

Review Questions (Lesson #14)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. Every Christian in Galatia had accepted the Judaizers' false doctrines.
2. Some Judaizers claimed that Paul taught the same thing they did.
3. If we just ignore false teaching, it will go away.
4. What you teach has no bearing on your salvation.
5. Accepting the false teaching of the Judaizers ruined the Galatians' good start.

Give short answers:

1. Briefly tell what it means that the Judaizers "troubled" the Christians: _____
2. Briefly discuss how error spreads: _____
3. What issues do we face today that are different from the problems the Galatians dealt with? _____
4. In contrast to the Judaizers troubling the Christians, what does Jesus do? _____
5. How is obedience an ongoing process? _____

Fill in the blanks:

1. Merely _____ that the apostles _____ a certain thing or _____ a certain practice doesn't make it so.
2. " _____ has to do with actions taken to prevent _____ such as burning _____ or setting up _____."
3. Paul wished that the _____ (who had fallen away from _____ anyway), _____ would just go ahead and become _____. Then everyone _____ could _____ see clearly that they had no _____ whatever with _____.
4. Paul warned young _____ to take heed to _____ and his _____ in order to save both _____ and his _____.
5. Members of Christ's _____ would be spending much _____ & _____ refuting the _____ of the _____ & trying to _____ the _____ situation.

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace
Lesson #14 Beware of False Teachers (Galatians 5:7-12)

Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). By the time Paul wrote to the Galatian churches, false teachers were luring Christians back under the Law. Paul spent several chapters explaining why they must stay with the Gospel. In Galatians 5:7-12 he expressed his frustration and disappointment over what had happened, and urged them to do better.

First, however, he gave credit where credit was due: "You ran well" (5:7). In their conversion and early lives as Christians, the Galatians had made good progress. Using Paul's analogy of a race, they had come off the starting blocks well, and their first few laps around the track had been admirable. A good beginning, however, doesn't guarantee success. Remember the tortoise and the hare! In the case of the Galatians, false doctrine ruined a good start. The same thing can still happen today! Every Christian must realize that obedience to the gospel is the beginning of the race, not the finish line. We must keep running all the way to the end, staying true to the word of God (2 Timothy 4:7).

Though the Galatians had started well, they were now hindered from obeying the truth (Galatians 5:7). Obedience is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. However, since truth and error are like oil and water (they don't mix!), false doctrine hinders those who accept it from obeying the truth. "Hinder" has to do with actions taken to prevent progress, such as burning bridges or setting up roadblocks. Paul was asking, in effect, "Who blocked your way or tore up your road toward Heaven?" Certainly Paul had not done so, nor had the Lord – "This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you" (v. 8). Since it wasn't from the Lord, one can only conclude it was from the evil one!

Not every Christian in the Galatian churches was following the Judaizers' path. Nevertheless, Paul understood it was imperative to stop the influence of the Judaizers decisively and immediately. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (5:9). Just as yeast permeates the entire batch of bread dough, so sin, if permitted to go unchallenged, will spread throughout the church. This holds true not only in regard to false doctrine, but cases of sinful behavior such as immorality (see 1 Corinthians 5:6). Confronting error and sin may be unpleasant, but how much worse is it to allow them to

fester and grow until they destroy more and more souls?

When the Judaizers first started their campaign to bind Jewish legalism upon Christians, the apostles and elders at Jerusalem wrote a letter charging them with troubling the brethren and unsettling their souls (Acts 15:24). Paul used the same word for "trouble" in Galatians 5:10, along with a different one in v. 12. Both words have almost identical meanings (agitate, stir up, cause commotion, upset). Gentiles who had believed and obeyed the Gospel would be understandably upset when told that they must also undergo circumcision and observe the Law of Moses. Those with a weak faith might even fall away completely. In any case, the members of Christ's body would be spending much time and energy refuting the errors of the Judaizers and trying to calm the situation. That time and energy could have been more productively used in positive activities that would help the church grow and become stronger.

Whereas false doctrine troubles the church, Jesus gives His people peace, and urges them not to be troubled (John 14:27). So the Judaizers and Jesus were leading people in opposite directions! No wonder Paul said, "but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is" (Galatians 5:10). The Lord does not take it lightly when people teach error and stir up His people! Paul warned young Timothy to take heed to himself and his teaching in order to save both himself and his hearers (1 Timothy 4:16). Faithful Christians are to remove from their fellowship those who persist in teaching false doctrine (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:9-11).

In a bizarre twist, some of the Judaizers were claiming that Paul actually taught the same thing they did (i.e. that circumcision was necessary for a man to be saved). Such an assertion defies logic and common sense, as the apostle pointed out with this question: "And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?" (Galatians 5:11). Both the Judaizers and the Jews who didn't believe in Jesus at all, hated and persecuted Paul precisely because he did *not* preach Jewish legalism! If Paul had agreed with them, they would have loved and supported him rather than persecuting him. The fact that Paul preached salvation through the crucified Christ offended the Jews (v. 11b, see also 1 Corinthians 1:23). If he had switched from preaching the cross to preaching circumcision, the offense of the cross would have ceased, and the Judaizers would have had no reason to persecute him.

Perhaps the Judaizers were trying to claim apostolic authority for

their doctrine by asserting that Paul taught their doctrine also. If so, that claim also would fall flat since most Judaizers denied that Paul was a bona fide apostle. In fact, he spent the first two chapters defending his apostleship. In any case, an important point arises for us: merely claiming that the apostles taught a certain thing or authorized a certain practice does not make it so. Of course we have no apostles living in the flesh today, so we cannot approach them in person with our questions. However, we have the written word to tell us what was and was not taught and authorized by the apostles of Christ. Let us, then, imitate the noble Bereans who "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

As discussed previously, false doctrine spreads like leaven. It also becomes progressively worse. "Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). Usually the change occurs a little at a time. When people become comfortable with a small amount of error, then the false teachers dial it up a notch, wait for the people to accept the slight increase, then push a little more. This devious tactic makes it hard to see just how far one has strayed from the truth. Paul wished the Judaizers would immediately take their erroneous teaching so far that their apostasy would be obvious to everyone. The way he expressed that wish shocks the senses: "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off" (Galatians 5:12).

Literally, Paul said he wanted them to mutilate themselves! The Judaizers placed a heavy emphasis on circumcision; Paul wished they would take the operation a giant step further by castrating themselves. While his statement may seem outrageous and extreme to us, the Galatians would more easily understand his point. Most of the Galatian Christians were Gentile converts from paganism who would have been familiar with the goddess Cybele (pronounced SIB-uh-lee). Even Jews living in Galatia would have known that Cybele was a nature goddess served by emasculated priests. Paul wished that the Judaizers, who had fallen away from Christ anyway, would just go ahead and become pagan priests. Then everyone could see clearly that they had no connection whatever with Jesus.

We may not face the exact issues that the Galatians did, but we certainly have others with which to contend. To a frightening degree today, truth has been sacrificed on the neo-pagan altars of sensationalism (entertainment), emotionalism (feel-good-ism), and libertinism (do whatever you want). Remember: whatever you trade in exchange for truth, it's a bad deal!