

15. Learning What it Means to be Called to Liberty

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn the difference between legalism and liberty. We saw that legalism is the result of trying to pressure people to follow the Old Testament law or to follow the rules of people. We saw that such teaching only brings new Christians into a new form of bondage. Instead, we are to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in liberty as they learn to be led by the Holy Spirit in their lives. That will be the focus of the next several topics.

In Galatians 5:1, we read, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” We begin by seeing that Christ has made us free. This is not something that will happen in the future but is something that has already happened. In John 8:32, Christ said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Then, John 8:36 adds, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” The night before He was crucified, Christ said that He is the truth in John 14:6. Later that evening, He said in John 16:13 that the Holy Spirit would guide the believers into all truth. When we accepted the truth of the Gospel and placed our faith in Christ, we were immediately set free. That is why we are told to stand fast in that liberty.

However, Galatians 5:1 warns that it is possible for a person to become entangled again with a yoke of bondage. That was exactly what had happened to part of the Galatians and that is the danger that faces every new or weak Christian. That is why it is so important to help our children learn how to help others grow in their spiritual lives so that they will not become entangled again with a yoke of bondage. In our last topic, we saw that the law can become a yoke of bondage to every new Christian. We saw a couple of topics earlier in Galatians 3:24-25 that the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ but after we came to Christ that we are no longer under the tutor.

The false teachers (Judaizers) were telling the new Christians in Galatia that they had to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law. Galatians 5:2-6 says, “Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be justified by law*; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” When a Gentile chose to be circumcised by the Jews, it meant that he was willing to join the Jewish religion and follow the Jewish law. Paul said that if they allowed the Judaizers to circumcise them and followed the Jewish law that Christ would profit them nothing because they were rejecting the death of Christ for sin.

Christ said that to accept circumcision from the Judaizers meant that they had not placed their faith in Christ and been set free from their sin. Such circumcision meant that they chose to make themselves a debtor to obey the whole law instead of putting their trust in Christ by faith. Paul said that such an action was really an attempt to be justified or made righteous by keeping the law. That would be a rejection of grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved

through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” The Judaizers were trying to earn their salvation by works and Paul said that would not provide salvation.

Paul pointed out that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision had any value. Instead, the Holy Spirit who came into our lives at the moment of true faith causes us to eagerly wait for the Lord because we know that we received His righteousness by faith. Paul said that true faith shows and reveals itself by love. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” We see that true faith is actually a response to the love of Christ. Because Christ comes into our lives at the moment of faith, our new nature is motivated by His love instead of the fear, guilt and shame that formerly controlled us. As a result, our lives will begin to show the love of Christ.

Galatians 5:7-9 says, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” The Galatians had started to grow in their new life in Christ until they had become confused by these false teachers. That confusion had hindered their spiritual growth and they had stopped obeying the truth. Today, many new Christians also stop obeying the truth. This actually happens for various reasons.

For many new Christians, they do not have a spiritual parent that helps them to understand the Word of God and provides them with an example to follow. 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 says, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” Instructors gave people rules to follow. In contrast, fathers give their children their own lives to follow as an example. Paul continually invited new Christians to follow his example. In the same way, we want to be an example to our physical and spiritual children and equip them to be an example to others. Then, they can see from our example what it means to be called to liberty.

The false teachers that had come into Galatia wanted to be instructors who told the new Christians what to do. In fact, they were telling them that they had to be circumcised and keep the whole Jewish law. Paul said that such false teaching was just like leaven. You put a little leaven in one corner of your bread dough and it quickly spreads to the entire lump of bread dough. Paul said that the legalism that the Judaizers were teaching would quickly spread and would hinder many people from coming to Christ by faith. That was why Paul had spoken so strongly in Galatians 1:9 when he said, “As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Paul made it very clear that anyone who taught that salvation could be obtained by works was accursed and faced eternal judgment.

Paul felt that the Galatians had demonstrated true faith in Christ when he had preached the Gospel to them. That is why Paul went on to say in Galatians 5:10, “I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.” Because Paul had confidence in the fact that the Galatians had true faith in Christ, his real concern

was for the fact that these false teachers were confusing the new Christians and hindering them in their spiritual growth. That is why he wanted them to realize that false teachers faced judgment because they were not true Christians at all.

The reason why Paul could have this confidence was due to the fact that he recognized that the Christians in Galatia had demonstrated true faith even though they were experiencing a period of struggle due to the false teachers. Here, we see one of the characteristics of a spiritual parent. A spiritual parent has spent enough time with new Christians to know that their faith is genuine. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 tells us, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” Paul had spent much time sharing his life with the new Christians.

We also see that Paul warned that each false teacher would bear his judgment. The word that is translated “bear” means *to carry on one’s self*. Paul wrote this letter to stop each false teacher from having any further impact on these new Christians. In Galatians 6:7-8, Paul wrote, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Paul knew that God was the One who would judge any false teacher.

In Galatians 5:11-12, Paul helped the Christians in Galatia to realize what it had cost him to preach the true Gospel. Those verses say, “And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” Paul helped the new Christians to realize that he would not have suffered and been stoned in Galatia if he would have been teaching the Galatians that they could be saved by keeping the law. In fact, Paul continued to suffer persecution wherever he went. Paul was able to do this with boldness even though it meant persecution because of the liberty that he had in Christ. He was motivated by the love of Christ instead of being controlled by the fear of those who were false teachers.

Paul said that the message of the cross is an offense to those who want to base their salvation on their own works. The cross is an offense because it leaves no room for the pride of man and his own self efforts. However, Paul was willing to preach the message of the cross even if it meant suffering. Truly, Paul chose to use his liberty in Christ to serve others. In the same way, we want to show our physical and spiritual children that we also want to use our liberty in Christ to serve others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children by your example how to serve other Christians in love.