

## *Tripped Up and In Trouble!*

*Galatians 5:7-12*

*Series: No Other Gospel - #19*

**Introduction:** Take your Bibles and join me in Galatians 5, Galatians chapter 5.

In July of 2014, Bill Hillman decided to try his hand at running with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain. The Chicago resident should have had a leg up on the rest of the runners because earlier in the year he co-wrote the e-book *How to Survive the Bulls of Pamplona*. In the book he offers tips on things like the best shoes to wear and which parts of the course are better for beginners. But poor Bill Hillman didn't quite live up to his own advice because during the running of the bulls he tripped and was gored in the right thigh by one of the enormous black beasts. I guess having good head knowledge and expert tips can only get you so far in something like running from the bulls! But more than that, one small misstep can become costly in a hurry. Bill's tripping incident put the bull's horn only centimeters from his femoral artery which would have spelled the end of him in a few short minutes. Knowing the dangers of running with the bulls and actually pulling it off without getting tripped up are two different things, I guess.

This is kind of like the Galatians. They were running along just fine while Paul was there preaching the pure Gospel to them, and they did well for a while after he left. But then someone butted into their race and tripped them up. And now they were in grave danger of spiritual desertion. That's what this letter to the Galatians is all about. It is God's grace through the pen of Paul to call these believers in Galatia to fight against error and persevere in Christ. The issue is justification. Will they be eternally declared righteous by God through their law keeping efforts, or will they be eternally declared right with God through their faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work. Paul has made clear to them that Christ is enough – and they must look only to Him to be justified. So he told them in verse 1 to stand firm in their freedom in Christ. Don't give in for even a second to the man-centered and man-exalting calls to trust in your own works of law keeping to save you – stand firm in the freedom and forgiveness and justification found only in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now in verses 7-12 he is going to explain to them from their own situation that error causes trouble in the Church and yet Truth triumphs because God is at work to keep His Church with His truth. Let's read verses 7-12 of Galatians 5.

We are on the cusp of the part of Galatians which gets intensely practical. So verse 13 down through the end of chapter 6 will contain the practical instruction which flows out of the Gospel truth which Paul has been defending. And all of it is rooted in the main command of verse 1 where we are called to stand firm in our freedom in Christ and refuse to submit to even the smallest portion of Law keeping. In these 6 verses we are presented with two truths which ought to encourage our firm stance in the freedom we have in Christ. In other words, understanding these two things helps us have more sure footing in the Gospel as a church.

I. Error Causes Trouble – vs. 7-9, 11-12

a. The first truth we see in this text is that error causes trouble in the church. Error is not some innocuous or innocent problem which is just part and parcel of church life. Error is not something we can just wink at and act as though it is relatively unimportant. No, when Gospel truth is being infiltrated with the errors and lies of the great deceiver, we must know that we have a problem. Error causes great trouble in the Church. So, Paul says that they were running along fine in this race of faith, but then someone butted in and tripped them up by bringing deceitful error into the church. This was not a slight stumble from which they quickly recover and hardly lose a step. No, this has been a major ordeal which is ultimately endangering their perseverance in the faith. You must also know that this tripping up was not done through ignorance or innocence, but it was done maliciously to destroy the truth. Notice that this entrance of error was first mental, then practical.

b. *Mental, then Practical*

i. So, they were running along fine and then they were tripped up. And they were tripped up mentally first and then this carried itself out into their practice – or it was about to do that as they seem to be on the verge of accepting circumcision as necessary for salvation. At the end of verse 7 and the beginning of verse 8 Paul uses some interesting words to help us understand what was going on in Galatia. He asks a rhetorical question at the end of verse 7 and says, “Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” He is not asking for names, but rather he is helping them self-evaluate the situation to help them identify the problem. Someone has impeded their ability to obey the truth. That word for obey has the nuance of being convinced to believe something and then acting based on that belief. In other words, someone got into their heads with error and persuaded them to start keeping the Law as a means to bolster their justification before God. So, the error entered into the churches in the form of teaching. It came in through their mental gateway which gave access for the false teachers to begin to influence their very practice. Or to say it backwards, their practice was beginning to reflect that they had been deceived by a false gospel.

