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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.

### ***“The Bewitching of Galatia”***

**August 4, 2013**

**Sermon Text:** Galatians, selected

**Scripture Reading:** Acts 14

#### **Introduction-**

*“The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.”*

Thus spoke Luther, who considered Galatians the best of all the books in the Bible. It has been called ‘the battle-

cry of the Reformation, the great charter of religious freedom, the Christian declaration of Independence.’ It is important because in any age it answers the basic question asked by the human heart: ‘How can I find true happiness? How can I obtain peace, tranquility, freedom from fear?’ [Taken from Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary].

“For all those who are willing to take God at his word, Galatians shows the way to true freedom (5:1). That genuine liberty is neither legalism nor license. It is the freedom of ‘bondage to Christ’. It consists in becoming a captive in his train, that is, surrendering oneself to God Triune as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ unto salvation. It is discovered when one is willing to desist from every attempt to save oneself, and to accept Christ Jesus as his Lord and Savior, glorying in his cross alone (6:14) and trusting in him as the fulfiller of the law (3:13). For all those who have by

God's sovereign grace been led to do this, the law ceases forevermore to be the means of attaining happiness now or the ticket to heaven when death arrives.

Guided by Christ's Spirit, the redeemed, out of gratitude for the salvation which they have thus received as a gift, begin to adorn their lives with 'the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control. Now fear has fled. Lust has vanished as a guiding principle. The prison-door has been opened. The air is exhilarating, invigorating. True freedom at last has been found. The sinner has been reconciled to his God. He is walking by the Spirit. Not only has he *found* the blessing, but he has also *become a blessing, for it is through him that God blesses the world.*"

***Legalism, libertinism, or true liberty, that was the question then. It is the question also today.*** [Hendriksen]

### **Who Were the Galatians?**

We know, obviously, that the letter is addressed to people called "The Galatians." But that term has two meanings. It could be referring to Galatia proper with its more racially uniform population of people descended from the Gauls, or, it could

refer to a larger area that was a Roman Province which would included other cities and people further south.

Cities in the Southern Portion of the Province (visited by Paul on 1<sup>st</sup> mission journey, Acts 13-14)

- Antioch (in Pisidia)
- Lystra
- Iconium
- Derbe

-or-

Cities in the Northern Portion of the Province (More racially uniform, Gauls)

- Pessinus
- Ancyra
- Tavium

This question is debated, and it relates to the date when Paul wrote the letter. It has other implications for interpreting Paul's words as well. The Northern Galatian theory, and the Southern Galatian theory.

William Hendriksen subscribes to the Southern Galatian theory, i.e., that "Galatians" in Paul's epistle is referring to the inhabitants of the entire Roman province of Galatia, including the southern cities, rather than that group of primarily Gallic people (descended from the Gauls who came

into the region from Gaul in Europe) centered in the northern part of the province.

His summary of the argument for the Northern theory is as follows:

1. “Galatian” has the primary meaning of “Gauls,” not “people who live in the province of Galatian.” This is how the term was used in ancient times. Convincing proof that Paul was using the term in a different way (ie, to mean the people who lived in the larger province of Galatia) is lacking. Ancient biblical interpreters all understood that the term “Galatians” refers to the Gauls of Galatia proper (ie, in the northern part of the province of Galatian),

2. Fickleness has always been an outstanding trait of the Gauls, and this character is apparent in the people Paul calls the Galatians. They welcomed him and his gospel readily (4:14-15) but quickly were swayed by false teachers (3:1-4, “Oh, foolish Galatians...”).

3. Acts 13-14, describing Paul’s ministry to the cities in the south (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Pisidian Antioch), does not agree in detail with how Paul describes his reception among the Galatians, or the circumstances in which he had come to them. Paul says:

You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. (Gal 4:13-14)

And yet in Luke’s account of Paul’s missionary journey to the southern Galatian towns, there is no mention of this ailment at all.

4. Luke, in Acts, does not use the word “Galatia” until Paul leaves the more southern cities of Derbe, Lystra, and so on and turns *northward*.

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. **And they went**

**through the region of Phrygia and Galatia,** having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (Act 16:1-6)

5. The epistle to the Galatians is written to people who were entirely or almost exclusively *converts from the Gentile world* –

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. (Gal 4:8-11)

And,

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. (Gal 6:12)

So they were people who had never been circumcised. They could not have been Jews. But the churches that were established in the southern part of the Roman Province of Galatia (where

Paul visited, Acts 13-14) consisted of both Jewish and Gentile people and the Jews may even have been dominant.

Act 13:43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

And,

Act 14:1 Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

The opposition, adherents to the southern Galatian theory (maintaining that the Galatians to whom Paul is writing are those of Acts 13-14), conclude that “Galatians” means the people of the larger Roman province called Galatia. Some of the primary arguments in support of this theory is:

- It was to the churches of *south* Galatia which the regulations of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) were delivered.

