TWO MISTAKES EVERY CHRISTIAN MUST AVOID
Galatians 5:1-15
By Andy Manning

I. **INTRODUCTION**
1. Imagine if you could stand up in front of an entire high school and warn them about two mistakes to avoid. What would you say? You might warn them about drugs and alcohol; sexual promiscuity; peer pressure; suicide; making bad grades; dropping out of school; fighting and violence.
2. Imagine if you could write a letter to Christians and warn them about two mistakes to avoid in their relationship with God. What would you say?
3. In Galatians 5:1-15, Paul warns the Galatians about two mistakes to avoid. These are mistakes that every Christian and every church is susceptible to. If you want to go to heaven, then you must avoid these mistakes. If you want to live a productive Christian life, then you must avoid these mistakes.

II. **TWO MISTAKES TO AVOID**
1. **Legalism.**
    i. Definition: Relying upon good works for salvation. It is performance-based salvation. It is trying to earn your salvation by being good enough; by following the rules; by doing deeds. It is the belief that at the end of your life, if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, God will let you into heaven.
    ii. **Galatians 5:1** "For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery."
        1. Paul is saying, "Christ set you free from legalism, so don't go back to it."
        2. Remember the context of Galatians.
            a. Before Christ, most were enslaved to idol worship in which they had to observe many rules and rituals.
            b. Then Paul came to their towns and told them about Jesus. He said that the idols aren't real, there is only one true God. And the way to heaven is not by earning it, because you can't. Instead, it is by believing in Christ, who paid for our sins on the cross.
            c. After Paul left false teachers (Judaizers) infiltrated their ranks and told them that it was not enough to believe in Jesus, they also needed to adopt the rules and rituals of Judaism.
        3. So, Paul is saying, "Christ set you free from the legalism; from having to earn your salvation. He didn't set you free from one prison so that you could enter another. He didn't set you free from the legalism of idolatry so that you could adopt the legalism of Judaism."
        4. Have you ever had a fly in the car? On many occasions I have had a fly in my vehicle, and I'll roll down the window so it can fly away, and it flies out and then comes back in. That's exactly what was happening with the Galatians. God saved them and freed them from the legalism of idolatry, and now they were going back to the legalism of Judaism.
        5. Next Paul gives them three reasons to avoid legalism.

   iii. Why avoid legalism?
1. If you are relying upon the law, you aren't relying upon Christ.
   a. **Galatians 5:2** "Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all."
   b. Circumcision was one of the many "good works" or rules that the Jews taught them to follow to earn salvation.
   c. Paul said, "You can either have circumcision or Christ. You can either have legalism, or you can have Christ. You cannot have both. Faith or works, not both. You can either rely upon what Christ has done for you, or you can rely upon your own good works.
   d. By its definition faith in Christ means forsaking legalism. It means forsaking self-righteousness. Faith is the opposite of works. It is to admit, I cannot earn my way to heaven. I am not good enough to go to heaven. I cast all my hope on Christ.
   e. Therefore, if you are relying upon good works, you do not have saving faith.
   f. To put it bluntly: If you are relying upon works, you can't be saved.
   g. **Galatians 5:4** "You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace."
2. If you are relying upon the law, you must keep it perfectly.
   a. **Galatians 5:3** "Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law."
   b. If you trust in circumcision, which is a law, to get you to heaven, then you are trusting in the law and not Christ. And if that's the case, then you need to keep every rule perfectly.
   c. There are two paths to heaven: Law, or faith. If you are relying upon the law, or good works, to earn heaven, then you have to keep the law perfectly. If you are not perfect, then you need to forsake legalism and trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.
3. We are justified by faith.
   a. **Galatians 5:5** "5For we eagerly await through the Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness."
   b. The only way to go to heaven is for God, the judge, to declare you righteous. That's the meaning of the word justification (to be declared righteous).
   c. What if you aren't righteous? God will declare righteous, or justify, those who forsake legalism and put their faith in Christ.
   d. **Galatians 5:6** "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love."
   e. Rule-keeping doesn't get you to heaven. What matters is faith. (We're going to get to the "faith working through love" part in a minute.)
   f. And of course the ability to trust in Christ comes from God's Spirit.

