

## LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works

Part seventeen - Teaching #2163

Sunday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 - 10 a.m.

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### FINDING THE PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS A DELIGHT RATHER THAN A CHORE

**IPAD TEXT - Galatians 5:1-7 - “For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery. [2] Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all. [3] Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law. [4] You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace. [5] For we eagerly await through the Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love. [7] You were running well. Who prevented you from being persuaded regarding the truth?”**

Verse 1 is the natural link with what Paul has just been teaching at the end of chapter 4: **Galatians 5:1 - “For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery.” - IPAD TEXT**

This verse is the simplified version of the rather involved teaching in chapter four about Hagar, the slave woman, and Sarah, the free woman, and our heritage in one line or the other. In that passage Paul was saying that we, in Christ Jesus, are all in the line of promise through Isaac rather than the line of slavery through Ishmael.

Look carefully at verse 1. Everybody wants to know God's will. Everyone wants to discover how to live and walk in God's will for their lives. Paul says, ***“Here is God's will for sure. God wills your freedom! He wants freedom in Christ Jesus to be the dominant factor in your daily living.”***

Try to remember how we finished last week's teaching. Freedom means different things to different people. There are fools who think that freedom means being able to live without any restraint - free to live without responsibility - freedom to avoid self-control - freedom to indulge the flesh. Of course, this kind of supposed freedom isn't freedom at all. In fact, it's the exact opposite. It's the road to anarchy and finally the worst kind of bondage possible.

Freedom means ***freedom to become***. Freedom, for the Christian, means freedom to ***do*** God's will and freedom to ***enjoy*** doing God's will. It's freedom of ***ability*** and freedom of ***desire*** linked together. Notice how Paul hits this same idea twice in one verse - ***“Listen! It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! Keep standing firm (in freedom), and don't be enslaved in bondage again”(1).***

In other words, once you have **started out** free, you must **stand your ground** in that same freedom. I see Paul saying there is way of living the Christian life from the wrong foundation entirely. There is a way of trying to live the Christian life that is full of drudgery and dry-rot. There is a kind of attempted Christian life that feels more like **bondage** than **joy unspeakable**. Is this where much of the church is today? Are people just becoming plain **weary** in their religious routines?

1) **HOW PROFESSING CHRISTIANS CAN WEAR THE YOKE OF BONDAGE WHEN THEY THINK THEY ARE WEARING THE YOKE OF JESUS CHRIST**

**IPAD TEXT - Galatians 5:2-4 - "Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all. [3] Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law. [4] You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace."**

**"Fallen from grace...."** What strong words - and just for participating in the practice of circumcision! How can this be when, in a matter of seconds, Paul will say this: **Galatians 5:6 - "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love."** - **IPAD TEXT**

How can Paul say circumcision means nothing in verse 6, and then caution against falling from grace for receiving it in verses 4 and 5? And remember, Paul himself had Timothy, whose mother was a Jew, circumcised in order to have better inroads for missionary work among the Jews.

How are we going to put all of this together? There really is no contradiction here. Paul had Timothy circumcised as a means of effective **outreach**, not as a requirement for **salvation**, as the Judaisers were teaching was necessary. Also, it is true that circumcision, as a physical act in itself, is neither here nor there in terms of one's spirituality.

**Verse 6** stands true. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything in Christ Jesus. But verses 4 and 5 are also true. Circumcision, and any other part of the law, **as a means of earning standing and favor with God**, is spiritual suicide. It is to be cut off from grace.

Paul is saying we can't have it both ways. Or, to put it in the form of Paul's analogy in chapter 4, we can't be **both** of Hagar, the slave woman, **and** of Sarah the free woman. We either rely on divine promise and provision or we rely on the flesh and human accomplishment. But we can't do both.

This is Paul's whole point. There is more than mere outward circumcision at issue here. Paul is talking about two contrary religious systems. That's his whole point when he says, in **Galatians 5:3 - "Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law."** - IPAD TEXT

Circumcision is only representative of a whole system that has its roots in *establishing ourselves before God by our own works rather than His own provision.*

This is the issue. If you're going to start paying God off, or paying Him back, you will have the whole weight of the law on your shoulders, not just circumcision! And that's *bondage*, not *joyous freedom*.

