

Lecture 26

Faith vs. Works – Galatians 3:1-4:31

If we were to give the book of Galatians a subtitle, we might call it “Unshackled” because this book is meant to break every bond of legalism. Maggie gave us a good start last week as we looked at Paul’s emotions and saw his righteous anger begin to boil.

In 1:6 he said, “You’re turning to another gospel.” He told about his call to preach the gospel of grace to the Gentiles (which included the Galatians) and how the leaders in Jerusalem agreed he was “right on” so to speak. His conviction was so strong in this truth that he even confronted Peter’s hypocritical withdrawal from Gentile fellowship and closed chapter 2 by stating firmly, “If righteousness could be gained through the Law, Christ died for nothing!”

Now you can almost hear Paul’s voice go up an octave and picture his face becoming more livid as he opens chapter 3. “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” It’s now or never – you either understand what grace means and stand firm on that truth or you live your Christian life in shackles and bondage. What hangs in the balance is the emancipation of Christianity and the freedom that Jesus, the cornerstone of Christianity, purchased on the cross.

In the early days of Paul, there were three errors concerning Law and Grace; errors which have continued right up to today, even though the truth is clearly taught in Scriptures. These errors are:

1. Legalism – that’s the teaching that we are saved by works, by observing rituals and ceremonies and keeping the Law, whether it’s the Mosaic Law and the Ten Commandments or those laws and traditions established by some modern churches. One entire book is devoted to answering this divisive error and that is the Epistle to the Romans.
2. The second is called Anti-nom-ian-ism (a big word). That teaching says that because we are saved by grace it makes no difference how we live and behave. Again a New Testament book is devoted to answering this satanic error. It’s the book of James.
3. The third error is termed Galatianism. This false doctrine teaches that we are saved by grace and then afterwards KEPT by the Law, making our ultimate salvation dependent on our works rather than the grace of God. To combat this error, the Holy Spirit chose Paul to write the Epistle to the Galatians. It is the strongest argument that we are SAVED, KEPT, and finally REDEEMED BY GRACE, without works of the Law.

You can see, can’t you, how Galatianism is the most subtle of all the errors because man is incurably addicted to his own self-effort to be right with God. That’s why a

true, scriptural understanding of grace is THE MOST freeing, joyful experience a Christian can have. It is life changing to know, without a doubt in your heart, that the only law that binds us is the law of love.

How is the law of love summed up? In four statements:

1. We are free to do anything the Bible doesn't forbid.
2. We shouldn't do anything forbidden in the Bible – it's disobedience to God and only causes trouble for others and ourselves.
3. We should refrain from some perfectly legitimate things if they would cause unnecessary problems for another Christian or a non-Christian.
4. We shouldn't continue in any activity that could become a useless or destructive habit that would detract us from God.

The Holy Spirit helps each one us recognize what those activities are in our lives.

We've talked a lot about Judaizers and I'm confident that each one of you could define that we mean by that term. Just remember they were professing Christians, they accepted salvation by grace through faith, BUT . . . after that, it was necessary to adhere to the Mosaic Law and be circumcised to truly be a Christian.

Today Galatianism takes a little different slant and we're going to call it legalism because that's what it really is. So what is legalism as it affects us?

It can take the form of being a moralist (I'm saved by what I do or don't do); an intellectual (I'm saved by what I know); or an emotionalist (I'm saved by what I feel). Obviously, they are all at fault.

Why is legalism so dangerous? First, **it has no need for God**. Legalism is the search for innocence, not forgiveness. Let me say that again – the search for innocence, not forgiveness. It's a systematic process of defending self, explaining self, exalting self, and justifying self. The obsession with legalism? SELF, not God.

I came across a little poem that has some good "food for thought" when it comes to self and uniformity (which is what legalism seeks to enforce).

If everybody was just like me . . .

The world would surely be a better place to be.

There would be no murder, for I'm not violent.

No stealing, for I'm not a thief.

No adultery, for I'm happily wed.

No atheism, for I believe in God.

No ignorance, for I've been to school.

If only the world was more like me . . .

Surely it would be a better place to be.
Or would it?

For if everybody was just like me . . .

There would be no merry-go-rounds, for I get dizzy.
No clowns, for I'm self-conscious.
No doctors, for I hate blood.
No painters, for I'm colorblind.
No mechanics, for I can't fix a thing.
No home run kings, for I can't hit a curve.
No balloon riders, for I'm afraid of heights.