ii. This is reflected in verse 8 where Paul uses a similar word as the one for “obedience” in verse 7, and he says that this “persuasion” is not from the one who called them. So, they are being persuaded and convinced that the Gospel God sent to them through the lips and life of Paul was not quite enough. The work of Christ on the Cross was good, but not quite enough to save you – they were being told. They needed to come into the people of God through circumcision and Law keeping. Then they would be saved. This was persuasive and powerful in the Galatian churches. These false teachers were effective in convincing the minds of these Galatian Christians and this was beginning to flesh itself out in their practice.

- iii. We get a small glimpse of some of their deceitful tactics in verse 11. Paul says – “But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.” Paul had to say this to them because apparently the false teachers were using Paul to bolster the persuasiveness of their argument. We don’t know exactly what they were saying about Paul, but most likely they were downplaying any disagreement Paul might have had with their new man-centered and man-dependent Gospel by saying that he preached the same thing that they were now preaching. So, when the Galatian churches first heard this new Gospel of Christ plus works from these false teachers, they probably responded by saying – that’s not what Paul taught us about Christ and His Gospel. But these able deceivers were ready with an answer. “Oh, Paul didn’t preach circumcision to the Gentiles, but he still does to the Jews. And the apostles in Jerusalem have sent us to make sure that you know that you do need to be circumcised to truly enter into God’s people. Without circumcision you are still condemned before God.” You see, they used sly and minute mental gymnastics to try and convince the Galatians that they were right. This is how error creeps in – in crafty and almost unnoticeable portions, but before long it is threatening the integrity of the Gospel.
- iv. But, notice that Paul fights fire with fire. He doesn’t just tell them to reject what they are being told by the Judaizers and remain loyal to him and his gospel. Rather, he reasons with them about this false teaching. He fights against this mental deception by reasoning from the truth of Scripture. This primarily happened in chapters 3-4 where Paul argued from the Old Testament Scriptures to prove that Law keeping was not a necessary prerequisite for justification. But here again in verse 11 he reasons with them from things they saw and can remember. So, he says, if it were true that I still preach circumcision then why in the world am I still being persecuted? That truth peels back the mask of this deception by exposing the heart of the matter. Paul has been persecuted because of the Gospel he preached. These Galatians had even seen that happen. Paul was persecuted by the Jews in front of their very eyes. It was in Lystra, one of the Galatian cities, where the Jews came in and persuaded the crowd to stone Paul and leave him for dead. They did this because of the Gospel he was preaching. So, the very people who are now reading this letter are some of the ones who helped Paul out from under the stones at Lystra as they marveled at the work of God to spare his life. Why was he stoned? Why did he continue to suffer persecution? Because he preached a Gospel absent of law keeping – absent of circumcision – absent of any ingredient of man’s works. If he would preach Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and would include that they also needed to be circumcised, then the Jews would have left him alone. So, Paul fights fire with fire. He unmasks the deceptive half-truths that are so common from the false teacher’s mouths

