

## **Are You Running Well?**

Galatians 5:7-12

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### TRANSCRIPT:

Galatians Chapter 5, I'd like us to read verse 7 through to verse number 12, which will be the text that we're considering this morning. Galatians Chapter 5, verse 7: "You ran well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off."

Let us pray. Lord, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, instruction in righteousness, that the man and woman of God may be perfect and mature, completely furnished unto every good work. Lord, I pray that this word, which is said to do these very things, might go forth this morning in the power of the Holy Spirit, for we confess that we believe in the Holy Spirit, that by His power the word of truth will touch the hearts of Your people and draw us into deeper, richer communion with You, our God. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

In verses 1 through to verse number 6, Paul has just begun by encouraging the church and commanding and exhorting them to stand fast in the freedom which Christ had purchased for them, and that they should do everything in their power not to be entangled again in a yoke of bondage. Christ had secured their freedom, and Paul was concerned that by their belief in the false teaching that was present in the church, they might become severed from Christ. He had a great concern for them. He warns them and instructs them and helps them to recognize that this path is a path that would lead ultimately to destruction, and that they should be as those who have true faith, who anxiously and eagerly await the hope of righteousness that is to come, people that look unto Jesus, people that wait for His promises to be fulfilled in them, even though we are living in difficult times.

In verse number 7, however, Paul introduces the concept of a race, the Christian life as a sort of race, and he views them in verse number 7 as marathon runners who were running well but have now become obstructed or hindered in their progress. He says, "You were running well," or "You ran well." What he means by that is not that they had strong calf muscles and they could go the extra kilometers; if that was the case, I would fail immediately off the blocks. Thank God the Christian race is not a physical race; I'll be down and out. But this is a Christian race, a heavenly race, a race of faith, a race with your eyes toward the Lord. And he says, "You ran well; as a church, you ran well. You received me as I came and preached you the gospel of Christ. You believed the gospel that I proclaimed, which was none other than the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You received the Spirit," as he says in Galatians Chapter 3, "by faith and not by the works of the law, and you knew something of the blessedness that you once had when you first believed in Jesus."

But now, things are changing, at least from Paul's perspective and his judgment of what's happening there at the church. Things are not as they ought to be or used to be. He's identifying the issue is that their progress has been blocked or interrupted; they've been hindered. And Paul is concerned that they would remember where they have fallen and would get up and continue on, and as it were, do the first works, as he says in the church to the church of the Revelation, as Jesus says to them. And they're hindered by an obstacle, and that obstacle was an obstacle of persuasion.

In verse number 8, he talks about this: "Who hindered you in verse seven from obeying the truth?" That's talking about not the fact that just merely the gospel; they're saying from believing the truth, which should reflect in a life of obedience. And this is the point Paul's trying to say: You can examine a person's comprehension of the truth of the gospel and understanding of the gospel by how they live. If they are living as legalists, applying themselves to law works for satisfaction in the sight of God, you can work backward and understand that there must be something wrong with their theology about who God is and what Christ has done.

And so, Paul says that you've been hindered from obeying the truth but hindered by the obstacle of persuasion, a theological persuasion, winning over of their confidence by perhaps smooth words and subtle argumentation, even rooted in biblical texts, as the Judaizers were obviously fond to do. But whatever was this theological issue that was happening, it was hindering them. Perhaps the Judaizers were promising progress, and the Galatians were not seeing this as a hindrance; they're probably seeing this as, "This is the way to go on; this is some truth that we've neglected. We shall be properly completed if we but get circumcised. Oh yes, believe in Jesus, but also keep the works of the law." And Paul is saying, "No, no,

even though they may present it as progress, in reality, this is hindrance; this is an obstruction."

You, as a marathon runner, are being hindered. It is like an intruder that enters upon the course as you are running that marathon and going and running and exerting yourself and just pacing and moving forward in that direction to the finish line, and then an intruder comes alongside you and suggests to you and insinuates to you and persuades you, as the athlete, that there are shortcuts on this marathon course that can get you to the finish line quicker. Or perhaps he encourages you, pulls out a bib from his pocket with another number on it, and says, "Hey, put this one on." There you can see what happens: that even though your number represents you, representing someone else, and therefore you might win the race even though you didn't win the race. Or perhaps encourage you to, "Here, have this drink of water," or "Here's a muesli bar to keep you on with a lot of protein that gets you on the way," when that marathon runner should only have refreshments from the aid stations appointed by the organizers of the event.