Come to think of it,

If the world were just like me . . .

It would be an awfully boring place to be!

So much for "cookie-cutter" Christians! God doesn't want them and we shouldn't expect them.

Second, **legalism has no pity on people and it's marked by a lack of love**, which should be the very identifying mark of a disciple.

- ❖ Legalism . . . makes my opinion your burden. There is only room for one opinion in this boat. And guess who's wrong?
- ❖ Legalism . . . makes my opinion your boundary. Your opposing opinion makes me question not only your salvation, but also your sanity.
- ❖ Legalism . . . makes my opinion your obligation. Christians must toe the church line. Your job isn't to think, it's to march to our tune, whether accompanied by an instrument or not.

So if that's what legalism is, then what is legalism not?

It's not the presence of law – otherwise God would be charged with promoting legalism since He's given man innumerable laws during human history.

It's not imposition of law on someone else or God would be a legalist of the highest order.

Charles Ryrie says, "Legalism is the wrong **attitude** toward the code of laws under which a person lives. Legalism involves the presence of law, but the wrong motive for obeying it and often the wrong use of power is evoked to keep it." He goes on to say, "Basically a wrong attitude may be defined as 'a fleshly attitude that conforms to a code for the purpose of exalting self.' Having to do something is not legalism, but doing it with the wrong attitude / motivation is."

God says, "Be holy for I am holy." So are we cultivating holy living because we love God and want to please Him with obedience, or does our attitude toward holy living become one that equates God's acceptance and love for us with our performance?

A legalistic view of justification says, "I must **add** to Christ's redemptive work on the cross for God to accept me into His family." And for sanctification, legalism says, "I must **do** certain things and not do others so God and my peers will think better of me." In both – the object again is self.

What caused the Galatians, and even Christians today, to so foolishly reverse their thinking and living after having come to Christ through grace? They began to flirt with a false gospel . . . one that makes more "sense" to the natural man (the flesh) that is addicted to doing rather than being. If you really want to put it in a nutshell, Legalism is actually a neatly disguised form of rebellion.

Paul is saying to the Galatians and to us, "How foolish to think that you can bring yourselves to a state of spiritual maturity in your Christian lives. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. Only He can do that for you."

Justification is the act of God removing from the sinner his guilt, and the penalty incurred by that guilt, and bestowing in us a positive righteousness, Christ Jesus Himself, in whom every believer stands, not only innocent and uncondemned, but also actually righteous in point of law for time and eternity. It doesn't matter if you "feel" righteous; God declared you the believer ARE righteous. Do you truly understand that? That is GRACE.

The law cannot punish a man twice for the same crime, and since Christ paid the penalty for our sins and satisfied the whole law, His righteousness is imputed to us and WE have satisfied the whole law. There is nothing else to satisfy. Christ is "the end of the law to everyone who believes." (Romans 10:4)

You've all heard TV ads for bill-consolidation loans. They give you one lump sum to pay off all your smaller bills. Christ's atonement for our sins worked in a similar way. With one gigantic sum (His death on the cross), He paid all our outstanding moral bills – past / present / future. But there is one tremendous difference – His payment is a gift not a loan and we need never –nor could we ever – repay. There's only one condition settling our sin-account: we must admit our sin-liability and ask the help of the only One who can pay our obligation. And since it's a gift, we must be willing to receive it.

If we are in Christ by faith, then we are Abraham's seed spiritually speaking. This means we are heirs of the spiritual blessings God promised to Abraham. This does not mean that the material and national blessings promised to the nation Israel are set

aside (Romans 11:13), but that Christians today are enriched spiritually because of God's promise to Abraham. This gives Christians new meaning for Old Testament Scripture. It shows us the spiritual lessons of the Old Testament have meaning for us today. In the Old Testament we have the preparation for Christ; in the Gospels the presentation of Christ; and in Acts through Revelation we have the appropriation of Christ.

The Law did not change the promise. God's covenant promise to Abraham involved justification by faith and having all the blessings of salvation through faith (Galatians 3:6-9). The wonderful truth is that the promise was made not only to Abraham, but also to the Seed – Christ. We are "in Christ" so we are heirs of the promise.

Clearly, the Law was to lead us to Christ and now that He has come, we are no longer under its supervision. And our memory verse reminded us that no one is more special than another when in Christ.

