

4. The Book of Galatians 2:1-10

Liberty From Law-Part 3

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We have recently started a new series through the Book of Galatians—but instead of going through the book verse by verse we decided to study it topically based on its main theme.

The main theme of Galatians is liberty—the liberty (or freedom) that is ours in Christ.

The Key Verse of the Book is Galatians, Chapter 5 verse 1—

Galatians 5:1 (NKJV)

¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

So, as I said when we began this series—we are going to focus our attention on 3 main areas (topics) of liberty that Paul brings up in this epistle—

I. Liberty from Lies—verses 1:6-10

II. Liberty from Law—verses 1:11-4:31

III. Liberty for Life—verses 5:1-6:15

We have finished looking at the first main point—“**Liberty from Lies.**” As we have previously said, we are living in a world full of lies—and it seems to be getting worse by the day. Some of the lies we experience are small and have a minimal impact on our lives—while others are very serious and potentially life altering—like the lies that are told within the context of adultery.

People understand that most lies, whether serious or small, can only affect us while we live on this earth—in other words, they can only hurt us *temporarily* in this life and can do us no more harm after we're dead. But then there are some lies that will not only affect us in the *temporal*—but will keep on affecting us in the eternal as well.

These lies tell us how to get to heaven—when in reality they will damn us to hell forever.

One of the lies that Paul dealt with in his missionary endeavors, and in fact, the one he is dealing with in his letter to the Galatians—was the lie of the Judaizers, which is legalism.

After sharing the gospel with the people of Galatia (modern day Turkey)—Paul moved on to spread the gospel in other parts of the region and then into Europe. Later on, he learned that the Judaizers had come into the area after him trying to pervert the gospel that Paul had given to them—and the churches were listening to them!

The Judaizers were Jews that were following Paul around telling the *Gentiles* that it was necessary for them to become Jews first (get circumcised and keep the Law of Moses) before they could believe in Jesus for salvation—and that the *Jews* had to remain loyal to the Law and keep practicing its tenets if they wanted to exercise faith in Jesus and be saved.

Paul wrote this letter to ‘*set the record straight*’ by presenting (actually defending) the one and only true gospel—the gospel of grace which he preached!

And that brought us last time to the second major section in our series, “*A Journey in Liberty through Galatians*”—“**Liberty from Law**”—which is really liberty from religion.

II. Liberty from Law

As we studied a few months ago in our series, “*The Top 10 Lies of the Devil*”—without a doubt the biggest lie the devil has ever fed the human race is the lie that you get to heaven by being good and doing good. Or in other words, that heaven is a *reward* for deserving people—folks, that is the lie of religion!

I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) where we were taught that religious practices and observances like—going to mass, lighting candles, keeping holy days, praying the rosary, abstaining from certain foods during lent and other acts of ‘piety’—would earn us a place in heaven.

This is absolute blasphemy against the completed work of Jesus Christ Who said from the cross—“*It is finished!*”

So, Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians to refute legalism as a basis for salvation and to reaffirm the message he had already given to them concerning the true gospel—the gospel of grace:

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NLT)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

A. The testimony of Paul—1:11-2:10

Galatians 1:11–17 (NKJV)

¹¹ But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to destroy it*. ¹⁴ And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were apostles before me*; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Scholars are divided on the exact chronology of Paul’s testimony.

It seems that right after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and was led into the city being blind—he stayed in Damascus for three days in darkness where he fasted and prayed while he pondered his life.

After three days God sent a believer named Ananias to Paul (Saul)—

Acts 9:17-22 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. ¹⁹ So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. ²¹ Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" ²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

It seems that there is a gap of time between verses 22 and 23 of Acts 9—a gap of about three years.

After Paul's initial ministry in Damascus, which could have lasted several weeks to several months—instead of going right up to Jerusalem to introduce himself to the other apostles, the Lord led Paul into the desert of Arabia where he spent the better part of three years.

