

7. The Book of Galatians 3:1-5a (Topical)

Liberty From Law-Part 6

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We are studying the Book of Galatians here at Calvary on Sunday mornings—going through the book topically based on its main theme.

The main theme of Galatians is **liberty**—the liberty (or freedom) that is ours in Christ. The book divides itself into 3 main areas 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—“**Liberty from Law**”—which is really liberty from *religion and legalism* as a way of being made righteous in God's eyes.

II. **Liberty from Law**

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

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

C. **The treachery of false prophets**— verses 3:1-4

False prophets are nothing new or unique to the Church Age—

2 Peter 2:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

So false prophets have been around since the beginning—in fact much of the ministries of God's true prophets in the Old Testament was taken up with confronting, correcting, and rebuking false prophets who were like a cancer in the land of Israel—

Jeremiah 14:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them,

nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.

The word ‘**prophet**’ comes from a Hebrew word that means “*to speak on behalf of another*” or “*to be a spokesman for another*.” Of course, the word is used most often in the Bible for someone who was a spokesman for God—unless of course the person was a false prophet.

We make the mistake of thinking that the true prophets of God were those men whose ministry was to *predict* the future (foretelling)—and certainly, that was *part* of what a prophet did when God sent them to speak on His behalf.

But most of what the prophets did when they spoke for God was simply to declare His words to His people—in other words, most of their ministry consisted not in ‘*foretelling*’ but in ‘*forth-telling*’—as in speaking *forth* the Word of God.

Therefore, anytime a teacher teaches the Bible or a Christian shares Scripture with someone—they are acting as a ‘prophet’ (a spokesman) for God in the broadest sense of the word. **So in that regard the Judaizers were false prophets—they were not speaking on God’s behalf.**

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.

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.

The Judaizers were going around telling people that salvation was a mixture of Judaism and Christianity—of law and grace—of works plus faith.

That is why Paul goes on to say to start Chapter 3—

Galatians 3:1–4 (NKJV)

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?

As we said last time, all evangelical Christians know they are *saved* by grace—but where they often stumble is buying into the false teaching (demonic lie) that after getting *saved* by grace they then think their *sanctification* falls completely on them in the way of doing good works.

Or as Paul put it: **“After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?” (verse 3—NLT)**

So, the mentality on the part of some Christians seems to be—

“Yes, I’m saved by grace—but I still need to go to church, read the Bible, keep the commandments, light the candles, pray the rosary, help out at the food pantry—if God will really love me and bless me in my walk with Him.”

Of course, this is completely at odds with what God's Word tells us that—not only are we saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), but then once saved, *"the just shall live by faith."* (Habakkuk 2:4; repeated in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38).

Now listen, I believe that Paul did have this in mind when it came to his opening rebuke in Galatians 3—that some of the people in the churches of Galatia who had received Jesus by faith and were genuinely saved were now trying to use the law (religious works) in a misguided attempt to sanctify themselves for God (reach their full potential of 'maturity and fruitfulness').

However, if we look at Paul's remarks closely in Galatians in the latter part of Chapter 2 and moving thru Chapters 3 and 4—it's obvious that what he's coming against is the Judaizers false 'gospel' that consisted of them blending law and grace together as being *essential* for salvation—not just sanctification.

Galatians 2:21 (NKJV)

²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

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.

Galatians 3:21 (NKJV)

²¹ Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

Galatians 4:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Alright, let's take a closer look at verses 1-4 of Galatians 3 which we've labeled **"The treachery of false prophets (teachers)."**

Galatians 3:1 (NKJV)

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

When Paul calls the Galatians **'foolish'**—the Greek word doesn't mean *'mental deficiency'*—in other words, he's not putting them down by calling them *'mental defectives.'* Rather, the word he uses speaks of **mental laziness and carelessness**.

As one author put it, *"The believers in Galatia were not stupid; they simply failed to use their spiritual intelligence when faced by the unscriptural, gospel-destroying teaching of the Judaizers."*

- Paul is saying, *"You're not using your heads and applying what you've been taught."*
- Jesus said that we are to, *"Love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength".*
- God told wayward Israel in Isaiah chapter 1, *"Come let's reason together says the Lord".*
- God has given us a brain and the ability to think critically and logically—and He expects us to use our brains to do so.

