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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.

***“Law and Gospel”***

**October 20, 2013**

**Sermon Text:** Galatians 2:19-21

**Scripture Reading:** Exodus 19:16-20:26

**Introduction-**

2 Corinthians 3:1-6 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? (2) You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known

and read by all. (3) And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (4) Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. (5) Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, (6) **who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

“Paul in terming the Gospel a ‘ministration of the spirit’ would call attention to its power to produce in the hearts of men an effect wholly different from that of the Law: it is accompanied by the Holy Spirit and it creates a new heart. Man, driven into fear and anxiety by the preaching of the Law, hears this Gospel message, which, instead of reminding him of God’s demands, tells him what God has done for him. It points not to man’s works, but to the works of

Christ, and bids him confidently believe that for the sake of his Son God will forgive his sins and accept him as his child.

And this message, when received in faith, immediately cheers and comforts the heart. The heart will no longer flee from God; rather it turns to him. Finding grace with God and experiencing his mercy, the heart feels drawn to him. It commences to call upon him and to treat and revere him as its beloved God. In proportion as such faith and solace grow, also love for the commandments will grow and obedience to them will be man's delight.

Therefore, God would have his Gospel message urged unceasingly as the means of awakening man's heart to discern his state and recall the great grace and lovingkindness of God, with the result that the power of the Holy Spirit is increased constantly.

Note: no influence of the Law, no work of man is present here. The force is a new and heavenly one— the power of the Holy Spirit. He impresses upon the heart Christ and his works, making of it a true book which does not consist in the tracery of mere letters and words, but in true life and action.

In this teaching you see no more the empty letters, the valueless husks or

shells of the Law, which unceasingly enjoins., “This thou shalt do and observe,” and ever in vain. You see instead the true kernel and power which confers Christ and the fullness of His Spirit.

In consequence, men heartily believe the message of the Gospel and enjoy its riches. They are accounted as having fulfilled the Ten Commandments. John says (Jn 1: 16-17): “Of his fullness we all received, and grace for grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John's thought is: The Law has indeed been given by Moses, but what avails that fact? To be sure, it is a noble doctrine and portrays a beautiful and instructive picture of man's duty to God and all mankind; it is really excellent as to the letter. Yet it remains empty; it does not enter into the heart. Therefore it is called “law,” nor can it become aught else, so long as nothing more is given.

[Law and Gospel, Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). The Martin Luther Collection: 15 Classic Works]

You see then that this epistle to the Galatians is also about Law and Gospel. The letter chiseled in stone and the gospel written on hearts by the Spirit. One is a ministry of death. It kills and condemns. The other is a

ministry of life and justification. We must never confound the two.

Galatians 2:19-21 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. (20) I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (21) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Let's summarize these 3 verses again before we move on.

First, the Law of God no longer condemns the Christian. Why? Because we have *died to it*. By the Law's own instrumentality, we were put to death. We died to our own self-reliance in seeking justification before God by our own works. The Law showed us that the sinner is entirely unable to meet its demands of perfect obedience.

And we died in another way. We died by being crucified with Christ. We are so united to Him that His death is our death. Our sins, our debt, were nailed to the Cross in the Person of Christ who became cursed by God's Law for us.

This death through and to the Law is indispensable if a person is to ever live to God. "...so that I might live to God." You cannot be raised up in resurrection as a new creation unless you have first died.

Second, because the Christian has been crucified with Christ, Christ has now become the defining principle of who we now are. We are no longer who we were, but now we are – Christ! The old ME is no longer animating and motivating and leading us. Christ is. This life, though I still live in a flesh and blood body, has come about by faith alone in the Son of God alone. Not by works of the Law.

We live to God, we walk before God, we are in the presence of God – entirely because of faith in Christ. His Spirit dwells in us, and we are not consumed. We live! All because of Christ. All because He loved us and gave Himself for us. Not because of any supposed good we had done.

Here is the key then to real self-esteem! Here is the remedy to shame and guilt. God, the creator of the universe, the One who at any given split second perfectly knows the innermost thoughts of every single human being on the planet, the One whose holiness is so perfect that He is a consuming fire to any creature with the slightest stain of sin, this God

*loved me. He loves me.* And He gave himself on the Cross for me. Freely. All I need do is believe all of this.

