

Handout 1: Galatians Lesson 4

Paul will use the literal Greek expression “works of Law” (without the article “the”) nine times in two of his letters— six times in his Letter to the Galatians (Gal 2:16 three times; Gal 3:2, 5, 10) and three times in his Letter to the Romans in 3:20, 28, and 32a.

The Church Fathers, to include Origin, Jerome, Ambrosiaster and Theodoret of Cyrillus, wrote that Paul was primarily referring to the ceremonial works of the Law that have become irrelevant in the coming of Christ. These works include circumcision (see Rom 2:25-29; 3:30; 4:9-12; Gal 2:3; 5:2-12; 6:12-15) the dietary laws (Rom 14:1-23; Gal 2:11-14), and the observance of feast days of the Sinai Covenant’s liturgical calendar (Rom 14:5-6; Gal 4:10; Col 2:16-17).

In 5:1, Paul offers his conclusion to the allegory in 4:21-31. He also begins an exhortation that continues through 6:10.

1. Paul focuses on the consequences of depending on circumcision as a path to salvation.
2. He appeals to the Galatians to side with freedom in Christ as opposed to slavery under the old Law.
3. He repeats his argument from 2:16 and 3:3 that it is faith and not circumcision that counts toward their justification and ultimate salvation.

In Galatians 5:2-4 Paul makes three points:

1. Every man who submits to circumcision as necessary for salvation is declaring that Christ’s sacrifice is of no benefit to him and forfeits his promise of eternal salvation.
2. If a person declares him/herself under the old Law, that person has to observe all the commands and prohibitions of the Law or that person is a hypocrite.
3. Just as those who decide to live in bondage to the works of the law must fulfill all the requirements of the law, those who profess faith in Jesus Christ must stand firm in their freedom.

In Galatians 5:7-12 Paul tries to persuade the Galatians to disassociate themselves from those who are trying to add circumcision and ritual observances of the Mosaic Law as a cause for salvation to the Gospel of Christ:

1. Paul asks the Galatians two questions (verses 7 and 11).
2. He makes a statement that the false teaching they have received does not come from God (verse 8).
3. He tells them a proverb (verse 9).
4. Paul gives a stinging curse-judgment against the agitators (verse 12).

Paul makes two points in Galatians 5:11:

1. If Paul continued to preach the necessity of circumcision, then there would be no reason to persecute him.
2. If Paul preached circumcision then he has made a “stumbling block of the cross” by making salvation on the basis of faith in the crucified Christ ineffective. By preaching circumcision Paul could remove the offense to Jews of a crucified Christ, but in fact he does not.

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In 5:13-26 St. Paul elaborates on the true meaning of freedom as a Christian:

1. Freedom does not mean the license to behave badly (verse 13). Bad behavior makes one a slave to sin and can cost one the gift of freedom in eternal salvation (verse 21).
2. The new life of faith in Christ is fulfilled in the freedom of loving service to God and to one another—its only law is love (verse 21).
3. Those who belong to Christ do not live in slavery to the works of the flesh; instead they live in freedom according to the gifts of the Spirit (verses 22 and 25-26).

The Catechism lists seven gifts of the Spirit in CCC 1831: wisdom, understanding, good council, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of God. The Catechism lists twelve fruits of the Spirit in CCC 736: self-control, modesty, patience, generosity, gentleness, charity (love), joy, kindness, goodness, peace, faithfulness, and chastity. It is the internal gifts of the works of the Spirit that yield the external actions of the fruit of the Spirit.

The ethical exhortation that began in 5:1 continues in chapter 6:1-10 with Paul's practical advice for the Christian and his community concerning the faith and freedom of the Gospel. His practical advice includes:

1. The responsibility to correct a fellow member of the community who is sinning (6:1a).
2. The accountability of the individual to do a self-examination.
3. The responsibility to bear the burdens of brothers and sisters in the family of God (6:2).
4. Individual accountability for one's works and bearing one's own burden (6:3-5).
5. The responsibility to support the teachers of the community (6:6).
6. Individual accountability for actions (6:7-8).
7. The responsibility as a community to do good deeds (6:9-10).

Paul concludes his letter with:

1. A notice that he is writing in his own hand and not a secretary (6:11).
2. A summary of his argument concerning circumcision (6:12-17): a final warning concerning the agitators (verses 12-13), and a final statement of his position (verses 14-17).
3. His closing blessing (6:18).

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