

5. The Book of Galatians 2:11-19

Liberty From Law-Part 4

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(1-14-24)

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We are studying the Book of Galatians here at Calvary on Sunday mornings—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. In 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

In our study we have entered into the second major section in our series, “*A Journey in Liberty through Galatians*”—“**Liberty from Law**”—which is really liberty from religion and legalism.

II. **Liberty from Law**

A. **The testimony of Paul**— verses 1:11-2:10

Galatians 2:1-2 (NKJV)

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

You see, after Paul visited the area of Galatia proclaiming the gospel of grace and moved on to share the gospel in other parts of Asia Minor and Europe—he later learned that the Judaizers had come into the area after him trying to pervert the gospel that he had given to them!

The word *Judaizer* comes from a Greek verb meaning “*Those who teach others to live according to Jewish customs and laws.*”

As we said last time, the Judaizers taught that, in order for a Gentile to become a Christian—he first had to become a Jew. In other words, had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses—then he could put his faith in Christ and be saved. 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 because he was the *'new kid on the block'* so to speak as an apostle and he didn't want to disrespect the other apostles by confronting them publicly just in case they disagreed with him on this issue.

You see, he was a little nervous that these Judaizers had gotten to the apostles in Jerusalem and had swayed them into believing that the Gentiles needed to become Jews first before they could believe in Jesus for salvation.

Remember that many of these Judaizers were well-connected and powerful Jewish leaders that held a lot of influence among the Jewish people in and around Jerusalem. Even though (as Paul discovered after talking with the other apostles in Jerusalem) the Judaizers weren't able to convince them that the Gentiles had to become Jews before they could be saved—that didn't mean they hadn't influenced the apostles at all when it came to the Law.

B. The transgression of Peter—verses 2:11-21

Galatians 2:11–13 (NKJV)

¹¹ Now when Peter had come to Antioch [Paul's home church], I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

This is shocking and somewhat disturbing to me but not all that surprising given how powerful peer pressure can be (usually among children and teenagers—but even among adults). Of course, *'peer pressure'* is when you do something because you want to feel accepted and valued by your friends or peers.

What's shocking to me is that godly and mature Christians like Peter and Barnabas (and other believers) fell prey to it.

James was the half-brother of Jesus who wrote the epistle of James—and was the senior pastor of the Jerusalem church. This gives us some insight into how much the Judaizers had infiltrated the church in Jerusalem and how much influence and weight they carried among the leaders there.

Paul was no respecter of people and so he rebukes Peter publicly for his *hypocrisy*—not heresy. Peter didn't embrace the false doctrine of the Judaizers—that wasn't the issue that upset Paul. What upset him was Peter's hypocrisy—the Greek word was used of an actor on stage playing a part.

It seems that Peter was playing a part for the Jewish leaders who had come from the church in Jerusalem, acting for their benefit, as though the Gentile Christians were not as good as the Jewish Christians, that in some ways they were inferior and second-class Kingdom citizens.

When I belonged to the RCC we felt that way about Protestants.

Now when Paul was in Jerusalem (Peter's church) he didn't rebuke him publicly—but now that Peter was in Paul's church (Antioch in Syria) he rebuked Peter to his face for his hypocrisy. Basically Paul is saying, *"Come on Peter you were enjoying those ham sandwiches and pork ribs yesterday at the church Bar-B-Q—and now you're acting all 'Mosaic'—Why? To impress these 'big shots' from Jerusalem?"*

What was going on in the church in Jerusalem that Peter felt so much peer pressure that it caused him to act the way he did? Well, to understand that we need to turn to Acts 21—

Acts 21:15–17 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge. ¹⁷ And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

The church in Jerusalem was glad to see Paul, not only because they loved him but also because—he had brought a gift of money from the Gentile churches to help the Jewish Christians living there. Unfortunately, what Paul encountered in the church in Jerusalem must have saddened his heart—

Acts 21:18–20 (NKJV)

¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law...”

There could have been a hundred or more elders in the church of Jerusalem at this time.

By Acts 5 there were 20,000 in the church at Jerusalem—and this is now 20 plus years later. The word **‘myriads’** means *‘tens of thousands.’* The statement by James in verse 20—**“You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law...”**—in the Greek actually reads, ***“they are all zealots for the law.”***

These were Jewish Christians who remained devoted to the ceremonial aspects of the Law—not for salvation but for the daily practice of their lives—but why?

Why were they still clinging to the customs and rituals of the Old Covenant?

One well-known pastor and author comments on this—

“These were Jewish Christians who remained devoted to the ceremonial aspects of the law. While not viewing it as a means of salvation, they still observed its required feasts, Sabbath regulations, ritual vows and dietary restrictions.

Why were they still clinging to the customs and rituals of the Old Covenant?