Let's see if we can get a better grasp on this and it will help us appreciate verse 21 more. Let's consider you. And let's say that you are one of those street urchin kids in a Dickens setting in old London. You are:

- Ignorant
- Rude
- Filthy
- Detested
- Penniless
- Unloved
- A thief

And you believe it all. An object of contempt and scorn, and you really view yourself in that way. Parents? Forget that. You have no idea.

Now, let's say that one day a very wealthy man happens along your way. You are used to being shunned, cursed at, and detested. But this man is different. He pauses, looks at you begging, and asks you if you are hungry. Where is your home? Your family? Then, he takes you by the hand and actually *touches you*, and invites you to come along with him.

And so begins your transformation.

You become his. You are adopted. Given his name. Made his heir. You live in his mansion. You are dressed now in the finest wardrobe.

You are no longer the person you used to be.

It takes you some time to get used to the new you. Maybe the first few nights you slept on the floor instead of in your own bed. Maybe you secretly put some food from the table in your pockets. Maybe you were waiting for your new father's wrath to lash you any second. And you had to learn some new things – like bathing, or manners, and so on. Your manner of speech needed some work, as did your relations and behavior toward other people.

But perhaps the most difficult thing for you to grasp, and the thing you had to wrestle with, is that the whole thing, this whole new life, was *free*. Nothing had to be earned by you. There was no catch. Your new father has paid it. *He loved you, and gave himself for you.* Certainly not because of anything you had done or not done. But simply that he was such a person.

This is what God has done for us, for you, in Christ.

Now, imagine a bit more. Let's say that a servant at the mansion next door

happens by you one day while you are out walking, and he begins to tell you that your new condition is too good to be true. There is no way this can all be free. You are going to have to start doing some things or you are going to get disowned sooner or later.

Would you listen? You shouldn't. But would you? *Not if you had grasped that the life I now live I live by faith in my new father who loved me and gave himself for me.*

This was the Galatians problem. They believed the false teachers because they didn't get the full impact of this. Christ loved them. It's free. It's done. He gave *Himself*. Believe it. That's all. Believe in Him as our righteousness.

### **Don't Reject the Grace of God**

Galatians 2:21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Paul announces that he will never make void the grace of God. He will say or do nothing that would declare God's grace in Christ, the gospel, worthless. And then he makes this sobering statement:

*"...for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."*

Here is Luther on this verse:

Did Christ die, or did He not die? Was His death worth while, or was it not? If His death was worth while, it follows that righteousness does not come by the Law. Why was Christ born anyway? Why was He crucified? Why did He suffer? Why did He love me and give Himself for me? It was all done to no purpose if righteousness is to be had by the Law. Or do you think that God spared not His Son, but delivered Him for us all, for the fun of it?

Before I would admit anything like that, I would consign the holiness of the saints and of the angels to hell. **To reject the grace of God is a common sin, of which everybody is guilty who sees any righteousness in himself or in his deeds.** And the Pope is the sole author of this iniquity. Not content to spoil the Gospel of Christ, he has filled the world with his cursed traditions, e.g., his bulls and indulgences.

We will always affirm with Paul that either Christ died in vain, or else the Law cannot justify us. But Christ did not suffer and die in vain. Hence, the Law does not justify. **If my salvation was so difficult to accomplish that it**

necessitated the death of Christ, then all my works, all the righteousness of the Law, are good for nothing. How can I buy for a penny what cost a million dollars? The Law is a penny's worth when you compare it with Christ. Should I be so stupid as to reject the righteousness of Christ which cost me nothing, and slave like a fool to achieve the righteousness of the Law which God disdains?

**Man's own righteousness is in the last analysis a despising and rejecting of the grace of God.** No combination of words can do justice to such an outrage. It is an insult to say that any man died in vain. But to say that Christ died in vain is a deadly insult. To say that Christ died in vain is to make His resurrection, His victory, His glory, His kingdom, heaven, earth, God Himself, of no purpose and benefit whatever. That is enough to set any person against the righteousness of the Law and all the trimmings of men's own righteousness, the orders of monks and friars, and their superstitions. Who would not detest his own vows, his cowls, his shaven crown, his bearded traditions, yes, the very Law of Moses, when he hears that for such things he rejected the grace of God and the death of Christ. It seems that such a horrible wickedness could not enter a man's heart, that he should reject the grace of God, and despise

the death of Christ. And yet this atrocity is all too common. Let us be warned. Everyone who seeks righteousness without Christ, either by works, merits, satisfactions, actions, or by the Law, rejects the grace of God, and despises the death of Christ.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 1091-1111). . Kindle Edition.

