

Galatians 4 – Defending Grace

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We are in a sermon series on the book of Galatians called Freedom Through Christ. The letter to the Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul to a group of churches in a Roman province in Asia Minor, which is now Turkey. He wrote them because false teachers called Judaizers were teaching that to be made right with God, it is not enough to have faith in Jesus Christ; one must also obey the Law of Moses. This is the main issue Paul addresses in Galatians.

The Judaizers also declared that Paul was NOT an apostle, that he had had NO personal revelation of Christ. So Paul challenges this right from the start and he spends much of chapters 1 and 2 explaining why the Galatians should listen to him rather than the Judaizers.

Paul had to rebuild trust because the Judaizers had attacked his character, his credentials and his communication. He had to do that before he got into the real issue he was writing about, which I'm preaching on in a message called Defending Grace.

So he spends a big portion of chapters 1 and 2 sharing his testimony to prove that he was called by God and that his revelation of grace came straight from God, not from man. In Galatians 1:16-17 he said that after his conversation:

I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

Paul proves that he did not receive the gospel from the apostles, but he went to Arabia and Damascus for 3 years where I believe he received revelation directly from the Holy Spirit. Then Paul says in Galatians 2:1-2

Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.

Paul wanted to be sure his revelation was from God so he submitted it to the elders in Jerusalem for approval. He did not want to run his race in vain by teaching error. Paul goes on to say in Galatians 2:3-4

Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.

Notice that Paul calls these Judaizers false brethren who secretly came into the church. They did not come in with name badges that said, “False Brother.” What they said sounded right to the Galatians, but Paul had to oppose them because they opposed the gospel of salvation by grace alone.

One of the major issues in this contention was circumcision. The circumcision of Titus was a potential issue because **circumcision was the sign of initiation into the Jewish faith and the Mosaic covenant**. If a Gentile man wanted to become a Jew, he would start by being circumcised as an adult. That’s what the Judaizers were saying to the Galatians. But in verse 5 Paul says:

We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

Paul refused to compromise his message even for a moment. Many people today easily compromise their beliefs. They adjust them for each situation. But Paul did not do that.

And to add weight to what he was saying, Paul told the Galatians that the leadership in Jerusalem accepted Titus (a Gentile convert) even though he was not circumcised in accord with the Mosaic Law. This shows that the church leaders accepted the gospel of grace as Paul preached it. **Paul believed, and the leaders agreed with him, that circumcision had no bearing upon salvation and was not to be forced upon the Gentiles.**

In fact, Paul said **if the Galatians submitted to this, they would be submitting to a form of slavery**. Remember – the theme of Galatians is freedom through Christ. That was Paul’s message and he was not going to surrender to spiritual slavery for one moment and neither should we! And Paul wanted the Galatians to know that the leaders in Jerusalem were in agreement. We see this in Galatians 2:6-8

As for those who seemed to be important — whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance — those men added nothing to my message.

This is not a putdown, but a statement that the leaders in Jerusalem did not add anything to what Paul taught because they agreed with him.

7 On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.

I love this because it’s a great key to conflict resolution. **These days many people seem to think that the only way to resolve a conflict is for one person to be right and the other person to be wrong.** And if you don’t agree with them, they

write you off. It's true that sometimes one person is right and one person is wrong. But not all the time. Sometimes there is just a difference in emphasis or approach.

In this case, Peter and Paul recognized that they had the same gospel but a different people group they were reaching. **Paul was called to minister to Gentiles and Peter to Jews. They were dealing with different kinds of people who needed different approaches to reach them.** After they came to this understanding, Galatians 5:9-10 says:

James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

There are different beliefs about which trip to Jerusalem Paul was talking about here. Many scholars believe that it probably was when Paul visited in Acts 15. Acts 15 is one of the most pivotal chapters in the New Testament. It is the account of the first church council – convened to debate this very issue. It took place in AD 50 – about 18 years after Pentecost. Up to this time the church had been struggling against external enemies, violence, and persecution. But now the churches were at peace.

During this time of peace and prosperity and absence of external conflict, Satan changed his tactics. He saw that external violence could not destroy the church, so he tried to destroy it through internal dissension and strife. **By the way – nothing will ever destroy the church. Local churches will come and go – but the universal church will always exist and the gates of hell will not prevail against it!**

Whenever Satan wants to cause problems in churches – he uses religious people – those who are more into rules than relationship. That's what happened in Acts 15:1-2

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

These false teachers followed Paul around everywhere preaching the law. Paul and Barnabas were not circumcising the Gentile converts and they based the churches they planted on the principle that salvation is by faith through grace, not by keeping the law of Moses. So, they were constantly attacked by those who taught that you cannot be saved without keeping the Jewish law.

This was the issue – law vs. grace.

Some Christians from a Jewish background said that Gentiles could not be saved unless they made themselves Jews first and brought themselves under the Law of Moses. Their idea was that salvation in Jesus was only for the Jewish people, and Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians.

And there was a big dispute that resulted in Paul and Barnabas meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem. Acts 15:4-9 says:

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith."

God had already used Peter to welcome Gentiles into the church in Acts 10. And Peter said that when God led him to preach the gospel of Christ to Gentiles – non-Jews -- they received the Holy Spirit just like the Jews did on the day of Pentecost – even though they had not been circumcised and did not conform to the Law of Moses.

