

Buyer Beware

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[0:00] As you take your seats, please do turn with me in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5, we're going to pick up where we left last week at the beginning of this chapter and read through to verse 12 together. Galatians chapter 5, reading from verse 1 through to verse 12, that's on page 974 in the Blue Church Bibles.

Galatians chapter 5, reading from verse 1, let us hear God's words. Verse 1,

It says God's word. Let us pray for his help with it together.

Father, we do pray that you would speak now, that you would speak to each and every one of us here.

Lord, that you would renew our minds, that you would correct us, that you would train us for righteousness. Lord, we ask that you would make us more and more like Christ, or for those who do not yet know him, Lord, that you would bring them to yourself. In the name of Jesus, we pray.

Amen.

[2:56] Amen. A couple of weeks ago, the Daily Telegraph ran an interview with Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London.

As expected, the interview was pretty wide-ranging. It covered a whole load of topics, but as part of it, the mayor did speak a little bit about his Muslim faith and the influence that had on his work.

What he said was this, I hope, and I say this in a non-pompous way, that the public service I do will bring rewards in this world and the hereafter.

I'm hoping the work I do is earning me brownie points. We call it baraka, blessings.

The idea is that life is an exam. If you pass the exam, you go to heaven. If you flunk it, you go to the other place.

[4:03] There it is, isn't it? Plain as day. If you've been with us the past few Sunday evenings, I trust you'll see immediately the relevance of those words to what we've been hearing in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

What gospel does Sadiq Khan believe in? I'm hoping the work I'm doing is earning me brownie points.

Life is an exam. If you pass the exam, you go to heaven. If you flunk the exam, you go as he puts it to the other place. The mayor of London's hope is in his works that he will be able to stand before God on the last day and point to his achievements.

And in that moment, hope. Hope with his fingers crossed that God will say he's achieved the pass mark and got himself into heaven.

From the lips of London's mayor in 2026, that there is the same false gospel the Galatians we're hearing 2,000 years ago.

[5:20] As far removed as the problem of circumcision it might feel while hearing that passage we just read in Galatians 5, although it might look very different, the very same gospel is out there today.

And it is one that many will find appealing. Just like the Galatians did back in the first century. We thought a little last week about the Galatians kind of threatening to walk back into slavery, to kind of pick up their chains again, to go back through the gates of the prison that Christ had freed them from.

But it is no surprise, really, is it, that those beckoning them back through the doors of slavery were not kind of presenting their property as the prison that it was.

The teachers were like dodgy estate agents, kind of doing everything they could to sell a crumbling house to ignorant buyers.

Don't look behind the photo frames. Don't lift up the rug. Don't ask why there's candles burning in every room. Don't open the loft. Just look at the lovely exterior.

[6:31] Just look at the surface. I know it can all be yours for an absolute bargain. And the Galatians are tempted to buy in. We've seen that already, haven't we?

And so far, Paul has made the kind of theological argument as to why this return to a works-based righteousness is straight up unbiblical. You won't find it anywhere in the Bible that the law that they want to turn back to, that very law, actually preaches Christ and justification through faith alone in Him alone.

But I think here at the beginning of Galatians 5, Paul anticipates some kind of remaining uncertainty in the churches he is writing to.

A response that effectively says, well, maybe, right? Maybe that is all there is to it. But why not just make doubly sure? Right?

Maybe we are saved by faith in Christ alone. But why not add on just some of our own works? Just in case. Why not kind of buy the equivalent of a second home for righteousness?

[7:43] Faith, yes, over here. But let's take on a few of our works too, just in case that doesn't work out. Just as a fallback option, in case the faith falls through at any point. But what's the worst that can happen?

Well, Paul says in these verses we are looking at this evening, it's not so much the question of what's the worst that can happen, it's that the very worst will happen.

To take this gospel of works on, you are not investing in an asset which can bolster your portfolio. You are about to buy into something that is going to completely bankrupt you.

Not financially, but spiritually. Not temporally, but eternally. And so he says, buyer, beware.

Beware. Beware of what you are about to buy into. Because if you do, you are going to bear the cost of your decision. Two things here in this passage that Paul warns the Galatians about.

