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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

“Are You Approved by God, or by Man?”

August 25, 2013

Sermon Text: Galatians 1

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55

Introduction-

What is this Book I am holding? What is this letter to the Galatians which we are studying? It is the Word of *God*. That is the very argument the Apostle Paul is making in his first words here. His gospel is not of man, but it is a

revelation from God through Jesus Christ.

What does this mean, that this Book is the Word of God? How do you view its words? What authority do they have in your mind and life?

Listen to John Calvin as he writes about the assurance that the Bible is God’s Word, and the implications of that fact:

“When that which professes to be the Word of God is acknowledged to be so, no person, unless devoid of common sense and the feelings of a man, will have the desperate hardihood to refuse credit to the speaker. But since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them.”

A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed - viz. that Scripture is of importance only in so far as conceded to it by the suffrage [the vote] of the Church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men.

These ravings are admirably refuted by a single expression of an apostle. Paul testifies that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets," (Eph. 2:20). If the doctrine of the apostles and prophets is the foundation of the Church, the former must have had its certainty before the latter began to exist. Nor is there any room for the cavil [argument] that though the Church derives her first beginning from thence [i.e., from the Apostles and prophets] it still remains doubtful what writings are to be attributed to the apostles and prophets, until her Judgment is interposed. For if the Christian Church was founded at first on the writings of the prophets, and the preaching of the apostles, that doctrine, wheresoever it may be found, was certainly ascertained and sanctioned antecedently [before] to the Church, since, but for this, the Church herself never could have existed.[70]

Nothing therefore can be more absurd than the fiction, that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church, and that on her nod its certainty depends. When the Church receives it, and gives

it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful or controverted but, acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bounds shows her reverence by an unhesitating assent.

As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that it came from God without recurring to a decree of the Church? it is just the same as if it were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their color, sweet and bitter of their taste.

4. It is necessary to attend to what I lately said, that our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose Word it is. The prophets and apostles boast not their own acuteness or any qualities which win credit to speakers, nor do they dwell on reasons; but they appeal to the sacred name of God, in order that the whole world may be compelled to submission.

The next thing to be considered is, how it appears not probable merely, but certain, that the name of God is neither rashly nor cunningly pretended.

If, then, we would consult most effectually for our consciences, and save them from being driven about in a whirl of uncertainty, from wavering, and even stumbling at the smallest obstacle, our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, Judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit.

.... the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted. This connection is most aptly expressed by Isaiah in these words,

"My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever," (Isa. 59:21).

Some worthy persons feel disconcerted, because, while the wicked murmur with impunity at the

Word of God, they have not a clear proof at hand to silence them, forgetting that the Spirit is called an earnest and seal to confirm the faith of the godly, for this very reason, that, until he enlightens their minds, they are tossed to and fro in a sea of doubts. 5. Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own Judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human Judgment, feel perfectly assured - as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it - that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God.

Nay, the modest and teachable reader will find a sufficient reason in the promise contained in Isaiah, that all the children of the renovated Church "shall be taught of the Lord," (Isaiah 54:13). This singular privilege God bestows on his elect only, whom he separates from the rest of mankind. For what is the beginning of true doctrine but prompt alacrity to hear the Word of God? And God, by the mouth of Moses, thus demands to be heard: "It is

not in heavens that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart," (Deut. 30:12, 14). God having been pleased to reserve the treasure of intelligence for his children, no wonder that so much ignorance and stupidity is seen in the generality of mankind. In the generality, I include even those specially chosen, until they are ingrafted into the body of the Church. Isaiah, moreover, while reminding us that the prophetic doctrine would prove incredible not only to strangers, but also to the Jews, who were desirous to be thought of the household of God, subjoins the reason, when he asks, "To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1). If at any time, then we are troubled at the small number of those who believe, let us, on the other hand, call to mind, that none comprehend the mysteries of God save those to whom it is given.

Calvin, John (2008-04-03). Institutes of the Christian Religion (Kindle Locations 1361-1468). Signalman Publishing. Kindle Edition.

As we come to this first chapter of Galatians, the Apostle Paul is anxious to show us these very things. His apostleship is not some office created by man, and his gospel is no word

invented by man. It is the Word of God.

NOTE: When we read the Bible, you and I, what is going on in our minds? What assumptions might be lurking? "The Bible says" = "God says."

1Th 2:13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Do you hear Him? Do you hear and know His voice?

Joh 10:3-5 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (5) A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Over and over again the Scripture calls to us: "Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says." Do you have ears to hear Him?

Listen then and *hear* this Word:

Gal 1:1-24 Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead-- (2) and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: (3) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, (4) who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, (5) to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

(6) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- (7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

(10) For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (11) For I would have you know, brothers,

that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. (12) For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (13) For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. (14) And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. (15) But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, (16) was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; (17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. (18) Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. (19) But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (20) (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) (21) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. (22) And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. (23) They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the

faith he once tried to destroy." (24)
And they glorified God because of me.

Let's see if we can give the main points of Paul's argument. Remember that his main thesis here is that the gospel he preached to the Galatians must be received by them because it is the Word of God, and it has been given to them by an Apostle of God.

1:1 – an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ

1:8 – a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you...

1:11 – the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel

1:12 – I did not receive it from any man...but through a revelation..

1:13-14 – Paul used to violently persecute the church, being extremely zealous in Judaism.

1:15-17 – But then this radical change. How do they explain it? It didn't happen because someone got hold of him and changed his mind because he actually isolated himself. He went away into Arabia.

1:18-20 – And 3 years later when he did go up to Jerusalem, he did not go and receive the gospel he preaches

from the church leaders there. He only same Peter and James.

