**CONDEMNING THE AGITATORS**

***7You were running a good race.******Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?*** ***8That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.*** ***9“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” 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 that 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!***

**Galatians 5:7-12 (NIV)**

The paragraph is a two-sided appeal but ends up in three parts. The primary appeal is directed toward the Galatians themselves (5:7-10) knowing the possibility that they will capitulate to circumcision. The second appeal has to do with the agitators (5:7,9,10b,12) who by implication (4:29) should be ‘cast out.’ The third issue has to do with Paul himself and a scandalous accusation brought against him by the agitators (5:11). So, while the paragraph is still directed toward the Galatians, it deals primarily with these trouble-makers. Paul’s concern for the Galatians and his desire that they rid themselves of the agitators tumble over each other in his attempt to affirm the Galatians and to see them rid of the problem. The metaphors change from a race, to baking (leaven in dough), to a law court (pay the penalty).

‘*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you**and kept you from obeying the truth?’*(5:7). Paul begins his appeal with a metaphor he had already used of himself in 2:2 – of the Christian life as a running race. In this case it is the problem of another runner cutting someone off by moving in front of them. Paul’s point is clear: these men are not helping you reach the heavenly goal, but are, in effect, cutting you off so that you don’t reach the goal at all. ‘*Who cut in on you?’*he asks rhetorically, knowing full well the kind of men they were, even if he did not know them personally.

Paul accuses these intruders of ‘cutting in on them’ ‘*and* (keeping) *you from obeying the truth?’*  The verb the NIV translates as ‘*obeying’* is usually translated ‘persuading.’ Obedience in this case would infer commands but the problem was more one of ‘persuasion’ regarding the truth, where the ‘truth’ is understood as the truth of the gospel (2:5,14). So, at stake ultimately was whether the Galatians would stay with the gospel or believe a lie which says God requires obedience to the Jewish Law as well as putting their faith in Christ.

‘*That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you’* (5:8). This is the second time (first in 1:6), Paul has referred to the Galatians’ relationship with God in terms of God calling them to Himself, language Paul has used of his own conversion (1:15). Paul has shifted to present tense. The One who first called them to Himself is now, through this letter, calling them again – not to conversion but to come back to ‘the truth of the gospel.’

‘*“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough”’* (5:9). The obvious meaning is that a small amount of virtually unseen substance can ultimately not only affect, but infect, the whole (c.f. 1 Corinthians 5:7). In context it refers to the teaching of the agitators, especially their insistence on circumcision for these Gentile followers of Christ. Paul may have principally had in mind the agitators themselves or their influence on the Christian community. Unlike Paul’s use of this scripture in Corinthians where the man was to be removed from the fellowship, he doesn’t directly say that here. He implies it in 4:30, in his citing Genesis 21:10 that they should *‘Get rid of the slave woman and her son.’* The emphasis here is on the persuasive and in this case evil influence these outsiders are having on the community. Paul does not want the Galatian believers infected further by their false teaching.

‘*I am confident in the Lord that you will* *take no other view’* (5:10a). Paul now speaks more confidently than at any other point in the letter that his Galatian friends will come back to their senses. He is ‘*confident in the Lord.’* This is a common expression for Paul, expressing not just his confidence but the source of his confidence – the Lord Himself.

What Paul is confident of is that they will ‘*take no other view.’* He uses a verb (the only time in Galatians is here) that means to set one’s mind toward something, to give it careful consideration. Paul’s confidence is ‘in the Lord’ that the Galatians will see things from God’s point of view.

‘*The one who is throwing you into confusion,**will pay the penalty,* *whoever that may be’* (5:10b). Paul places the ultimate condemnation on ‘*the one who is throwing you into confusion.’* The shift is from the plural to the singular. It appears that not all the troublemakers are equally responsible. The agitators seem to have been led by one person, although he doesn’t seem to be known to Paul (‘*whoever that may be’*). Paul believes he ‘*will pay the penalty,’* which can only mean divine judgement of some kind.

‘*Brothers,* *if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished’* (5:11). It appears that one of the tactics used by the trouble-makers was to argue that Paul himself is ‘*still preaching circumcision.’* This must mean that Paul was said to have done this elsewhere but not in Galatia, so he could gain favour with the Galatians. This would make greater sense of 1:10

where Paul was accused of seeking human approval above anything else.

Where could such an idea have come from? A possible answer is Acts 16:1-3 where Paul had Timothy circumcised so as not to offend the Jewish community where he always began his mission. But Paul was keeping to his own missionary strategy, based on two principles:

(1) that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counted before God. Against this, the present agitators gave it value in God’s eyes

(2) as noted in 1 Corinthians 9:19-20 *‘Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.****20****To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.’* Those who wanted to live under the Law reacted against Paul by claiming ‘inconsistency’ on his part.

‘*In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished’* (5:11b). ‘*In that case’* must refer back to ‘*if I am still preaching circumcision.’* The ‘*offence of the cross’* was the proclamation of a ‘crucified Messiah’ (1 Corinthians 1:22). It was unthinkable for Jew and Gentile alike that a deity would die by crucifixion, an execution reserved by Romans for insurrectionists and runaway slaves. Paul’s point is that anyone who preaches such a message is not going to preach circumcision at the same time to curry favour with any group.

‘*As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!’* (5:12). In response to the accusation and probably resulting frustration, Paul ‘wishes’ the agitators would castrate themselves. There is a double irony here. Castrated males could not serve in the Temple. Paul is just as scathing in Philippians 3:2 of the agitators there.

Christianity among Gentiles would not have lasted a generation had these agitators won the day. Furthermore, this letter as a whole and Paul’s later response in his letter to the Philippians make it clear that they were not evangelising, but were going from Pauline church to Pauline church trying to make Law-observing Jews out of Gentiles who had believed on Christ and received the Spirit.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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