Any of those deviations encouraged and suggested by that intruder would disqualify that marathon runner from the race. And Paul is seeing the persuasion of the Judaizers as something of that kind. They were suggesting ultimately that Christ is not enough. Now, they would never say that, and I will assure you today there is not one false teacher in this world that you could probably tell me that would say that, that confesses to be a Christian. I never heard it, but lots of false teaching, seen lots of things online, this had a lot of articles, but to say blatantly, "Christ is not enough," that statement would never come out of the mouth of any teacher. But by what they introduced and what they suggested and what they insinuated, they were simply teaching that Christ was not enough.

They were introducing circumcision, just a little cutting ritual that has been practiced by people for generations. What is the harm of it? In fact, they could probably say, "Half of your brethren here do we share anyway, and they're already circumcised. What's the big deal?" But by it, they were implying that you complete your salvation through circumcision, and that you are accepted in God because of circumcision, and circumcision will put you in a better place with God. Just a little works to grace, and they won't even call it works; they'll call it sacraments, they'll call it all done through grace, things done by the Spirit, clothed in whatever theological garb and dress. But at the end of the day, what it simply suggests to the people that hear it and believe it is that Christ is not enough.

It even would come to them with a sense of care and concern that we're just trying to help, dressed in fine theological language, distributed by zealous

Christians who love the Lord and who appear to be just so kind and concerned. But ultimately, what Paul is saying here is that it is not of God. But he says in verse number eight of this passage, "This persuasion, although persuasive it may be, although convincing it may be, although wise and subtle and kind and the way that it is presented to you may be very influential and impactful," it's said, he says here, "This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you." It's man; it's man's persuasion; it's not the truth of God. It is the doctrines of men being taught as the truths of God, which were deceiving the Galatians.

What's interesting about number eight is that Paul says these words, and we have to ask us why did he say this: "This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you." What do you say, "This persuasion does not come from God"? He says, "This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you," which obviously is a reference to God. Well, I think what Paul is trying to help them understand is similar to the idea of running well. It is God who called you to the race. It is God who has granted you repentance and faith. It is God that has set and called and put your feet on the starting blocks. It is God that has arranged the course upon which you run as Christians that have been called by God to this race.

What Paul is helping them understand is that you ran well, but it was God who called you into the race. It is God who called you to run. It is God who called you by His grace into the grace of Christ. And he's simply saying to them, therefore, all persuasions must be measured according to the authority of Him who called you. You do not measure truth by eloquence. You do not measure truth by acceptance among peers or great names out there. You measure truth by Him who calls you. You examine the course upon which you run and see if your feet are on track by consideration of the one who put you in the race. And all persuasions must be measured, therefore, by the authority of God. And this is what Paul was encouraging in them to do. And that persuasion of another gospel does not come from God, from Him who calls you.

And verse number nine, he talks about and introduces a common proverbial saying used in other parts of the Scripture as well, but to help explain the severity of the issue that was there before them, this false teaching. He says, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump," a common proverbial saying known among people, practiced in most of the households, if not all of the households, of the people to whom Paul was speaking, of baking bread. I don't know how many sourdough lovers we have here. I had to kick sourdough away just to keep the weight down, but amazing taste, especially the tanginess and the sourness that is impacted and produced by the work of leaven in the bread. And Paul uses this saying in other places, like in 1 Corinthians 5:6, we're talking about moral corruption in

the church, talking about this man who was indulging in sexual immorality and was unrepentant, and he was. Paul said that if we don't deal with him, if he's not put on the discipline and excommunicated from the Church of God, the moral influence of this man and the lack of addressing the sin appropriately will soon spread like leaven throughout the whole lump. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." It refers to the same thing here. Paul uses it again here in Galatians but using it more in relation to theological corruption, false teaching. And just like that moral offender, undealt with, unrepentant, undealt with, would lead to more moral sin spreading throughout the life of the church, so this theological issue, not dealt with properly, not dealt with adequately concerning the sufficiency of Christ in the gospel, would lead to corruption spreading throughout the church and would end up influencing the whole. And Paul is simply saying here, you are being invaded right now by a little bit of leaven, a little bit of theological leaven.