And so we see why a "good" person is not good. Anyone who fancies themselves to be good in God's sight, based upon their own works and merits, is in fact necessarily announcing that the Cross is of no value. They despise the Son of God and exalt their work above His.

Hebrews 6:4-8 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, **since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.** (7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and

produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

“Christ died for no purpose. I am justified. God is quite pleased with me. I am good enough.” I trust that this kind of thinking is not present in any of us here, but we must examine ourselves carefully and ask the Lord to reveal any self-righteousness lurking in us. I fear that many people who profess to be Christians have, in fact, never truly considered themselves to be “a bad person.” That is to say, the Law has not killed them yet. And the person who is acclaimed “good” by others is in particular danger here. “Why, there is the finest man you could know.” Dangerous words.

At the same time, we must grasp those words – “*I live by faith in the Son of God.*” Who we are in Christ is holy. A new creation. In this we can take confidence. We do live before God. We are accounted as His children. In Christ. But by faith in Christ’s works.

Romans 3:27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

Galatians 6:14-15 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

### O Foolish Galatians

Let’s move on now and at least introduce the next section which extends from verse 1 down through verse 9 in chapter 3. Here, Paul actually returns to his opening subject:

Galatians 1:6 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--

Paul had left off this main subject to go to lengths to show the Galatians that the gospel he had preached to them by which they had been saved came to him by revelation from Jesus Christ, and is not any creation of man. Having established this thoroughly, he once more deals with them directly and pastorally:

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

What do we see here? –

- Christians can be foolish
- Christians can be bewitched

I can be foolish. I can be bewitched by lies. I need to admit this. It is dangerous to deny it. We dare not be careless as so many have before us:

Of all the diseased and vicious doctrines of the papacy the worst is this: **“If you want to serve God you must earn your own remission of sins and everlasting life, and in addition help others to obtain salvation by giving them the benefit of your extra work-holiness.”**

Monks, friars, and all the rest of them brag that besides the ordinary requirements common to all Christians, they do the works of supererogation, i.e., the performance of more than is required. This is certainly a fiendish illusion.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 1167-1171). . Kindle Edition.

We also see here in 3:1 that:

- There are “bewitchers” who will seek out the foolish

**Baskaino:** to deceive a person by devious and crafty means, with the possibility of a religious connotation in view of the literal meaning 'to bewitch'

It was as if these Galatians had been placed under an evil spell. Why was Paul so astonished? Because:

*“It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”*

Surely Paul is referring here to the effectiveness of His preaching to them. The Holy Spirit so impacted them as they heard the gospel that it was as if they were standing at the Cross, witnessing the whole event.

While this word “bewitched” may have some magical connotations, Paul is referring to the deceptive, blinding tactics of these false teachers. We should review some of these lest we find ourselves spellbound by such kinds:

False teachers work to bring us under the spell of a false gospel by:

- Offering a message that is pleasing to man,
- They flatter and “make much” of us (4:17)
- Foisting themselves off on us as being “angels of light.”



Then, once the spell is cast – they set the hook by presenting a false gospel that always involves some kind of works righteousness. Their goal is self-serving. They want us to worship them. They want us, they want our money, but they do not serve Christ.

Galatians 2:4-5 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-- (5) to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

The Scriptures are filled with these kinds of warnings. Did you ever notice this one:

2 Corinthians 11:25-26 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; (26) on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, **danger from false brothers;**

I believe that I can correctly state that 1) We too often believe that we are far too wise to be taken in – to be

bewitched, and 2) that surely such false brothers and spies could never come to or be in this church.

Satan is clever. He does not only bewitch men in a crude manner, but also in a more artful fashion. He bedevils the minds of men with hideous fallacies. Not only is he able to deceive the self-assured, but even those who profess the true Christian faith. There is not one among us who is not at times seduced by Satan into false beliefs. This accounts for the many new battles we have to wage nowadays. But the attacks of the old Serpent are not without profit to us, for they confirm our doctrine and strengthen our faith in Christ. Many a time we were wrestled down in these conflicts with Satan, but Christ has always triumphed and always will triumph. Do not think that the Galatians were the only ones to be bewitched by the devil. Let us realize that we too may be seduced by Satan.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 1133-1138). . Kindle Edition.

