Race: Galatians 5:1-12', Tenny FS, 115-120)" (Bruce, 234).

v. 8 **persuasion** "The term [*peismone*] is a rare word that appears only here in the NT and for the first time in any Greek writing . . . it seems best to understand it in a pejorative manner as meaning humanly 'contrived persuasiveness' in contrast to God's will and purpose" (Longenecker, 230-31).

v. 10 **penalty** Cf., "whoever is upsetting you will be punished by God" (GNT).

v. 11 **still preaching** "Perhaps he was accused of being a trimmer: of recommending circumcision on some occasions and forbidding it on others . . . The Paul of the epistles, who himself conformed to Jewish ways when living among Jews (1 Cor. 9:20), would not have forbidden other Jewish believers to follow his example in this. If they wished to circumcise their infant sons out of regard for an ancestral custom and not as though the rite retained any covenant significance or established any claim on God, it is difficult to see how, on his own principles, he could have objected to their doing so . . . his critics could have claimed that he was not always so totally opposed to circumcision as he appeared to be in his dealing with the Galatians. To claim this would be to overlook, whether inadvertently or deliberately, a fundamental distinction: the Galatians were Gentile believers for whom circumcision was not an ancestral custom, and they were being urged to accept it in order to secure the approval of God" (Bruce, 236-37).

v. 12 **emasculate** "As insulting and disgusting as it may seem, Paul's comment should be understood as a sarcastic way of characterizing the Judaizers and his attitude toward them, as most modern commentators recognize (so, e.g., Lightfoot, Burton, Mussner, Betz, Bruce). Indeed, it is the crudest and rudest of all Paul's extant statements, which his amanuensis did not try to tone down (Longenecker, 234). Perhaps, "the thought here is that of self-excommunication which the verb carries in the light of Dt. 23:1 (LXX 23:2), which forbids any emasculated person to enter the assembly of the Lord: by desiring self-emasculation for the agitators Paul is wishing that they would shut themselves out of, and cease to trouble, the company of God's people" (Fung, 242).

v. 13 **sinful nature** Lit., "the flesh" (ESV, NET, NKJV, HCSB), i.e., "the human individual in his or her sin and depravity apart from the redeeming grace of God and the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (244).

Family Time

Parents, our summer series in *PantegoKids* is called **True or False?** Like the adults, we will be studying the book of Galatians to discover how to live out true faith. *Our kids' lessons, however, will not textually align each week with adult teaching. Core competencies will also likely be different. We will be memorizing Galatians 5:22-26.*

Summer is winding down. It won't be long before we will be school shopping. New shoes, new colored pencils, new backpacks and lunch boxes. It's hard to believe we are here. In some ways it feels like it just started. I hope you had the opportunity to make fun memories with your family this summer. I also hope your family had a chance to serve together in some way. In our passage this week, Paul reminds the Galatians that they will reap what they sow. He encourages them to do good to everyone, especially those who belong to the family of believers. This principle of reaping and sowing is a valuable one for our kids to learn early in their lives. Our acts of service to others will certainly bless us as well. How beautiful for the body of Christ to serve one another! It's not too late! Cook dinner for another family. Watch kids so parents can have a date night. Volunteer at Mission Arlington. Let's spread the love of Jesus around our community before the routine of the school year begins.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Galatians 6

1. What does verse 2 instruct us to do?
2. Fill in the blank. "A man _____ what he _____." (v. 7)
3. What does verse 9 encourage us to do?

What Do You Think

1. What does it mean to carry each other's burdens?
2. In what ways have you seen a harvest from good things you have done?

What R U Going To Do

Plant a small garden (veggies or flowers) in your yard. Take good care of it and then watch it grow. Ask God to continue to help you sow good things into your life and the lives of others. It will be fun to see the harvest when it comes!

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Giving Away my Life - I give away my life to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

Galatians 5:22-26

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.