And leaven is that sourdough starter, if any of you have made sourdough. If not, you probably inspired to do so after looking into leaven a little bit more. It's that sourdough starter, that, if I could say, the old dough from the previous batch that has been left out in a jar to ferment, and then when you make your new batch of dough, you take a little bit of that sourdough starter or that leaven that has been fermenting in that jar on your kitchen bench, as it were, and you take some out, and you put some in to this new batch of dough, and you knead it through, and you let it rest, and it proofs. And what ends up happening is the microorganisms and microbes from the leaven or the starter start to consume the sugars in the flour and produce lactic acid and other compounds that produce that tanginess that is amazing in the loaf. But the point is simply this: just that little bit of leaven, when it is put into that lump of dough, it works its way through the whole dough so that every part of the bread has been influenced by it, so that wherever you cut that loaf and wherever you taste of that loaf, you're going to taste that same tanginess. And what Paul is trying to help these people understand is that even though this persuasion appears in minor form in perhaps your understanding, you might think it's not so serious to introduce a little circumcision on the side or to encourage these false teachers to remain present in the church, but understand this: just like that leaven will work its way through the whole lump and influence the whole, so will happen to that false teaching that is not checked and dealt with.

"Oh, but it's just a little bit, little law to grace, a little incision in the flesh." Paul says it changes everything. Now, I don't know about you, but when I see the Galatians, who experienced Paul's ministry and had a great endowment of the power of the Spirit on their lives early on in the ministry, and all these great things were done among them, and then Paul says something

like this, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump," I think to myself sometimes, "Wow, so many perils looming around us, so many dangers on every corner, so many things, little influences that can disrupt and destroy the work of God." And you think to yourself, "What confidence do we have in the church of survival if it's just a little leaven that leavens the whole lump, just a little, almost somewhat undetectable? Then what chance is there for the Church of Jesus Christ being perpetuated in the world? And what chance is there that this church would even last until Christ returns, Lord willing?"

Well, the beautiful thing about this is that Paul tells us that despite all these dangers and despite the fact that they were running well and had now been obstructed and hindered, Paul hasn't given up hope and confidence. Look what he says in verse number 10 of this passage: "I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind," or no other view, "but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is."

Paul says here, "I have confidence in you, in God," not in you because of you, no confidence in man, "but I have confidence in you, in God, because I know it is God who has called you. I know it is God's church. I know if you are God's people, that He promises to keep His people." And despite the influx of false teaching and the invasion of this leaven in the assembly, Paul says, "I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other view, that even though your minds are being taken, I believe God will keep you." He is confident of this very thing, as he says to the Philippians, that "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it to the day of Jesus Christ." He's confident, as our Lord Jesus Christ said, "My sheep hear My voice. My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." He's confident that the true sheep of our Lord Jesus will continue to hear the voice of the Chief Shepherd, despite the voice of the many false shepherds that go about and proclaim their false messages in the world. Paul says, "I'm confident that God will keep His people, that God will keep His people from falling."

But also, he is confident that God will judge His enemies. "I'm confident in you, in the Lord, that you will not be of any other view, but also this: but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is." Paul is not only assured that God will keep His people, but that God will judge His enemies. That the trouble is of the Lord's people, the enemies of the cross, will bear their judgment. That as sure as the sun rises and as sure as the sun sets, and as sure as that represents God's faithfulness to us and His compassions, which are new every morning, and His great faithfulness, so it represents His faithfulness to judge the enemies of the Lord. That He will come again, and He will destroy the workers of darkness. That

those that are false prophets and teachers will be reserved for the day of destruction, and they will be repaid from the Lord, as 2 Peter 2:3 says, "For a long time, their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." And although we have moments like in Psalm 73, when we ask, "Why do the wicked prosper?" and it looks like the corruption is invading the church and destroying the Lord's people, the truth of the gospel will triumph. Christ is King and Lord. The will of our God will be done, and nothing can thwart it. And then the end of the day, God will keep His people and present to Himself a glorious church in splendor and in glory, and we will worship Him forever and ever, and in beauty and in holiness, because He has determined it. And Satan can make all the noise in the world that he wishes to make. The false teachers can seek to destroy the people of God, but God will ensure their destruction, as represented in the book of Revelation, where the beast and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire with the devil and his angels, and they will burn forever and ever because Christ reigns. And this is Paul's confidence. And though he writes this letter with weeping, he recognizes and understands that God's church is His church; it's the Lord's church. And that God will keep His people and destroy His enemies. What confidence that is, and how important that is for us to have as we minister to one another in the work of the Lord.