Here is more from Luther:

Since the devil has this uncanny ability to make us believe a lie until we would swear a thousand times it were the

truth, we must not be proud, but walk in fear and humility, and call upon the Lord Jesus to save us from temptation. Although I am a doctor of divinity, and have preached Christ and fought His battles for a long time, I know from personal experience how difficult it is to hold fast to the truth. I cannot always shake off Satan. I cannot always apprehend Christ as the Scriptures portray Him. Sometimes the devil distorts Christ to my vision. But thanks be to God, who keeps us in His Word, in faith, and in prayer. The spiritual witchery of the devil creates in the heart a wrong idea of Christ. Those who share the opinion that a person is justified by the works of the Law, are simply bewitched. Their belief goes against faith and Christ.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 1145-1151). Kindle Edition.

Paul now begins his work of bringing them out from under this bewitching spell. He does so by asking them 4 questions in rapid succession, then giving them an example from the experience of Abraham:

Galatians 3:2-5 Let me ask you only this:

Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

(3) Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

(4) Did you suffer so many things in vain--if indeed it was in vain?

(5) Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith--

Now what is the common phrase in these questions?

*“by hearing with faith”*

These Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. Was this evidenced in some visible manner? We aren't told. But the presumption is that they all were quite certain that they had indeed received the Holy Spirit when Paul ministered to them. The Spirit is Christ in them. Having the Spirit is equated with justification. With what Paul just described back in 2:20.

Hendriksen paraphrases Paul's first question this way:

*“Was it as a result of law-works that you received the Spirit, or was it as a result of faith-inspired listening?”* Salvation by works vs salvation by faith. The answer is obvious to them.

Secondly, Paul asks them: *“And if you had your new birth in Christ by simply hearing the gospel and believing it, do you really think that now you must perfect yourself by doing works in your own flesh/effort?”*

It was the Spirit who birthed them through faith in Christ and it is the Spirit by whom they will be sanctified, not by doing the law.

Now as God gave the Holy Ghost to the Gentiles without the Law by the simple preaching of the Gospel, so He gave the Holy Ghost also to the Jews, without the Law, through faith alone. If the righteousness of the Law were necessary unto salvation, the Holy Ghost would never have come to the Gentiles, because they did not bother about the Law. Hence the Law does not justify, but faith in Christ justifies. How was it with Cornelius? Cornelius and his friends whom he had invited over to his house, do nothing but sit and listen. Peter is doing the talking. They just sit and do nothing. The Law is far removed from their thoughts. They burn no sacrifices. They are not at all interested in circumcision. All they do is to sit and listen to Peter. Suddenly the Holy Ghost enters their hearts. His presence is unmistakable, “for they spoke with tongues and magnified God.” Right here we have one more difference between the Law and the Gospel. The Law does not

bring on the Holy Ghost. The Gospel, however, brings on the gift of the Holy Ghost, because it is the nature of the Gospel to convey good gifts. The Law and the Gospel are contrary ideas. They have contrary functions and purposes. To endow the Law with any capacity to produce righteousness is to plagiarize the Gospel. The Gospel brings donations. It pleads for open hands to take what is being offered. The Law has nothing to give. It demands, and its demands are impossible.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 1193-1203). Kindle Edition.

Which is it then? Are we justified by our own performance of the law? Is that how the Spirit comes to a sinner and gives them a new heart? Of course not. It is by faith alone from first to last. Faith alone in Christ alone. It is by the works of Christ that we are justified, not our own works. Our work is simply to hear of Christ and believe.

We will end here this time and plan to resume with Paul’s argument next week. We close with still one more wonderful summation from Martin Luther:

The heart of man finds it difficult to believe that so great a treasure as the Holy Ghost is gotten by the mere hearing of faith. The hearer likes to reason like this: Forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death, the gift of the Holy Ghost, everlasting life are grand things. If you want to obtain these priceless benefits, you must engage in correspondingly great efforts. And the devil says, "Amen."

We must learn that forgiveness of sins, Christ, and the Holy Ghost, are freely granted unto us at the preaching of faith, in spite of our sinfulness. **We are not to waste time thinking how unworthy we are of the blessings of God. We are to know that it pleased God freely to give us His unspeakable gifts. If He offers His gifts free of charge, why not take them?** Why worry about our lack of worthiness? Why not accept gifts with joy and thanksgiving?

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 1238-1244). . Kindle Edition.