## 2) A PRACTICAL DESCRIPTION OF RELIGIOUS BONDAGE FOR GENTILE CHRISTIANS IN 2022

I'd like to take a careful look at a single idea in **Galatians 5:3 - "Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law."** - IPAD TEXT

I believe, buried in this little, perhaps obscure verse, there also lies the yoke of bondage for *non*-Jewish people, who would never dream of keeping any of the laws of ethnic Judaism from the Old Testament.

\ The key is found in the last phrase of the verse - “...**he is obligated to do the whole Law.**” Literally that phrase reads, “...**that he is a debtor to do the whole law.**”

This is a **debtor** religion. There is no delight to being in debt. Debt hangs over you like a gray cloud. It takes all the joy and spontaneity out of life. And more than anything else (and this lies right at the heart of our text), it robs you of **freedom**. Remember, “**It was for freedom that Christ set us free**”(5:1).

The condition of being in debt is perhaps the best picture of the **opposite** of freedom. I have debt. I have a mortgage. I must make payments. In fact, the one thing I **must** do is make those payments. There are certainly things I'd **rather** do with my money, but I'm not **free** to do them because I'm a debtor, and paying my debt is what I **must** do.

Paul looks at these precious converts in Galatia, and his blood boils at these Jewish false teachers, not because he's some narrow minded, religious bigot, but because he sees a whole group of Christians who are being enticed into a religious system designed to **pay God back - to get out of debt - rather than let Jesus Christ pay it all for them.**

And right at this point comes the strong application of this text for our own lives. The Christian life won't work from the principle of sheer **obligation**. Yet there creeps into all our hearts the subtle motivation to **pay God back** for His free work of grace on our behalf.

In our text, all of the works of the law, including circumcision, are the currency used to pay God back - to **get out of debt**. But if you pay back grace, it isn't grace anymore! That is exactly what Paul means when he says "**Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all.**"(5:2).

We all need to consider this. You can have a debtor's heart even if you don't have any knowledge of the Jewish law. Any time you feel obligated to do something for God simply because you somehow **owe** Him for what He did for you in Christ Jesus, you are in danger of the debtor's ethic:

"Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow." Is that really how it works? "Jesus did this for me and now I have to do so much for Him. After all, I'm in debt. And debts have to be paid."

The real tragedy in debtor spirituality is the way it robs God of the glory He deserves for the riches of His incredible grace. It works like this: Imagine you have Reni and me over for supper. And you've gone to quite a bit of trouble. There is a lovely meal served in a very gracious setting. Then, when it's all over, just before we leave, I stop in the doorway and say, ***"What a lovely evening. This was one of the best evenings out we've had in a long time. You made us feel so special. The food was wonderful and your conversation enriched our lives."***

And then, to your horror, I take out my wallet and continue: ***"That roast beef must have set you back plenty. And the desert! It was out of this world. And, let's see, there's also your time. You must have spent all day getting that spread ready, so at \$28 an hour....I figure the whole evening is worth about \$300."*** And I take six fifties out of my wallet and hand them over to you.

Once you get over the shock, the first thing you will think (and this is very important) is that I must be about the most **pride-filled** person on the face of the earth. I simply can't stand to bear the weight of allowing someone else to do something like this **for** me. I won't allow myself to be **in the red** as far as owing you for your kindness. (Of course, in church circles we don't actually **pay** for these acts of kindness. But we have constructed a whole different system that works the same way - "**We've had so and so over three times Sunday night and they've never asked us back once!**")

Back to our illustration. Even more troubling, when you think about it, is the insult my actions are to **you**. When I take out my wallet after dinner at your house I'm twisting your intentions and designs for the whole event. I'm robbing your character of its most noble and gracious impulses. **Grace, by definition, is always distorted and twisted when you try to pay it back.** Paying back grace belittles and blasphemes the giver. And on the Cross, God Himself is the Giver!