by pointing God's people to the clear and unadulterated truth. We learn much from Paul here about how to combat error in the church. We must speak the truth with clarity and with charity and with constancy. But we must speak the truth. We also learn a lot about error here. Error in the church comes in through mental gateways and then eventually impacts how people live in light of what they now believe. These errors are often small and subtle changes to truth, but in the end they are soul-damning doctrines of demons. Man is offended by the truth of the Cross which says that man can do nothing to save himself, but God has done everything to save us through and in Christ. Man wants a part of the action of our own salvation. We want a man-centered and man-exalting religion that gives lip service to God. But God does not work on those terms. His Gospel is all about Him and His gracious work to redeem and regenerate us for the ultimate end of His own glory and our complete joy. And we must be willing to die a thousand deaths in order to defend the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. *Illustration:* This is not new ground for the church to tread. Error has always caused trouble in the church and this has often taken the form of persecution for those who cling to the truth. Just one small example from Church History. During the days of the Protestant Reformation in the 1500's there was a bloody attack against the true Gospel in the land of England. Mary Tudor sat on the throne and she made it public policy number one to reinstate the Roman Catholic Church as the only acceptable church in the land. John Rogers had once been a catholic, but had been converted through a close connection to William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale as he helped them work on an English translation of the Bible. He eventually ended up in England serving as a pastor of a church under the reign of the Protestant King Edward VI. But when Edward died and Mary Tudor violently took the throne she saw to it that John Rogers was quickly imprisoned so as to silence his preaching of the pure Gospel of Christ which was absent of the works of man for salvation. During John Rogers' many examinations it was promised that he could return to his pulpit and his church if he would just accept the Pope as the head of the Church and if he would accept and teach the doctrine of transubstantiation – where it was taught that Christ was physically present in the bread and the wine at communion. John Rogers could preach Christ and he could preach a form of the gospel, but he could not simply preach the cross and resurrection of Jesus as man's only hope. He had to mix that with man's works of being a part of Rome's church and of taking communion – then he could preach freely. Rogers refused to accept these small pieces of leaven and it cost him his life. He became Mary Tudor's first

protestant martyr as he was marched to the stake in front of his dear wife and 10 children – one of them a baby he had never met! And yet before his execution he wrote to John Day, the printer of Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, “You will live to see the alteration of this religion, and the Gospel freely preached again. Therefore, have me commended to my brethren, . . . , and bid them be circumspect in displacing the Papist, and putting good ministers into Churches, or else their end will be worse than ours.”

2. Error causes life-threatening trouble in the Church and men like John Rogers stood firmly against it all the way until their final breath!

c. *Small, then Large*

- i. This leads us to another observation about error in the church. It starts small and then it becomes large. Paul quotes a parable about leaven in verse 9 to make the point that error often starts small and then becomes large. It only takes a small amount of leaven to leaven a whole lump, and it only takes a small amount of error to pollute the Gospel.
- ii. These false teachers who were coming to the Galatians were not peddling some intricate system of error. Rather, they were simply tweaking the Gospel here and there. But their small and subtle tweaks were destined to become Gospel altering deceptions. That is what we see happening in Acts 15 – which is chronologically after this situation in the Galatian churches. The push for circumcision among the Gentile believers in the early church moved from a preference into a strong stance which proclaimed that Gentiles couldn’t even be saved unless they were circumcised. Listen to the words of these false teachers as recorded in Acts 15:1 – “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” This initially small compromise had developed into a major error which completely countered the Gospel.
- iii. This is also similar to what Paul was battling in Corinth when he wrote the first letter to that church. In chapter 5 he confronts their tolerance of abhorrent sin in their midst and he uses this parable there as well to illustrate the danger – a little leaven soon leavens the whole lump of dough. So, truth is quickly infiltrated by error when it finds a small opening by which to enter. Couple this with what we see in Corinth and we see that a local body of Christ is quickly infiltrated by sin if they tolerate it in one of their members. Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy matter. Believing rightly and behaving rightly go hand in hand. Doctrine informs behavior and behavior displays doctrine. A little leaven leavens the whole lump – both in teaching and in obedience.

d. *Therefore, Listen to the Great Shepherd – vs. 8b*

- i. And so what is the practical take away from these observations? If error causes trouble and it does that by entering into the minds of God’s people

through false teaching, and if error comes in small doses and then causes major trouble – then what is the answer?

