

Study 13
Galatians 5:7-15

1. When Paul writes about the "little leaven leavens the whole lump" what is he referring to and why is he writing to the Galatians about this

When Paul writes "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9), he is using a metaphor to illustrate how a small influence can have a significant and pervasive effect, particularly a negative one. In biblical culture the leaven is always a metaphor for evil. Even in Levitical sacrifices for purity leaven was not permitted. Leviticus 2:11 (ESV) 11 "No grain offering that you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the LORD.

In this context, the evil of this "leaven" refers to the false teachings of the Judaizers, who were advocating for the necessity of circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic Law as a requirement for salvation. Paul warns the Galatians that even a small acceptance of such teachings can corrupt the entire community, undermining the gospel of grace.

He addresses this to the Galatians because they were being swayed by these false teachers, jeopardizing their understanding of salvation by faith alone in Christ. Paul emphasizes the need to reject any addition to the gospel message, as it compromises the truth and freedom found in Christ.

2. a) Why was Paul persecuted in the Galatian regions for "circumcision"?

Paul was persecuted in the Galatian regions because he preached salvation by faith in Christ alone, rejecting circumcision and the Mosaic Law as necessary for salvation. This stance directly opposed the Judaizers, who insisted that Gentiles must adopt Jewish customs, including circumcision, to be saved. By denying circumcision's salvific role, Paul undermined their teachings, provoking hostility from those clinging to the law as a means of righteousness. His message also offended Jewish communities who saw the law as central to their identity and relationship with God.

- b) Why is the cross the polar opposite of circumcision and all it represents?

The cross is the polar opposite of circumcision because it symbolizes complete dependence on God's grace, while circumcision represents reliance on human effort and adherence to the law. Circumcision, as part of the Mosaic covenant, was a sign of striving for righteousness through works. In contrast, the cross declares that salvation is a free gift through Christ's sacrifice, making human effort irrelevant for justification. The cross exposes the futility of works-based righteousness and centers salvation entirely on Christ's atoning death.

- c) Why is the cross always offensive to people even today?

The cross is offensive because it challenges human pride, self-sufficiency, and the idea that we can earn salvation through our efforts. It confronts people with their sinfulness and their inability to save themselves, requiring them to accept their need for a Savior. Furthermore, the cross's message of grace undermines systems of merit, power, and control, making it uncomfortable for those who prefer to trust in their own achievements or moral superiority. Even today, its radical exclusivity and call to surrender remain countercultural and provoke opposition.

3. a) What are the common ways in which we can be tempted to mitigate or lessen the offense of the cross when we interact with others in evangelism?

In evangelism, we may be tempted to mitigate the offense of the cross by:

1. **Softening the message of sin:** Avoiding discussions about sin or guilt to make the gospel more appealing, neglecting the need for repentance.
2. **Emphasizing human effort:** Presenting salvation as a partnership where good works, morality, or religious rituals contribute, instead of emphasizing grace alone.
3. **Adapting to cultural norms:** Diluting the exclusivity of Christ by suggesting that all paths lead to God or de-emphasizing the unique need for Christ's atonement.

Avoiding confrontation: Downplaying the cost of discipleship or ignoring controversial truths like judgment or the necessity of faith in Christ alone. These attempts often reflect a fear of rejection or a desire to make the gospel more socially acceptable but risk compromising its transformative power.

b) In *Galatians 5:4* *You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.* He seems to be saying we are either in Christ with grace totally and against the law. In *Galatians 3:11* *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Yet he writes the opposite about fulfilling the law in *Galatians 5:14 (ESV)* *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* Is Paul contradicting himself in this letter? Please explain.

Paul is not contradicting himself but addressing two distinct aspects of the law: **justification by the law versus fulfilling the law through love.**

1. **Justification by the law (Galatians 5:4; 3:11):**
Paul strongly rejects the idea that the law can justify anyone before God. Attempting to earn salvation by observing the law alienates one from Christ because it denies the sufficiency of His grace. Righteousness is by faith alone, as "the righteous shall live by faith," not by human efforts or adherence

to the Mosaic law.