[8:47] Two things for them to be aware of. Beware of the cost of what you are about to buy. And beware of the people who are trying to sell it to you.

Let's start with the first of those in verses 1 to 6. Beware of the cost of compromise, the cost of what you are about to buy. Just look there with me at verse 2 and 3. Paul says, Look, I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. Sadie Kahn said that the idea is that life is an exam.

Right, Paul is kind of saying to the Galatian church, If you accept circumcision, i.e. if you try to attain even just a little bit of your own righteousness before God's, then life is an exam and you are putting yourself in the exam hall.

Maybe this is stretching the analogy a little far, but Paul is saying, right, there is only one person who can take the test. And as soon as you start answering some of the questions for yourself, then it's all on you.

[9:59] Christ will be of no advantage to you. Verse 4, You are severed from Christ. You who would be justified by the law.

And now we might wonder, the Galatians might have wondered, how adding just a little work onto faith could completely separate them from Christ. to the point of him being no advantage whatsoever.

Why can't Jesus just kind of help us get ourselves to the pass mark? But the answer, I think, is quite simple, really. Jesus, doesn't he?

Jesus becomes our help when we put our faith in him, when we put our trust in him. I think I mentioned something similar maybe a couple of months ago, but if we say we trust someone to do something and then start doing that very thing ourselves, what does that reveal?

This happens all the time in our house. Something, probably the car key's lost. I'll ask Mary if she's checked the bag. She'll say yes. And if you asked me right there that round, do you trust her? I'd say yes.

[11:16] But if you watched me, you'd see me go and check the bag. Right, well, what is that saying? I'm checking the bag just to make sure.

Just to make sure. But me making sure myself is revealing, isn't it, that what I said isn't entirely true. I don't completely trust her to have properly checked the bag.

Jesus says he has saved us from our sin. Jesus says he has completely covered the cost. And if you ask the Galatians, do you believe that?

I'm sure they would have said, yes, of course we do. But then if you started watching, their actions were about to reveal something else.

Right, they were on their way to checking the bag themselves. We just want to make sure. But just wanting to make sure is actually, isn't it, we don't completely trust you.

[12:38] And if you don't completely trust Jesus, then you don't really have faith in Jesus. And if despite what you say, you don't really have faith in Jesus, then you are not united to him by faith.

And if you're not united to him by faith, verse four, you are severed from him. Those are strong words, aren't they?

And I think it is perhaps worth just being clear, to be uncertain about whether your faith is really strong enough, that that is a different thing to being uncertain about whether Jesus has really done enough.

Right, the former will leave a genuine Christian lacking assurance. If you're not sure about the quality of your faith, it's not ideal, but it is okay to lack confidence in the strength of your faith and still be saved by Jesus.

It's not okay to lack confidence in the work of Jesus. To just want to make sure with any of our own works, from Bible readings to baptism, from evangelism to circumcision, to want to bolster our case with any of those things, to just want to make sure is to betray a lack of trust in what Jesus has said he has done.

[14:09] And that will mean you are severed from Christ. It will leave you standing before God in the last day with nothing to show for except what you have done.

And as Paul says, unless you have kept the whole law, ace the exam from the day of your birth until the day of your death, then that is going to be a bad, bad day.

But Paul reminds us in verse 5 that that is not a fear we need to have. If we do not compromise that the true gospel works, if we live by faith through the Spirit, we do not need to live in dread of that day, but instead can look forward to that day.

Look at the confidence Paul writes with there, verse 5. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

We do not need to hope that that day might go well for us. We can, with Paul, eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness, knowing that with a genuine, trusting faith in Christ, God will look at us and say, righteous.

[15:35] Righteous. Not because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus has done for us. Nothing we have done counts for anything on that day.

Paul's point is not that uncircumcision is better than circumcision. If there were people in the Galatian church who thought they were righteous because they hadn't been circumcised, Paul would have to write this whole letter again in reverse.

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but only faith working through love.

Only faith. Hopefully we're there now by this point in Galatians. But maybe the last three words there come as a surprise. Faith working through love.

We might ask, isn't this whole book about faith, not works? Well, that's maybe a little bit of an oversimplification. The whole book is about being saved by faith, not works.