- ii. Well, look at verse 8 again. Paul says that this persuasion is not from him who calls you. He is obviously referring to God who effectually called them unto Himself by His grace. God who worked so clearly to reveal His Gospel to their hearts and to call them from darkness into light, was not now calling them back into the dark. Having led them from the bondage of man-centered effort to the freedom of faith and trust in Christ's finished work, God was not now calling them back to bondage by telling them to keep the Law. These false teachers were not speaking with the truth of God crossing their lips. They were not speaking in the place of God, and they were not representing the voice of the Great Shepherd.
- iii. Therefore, if we as Christ's Church are to stand strong against the error which seeks to destroy us we must listen to the voice of our Great Shepherd. He never speaks a confusing or convoluted message. He never mixes error with truth, asking us to parse out one from the other. God has spoken through His apostles and prophets as holy men of old were moved along the Spirit of God. Those clear and unadulterated words of God are now preserved for us in this His Holy Book. We must stand strong against error by being so familiar with the voice of God as found in His Word that we will not tolerate nor be deceived by words which convolute and deceptively twist His truth. We will not entertain false teachers, but rather we will react with righteous indignation which desires their conversion or their demise.
- iv. One of the evidences of a believer who is aware of the danger of error in the church, then, is his stance towards false teachers within the church. Paul echoes the words of Jesus in verse 12 when he says that he wishes those who were troubling the Galatians would emasculate themselves. Paul is using harsh and yet Christ like language to draw attention to the seriousness of the error of these false teachers. This is what Jesus did in Matthew 23 when he pronounced 7 very public and scathing woes against the respected religious leaders of the day – the scribes and Pharisees. They were distorting and blocking the truth of the Gospel, and so Jesus pronounced eternal curses upon them. And Paul does the same thing here. He desires these false teachers to not just call for circumcision but go the whole way to full emasculation. In other words, if you are going to have a man-centered religion which bases justification on man's works, then by all means take those works to their complete extreme. Don't stop somewhere in the middle between grace and man's effort – just go all the way! It is also a wish by Paul with spiritual overtones. So, in the OT Law – in Deuteronomy 23 to be exact – a man who has been emasculated cannot enter into the fellowship of worshiping God with God's people. So, in this statement in verse 12, Paul is wishing for these false teachers to also be cut off completely from the fellowship of God's people! There is no sympathy

or tolerance in Paul's heart for these false teachers. They were a leaven which needed to be removed from the body before they did more damage. So, one of the signs of a believer who is aware of error's danger and of the need to follow the voice of the Great Shepherd is that they will have zero tolerance for false teachers. So, are you ambivalent about the error which is infiltrating our church? Is your radar even up? Are you seeking to be like the believers in Berea who weighed everything they heard from the lips of man with everything they heard from the mouth of God? Does it give you spiritual heartburn to think that right now all across the globe there are men and women standing in church buildings like this claiming to speak for God and saying things that are antithetical to the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ? Does it set off your spiritual security system alarm that there are false teachers seeking a way to enter into this church to cause great damage to our faithfulness to God's Gospel?

1. *Beloved – I have expressed this to you before, but let me say again – we live in some of the most spiritually dangerous times in the history of the church. Satan has so many avenues of entrance into the hearts and minds of God's people today – more than ever before. The prolific production of books, blog posts, magazines, sermons, music, and movies which claim to be Christian is higher now than it has ever been. Combine that with the fact that you have instant access to most of those things, and you have the ripe conditions for both the building up of the Church and the destruction of the Church. Truth can be prolifically spread and so can error. You must be discerning! You must be careful about what authors you read. Do some research – know who they are and where they are coming from theologically. You must think about the music you listen to and the sermons you turn on.*
- v. We must be constantly aware of how dangerous and spiritually deadly error is! But let's finish this morning by recognizing the amazing sovereignty of God in His Church. So, error causes trouble in the Church, and this could be a really discouraging and seemingly hopeless reality. But Paul is not discouraged in this text. He is not hopeless. And this is so because truth triumphs. Error threatens the True Church, but truth always Triumphs among God's people.

