

Galatians 5:10-15—“⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love... ¹⁰I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. ¹¹Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹²As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! ¹³You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ¹⁵If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

¹⁰I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view.

- How could Paul have been so confident, when to all appearances, it seemed that the Galatian people were almost completely won over by the humanizing heretics?
 - The answer appears in this phrase: **“I am confident in the Lord...”**
 - **Timothy George:** “Paul’s confidence toward the Galatians was rooted in the same reality: the love of God and the faithfulness of Jesus Christ which in turn is the basis for the perseverance of the saints. Paul firmly believed that the Lord had truly saved at least some of the Galatians...What Paul later said of the Philippians he here intimated of the Galatians: The Lord who began his good work within them would keep right on developing it until it is brought to completion on that day when Jesus Christ returns (Phil. 1:6).”¹

The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.

- As much as we might like (indeed, as Paul might have liked!) to motivate people solely by the beauty of Christ’s love and power, neither we nor Paul can ignore the reality of judgment.
- **Ills.:** Not to warn the Galatians about this would be like trying to get someone to step off some railroad tracks in order to smell the beautiful flowers but not telling them a train is coming. Paul warns people that judgment is coming.
- **David Lodge:** “At some point in the nineteen-sixties, Hell disappeared. No one could say for certain when this happened. First it was there, then it wasn’t. Different people became aware of the disappearance of Hell at different times. Some realized that they had been living for years as though Hell did not exist, without having consciously registered its disappearance. Others realized that they had been behaving, out of habit, as though Hell were still there, though in fact they had ceased to believe in its existence long ago...On the whole, the disappearance of Hell was a great relief, though it brought new problems.”²
- **R. Albert Mohler, Jr.** “The traditional doctrine of hell was developed in the earliest centuries of Christian history. Based in the New Testament texts concerning hell, judgment, and the afterlife, the earliest Christian preachers and theologians understood hell be the just judgment of God on sinners without faith in Christ. Hell was understood to be spatial and eternal, characterized by the most awful biblical metaphors fire and torment.”³
- **Thomas Oden:** “Hell is the eternal bringing to nothing of corruption and ungodliness. Hell expresses the intent of a holy God to destroy sin completely and forever. Hell says not merely

¹ Timothy George, *Galatians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture in The New American Commentary* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 366-67.

² David Lodge, *Souls and Bodies*, (London: Penguin, 1980), 113.

³ Albert Mohler, “Modern Theology: The Disappearance of Hell,” in *Hell Under Fire*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan & Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 16.

a temporal no but an eternal no to sin. The rejection of evil by the holy God is like a fire that burns on, a worm that dies not.”⁴

- **Augustine:** “Moreover, is it not folly to assume that eternal punishment signifies a fire lasting a long time, while believing that eternal life is without end? For Christ, in the very same passage, included both punishment and life in one and the same sentence when he said, ‘So those people will go into eternal punishment, while the righteous will go into eternal life.’ [Matt. 25:46] If both are “eternal,” it follows necessarily that either both are to be taken as long-lasting but finite, or both as endless and perpetual.”⁵
- One of the great difficulties when contemplating the doctrine of eternal punishment is the (apparent) disproportionate punishment (eternal) for sin (finite). That is, how is it just to punish someone eternally for sins that are not eternal? Jonathan Edwards examined this question with his typical insightful precision. He noted that the degree of blameworthiness is commensurate to the greatness and dignity of the one that you offend, not from how long you have offended a particular being.
- **Edwards:** “The crime of one being despising and casting contempt on another, is proportionably more or less heinous, as he was under the greater or less obligations to obey him. And therefore if there be any being that we are under infinite obligation to love, and honor; and obey, the contrary towards him must be infinitely faulty. Our obligation to love, honor and obey any being is in proportion to his loveliness, honorableness, and authority...But God is a being infinitely lovely, because he hath infinite excellency and beauty...So sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous, and so deserving infinite punishment...The eternity of the punishment of ungodly men renders it infinite...and therefore renders no more than proportionable to the heinousness of what they are guilty of.”⁶
- Verse 11 seems to be an answer to someone’s objection.

¹¹Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.