Such confidence keeps us from extremes, doesn't it? Extremes that lead to us manipulating outcomes, trying to persuade people against their will, seeking to perhaps keep the church in our own control, in our own strength, and make it operate just as we would like it to be. No, Paul says, "I warn, I correct, I rebuke, I instruct, I labor, I pray, but it is God who keeps." And that the hearts of men are in God's capable hands, and therefore we need not fear and let our confidence go and flee from us and be in a place of despair. And this is a great confidence for all of us, for our children that are believers in Jesus Christ, so that we are praying and seeking the Lord for, and all the voices out there, rather people that we're discipling one-to-one, perhaps, or other people we're praying with and working with, and we wonder, as something is sent to them by someone, and it's a false teaching, and we feel like, "Oh no, what am I going to do?" And all of a sudden, we get awfully controlling, and we disrupt the relationship we have with them, and we lose our patience because our confidence is not in them, in the Lord. It's a very important thing, the people of God, that we have to understand that although the world is messy, God is in control of the mess, and He will bring out His beautiful purposes and make all things beautiful in His time.

And finally, Paul addresses a sucker punch accusation. He does so with an indisputable answer. Look what he says in verse number 11, look at his accusation, such a low blow. "And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has

ceased." It seems apparent that the Judaizers were leveraging Paul's name to support their false teaching of circumcision, which was not only a blatant lie. Paul is saying, "If I preach circumcision," as if to say, "This is what you're hearing by these false teachers." So they're coming in saying, "Oh yeah, you need to be circumcised, and by the way, Paul teaches it. Hey, Timothy was circumcised, and Paul himself is right, he's a Jew, Pharisee of the Pharisees," all these kinds of things. And they were so low that they would, knowing Paul did not teach these things, would blatantly lie, twist, corrupt, in order to secure the obedience of the Galatians to their persuasion.

And Paul answers that objection amazingly. I love it. Look at it. He says in verse number 11, "If I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?" Look how he says it in chapter 6, verse 17. "From now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." You know what Paul says? "You think I preach circumcision? You're going to believe that accusation? Let me take my shirt off, and you see my marks on my back, and let me ask you this question: Who has been giving me these lashings? Who has chased me out of Galatia and of the region? Who has persecuted me? Read Acts 13, 14. It was the Jews from the synagogue. They could not bear the teaching of Paul's doctrine of grace alone through faith alone that pursued him, chased him out of the city, left him for dead at Derby, and forces you to think, 'I'm preaching circumcision? If that was the case, I would never be persecuted.' Look at the marks on my body. Look at the sufferings that I've gone through. Read the list in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, if you were at your own time, and ask yourself the question, 'Am I preaching a message that tickles the ears of the Judaizers and of the Jews, or am I preaching a message of the cross that offends?'"

It says, "If I preach circumcision, why am I suffering persecution?" And then, basically, he says this statement, "Then the offense of the cross has ceased." It's basically saying, "It's because I preach the cross that the offense of the cross will never cease." The fact that I'm being persecuted proves and shows that it's not the message of circumcision that cuts people the wrong way, but it's the message of the cross of Jesus Christ that really hits people where it hurts. I'm being persecuted because I preach the cross.

And Paul understood the offensiveness of the message of the cross. He knew it was a stumbling block to the Jews, and he knew it was foolishness to the Greeks, but he knew that it was the power of God and the wisdom of God, and by its men must be converted through that means and that means alone. It was a message marked by opposition and marked by rejection, and Paul understood as I preach that message, and it rubs against human depravity, it guarantees resistance. Paul had been doing it for quite some time now and experienced that resistance to know full well that the



persecutions a result of the offense of the cross.

How does the cross offend people? I could almost say in every which way. Let me give you some things to think about. Firstly, the cross runs contrary to human wisdom. Think with me just for a moment: a crucified King, a crucified King, a man hanging upon a tree, defeated, bleeding, wounded, afflicted, Him who could not save Himself, as the people said, "Him others He can save; well, save Yourself, come down from the cross." A dying Savior, dying Savior, can't save Himself, but the Savior of the world. Think about how this relates to human wisdom of the Greeks, who thought of their mythological characters that were mighty, Hercules, and here you have a suffering, crucified Lord. What out of foolishness, it makes no sense at all. Surely it's just imagination of these early fishermen that have no understanding of what reason really is, and human wisdom looks at the cross, and they can't grapple with this. It's darkened by their own sinfulness and their own hearts, and it rubs against their depravity, saying, "Me, submit to Him? May it never be!" And it offends them. You would call them to such, and the cross runs contrary also to human self-reliance. It wounds the self-righteous.

