

25. The Book of Galatians 4:9-11 (Topical)

Liberty From Law-Part 24

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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We have been studying the Book of Galatians here at Calvary on Sunday mornings going through the book topically based on its main theme.

The main theme of Galatians is **liberty**—the liberty (or freedom) that is ours in Christ.

In our study this morning, we find ourselves in the second main division of the book—“**Liberty from Law**” — which is really liberty from *religion and legalism* as a way of being made righteous in God’s eyes.

Galatians 4:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

Prior to their conversion to Jesus—the Galatians (in their ignorance of the one true God) were in bondage to false gods such as Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:11-13).

But at one point through the ministry of Paul—they embraced the gospel of grace and came to know the true and living God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for ‘**know**’ means—“*to know intimately on a personal level.*” Yet the simplicity of their faith in Jesus was in the process of being corrupted by some false teachers known as the Judaizers—prompting Paul to ask the Galatians:

➤ **“How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements...” (verse 9)**

So after having been delivered from the worship of false gods (paganism)—the Galatians were allowing themselves to get sucked into a false teaching connected with Christianity—**legalism!**

In turning to legalism, the Galatians were not turning to a new error, but coming back to an old one—the idea that I grow as a Christian and earn God’s favor by keeping laws, sacraments, holy days and other religious rules and regulations (which is what paganism was built on).

Paul uses the same Greek word for **elements** in verse 9 that he used in Galatians 4:3 for those who were like children in their faith—in bondage to the law.

Warren Wiersbe—

“One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a ‘second childhood’ of Christian experience.”

How was this legalism being manifested in their lives?—

Galatians 4:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Is it wrong for Christians to observe holidays and set aside certain days for spiritual purposes?

I don't think that's what Paul is saying, because Paul himself kept the Passover and other Jewish feast days as a Christian (Acts 17). But Paul kept the Jewish feasts as an act of devotion—the Galatians were told to keep special religious days, months, seasons and years as a way of gaining God's favor and earning blessings from Him.

One Jewish scholar and believer in Jesus comments on this—

*“Paul enumerates some of the rituals they are going back to on the basis of the law in verse 10. They were observing **days** (the Sabbath); **months** (the new moon festivals); **seasons** (the Jewish festivals in the Spring and Fall); **years** (the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee). There is nothing wrong with observing these rituals on a voluntary basis, but they were making them mandatory, which would lead to bondage.”*

One of the main problems with legalism is that—people want to take their convictions about spiritual and moral things and make them a universal mandate for all Christians to adhere to. This makes them feel spiritually superior and leads to them looking down on others that don't follow their example—which is wrong and leads to some big problems in the local church.

Turn to Romans 14 and let's look at what Paul had to say on the subject—

Romans 14:1–3 (NLT)

¹ Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. ² For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. ³ Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them.

The issue here is *legalism* which seeks to be right with God based on externals and persecutes those who want to live by grace—

Colossians 2:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

- Legalism connected with *salvation* is heresy—legalism connected with *sanctification* is immaturity.
- Legalism in the church leads to division which fractures a church and leads ultimately, and if not dealt with, to the destruction of that church—

Galatians 5:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Division fueled by legalism has always been a major problem among God's people in both the Old and New Testament periods.

Almost every local church mentioned in the New Testament had divisions to contend with—no wonder the psalmist wrote, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”* (Psalm 133:1).

The devil loves to divide the Church because he knows that a divided church is a defeated church.

That’s why Jesus prayed to His Father on the night before His crucifixion—*“Father I pray that they might be one even as we are one.”* (John 17:11)

In Romans 14 Paul was addressing those who were *“strong in the faith”*—that is, those who understood their spiritual liberty in Christ and were not enslaved to non-essentials like diets and/or holy days.

It’s interesting that those who are legalistic in their faith often think of themselves as being more mature and spiritual in their walk with God than other Christians. However, in reality, Paul tells us that they tend to be the most immature and carnal in their faith because—mature Christians live by grace and not law.

So, when Paul talks about those who are *“weak in faith”* (Romans 14:1)—he’s talking about immature believers who felt obligated to obey legalistic rules concerning what they ate and when they worshiped.

Again, many people have the idea that the Christians who follow strict rules are the most mature—but this is not necessarily the case.

In the churches in Rome—the weak Christians were those who clung to the Law and did not enjoy their freedom in Christ. The weak Christians (the legalists who thought they were the most spiritual) were judging and condemning those Christians who wanted to live by grace and not law.

Whereas the more mature believers didn’t want to allow these immature Christians into their church because they were proud, arrogant-know-it-all, critical hearted and judgmental—but Paul admonished the stronger to:

Romans 14:1 (NKJV)

¹ Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

Paul is admonishing the stronger Christians in the faith not to exclude from the church those who are weak in the faith (not *“weak in faith”* but *“weak in the faith”*.)

