

Galatians

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[0 : 00] May the Lord help us to consider words you'll find in the epistle to the Galatians, chapter 5, the first verse.

The fifth chapter, in Paul's epistle to the Galatians, the first verse. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

It was a very sad feature of the life of the early churches, especially those churches formed as a direct result of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, that so early in their life they were in trouble.

Now, as Paul writes this epistle to the Galatians, it is very evident that he is deeply troubled by things which had so quickly happened after the commencement of these infant churches.

I suppose we should not be surprised that that was so, because wherever there is a work of God being carried on, Satan will be sure to oppose it.

[1 : 40] We are shown clearly in the scriptures that when a work is indeed a work of God, the bitterness and hatred of the enemy will certainly be seen.

We shall know that personally. If God is working in your heart at all, you may be sure that Satan will be opposing that work.

If there has been but a little beginning of the work of the Spirit of God in your soul, Satan will try to destroy it.

He is a destroyer, that's his very name. Apollyon, the destroyer, he is seeking always to destroy. And particularly, would he delight to destroy the work of God?

Well, he was at work amongst these early churches and amongst the Galatians, trying to destroy the purity of the Gospel.

[2 : 42] Trying to destroy the work of grace in the hearts of these people. Seeking to destroy those blessings and privileges which these people profess to enjoy.

We are well persuaded, surely, from the scriptures that the work of God cannot finally be overthrown. That is a comfort. And sometimes a very great comfort.

To know that the work of God cannot be finally overthrown. As Paul says to the Philippians, He which hath begun a good work in you shall perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

But, between the beginning of that work of grace and the last day of a person's life, between the beginning of a work of grace in a church, and the end of that work of grace in a church, there are many, many changes.

It was so amongst the Galatians. It would take me far too long to deal with all the concerns which Paul had regarding these people.

[4 : 07] The principal point I want to make this evening was that Paul was greatly concerned that these people would turn away from his Gospel.

There is something most striking about Paul's preaching and teaching. I don't know whether you see it as I see it at times, but there is such an utter conviction.

I know Paul was inspired of God, inspired by the Spirit of God to write as he did. He was utterly convinced. So convinced of the truth.

So clearly taught by God, that when others rose up teaching something different, he opposed them immediately. He not only opposed them, he told them that any Gospel other than that Gospel which he preached, was not a Gospel.

Now I dare not make any such claim as that for myself. I make, and I am conscious of making, many mistakes.

[5 : 24] But I am convinced of this, that the Gospel of the Scriptures is the Gospel, and insofar as I could speak to you of the Gospel which is in the Scriptures, then I can say there is no other.

And if those come to you preaching a Gospel which is not the Gospel of the New Testament, then immediately you can say, this is not a Gospel.

This is not the Gospel of Christ. Verse 9 of the first chapter is exactly how Paul put it.

We said before, So say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

For I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 37] And the theme of this epistle is the theme of the Gospel.

And the theme of the Gospel which Paul so much emphasizes in this epistle is the theme of liberty, freedom. What happened in these churches was something like this.

Paul came preaching Christ. In his preaching of Christ, he plainly proclaimed a free, full, complete forgiveness for all sin through Jesus Christ, his Lord.

He preached Christ and him crucified. He preached the doctrine of faith in Christ alone for salvation.

He turned his back completely upon any suggestion that it was possible for a man to earn his salvation.

[7 : 48] By the deeds of the law, he said, shall no man living be justified. This was his great contention.

That salvation is altogether a work of God and that the blessings of salvation are utterly free gifts of God.

And that God sovereignly gives to whom he will his blessings and when he gives them they are given to those who could not and do not deserve them.

Indeed, he goes so far as to say this in the epistle to the Romans that God justifies the ungodly. the simple doctrine of the gospel is that Jesus saves sinners.

He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and he doesn't save them because they repent. He calls them to repentance because he saves them.

[8 : 59] Because he saves them. Well, I hope in that brief summary you can see the theme of Christian liberty.

if a sinner is saved holy by grace if a sinner is saved by a merciful gracious act of God through the blessing of Jesus Christ then he is free.

He is completely free. What do I mean by that? He is free. Well, if you read on down through this chapter that we read together you will see that Paul is contending about one particular point and that is in regard to circumcision.

