

Galatians 5:7-15

Zero Tolerance

This last Tuesday was the same as any other day on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh. Students lying on the Cathedral lawn, going to classes and eating with friends.

The only difference was that 1,000 of them were wearing identical shirts.

The "Gay? Fine By Me" T-Shirt Project, which has more than 20,000 people across the country wearing T-shirts with the same motto, came to Pitt ostensibly as part of a national campaign to combat homophobia.

Pitt joined other Pennsylvania schools such as Penn State and Bucknell in hosting a T-shirt drive this spring.

The shirts were paid for by the Student Government Board, which I would suppose gets its funds from student fees that every student has to pay.

Now, if I were a student at Pitt I'd be very unhappy about the way the SGB chose to spend my money. I wouldn't want them to hand out shirts that were anti-homosexual, but I sure wouldn't want them to hand out pro-gay shirts either.

Incidentally, the same issue of the Pitt News, which I read to learn about the T-shirts has a column by Rose Afriyie,

Pitt News Sex Columnist, which gives instructions on a particular sex act in graphic detail. PA residents, that's your tax dollars at work!

But this is much bigger than the University of Pittsburgh. This is all part of a gigantic movement to win the hearts and minds of young people when it comes to moral issues. Very important concepts like civil rights, freedom, individual choice, and tolerance have been hijacked and redefined by some very influential voices in our land.

In fact, it really doesn't matter whether its religion, law, morality, family; all of these areas have come under attack and if anyone tries to talk about standards or truth their shouted down or drowned out.

The idea is we're all tolerant of anything so no one should make value judgments on anything. There is no right or wrong when it comes to morality.

Of course, no one would want to live in a world in which there was no moral right and wrong. It would be anarchy. To say there's no moral right and wrongs is the height of hypocrisy.

The clear teaching of the New Testament is vastly different from this cultural outlook. Christianity doesn't allow us to sit on the fence.

It challenges us to be definite and decisive. Not to be hostile or combative but to take a stand for right and wrong and to speak the truth in love.

The Bible makes it crystal clear that there is the false and there is the true: doctrinally, ethically, and morally.

So, what happens if we as the people of God don't stand for truth. what happens if we allow ourselves to be anesthetized by the distorted spirit of tolerance which has gripped our age?

How do we balance out being loving and Christ-like in spirit, and yet uncompromising in what we believe?

I believe the answer is found in our passage for today, **Galatians chapter 5 pg 1036**

As you read through the New Testament it becomes crystal clear the God loves the local church. It's the center of His plan for this age. God loves the church, but the church isn't infallible. Pastors make mistakes. Church leaders make mistakes. Church members make mistakes.

It's significant to me though, as I read through these letters addressed to local churches that the solution to every problem always begins with a correct understanding of biblical truth.

That's why the heartbeat of Faith Community Church has always been to teach the Word of God accurately. It takes time. It takes work. It takes a real submission to the Holy Spirit.

But in the end, it's what we believe that determines how we live.

We're in a verse by verse study of Galatians and so far Paul, who wrote the book under the inspiration of God, has built a foundation of doctrine. He's spent the first half of the book talking about what we should believe.

Now he's going to apply that to how we should live.

Galatians is a letter written to a group of local churches that had become confused by false teaching. The teaching sounded real spiritual. It was, "live out the commandments of God to be accepted by God. Take the law as it was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai and use it to earn your way to God."

Of course, as we've seen over and over again throughout the whole Bible, there's no way imperfect people can earn their way to a perfect God. there's only one way to God, and that way is a person.

Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

He didn't say, "I'm one of many ways. I'm part of the way. Hang out with Me and I'll point you in the right direction." He said, "I am the way."

Jesus Christ is the way because Jesus Christ paid the complete and total price for our sins at the cross. Jesus is God in human flesh who stood in our place of judgment.

Our sins were actually placed on His shoulders and He bore the penalty. The way of salvation is to trust Him. That means to believe that He died in your place and rose again.

The Bible says, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

God's law as given to Moses and Israel is perfect and good. But it's only functionality ultimately is to condemn. It's a perfect standard that demands perfect obedience. We can't provide that perfection, but Jesus Christ can and did. So in Him alone is forgiveness.

