

**Gal. 5:2-11, A Personal Plea Against Circumcision**  
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**A. Overview**

In this, his third personal plea to the Galatians, Paul for the first time addresses the specific suggestion that the judaizers were making: that the Galatians should be circumcised. All the theological argument about faith vs. law and freedom vs. bondage is just a foundation for this, the critical decision that they face.

1. 2-4, The *refutation* of the error, showing what it really implies concerning Christ and their position in him.
2. 5-6, The *antidote* to the error, the true way to eternal life.
3. 7-9, The *source* of the error. Attempts to build an "us/them" mentality with regard to the false teachers.
4. 10-11, The *outcome* of the error. What future does Paul see for each of the participants in the discussion (the Galatians, the false teachers, and himself)? Contrast 4:11,20.

**B. 2-4, The refutation of the error**

Paul's method of argument here is worth emulating. It is to show people the consequences of their current course. (Often they don't know where the road they are taking will lead them.) This argument is founded on Prov. 14:12; 16:25; Matt. 7:13,14. NB: Don't assume that people draw all the logical conclusions of their beliefs. They usually do not. Note the personal nature of the appeal, the repeated statement of the error, and then the two consequences.

1. The personal appeal, "behold, I Paul."
  - a) Other occurrences: 2CO 10:1; EPH 3:1; COL 1:23; 1TH 2:18; PHM 1:19
  - b) Highlights the personal nature of this section. Not logical but emotional, and founded upon his relation with them. "I Paul, who led you to Christ, who taught you your spiritual ABC's. Not the other brothers who are with me, not the scribe who is writing this letter, not the brother who is reading it to you, but I myself.
2. The basic assumption: "if you let yourself be circumcised." Here is the error that is being forced upon them. Cf. Acts 11:3. This is the one thing about Gentiles that makes them unacceptable to Jews.
3. 5:2, The first consequence of circumcision: "Christ shall

profit you nothing."

- a) The *question*: Seems strange. If I'm saved by Christ, having a bit of extra insurance in the form of circumcision seems harmless enough, and might even help. Cf. the tendency in polytheistic cultures to add Jesus as just one more god.
- b) The *fact*: The strange arithmetic of Christianity: adding anything to the work of Christ takes away from its effectiveness. If we will not let Christ do the whole job, he won't do any of it. Like the warranty on a piece of complicated Hi-Fi equipment that says, "Not valid if this seal broken." If you want them to fix it, don't try to fix it yourself. The required attitude is that of Phil. 3:7-9.
- c) The *reason*: Isa. 42:8; 48:11, "I will not give my glory unto another." God will not share his glory with anyone else. Rom. 4:4, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." No one in heaven will be able to claim any credit for himself. God will receive all the glory.

- 4. 5:3, The second consequence of circumcision: "He is a debtor to do the whole law." James 2:10 lays down the basic principle of law: demands perfection. Many Jews accepted only circumcision to make a proselyte, but if you choose the way of law, you must keep all of it. This is not impossible to do, at least outwardly; Paul did it (Phil. 3:6), as did the parents of John the Baptist (Luke 1:6). But that is a way of bondage.
- 5. 5:4, The summary. Covers both of the circumstances anticipated in the previous two verses.
  - a) "Christ is become of no effect unto you." Summarizes v.2. Literally, "you are abolished from Christ." Just the reverse of Rom. 7:6, "But now we are delivered from [abolished from] the law, being dead to that in which we were held." Christ and the law are mutually exclusive.
  - b) "You are fallen from grace." That is, from the grace method of salvation, by turning back to the law and thus imposing on yourself all of its demands.

**C. 5-6, The antidote to the error**

In contrast with this, Paul sets forth the way of life. Note the first person plural of faith, and then two verbs that describe our Christian life: "wait" and "work".

- 1. "We." First person of faith. Invites them to say this with him. It is true of "I Paul"; he longs that it might be true of them as well.
- 2. 5:5, The first verb that characterizes our lives is "wait."