- Perhaps the Judaizers said that even Paul himself teaches circumcision sometimes, as when he had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:1–3).
- Paul denies the charge. Paul says that he preaches the cross not circumcision and that is why he is so often persecuted—because the cross is a stumbling block.
- The cross makes people either ecstatically happy or vehemently angry because every ground for boasting is removed.

¹²As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

- These are harsh words, shocking words. It simply goes to show how serious this issue is.
- **Longenecker:** “The crudest and rudest of all Paul’s extant statements.”⁷

⁴ Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992), 3:450.

⁵ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, tr. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), 1001-2.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 1:669. For an exposition of Edwards’ view on hell, see Jonathan Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publishers, 1999); and Chris Morgan, *Hell and Jonathan Edwards: Toward a God-Centered Theology of Hell* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003).

⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians in the Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 41, ed., Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 234.

- **Marvin Vincent:** “These people are disturbing you by insisting on circumcision. I would that they would make thorough work of it in their own case, and instead of merely amputating the foreskin, would castrate themselves as heathen priests do. Perhaps this would be even more powerful help to salvation.”⁸
- The mention of heathen priests in Vincent’s paraphrase refers to the ritual of sacral castration practiced by the priests of Cybele, a mother goddess (*Magna Mater*) and the focus of a thriving mystery cult in Asia Minor.
 - The castration of the Cybeline priests was an annual ritual in which the dying & rising of Attis, the consort god of Cybele, was reenacted.
 - Each year at the spring festival the worshipers of Cybele would fast, pray, and mourn the death of Attis.
 - Then the priests would emasculate themselves, drink their own blood, and bear to his grave in solemn procession an image of the young god Attis.
- **Will Durant:** “But on the morrow the streets would ring with exultant shouts as the people celebrated the resurrection of Attis and the renewal of the earth. ‘Take courage, O mystics,’ cried the priests, ‘the god is saved; and for you also will come salvation.’ On the last day of the feast the image of the Great Mother would be carried in triumph through crowds that hailed her as *nostra domina*, ‘Our Lady.’⁹
- One of the major centers for the worship of Cybele was in northern Galatia.¹⁰
 - It is quite possible that some of Paul’s readers may themselves have been devotees of the Cybelinc cult in their pre-Christian days.
- In any event, they could not have missed the insinuation of Paul’s allusion: the Judaizers who made so much of circumcision were really no better guides to the spiritual life than the pagan priests who castrated themselves in service to an idolatrous religion.

¹³**You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.**

- Verse 5, you may recall, said that a day is coming when those who are in Christ will be made perfect in righteousness (implying that we are not yet perfect).
- Then verse 6 is added as an argument for *why* we wait through the Spirit by faith and not through the flesh by works of law like circumcision: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”
- The reason we live by faith and not by works is that works have no power to win blessing from God. In fact, they offend God by nullifying his free grace.
- Someone may ask, “Is there really that big a difference? Isn’t faith just as much a work as circumcision? What’s the big deal?”
- **Romans 4:4-5** answers that by saying, “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

⁸ Cited in K. S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 1:146-47. Vincent’s interpretive translation follows this earlier paraphrase by Theodore of Mopsuestia: “If they think that a frivolous excision of flesh is something good, let them cut off their genitals completely and gain still greater advantages!”

⁹ Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to A.D. 325* (MJF Books: 1994), 523.

¹⁰ In the city of Pessinus, which was a leading city in North Galatia. See Timothy George, *Galatians*, 372.