Act 15:30-31 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they

delivered the letter. (31) And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

- Barnabas is mentioned 3 times in Galatians (2:1, 9, 13) and he had worked with Paul in *south* Galatia.
- There is a lack of information in Acts about the North Galatian churches (Guthrie, NT Intro). It is strange that if Paul is writing to the people of North Galatia in his epistle, to counter an important and dangerous false teaching there, that there is no mention of his original ministry in that area in Acts.
- If Paul were suffering at the time from a severe physical ailment and that is the reason he visited the Galatians, the southern regions are more probably because the northern area is in difficult country.
- It was Paul's habit to use the names of Roman provinces when he addressed or spoke of churches in those provinces. The churches of Achaia, Asia, Macedonia, etc.

Most modern scholars lean to the South Galatian theory – that Paul's epistle is addressed to those churches

and towns where he ministered as described in Acts 13-14, and later.

As to the date Paul wrote Galatians, as you can imagine there has been much debate as well. The Northern theory party requires a bit of a later date than the Southern, but it does appear that Galatians is likely the very first of Paul's epistles that has been preserved. Most likely it was written sometime around 49-60 AD.

### **Why Did Paul Write Galatians?**

Whenever and wherever Christ's gospel is proclaimed, the enemy can be counted upon to distort and oppose it. Paul, if we adhere to the southern Galatia theory, had preached the gospel in Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Pisidian Antioch. He and Barnabas had been sent out-

Act 13:1-3 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (2) While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (3) Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

The response they got from the people when they preached was –

Act 13:48-52 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (49) And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. (50) But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. (51) But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. (52) And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

And-

Act 14:19-23 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. (20) But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. (21) When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, (22) strengthening the souls of the

disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. (23) And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

There was great celebration when they returned to home base at Syrian Antioch and made their report:

Act 14:25-28 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, (26) and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. (27) And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. (28) And they remained no little time with the disciples.

It was about this time (Acts 15) that false teachers came on the scene –

Act 15:1-6 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (2) And after Paul and

Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. (3) So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. (4) When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. (5) But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." (6) The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

Paul and Barnabas and others personally delivered the letter from the Jerusalem Council which countered the claims of the false teachers:

Act 15:22-35 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, (23) with the following

letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. (24) Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, (25) it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (26) men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. (27) We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. (28) For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: (29) that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." (30) So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. (31) And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. (32) And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and

strengthened the brothers with many words. (33) And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. (34) [*But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.*] (35) But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

So what we have here in this letter to the Galatians is Paul dealing with the same kind of error that had crept into these Galatian churches where he had ministered. Word was out. Paul's gospel announced that salvation was by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone. "Certain men" who apparently believed Christ was the Messiah, nevertheless demanded that if anyone was to be saved, they must still be circumcised. They must be a Jew. Salvation was still wrapped up in Moses and the Old Covenant. The Law had to be kept. Listen to Hendriksen explain-

"...among those who heard the news [about the fruit of Paul's ministry] there were also some nominal converts from the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5). In common with the disciples of the Lord, all Pharisees believed in the resurrection from the dead. In addition, the Pharisees mentioned here in Acts 15:5 may have been impressed by the strength of the evidence for Christ's

resurrection., and by the indisputable grandeur of his miracles, and may for these reasons have joined the followers of the Nazarene. But at heart they remained Jewish legalists. They were convinced that it took more than simple faith in Jesus to be saved; and that strict observance of Jewish ceremonies, was also necessary.

So, when news of the conversion of the Gentiles *apart from the work of the law, and especially apart from the necessity of receiving circumcision*, reached the ears of these men, off to Antioch they went, with a protest in their hearts and an ultimatum on their lips. Arrived in the city, they hesitated not a moment to announce to the startled, mostly Gentile, congregation, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' (Acts 15:1)."

The freedom of the gospel freaks legalists out. They can't stand it, and they have to rush right out and put a stop to it. Their problem, besides craving to control others, is that their entire concept of the New Covenant in Christ is warped. They miss the radical nature of it. And they do something else – listen to Hendriksen again-

"This stern pronouncement (that circumcision is required for salvation) must have caused considerable consternation and alarm. The church



decided to do something about it, encouraged no doubt by the growing and well-founded suspicion that these trouble-makers had not been authorized to deliver this scare-fomenting message (see Acts 15:24). And so it was agreed to refer the matter to a General Conference at Jerusalem, that is, to the apostles and elders. Paul refers to this council in Galatians.”

Despite the clear authority and pronouncement of this council, the trouble-makers were not going to give up. We call them Judaizers. They followed along wherever Paul went, trying to tear down the work that he had done in each place. They drew Peter in at one point and started to do the same with Barnabas-

Gal 2:11-13 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (12) For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. (13) And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

On through Galatia they go, spreading their poison. And, as false teachers always do, they work

to discredit Paul and the real gospel. Paul confronts them and exposes their true motives in his epistle:

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

Gal 6:13 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.

