

FROM WHAT ARE WE FREE?

We live in a country where freedom is pretty much taken for granted. We boast, “This is a free country!” If someone wants to think, or say, or do something that is a little different, maybe weird, we may shrug our shoulders and say, “Well, what’s to stop him, it’s a free country.” If someone wants to be critical of the President, we say, “It’s their right, it’s a free country.”

But of course, being a free country does not mean that everyone is free to do anything they want to at any time and at any place. No, we do have rules, and laws and limits. So, yes, while on the one hand, we are a free country—in a manner of speaking, we recognize that even our freedom has some restraints and limitations.

If you have been keeping up with us in New Testament Studies this week, I am sure you couldn’t help but notice how many times the words, *freedom*, or *liberty*, or *free* were used by the writer Paul in his letter to the churches of Galatia. In **5:1** he writes, “*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*”

Of course, Paul wasn’t talking about the same kind of freedom we think of when we talk about the U.S. being the land of the free. He wasn’t talking about political freedom, or freedom to speak, or freedom to dissent, or freedom to bear arms. He wasn’t talking about freedom of religion. He was talking about another kind of freedom altogether. This morning I want us to look at what Paul was saying in the book of Galatians and leave here having a better understanding of the freedom about which Paul was writing.

Interestingly, Galatians is the only letter we have from Paul in which there are no words of praise for the Christians to whom it had been sent. That is because in this epistle, Paul was trying to do several things that were very critical. One, he was responding to those who had undermined his authority as an apostle. Two, he was trying to keep these Christians from going back to ungodly living sin again. But most of all, number three, Paul was trying to keep the Christians in Galatia from believing in a distorted gospel. And it is very critical that we understand what Paul was saying here because if I or any preacher is preaching anything other than the gospel proclaimed by the apostles, then it is not a message that will set you free.

You see that expressed very early there in **chapter 1**, where beginning in **verse 6**, Paul writes:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Most Bible students believe that Paul was referring to the problem of the so-called Judaizers. These were men, who were supposed to be Christians, but they went about troubling Gentile

churches. They insisted that in order for Gentiles to be saved by the gospel of Christ, certain elements of the Mosaic Law also had to be kept, such as circumcision. Well, of course that wasn't true but these men were persistent in teaching that and in doing so were turning the gospel of Christ into something that wasn't the gospel at all.

In 1:11-2:14, Paul writes about himself but he prefaces that by saying –**verse 11**, “*For I would have you know brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not man's gospel.*” He went on to say that he did not receive from any man, but he received through a revelation of Jesus Christ. In talking about his own story, of first his background in Judaism, then his conversion and his calling from the Lord, he was trying to let them know, he was much more qualified to explain the gospel than those Judaizers. In talking about his interaction with the twelve apostles, Paul was trying to show that the gospel he preached was taught to him by Christ, not by them.

Even so, in **chapter 2**, Paul says that on one occasion he did go up to Jerusalem and set before the apostles the message that he was preaching. Look at what he says there in **verse 2**: “*I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.*” He says, I did that, but even on that occasion, a Greek Christian named Titus was not forced to be circumcised. He went on to say in verse 6, that during that time, the apostles did not teach him or require him to teach anything other than what he had been teaching. He says in verse 9 that he and Barnabus was given *the right hand of fellowship* in going to the Gentiles. That “right hand of fellowship” signified that they were in full accordance with what Paul and Barnabus were doing and teaching.

Then he relates another incident, sometime later when he had to rebuke Peter to his face, and even Barnabus also because they were giving into the influence of the Judaizers. Beginning in verse 14, he writes what he said on that occasion:

But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews? 15) We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16) yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

So that was some of Paul's background and experience. And he went over that to show the Galatians that not only did he understand the “ins and outs” of Judaism, but that he was every bit as qualified to address these matters as were the twelve apostles.

Paul then turns his attention to the matter of the law, referring of course, to the Law of Moses; the law that the Judaizers were insisting that Gentiles need to keep. Notice what Paul says in **verse 19** (chapter 2): “*For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.*” That's an interesting statement, and let's think about that for a bit. First of all, notice that Paul

says he died to the law. That implies, and other scriptures teach that Paul himself was no longer under the law. But he said he had died to the law “through the law.” What did he mean by that? He was saying that it was the law itself that led him to die to the law. It did that in two ways. The first way was that the law taught him was that as long as he tried to be justified by the law, he was in trouble. He had just said **by works of the law no one will be justified**. In **3:10**, he will say, “*For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them.”*” I believe in that Paul was humbly admitting he had not kept all things written in the Law, and therefore he himself was under a curse and he too needed a savior. And that was the second way that the law itself had led him to die to the law, and that was that the Law made it clear that God was going to send a savior. Through a careful study of the law and the prophets, Paul now knew that the One who had called him was that Savior.

So he says, as we read in **2: 20-21**:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

In **chapter 3**, Paul writes, “*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*” Now he is not calling them fools, but he is expressing his anguish over the foolishness of what they had done.. In listening to and doing what the Judaizing teachers had taught them, they had foolishly put themselves back into slavery.