Now we are not perhaps so much concerned about circumcision because we are not Jews we are Gentiles we have never had to face the kind of difficulties that converted Jews had to face.

It was a very great problem with them. They have been brought up in this way in this teaching in this plain command of God that the male children of their houses should be circumcised and when the apostle Paul came preaching and teaching and some of the Gentiles were called by God's grace and God blessed the Gentiles with repentance and faith in his name it was a very real question should the Gentiles be subject to the same laws and rules and regulations that the Jews had been subject to.

[11 : 06] And so this question of circumcision was a very pressing point but it went deeper than that and I want to try and explain it simply and then apply it to our own situation.

It went much deeper than that. You see it was all a question of the attitude of a person's heart and mind. Circumcision was never given as a way of salvation just because a person was circumcised did not mean that they were in a covenant relationship to God it simply meant that they bore the mark of a covenant relationship to their nation a nation which God had promised to bless in the way of obedience.

But Abraham was justified by faith long before God laid upon him any such obligation as that. Still I mustn't get too much distracted from the point at issue it was a question of the attitude of the people's mind and heart.

Why did the Jew want the Gentile to be circumcised? Why did these Christian Jews these believing Jews make so much of circumcision?

Why friends because they were still adopting that old mistaken attitude that in doing things God would save them.

[12 : 54] Because of what they had done they would be safe. Paul is so emphatic he says I Paul say unto you that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing for I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

If your attitude of mine is like this now if I do this and I do that and I do the other according to God's command then God will bless me then God will save me then I shall get to heaven then I shall be righteous in God's sight then I say Christ and you have no relationship if that is your spirit and attitude of heart and mind you are yet strangers to God's way of grace now they are strong words and I intend them to be strong words for Paul says Christ is become of no effect unto you whosoever of you are justified by the law the spirit then in the hearts of these people was like this

God will accept me as righteous because of the things I have done now that is what being justified by the law means it was the great mistake of the Jews a mistake which had marred their lives for centuries thinking that by the deeds of the law God would accept a man as being righteous why if there had been a law given by which a man could have gained life then life would have been by the keeping of the law but Paul altogether contradicts it he says there never was such a law given the law was never given for that reason that a man may earn eternal life by his keeping of the law the law was added because of transgression the law is simply

God's way of underlining man's sin the law is not given by God as a way of salvation it never was you say well we all know that I hope so but you know friends this spirit and I will refer to it as this legal spirit is deeply ingrained in every one of us deeply ingrained in us we are born in that sense under the law not the Jewish law certainly but under God's holy principles we are born in that way and we have in us that spirit which is constantly trying to earn salvation and gain God's favour by something that we do you may say well we were brought up differently we are not so much concerned to earn our salvation by being moral and upright we know we ought to be moral and upright and we know we need something else beside that in order that we shall be saved we are conscious that we are sinners we've been told it so often and we know that we need forgiveness for our sins but then there comes just the same old legal spirit the spirit that says now if I change my way of life if I begin to do the things that

Christian people do if I begin to pray and read the Bible and go to chapel and attend all the meetings Sundays and weeknights if I set myself a time every day for reading and praying and many other things you could add to the list if I do all that then surely in the end it will be alright and it may go even so far as to say well if I make some confession of faith in Jesus Christ and I am baptised and become a member of a church then surely I shall be alright I met a woman and I was staggered to realise it but I met a woman in one of our chapels once who really did think that and it so startled me I felt well I if ever I preach on this subject I shall have to be very clear about the matter no friends you could live a life upon which another person could not put a pin's point of accusation you could live outwardly a life which everyone would say was a gracious

[18 : 39] Christian life and yet be a legalist in your heart you could still be working away inwardly in order to gain God's favour you could still be basing your hopes of heaven upon your religiosity now this is why Paul was so emphatic he says this is not spiritual this is not the gospel this is not the way of salvation this is not the work of Christ in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision none of these things avail anything and it goes far far beyond the detail of circumcision in regard to the soul salvation none of these things count for anything this is not

