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“1 ¶ Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also. 2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. 3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: 4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: 5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” (Ga 2:1-5 AV)

What is bondage? What is liberty? The two are very closely connected. Your view of liberty is directly related to what your view of bondage is.

Illustrations: A high school boy thinks that it is terrible for his parents to put restrictions upon his movements—to forbid him to do this or that, to go this place or that place. To him, liberty is “being on his own,” to make his own choices about where he goes and what he does.

A wife is upset because she must tend the children. She resents that her husband goes to work, gets to meet people, while she must stay at home, keep house, and mind the kids.

Another woman has a career, postpones marriage and children, feels constrained by her job and its demands, and longs for the freedom of staying home like her grandmother did, to take care of children.

You could build your own scenario. We have seen significant curtailment of what some might call liberty in this country: People must go through increased security—cannot carry weapons. Buildings have been evacuated because of concern over anthrax—the right to do a job and work in a certain place. People are angry and fearful, and are afraid that other freedoms will be taken away. The plunge of the stock market, greatly decreased some people’s wealth and removed freedoms that they might once have enjoyed. Certainly people who had to file for bankruptcy were no longer able to afford some freedoms that they might had enjoyed before.

What people do not often consider, however, is the most basic freedom of all—the freedom to live in joy and communion with God. This is what man is created for. His natural environment is the favor and blessing of God. When God approves and blesses man, then man prospers and is happy. A fish is normal and prospers in the water; a bird is normal and prospers in the air. If you put the fish in the air and put the bird under water, both will eventually die and decay, because the environment is not normal for them.

Man was created to love God and to enjoy Him forever. Adam would have prospered and have lived forever if he had continue in fellowship and communion with God. But his sin was not listening to the voice of God, but substituting the voice of the devil as a guide for his faith and behavior. This brought him under the power and the condemnation of sin and despair.

Psalm 1 sets before us in dramatic contrast two sorts of men:

- A. The blessed man: vs. 1-3. He has rejected an ungodly communion [walk, stand, sit] for a godly one: he law of the Lord, in which he meditates.]
- B. The cursed man: Like the chaff which the winds drive away. The winds will drive away Bin Ladin and those associated with him, just as they did Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and others like them.
- C. The wicked shall not abide, and evil will not triumph.
- D. God knows the way of the righteous: There is not equivalency. God makes a difference.

But let us look at the words: Gal. 2:1-5 I am not going to spend a great time on the chronology, or when it was that Paul went up to Jerusalem with Titus, although that is a profitable debate. This might have been the time of the great Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, or it might have been some other time, perhaps when he visited there because of the famine. It is enough to know that he had been some time in the preaching of the Gospel, and that his ministry was seasoned and developed.

Paul is very careful to let us know that he did this by revelation, not because of some human concern—he is always careful to witness as to the special divine character of his message, that it was not dependent upon human teaching—that it had come to him from God.

He communicated to them the gospel that he preached; they did not tell him what to preach. He was wise enough to have a private communication with those who had authority at Jerusalem. The church at Jerusalem approved his message and gave him the right hand of fellowship, verse 9, reaffirming his mission to the Gentiles. Paul was wise on this; you cannot have too many friends for the Gospel, and Paul did not want to unnecessarily impede the progress of the Gospel.

This time he did not yield on the subject of circumcision, and Titus was not circumcised, although this was offensive to some of the Jewish Christians. This was important for circumcision would soon arise as a major issue, as this epistle proves.

False brethren—fake Christians—had been “brought in.” There were politics in the church at Jerusalem, and the enemies of Paul’s gospel were willing to use subterfuge and deceit in order to win. Some of the nastiest kinds of politics are done in the church, and wise men must be aware of the kind of things that are done.

The purpose of inserting these false brethren was to “spy out” our liberty. These were people who were not willing to see the truth but were collecting ammunition to use against Paul. There was nothing Paul could have done with respect to Titus that would have pleased them. If he circumcised Titus, they would have accused him of being two-faced and contradicting what he preached. If he did not circumcise him they would have accused him of being against Moses and the word of God. He could not win in their minds on the issues. Paul opposed them as a matter of principle, acting in terms of principle and not in terms of peace. Peace was not the issue here; Paul was not going to have peace; it was out of his hands. Peace is worth a very great price, and Paul had purchased it formerly by allowing Timothy to be circumcised, so as not to offend those at Jerusalem. But the issue had gone beyond that, now. Circumcision itself was the issue, so Paul stood on principle.