Well, in chapter 4, Paul explains their adoption 4:1-7; he laments their regression in vs. 8-11 and seeks their affection in vs. 12-18.

Since salvation comes through the Spirit and not flesh, and through faith not law, it's reasonable that we should continue in the Spirit and faith. The illustration of human birth is appropriate. Two parents are required for a child to be conceived and born and so there are two spiritual parents required for a child to be born into God's family – the Spirit of God and the Word of God (John 3:1-8 and 1 Peter 1:22-25). When a normal child is born, he has all he needs for earthly life, nothing more is needed to make him more "alive." When a child of God is born into God's family (we call that born again), he has all he needs spiritually; nothing needs to be added to give him eternal life. All that's necessary is that the child has food, exercise, discipline and cleansing that he might grow into maturity.

Paul may have been frustrated and angry with the Galatians backsliding into legalism, but he still loved these people. Oh how we hurt when those we love get off track, don't we? We parents never seem to outgrow our concern for our children and our grandchildren. When they're little they step on your toes, when they're grown, they step on your heart!

Of course, this relationship with the Galatians wasn't just a love that was a one-way street either. Paul comments on their compassion for him and how they would have torn out their eyes and given them to him. (Perhaps it was eye trouble that was Paul's thorn in the flesh.)

Today's lesson closed with the allegory about Hagar and Sarah. In the allegory there are two women: Hagar / Sarah; two sons: Ishmael / Isaac; two covenants: law /

grace; two mountains: Sinai / Calvary; and two cities: earthly Jerusalem / heavenly Jerusalem.

Hagar was the first to bear Ishmael. So too the Law was given first, before grace and truth were revealed in Jesus Christ. But the firstborn Ishmael was set aside, the younger son Isaac was the son of promise. The meaning is clear. The law that came first could not save and must be abandoned as a means of salvation and justification. We must be saved by grace alone. The first becomes last, and the last becomes first. The barren wife, Sarah, becomes fruitful while the woman of bondage, Hagar, is set aside. Grace superseded law. The Law cannot, nor was it ever expected to save a sinner. We will learn in our Exodus study next year that God gave the Law to PROVE that man could not be saved by works and that very realization should convince mankind to accept the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

The Law is perfect; that's why imperfect men cannot keep it. The Law is holy; that's why sinners are condemned by it. The Law is just and therefore cannot show mercy to the guilty for it would be a violation of justice. The perfect Law can only show the nature of sin. Galatians 3:10 reminds us, "Cursed is every one that does not continue in **all** things which are written in the book of the law."

One more thing to note – There was no compromise. Hagar and Ishmael were cast out. The break was permanent however painful to Abraham. You cannot compromise and blend them together. Hagar and Ishmael didn't make occasional visits to Abraham's home; it was a permanent break. Judaizers then and legalists today continue to try and reconcile them, but any such reconciliation is contrary to the Word of God. And remember, Hagar was not married again – God never gave Law to any other nation or people including His church. To try and wed Mt. Sinai and Calvary is to deny God's plan. Thank God the Christian is set free from the curse of the law and the control of the law!! "Cast out the bondwoman and her son." To attempt to mix Law and grace is to attempt the impossible. It makes for a frustrated, barren Christian life.

I know you understand all I've been saying about law and about legalism, but this is my last chance this year to really expand upon and try to clarify grace. **I am passionate that you do not leave this study without a clear understand of grace.** It's so much more than just unmerited favor.

The American church and Christians in it accept grace in theory but more often than not deny it in practice. We say we believe that the fundamental structure of reality is grace, not works – but our lives refute that faith. By and large, the gospel of grace is neither proclaimed, understood, nor lived. Everybody has their "list" of what constitutes a true Christian or what exempts us from having fellowship with one another. Too many Christians are living in the cold house of fear and isolation and not in a warm house of love.

We talk about acquiring virtue as if it were a skill that can be attained like good handwriting or a good golf swing. We focus on overcoming our weaknesses, getting rid of our hang-ups, and reaching Christian maturity. We sweat through various spiritual exercises as if they were designed to produce a Christian Charles Atlas, or perhaps a more modern example, an Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Though lip service is paid to the gospel of grace, many Christians live as if it's only personal discipline and self-denial that will mold the perfect me. Every Christian generation tries to dim the blinding brightness of the gospel of grace because it seems just too good to be true. We can't fathom that God loves me just as I am, and also knows me exactly as I am. Because of this, I don't need to supply any spiritual cosmetics to make myself presentable to Him.