Paul was upset that the Galatians weren't thinking the doctrine of the Judaizers through to its logical conclusion—that if our works got us into heaven then Jesus died in vain—His death was unnecessary! And if we can work our way into heaven then why do we need grace (*'getting what we don't deserve'*)?

"Bewitched" means to be *'enchanted'* or *'charmed.'*

In other words, Paul is asking them, *"Who put a spell on you that you've been spiritually seduced into leaving the simplicity that is yours in Christ?"*

"Portrayed"—comes from a Greek word that means *"to post a notice in the town square."*

Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection were common knowledge—it was no secret. (*"These things weren't done in a corner."*—Acts 26:26)

"Crucified" in the Greek is in the perfect, passive participle and denotes an act that happened in the past but the effects of which continues to have ongoing results in the present.

In other words, *"The solution to the problem of sin in your life is still the same—nothing has changed. It's still the blood of Jesus and the power of God accessed through faith—not human works".*

Galatians 3:2 (NKJV)

² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—

Paul is asking them—

- *"When you got saved did you have to do something to receive the Holy Spirit who came inside and gave you new life?*
- *Did you have to go to church so many times first?*
- *Did you have to fast and pray for a week?*
- *Did you have to participate in a ritual or ceremony of some kind?*

No, you simply believed in Jesus, the Holy Spirit came inside, and you were saved by God's grace—period!"

How did the Philippian jailer get saved? How about the thief on the cross?

Galatians 3:3 (NKJV)

³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Let me paraphrase what Paul is saying—

- *"If salvation is all by God's grace then why do you so foolishly think He needs you to finish the work He has begun?"*

Here's the main problem—many false teachers and so-called Christians churches have turned salvation into a *'process'* (the work of a lifetime) instead of what the Bible teaches salvation is—*'the miracle of a moment.'*

Growing up in the Roman Catholic Church—this is what we were taught about salvation—that it is an ongoing process.

That salvation is earned over time (going to mass, keeping the sacraments, lighting candles, praying the rosary etc.) and no one can say that they have eternal life (not even the pope) they have to wait till they die and stand before God to see if they did enough good works in their lives to have earned it.

1 John 5:13 (NKJV)

¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue* to believe in the name of the Son of God.

This was exactly what the Judaizers were going around teaching people. You see the Judaizers had convinced the Gentile believers that receiving Jesus by faith was not enough to make them fully justified—they needed ongoing obedience to the law to be ‘*fully redeemed*’ (saved) and that would be a lifelong process.

But once again, I also see here a trap that many true Christians can sometimes fall into—that once they are saved by grace, they then need to keep the law to be all that God wants us to be (mature and fruitful). So many Gentile believers in Galatia who were already saved were now undergoing circumcision, observing dietary laws, keeping the Sabbath and so on.

Paul is asking them, “*How is that going to perfect the work that God began in you through His Spirit (salvation) when you exercised simple faith in Jesus?*”

“*The just shall live by faith (not law).*” (Galatians 3:11)

Galatians 3:3 (NLT)

³ How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect [‘saved’ and/or ‘sanctified’] by your own human effort?

Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

God will finish the work He has begun—He doesn’t need our help!

Calvary Chapel began as a work of the Spirit—but some of our pastors are trying to perfect what God has started by using marketing strategies, demographic studies and other church growth principles as a way of “*helping God*” to finish what He started.

Galatians 3:4 (NKJV)

⁴ **Have you suffered so many things in vain...?**

In other words, Paul is asking them—“*You were persecuted in the beginning when you first got saved because you believed it was all by God’s grace—are you going to let all that be for nothing?*”

How many of us lost friends and even family when we first got saved because we were telling them that they wouldn’t get to heaven by being good, or by going to church, or lighting a candle or saying the rosary—it was only through faith in Jesus that would get them there.

Paul is saying to the Galatians, “*If you go back to the law, it will be like saying that your persecutors were right after all?*”

Galatians 3:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was in vain*?

By saying this, Paul is expressing hope that they will return to the gospel he taught them—the true gospel for which they once suffered.

D. The truth of the Gospel—verses 5-9

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?*

It's a little off topic, but since Paul mentions the Holy Spirit working **miracles** among the churches of Galatia—let's talk about it.

A miracle is a supernatural event for which there is no natural explanation.

There are many who don't believe in miracles or in the supernatural—they believe that all the miracles in the Bible, and down through history, can be explained through natural laws and phenomena.