[16:41] But we are very much saved for works. We read about that earlier in Romans 6. We are saved by faith that then bears fruit. Just back to the exam hall for a minute.

Imagine getting ready for an exam that your entire life depends on. If you are fearful of failure in that exam, what is all of your attention going to be fixed on in the run-up to that day?

It's going to be, isn't it, you doing everything you need to do to make sure you pass the exam. And life very quickly revolves all around you, doesn't it?

I was reading this week that nearly 85% of students get anxious and run up to an exam. 65% of them said that exam season put significant strains on family relationships.

Because the blinkers come on, don't they? When we have an exam coming up, we are worried for ourselves. But imagine sitting in the same library facing the same exam but already guaranteed to pass.

[17:57] You know the outcome is secure. What happens when a classmate asks you to give up some of your time to help them with a question? But what happens when a friend phones asking for some help moving flat?

All of a sudden because your outcome is secure, you are freed, aren't you? Freed from the burden on yourself to look instead towards the needs of others.

Faith, real faith, works itself out. Not in ceremonial works of the law done for one's own sake but in love for others.

The Christian life is not one where works are absent but it is one where works of love are the outflow of a faith that saves. If we have a genuine trust in Jesus that saving faith will work itself out in love.

But if we put the cart before the horse that there is a danger of Christ being no benefit to us. That is why Paul issues such a stark warning there in verses 2-4.

[19:08] Beware of the cost of compromise. Do not compromise faith with works. Let the works flow from faith. Deciding to just make sure with any of our own works will ultimately sever us from Christ.

That was Paul's first warning. His second warning to those threatening to buy a stake in this religion of works. Beware of sly slave masters. When people are selling a bad product, they don't tell you it's a bad product, do they?

There was an article in BBC News a month ago or so during one of the many heat waves, none of which have seemed to have migrated that far north. But they took a look at some of the portable air conditioners that were being advertised all over social media.

Kind of little cubes. Maybe you've seen something you've had to put it yourself. Little cubes that were said to cool down in a room in 90 seconds. Sounds pretty impressive, doesn't it?

Why wouldn't you want to get your hands on that when you're sitting in a 40 degree sauna? One advert described the product as a reverse engineered aircon unit featuring a liquid compressed cooling cartridge.

[20:24] It sounds good. But when a civil engineer opened it up, he found a load of cardboard fins that get wet as water blows past them. They were rudimentary devices being sold at a premium because they were advertised as revolutionary.

The product was pretty useless but those selling them were sly, ready to cleverly lie about their product in order to hook people in. That article was written in part to warn people.

Be aware of sly salesmen selling a product that does not do as advertised. But Paul writes these words in verses 7 to 12 to warn people, to be aware of sly slave masters selling a product that does not do as advertised.

But Paul wonders in verse 7 who has hindered the Galatians. The analogy kind of under the surface of the translation there is of someone sort of tripping up competitors in a race. The European Championships won recently, I don't know if you've watched any of it, in the kind of longer distance races and there's a big group huddle of people running around the track all together.

I'm pausing there is someone in that group in the Galatian church who is kicking at other people's heels. They are elbowing people in the ribs trying to knock them off course in a way that the rest is not going to see.

[21:55] It is sly, it is sneaky, it is subversive. The Galatians themselves might not have entirely sure where it was coming from.

Paul doesn't know exactly who it is but he knows who it is not. Verse 8, it is not from the one who has called them.

So sometimes God does, doesn't he lead us into situations we wouldn't choose? We thought a little bit about that this morning. Sometimes in his wisdom, he puts us through trials to refine our faith.

He never puts a stumbling block in our way that we would fall from our faith. You can imagine, can't you, the Galatian church listening to the slick words of the false teacher and thinking maybe, maybe this is the path God is leading us on.

Maybe God sent this guy for us to listen to. But they are not from God. It's why Paul's defense of the last two chapters has centered on the scriptures because that is where you go to discern whether or not what someone says is to be listened to.

[23:10] Whether it is God leading you in a direction or slave masters trying to knock you off course. Paul has shown what the Bible says. And what these false teachers were saying is not what

the scriptures preached.

Not from God, not to be listened to, not to be allowed even a foothold, not a receptive ear to be engaged with because a little leaven leavens the whole lump like dropping a spotted dye into a glass of water.

