

2. Understanding the Gospel of Grace – Part 1

Many Christians are controlled by fear in their lives. That is not the plan of the Lord. Instead, the plan of the Lord is to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be led by the Holy Spirit and to yield to the Holy Spirit, so that their lives will be filled with boldness as they serve the Lord. In order to help our children grow in understanding and boldness, we need to help them understand the Gospel of grace. This will be our focus in this topic and in the next three topics.

In Galatians 1:10-14, Paul told how he had taught the Jewish religion before he had placed his trust in Christ. Those verses say, “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” The first thing we see about the time when Paul taught the Jewish religion was that his teaching pleased the Jews. Paul said he could no longer seek to please people because he had become a bondservant of Christ.

This is an important difference to notice. As long as we seek to please people, we will be driven by fear. The reason for this goes right back to the third chapter of Genesis. In Genesis 3:7-13, we see that sin produced five changes in Adam and Eve that have affected every person since. They experienced separation from God. They experienced fear, guilt and shame within. Genesis 3:10 says, “So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’” Then, they began to blame. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. Those five changes have caused every person that has not placed their trust in Christ to be driven by fear. It is only as we help our children to put their trust in Christ and then grow in Christ that they learn to be led by the love of Christ.

Instead of trying to please people, Paul said that he was a bondservant of Christ. A bondservant is another word for a slave. When a person is a slave to another human being, that person is usually also controlled by fear. In contrast, when we become bondservants of Christ we begin to realize and understand the fact that Christ has set us free. John 8:36 says, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” As we grow in our understanding of this freedom, our lives become motivated by the love of Christ. 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 have a desire to live for Christ and serve Him because He has set us free from the bondage that came into the world as soon as Adam and Eve sinned.

Paul also said that the Gospel he preached was not according to men. Any religion that is based on works in an effort to try and earn salvation will always come from people. Paul said that the Gospel he preached had not been developed by any human person. Instead, Paul defined the gospel that he preached in Romans 1:16 where we read, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,

for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Here, we see that Paul preached the Gospel of Christ. He said that the Gospel of Christ has its source in the power of God. As a result, the Gospel of Christ produces salvation for all those who accept that Gospel. This includes both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul also said that he had received the Gospel that he preached by direct revelation from Christ. Paul explained where he received this direct revelation in Galatians 1:15-17 where we read, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Here, we see that Paul did not learn the Gospel from the other apostles. Instead, the Lord taught Paul for three years in the land of Arabia.

It was important for Paul to receive this personal training from the Lord because the Lord had called Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. If Paul would have learned the Gospel from the apostles, the apostles would have taught him how to develop good Jewish Christians that were zealous for the law. This is clearly seen by what the apostles said to Paul after he returned to Jerusalem after many years of sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles. Acts 21:19-21 says, “When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.’” In this verse, we see that the Jewish Christians were all zealous for the law because God had given circumcision to Abraham. Paul had to receive his instruction about the Gospel directly from the Lord or Paul would also have been zealous for the law and would have taught the Gentile Christians to follow the Jewish law.

However, because of the decision of the Jerusalem Council that is recorded in Acts 15, the leaders of the church at Jerusalem recognized that the Gentiles did not need to keep the Jewish law and all of the restrictions that went with the law. That was what made the Jews a separate people but that had nothing to do with the Gospel. In fact, after telling Paul that the Jews were all zealous for the law, the leaders of the church at Jerusalem then reviewed the decision that had been made by the Jerusalem Council. Acts 21:25 says, “But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” These four things were things that God said long before God called Abraham to become the father of nation of Israel. Notice when God spoke about these four things.

God showed the danger of making anything an idol when He did not respect the offering of Cain that was based on his own works. Genesis 4:4-5 says, “Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” Abel brought a blood sacrifice as a covering for his sin because he had faith in the promises of God. Cain brought a sacrifice that was the result of his own efforts of tilling the ground. By this action, Cain showed

that his idol was the works of his own hands.

God also warned about blood and things strangled in the early chapters of Genesis. Right after Noah and his family came off the ark God said in Genesis 9:4-6, “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. ‘Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.’” Here, we see that Noah and his family were told not to eat blood or any animal that still had its blood in it. An animal that was strangled would not have had its blood drained out of it so that was why both blood and things strangled were to be avoided.

The final prohibition for the Gentile Christians went clear back to the instructions that God gave to Adam and Eve when God brought Eve to Adam and performed the first marriage. Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” God said that in marriage two become one. They were not to violate this oneness by any form of immorality. God told Adam and Eve that people were to leave their parents and become one even though Adam and Eve had no human parents to leave. This shows that God established the principle of oneness that was not to be destroyed by any form of immorality.

Since most of the people of the world are Gentiles, it was important that Paul learned how to explain the Gospel to the Gentiles without adding any of the Jewish law to the Gospel. This is also important for us to understand as we teach our physical and spiritual children about the Gospel of grace. Today, many churches have added all kinds of rules and traditions to the Gospel of grace. As a result, many Christians end up in bondage to the rules of their church instead of enjoying the freedom that we have in Christ. That is why Galatians 4:30-5:1 says, “Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Christ wants us to help our physical and spiritual children understand what it means to be set free from the law.

Galatians 5:13 tells us why we have been given liberty when it says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” We have been set free to serve one another in love. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn what it means to be free to serve one another in love.