1:21-24 – He preached through Cilicia and Syria, still not having been among the churches in Judea, and they rejoiced in what he was preaching, saying "*He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.*"

In other words, (and his argument will continue on through chapter 2), Paul's gospel is not man's word. It is God's Word and it was revealed to Paul by Christ. Not only was the "data" of the gospel given him, but the Father "revealed His Son" to Paul (vs 16). This is regeneration. Paul heard, and Paul believed because he "saw" Jesus to be Lord. This is an essential in indispensable work that the Lord must effect in us if we are to hear and believe His Word.

Let's go back now to verses 6-10 and move in for a closer look. Listen once more:

Gal 1:6-10 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- (7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from

heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (10) For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Paul is shocked! He marvels that after his ministry to them such a short time before, after the powerful moving of the Spirit of God among them so that it was as if THEY had been there at the Cross:

Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

...they are so quickly deserting. Along had come these false teachers whose “gospel” added works to faith, and the Galatians were buying into it.

Notice these points:

1. There is no other gospel. If man is going to hear good news from God, the gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul preached—the message of forgiveness of sins through faith in

Christ alone – is the only such good news. All else is bad news.

2. While he admonishes the Galatians for their foolishness, he reserves his wrath for the real culprits – the false teachers. Notice what he says about them as he exposes their motives and pronounces them cursed by God:

“there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”

“If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”
(1:10)

And –

“If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (vs 1:10b)

“Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery –“ (2:4)

“They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.”
(4:17)

“It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted

for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.’ 6:12-13

Behind it all, you see, was these false teachers’ desire for self-glory. They used flattery to gain the Galatians’ loyalty, only then to bring them into spiritual bondage once again. And the Galatians had fallen for it.

Beware the flattery of man. It is a bait and switch tactic to draw us in and then enslave us to a false message supposedly from the Lord.

In addition, these false teachers had “tweaked” the gospel so that it was no longer objectionable to the Jewish powers in Jerusalem, and thus there was no persecution for those who followed and taught it.

No wonder Paul pronounces them cursed by God! Twice! Anathema!

2. The gospel not only is not from man, but it does not please man –

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (1:10)

We have already heard Paul say that one motive of the false teachers in distorting the gospel was to make it a message that would not result in them being persecuted.

Let’s spend some time thinking this through.

God’s way of salvation in Christ is alien to man. In fact, it is more than strange to man. It is *hateful and obnoxious* to him. That is why those who preach it and believe it are persecuted. If being popular with everyone is your goal in life, then following Christ is not for you!

Listen again:

“If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (10:b)

This should drive each of us to some very serious self-examination before God. What am I trying to do? What are you trying to do? In our profession of Christ? What is it that we are after? Because if our motive is to somehow seek man’s approval, then we have gone very, very wrong and we don’t belong to Christ. The two things are mutually exclusive.

Many professing Christians make their profession, and even become very zealous about it, and yet do not belong

to Christ because their goal is really to be popular with man. That is, to be popular with the world.

This necessarily means that any person who is seeking man's approval MUST adhere to and proclaim a 'gospel' that is not the gospel of Christ! Because Christ's gospel is hated by man.

1Th 2:1-6 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. (2) But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. (3) For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, (4) but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. (5) For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness. (6) Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

I want to ask each of you a very serious question:

***Have you ever suffered for Christ?
Has the gospel that you claim to believe ever resulted in loss to you?
Have you ever been shamefully treated because you follow Christ?
Are you pleasing to most everyone?***

Men and women, young people and children, *look at Jesus!* What was His experience in this world? Now, you say that you follow Him? So what is your experience? Do you suffer loss because of Him? Are you hated because of Him? If not, then let me ask you this:

"How is it that you seem to have found a way to walk in Christ's footsteps, and yet not go where He went? Namely, to the cross?"

How is that? Are you better than Christ?

Mat 10:21-25 Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, (22) and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (23) When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (24) "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant

above his master. (25) It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

Joh 15:18-21 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (20) Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. (21) But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Galatians 1:10 then becomes a serious fork in the road point for every single one of us. Christ or the world? Christ or a façade? Christ's gospel or a fake one that is popular with the world? I suggest to you that the majority of people who claim to be Christians are in fact just wearing a mask that is not Christ at all.

Is that too radical of a claim? Well, consider:

Luk 13:23-27 And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, (24) "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (25) When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' (26) Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' (27) But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'

Let's rephrase verse 10 to zero it right in on each of us. Insert your name in the blanks:

" _____ , are you now seeking the approval of man, or of God? _____ , are you trying to please man? Because, _____ , if you are trying to please man, you are not a servant of Christ."

Fundamentally, you see, this is the fork in the road that we all face every day. Many people become church members simply because they want to please others. Somehow they think that the road to heaven can be paved

with all sorts of pleasantries. There are churches that will give that to them. But then, in God's view, those are not churches at all.

Behind me is the baptistery. Some of you were baptized in it. You professed Christ. You went down into the water and were buried. You rose up out of the water – a kind of resurrection. Baptism visibly portrayed your declaration that by faith in Christ you died in Him and were raised in Him a new creation.

Now, when you were baptized into this new life in Christ, what did you think? In many eras of church history and in many places in the world today, you would have had to have been baptized secretly. Why? Because to be a Christian would mean death. To stand for Christ's truth would, and does, mean that you will be hated.

Gal 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Men and women, *does God approve of you?* You cannot please people AND serve Christ. This points us to still another proof that the gospel Paul preached, that we have recorded for us here in Scripture, is not man's invention.

Approved by God. There is the "stamp" we must each end our earthly lives with – at all costs.

2Co 5:9-10 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.