- Verse 4 indicates what *it means to live by works: to have the mindset of an employee with God as the employer in need of your service.*
- When you do what he needs, then he owes you wages. That's the essence of legalism or works religion: us working for God and him paying us the wages we are due.
- But notice verse 5: (what it means to live by faith).
 - First, it means that you stop thinking of yourself as an employee and God as an employer—you stop working for God in this sense.
 - Faith is not added to works, and works are not added to faith.
 - Faith excludes works, because faith has a totally different mindset.
 - God is not the employer who needs my labor and pays me for it. I am the needy person in this relationship, and God is the workman who has all the know-how and power and integrity to meet all my needs.
 - So in the mindset of faith I never work to supply any deficiency God has. He is always working for me to supply all my deficiencies.
 - ***The Pleasures of God:*** “God has no needs that I could ever be required to satisfy. God has no deficiencies that I might be required to supply. He is complete in himself. He is overflowing with happiness in the fellowship of the Trinity. The upshot of this is that God is a mountain spring, not a watering trough. A mountain spring is self-replenishing. It constantly overflows and supplies others. But a watering trough needs to be filled with a pump or bucket brigade. So if you want to glorify the worth of a watering trough you work hard to keep it full and useful. But if you want to glorify the worth of a spring you do it by getting down on your hands and knees and dirking to your heart's satisfaction, until you have the refreshment and strength to go back down in the valley and tell people what you've found. You do not glorify a mountain spring by dutifully hauling water up the path from the river below and dumping it in the spring...the way to *please* God is to come to him to get and not to give, to drink and not to water. He is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him...God is the kind of God who will be pleased with the one thing I have to offer—my thirst.”¹¹
- ***Ills.:***¹² The human heart produces desires or longings like fire produces heat. Your heart is defined by its longings. As surely as sparks fly upward, your heart pumps out desire after desire. So we should be able to define faith and works in terms of this stream of longings that gush up out of the heart all day long.
 - The heart that is set on works (flesh) desires the thrill of feeling its will and its body rise victoriously to some challenge.
 - The heart that is set on works will attempt to scale a vertical rock face, or take on extra responsibilities at work, or risk life in the combat zone, or agonize through a marathon, or perform religious fasting for weeks—all for that wonderful thrill of conquering a challenge by the force of its will and stamina of its body.
- ***Piper:*** “Even though the heart that is set on works often expresses its love for independence and self-styled pleasure by rejecting courtesy and decency and morality, it's the same heart of works which also gets disgusted with animal dissipations and sets out to find the real thrill of

¹¹ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2000), 208-209.

¹² The following illustration was taken from John Piper, “Saving Faith Produces Love,” June, 1983, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/396_Saving_Faith_Produces_Love/.

self-denial and courage and personal greatness. The heart that is set on works longs for the thrill of feeling itself overcome great obstacles.”¹³

- But the heart that is set on faith is very different. ***Its desires are no less strong***; but what ***it desires is the thrill of feeling God rise victoriously to a challenge in us and through us***.
 - Works wants the thrill of feeling itself overcome an obstacle. *Faith* wants the thrill of feeling God overcome an obstacle.
 - Works longs for the joy of being glorified as capable and strong and smart. Faith longs for the joy of seeing God glorified for his capability and his strength and his wisdom.
 - In its religious form works accepts the challenge of morality, conquers its obstacles through great exertion, and offers the victory to God for his gratitude and applause and recompense. ***Faith also accepts the challenge of morality, but only as an occasion to become the instrument of God's power***, and when the victory is achieved, faith rejoices that all the glory and thanks belong to God.
- Now with that understanding of faith and works in mind: why does genuine faith inevitably produces love, according to Galatians 5:6.
 - Paul isn't saying that we are justified by two things: faith and works of love. He is saying we are justified by one thing, faith, and this faith is of such a nature that it produces love like a good tree produces good fruit. Being a loving person is absolutely essential to being saved, because the faith which saves by its very essence works through love.
 - Therefore, it is tremendously important that we see how saving faith produces love.
- An exceptional illustration/definition can be seen in ***Acts 20:35***—“I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” In other words, we love other people when we stop using them as means to supply our deficiencies and instead rejoice in the divine enablement for us to supply their deficiencies.
- Now how does faith make you into a person of love like that? Faith works in two ways.
 - It produces love by what it takes away from the heart and
 - It produces love by what it gives to the heart.
 - Faith takes away from the heart ***guilt*** and ***fear*** and ***greed***.
 - It takes away guilt because it is confident that “Christ died for our sins” (***1 Corinthians 15:3***) so that “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Ephesians 1:7).
 - Faith takes away fear because it is confident that “God works for those who wait for him” (***Isaiah 64:4***). He promises to help, strengthen, and protect (Isaiah 41:10). He will work all things together for our greatest good (Romans 8:28). Therefore, faith banishes fear.
 - Faith takes away greed because it is confident that Christ is greater wealth than all the world can offer (Hebrews 11:26; 13:5, 6; Philippians 3:8). So faith pushes guilt and fear and greed out of the heart.
- And at root it is guilt and fear and greed that keep us from being loving people?

