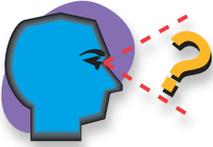


Galatians



Responses to the Questions



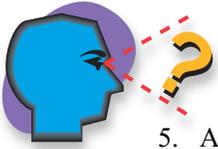
NOTE: BE SURE TO RESPOND TO ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THESE RESPONSES IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

A SERIOUS WARNING

GAL. 5:1-12

1. Paul has made it clear to the Galatians that the Mosaic law can only bring bondage. Christ came to end that bondage and deliver them into freedom—they are free from the curse of the law and free from its ceremonial restraints. He wants them to remain in that freedom; circumcision would be a departure from freedom, because it would obligate them to return to the bondage of the law, thus becoming slaves to it.
2. This is a sober warning to the Galatians. Paul wants them to imagine a life in which Christ would be “of no advantage” to them. Nowhere in the letter does he describe more dramatically than in these verses how opposed the two “systems” of justification are to each other. To return to the Mosaic code is to be severed from Christ. That would constitute a “fall” from grace. What does that mean? Remember, throughout this letter, Paul has contrasted the system of grace to the system of works. Grace means that God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In it, we understand that we must rely on His mercy in order to please Him, since we can never perfectly keep the law. For Paul, a return to the law means a return to seeking righteousness by obedience to the law and not by faith in God’s promise of gracious blessing through the work of Christ. The Galatians appear to be tottering on the brink of leaving one system for another. The consequences of that would be drastic.
3. This statement by Paul indicates that the righteousness which is ours in Christ has two dimensions. We know from what he has said earlier about Abraham that God credits one who believes and puts faith in Him as righteousness (right behavior). Yet here he indicates there is something we still need to “wait” for, something that is a “hope,” which speaks of the future. There is more to come, and we make progress towards it by continuing our life in the Spirit, by faith. Our being made righteous (justification) is a *process*, which looks to the future for its completion. That explains Paul’s urgency in this letter. It looks to him as if the process begun in the Galatians by their belief in the gospel is about to be derailed.
4. In addition to making a clear reference to the possibility of falling from grace (vs. 4), Paul speaks very directly in this part of his letter about the dire consequences of the behavior the Galatians are contemplating. Being “severed from Christ” and receiving no “advantage” from Him are extremely serious results of returning to observance of the Mosaic code. There is no ignoring the fact that the Galatians *began* their Christian lives in the right way. Paul has made it clear he’s writing to people who have been genuinely justified by their faith in the gospel. Their experience of the Holy Spirit was not bogus. Yet here he is warning them that they will lose all and be cut off if they depart from the life of grace. How much clearer can it be that “once saved, always saved” is contradicted by this passage? Notice that Paul doesn’t fault the kind of faith they had in the gospel; he faults the way they are departing from it. There is nothing here to suggest the irrevocability of salvation; in fact, quite the opposite is true. Some actions on the part of true believers can cost everything. Paul will speak to this issue again later in the chapter (vs. 21).





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

5. As we have seen already, an initial act of faith in the gospel will not *guarantee* that the believer will continue to live by faith. If it did, Paul would not have needed to write this kind of letter to the Galatians. They certainly had made an initial act of faith, receiving the Holy Spirit and experiencing His fruit in their lives. But Paul was concerned that they would not continue to live by faith. Their faith had to find some kind of expression if it was to make a difference. So, it isn't simply "faith" that Paul contrasts to circumcision, but "faith working through love." Our belief in the gospel must be joined to a *love* for God, a love which cherishes and adores Him, which makes the believer loathe to offend Him, which disposes the believer to obey and honor Him. Does faith in the gospel automatically or inevitably lead to that kind of relationship with God? Apparently not, or Paul was worried needlessly.

It was this clear statement of Paul's that presented the Catholic Church with a dilemma when Martin Luther, in his emphasis on faith, suggested that we are saved by faith *alone*. The Council of Trent was called to settle this question. It ruled that "faith, unless it be joined to hope and charity, neither makes us one with Christ nor loving members of his Body. That is why it is rightly said that 'faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead' (**James 2:17**) and idle, and that 'in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love'" (Council of Trent, *De iustificatione*, chap. 7).

6. Paul seems to think of the Christian life as a race. The Galatians appeared to be off to a good start, but a hindrance has appeared on the path. You will see from the other passages noted that Paul makes much use of this metaphor. Look closely at both of them. They testify to Paul's understanding that our justification won't be complete until we have finished the race. It is not enough to start the race (as the Galatians most certainly had); one needs to be able to say, at the end of one's life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." That is when the "hope of righteousness" (see question 3 above) will be fully realized.