One man said, "When I get honest, I admit I'm a bundle of paradoxes. I believe and I doubt; I hope and get discouraged; I love and I hate; I feel bad about feeling good; I feel guilty about not feeling guilty; I am trusting and suspicious; I am honest and I still play games." Isn't that true?

We have been given God in our souls and Christ in our flesh. Never confuse your perception of yourself with the "mystery" that you are fully and completely accepted. Whatever our failings may be, we need not lower our eyes in the presence of Jesus. Jesus doesn't come for just the super-spiritual, but for the wobbly and weak-kneed who know they don't have it all together and who aren't too proud to accept the handout of amazing grace. We can and should look at Jesus' eyes and see His deep understanding and gentle compassion.

Any church that will not accept that it consists of sinful men and women and exists for them, implicitly rejects the gospel of grace. It's true that the church must always disassociate itself from sin, but it can never have any excuse for keeping sinners at a distance and that includes sinners like us who disagree with us. Often hobbling through our church doors on Sunday morning comes grace on crutches – sinners still unable to throw away their false supports of works and stand upright in the freedom of being children of God. We need to encourage them, teach them to walk without crutches and, heaven forbid, don't handicap them even more with man's traditions promoted to the same level of authority as God's Word.

If we agree on the basics: Jesus is the Son of God, He was crucified for our sins, buried, resurrected, sits on the right hand of God and is coming again – then all else is not a test of fellowship and falls under grace. This is the only way the church will ever be united as Christ intended.

In essence the only thing God asks of us as Christians is that we be men and women of prayer, people who live close to God, people for whom God is everything and for whom God is enough. Should I say that again?

In essence the only thing God asks of us as Christians is that we be men and women of prayer, people who live close to God, people for whom God is everything and for whom God is enough.

Living by grace inspires a growing consciousness that I am what I am in the sight of Jesus and nothing more. It's His approval that counts. Listen and believe what He is saying to you –

"Has it crossed your mind that I am proud that you accepted the gift of faith I offered you? Proud that you freely chose Me, after I had chosen you, as your friend and Lord? Proud that with all your warts and wrinkles that you haven't given up? Proud that you believe in Me enough to try and try again? Are you aware how much I appreciate you for wanting Me? I want you to know how grateful I am when you pause to smile and comfort a child, how grateful for the hours you devote to learning more about Me, for the word of encouragement you pass on to your pastor, your visits to those shut-in, your tears for the hurting. What you did to them, you did to Me. You know, I'm sad when you don't believe that I have totally forgiven you or when you feel uncomfortable approaching Me. You're making what I designed to be so accepting, so difficult. A little child cannot do a bad coloring; nor can a child of God do a bad prayer. I love you – each and every one."

So I guess the question really boils down to this: "Do you really accept the message that God is head over heels in love with you?"

The answer is at the core of our ability to mature and grow in grace. If in our hearts we don't really believe that God loves us as we are, if we are still tainted by the lie that we can do something to make God love us more, we are rejecting the message of the cross. Those are strong words, my friends, but it is the truth!

I want you to be awakened to grace this year. There are four strategies I'm going to offer you on how to begin:

1. Keep standing firm in your freedom. Stand your ground. Ask the Lord to give you courage.
2. Stop seeking the favor of everyone. You're unwise to stay in situations where your conscience tells you it's not right. That's nothing more than serving men, not God.
3. Start refusing to submit to bondage. It's trying to be spiritual by performance.
4. Continue being straightforward about truth. That means to live honestly. If you don't agree, say so kindly but firmly. Be true to yourself and God. If you blow it, admit it. Nobody should expect perfection, but they should and do expect honesty.

5. Have the grace to let others be. Refusing to dictate to others allows the Lord to direct their lives. If they're wrong, He's capable of showing them truth. Even the godly disagree. Remember Paul and Barnabas? If you don't get your way, get over it, get on with life. Sometimes separation is the best solution and sometimes painfully it's the only solution.

I truly hope some of you are breaking through to freedom through this study this year. Certainly no one is more delighted than the Lord Jesus Christ. Stay at it. Never forget His words; "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Let's pray: Father, let the facts of your gift of grace settle deep into our souls. It's my sincere prayer in Jesus' name.