

*Paul and the Bad Apple*

*You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? It certainly isn't God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough! I am trusting the Lord to keep you from believing false teachings. God will judge that person, whoever he is, who has been confusing you.*

*Dear brothers and sisters, if I were still preaching that you must be circumcised—as some say I do—why am I still being persecuted? If I were no longer preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, no one would be offended. I just wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would mutilate themselves. (Galatians 5:7-12, New Living Translation)*

The Apostle Paul both loved the people of Galatia, and he was angry with them. He loved them and desired that they might know all the benefits gifted to them through the death of Christ, one of which is the freedom to live according to God's purpose for the sake of the neighbor. He was angry with them, because although at first they seemed to clearly understand that God's love and grace were a gift, a "bad apple", a "false teacher" had infiltrated their community and they were taken in by a lie.

Paul, whose background was as a pious and observant Jew had come to understand that the love of God did not stop at the boarder of Abraham's descendants. He came to understand that the cross was for the Gentile as much as for the Jew. He passionately welcomed all into the community of faith, regardless of whether or not they had been circumcised (the covenantal mark of Judaism). Some other Christians who had also been raised as pious observant Jews came to live among Paul's Jewish/Gentile communities of faith. They could not see the radical nature of grace and so told the Gentiles that they must become like them, in this case observant Jews, before they could fully be Christians.

Paul was angry at those who peddled that idea. He said they were like a little yeast, changing the entire bowl of dough, or as I implied in my title, like a bad apple that would spoil an entire bushel of good fruit. That bit of yeast, that single piece of fruit with a spot of spoilage, is all it takes to change everything.

Even so with us. One discordant voice, one idea contrary to the truth of the Gospel can quickly infect an entire community of faith. That discordant word can usually be boiled down to something like, "If you're not a Christian just like me, you're not really a Christian at all." Often the first casualty of such a self-centered word is love of neighbor. Selfishness almost always generates conflict, which cause us to seek a protective stance, closing us from both dangers as well as opportunities.

What is lost is freedom. What is lost is grace. What is lost is our reliance upon the love of God for us in Christ. All of that ultimately replaced by our own plans, positions and efforts.

In the next three verses Paul will offer a warning that is needed council for churches of any age.

*For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another. (Galatians 5:13-15, New Living Translation)*

Is there any part of your life today, any among your family network, within your community or in your church where this is a needed counsel? How can you use your freedom to challenge a destructive idea? How can love be your guide in making that challenge?