This was all very frustrating and troubling to Paul because many of the Galatians believed these guys! O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?

Hendriksen summarizes this matter of the purpose of Galatians-

“The occasion which prompted Paul to write this letter was the sinister and, to some extent, successful influence which Judaistic trouble-makers were exerting upon the churches of South Galatia. And the purpose was to counteract this dangerous error by re-emphasizing the glorious gospel of free grace in Christ Jesus: justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law, and to urge those addressed to adorn their

faith and prove its genuine character by means of a life in which the fruit of the Spirit would be honored.”

tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

### The Dangers We Face Today

Nothing has changed when it comes to assaults upon the truth of the gospel and attempts to rob us of the freedom that Christ gives us. We are threatened all around us by-

- Libertinism
- Legalism

The libertine proclaims the message that repentance is not necessary to be saved. These kinds of people are often all bubbly and excited and quite readily embrace anyone who claims to have believed in Christ. Their message announces a false freedom that really is nothing but the same old bondage to sin. They open the church doors to evil and dangerous people:

Rev 2:18-20 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. (19) "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. (20) But I have this against you, that you

This kind of person pronounces people to be saved even though they habitually pursue and practice sin.

But it was the legalist that threatened the truth of the gospel in Galatia. Today it is still with us, though in different forms. We don't hear people telling us we have to be circumcised and become a Jewish proselyte. But the poison comes at us still.

In older days, perhaps, legalism was easier to spot. A Christian must not do this or that. A Christian is never to drink alcohol of any kind, or see a movie or....you can fill in the list. Anyone who smoked a cigarette was surely not a Christian.

But I want to warn you about a more sinister and subtle form of legalism that threatens our freedom today, and which warps the gospel and even our very concept of God. I suppose I would call this form of false gospel –

## ***Shaming***

The religion of the Pharisees always uses shame to oppress and control. Think for example of how the Pharisees viewed Gentiles or women or the lame or blind or the poor. To belong to one of those classes was to be shame-ridden, and shamed *by the very people who you were taught to believe represented God!* So, that is what you think God thinks of you.

The Galatian Judaizers of our day love to tell us what we should or should not do. They are not satisfied to leave this up to the Spirit working in the believer. With a cold, judging, lack of empathy, they pronounce their judgment upon us.

- What you did was wrong (even if the action in question was a matter of conscience)
- You need to....
- Are you sure that you....?
- And....on and on

One of the chief characteristics of a Judaizer is that you can *feel* them. They make you feel shamed and they make you feel fear. You are never at ease when they come on the scene. You never feel good enough. And because they are *religious*, they want you to believe

that this is the way you should feel when you think about God. They intimidate and they bully.

2Co 11:1-4 I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! (2) For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (3) But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (4) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

2Co 11:20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

Notice the following very carefully:

Gal 6:12 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.**

See it? Paul identifies a chief motive here of the legalist. Legalism is a system that makes sense to the world. It makes sense to false religions. Do this. Don't do that. God approves. God disapproves. Performance based. Shame and fear motivated. And because the world approves of it, there is no persecution, especially from the established false religion of the day.

And so the real gospel is a terrible threat to such people, and they set out to force everyone else to conform to their system, or they will be pushed outside.

Let me illustrate this fear and shaming that modern day Judaizers do by reading this description of what is called workplace *mobbing*. [from Wikipedia]:

In the book *MOBBING: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace*, the authors identify mobbing as a particular type of bullying that is not as apparent as most, defining it as "...an emotional assault. It begins when an individual becomes the target of disrespectful and harmful behavior. Through innuendo, rumors, and public discrediting, a hostile environment is created in which one individual gathers others

to willingly, or unwillingly, participate in continuous malevolent actions to force a person out of the workplace."

Victims of workplace mobbing frequently suffer from: adjustment disorders, somatic symptoms (e.g., headaches or irritable bowel syndrome), psychological trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression. In mobbing targets with PTSD, Leymann notes that the "mental effects were fully comparable with PTSD from war or prison camp experiences. Some patients may develop alcoholism or other substance abuse disorders. Family relationships routinely suffer. Some targets may even develop brief psychotic episodes, generally with paranoid symptoms. Leymann estimated that 15% of suicides in Sweden could be directly attributed to workplace mobbing.

See it? The legalists were swooping into the churches of Galatia and *mobbing* the new believers there. Conform or get out!

But never forget this:

Act 15:22-26 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas,

and Silas, leading men among the brothers, (23) with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. **(24) Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,** (25) it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (26) men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

never let anyone "should" that freedom away from us.

The legalist acts as if he has God's authority. But he doesn't. Christ has not sent him. Such people "trouble us with words and unsettle our minds." But they are not speaking truth, they are not of Christ.

The Apostle Paul then, an apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father...sets out then to expose these false teachers and to expose their false gospel for what it is, no gospel at all and in fact, anathema before God.

And he will remind us what the gospel really is, what the freedom is like that it brings, and how we must strive to