First, because those customs and rituals had been established by God. Coming to faith in Jesus Christ enhanced these Jewish believers’ love for God and desire to obey Him and thus may have motivated a greater zeal for the old ceremonies.

Second, the apostles and other leaders in the Jerusalem church did not oppose the continuation of these practices. Nowhere in the New Testament are Jewish believers condemned for observing them. In fact, Paul commands tolerance for such “weaker brothers” (Romans 14:1; 1 Corinthians. 8–10) until they grow to understand their freedom and can use it with clear consciences. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), while forbidding the imposition of Old Covenant rituals on Gentiles, did not prohibit Jewish believers from continuing to observe them.

God Himself was tolerant during this period of transition, knowing how difficult it was for the Jewish Christians to break with their past. He also knew that in a few years this would no longer be a dominant issue in the church. After the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66–70), which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem, the influence of the Jerusalem church waned. Christianity gradually became a predominantly Gentile faith, and other churches (such as Antioch and Alexandria) ascended to the forefront.”

Acts 21:20–21 (NKJV)

²⁰ And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; ²¹ **but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs.**

So, there were those who were spreading lies about Paul—that he had become ‘anti-Jewish’ and was going around in his missionary journeys telling Jews to forsake Moses and not to circumcise their baby boys. That wasn’t true but it was the rumor that had gotten back to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

One commentator—

“Paul did warn the Gentiles not to get involved in the old religious practices of Judaism (Galatians 4:1-11)—but he nowhere told the Jews that it was wrong for them to practice their customs, so long as they did not trust in them for salvation or make their customs a basis for fellowship (Romans 14:1–15:7). There was freedom to observe special days and diets, and believers were not to judge or condemn one another.”

So once again, the issue with Peter wasn’t that he had embraced the Judaizer’s heretical teachings.

What upset Paul was Peter’s hypocrisy—in that when Peter was visiting Paul’s home church in Antioch, he ate with the Gentile believers there and fellowshiped with them. But when the leaders of the church in Jerusalem showed up—he withdrew from the Gentiles and would only eat and fellowship with the Jewish believers.

Again, it seemed that Peter was acting in a way that made the Gentile Christians feel as though they were inferior to Jewish Christians and that’s what made Paul angry.

Galatians 2:13–15 (NKJV)

¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? ¹⁵ We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles...

The New Living Translation translates v.15—“**You and I are Jews by birth, not ‘sinners’ like the Gentiles...**[but even we as Jews couldn’t live under the burden of the Law—so why do you feel that Gentiles should live under that burden?]”

Galatians 2:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

In other words, Paul is saying—“Come on Peter, even we Jews came to realize that the works of the Law couldn’t justify us.”

Warren Wiersbe—

“In justification, God declares the believing sinner righteous.

Before the sinner trusts Christ, he stands GUILTY before God; but the moment he trusts Christ, he is declared ‘NOT GUILTY’ and he can never be called ‘GUILTY’ again!

Justification is not simply “forgiveness,” because a person could be forgiven and then go out and sin and become guilty. Once you have been “justified by faith” you can never be held guilty before God.

Justification is also different from a “pardon,” because a pardoned criminal still has a record. When the sinner is justified by faith, his past sins are remembered against him no more, and God no longer puts his sins on record (see Psalm 32:1–2; Romans 4:1–8).”

Galatians 2:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

What exactly is Paul saying here? Well, he’s responding to his opponents that were going around saying that Paul was teaching *antinomianism* (‘without law’ or ‘lawlessness’) Paul’s enemies argued that since justification by faith eliminated the Law—it encouraged sinful living.

A person could believe in Christ for salvation, and then do as he pleased, because (as they said Paul was teaching) a person is saved by grace and therefore they’re not responsible to live for God—they could live in sin and it wouldn’t matter.

This is a common argument by legalists against the preaching of pure grace today—that it encourages sinful living—Paul responds by saying, ***“That’s nonsense!”*** That would make Christ a ‘minister of sin’—i.e., ‘a promoter of sin.’

Besides, Paul goes on to say, *“By going back to the Law (legalism), you are building up what you tore down! This means that you’re admitting that you were wrong (sinful) to tear down the Law in the first place! And that means you’re declaring to the world that the gospel of grace in Christ was a false way of getting saved to begin with.”*

Paul is arguing that—*“Grace and grace alone can save us (and sanctify us once we are saved); and if you try to add the Law to it—that doesn’t make us more righteous it only condemns us because the Law can’t save it can only condemn.”*

Galatians 2:19–21 (NKJV)

¹⁹ For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which 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 set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

There is so much here in these verses, so much that is vital to our walk with God as Christians—that for the remaining minutes we have left I just want to focus on verse 19 and then pick this up next week.

“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.”