God's way of salvation no friends it's not in any kind of working whatsoever neither natural moral working neither good works amongst our fellow men neither religious works amongst believers oh friends if only this was really embedded in our hearts as a deep conviction you know could my tears forever flow that is could I show a continuing day by day grief over my sins and we weep over them time and time and time again all for sin could not atone do you really believe things like that oh this is the wonderful gospel of free full complete salvation in Christ this is why the apostles kept saying again and again and again believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved because there is no other way they didn't go around to the Jews and say now you be good Jews and they didn't go to the Gentiles and say now you Gentiles have got to become just like good Jews and then God will bless you they went preaching peace by Jesus Christ he is Lord of all to quote from the Acts of the Apostle and when they preached peace by Jesus Christ they were preaching full complete immediate peace by Jesus Christ not a peace which is attained through a life long series of self denials and efforts and works oh friend I fear often times people are saying in their hearts if I was better if I was more godly if I was more religious if I was more like

Mr. so and so then God would bless me indeed they may be saying and this I say very carefully they may be saying in their hearts if I was more like Jesus Christ then God would save me friends that is not the gospel that is not the gospel oh may God ever fill our hearts with a longing desire to walk in the example of Jesus Christ and be more like him but friends that will not be our salvation salvation no friends that must flow from salvation and not be the ground of our salvation it is not because we are like Jesus that we are saved you say well that is strong language indeed it is indeed it is but you see friend unless we attained entirely and wholly to the pure perfect example that Jesus has set then we could not be saved could we

God only accepts perfect righteousness if we fail in any respect and at any time in our life to attain to that holy standard we are immediately rejected and indeed the scripture shows us that it is an impossibility anyway because we are born in sin we have a depraved heart and a wicked nature and we never could and that never was intended to be the way of salvation now friends the way of salvation and again I quote from Acts chapter 13 is very simply expressed by Paul be it known unto you therefore men and brethren that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the

[24 : 40] Lord Moses no nor by any other law nor by any other system nor by any other set of regulations salvation no friends nor by anything that any man can ever do not by anything that any man can ever do but only by what he has done and through what he is that is our salvation salvation and friends that is the only ground of salvation and that is the only way in which God ever saved a soul stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free friends it's not our attainment in anything however spiritual it may sound which is the ground of our salvation it is what

Jesus is and it is what he has done it is because he is God manifest in the flesh it is because he is perfectly righteous it is because he went to the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believed it is because he is accepted of God it is because the father can look upon him and see of the travail of his soul and be perfectly satisfied it is because he is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption it is because he is righteous and pure and holy and upright it is because he served God and obeyed his father it is because he suffered bled and died on calvary's tree to make an atonement for sin and offer himself a sacrifice for many this is our salvation oh friends how sadly dark how sadly confused many poor hearts are in this matter still clinging to this deep ingrained attitude that if they could do this or if they could do that then their minds would be relieved they would feel they were truly godly and they would have some assurance that they were saved by grace now friends where where does light and life and power and love and assurance come from by looking at our attainments by minutely examining our spiritual state oh don't think I belittle the importance of examination of ourselves and our state not at all for that is exhorted in the word to examine ourselves whether we be what righteous no whether we be in the faith or no whether we be in the faith or no friends our comfort our assurance our joy our knowledge of salvation comes through

Jesus Christ alone alone stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and you know the truth is surely this that when God in his wonderful mercy brings a sinner to that real living faith in Jesus Christ it is a divine sign it is a divinely given mark it is a divine proof that that man is accepted liberty the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free it is his work it is his work to awaken a sinner it is his work to enlighten our hearts it is his blessed spirit's work to show us

Jesus Christ so that we can see him the God man the saviour of sinners the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free this is why Jesus said come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest what was really the Lord saying stop working why go on being burdened and labouring like that that is no way of salvation if you go on like that to the end of your life you'll never find rest this was the distress of the poor Jew he was labouring through a morass of confusion through an absolute labyrinth of rules and regulations and still he wasn't satisfied still he had in his heart this fear that after all he hadn't really attained to what he got to attain to that perhaps at the end of his life he would be mistaken after all now friends that is not the liberty wherewith

Christ hath made us free by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast and friends salvation never will be as a result of our works God may deal and will deal with us if we sin against him and grieve his Holy Spirit that is true but one thing God will never do and that is he will never cast a believer into hell one thing God will never do and that is he will never pass the sentence of death against a believer in Jesus Christ Paul says so they're not my words there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in