2. Fulfilling the law through love (Galatians 5:14):

Paul teaches that the moral essence of the law is fulfilled when believers, empowered by the Spirit, love their neighbors. This love is not a means to achieve righteousness but a natural outcome of salvation through faith. It aligns with Jesus' teaching that love for God and neighbor sums up the law (Matthew 22:37–40).

In essence, Paul distinguishes between the law as a means of earning salvation (which he rejects) and the law as a guide for living a life of love in response to God's grace. Far from contradicting himself, Paul shows that grace empowers believers to live in a way that reflects God's heart, fulfilling the law's intent.

4. The common secular understanding of freedom is based on the concept that we are completely free to do as we please. It is a cherished right enshrined in the constitution of many countries.
- a) However, based on this passage is this true?

The secular understanding of freedom—being completely free to do as we please—is not true according to this passage. Such a view misunderstands the nature of freedom for creatures created in the image of God. While it celebrates autonomy, it often ignores the reality that unchecked "freedom" can lead to enslavement to sin, harmful desires, and idolatry. Paul demonstrates this in Galatians, showing that humanity is not truly independent; we are either enslaved to sin or bound to God in righteousness. True freedom is not about doing whatever we want but being liberated to live in alignment with God's design and purposes.

- b) What is true freedom for creatures created in the image of God?

True freedom for those created in God's image is the ability to live as we were designed—to reflect God's character and fulfill His purposes. This freedom is found in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, where we are freed from the power of sin and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love and serve others. Paul explains that true freedom is not self-centered but rooted in love, as seen in Galatians 5:13-14: "You were called to freedom...but through love serve one another." This freedom enables us to love God and our neighbors, fulfilling the law's intent.

- c) How can embracing the concept of grace be distorted as a license to sin?

Embracing grace can be distorted as a license to sin when it is misunderstood as permission to live without moral accountability. This distortion arises when people think, "Because I am saved by grace, my

actions no longer matter." Such an attitude misrepresents the purpose of grace, which is not to enable sin but to empower holiness. Paul warns against this in Galatians 5:13, saying, "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh." True grace transforms hearts and produces obedience out of love, not rebellion cloaked in false freedom. Using grace as a pretext for sin demonstrates a failure to understand its purpose—to restore us to God's image and align us with His will.

Case 1

Scott and Diane recently started attending a church that had recently started in their neighborhood which had many of her friends excited for the first time about any church. The lead pastor there preached a refreshing message about the beauty of grace and declared that believers were free from sin. The cross pays for all our sins past present and future hence we are no longer bound by the Law. We do not need to confess our sins anymore. There is no need to feel and grief about our sins. There is no more need for discipleship because when God looks at us He sees the righteousness of His Son. We are destined to reign and if we exercise faith He will grant us all the covenant promises of Abraham and grant us our hearts desires.

So many of their friends burdened by years of guilt were now happily attending church and some were prospering in their jobs and business. They are no longer fussing about their sins or looking toward righteousness because they are done with the Law. It is a curse that is lifted. On the other hand, the pastor had recently become obsessed with the Lord's supper and advocated for it to be done as often as possible as it conveys grace and blessings even good health and success in the job. Some of Diane's friends were doing it several times a day and they testified that it kept their looks fresh and some even claimed to look actually younger.

- a) Discussion Question. What do you think about the teachings of this church? Is it biblical? Can you critique it based on what you have learned so far in the book of Galatians? Why is such a church so popular?

- b) Discussion Question. Many of the couple's friends have felt a burden being lifted and live joyous lives now that they don't have to worry about sin. For the first time they feel free from guilt and their burdens lifted. They condemn the traditional church which had been for years been making them feel bad. Some of them are now more active in church and evangelizing. What do you think about this? Do their stories confirm the truth about this pastor's teachings?

- c) Discussion Question. What do you think about the practice of doing the Lord's supper and repeating the benefits of good looks and health and blessings? In what way is this practice undermining the pastor's preaching on grace? Ref Gal 5:6.

d) Reflection Question. How do you currently approach God in repentance? How often do you do it? Is it detailed or specific? Do you pray for God to change your ways?

Takeaway

True freedom in Christ liberates believers from legalism and the sinful desires of the flesh, enabling Christians to live out their faith through love and service to others. Salvation is assured by faith in the finished work of Christ, not by human effort or adherence to the law.