

• Paul is speaking of the here and now

• Nothing of great value comes from trying to be religious or moral or obedient to a law-code

Persistent faith is needed

Experience confirms the point

• They had lost their joy

• Legalism – a step backwards – away from God

Small mistakes – big consequences

• Even a little of the Mosaic way of doing things brings great harm

False gospels are under judgement

Our interpretation of verse 5 is confirmed by verses 6–12. He is still speaking of what the Christian is to hope for in the here-and-now.

We expect to become **actually** righteous in ourselves, says Paul, after Christ's righteousness has been reckoned to us. When we are living by faith in the righteousness of Christ as our cover, we are set free to become **righteous** in ourselves. We wait for the hope of righteousness. *'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any significance, but only faith working through love'*. ^{¶1} Mosaic 'religiousness' and Mosaic righteousness (morality; Jewish culture) will do us no good. Nor will the opposite do any good for us either! Nothing of great value comes from trying to be religious or moral or obedient to a law-code. On the other hand, it is not a matter of trying to be secular or worldly or disobedient to any law-code. That will not help either!

¶1 5:6

What is needed in our lives is persistent faith. The one thing Paul wants us to do is to persist in faith. If we do that we shall find that we are able to show love to everyone everywhere. It does not mean that we give everyone everywhere exactly what they want, but we start genuinely and sincerely asking the question, 'How can I show love to this person? To that person? How can I show love to my enemies?' The toughest question of all will be, 'How can I show love to those who are close to me?' It might well be tougher to love Christians who are close to us or family-members than it is to love anyone else! But persistent faith in Jesus will enable us. The faith that justified us will also sanctify us.

Experience teaches us the same point. If the Galatians will only think more carefully about themselves, they will realize that their experience confirms what Paul is saying. *'You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?'* ^{¶1} At one stage the Galatians had been like runners in a race. They had been full of energy and joy in the Lord Jesus Christ. But then they lost their joy. Legalistic Christians are never joyful! Paul says, *'This persuasion is not from Him who calls you'*. ^{¶2} The change in their lives had not come from the God who called them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were not making progress. They had taken a step backwards. Can they not see it? Does their own experience not tell them that they have moved away from God, not closer to Him? We do not get our teaching from our 'experience', but when we have found the truth it works out well in our experience of God. If our experience of God is going astray then we ought to ask some questions.

¶1 5:8

¶2 5:8

A small mistake can have big consequences. *'A little leaven leavens the whole lump,'* says Paul. ^{¶1} A small amount of yeast or 'leaven' will have an effect on a large amount of dough. If you mix a tiny bit of 'Mosaism' into your life it will damage you. A little preoccupation with external morality without a close knowledge of Jesus; a little feeling that you ought to be more Jewish; a little Christ-less religiousness with its fuss and bother about holy days, its rules and regulations about what you can eat, and who you should talk to; a little leaven – the Mosaic way of doing things – and the whole of your Christian life will be damaged. In 1 Corinthians 5:6 Paul uses the illustration about leaven to refer to loose living in obvious sin. In Galatians 5:9 it refers to becoming strict in modelling your life on the Mosaic law. Either way, a small step can do great harm.

¶1 5:9

False gospels are under judgement. Paul believes these Galatians will triumph over the temptation to legalism. *'I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, but the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.'* ^{¶1} What will happen to the man (there seems to be one in particular) who is tempting the Galatians into a false gospel? He will

¶1 5:11

• *God will punish false teaching especially when it does harm*

• *Paul responds to his accusers*

• *The truth is that Paul's persecution was the result of preaching the cross instead of circumcision*

• *Strong words and rough humour – legalism is to be banished altogether*

• *Faith is the central concern*

• *Faith results in the leading of the Spirit and the enabling to love everyone*

sooner or later come under God's judgement. Changing the gospel is a serious matter. Paul deliberately uses strong language. A false gospel will be punished sooner or later – and if it is doing harm to God's church it is likely to be sooner! Some of Paul's enemies said: 'Paul secretly agrees with us but he knows that circumcision brings persecution, and he avoids preaching the law so as to avoid persecution.' But the accusation is altogether nonsense! Paul says, *'But if I, brothers and sisters, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?'* ¶² Paul used to preach circumcision before his conversion. Since his conversion he has regarded it as something totally unimportant. Jews may keep their culture if they wish. Circumcision may be practised if it disarms **prejudice** against the gospel. ¶³ Actually the truth is: Paul is persecuted for preaching the cross instead of circumcision! And it is the agitators who want to avoid persecution by avoiding the message of the cross. ¶⁴ If Paul were preaching the message of the agitators, *'In that case the offence of the cross has been removed'*. ¶⁵ If Paul had preached Jewish culture instead of the gospel-message of the cross of Christ, he would have avoided persecution. Jews were tolerated in the ancient world. Christians were not. If a Christian pretended to be merely Jewish he could escape persecution, but it would be to deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's last word here is: *'I wish those who unsettle you would cut themselves off altogether'*. ¶⁶ It is a reference to Deuteronomy 23:1. A eunuch was not allowed in the assembly of God's people. Paul wishes the agitators could be banished from the churches altogether! There are some things that are more important than being polite. Paul's rough humour comes through when he suggests the false teachers mutilate themselves. In effect, he says 'I wish those who want to use a knife would use it on themselves and get themselves banned from the Christian churches altogether.' This is his last word about them for the moment. Legalism is to be banished altogether. The kind of things that were high on the agenda in the Mosaic law are not important to the Christian. We have no interest in holy buildings, holy days, holy foods. Even the preaching of morality is not the central concern of the church (for morality comes automatically when we walk in the Spirit). Instead we persist in faith, faith and more faith – in the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. Our faith in Jesus results in the continuing leading of the Spirit, and then we are enabled to love everyone everywhere. And so we make progress in the things of God. The Mosaic law is something we learn from (for it points to Jesus), but we are not under it at all.

¶² 5:11 a

¶³ see Acts 16:3

¶⁴ see Galatians 6:12
¶⁵ 5:1 1b

¶⁶ 5:12



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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