During this time Jesus taught Paul (not in visible form but thru the revelation of the Holy Spirit), not only the gospel, but also how all of the Jewish Scriptures pointed to Him—even as the Lord Jesus said in Psalm 40:7— "*Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me.*"

As Jesus told the Pharisees in John 5:39: "*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*"

This time in Arabia was going to be invaluable to Paul's ministry. The apostles had received three years of teaching from the Lord Jesus—and now Paul was going to have his own opportunity to be taught by the Lord for three years.

Galatians 1:17 (NKJV)

[after Paul was saved] ¹⁶...**I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,** ¹⁷ **nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.**

This seems to be where the chronology of Paul's life is picked up again in Acts 9 starting with v.23—

Acts 9:23-30 (NKJV)

²³ Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴ But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket. ²⁶ And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. ²⁹ And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. ³⁰ When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

This coincides with what Paul says here in Galatians 1:18-24:

Galatians 1:18-20 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

After his short stay in Jerusalem Paul began making his way back to his hometown of Tarsus.

Galatians 1:21-24 (NKJV)

²¹ Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ. ²³ But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to destroy*." ²⁴ And they glorified God in me.

As Paul went through Syria, he preached the Word, and when he arrived in Cilicia, his home province (Acts 21:39; 22:3), he began to evangelize (see Acts 15:23).

Historians have concluded that he remained there perhaps seven years ministering in relative obscurity until Barnabas recruited him for the work in Antioch of Syria—

Acts 11:25-26 (NKJV)

²⁵ Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Antioch in Syria became Paul's home church and the headquarters for the Gentile churches—even as Jerusalem was the home church and headquarters for Jewish believers.

Galatians 2:1 (NKJV)

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with *me*.

Whether this was fourteen years after his conversion, or after his first missionary trip—we don't know.

Galatians 2:2 (NKJV)

² And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

Paul went up to Jerusalem, not because the apostles "summoned" him, but he went because the Lord told him ("**by revelation**") he needed to go and get some clarification as to what the apostles in the "mother church" in Jerusalem had to say about the teachings of the Judaizers.

The Judaizer's heresy had really corrupted the concept of many Jewish Christians as to how the Gentiles were saved.

Paul met with the leaders in Jerusalem privately not only because it was the respectful thing to do (Paul didn't want to ride into town as a new apostle with '*guns blazing*' and make a big scene). But also, because he was a little nervous, in that many of the Judaizers were well-connected and powerful Jewish leaders, and he was worried that they had gotten to the other apostles and had corrupted them as well.

When Paul said he met with the other apostles privately to share the gospel the Lord had given him for the Gentiles—"lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain"—he wasn't expressing doubts that the gospel

he had been preaching might not be the right gospel or that he had doubts about his ministry to the Gentiles in general. He knew the Lord had called him and told him what to preach to the Gentiles (and also to the Jews for that matter).

It means that Paul was worried that if the apostles sided with the Judaizers and held to the view that the Gentiles had to be circumcised and become Jews first by keeping the law of Moses before they could trust in Jesus for salvation—that that would be a serious problem for his ministry.

Paul knew that it would destroy all of his hard work in trying to bring Jews and Gentiles together and make them one in Christ through the gospel the Lord Jesus had given to him. That's what he was referring to when he said he was worried he might have **“run or labored in vain.”**

This was such a divisive issue that it had the potential of tearing the Church apart and ruining all the work Paul had done in trying to bridge the gap that still existed between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Galatians 2:3-5 (NKJV)

³ Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. ⁴ And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), ⁵ to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

The **‘bondage’** Paul is referring to here is the bondage of *legalism*. We see this incident recorded initially in Chapter 15 of the Book of Acts—which led to the *“Jerusalem Council”*—the first council of the Church Age:

Acts 15:1–5 (NKJV)

¹ And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. ³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴ And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.”