In Jesus Christ there's forgiveness for sin for eternity and there's the life changing power to deal with sin in our lives in the here and now.

The exciting thing is that the idea of salvation by grace and living by grace aren't concepts that we would dream up on our own. A bunch of religious guys didn't sit down one day and say, "Let's write the Bible."

It's been said that "Man couldn't have written the Bible if he wanted to, and wouldn't if he could have."

Man couldn't have written the Bible because it's 100% prophetically accurate. It has hundreds of specific predictions, covering thousands of years that can be easily verified. None of this Nostradamus stuff.

Man couldn't have, but he also wouldn't have. There's no other religious book that says we are made right with God by faith in what God Himself did for us. Not one.

The idea of salvation by grace through faith is a total stumbling block to so many. No one's ever come up with it on their own.

There's only one way that we could know about salvation by faith. God had to reveal it to us. There's only one way to understand, that's through the revelation of God.

Now see how important an accurate understanding of the Bible is?

If our relationship with God depends on the understanding of truth as He's revealed it, then we'd better understand His truth. And not only that, but if we get away from that truth we are headed for trouble.

In fact, it is a biblical concept that even a small amount of false doctrine eventually grows to corrupt the whole.

I. A Small Amount of False Doctrine Eventually Grows to Corrupt All

Notice in chapter 5 of Galatians, Paul's questions as he begins in verse 7.

Read vs. 7 & 8

We live in a society that loves sports. We just finished up “March Madness” and today Washington plays Chicago in the first of the NBA playoff games. Baseball is getting into gear with the new Washington Nationals.

Well, the Greek world of the 1st century was just as enraptured with sports as we are, if not more so. Paul was writing this letter to the Galatian churches from Corinth, Greece. Corinth was the home of the Isthmian games. The Olympics, as well as all the other Greek athletic contests always included races. Because of that, Paul often used the imagery of running to illustrate the Christian life.

It’s important to note that Paul never uses the image of a race to tell people how to get to God. He is always talking to Christians about how to live the Christian life.

A contestant in the Greek games had to be a citizen before he could compete. We become citizens of heaven through faith in Christ. Then the Lord puts us on our course and we run to win the prize. We don’t run to be saved. We run because we’re already saved and want to do our best for Jesus Christ.

So Paul says to these people - “You ran well.” “You were off to a great start.”

Back in Chapter 4 and verse 14 he had said, “You received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.”

Here was a group of people who accepted the Word of God, trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, and received the Holy Spirit. They had a deep joy.

These people were so excited about Christ that they were willing to make any sacrifice for Paul who brought them the message of Christ.

But now that’s changed.

“Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” Literally the Greek text says: Who cut in on you?”

“You were right on track but some one cut in on you and made you lose your stride.” In the races, each runner had his own assigned lane, but sometimes, runners would cut in on the others.

That's what the false teachers had done to the Galatian believers. They cut in on them and caused them to get off course. Now, it wasn't God who had done this. He'd called them to run faithfully in the lane marked "grace."

So Paul asks, "Who was it that broke your stride?"

Now he didn't want a print out of all their names. It wasn't that he didn't know who was troubling the Galatians. It's that He wanted the Galatians to think about the character of these people who would cause them to defect from the truth.

And he's asking them, "OK guys, what did it take to get you off track?"

That's the question for us, isn't it? What would it take to cause you to defect from the truth?

Are you strong enough in the truth of what you believe to keep from being swayed by a fast talker or a dynamic personality?

A lot of Christians have started off well in their Christian lives only to be side tracked and knocked out of their lane by false teaching.

Now, at this point it would have been tempting to say to Paul, "Wait a minute. What are you getting so bent out of shape about?"

"So there's a little false doctrine. So these guys aren't straight down the line on every little thing. Don't be so judgmental Paul."

"They still talk about believing in Jesus. They still worship God. They still use the Bible."

"You need to mellow out a little here Paul. You are getting all bent out of shape about nothing. Let's not blow things all out of perspective."

