

Grace Didn't Die
The Danger of False Doctrine
Galatians 5:7-15

Introduction: Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between what is false and what is not. The internet is full of people who twist the truth, or only share parts of it, so that you don't see the truth, just part of it, and thus never the actual truth. The news media do this all the time. The day I was writing this sermon, I opened up Fox News, and they did it in their lead story! The headline read "NC Gov. Roy Cooper declares 'state of emergency' over school choice bill".¹ The article was filled with statements from others that made it seem Gov. Cooper had issued an actual executive order that put North Carolina into a legal state of emergency. However, if you read the article closely, you would eventually see that Gov. Cooper made it clear in his speech that "There's no Executive Order" and that he was using the phrase to emphasize his opposition to something I personally support—school choice. The problem is that the article itself was focused on communicating the opposite, not just in its headline, but also in the vast majority of its content. As such, it could easily lead the reader to believe that the Governor actually did issue an Executive Order. As much as I disagree with the Governor on this issue, it doesn't change the fact that the Fox News article was blatantly misleading.

Similarly, a few months ago, the NC State legislature clarified its public obscenity laws to protect children from seeing sexually obscene acts. However, headlines all over the country read that the NC Legislature banned "drag shows." The WCNC headline read, "NC Republicans propose banning public drag shows, with felony charges."² You have to read almost the entire article before you read, "House Bill 673 would lump at least some drag performances – what the bill calls 'male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest'—in with strippers and other adult entertainers in state law." But they then quote people who say the bill is too vague, and in so doing, suggest that the bill isolates and threatens transgender people. The article never once informed readers that the term the legislature used, "prurient interest," is, in fact, the standard terminology and definition used in U.S. courts for what is and isn't considered obscene material. Note,

"The Court defined material appealing to prurient interest as material having a tendency to excite lustful thoughts, and defined prurient interest as a shameful or morbid interest in nudity, sex, or excretion."³

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/media/north-carolina-gov-roy-cooper-declares-state-emergency-school-choice-bill>

² <https://www.wcnc.com/article/news/politics/north-carolina-politics/nc-republicans-propose-banning-drag-shows-felony-charges/275-2a887d16-ffae-4d47-9d3d-7928db37335c>

³ https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/amdt1-7-5-11/ALDE_00013812/#:~:text=The%20Court%20defined%20material%20appealing,nudity%2C%20sex%2C%20or%20excretion.

The truth is that the NC Legislature took no aim at public drag shows at all. The bill defines “adult live entertainment” as a “performance featuring topless dancers, exotic dancers, strippers, or male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest, regardless of whether or not performed for consideration.”⁴ The required determining factor being “appeals to a prurient interest.” Male and female impersonation wasn’t defined as adult live entertainment, just when it’s done with an obvious sexual appeal. As such, the legislature then wrote that it is therefore, “unlawful for a person to engage in adult live entertainment (i) on public property or (ii) in a location where the adult live entertainment is in the presence of an individual under the age 18.”⁵

Now it’s one thing for the news media to post misleading headlines and publish stories that knowingly leave out or bury pertinent information, but it’s an entirely different thing to do that with God’s Word! False and misleading stories have caused all kinds of division in our nation, but as much as I love the United States of America, the USA is not nearly as important as God’s Church! As such, the New Testament is filled with warnings about false teachers who will proclaim to be preachers of Christian doctrine when in fact they are publicizing false and misleading stories that lead people away from Jesus! For instance,

“15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Matthew 7:15)

“1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies,” (2 Peter 2:1)

Therefore, in his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul makes it very clear that the false doctrine of the Judaizers or anybody else who would attempt to add or subtract anything from the Gospel is no small matter. Paul wanted them to understand the serious danger in all of it, so he taught them three truths about false doctrine itself.

Proposition: Galatians 5:7-15 gives us three truths about false doctrine.

The first truth in Galatians 5:7-15 about false doctrine is that ...