7. That simple phrase—obeying the truth—gives us a window of insight into Paul's understanding of truth. Knowing the truth requires a response. That is because Truth is a Person, not a collection of ideas or concepts or teachings. The Galatians knew the truth of the gospel, because Paul had preached it to them. For them to entertain novel teachings that had not been authorized by the apostles was actually a departure from what they had received. To respond properly to the truth is to submit to all that it teaches, not turning to the right or the left. It is to actively live in conformity to it. As Jesus said to the disciples, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" (**John 14:15**). Allegiance to Jesus, the Truth, is inseparable from obedience.

8. He wants them to recognize that this temptation to observe the Mosaic code is exactly that—a temptation. He knows how dangerous even just a little bit of error can be. He seems confident that they will be persuaded by all he has written them to remain faithful to what he has taught them.

9. Paul appeals to logic—if he were still advocating circumcision, why on earth would he continue to be persecuted by the Jews? Contrary to any rumors they might have heard, the fact that the Judaizers continue to oppose Paul should prove to the Galatians that he has not budged an inch on this issue.

10. Answers will vary. These were unquestionably Christian people Paul addressed. They had been baptized and had experienced the Holy Spirit in their lives. Several questions come to mind, reading through these verses. If some of the Galatians had already submitted to circumcision, does that mean they were lost forever? Suppose they heard Paul's letter read in church and were convicted of their error. Was there any hope for them? Is this the only kind of error that can so dramatically threaten their relationship with Christ, or are there others? Fortunately, the rest of the epistle holds answers to these questions.





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

A NEW KIND OF FREEDOM—LIFE IN THE SPIRIT GAL. 5:13-END

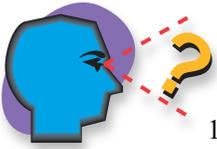
11. Paul has spoken about our “freedom” in Christ, but now he wants to ward off any misunderstanding that might arise over the use of that word. It is true that Christ has set us free from the curse of the law and the power of our own sin, but what kind of freedom is this? In **5:1**, he urged the Galatians not to submit to a “yoke of slavery.” But in **vs. 13**, he says we must be servants of one another. Have we exchanged one yoke for another? It appears we have. Gone is the yoke of slavery to the law of Moses, but in its place comes the yoke of Jesus, which is “easy” compared to the heavy weight of a legal contract that could never be kept. We have been given freedom *from* the Mosaic code, to enable us to be really free *for* something else: the law of love. The world’s concept of freedom is that it enables us to do whatever we want to do; Christian freedom enables us to do the right thing.

12. There must have been bitter arguments among the Galatians over circumcision. It is likely that the Judaizers suggested a superiority in being Jewish, which led to judgment, resentment, and deep division. Paul realizes that this breach of love among them is a serious consequence of the error to which they have been exposed. When he warns them against being “consumed by one another,” he is making a reference to real catastrophe, because that would mean they have turned away from the law of love, and while they may still have faith, it is certainly not “faith working through love.”

13. In every believer, the Spirit and “the flesh” (that is, our stained and disordered human nature) will do battle against each other. In baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit, as well as our freedom from the penalty of our sin, which is death. However, as Paul teaches here, we are still tempted by sin. It has left its imprint on us. The Spirit wants to advance us on our journey to God, enabling us to live our lives by faith. The “flesh,” or our sinful human nature, is still weak from original sin; it always wants to rebel against God (this is what the Church calls “concupiscence”). In **vs. 16**, Paul challenges the Galatians to make a choice—he wants them to say “no” to themselves and “yes” to God. This is the age-old test of man’s love for God, dating all the way back to the Garden of Eden. In order for us to fully reflect the image of God in us, our love must be *tested*. If we are truly free, we must freely choose to love Him more than we love ourselves. Every believer will experience this tension in himself. God has granted us everything we need to win the battle, but we must willingly and purposefully cooperate with Him. That is exactly what Paul urges the Galatians to do.

14. This verse is short, but it is open to much misinterpretation. Does Paul mean that those who are led by the Spirit are under no law at all? No, he has already indicated that our freedom from the Mosaic law makes us free to serve the law of love (see question 1 above). Recall the discussion in this study about the “rules” issued by the Council of Jerusalem in **Acts 15**. The Council felt it necessary to spell out specifically what the law of love would require of Gentile Christians. Paul is not addressing that issue in this context. Here he exhorts the Galatians to “walk” by the Spirit and resist the desires of the flesh. He is eager for them to engage in this holy battle. When he reminds them that those who are led by the Spirit are “not under law,” it is meant as an encouragement to them to remember that the power of sin to destroy them has been broken. The reference here, in this context, is to the Mosaic law, which was *powerless* to enable them to overcome sin. That law exposed sin but left a man unable to defeat it. Paul tells the Galatians that life in the Spirit isn’t like that! A great transformation has taken place. The Mosaic law brought out the worst in sinful men; the Holy Spirit has come to restore and heal and make the best possible.