It begs the questions:

- *Were these Judaizers really Christians?*
- *Can a person be a Christian who tries to add human works to the gospel making them essential for salvation?*

In Galatians 2:4 Paul called these Judaizers—**“false brethren.”**

Acts 15:6–7 (NKJV)

⁶ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷ And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Peter reminded the members of this council that “*a good while ago*” (about 10 years—the date of this council is generally taken to be 49 AD.) God had sent him to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10) to preach the gospel to the Gentiles officially opening the door to the Gentiles to be saved and to become members of the Church—without becoming Jews first!

Acts 15:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Peter makes the point that God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (Cornelius and his family) to bear witness that they truly were born again—without being circumcised.

Only God can see into the human heart—so, if these people had not been saved, God would never have given them the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)—but they did not receive the Spirit by keeping the Law, but by believing the gospel—the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ.

Peter’s message was “*whoever believes in Him [the Lord Jesus Christ] will receive remission of sins*” (Acts 10:43)—not “*whoever believes and obeys the Law of Moses.*”

Acts 15:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

This was Peter’s strongest statement—how that, through the gospel of grace, God has removed the yoke of the Law, not only from the Jewish people—but also from the Gentiles. The Law was indeed a yoke that burdened the Jewish nation—but that yoke had been taken away by Jesus Christ:

Matthew 11:28–30 (NKJV)

²⁸ Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” (The New Covenant)

➤ *Was the Law nothing but a burden—a meaningless and useless ‘yoke’ that had absolutely no purpose?*

No, the Law was given by God for a definite purpose and was good—but only if used properly for the purpose for which God intended it (we’ll look at this more when we get to chapter 3 of Galatians).

Acts 15:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

After Peter had finished, Barnabas and Paul gave an account of how God had visited the Gentiles and had accompanied the preaching of the gospel with ‘*miracles and wonders.*’ Paul’s point is that God doesn’t confirm *false* doctrine with miracles—the Judaizers didn’t have any confirming miracles to prove their ‘gospel’ was from God—

Galatians 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, *does He do it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

After Paul and Barnabas finished giving their testimony—James (evidently the head of the church at Jerusalem), then took the floor and issued a summary statement (he was Jesus’ half-brother who wrote the Epistle of James)—

Acts 15:13-17 (NKJV)

¹³ And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me:

¹⁴ Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ¹⁶ ‘*After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up;*’ ¹⁷ *So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things.*’

Here James quotes from Amos 9:11-12—which is basically saying that there is coming a day when God will do a great work of salvation among all mankind (Gentiles).

One commentator had this to say about the prophecy in Amos—

“This is a Millennial Kingdom prophecy, but James is using it to prove if Gentiles had to become Jews first to be saved—then that would mean that God only saves Jews but He spoke of saving Gentiles here—‘If Gentiles can get saved in the great and glorious Kingdom Age, then why can’t you accept that God can save them right now in the Church Age?’”

Acts 15:18-21 (NKJV)

¹⁸ “Known to God from eternity are all His works. ¹⁹ Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.*

²¹ For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

“Therefore I judge...” is an authoritative judgment or decree in the Greek—indicating that James and not Peter is presiding over this council—he was the ‘senior pastor’ and leader of the church in Jerusalem.

There are those who say that even though James is making a judgment based on grace and not law—his pronouncement seems to contradict or reverse himself.

- *Was this not a form of legalism?*
- *Was he not now putting them back under the law?*

To that point let me say—this has nothing to do with the subject of salvation—that issue had already been settled (salvation is by grace through faith). This pronouncement or decree by James had to do with *fellowship* between Jewish and Gentile believers.

While obedience to these instructions was not a condition of salvation—it most certainly was of great importance when it came to unity and fellowship among Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ.

Acts 15:22-29

²² Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. ²³ They wrote this *letter* by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “*You must* be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no *such* commandment—²⁵ it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

This judgment brought about by the Jerusalem Council and its leader James is being reflected in Paul’s statement in Galatians 2 verses 6-10—

Galatians 2:6–10 (NKJV)

⁶ But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed *to be something* added nothing to me. ⁷ But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter ⁸ (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

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