[32 : 15] Christ Jesus there can't be they're in Christ Jesus the righteousness of Jesus God counts their righteousness the obedience of Jesus God says is their obedience and the sacrifice of Jesus has washed away all their sin the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and friends the thunder clouds of divine judgment holy anger and divine wrath never gather over the head of a believer they never have and they never will for there is no reason why they should there is therefore now no condemnation God does not threaten his believing people with hell in order to make them obedient to his will

God does not extort from an unwilling heart an unwilling obedience to his holy will you know when I was young I was as much a legalist as anybody I used to think to myself if I pray and I pray every night if I diligently ask for my forgiveness every night if I do this and I do that then I'm sure I shall be safe but yet you know in my heart of hearts there was some question is it really like that can it really be like that is it because of what I am doing is my peace a false kind of peace and it was it was just me satisfying my own conscience by a kind of diligent labour oh stand fast in the liberty wherewith

Christ hath made us free you know this freedom is a complete freedom so complete that Paul says to the Romans ye are not under the law but under grace God is not threatening the believer with his law God is not governing a believer's life by the threatening of his holy anger and I used to think when I was young I suppose if I want to be saved I have got to be religious I have got to do this and I have got to do that which my heart of hearts didn't really want to do I didn't really want to be religious and yet I was so afraid that I thought I had got to be and

I suppose I imagined in my young mind that if I was sufficiently religious then all would be well but you know I didn't want to be I found it a very irksome thing to think of all that I got to give up in order to be religious this is legality isn't it this is the old legal spirit at work you know many people seem to present a gospel in just that form or they're telling people they've got to do this and got to do that and they've got to do the other and then all will be well you know whatever a person does if it's not done from a right reason and a right spirit within it can never be right my people said the Lord shall be willing willing this is freedom they shall be willing in the day of my power it won't be a feeling you've got to do this and that and the other against your will liberty is doing what you want that's liberty and friends when

Jesus makes a man free he makes him so free that that man wants to do what is right he wants to do whatever the Lord directs he wants to do whatever the saviour command it's not at all a case of having to do things though deep down within you don't want to that's bondage that's forcing yourself into a kind of religious straitjacket that's bondage no friend when the saving power of Jesus Christ is known in a sinner's heart there is liberty freeness you read the acts of the apostles again when the gospel was so beautifully and simply and graciously and powerfully preached there was great joy in Jerusalem there was great joy in Samaria there was great joy in that

[37 : 59] Ethiopian eunuch's heart he went on his way rejoicing he didn't go on his way saying oh dear now I've got to spend the rest of my life being religious no oh may God deliver you and me from that terrible bondage stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free friends I hope too you will see this liberty set over against the bondage of fear and the bondage of uncertainty I touch upon very deep very mysterious things it is a work of the spirit indeed to bring us into this liberty but friends having been brought into this liberty having seen with that heavenly spiritual eyesight the Lord

Jesus Christ as your righteousness your peace your Lord your Master your Saviour let it be ever your concern to stand fast in that liberty that you then knew that you then rejoiced in and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage be sure of this men and Satan will be at work to get you entangled again into the yoke of bondage I was told not very long ago that in one of our chapels a minister got up and said that the Holy Spirit leads men to Christ for salvation and then he leads them back to the law for their sanctification now friends that's one reason why I preach from a verse like this stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith

Christ hath made us free the Holy Spirit does not lead a man back to the law for his sanctification the law was not intended to be and still is not intended to be the source of a man's holiness Christ is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption Christ is the source of holiness Jesus Christ the saviour of sinners is the grand source of divine power whereby a sinner lives a holy life stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free have you ever noticed the freedom of the new testament have you ever noticed the freedom of the worship of believers in the new testament have you ever noticed the freedom of the apostle Paul in his life and behaviour in the new testament have you ever caught a sense in your heart of the glorious liberty of the children of God why friend my heart sometimes goes out in great longing to God lord take me out into the field of liberty and set me free for brethren verse 13 we read for brethren ye have been called unto liberty

