

LEGALISM AND OTHER FAULTS OF THE GALATIANS

Galatians 6:1

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We have come a long way in the book of Galatians haven't we? Remember that Paul was occasioned to write this book because some Jewish teachers had come into the churches of Galatia teaching that it was necessary to be circumcised to be saved. And this really angered Paul because the very core of the gospel message is that a man is saved by the sheer grace of Christ.

Paul's own salvation experience is proof that salvation is a miracle of God's grace and not a product of law keeping. Saul, was a Jewish law keeper of the highest order. He had advanced beyond his peers in the Jewish religion. And in his zeal for his religion he persecuted Christians. But on his way to Damascus, the Lord Jesus intervened in his life. And Jesus struck Saul to the ground and made himself known to Saul. And this is how a man is saved. Saul was not saved by law keeping in the least. His Jewish works had nothing to do with his salvation. In fact his religious works were evil. But Saul was saved by the miraculous intervention of Christ into his life. And so are we all.

Paul is angry in this letter - and rightfully so. The very heart of the gospel is at issue. Is a man justified by the works of the law? Or, is a man justified by faith alone? This perhaps was the first great doctrinal debate in the early church. And at the Jerusalem Council, Peter and the other apostles had to bow to Paul and Barnabas and agree that no other obligations should be imposed on the Gentiles for salvation.

In Paul's defense of the gospel in this great book, he has proven that there is a great contrast between the old way of doing things under Judaism and the new way under Christ. He has shown in chapter three the vast superiority of the gospel message that was given to Abraham compared to the law message that was given to Moses.

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then,

they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Galatians 3:8-10

There are several characteristics of the law which demonstrate that it is far inferior to the gospel.

1. The Mosaic Law was a temporary institution.

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.

Galatians 3:19

2. The Mosaic Law was a non-saving institution.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith.

Galatians 3:11

3. The Mosaic Law was a cursing institution.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.

Galatians 3:10

4. The Mosaic Law was limited institution.

What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because unto them were committed the oracles of God.

Romans 3:1, 2

On the other hand, the gospel that was preached to Abraham was a permanent institution designed to save sinners and it was designed not for the benefit of one nation but for the benefit of all nations.

Now we have seen in Galatians chapter five that one of the key principles of the Christian life is that we have liberty in Christ.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

Galatians 5:1

This is the central message of Paul in this book. We have been set free. But taken out of context that would be a rather nebulous statement, wouldn't it?

Example: If you were tied up with a rope to a post outside of our building and I came with a knife and cut the ropes off and I said, "I have set you free," you would know exactly what I meant. I have freed you from the post.

And when Paul tells the Galatians that they have been set free, it is perfectly obvious from the context that they have been set free from the law. This is whole story of Galatians. The Jewish teachers are telling them they must adhere to the law. Then, Paul spends two chapters telling how the law is inferior to the promise to Abraham. And then Paul tells them to stand fast in the liberty which Christ has made them free.

The Galatians had been freed from the Mosaic Law, pure and simple. They were not required to be circumcised. They were not required to eat certain foods. They were not required to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. They were not under a Levitical priesthood. They were not required to bring animal sacrifices.

We spent nine months studying the book of Hebrews and we saw in that book that Judaism was broken down piece by piece. Christ is the substance of which all those things in Judaism were only the type. And Galatians also reinforces that that old Jewish economy has passed away in favor of a new administration of things under Christ. And so, Paul says,

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

Galatians 5:1

So we have liberty in Christ rather than bondage under the law. That is the state of things in the Christian life. And this liberty that we have in Christ is further discussed in the last half of chapter five. And let's summarize:

1. Liberty means that we are not under the law.

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Galatians 5:18

When it says ye are not under "the" law, it is a clear reference to the Mosaic Law. It is the same law that Paul called the "weak and beggarly elements (Galatians 4:9).

We all know this because we no longer keep the Mosaic Law. We are under a whole new administration under Christ and that old shadowy religion has been swallowed up in the light of Christ.

2. Liberty means that we are no longer under the law that says "work," but we are under the law of liberty that says, "love."

For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Galatians 5:13, 14

The Mosaic Law said, "Do, do, do." The law of liberty in Christ says, "Love, love, love."