Read vs. 9

Earlier this month two employees of Indonesia's national airline were detained for questioning in the in-flight poisoning death of a 38-year-old Indonesian

human rights campaigner. He was poisoned with arsenic on a flight from Jakarta to Amsterdam back in September.

Someone slipped him a lethal dose of arsenic in his airline food. He never knew it was there. That might have something to do with airline food, but the fact was it doesn't take much arsenic to do the job.

It only takes a pinch of arsenic and the whole pie becomes deadly. "A little leaven (a little bit of yeast) leavens the whole lump" It only takes a little bit of the false doctrine to corrupt the true.

Paul uses that common Jewish proverb twice in his writings. He uses it here to talk about false doctrine, and in I Corinthians 5:6 to talk about sin in the church.

One of the most serious things about evil and error is that they both spread.

In this case the error was legalism. Paul couldn't have picked a more appropriate illustration here, then yeast in the dough.

Yeast causes dough to rise, to puff up. And that's exactly what legalism does. It makes people proud of the things that they are doing for God until they feel superior to all the people around them who aren't doing the same things they're doing.

Be careful of compromising with error. Error will grow and corrupt that which is good.

Back in the 70's a number of churches and schools began to give up the inerrancy of scripture. Inerrancy means without error.

The transformation went something like this.:

1. The Bible contains tough areas which appear to be contradictions (no benefit of doubt).
2. The Bible is inspired but only inerrant in matters of faith and practice.
3. The Bible has questionable areas of practice. (women in ministry)
4. The Bible is doctrinally in error.

Error will poison. It is insidious. It grows. What happened in Galatia has been multiplied over and over again thousands of times.

Today the battleground is the sufficiency of Scripture.

John MacArthur writes: "Psychology today is making inroads into the church that really are frightening. In fact, there is in the evangelical church what is fast becoming a wholesale exodus from the traditional land of biblical theology into the new promised land of psychology and psychotherapy."

"Churches that once would hire pastors and evangelists and teachers are now hiring psychologists. Pastors that once would go to seminary and learn the Word of God or Bible college and master the Scripture are now going to schools of psychology to study human wisdom in dealing with problems."

I was in a church last Sunday that had every 12 step and recovery program you could think of but when I asked them for a doctrinal statement they couldn't find one.

- I. *A Small Amount of False Doctrine Eventually Grows to Corrupt All*
- II. *If we could see the end result of false teaching, we wouldn't want to get involved in the first place.*

If we would just see the big picture, believe me we'd be a lot more careful.

Paul puts it this way. vs. 10

See, even though Paul has to warn the Galatians he doesn't give up on them. That's because he knows that ultimately it's God's work that's going on.

So he says, "I have the confidence to believe that once you see what's happening, God the Holy Spirit will straighten you out. But, the false teachers will be judged for what they've done to you."

He who troubles you shall bear his judgement. What a solemn warning!

The church of Jesus Christ is his purchased possession bought with the precious blood of Christ.

It is the body of Christ; the bride of Christ. I Cor. 3 says it's the temple of God and the spirit of God dwells in the church. *If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*

It's serious business when anyone messes with God's church.

That judgment will some day fall. We can be sure of that because God has decreed it.

To us at times, it may seem like judgment is a long time coming but God will judge in his own way and in his own time.

Now, thinking of this coming judgment on these Judiazers spurs Paul's thoughts on to bring up a way in which they tried to spread their leaven.

Read Verse 11

When Paul was in Lystra, a market town of Lycaonia in south central modern-day Turkey, he took on a young man on as an assistant named Timothy. Timothy was part Jew and so as not to offend the Jews Paul had him go thru with circumcision.

Now, there wasn't any compromise here because no one was insisting on circumcising Christians at that point. It wasn't compromising the gospel in any way.

If your trying to reach a group of people in another country then you would want to do whatever you could culturally to fit in, so that you wouldn't offend any one.

My first exposure to missions was listening to the testimony of a girl who had gone to a remote country to reach people for Christ. She was served a cooked rat. What do you do?