Notice that Paul didn’t say **“the law died”**, he said—**“I through the law died to the law…”**

In Romans 7 Paul talks about the time in his life when he believed that keeping the law would bring him eternal life. Because he had kept himself from all outward violations of the law (murder, stealing, blaspheming etc.)—he believed the law was bringing him life (eternal life in heaven).

That is until he stopped to reflect upon the final commandment of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) which said, *“Thou shalt not covet” (Exodus 20:17).*

You see all of the other commandments dealt with outward actions, which Paul believed he had kept—but the tenth commandment dealt with inward attitudes or sins of the heart (lust, hatred, envy, jealousy etc.).

And remember that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that if you look at someone and lust after them in your heart in the eyes of God you’ve committed *adultery*; and if you have hatred in your heart towards another in the eyes of God you have committed *murder*.

It was then that Paul realized he had broken the law of God many times in his heart which meant—the law wasn’t *saving* him—the law was *condemning* him! He said in Romans 7:10, *“So I discovered that the law’s commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead.”* (NLT)

That’s why Paul said it here in verse 19, ***“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God”***.

In other words, he is saying that, *“The law ‘killed’ me (condemned me to eternal death in hell)—it was then that I died to the law as a way of making me righteous and earning me a place in heaven—and as such, I found a new and better way to live to God!”*

He realized there was only eternal life in Jesus who said, *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father (heaven) except through Me”*. (John 14:6)

Alright, it’s vitally important we know that the Law doesn’t save us, that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (and we’ll build on this next time as we continue looking at ‘Liberty from Law’). But again, I don’t think that that is ultimately what’s going on with Peter and the other leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

They had not embraced the heresy of the Judaizers that Gentiles had to become Jews first before they could be saved—and most importantly, they didn’t believe that keeping the Law was essential for salvation.

- So then what was going on with their adherence to the Law?
- Why were they clinging so tightly to it, and
- Why were they being so zealous in imposing it on the Gentiles?

Well, it could be that even though Peter and the other apostles didn’t believe that the Gentiles had to keep the Law to be saved. It could be that they believed that even though Gentiles were saved without the Law—they could never be fully sanctified without the Law.

In other words, without observing the ceremonial aspects of the Law (the Feasts Moses, the Sabbaths, ritual vows, and dietary restrictions)—the Gentiles would never be all that God desired them to be. They could never be as good and as fruitful in God’s eyes as the Jewish believers who still embraced the Law (not for salvation but for sanctification, fruitfulness, and blessing).

Some of you may not realize it, but there are Christians today who feel the same way about the Law for sanctification as the Jewish Christians did back in Paul’s day. There are those Christians who have embraced the ‘Hebrew Roots Movement’ (HRM) who hold to similar beliefs.

One author had this to say about the HRM that has come into the Church—

“The Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM) is, in general, an attempt by its adherents to draw closer to God by gleaning things from Judaism that are perceived to be biblically significant and valuable. Though the movement includes Jews who have professed faith in Jesus Christ as their Messiah, for the most part, it comprises non-Jewish professing and true Christians (Gentiles).

The HRM technically is not a movement as we would normally define one. There is no national organization or hierarchy of leadership among this group, yet there are leaders and writers from diverse ad hoc organizations, churches, and ministries who favor the trend.

Within the subculture, churches may be called ‘*synagogues*’, pastors may be called ‘*rabbis*’, Jesus may be referred to as ‘*Yeshua*’, depending on the whim of the leader or leaders. That make-it-up-as-you-go-along concept was demonstrated when one “Christian Rabbi” wrapped a prosperity teacher in a Torah scroll, called the teacher ‘king’, seated him in a chair, and had ushers parade him around on their shoulders.

The attraction for many to the HRM is often motivated by a love for the nation of Israel and its culture and traditions. However, those feelings have taken multitudes *beyond* a biblically acceptable attitude toward things Jewish and into beliefs and practices that are contrary to the teachings of Scripture. For some, the HRM has led them into a gospel of works, which the Apostle Paul warned against and condemned in his Epistle to the Galatians:

‘Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ’s death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. ² Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. ³ How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?’ (Galatians 3:1–3 NLT)

Let me end by saying this—the devil will always work in your life to put you back under the Law in some way, shape or form.

➤ *Why? Because only then will he be able to condemn you when you don’t live up to the Law!*

Unfortunately, many Christians (HRM and others) who have **voluntarily put themselves under the Law**, because they believe it’s necessary to please God and be all that He wants them to be—have fallen right into his trap!

This is why Paul was so adamant in his fight against the Judaizers—it was because he knew that far from the Law helping and enhancing our walk with God—it would destroy our walk with God by putting us under the legalism of the Law where Satan could then condemn us.

The devil can never condemn you if you’re relating to God by grace and not by law.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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