You even have people like the Christian Scientists who believe Jesus really didn't perform miracles—he was a scientist who was simply ahead of His time and understood the laws of science and used them to do things that others back then thought were supernatural miracles.

Skeptics still protest by holding on to the belief that miracles are impossible—but it's as Pastor Chuck Smith said in his book, *Living Water*—

“...a miracle is something that is humanly impossible but divinely simple. [The] Difficulty [of anything] must always be measured by the capacity of the agents doing the work. When God is the Agent doing the work, talk of difficulty is absurd.”

The denial of God and the supernatural today is due to an anti-spiritual, secular, rationalistic and materialistic mindset that has taken captive the thinking of academia, the scientific community, and Western civilization in general over the last 2 or 3 hundred years.

However, for those of us who believe in the God of the Bible we know that He is a supernatural God who has created the natural universe and has put in place natural laws by which He governs or controls it. But at any time, if He chooses to, He can *suspend* or work *contrary* to those natural laws if it suits His purposes and when He does, we call it a miracle—but for God it isn't anything special, for Him it's normal!

It's all in the realm of His Almighty power—as He said in Scripture—“*I am the Lord—is there anything hard for Me?*” Or as the angel Gabriel said to Mary—“*For with God nothing shall be impossible.*”

Whenever people stumble over the reality of miracles, I always say to them, “*Do you believe in the first verse in the Bible, that ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (the physical universe)?’—they usually say “yes”.*”

Well then, I tell them, if you can believe the first verse in the Bible—when it comes to miracles—the rest is easy!

We see all throughout the pages of the Old and New Testaments—God using the supernatural to testify to His existence and validate His power—that He is Almighty God.

- One of the primary examples of this in the Old Testament (apart from creation) was the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea.
- But we also see in the Book of Joshua how God parted the Jordan River at flood stage, and how He caused the sun to stand still in the sky for almost a whole day.
- We also read how through the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, He worked numerous miracles—even raising the dead!
- In the New Testament, Jesus worked many miracles like: walking on water, turning water to wine, multiplying small amounts of food to feed thousands of hungry people.

He healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed the storm—in fact He did so many miracles that John said at the end of his gospel—*“Jesus truly did so many miracles in our presence that I couldn’t fit them all in my gospel...in fact so many that if they were listed one by one, I don’t think that all the books in the world could contain them!”* (paraphrase from John 20:30-31; and John 21:24-25)

We also see how God continued to work miracles during the Book of Acts—primarily through Peter and Paul—but also through others like Stephen and Philip.

That brings up an important point, did miracles cease with the end of the apostolic period?—many say yes, but I don’t believe that is true. God has always been the God of the miraculous—and He is the same yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

So where are all these miracles today?

They’re out there—mostly in places where simple people believe in God with simple faith—poor people who are desperately dependent on God for everything—not self-sufficient and skeptical people as we see in this country. If you read the reports from missionaries around the world, especially in third world countries—you’ll see that God is still working miracles.

Several years ago there was an elderly Christian woman in her late seventies or early eighties who felt that God was calling her to be a missionary in Chile...(listen for the rest of the story).

So why doesn’t God work more miracles in America?—because of our unbelief.

Now, not only do I believe that the days of miracles are not over—I believe we are about to enter a period in our planet’s history that will be unparalleled in miraculous events—this will be good and bad.

The Spirit of God is going to be moving in the miraculous in the days of the Antichrist’s reign (primarily through the miracle of the new birth)—but the devil will also be working through *lying* signs and wonders designed to deceive and destroy. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)

Right now, it’s important that we draw near to God and allow Him to work through us in whatever way He chooses to do His work to touch this world for Jesus while we’re still here.

- We have to be people of faith—walking by faith and not by sight (*“Blessed are those who believe without seeing...”*)
- We serve a miracle working God—it’s time we stop making Him small in our eyes, and we start praying ‘BHAG’ prayers.
- BHAG stands for “Big, Hairy, Audacious, Goal”—just make sure you’re not asking great things for yourself but for the glory of God.
- There was a young pastor who asked an older Christian who was known for doing great things for God to pray with him—after a little while the older man told the young pastor—*“You pray too small!”*
- The reason our prayers are often too small is because our concept of God is too small.
- **It honors the Lord when we pray big prayers to our big God.**

(Dawson Trotman—*“I had to repent because it was noon and I hadn’t asked God for anything great yet!”*)

Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV)

³‘Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’

William Carey, the famous missionary to India said, *“Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.”*

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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