She dug right in and ate the rodent. She ate that rat because to turn it down would have been the height of insult - and so she did what it took to reach out to others.

When Jew's who became believers in Christ chose to circumcise their children I'm sure Paul was silent.

There was no reason to make an issue out of it as long as people weren't placing the wrong emphasis on it. With Timothy and other Jewish Christians there was no idea of "this is necessary, along with faith, for salvation."

Now, the Judaizers picked up on this and said to the Galatian people, "Look, even Paul, by his own actions, admits that circumcision is necessary sometimes. Actually Paul is being a hypocrite. You can't trust the guy. He says one thing one day, and another thing the next."

"At least we are consistent. We say EVERYBODY comes to God the same way. Through His law. And for a male that begins with the covenant sign of God-circumcision."

Paul's answer to that is "Hey look, if I was preaching circumcision everything would be OK now. I wouldn't be catching flack.. If I preached works for salvation then there'd be no offence of the cross."

The offence of the cross isn't just that Jesus died. People aren't offended by that. As long as Jesus is just a martyr there's no problem. As long as the cross is just about Jesus love everything's fine.

The offence of the cross is the clarity and simplicity of the gospel. What makes the cross offensive to people is that the cross is about Jesus Christ doing it all. It's about Jesus Christ being the only way to heaven.

The concept of "no works" becomes a stumbling block. There would be no persecution if Paul was simply preaching a religion of human effort.

So he says, I suffer persecution because I preach the cross, but these false teachers, they're celebrities because they preach a religion that pampers the flesh and feeds the ego. Do they want to circumcise you?

Read vs. 12

Now hang on for this one because this is where it gets heavy and we run the danger of misunderstanding what's meant.

The standard meaning of *apokopto* in Greek literature, the verb translated “to cut off” is “to castrate.”

And what the Bible is saying is “I would that those who upset you might make Eunuchs of themselves. They put so much emphasis on the physical act, but that’s all they have to offer. Why don’t they just follow it to completion, then you’d see clearly what they are really like.” Wow!

Now remember these Galatians had come out of an extremely pagan background. One of their main goddesses was Cybele. ("sib - ailey") And all of the priests included in the worship of Cybele were eunuchs.

Circumcision, under the law of Moses, was a token of the covenant made by God with His people Israel.

To the Galatians it had absolutely no religious significance.

When the Judaizers tried to make this a point of worship what they actually were doing was telling the Galatian people that the physical act of cutting the flesh would bring them close to God.

And all that did was, differ in degree, but not in kind, from the pagan worship that was going on around Galatia.

So Paul says, “I wish these guys would just go the whole route. Then you’d see what they are saying for what it is. They really don’t have any more to offer you than your paganism did.”

Now at first reading that sounds pretty harsh, doesn’t it?. Don’t you kinda wonder, “Paul you’re a man of God, how could you write such a thing?”

Remember a couple of things.

1st. Paul was mentioning something that was current events for these people. This was an integral part of their culture.

2nd. Paul wasn’t saying “I wish God would drop a big rock out of the sky and

wipe them all out.” He wasn’t saying “I wish they were all mutilated so they would suffer.”

His point is “I wish these guys would show themselves for what they really are. I wish they’d come to you in such a way that you’d clearly see the end result of what they are saying to you.”

To bring that over and to make that applicable to us we ought to pray that God would let us see every situation, every new doctrine, every preacher, every book that we read, every organization for what it really is. That we’d have enough spiritual discernment to see the end result; to see what the whole lump is going to look like after the leavening has done its job.

If I were going to pray like the Apostle did here, this is what I’d pray:

That when those clean cut, freshly scrubbed, young Mormons come to your door they would talk about what they really believed; that God was once a man who worked real hard and got to be God. And that there are thousands of gods over their own worlds. That a person can atone for some of his own sin with his own blood, that heaven for women is to be eternally pregnant, that the Bible really isn’t true because it isn’t translated correctly, but no one really knows how it’s supposed to be translated so we really can’t trust it.