So, to return to our text, the one who has himself circumcised (and that is only **one** expression of works used by Paul in this passage) puts himself in the place of being a **debtor** to God. And keeping the law is the currency he uses to pay his debt. And there is no freedom in being a debtor. Remember, "**For freedom Christ set us free**"(5:1).

This debtor mentality can manifest itself in countless ways, even in our own lives. Sometimes it is manifested, not only in our **works**, but even in our **questions and objections** to those works. “Why do I **have** to give money to the church?” “Where does the Bible say I **have** to go to church on Sunday night?”

Let me just take that question as an example. Usually people think they’re being clever in asking it. “Where does the Bible say I **have** to go to church on Sunday night?” And, of course, the Bible doesn’t say anyone **has** to go to church twice on the Lord’s Day.

But the question is hard to answer, not because it’s clever, but because it’s foolish. It’s coming out of the debtor mentality. For the child of God, going to church isn’t a “**have to**” issue - or, at least, it **shouldn’t** be. Here are some “**have to**” issues: I have to pay taxes. I have to pay my mortgage. I have to periodically go to the dentist. But there are other issues that clearly aren’t “**have to**” issues. In fact, some issues are **soiled and spoiled** when they are made into “**have to**” issues.

Spending time with my family isn’t a “**have to**” issue. It’s a “**delight to**” issue. Spending time with dear friends isn’t a “**have to**” issue. It’s a “**delight to**” issue. Does a husband “**have to**” make love to his wife? Or should it be a “**delight to**” decision?

The law can never birth delight in my walk with God. It can only manifest a “**debtors’s response.**” And that response can only bring drudgery, never freedom.

### 3) HOW TO DELIGHT IN OBEYING THE TRUTH

**IPAD TEXT - Galatians 5:5-7 - “For we eagerly await through the Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love. [7] You were running well. Who prevented you from being persuaded regarding the truth?”**

Let’s start with verse 7 and then work backwards. You would think that devoting yourself to the law of God would **help** with the whole issue of obedience. But Paul says it doesn’t. As these Christians are poised on the edge of turning back to the law through circumcision Paul actually says they are being “**prevented you....regarding the truth.**”

This establishes everything we’ve been studying so far tonight. The debtor’s spirituality can never **produce** freedom and life and holiness. It can only generate bondage. It “**prevents**” people from obeying the truth.

Why? Because, unless the heart is changed to find **delight** in obedience and **freedom** in obedience (remember our skydiving illustration from last week about **freedom of desire?**) no one will **continue** in obedience for long.

Now look quickly at **Galatians 5:5-6 - “For we eagerly await through the Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love.” - IPAD TEXT**

First, notice that when the Holy Spirit is at work in a person’s life, faith **will** be productive. Verse six describes a **working** faith - “**faith working through love.**” But the work isn’t **debtor’s** work. It’s **loving** work. And that means it is **freedom producing, joy enhancing** work.

When I was just a teen living at home it was frequently my assignment to shovel our sidewalk and driveway. I can remember many times when, after a heavy prairie snowfall, dad would come into my room on Saturday morning (usually with his shaver running full-blast) and get me up to shovel. I hated that, but I wanted to eat and loved my life enough to get up and do it.

Also while I was a teen, my mother had terrible problems with her back. She wore a neck-brace for many months and was in serious danger of losing the use of many of her major muscles. In fact, God healed her when she was prayed for in our church, and she was freed from that problem.

But I remember coming home from school one day and seeing my mom outside, just in agony, shoveling the driveway. I was instantly moved by her suffering, took the shovel and did the entire driveway with what seemed effortless energy and enthusiasm. In fact, I felt **good** doing it.

This is a simple story that can make many of us holier, happier Christians. Here's the question. Why did I hate shoveling on Saturday morning, and love shoveling when I helped my suffering mother? The answer is simple. I **had** to shovel when my dad got me up Saturday morning. That shoveling was a **job**. I **wanted** to shovel when I saw my mom. That shoveling was motivated by **love**.

**IPAD TEXT - Galatians 5:6 - "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is *faith working through love.*"**

Faith and works are never contradictory when the motive is love. That's the secret. Never forget it.