Emphasizes the absence of our own merit in our salvation.

- a) For what? "The hope of righteousness," "the hoped-for righteousness." Right now we have imputed righteousness, but one day "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." In that day, when he returns, we will be righteous in practice as well as in position. We do not earn this, but wait for it.
  - b) "through [by, in] the Spirit," as contrasted with the fleshly approach of the Judaizers. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood." It's so easy to measure results in the physical world, but the real sphere of our activity is spiritual.
  - c) "by faith," by trusting in the finished work of Christ rather than in our own goodness.
3. 5:6, The second verb is "works." Works do not save us, but salvation does produce works. Cf. Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:4-8.
- a) "In Christ Jesus." Once we are in him, once we are saved. This verse describes not how we become believers, but the nature of our conduct once we are believers.
  - b) "faith working through love." Love is the practical expression of our salvation.

**D. 7-9, The source of the error**

Paul shows them that the error is neither native to themselves, nor from God, but imposed from outside. He attempts to build an "us/them" mentality with regard to the false teachers. NB: One of the most difficult distinctions to make as a believer is to know when polarization is needed but not there, and when it is present but unjustified. Cf. Exod. 2:11-13. We need to know when the other guy is an Egyptian who needs to be killed, and when he is a fellow believer with whom we should be reconciled.

1. First, Paul denies any divine origin for this error, v.8.  
"Don't think that God has sent these false teachers to you."
2. Then he uses two metaphors to illustrate their effect as a foreign agent.
  - a) 5:7, a footrace. "Who has cut in on you?" Two ways to run a race: run as fast as you can yourself; and do all you can to hinder the others. The latter is the tactic that the Judaizers are using. Unable to keep up with the Galatians in their true faith, they have been trying to cut them off, run them into the wall. Cf. the jealousy dynamic we explored in 4:17,18.
  - b) 5:9, leaven in bread. It is a foreign substance that has a

pervasive influence on the entire loaf, just as the false teaching of the Judaizers is affecting the Galatian's entire spiritual position.

**E. 10-11, The outcome of the error**

Contrast 4:11,20. There, Paul feared for the well-being of the Galatians. Here, he is more optimistic. He considers each of the parties to the disagreement.

1. The Galatians, 10a.

- a) The expression is a little confusing. His confidence is "in the Lord" but "concerning them." KJV "in you" matches neither the Greek nor our modern idiom. We do not trust in people; we trust in the Lord for the things that concern people.
- b) "You will be none otherwise minded," but will adopt the position I have set forth in this letter.
- c) Ultimately, we have to trust the Lord for the spiritual outcome of our ministry. One sows, another waters, but only God can give the increase.

2. The false teachers, 10b. Presented here as singular, but plural in 12. The emphasis here is that God will judge them. Cf. Matt. 18:6,7, giving penalties for offending those who believe in Christ. God will surely judge those who lead his people astray. Warned against in Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29.

Not to be confused with believers who stumble into innocent error. None of us has perfect understanding in the Scriptures. We are responsible to be diligent in studying the Word of God, so as to avoid error, but the sign of a mistaken believer rather than a false teacher is that the believer will welcome correction.

- 3. Paul, 11. Apparently, some of Judaizers say that he still preaches circumcision, just as he did before his conversion. No; on the contrary, he is persecuted precisely because he does not preach circumcision. This, in fact, is the offense of the Cross. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:23. The one thing that the Jews cannot get over is that the Messiah comes not to reward righteous Israelites but to die for sinful ones! Paul will go right on preaching this offensive gospel, in the face of the judaizing pressure.
- 4. The false teachers once again, v.12. Paul's desire that they would completely mutilate themselves is not just a coarse jest. The allusion is to Deut. 23:2, where people mutilated in this way are excluded from the congregation of Israel. Circumcision (as an attempt at justification) under the new covenant has the same effect as complete mutilation under the old; it excludes one from the kingdom. The Judaizers

should realize that this is the logical outcome of their error.

Hymn: Phil. 3.