¹³ Piper, “Saving Faith Produces Love,” Same web address as footnote #3.

- Guilt: We feel guilty, and so we wallow in self-centered depression and self-pity, utterly unable to see, let alone care, about anyone else's need.
 - Or we play the hypocrite to cover our guilt and so destroy all sincerity in relationships.
 - Or we talk about other people's faults to minimize the guilt of our own. And so guilt destroys love.
- Fear: We feel fearful so we don't go up to a stranger after the service on Sunday but make a beeline for the car.
 - Or we reject a call to missions as too dangerous. Or we waste money on excess insurance.
 - Or we get swallowed up in all manner of little phobias that utterly blind us to the needs of others and make us preoccupied with ourselves. And so fear destroys love.
- Greed: So we spend money on luxuries, money that ought to go to the spread of the gospel.
 - We don't undertake anything risky lest our precious possessions or financial future be jeopardized.
 - We focus on things instead of people, or see people as resources for our advantage; so greed destroys love.
- So it isn't hard to see, is it, that when faith pushes out guilt and fear and greed, it frees us for love? All of our unloving behavior can be traced back to a failure to rest in God's promises (which are all based on the cross, Romans 8:32).
- What Faith Gives to the Heart
- But I said that faith produces love not only by what it takes away from the heart (guilt, fear, greed) but also by what it gives to the heart.
 - *Faith gives the heart an appetite for the thrill of experiencing God's power* moving in us and for us as we do his will.
 - Faith cherishes the experience of having God overcome obstacles in our lives.
 - In other words, faith not only takes away the barriers to love; *it also provides a positive impulse* to move us to love.
- **Jonathan Edwards:** "This sense of the beauty of Christ is the beginning of true saving faith in the life of a true convert. This is quite different from any vague feeling that Christ loves him or died for him. These sort of fuzzy feelings can cause a sort of love and joy, because the person feels a gratitude for escaping the punishment of their sin. In actual fact, these feelings are based on self-love, and not on a love for Christ at all. It is a sad thing that so many people are deluded by this false faith. On the other hand, a glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ causes in the heart a supreme genuine love for God. This is because the divine light shows the excellent loveliness of God's nature. A love based on this is far, far above anything coming from self-love, which demons can have as well as men. The true love of God which comes from this sight of His beauty causes a spiritual and holy joy in the soul; a joy in God, and exulting in Him. There is no rejoicing in ourselves, but rather in God alone."¹⁴

¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "How to Know if You are a Real Christian," originally, "True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils," updated by William Carson, 1994, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/je-howknow.htm>.

- When all guilt and fear and greed have been removed by the assurances of God’s forgiveness and love and power, what force will move us out of our contented living rooms to take upon ourselves the inconveniences and suffering that love requires?

Application:

- What will you do today to reflect your faith?
- How does your faith push you into the current where God’s power flows freely?
- *Piper*: “What will propel you to greet strangers when you feel shy, to go to an enemy and plead for reconciliation when you feel indignant, to tithe when you’ve never tried it before, to speak to your colleagues about Christ, to invite new neighbors to a Bible study, to cross cultures with the gospel, to admit you’re a homosexual and want help, to create a new ministry for alcoholics in the area, to give an evening to drive a van, or a morning to pray for renewal? None of these costly acts of love just happens. They are propelled from the heart by a new appetite—the appetite for the thrill of experiencing God’s power in your life. Faith loves to rely on God and see him work miracles in us. Therefore, faith pushes us into the current where God’s power flows most freely—the current of love. Faith produces love because in acts of love we feel the power of God conquering our sin, and conquering Satan, and transforming the world.”¹⁵
- To sum up: Works is the mentality of being God’s employee, providing him with services he needs so that he will pay us our due. Faith does not work for God, but always trusts in God as the worker who meets our needs. The heart set on works hungers for the thrill of feeling its will and body rise victoriously to some challenge and it loves praise. But the heart set on faith hungers for the thrill of feeling God rise victoriously to a challenge in and through us, and it loves for him to be praised. This is the faith that produces love.

¹⁵ Piper, “Saving Faith Produces Love,” Same web address as footnote #3.