It soon spreads and becomes near impossible to get out. It is, isn't it? I think you had another reminder that for us to be people of the Word, that those who let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, and listen, listen to those, not who sound wise or winsome in the eyes of the world, but speak from the Bible in season and out of season.

But people like those preaching circumcision in Galatia can pluck verses out of God's Word and persuade people of any number of things. But equipped with a rich understanding of God's Word, and we will be better able to guard ourselves against every wind of doctrine that might blow our way.

But our confidence need not only depend on our knowledge of God's Word, but on God Himself. See how Paul expressed that confidence in verse 10?

[24 : 41] I have confidence in the Lord. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine. Those words might have been reassuring for the Galatians, perhaps humbling, maybe both.

Reassuring, isn't it? Wonderfully reassuring that the Lord had His people in His hands. That is where Paul's confidence lies. Humbling, perhaps, in that Paul's confidence is not in the wisdom or intellect of the Galatians, but in God.

Maybe you've been listening to this series in this book where we've had the wonderfully simple gospel put before us again, and again, and again, and we are warned time and again that we must not fall into any other gospel.

Maybe you've heard it all and you think that'll never be me. I'd never be so foolish as to buy into this so-called faith plus works gospel that these people are selling.

Maybe you think you know enough of your Bible to be confident in fending off false teachers. Wisdom and knowledge are great things, but perhaps if that is you, you do need to be aware of putting confidence in yourself.

[26 : 08] That, rightly, is not where Paul's confidence is. He doesn't say, does he, now that I have made you wise and knowledgeable, I am confident in you. No, his confidence isn't in the Lord and in him alone, and that ought to be where our confidence is too, because error is always obvious in hindsight, but often very subtle in the moment.

I think we got a little insight into that in verse 11. Why does Paul have to stress that he doesn't still preach circumcision? That's certainly not from Galatians, has it?

It's not come from Acts where we see Paul preaching the gospel in Galatia. What do you think is behind that verse? Sly slave masters.

Do you not want to be a Christian like Paul's a Christian? Abraham was circumcised, Jesus was circumcised, the law commands God's people to be circumcised. You know Paul was circumcised too, don't you?

If you want to be a Christian, do you not think you better get circumcised as well? This was a very young Galatian church. I think you and I would have to be very proud to think we would have stood there and not even wavered a little.

[27 : 32] The false teachers were doing all that they could to say we preach the same message, the same gospel as Paul. We preach circumcision, Paul was circumcised. Come on board with us and you'll be a real Christian just like he is.

Paul's having to defend himself isn't he? Saying no, no, no, no, it's a different gospel, we preach a different message. I was listening recently to a podcast about the rising interest in Eastern Orthodoxy amongst young Protestants.

One of the guys in the podcast who used to be an Eastern Orthodox priest was saying that if you went into one of their churches churches, the priest would tell you everything you wanted to hear. They would do all they could to convince you it was one and the same gospel as the one you hear from God's words.

If a young Protestant walked in, the priest would do his very best to convince that person that there is very little difference. But sit in that church for a few years and you will soon realize there is no gospel at all.

If we carry the gospel into a context like that, we might find a way to map it on to what we are hearing. But there is actually nothing there. Nothing except another religion of working your way to God.

[29:00] We started with a quote from Sadiq Khan, but credit where it's due to the mayor. He made no attempt to hide what he was preaching. But many will. many of those who wear the name of Christian taking the name of Christ, quoting from God's word, saying that Jesus and Paul preach the same things that they do.

They are sly. And it will always be much more subtle than we think. Obvious in hindsight, not always in the moment.

But if they believe in any other gospel than righteousness through faith alone and Christ alone, they are slave masters bringing people back through the gates of prison.

And they will do a lot of damage because of the subtlety of their message. And so we need to beware. All of us always need to beware.

Never think you are the point of not needing to worry because you know it all. because I have got such a solid grasp of the gospel that no one could possibly ever convince me otherwise.

[30:15] Beware. Paul wishes in verse 12 that we wouldn't need to be so on our guard. Instead, these people would out themselves for all to see.