3. Liberty means that we are no longer under the power of the flesh, but under the power of the Spirit.

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Galatians 5:16, 17

The Mosaic Law was a flesh honoring institution. It said, "If you can keep the law, then you are worthy." And down through history, only one man was found worthy. Every other

man was found unworthy under the law. That is because the Mosaic Law never empowered a man. The Mosaic Law left the Jewish man in his flesh. It didn't save him. It gave him no power. It left him in his own fallen nature. And everyone who is under the law is cursed.

But Christ gives us liberty indeed. That is, he empowers us. He doesn't leave us to the dictates of our old nature. But he gives us a new nature which is empowered by the Holy Spirit himself. This is the very difference between the lost and the saved. It is the difference between the flesh and the Spirit.

And what a difference it is. You see what the flesh produces.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.

Galatians 5:19-21

And you see what the Spirit produces.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,; against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22, 23

Thank God that when he saves us, he also gives us his Spirit that produces these qualities in us.

Now in the sixth chapter of Galatians, Paul is going to address certain practical applications to our liberty in Christ. We have seen throughout history how the flesh operated under law. And it was not a pretty picture. The Jewish nation was a mess under the power of the flesh. But now Paul is going to show us how a spiritual man operates under liberty.

Note: When I say a "spiritual" man, I don't mean some extraordinarily pious man or some man that is running around speaking in tongues or prophesying. But I simply mean a man who has the Spirit of God in him. This is a "spiritual" man as

opposed to one who is left to the power of the flesh alone.

Now we are going to be looking first of all in Galatians six, at how a “spiritual” man deals with the faults of others.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Galatians 6:1

And in order to get a feel for what Paul may be talking about, let’s consider what faults of the Galatians were in Paul’s mind.

The Galatian Faults

- I. Some had adopted circumcision and other ceremonies of Judaism.

This was the glaring fault. This was the fault that prompted Paul to write this epistle. And it is probable that some of the Galatian converts had already been circumcised. Some of them had already begun to observe the Jewish feast days. And in doing so they had left the truth.

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth . . .

Galatians 3:1

So, it appears that there were some, maybe many, in the church who had fallen into this great fault.

- II. Some had fallen in legalism.

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

Galatians 3:3

Legalism was at the very core of Judaism. It shouldn’t have been so. But it was. When they took Christ out of their religion, it became a religion of works and law-keeping. And Judaism without Christ became a religion of self-righteousness and religious snobbery. Jesus called the self-righteous Pharisees

“whited sepulchers.” (Matthew 23:27) They cleaned up the outside, but the inside was as nasty as could be.

A. Legalism says a man must do something to be saved.

Some of the Galatians were being circumcised in order to be saved. This has always been a grave error – to suggest that there is something that you can do to be saved. This is the error which permeates the hearts of fallen men everywhere. They suppose that there is something they can do to be saved. This was the error of the Jews and it is the error of men everywhere.

The Jews thought they were saved by their ceremonies. And though the ceremonies were a yoke of bondage, (Galatians 5:1) they performed those ceremonies religiously because they thought they were saved by doing something.

But there is not a thing in the world a man can do to be saved. Salvation is not a matter of what we can do, but it is a matter of what Jesus has done. Jesus has done all the work and salvation is merely by casting faith in his work.

But people will yet maintain that we are saved by doing something. People say that you are saved by going to Mass every Sunday. They say that you are saved by offering sacrifices each week at the altar. They say that if you sin, you are saved by coming to a human priest and making profession. And if you die before you have made confession, you are saved by your friends and relatives who can pay money to buy you out of torment.

What false doctrine we devise to get to heaven on our own merit!

Others say you must be baptized to be saved. Others say you must canvass door to door and witness to so many people in order to be saved. Others say you reach God by meditation. Others say it is by self-sacrifice. And all of this is legalism to the hilt.

A man is only saved by the work of another man. Jesus worked so that we might go free. Jesus worked because our work is insufficient. Jesus worked because he wanted all the

glory for saving his people. We are saved by the gracious work of Jesus.

And we are saved because the Holy Spirit graciously applies his work to our hearts. Like Saul, we were traveling down our own road to Damascus, when Christ came calling on us in the form of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit moved on our hearts and made us alive. And like Saul, we asked, "Lord, what would you have us to do?"