    iv.   Notice how much Paul hated legalism.

    v.   **Galatians 5:7-12** "7 You were running well. Who prevented you from being persuaded regarding the truth?, 8 This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough. 10 I myself am persuaded in the Lord you will not accept any other view. But whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty. 11 Now brothers and sisters, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. 12 I wish those who are disturbing you might also let themselves be mutilated!"

    vi.   The pagans in Galatia worshiped a false god called Cybele. And if you were really devoted, you would castrate yourself. So, Paul says of the Judaizers who were pushing circumcision, "I wish they would do like the Cybele worshipers and go all the way by castrating themselves."

    vii.   So, the first mistake for Christians to avoid is legalism – relying upon good works for salvation.

    viii.   How do you know if you have fallen into legalism? Answer this question: Why should God let you into heaven? If your answer has anything to do with your performance, your good works, your effort to be good or follow the rules, then you have fallen into legalism. You may believe in Jesus, but you are relying upon good works for salvation. If you are relying upon Christ, then your answer will be that you believe in Christ who died for your sins and rose again. Period. Christ and nothing else. Christ is all.

    ix.   But there's a second mistake for Christians to avoid.

2. Libertinism.

    i.   Definition: Using grace as an excuse to sin. A libertine is a person who is unrestrained by convention or morality. Christian libertinism says that since salvation is by grace, a free gift, unearned and undeserved, then we can sin all we want. The law is insignificant. God doesn't care about it. Since we don't need to keep the commandments to go to heaven, then we discard them. Since we don't need to be good to go to heaven, then we can be bad. Since Christ set us free from the law, from legalism, then we can sin all we want.

    ii.   AKA "Grace abuse," or "Cheap grace."

    iii.   **Galatians 5:13** "For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love."

    iv.   While some people in the Galatian churches were falling into legalism, or relying upon the law for salvation, others were going to the opposite extreme and throwing the law in the trash. So, Paul gives three reasons to avoid libertinism.

    v.   Why avoid libertinism?

        1.   True faith works.

            a.   **Galatians 5:6** "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love."

b. As Paul is finishing up his argument against legalism, he says that all that matters is faith. But he says something interesting about this faith – it works through love.

c. In other words, true faith is not a mere mental thing. It comes out in your behavior.

d. I want to show you two verses, and then we'll talk about them.
   i. **Ephesians 2:8-9** "8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—9 not from works, so that no one can boast."
   ii. **James 1:17** "In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself."

e. Paul says that salvation is by faith, not works. James says that faith without works is dead. How do we reconcile these two?
   i. First, true saving faith involves repentance.
      1. When you put your faith in Christ for salvation, you are trusting Him as Savior and boss. You are forsaking self-righteousness, but you are also forsaking self-leadership. You are forsaking legalism, but you are also forsaking sin.
      2. **Luke 13:3** "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as well."
      3. Remember, even the demons believe, but they are going to hell (James 2:19). Saving faith is more than just mental assent, or agreeing that certain ideas are true. It is a commitment to a person – Jesus Christ.
   ii. Second, salvation results in an transformation.
      1. **2 Corinthians 5:17** "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"
      2. When you get saved, God gives you a new heart with the desire and power to please God. This is called regeneration.

f. So, if someone claims to be a Christian but is not at least sorry for their sin and trying to repent, then they aren't a true Christian.

g. **1 John 2:3-4** "3 This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know him," and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

h. So, the first reasons to avoid libertinism is that true faith works. If your faith does not push you to love God and others, then your faith isn't real.