God's effectual calling his divine gracious voice my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me where do they follow him into bondage into legality no friends they follow him into liberty and if the son shall make you free you shall be free indeed free indeed oh there's a liberty there into which the lord leads his people that they may be free of fear and oppression and doubt and uncertainty I'm sure friend if you read the acts of the apostles and see what work of the holy spirit was accomplished there you will readily see what I mean there was a joy a joyful persuasion there was as

Paul says to the Romans joy and peace in believing that's the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free this is the work of faith that you believe on Jesus Christ whom God has sent there's the way of liberty there is no legal bondage but living a life of implicit whole hearted trust humble whole hearted confidence in another not in me not in my works not in my religious attainment not in my preaching even Paul said lest having preached to others I myself should be a cast away he saw that even that even his admittedly great attainments in the ministry were no ground of salvation no all those things were simply

[43 : 49] God's gracious gift God's gracious word the Holy Spirit's gracious influence upon him and in his heart and life you know one of the great causes of opposition to Paul was because those to whom he preached did not receive and could not receive the doctrine of liberty they couldn't see it the Jew was utterly blinded by all his rules and regulations they couldn't see it the veil is still over their face says the apostle they can't see they've never with open face behold the Lord Jesus Christ friends if God sweeps the veil away from your face and you see in Jesus

Christ all your salvation all your hope all your righteousness all your holiness all your strength what liberty that is another thing that troubled so many when Paul preached this doctrine was the suggestion that a man who was thus free would live a life of evil and sin it's as though people were saying now you take away the restraints off people and see how they behaved then now friends that would be true for instance if in our parliament it was decided that our laws the legislation of this land was outmoded and outdated and in such confusion that the best way to deal with it was to be crossing it all out and

I have no idea of the chaos and confusion that might follow why because friends men's hearts are not law abiding hearts but if men's hearts were law abiding hearts then you could cross out the law of the land and they wouldn't live any different would they now friends if God by his blessed spirit has brought you into the liberty of the gospel he has brought you into the liberty of wanting to do his will of wanting to do his will that's liberty walk in the spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh that's liberty walk in the spirit ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh and I sometimes think friend that people's idea of our sort of religion is that we fence people round with so many rules and restrictions and regulations and they're so afraid that if you take any of them away people will break out into all kinds of evil and wickedness words friends it is not so if those who have professed the

Christian name have abused that name by licentiousness it is not the fault of Christian doctrine it is the fault of their unconverted hearts it is their sin friends it is not the fault of this glorious doctrine of true, God-given, Christ-exalting liberty.

If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. You are not compelled by rules and regulations. You are not bound on every hand by this, that and the other which you bow to unwillingly.

[48 : 05] It is just, to put it as simply as I can, it is just the Saviour saying, follow me, follow me. And your heart responding with love and faith and saying, Lord, I would follow thee.

Oh, I would follow thee. Lead me, Lord. Lead me in what? Legality? No. Lead me in thy righteousness.

That's the way, friend. Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. And be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

We are not under the law. We are not under a system of regulations. We are free. We are free to obey. We are free.

You look in the, there isn't time now, but you look in the previous chapter how Paul speaks so emphatically of this freedom. You remember Abraham's domestic life.

[49 : 15] You remember how with human scheming he went in to his servant maid and a child was born as a result of that relationship.

They were working to try and fulfill God's promise. By a human scheme they thought they would attain to what God had promised.

But their working was of no avail. There comes the time according to divine appointment when both are past age and yet Sarah has a son.

Then there seems to be something like what we might call unpleasantness in the home. The son of the bondwoman is seen mocking the son of the free woman.

And Sarah turns in anger and says, the bondwoman and her child must be turned out of home. And poor Abraham is grieved and God says, it mustn't grieve you Abraham.

[50 : 24] You must do, in this case you must do what she says. And Paul takes this up, nevertheless what saith the scripture, cast out the bondwoman and her son.

You see, the bondwoman Hagar and her son were typical of those who are held in bondage and they are cast out.

So then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman. We are not children of the bondwoman. We are not working for our salvation.

We are not trying to fulfil a sister in order to gain God's blessing. no, we are children of promise.

We are children of the free woman. Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

[51 : 31] According to God's gracious purpose, according to God's gracious promise, the children of the free woman. Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. May the Lord add his blessing. Amen.