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

15. Paul says it's no mystery as to whether one is living a life of fleshly gratification. He names all sorts of characteristics of the flesh—from the obvious to the hidden. What is surprising about this list is that it touches every aspect of human life—what we do with our bodies, what we do in our relationships with God, what we do in our relationships with others. It is very comprehensive, making it impossible to hide from the light. Human sin can take many forms, and Paul wants his readers to be acquainted with them all. Although the forms vary, underneath them all is the disordered human nature which is bent towards sin.

16. As we noted above, all believers who intend to live their faith will feel the tension of a battle. To experience that tension and struggle against sin is not the problem; the problem is giving in to it, capitulating to it. Jesus has mercifully given us the sacrament of reconciliation for the times when we fail (this will be addressed in the next lesson). In our confession of and contrition over our sin, we receive grace to strengthen our resolve and our ability not to fail again. In a wonderful way, our failures can lead to our growth in holiness. But one who has no repentance and no repugnance over these sins is one in grave danger of losing his inheritance. That one has given up the battle and has chosen to gratify his desires instead of resisting them. Whether it is fornication or jealousy or carousing, if a man persists in those behaviors without repentance, even if he has acknowledged faith in Christ, he is lost.

17. When we see the fruit produced by the Spirit in the life of one who is led by Him, we recognize that, contrary to life in the flesh, the virtues created are ones that no human society has ever written laws against. In addition, “the law” could not produce this kind of behavior. The law itself stirred up sinful behavior; the Spirit enables men to obey the law from their hearts. In that sense, there can be no real competition between what the law can produce and what the Spirit can produce. The law doesn't stand a chance “against” the Spirit.

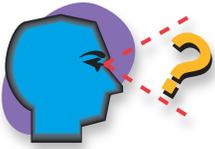
18. Our death with Jesus, through baptism, means that we are no longer in the grip and under the dominion of sin. We are still able to be tempted, but we have the power, through the Holy Spirit, to resist. This is yet another incentive from Paul to the Galatians to remember what he said in **vs. 18**. This is meant to rouse them to fully engage in the battle against the flesh, since their victory in that battle is sure, if only they will persevere.

19. In **vs. 13**, Paul has already warned the Galatians not to abuse the freedom that is theirs in Christ. It is true that they have been born into a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit, but being born isn't enough. Now they are faced with the need to grow, to make progress, to continue to live their lives by faith working through love. This is what he means when he exhorts them to “walk by the Spirit.” As he made clear in **vs. 21**, they must resist the desires of the flesh in order to receive their inheritance. That leads him to his final word of warning in this chapter.

20. We have surmised that this controversy over circumcision has caused deep divisions in this community. There's nothing like controversy to provide opportunities for gratifying the desires of the flesh! In vss. 20-21, Paul mentioned many evidences of “the flesh.” Notice especially enmity, strife, jealousy, selfishness, dissension, party spirit (this refers to forming little groups that criticize each other), and envy. Was Paul concerned that this controversy was stirring up these fleshly passions in the Galatians? Most assuredly he was. The last words of this chapter are Paul's pastoral admonishment away from dangerous behavior.

21. Answers will vary. It is clear from the way Paul writes that a believer, simply on the strength of his faith and baptism, will not *automatically* and *inevitably* live the way he needs to in order to preserve the blessing he's been given. There are several implicit clues here about how Christian transformation takes place:





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Make a decision about how to use your freedom (vs. 13) from the condemnation of the law and the power of sin. Freedom can be used for good or ill. It can be directed towards service or it can be directed towards license and self-indulgence. Realizing that a choice is necessary is an important first step.

Keep love as the goal of the journey (vs. 14). Love of God and love of neighbor will help us to resist the impulse to be self-absorbed and self-serving. Our freedom in Christ enables us to start each day by saying, “How much can I love this day?” That was always the goal of the law, as Paul says, but our bondage prevented it from being realized. Now we are free to reach it.

Walk in the companionship of the Holy Spirit (vs. 16). Be prepared to go out, into the events (and non-events) of every day, not in solitude and autonomy but with the One who has the map and who can supply the energy to reach the destination.

Be prepared for resistance (vs. 17). The flesh is not passive in our walk by the Spirit; it actively resists. Be ruthless, if necessary, with the opposition. As Jesus said, “If your eye offends you, pluck it out; it is better to enter heaven maimed than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (**Matt. 5:29**)

Be patient—fruit takes time to ripen (vs. 22). Perseverance in a daily walk with the Spirit is crucial to the bearing of His good fruit. Realize you are in this for the long term.

Remember the Cross (vs. 24). Our identification with Jesus, on a daily basis, in His Passion especially, will keep our perspective focused. This is not to be morbid. This is to be realistic about the need to suffer in order to conquer sin. It is also a crucial reminder of the truth of our deliverance, particularly in times of temptation. The most Catholic way of remembering the Cross is the Mass.

Examine yourself regularly (vs. 26). The sacrament of reconciliation gives us a perfect opportunity to check our lives—our motives and actions—to see if we are walking in the law of love.