2. We were saved to serve through love.

a. **Galatians 5:13** "For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love."
b. When God saved you, why didn't He immediately transport you to heaven? Why did He leave you on earth? What does He want you to do? God did not save you from hell so that you could go on sinning, but so that you could serve others in love.
c. This passage has two good summaries of the Christian life:
    i. Faith working through love.
    ii. Serving others in love.
d. What does it mean to serve others in love?
    i. Let your life be devoted to helping others.
        1. Before Christ we naturally lived for ourselves. We were…
            a. Self-centered. We live only for ourselves. We think only of ourselves. We spend all of our time, effort, money, and energy on our own happiness.
            b. Selfish. Even when we know that our behavior hurts others, we persist.
            c. It's all about me, myself, and I.
            d. Self-preservation, self-promotion, self-advancement, self-glorification, self-serve, self-help.
            e. As Christians, we are called to be selfless, self-effacing, self-giving, self-sacrificing servants of God and others.
        2. Always be on the lookout for ways that you can help others – at home, at school, at church, at work.
        3. Look for ways to help others with your words, with your money, with your possessions, with your skills and talents, with your energy.
    ii. Let your service be motivated by love.
        1. Notice that we are to "serve others in love."
        2. There are two differences between Christian service, and non-Christian service:
            a. First, our motivation. As Christians, our motivation is love for God. We don't serve and help people to earn salvation, but out of gratitude for salvation. Because God has so loved us through Christ, we now devote ourselves to pleasing Him by serving others.
            b. Second, our model. Our model for love is Jesus. Our example is Jesus. It is natural to

love and serve people who are attractive, who are rich, who are like you, who are nice to you, who are related to you, who have something you want. But Jesus loves everyone. He teaches us to love people who are unattractive, poor, who aren't like us, who are mean to us, who can't give us anything in return, who are undeserving and ungrateful.

iii. Let your love be informed by God's moral law.

1. We are commanded to serve one another in love, how do we know what it looks like to exercise love? The world says, "Love is love." But that's called a circular definition, which is when you define a word using that word. You haven't actually defined anything. That's like saying an elephant is an elephant. So, what does it mean and look like to love others?

2. **Galatians 3:14** "For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself."

3. Paul is saying two things here.

   a. First, "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a summary of God's law. All the commands in the Bible about how to treat people.

   b. Second, "Love your neighbor as yourself" is defined by God's law. If love is the summary of God's law, then the particulars of love are found in God's law. In other words, the way we learn to love people is by studying and living according to God's law (1 John 5:2). To put it another way, it is never loving to others to break God's commands. It is never loving to lie, cheat, murder, covet, dishonor your parents, be sexually immoral, etc.

   c. **1 John 5:2** "This is how we know that we love God's children: when we love God and obey his commands."

   d. It is impossible to break God's commands in the name of love. It is impossible to say, "I disobeyed God so that I could help this person."

6

e. So, a second reason to avoid libertinism is because God didn't save us to sin, but to serve through love. And you can't serve others through love and sin at the same time.

f. Paul gives us a third reasons to avoid libertinism.

3. If you ignore the law, you will destroy each other.

   a. **Galatians 5:15** "But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another."

   b. What is Paul saying?

   c. God's laws are given for our benefit. Life works best when you do it God's way. Relationships work best when you follow God's rules for relationships. He made us; He knows how we function; He gave us an instruction manual; it is to our benefit if we follow it.

   d. So, Paul is just saying that if you throw away God's law and surrender to a life of sin, you will destroy each other. Other people will hurt you, and you will hurt others.

   e. Consider the context of the church. The church is a family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. If we all abandoned God's moral law and just lived lives of sin and selfishness, how long would our church survive? We would destroy each other. We would run each other off in a heartbeat.

   f. This is a second motivation for obeying God's law. The wrong motivation is to earn our salvation. That's legalism, and it is unbiblical. The right motivation is love and gratitude toward God for saving us through Christ. A second motivation is personal happiness. Living according to God's commands is the best way to live. Choose to sin, choose to suffer. Choose obedience, choose abundant life.

III. **CONCLUSION**

1. Two mistakes every Christian must avoid: Legalism and libertinism.

   i. Legalism is relying upon good works for salvation.

   ii. Libertinism is using grace as an excuse to sin.

2. Both of these are distortions of true Christianity. They are counterfeits of the real thing.

3. Do you have the real thing?

4. If you died today, would you go to heaven?

5. If you are not sure, then I encourage you today to ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.

6. It's as simple as A, B, C. Admit you are a sinner; believe in Christ's death and resurrection; and call on Christ to be your Savior and Boss.