## II. **But Truth Triumphs – vs. 10**

- a. There are two ways that this happens, and we see them both in verse 10. Truth triumphs by God's preserving grace and by God's righteous judgment.
- b. *By God's Preserving Grace*
  - i. Look at verse 10 again. In the midst of all of Paul's concern about these believers being tripped up by false teaching he says – "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." Take note of Paul's confidence. This word is the same one used in verse 7 to describe their obeying of the

truth. Remember that it has the nuance of being mentally persuaded of something which then influences behavior. Paul is mentally persuaded of some great truth which is now keeping him from a spiritual panic attack over the fate of these churches. But his confidence is not in man in any way. He is not confident because of the persuasiveness of his teaching, or because of the largeness of his personality which will call them back to him, or of their great ability to sniff out doctrinal error. No, his confidence is placed squarely upon the Lord. He is confident “in the Lord” he says. He is persuaded of some great truth about God which gives him unyielding resolve in their future faithfulness to the one true Gospel. God will preserve them by His great and Sovereign Grace.

- ii. God must preserve them because there are varying and different views. Notice that Paul says he is confident that they will take no other view on circumcision and the Cross. He is sure that they will come back to the pure Gospel which is absent of any trust in man’s work. But this makes clear to us that there will always be varying views within the broad umbrella of the church. Many self-professed Christians will disagree and take varying views on matters of great theological significance. Many conservative Christians have been bothered by this and have wondered if this is evidence of a confused God, or of doctrine that maybe doesn’t matter as much as we say it does. But look at the text. Confusion of views, and a variety of views does not negate that there is a right one, and it does not incriminate God as though He has somehow been unclear. No, the variety of views points to confused men who claim to speak for God, but who are absent of the truth. This should not make us doubt if there is truth at all, or if it really matters whether or not we have it right. No, if you are a part of God’s true Church through the redemption of Jesus Christ, then you will be preserved by God’s great grace and you will walk in the truth!
- iii. This reflects the promise from the mouth of Jesus himself in John 10. Turn there with me – John chapter 10. As Jesus explains his unique relationship between Him and His people He says this in verses 14-16. . . Now look down at verses 24-30. Notice that the sheep are given eternal life by the Shepherd. They hear His voice and they follow, and they are forever kept by the greatness and power of God. This is sovereign grace. This is the mysterious and supernatural work of God to make you a sheep of his pasture and then to guarantee that you will forever remain in His fold. False sheep will come and go, but the true sheep will forever remain. And this is not to their credit or in any way a product of their own power. No, this is because of God and His sovereign preserving grace. We persevere in the truth because God preserves us with His grace! And in that way truth triumphs in the Church.

c. *By God’s Righteous Judgment*



- i. It also triumphs in that God brings righteous judgment. Do not think for a millisecond that God does not care about these false teachers who are doing such great damage to the Church. So Paul says that he is just as persuaded about this as he is about God's preserving grace. The truth will triumph in the Galatian churches because the one who is troubling them will bear the penalty. This word for troubling them has already been used in this short letter. Back in 1:7 Paul said that there are some who are troubling the churches and he put this parallel thought with that – he said they want to distort the gospel of Christ. So, those who are troubling the church by seeking to distort the Gospel of Christ will bear the judgment of God upon them. And you can be sure that even if it seems now like the false teachers are thriving – there is coming a day of great judgment upon their souls.
- ii. As we close turn with me to 2 Peter 2 – 2 Peter 2. This is the clearest passage I am aware of which promises the judgment which will fall upon false prophets and false teachers. *Read 2 Peter 2:1-9*
- iii. Notice that the church will have to deal with false teachers and notice that they will have a large following, but God will preserve a righteous remnant and he will judge those false prophets and false teachers. He did not spare angels when they sinned, and he did not spare the generation of Noah's day, and he did not spare Sodom and Gomorrah of Lot's day – you can be assured that the Lord will rescue you from the trials of false teaching and he will bring the unrighteous to that Day of Judgment which is soon coming!

**Conclusion:** Beloved – be aware of the trouble that error causes in the Church. Be on guard for the persevering salvation of your own soul and the souls of others in the body. Despise and deal swiftly with those who distort the Gospel, and stand firm in the preserving grace of our God who guarantees our faithfulness by His own power. And know that one day, these false teachers will answer to a righteous and holy God! Let's pray.