

13. Liberty in Christ

April 4, 2013

The Statue of Liberty is a world-wide known sculpture on Liberty Island in New York Harbor, designed by a French sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi and dedicated on October 28, 1886. The statue, a gift to the United States from the people of France, which bears a torch and a tablet upon which is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776. A broken chain lies at her feet.

The statue is an icon of freedom and of the United States: a welcoming signal to immigrants arriving from all around the world. When our family visited New York, I told them that I had to go see her. We saw her from a distance.

As the Statue of Liberty is an icon of liberty to those immigrants who come to the United States from their oppressed countries, the grace of God is an icon of liberty in Jesus Christ.

Through the grace of God, we are set free from the bondage of sin and death. But the Judaizers wanted the believers of the Galatian churches to go back to their idol of religion – Judaism. Because they say, “Paul’s doctrine of grace is dangerous!” cried the Judaizers. “It replaces Law with license to sin. If we do away with our rules, the churches will fall apart.”

First-century Judaizers are not the only ones afraid to depend on God’s grace. Legalists in our churches today warn that we dare not teach people about the liberty we have in Christ lest it result in religious anarchy. These people misunderstand Paul’s teaching about grace, and it is to correct such misunderstanding that Paul wrote the final section of his letter chapter 5 and 6.

Paul turns now from argument to application, from the doctrinal to the practical. The Christian who lives by faith is not going to become a rebel. Quite the contrary, he is going to experience the inner discipline of God that is far better than the outer discipline of man-made rules.

A. STAND FAST IN THE LIBERTY

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

When God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery, it was the breaking of a yoke according to Leviticus 26:

Leviticus 26:13 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright.

When the believers in Galatia trusted Christ, they lost the yoke of slavery to sin and put on the yoke of Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

The yoke of religion is hard, and the burdens heavy; Christ’s yoke is “easy” and His burden is “light.” That word ‘easy’ in the Greek means “kind, gracious.” The yoke of Christ frees us to fulfill His will, while the yoke of the Law enslaves us.

The unsaved person wears a yoke of sin; the religious legalist wears the yoke of bondage; but the Christian who depends on God's grace wears the liberating yoke of Christ.

This does not mean that we are outlaws and rebels. It simply means that we no longer need the external force of Law to keep us in God's will, because we have the internal leading of the Holy Spirit of God.

B. THE CONSEQUENCES OF EMBRACING LEGALISM

Galatians 5:2-6 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Just think about the audacity of the Judaizers' argument. They insisted that the Galatians had to receive circumcision in order to be truly saved. In other words, Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross was not good enough and complete enough. So, they had to help Him to finish His work of salvation. That is the same thing what Jehovah's Witness says; that is what the Mormon says; and that is what any legalist says.

Whenever we step toward legalism, we set ourselves up as gods, relying on our own efforts to achieve salvation and at the same time, rejecting the Savior Jesus Christ. His death profits us nothing.

The Galatians couldn't choose just one small part of the Law; once they chose any of it, they had really chosen the whole. That's a staggering thought. Who of us could obey the whole Law for even a day? As we learned, the whole point of the Law is to point us to Jesus. Obviously, no one can, except for Christ and that's why He came. Before we decide to become legalists, we must count the cost.

V4 shows us a clear image about the men's futile effort to come to God through observing the Law. The word 'estranged' is "apo" in Greek which means "separated". As I said before, religion is men's absolute vain approach to God. The more we try to approach God with our method, the further we fall away from grace of the Lord.

To live by grace means to depend on God's abundant supply of every need. To live by Law means to depend on our own strength – the flesh – and be left to get by without God's supply.

The efforts of the flesh can never accomplish what faith can accomplish through the Spirit. And faith works through love – love for God and love for others. Unfortunately, flesh does not manufacture love; too often it produces selfishness and rivalry.

C. WHO HINDERED YOU FROM OBEYING THE TRUTH?

Galatians 5:7-12 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever

he is. 11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. 12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

What apostle Paul said here in v7 reminds me his famous question from chapter 3: *Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?*

However, the tone of his voice is much different. In chapter 3, he was chastising them, but in chapter 5, he is speaking gently and reminding them about what the Lord Jesus had done for them.

Judaizers enticed these spiritually immature Galatian believers to follow their false doctrine of works by making spiritual detour.

Like leaven spreads quickly throughout the entire dough, by nature, legalism can spread quickly within church because it fans men and women's pride. As we know that leaven is generally pictured as a symbol of evil in the Bible.

The spirit of legalism does not suddenly overpower a church. Like leaven, it is introduced secretly, it grows, and before long poisons the whole assembly. In most cases, the motives that encourage legalism are good – "We want to have a more spiritual church", but the methods are not scriptural.

Whenever I prepare my teachings, I want to make sure that I don't come up with my own goofy theologies. It doesn't matter how wonderful it might sound to me, but if it does not go with the Bible in context, I must ignore what I think. That is why I heavily rely on the Cross Reference Verses method. As I taught you guys before, the best way to interpret the Bible is through the Bible. I am glad that I am not in the sandals of these Judaizers.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

In v10, this aging apostle still sees the yearning spiritual desires of the Galatians who wanted to be spiritual. He is encouraging them to do what is right in the Lord. But the Judaizers will be judged according to the Law and will be condemned. Paul wanted them to see and understand where legalism would lead.

In addition to how these Judaizers led the Galatian believers away from the Lord, they were using Paul's name and what he did out of context for their own advantage in v11. Paul had Timothy circumcised due to the Jews in the region of Lystra and Iconium according to Acts 16. The apostle had Timothy circumcised out of cultural sensitivity to the Jews, among whom they would be working, not as a requirement for Timothy's salvation. They pointed to that action as an indication that Paul actually still believed and practiced the Judaism.

In response to their false claim, Paul spoke his mind against this enemy of God. When he said, "cut themselves off", since they thought that having circumcision done is a very important point of salvation, he was telling them to go all the way and castrate. I am glad that I am not against Paul.

God's grace is sufficient for every demand of life. We are saved by grace, and we serve by grace. Grace enables us to endure suffering. It is grace that strengthens us,

so that we can be victorious soldiers for the Lord. We can come to the throne of grace and find grace to help in every need.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) No matter how you look at it, legalism is an insidious, dangerous enemy of Christianity. When you abandon grace for any religious rules and regulations, you always lose.

2) God's grace is sufficient for every demand of life.