(1) False Doctrine is aggressively contagious. (5:7-8)

- A. 7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.**
- B. The imagery Paul begins this passage with is of a foot race. Imagine you are running a 1,600-meter race in the Olympics. The pack has formed, and you are right there in it. Step for step, you match the runner in front of you with enough distance to not interfere with his steps or yours, but close enough to pass him**

⁴ <https://webservices.ncleg.gov/ViewBillDocument/2023/3981/0/DRH30258-ML-76>

⁵ <https://webservices.ncleg.gov/ViewBillDocument/2023/3981/0/DRH30258-ML-76>

when the time comes. However, suddenly, one of the runners to your right decides to cut in between the two of you, only he doesn't fit in the gap, and as such, he causes you to trip. You're now doing everything possible to regain your balance and keep from falling, but the flailing around to try and not fall has caused everybody behind you, who were in synch with your steps, to start running into each other, and you as well! The result is that you and all that followed you have been separated from the winning pace because the pack has left you.

- C. With that imagery, Paul writes, **"7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?"**
1. Understanding the context is essential: They are no longer "obeying the truth," that is, the Gospel. To obey the truth is not simply to believe it's true but also to live from that truth. Our actions are always oriented by what we are submitted to and believe in.
 2. When it comes to the Gospel, the moment we suggest that there is any necessary tradition, ritual or rule we must follow to receive or grow in God's grace; that there is a system we must follow, then we have in that moment suggested disobedience to the truth that Christ's death and resurrection is enough to provide us full access to know God in the freedom of a relationship of a dad with his son. We are disobeying the Gospel the moment we say, "I must do x" to gain access to or experience a relationship with God.
 3. Putting this together, Paul says you were in the pack running in lock step with the truth, but now you are not. Somebody got between you and Jesus, and now you are running out of step with Jesus and in step with whoever it is that got between you! You are disobeying the truth and instead obeying a lie.
- D. Paul then makes it real clear that this teaching that has gotten them out of step with the Gospel is not from Christ. **"8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you."**
1. Now, that may not sound too harsh on the surface, but it is. When Paul says the teaching that cuts you off is not from Christ, he is necessarily saying it's from Satan! That should be enough reason to have nothing to do with it; however, that's not the point he's trying to make here.
 2. The point he's trying to make is that teaching, that's not from God, and thus find its roots in what is of this sinful world under the rule of sin and Satan, is no small matter because it not only knocks you off track, but it also spreads like wildfire and affects everybody else! It's why he adds the proverb in verse nine, **"A little leaven leavens the whole lump."**

3. Leaven is a small portion of dough with active yeast (bacteria) that causes it to rise. The gas that makes the bread rise is the carbon dioxide produced by the bacteria consuming the sugar in the dough. Who knew bacteria's flatulence could be so productive? Bakers only have to add a little leavening to a lump of dough to affect the entire lump because the bacteria multiply rapidly. Now, leaven multiplying in bread is a good thing, but in the case of false doctrine, it's a terrible thing because what's spreading is not becoming a beautiful and delicious piece of bread, but rather a dead, decaying body!
4. However, the point here is not what it makes, but rather how quickly a little false doctrine, which in this case is religious thinking, will rapidly get popularized within a local church. It only takes a little to infect everything, which is why we can never justify religious thinking or practice within the church. The nature of religious thinking is that when you justify a little bit of it in the church's life, it will soon spread through the entire church. We as human beings are given to religious thinking and practice. We gravitate to it by default. It makes sense with little or no effort, and as such, the church is a like ginormous pile of dry wood just waiting for somebody to toss a religious match in it that will set it on fire and destroy it, which takes us straight to ...

The second truth in Galatians 5:7-15 is about false doctrine.

(2) False Doctrine is dangerously destructive. (9:10-12)

- A. **10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. 11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!**
- B. To begin with, let me explain the argument he presents in verse 11 and then return to verses 10 and 12 that surround it.
- C. **11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.**
 1. It is possible that the Judaizers were attempting to use the fact that Paul had Timothy circumcised as a way to suggest Paul agreed with them. However, as I shared last week, in Acts 16 it was clearly done so that Timothy could effectively challenge the Jews that Christ had died to fulfill and replace the Law with something better.
 2. Paul, therefore, refutes the idea that his requirement of making Timothy get circumcised was in fact him preaching that all male followers of Jesus needed to be circumcised by the simple fact that he's been persecuted for

preaching against it! If Paul were now preaching that a person had to be circumcised to be in a favored status with God, then Paul would no longer be preaching the Gospel, and as such, he would have removed “the offense of the cross” that he is constantly being persecuted for preaching. Why would he accept persecution for something he doesn’t teach? Remember, the cross offends all who believe in a system of rules, traditions, or accomplishments that give you the right to know God or enhance your ability to experience Him. The Gospel is clearly that which Jesus did on the cross, and in His resurrection; that which gives us the right to freely know God as His fully favored sons and daughters at such a level that it’s impossible to enhance it even with Christianized versions of Old Testament practices! R.J. Utley noted,