There are many people that believe the lie of self-salvation, but the cross and that crucified Lord Jesus, who is there hanging on the tree, tells us one thing, and it tells us that you cannot save yourself. Someone bled in your place. Someone was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. And as that cross is preached, the self-reliance, self-salvation, Pharisee-type-minded people, they think to themselves, "Nah, this guy hanging there is meant to be my salvation and my salvation alone, and nothing that I can contribute to it? No ritual, no circumcision, no keeping of the law, no keeping of the sacraments, no church attendance, nothing that I do can satisfy God, but a dying man, someone bled for me? No, no, no. Each man must die for his own sin," they might say. Well, it offends them. They think to themselves, "No, no, no. I'd rather rely on myself than on that man hanging there."

But it also destroys human pride, doesn't it? The preaching of the cross exposes sin. It points out the fact that we are sinful because, yes, He's dying in our place, but He's dying because of our sins. It's not merely a hero that's rescuing us just from, you know, some kind of psychological trouble or to make our lives better by setting out a certain example. He's dealing with our sin. And so the cross destroys human pride because it exposes our sin, and it points out our sins, and it tells us to own our sins and to repent of our sins. This is what Peter said to those Jews on the day of Pentecost. He says, "You have taken Him, and by lawless hands have crucified Him and put Him to death." What he's saying is, "It is you, your hands, your filthy hands, that have crucified the Lord of glory. And it is

your sin that is the cause of His death." And human pride will not have it, and it cuts them, and they're offended by the message of the cross.

And finally, it cuts and runs contrary to pluralistic religious thinking. World of pluralism and thinking that there are many ways to God, but the cross, as we look at the cross and we hear the offense of the cross, the cross simply says there is no other way. There is no other way for God to be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus unless His Son is set forth as a propitiation through His blood, unless His Son bears the wrath of a holy God on our behalf so that God can be just and remain holy and yet be the justifier and the one who declares us righteous. There must be a suffering servant who is perfect and pure. There is no other way. The man dying on the cross was not the idea of the Jews, nor was the idea of the Romans. It was the predetermined counsel of God. This was not something that was plan B. This was God's plan from the beginning, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. And despite what anyone may say and despite all the reasons why they may put out there to try and justify that there are many ways to God, and Jesus did one thing over here, God is saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, and no one will be accepted unless they're in the Beloved."

And you preach a message like that, containing all those truths, and you could only imagine what you're met with: resistance. You'll be met with what the Lord was met with in His ministry. "Right, if they persecuted Me, they'll persecute you. If they kept My word, they'll keep your word." But obviously, they haven't. They crucified Me. So get ready to die for the name of the gospel. Take up your cross, come follow Me, is what Jesus calls us to. And Paul's saying, "If I was preaching circumcision, there'd be no offense. I changed the message, suit the views of the day, soothe the consciences of the religious and the cultural, make it more acceptable so that we can avoid the offense and the persecution." And Paul says, "No, no, no. But if I do that, what ends up happening is there is no gospel, there is no good news, and there is no salvation." So Paul said, "I'd rather be persecuted and preach that gospel because the offense of the cross shall not cease." And it's proof of that because I'm suffering, not because I'm preaching circumcision, because I'm preaching Christ and Him crucified.

And finally, Paul makes a very sharp-witted wish that has got translations in all kinds of mess, but I'm not going to go there today. Just tell you what I think it means. Verse 12: "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off." Paul is speaking metaphorically here, but he's basically saying, and I'm wishing, he's saying, "I'm wishing." This is pretty vulgar language here, but he's wishing that the knife of circumcision that the Judaizers were trying to apply to the Galatians would slip, as it were, and cut themselves off from the communion of God's people. He wants the

heaven cut out. He wants the hindrances removed. This is how serious heaven is and false teaching is to Paul and the importance of us holding up the preaching of the cross, despite the fact that it offends.

Perhaps you're here this morning, and you are someone that hasn't yet joined the Christian race because the cross offends you. Perhaps you're here this morning, and you've heard the gospel time and time again, but you cannot bring yourself to receive its message because it strikes you and wounds you, and you do not want to receive the woundings of that sort. And so you stumble upon Christ. Does the cross wound your pride this morning? Does the cross demolish your self-righteousness, which you are trying to erect, this high tower of your own glory? Does the cross of Jesus Christ cut you time and time again, and you, like Saul of Tarsus, who keeps kicking against the goads?

Friends, I have a word for you this morning from God, and that is this: You cannot stop the power of the cross. You may scoff at the cross, you may mock the cross, you may slander the cross, you may work against the cross in all your power and all your might, but understand this this morning, that the dying Lamb that was slain, He will receive the reward of His sufferings, and He will bring people into His kingdom, and by His stripes, He will heal the wounded sinners. He will not die in vain; He did not die in vain. All that the Father has given the Son will come to Him, and he that comes to Him, He will in no wise cast out.