You see, there is nothing we can do to be saved. That depends wholly on God moving upon our soul. But there is plenty to do after. There is a lifetime of service that can be rendered out of love to Christ, but this is all a result of Him first loving us. There is nothing that you can do to save yourself. And this is the error of legalism

Legalism not only says a man must do something to be saved, but also,

B. Legalism says a man must do something to be sanctified.

There is a strong force within our flesh that causes us to look for goodness and ability within ourselves. And sometimes we admit that we are saved by pure grace, but our flesh tells us that we live out our salvation by reverting to a law principle. And so, we devise some standard of conduct, and if we adhere to that standard, then we suppose that we are living unto Christ. And this is also legalism.

Example: In science, when you start with a false assumption, then you get false conclusions. This is the problem with evolutionists. When you start with the false premise that God does not exist, then you necessarily get false conclusions.

Legalism starts with a fallible premise. And that premise is that the flesh can do good. Legalism says, "I can obey the law. I can do what God wants me to do. I'll show God and everyone else how good I am." And before those words are out of a man's mouth, he is engaged in sins and trespasses.

When are we ever going to realize that our fleshly nature is a beast? And I am just as needy now as I was on the day of

my conversion. My flesh is just as nasty as it ever was. It is just as powerful. And there is no good in it.

The legalist still wants to prove to God how righteous he is. But the spiritual man says, in my flesh is no good thing. The legalist says, "I can do this." The spiritual man says, "Lord help me by your Spirit, I cannot do this."

At my conversion I was totally dependent on the Holy Spirit of God and 46 years later I find that only his power keeps me from all manner of sin.

We can no more be sanctified by keeping a bunch of rules than we could be justified by keeping rules. God doesn't work in his people by legalism. Rather, he works by grace, grace and more grace.

Legalism will cause your flesh to flare up into many sins. But a wholehearted grasp of God's grace, will cause you to obey Him out of love.

A legalist may restrain himself from stealing because he is compelled by the law not to steal. He is afraid of God. Or, he wants to prove his own worth. So, he does not steal. The spiritual man will not steal because he loves his gracious God. And there is a huge difference between the man under the law and the man under grace.

The legalist says, "I am righteous and I will prove it." But, the spiritual man says, "Woe is me. I am thoroughly unrighteous and I must have the power of God."

Furthermore, the legalist says, "I am more righteous than everyone else." This is the characteristic of the man who is overcome with legalism. He will find fault in everyone else. He will come to church thinking, "All of these people are hypocrites." He sees everyone else's sins and weaknesses and he compares himself and says, "I am better than that." The legalist is always looking to prove how righteous he is. And in his own eyes, he is better than you and better than me.

The spiritual man is keenly aware of his own faulty condition and he sees others as better than himself.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
Philippians 2:3

The legalist will tend to put extra biblical requirements on you. He will set up a standard for himself and then put you under the same standard. And he will be harsher on you than he is on himself.

Now, we are reviewing the faults of the Galatians by way of introduction to the sixth chapter because Paul is going to tell us how spiritual men deal with faults.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one . . .

Galatians 6:1

III. Some were biting and devouring one another.

But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed ye be not consumed one of another.

Galatians 5:15

It seems likely that because of the spirit of legalism which was permeating the churches of Galatia, either there were outbreaks of bickering and biting one another, or there was a danger of it. And I think it is likely that some had fallen into this spirit of arguing and backbiting and fighting with one another.

And this is a great danger in the church. Once this kind of spirit engages the church then look what Paul says,

Take heed ye be not consumed one of another.

The picture here is of a wild beasts being let loose. And these beasts bite and devour each other until they have eaten or consumed one another. In other words, if the flesh is allowed to run rampant through the church and if legalism has its way, the church will be utterly ruined and destroyed as a Christian community.

So, perhaps this is one of the faults that need to be

addressed in the next chapter.

IV. Some were desirous of vain glory.

Let us not be desirous of vain glory.

Galatians 5:26

Legalism by its very nature says, "Look how good I am." And by so doing, the legalist is looking for glory. He is not seeking the glory of God, but he is seeking the glory of man. He is seeking his own exaltation but he is not seeking to exalt the name of Jesus. And of course, this is a great fault if it ever comes into the church.

The spiritual man is not engaged in the pursuit of his own glory. He has already been shown by the Spirit of God that he is not glorious. And the spiritual man has no interest in his own glory.

The spiritual man is extremely interested in the glory of God. This is his whole approach to life. This is his focus. "How can I bring honor to Him?"

And the spiritual man is then also engaged in serving God's people. That is all he wants to do in the church. He looks for ways to love the people in the church. And his own glory is of no importance whatsoever.