That's what's going on there. In first reading, it might seem unnecessary, perhaps even vulgar, that Paul would want the knife to slip up a little further. other, but there is a point to Paul's comment here, maybe two.

In the Old Testament law, such people would be visibly cut off from the covenant community. If they had been emasculated, everyone would know that they did not belong amongst God's old covenant people.

I think Paul has some of that in mind. Paired with that, there was a prominent pagan festival in northern Galatia at this time, where pagan priests would castrate themselves, so that everyone in Galatia would assume a castrated male to be a pagan priest.

Now, we saw last week, perhaps you don't remember, you weren't here, back in verse 8 and 9 of chapter 4, Paul kind of implicitly equate this law-based gospel being preached to the Galatians with pagan religion.

[31:32] He said that they are two sides of the same coin, one and the same thing. And it seems in verse 12 the two things are coming back together again. What would the Galatians, what would those who know the Old Testament law think of those who had been emasculated?

They do not belong amongst God's people, and they are preachers of a completely different religion. But Paul was not longing for bodily mutilation, but staying on the circumcision theme, he is voicing his desire that would become evident to everyone just who these people really are.

And we should want that too. We don't have people preaching circumcision, nor do we have a prominent pagan festival happening in Peterhead, so emasculation is not language we need to use. But we should long for false preachers, preachers of false gospels, to be exposed.

to be shown to be preaching a completely different religion from the gospel of Christ, because the more obvious they are, the easier they will be to avoid.

Paul says in Acts that there will be wolves who come in sheep's clothing. Paul is wishing for the sheep's clothing to fall away, but he has to express that desire, doesn't he?

[32:57] Because often the sheep's clothing is there, and it looks very, very real. they are not so obvious, and they are not so easy to avoid, and so we need to beware.

Beware of slave masters who will subtly sell a gospel that they claim is the same, but in fact could not be more different, and will ultimately bring people back into the slavery that Christ came to free people from.

there are two things here that Paul calls us to beware of, the cost of compromise and the subtle words of sly slave masters.

Buy into this false gospel and you will find yourself bankrupt, cut off from Christ. there are some pretty serious warnings in this passage, but there is, I think isn't there in there too, some pretty wonderful assurance that when our faith is in Christ, when we do not buy into the message of those who say anything other than faith alone and Christ alone, when our hope really is in the Lord Jesus Christ and nothing else, we can wait eagerly for the hope of righteousness, confident in the Lord that he will keep us until the end.

Sadik Khan's hope is that when he stands before God, he might have enough good works to get him to heaven.

[34 : 40] If your faith is in Christ this evening, you can cast away all uncertainty. You can be absolutely sure that you have everything because you are in Christ, that on the last day you will be declared, God will look at you from his judgment seat before him and say, righteous.

Righteous because your faith as strong or as weak as it may be today, your faith is in Jesus and in him alone. You trust in Jesus to have done all that he has said he has done with even a childlike, a mustard seed of faith in that gospel, you will never be plucked from God's hand, but will stand secure both now and forevermore.

Let's pray that that will be the case for each and every one of us here and give thanks to God for that wonderful truth before singing together. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Father, we do thank you for the one true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, that he came to bear away our every sin. Lord, that he covered the cost of our every iniquity. And not only that, Lord, but with our faith in him, you have imputed us with his very righteousness.

[36 : 16] Lord, that we stand before you clothed in all that he has done right. We praise you for that amazing gospel.

Lord, that we bring nothing in our hands, but we come with a full assurance that Christ has done it all for us. Help us all to come before you with faith in him and faith alone.

Lord, help us to be on guard against any other gospel that might sever us from Christ. Lord, help us to know the cost of compromise.

Help us to be aware of those that would subtly preach any other message. Lord, may our confidence not be in our own strength and wisdom and knowledge, but in you.

may we be confident in you and in your word and in the gospel you have given to us through it.

Lord, may you hold us fast and keep us from error, that we might stand before you and be declared righteous, not because of what we have done, but because of what you have done for us.

[37 : 32] We do thank you for that wonderful gospel. Lord, help us never to lose sight of the wonder of it. Help us now as we sing your praise to do so with joy and thanksgiving in our hearts, marveling at what you have done for us in spite of who we are.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.