The dying lamb is also the risen, ascended, reigning King Jesus, who will return in mighty power and will destroy the wicked and establish His kingdom forevermore. And your resistance against the cross because it offends you will only lead you to your destruction because you will fall on that stumbling stone which is Christ and be destroyed. And so, hear the Word of God: "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Quit resisting the power of the cross. Bow before its power. Be wise and submit to the wisdom of God. Don't be the fool that despises the only remedy for his soul's sickness. There is the cure at the cross of Jesus, at the foot of the cross. If we would humble ourselves before Him and receive Him as our Lord and Savior this morning, you will be saved.

Christ is the power of God; He is the wisdom of God. But He will be unto you a rock of offense and a stone of stumbling if you will disobey His voice, which calls you this morning to come and believe on His name.

Brothers and sisters, we're encouraged here to run well, aren't we, this morning? Are you running well, the Christian race? It's a long race; it's got

its challenges. We're not to run it alone; we run it with the people of God. We run it looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. But for many of us, perhaps this morning, we are beginning to become hindered or are hindered in our progress. Perhaps this morning, you have traded the cross for circumcision. Running with the cross on your back seems way too hard and heavy. To remain in repentance and to remain in faith and to remain dependent on Christ crucified and to derive your sufficiency for your life and your energy from that gospel which you should preach to yourself day after day is becoming tiresome and difficult. And the glories of the cross seem to be a dim reality to you, somewhere in the far future.

And here comes alongside one intruder and says to you, "Hey, there's another way. I can just help you deal with some of those challenges in your life. I can make the race a lot easier if you just take this shortcut, if you just follow this formula. You'll be accepted before God if you just pray this prayer, if you just have this disciplined ritual. All of a sudden, your life will fall into place, and everything will work well for you, and there will be no more persecution, no more suffering, no more hardship. Get the knife and cut it out. Don't trade the cross for circumcision. Just a little more to be accepted in the sight of God? No, no. Nothing more than the cross makes us accepted in the sight of God."

And as you sin and as you struggle on, and as you fight and as you war, you be very careful of the subtlety of your own heart, which speaks lies at times to us, or Satan's fiery arrows, or perhaps even things you hear out there that will seek to take you away from the glory of the cross. Perhaps your eyes are upon your service or upon your gifts, and you've lost the joy of your salvation because they're not on Jesus, the one who bled and died for your salvation. We know this: when our thankfulness starts diminishing, it's amazing how little complainers the new believers are, so often. They've seen Jesus in all His splendor and His glory and His beauty, and they just feel like, "Wow, I am so thankful that I've been saved. And if it wasn't for the grace of Christ, I'd be a mess." And they look at the trouble in other people's lives, and they keep reminding them of the grace of Christ. It's all about the goodness of God, and they're being encouraged, and they're strengthened, and they're going on in this great power and strength, and there's so much vitality in their Christian life, and so much zeal that it looks like they're like a car zooming down the highway, and no one can stop them, or a marathon runner that's just going on with great joy, running the race.

All of a sudden, after whatever happens, some reason, they start to find themselves obstructed in their progress. Like, "What happened? What happened?" In most cases, it's that they lost the joy of their salvation. Somewhere along the line, usually when they sin, and usually when they struggle, like they're on a good winning streak in terms of overcoming this

certain sin in their life, and then they find themselves to be what the Bible says of them: sinners, still corrupted, "Wretched man that I am," they think to themselves, "Oh no, it's all over now. I've got to start again." No, no. And they look away from Christ and Him crucified and the blood of Jesus that was shed for them that cleansed their conscience, and all of a sudden, they're getting so much trouble about their soul that they start going on to service and gifts and works and energy, trying to build up their favor with God again and trying to get back on track in that way, as opposed to saying, "I have fallen. Preach the gospel to yourself. That He died for me, He's buried, He rose again. If I confess my sins, He's faithful and just to forgive my sins and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness, and that I'm justified by the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and it's nothing I've ever done that has made me pleasing in the sight of God." Nothing. And they get back up, and they run.

We've got to be careful about those subtleties in our lives that rob us of the joy of salvation. And Christian, don't be afraid of the offense of the cross. We cannot get rid of the offense of the cross unless we get rid of the cross. You preach Christ, you preach Him crucified, you live and run the race, and you run well, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.

Let us pray.