In **verse 2**, Paul says, “*Let me ask you this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?*” He asks another question—**verse 5**—“*Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?*” Well, of course the answer to both of those questions is “*by the hearing with faith.*” The law had nothing to do with either of those two things. They didn’t learn anything from the law about obeying the gospel and being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for which they received the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. None of that came from the law. That came from the faith (see also 1:23), or gospel, that had been preached to them by Paul.

He says what happened to them was the result of faith, not the result of keeping the law. And in that way, they were just like Abraham. In verses 6-9, he writes:

just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? 7) Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” 9) So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Then notice again what Paul says there in **verse 10**: *“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them.”*

Then he goes on to say there in **verses 11-13**:

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12) But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”--

Look at **verse 19**. Paul asks, *“Why then the law?”* Paul asks that knowing this was a question many of the Galatian Christians would be asking. If the law was not given for the purpose of justifying people, why was it given? The answer Paul gives is kind of hard to get hold of, but we will give it a try. Paul says the law *“was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.”*

Quickly let me draw your attention to the words *added*, and *until* in that verse (your version may use slightly different words, but the meaning will be same). Paul says *the law was added*. It wasn't given at the beginning of man's history. It wasn't given at the time God made His promise to Abraham. It was added later, in the days of Moses. But Paul also used the word *until*. That is the law was added, but it had a predetermined shelf-life. It was going to last *“until the offspring should come,”* and of course that referred to Christ. So, the law was added in the days of Moses, and was to last until the days of Christ.

But again why was it added? Why was the law given, if it wasn't for the purpose of justifying men from their sins? Paul says, it was given because of transgressions. What Paul meant by that is this, and what he will make even clearer in just a few verses, is that the law was added to the promises made to Abraham, so that people who were thinking of themselves as God's chosen people would realize they were sinners and were in need of a savior.

Look at **verses 23-25**. Paul says,

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”

Paul was referring of course to Christ's coming but also of the gospel which set forth the opportunity for justification through faith in Christ. And because Christ did come, and because the gospel is being preached, men everywhere—both Jews and Gentiles—now have the opportunity for becoming sons of God. Paul says in **verses 26-29**:

for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

He will go on to say in **chapter 4, verse 7**, *“So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”* And then in **5:1**: *“For freedom Christ has set us free, stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”*

Now in the rest of chapter 5 and chapter 6, Paul makes some practical applications of both his teaching on the law and about applying the life of faith to our daily lives. Let's wrap up by drawing ___ observations.

Number one, the freedom that Paul is talking about in Galatians, is first of all, freedom from being under the law of Moses. In **3:10**, Paul speaks about *“all things written in the Book of the Law.”* That would, of course, necessarily include the Ten Commandments which are found in the 20th chapter of Exodus and repeated again in Deuteronomy 5. We are not under that law, and in **5:4**, Paul says, *“You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”* So much for the doctrine that *“you can't fall from grace!”*

But now, saying that we are free from the law, even the ten commandments is not to say that we are now free to have more Gods, or worship idols, or dishonor our parents, or to commit fornication, or to kill. What it means is that no one is dependent upon the law of Moses as a means by which they can be justified, forgiven of their sins, and saved. Not that anyone ever could have been saved by the law, but the Jews were, until Christ came, under that law. And it was a law that Paul frankly admits, no one could keep, at least not completely. However, the Jews who were under that law would be condemned, unless in the same way Abraham did, they by faith pursued righteousness. Today, that is our calling, to pursue righteousness by faith.

Number two, the freedom that Paul is talking about in Galatians is the freedom that comes to us when we are given the Holy Spirit, which of course comes at the time we are baptized into Christ—Acts 2:38, 5:32, and 1 Corinthians 10:13. It is a freedom from sin—Romans 6; both the power of sin and the consequences of sin. In **Romans 6:22**, Paul will say that we have *“been set free from sin and have become slaves of God.”* He said a few verses earlier (19) that we have become *“slaves of righteousness.”*

Returning to Galatians, in **5:13**, Paul says, *“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”* We have been set free from the Law, not to live a morally and spiritually corrupt life, but to be filled with the Spirit. Just how that works out in our daily lives is pictured very clearly for us in **5:16**, where Paul writes: *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”* I would really urge each of you to look at that verse. I would urge you to underline or highlight that verse, even commit those words to memory and really spend some time thinking

about what they are saying. Paul said if you will walk by the Spirit, you WILL NOT fulfill the desires of the flesh! Are you tired of the flesh winning all of the battles in your life? Then here's the way of escape for you. Paul said, "*Walk by the Spirit.*" Then he goes on to say:

17) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Think about that brethren! From what does Christ set you free? He not only sets you free from that old law which was never intended to justify a man anyway, He also sets you free from a life of immorality, idolatry, witchcraft, fussing and fighting, jealousy, anger, divisions, and all manner of addictions. He also sets you free to live a life filled (FILLED BRETHREN, THINK ABOUT IT!) with love and joy and peace, and kindness, and goodness, and self-control. Really, when you think about it, it isn't hard to see which choice people should make.

Have you made up your mind as to which way you want your life to go as you get on with the rest of your life here on earth, and as you consider where you want to spend eternity? Christ came to give you that choice, and you are now free to choose.

Invitation

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