- a. **“The cross was an offense to the Judaizers because it gave freely that which they were working so hard to achieve (cf. Rom. 10:2-5).”⁶**
- b. D.K. Campbell noted, **“Thus the Cross marked the end of the Law system and rendered circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law unnecessary.”⁷**

3. Therefore, if Paul is preaching that the Law of Moses was not fulfilled and replaced by Christ and that people still need to obey its rules and traditions, why is he being persecuted by those who obey its rules and traditions?

D. Ok, with that understanding, that the cross is an inherit threat and offense to all who love religious thinking and practice, let’s go back to how Paul is responding to those who are so offended by his teaching that they are lying about Paul and his ministry to persuade the believers in Galatia to reject the Gospel for their religious version of it, that, by definition, is no longer the Gospel. Paul writes in verse 10,

E. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

1. As animated and as thorough as Paul is being in his argument against the religious thinking and practice that is spreading among the churches in Galatia, and as adamant as Paul is being about their need to repent from such belief, Paul still did not for a second take away from his confidence that God loved the believers in Galatia more than he did, and as such, God was more committed and more capable of rescuing them from this false doctrine

⁶ Utley, R. J. (1997). [Paul’s First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians](#) (Vol. Volume 11, p. 57). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

⁷ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Galatians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 606). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

than Paul could ever be! Clearly, Paul is not taking away from their responsibility of being “obedient to the truth,” nor his responsibility to preach it. However, it also helps us see that in all of his worry and frustration, there is still a huge rock under Paul’s feet that He is standing on! There is still a confidence in the love of God for us that the Gospel only reveals, and it’s why Paul could also write things like this in the New Testament,

a. **29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)**

b. **11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)**

c. **6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)**

2. However, on the other side of this confidence in the Lord’s sanctification is a confidence in the Lord’s judgment on whoever the ringleader is, that’s misleading them! **“I have confidence in the Lord that ... the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty”**

a. In one of his letters to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote, **13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)**

b. This is not to suggest that there is no need to confront false teachers; Paul is blatantly doing that in this letter. However, we can do so with the confidence that we are all going to stand before God and, as such, nobody is getting away with anything, especially as it relates to misleading or persecuting God’s kids!

F. Now, after hearing that confidence, you might think that False Teachers and the false doctrine they teach are really not that big of a deal for us to worry about. You might think that if God is going to sanctify his people anyway, and God is

going to judge the false teachers, then there is really no reason for us to get worked up over any of it. But then you read verse 12!

G. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

1. **“Paul is confident that they will be judged and even utters a wish that they be mutilated (possibly an allusion to the mutilating practices of pagans in Asia Minor, but very likely also a reference to castration, which, incidentally, disqualified Jewish men from becoming priests).”⁸**
2. **“Vincent expresses his conception of Paul’s words as follows: “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.” He says that this is perhaps the severest expression in Paul’s epistles. The great danger in which Christianity was placed by the Judaizers, made such a severe statement necessary.”⁹**

H. And therein lies my point. To tell them to castrate themselves is about as clear a statement that Paul could make on how he felt about what they were doing, and what he wanted them to do about it. This is a far greater vulgar invective than even saying, “shove it up your rear end.” If the man at the center of this effort, and those helping him, think for a moment that Paul might tolerate their teaching, that statement should totally remove it!

I. So, what then does this teach us about what is false, especially in the context of what is falsely called the Gospel? Well, we should realize that if it can invoke that kind of response from Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then it must be something massively dangerous that we should have nothing to do with. There is just no way you can read Galatians in context and possibly defend any sort of religious thinking and practice. It is clearly presented as something horribly detrimental to us personally and as a church. It is not just destructive, it's dangerously destructive! Justifying religious practices and thinking is like dousing the church with gasoline, then tossing a lit match into the middle of it, but then wondering why everything got burned down to the ground!

The third truth in Galatians 5:7-15 about false doctrine is actually in the context of correct doctrine. That is ...