That’s what Paul’s prayer is, that people could see what they’re really like.

i’d pray that Christians would recognize that Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Korean Billionaire who owns the Washington Times newspaper, U.P.I., Insight magazine, The University of Bridgeport, and The New Yorker Hotel has hundreds of political, religious, and social front organizations.

Moon's vision of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth includes the absorption of all the world religions into Unificationism as well as the abolishment of all languages except Korean. Core Moonie members do a ritual pledge service every Sunday morning, bowing before an altar with Moon's picture on it and promising to fight for the Fatherland (Korea).

He teaches that Adam and Eve didn’t fulfill God's ideal, that Jesus was a failure because He didn’t get married and have children (I guess Rev. Moon hasn’t read

the Da Vinci Code yet) and so Rev Moon is the lord of the second advent who fills in where Jesus failed.

The list could go on and on. There's a lot of people out there pretending they are something they are not. They're giving people these little "tidbits" to bring them in. They use terminology that sounds biblical. But in the end it's nothing more than paganism.

- I. *A Small Amount Of False Doctrine Eventually Grows To Corrupt All*
- II. *If We Could See The End Result Of False Teaching, We Would Not Get Involved In The First Place.*
- III. *False Doctrine Produces Self-Righteousness But True Doctrine Produces Christ-Likeness.*

Read vs. 13- 15

Verse 13 begins with the word "for". This is important. It's an explanation. It's a summation of the 1st 12 verses. It's not just hanging out there alone.

Paul is saying "Hey, the reason that I'm so disturbed about what's happening is that false teachers are trying to subject you unto bondage when you have been called by Christ unto liberty. But, you don't use your God given liberty as an occasion to the flesh."

Liberty and freedom aren't about serving yourself.

Turning liberty into license is an attitude that's ingrained in our sin nature. It's just so easy for us to misinterpret liberty as the right to sin, and to understand freedom as the privilege to do anything our heart desires.

What liberty really means is, a Holy Spirit implanted ability and desire to do what I should do.

It seems like a contradiction doesn't it? You've been called to freedom, now make yourself a slave to others. But isn't that what Jesus did? "Took upon himself the form of a servant." Only hours before he stepped into the garden of Gethsemane with all the agony and trauma, he took a towel and a basin of water and washed his disciples feet to teach them about loving one another.

Let me ask you something. Do you think your average “run of the mill” Pharisee would have gotten down and washed another man’s feet? Why not?

Because legalism and love are contradictory. God has called us unto liberty and now notice what that liberty does. It gives us freedom to serve. It was never intended to be license to sin - it was the only way we could serve in love.

Legalism brings pride. Pride in all our spiritual accomplishments because we kept all the rules.

If my focus is “I don’t do this,” and “I don’t do that,” and then I find out that you do those things, then I don’t wash your feet because I look down on you.

Liberty frees me up to serve.

And with all these arguments of the Judaizers to try to get the Galatians to put themselves under the Mosaic law,. in the end the law’s really fulfilled in love.

The law established the freedom of the Gospel, because the Gospel produces the love that the law demands, but can’t provide.

God has given liberty - not liberty to sin - but liberty to love. Carry that out and you will fulfill God’s commands. But, get immersed in legalism and love won’t even register for you. You’ll be critical and judgmental and self righteous and you’ll end up like the two snakes that caught each other by the tail and started eating.

See he’s really zeroing in here on an often times overlooked aspect of spiritually. If you want to evaluate your own walk with God, outward actions are important, but so are your attitudes. If you have the actions right but the attitudes wrong you can’t classify yourself as “Christ-like.”

Now he’s not talking about being weak. Love doesn’t mean that you never speak out against sin and wrong.

Love sometimes has to be firm. Love spansks when a child is naughty. Paul himself has said some harsh things.

In his letter when it involved false doctrine. But now he's speaking of Christians quarreling, gossiping, verbally tearing down one another. Those kinds of attitudes come out of legalism. Love conserves, lack of love consumes.

Which lane are you running in today? Are you still running well. We've been called into liberty in Christ. If you know the truth of the freedom and life that you have in Christ then let love control your every action.

The only way to be a winner is to purge out the old leaven - then to run the race with patience that's been divinely set before us.