Therefore, **since God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile, but poured out the Holy Spirit on all – it was evident that keeping the ceremonial law was not necessary in order to be accepted by God.** God's plan of salvation was not based on keeping the law, but on trusting in Christ. There was much debate about this until Peter said in Acts 15:10-11

Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? No! We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.

James ended the conflict by saying that believers were not saved by keeping the law of Moses by saying this in Acts 15:21

For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.

And graceless pastors in graceless churches are still preaching Moses to this very day! But grace-based pastors understand the truth of John 1:17

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Lack of grace keeps you under the old covenant rather than the new.

The old covenant was based on outward obedience to the Law.

The new covenant is based in an inner change of heart.

The old covenant was based on what man did.

The new covenant is based on what Jesus did.

The Jerusalem council decided that Christians are not under Jewish law. But there is a modern-day group of Judaizers who teach that Christians are still under the Old Testament law and we must keep the Jewish Sabbath and feasts and dietary laws. They start judging people for eating bacon or going to church on Sunday or not calling God Yahweh or not calling Jesus Yeshua.

Listen - learning about Jewish roots of the church is good – we've taught that here. And if people want to celebrate the Jewish feasts or follow the Old Testament dietary laws or worship on Saturday – I think that's great!

But when it becomes a requirement of Christians - it results in putting people back under the Jewish law. We must resist these modern day Judaizers and their attempt to put Christians back under that law.

Listen to how Paul addressed this in Galatians 2:14-16

How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Colossians 2:16-17 says:

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Not only should we not let others judge us for these things, but Titus 3:9 also says: ***Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws. These things are useless and a waste of time.***

Do not buy into the false gospel that you need to keep the Jewish religious laws or add to the work of Christ on the cross to be saved.

The Law of Moses was made up of three types of laws:

Moral laws – how to live morally – includes the 10 commandments.

Civil laws – how the country and gov't of Israel should operate – and the Ceremonial laws – the ceremonies, holy days and sacrifices of Judaism.

The main ceremonial rite of the Jewish religion was circumcision. They believed if men weren't circumcised, they weren't saved.

Old Testament dietary laws do not apply to us – Old Testament law about how ancient Israel should be governed do not apply to us – but the moral laws of God apply universally to everyone everywhere!

Paul stood strong for the gospel that you don't have to become a Jew. **Salvation does not come from keeping the law of Moses. Salvation is God's gift received by your faith in Jesus.**

Peter said that adding anything to Christ would be putting a yoke of bondage on the disciples which the Jews themselves had not been able to bear. Yokes symbolize burdens. Yet, Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30

Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Jesus said His yoke was easy - so for these teachers to attempt to put a heavy yoke upon the neck of the Gentiles was a great injustice. Jesus came was to set people free from such bondage. **Freedom comes from being yoked to Christ, not the law.** Galatians 5:1 says:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

The yoke this is talking about is the yoke of keeping the law of Moses. Christ came to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the Judaizers wanted to re-enslave those whom He had made free.

Peter's conclusion was this: since the Gentiles, who did not keep any part of the law of Moses, have been born again and baptized in the Holy Spirit– it is obvious that keeping the law is no longer necessary for salvation. **All people - both Jews and Gentiles - are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is by Grace plus nothing!**

At this point in Acts 15, James, the brother of Jesus, speaks up and quotes from the Old Testament prophet Amos in verses 13-17

When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed His concern by taking from the

Gentiles a people for Himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things.'

This quotation seems out of place until you realize the main point was to show that the Old Testament prophets prophesied that the Gentiles would be accepted as children of God. Amos prophesied that God would restore the Tabernacle of David. For what purpose – just to bless the Jews? NO! God wanted to extend His love to others so that the rest of mankind could also partake of the grace and blessings of God.

God did not say He would restore the Tabernacle of Moses – which represented the law and separation from God's presence. He did not say He would restore the Temple of Solomon in all its glory and splendor. He said He would restore the Tabernacle of David – which was a simple tent sheltering the ark of the covenant where praise and worship was offered to God 24/7.

The Tabernacle of David represented grace because everyone could worship in the presence of God – not just the priests. This seems so out of place in Old Testament history – but the tabernacle of David was a prophetic picture of the new covenant of grace.

Since salvation for everyone by grace is a part of God's plan, it should not be opposed and resisted by us. A decision was made in the early church to serve Christ rather than Moses – we've got to make the same decision today.

The first church council in Jerusalem declared what was necessary to be a true Christian – faith in Christ – not keeping the law. Christ + nothing! Grace plus nothing! We must believe that and preach that today.

The Tabernacle of David is a call back to grace, rather than legalism.

A call to relationship with God, not just keeping rules.

A call to worship in spirit and truth, not working in the flesh to try to please Him. In fact, the Tabernacle of David shows us that it's NOT about our efforts at all!

When Jesus said "it is finished" it was finished and there's absolutely nothing you can add to it! Salvation is accomplished by grace plus nothing! The ability to enter God's presence is by grace plus nothing! Every blessing from God is received by grace plus nothing! Freedom is obtained by grace plus nothing!

The grace of God is sufficient and Jesus is enough! To believe anything else is to be put into a yoke of slavery, but Jesus came to set us free and whom the Son sets free is free indeed!