There is great wisdom for us here. If the issue is peace, let us pay a great price for peace. If peace is not the issue and we will have strife no matter what, then let us stand for principle. Don’t raise issues that will disturb the peace—but if peace is already disturbed, let us stand for principle. We will win many victories in the peace and tranquility of the Church; we will lose many victories in the midst of strife.

This brings us to the crux of the matter. We will be laying down the center of this epistle this morning, and will return to these themes again and again in our consideration of this book.

- I. Circumcision in and of itself is an indifferent thing. But the reason for circumcision might be a very serious thing. If a man was circumcised because he was a Jew and it was the practice of his fathers, it was an indifferent thing. If a man was compelled to be circumcised because he would not be considered a complete Christian without it, then it was not indifferent and needed to be resisted.
- II. There were two things connected with circumcision in the Old Testament. It is very important to identify these strains and to differentiate between them.
 - a. It was sign of faith given to Abraham. Abraham was given a promise that in his seed all the families of the earth would be saved. It was the promise of the redeemer.

- i. The promised seed would not be a natural seed. He would not be born of man, but of the woman.
 - ii. God’s blessing would be the work of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit would come, he would make a new humanity, of those who were circumcised in heart.
 - iii. Abraham’s seed therefore was an Individual—Christ, born of the Virgin Mary; and all those who were born of the Spirit.
 - iv. When Christ comes, there is no longer any reason for this sign: Christ has already come; and the Holy Spirit has been given to change our hearts; These truths are shown in baptism, not by circumcision.
 - v. To be circumcised in terms of Abraham’s faith, therefore, would be a denial that the Lord Jesus Christ has come and that the Holy Spirit is given; therefore unbelief and not faith.
- b. It was a sign of the covenant that God had given to Israel at Sinai, and represented the obligation of Israel to do all the law. The law required that everything that was contrary to God and his holiness must be cut off. Be holy, for I am holy. Put away all uncleanness.
- i. This idea is expressed in Romans 10:5 “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” Negatively it is expressed in Galatians 3:10 “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”
 - ii. The idea of cutting off, or removal, is everywhere expressed in the law, and death was represented in the very altar in the midst of the camp of Israel. Death and dying were everywhere.
 - iii. Jesus expresses this in Matt. 5:29, 30. This is in Christ’s explication of the law, and is showing its true demands. If you are serious about law-keeping, then you better pay very close attention. This is what the law requires, and because we are sinners it works death.
 - iv. The commandment is certainly given for the purpose of giving life; but my problem is sin, which brings condemnation upon me because of the law. Cut of the diseased is certainly for the purpose of life; but what if the problem is in the heart?
 - v. Contrast this with Romans 6:12-14
 - vi. This is the point: We either must die ourselves; or there must be another way. The other way is Christ, who was cut off for us—in our places.
 - vii. To be circumcised in these terms was to deny the Gospel and obligate yourself to do all the law; This is to deny Christ, who promises to change our hearts. We die in Jesus Christ, and are made alive in Him.
- III. The reason for circumcision was everything, and Paul resisted any circumcision in terms of its meaning in the Old Testament. Christ had come, and He changes hearts—the law does not teach its own use. This brings us to full circle:
- a. Blessed is the man: Who is this man in Psalm 1: There is only One. This is Jesus Christ, the last Adam. He is the only Tree that is planted by the rivers of water. To a limited extent this applies to those who are in Christ, the meek who will inherit the earth.
 - b. Cursed man: this is Adam and all his seed. The chaff drives them away.
 - c. Put off the old and put on the new. This is the formula for liberty. The righteous man is planted in Jesus Christ, in the water of life, in Him who fully kept the law and by His spirit renews to life and joy.

May God bless you.