⁸ Silva, M. (1994). [Galatians](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1218). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 146–147). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

(3) The false application of right doctrine is as dangerous and destructive as false doctrine! (5:13-15)

A. 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

B. The contrast in verse 13 is unmistakable.

1. Don't use your freedom from not having to serve the Old Testament law as a reason to serve the lusts of your flesh, that is, those desires within you that are contrary to the moral and ethical values of God. Don't let God's unconditional love for you be your excuse for living that way; for saying, "well, God is going to love me anyway, so I can say yes to whatever desires I have," and in that sense, serve those desires rather than Christ and others.
2. 1 John 2:16 adds to this thought the service of the "the lust of the eyes" and "the boastful pride of life". That is, don't take the freedom you have in this family relationship with God, where He will never forsake you or leave you, and use it to justify spending your life serving the desire to have all that your eyes see and want, or the desire to get the affirmation of man. Don't use the freedom God has given you from the power of sin to live in it!
3. Therefore, instead of serving the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the boastful pride of life, let the incredible freedom God has given you to know Him without any performance requirement; to know Him with the comfort and normalcy of a favored children; cause you to serve others the way God has served you!

C. This then leads us back to how the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind is applied to how we interact with others. If we are going to know Him as His children and love Him as such, then we also need to love others as we should love ourselves (Mark 12:28-34). And understand this: this command comes from God, who loves Himself so purely and completely that He, who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are fully three and fully one all at the same time. God is not issuing this command from a context of selfishness, but a context of perfect holiness. God is not issuing this statement from a distance either. He loves us as He loves Himself, meaning He loves us in person! He is abiding with and in us (John 15). Therefore, it is only fitting that we love others in the same way! This is why Jesus clarified this command by teaching that we are to love others as He loves us! (John 13:34-35)

- D. Paul then speaks about what happens if you serve yourselves rather than God and one another: **“15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”**
- E. This is another vivid metaphor. When you and I become spoiled rotten brats who take advantage of God’s unconditional love for us to serve our own desires, we will end up destroying each other!
- F. “By means of an ascending series of gruesome acts their violence and its threatening woeful result is pictured: they bite each other, “gulp each other down,” and, if they persist, will in the end be totally consumed by one another. They obey the dictates of their old self and resemble nature “raw in tooth and claw.” Robertson reminds us of the story of “two snakes that grabbed each other by the tail and each swallowed the other.” (*Word Pictures*, Vol. IV, p. 311). And Cole refers to “the two Kilkenny cats of Cromwellian times who fought so furiously that not a scrap of fur remained of either” (*The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, p. 158). One might expect such acts of terror and violence from the enemies of God’s people in their onslaught upon the righteous (Ps. 35:25; 79:2, 7; 80:13; 124:3), but surely those who style themselves “believers in the Lord Jesus Christ” and “members of the one holy universal church” cannot be accused of such behavior? ... At any rate, the apostle shows “how distressing, how mad it is that we, who are members of the same body, should be leagued together, of our own accord, for mutual destruction” (Calvin).”¹⁰
- G. Ultimately, this is vivid language to tell them the wrong application of the right doctrine of the liberty they have been given to know God; that He will never stop loving them; that He will never require them to earn their stay in the Kingdom; that He will never require them to do anything to earn His favor because it is fully given; will end in the same place false doctrine ends—death, decay and destruction!

Challenge: What area of your life are you misapplying the Gospel of Christ and using it as justification to serve the desires of your flesh?

We all have religious tendencies and thinking, even if it’s just the extremely detrimental private struggle to believe God has forgiven us and truly wants us. It’s crazy how we will end up burning ourselves with something we’ve already been burned by in the past, and in this case, religious thinking and practices will always be coming to offer themselves as “improvements.” Therefore, my main motive in preaching this book to you was to equip you for the inevitable temptation to religion that will come, and as such, not only help keep it out of your life and mine, but also to keep it from having the opportunity to spread through the entire church and turn into an ash heap!

¹⁰ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Galatians* (Vol. 8, pp. 209–213). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

But on the other hand, I do sincerely worry that too many Christians use the freedom we have from all the nonsensical religious thinking and practice as justification to now serve what is equally detrimental to life—sin! Brothers and sisters, please don't underestimate the danger of serving the desires of your flesh, the desires of your eyes, and the desire for the affirmation of man; don't underestimate how that will destroy you, your family, and the fellowship of the local church. Confess what you're doing, claim the forgiveness He's already given you, and believe that God genuinely wants you to abide in Him because He loves you and wants you, and as such, run back into the joy of loving and following Him!