He said, *“Receive them—but not to disputes over doubtful things”* which means— *“Welcome them into the church but not with the intent of changing their convictions by debating or arguing with them.”*

The believers in Rome were divided over observing special **diets** and special **days**—

Romans 14:2–3 (NKJV)

² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Some of the members thought it was a sin to eat meat sacrificed to an idol—so they ate only vegetables at the weekly church ‘love feasts.’

Other Jewish believers thought it was a sin not to observe the Jewish feast days because they were called the “Feasts of the LORD” in Leviticus 23:2 and therefore, they felt, transcended the old covenant and should be observed in the churches.

If each Christian had kept their convictions to themselves, there would have been no problem—but they began to criticize and judge one another convinced that the other group was carnal and they themselves more spiritual.

Satan loves to divide believers from one another and to get them fighting with each other over the non-essentials of the Christian faith—because it destroys our witness to the world.

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Now certainly there are doctrines that are essential and must be contended for.

Jude 1:3 (NKJV)

³ Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

The problem is when Christians start contending for the non-essentials or *'gray areas'* of doctrine and start dividing over them—this is what Paul is addressing here in Romans 14. *Unfortunately, this happens all the time.*

Spurgeon accused Joseph Parker of being worldly because he went to the theater—and Parker accused Spurgeon of being carnal because he smoked cigars. Moody almost fell over when he saw Spurgeon smoking—but Moody was over 300 pounds and Spurgeon looked at him and said, *"At least I eat in moderation."*

So much of this is cultural in nature—it depends on how you were raised and even where you were raised. In America if after church we all went out and had a cold beer—that would be considered carnal and even sinful—but Christian women in America don't think anything of wearing make-up.

However, in Germany the reverse is true. (Listen for context)

- There are many Christians in this country who sincerely believe that going to the beach is wrong because it promotes lust and immorality.
- While some believe that going to the movies is wrong (even if they're "G" or "PG" rated) because it supports all the immoral garbage coming out of Hollywood.
- There are those who believe that Christians shouldn't celebrate Christmas or Easter because of their pagan origins.

I just talked to a pastor on Friday who told me about a man in his church who thinks that using computers and the internet is sinful because they're going to be used by the Antichrist when he comes on the scene—however he communicated to this pastor through text messages!

All of these are a matter of personal convictions—and that's fine—as long as you don't try to impose your personal convictions on everyone else!

We are not to play Holy Spirit—Augustine said, *"On essentials—unity; on non-essentials—liberty; in all things—charity."*

Romans 14:3 (NKJV)

³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; **for God has received him.**

In other words, ***“God has received him into His family—who are you to reject or judge him?”***

What too many Christians fail to realize is that in these cases of judging and dividing over non-essential doctrines and practices—in God’s eyes the division is more offensive to Him than the petty issues Christians have divided over.

In Romans 14 verses 2 and 3 Paul addresses a big issue in the first century church—eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Let me give you 3 *tests* to help you determine if you should be involved with something that is considered a ‘gray area’. these come out of 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Corinthians 10.

1. The Utility Test—will it profit me and be helpful in my race for Christ.**1 Corinthians 6:12a (NKJV)**

¹² All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful...[watching the ballgame instead of coming to Bible study]

2. The Authority Test—will it enslave me or bring me under its control.**1 Corinthians 6:12b (NKJV)**

¹² ...All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. [having a glass of wine with dinner]

3. The Charity Test—will it hurt or cause another Christian to stumble.**1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (NKJV)**

²³ All things are lawful for me...but not all things edify. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's *well-being*. [exercising my freedom in such a way that another Christian is stumbled]

God is the Master and each Christian is His servant—and it is wrong for anyone to interfere in this relationship. Besides, we don’t know the whole story.

You might see someone come out of church on a Sunday morning, light up a cigarette in the parking lot and say to yourself—*“How sinful for them to do something like that—how can they even be saved!!”*

But you don’t know that a month earlier they were smoking dope and crack cocaine—God is making them ‘*stand in the faith,*’ He is working on them—and therefore, it’s wrong to judge them when we don’t even have all the facts!

That’s what Paul is essentially saying here—stop judging and looking down on them, God loves them and is working through His Holy Spirit to mature them in Christ—*“In His time.”*

We don’t look down on toddlers for not acting like mature adults—why do we do that with young Christians? Just because a Christian is 6’4” tall physically doesn’t matter—he might still be a ‘*toddlers*’ spiritually speaking.

Paul is telling us that when it comes to non-essentials, to mind our own business! They're God's kids, He is teaching them how to walk and stand in the faith!

You wouldn't like it if someone came up and started scolding your kids—and by the same token, God doesn't appreciate it when others do that to His kids!

It is encouraging to know that our success in the Christian life does not depend on the opinions or attitudes of other Christians—God is the Judge and He is able to make us stand—

Romans 14:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

The word "servant" here suggests that Christians ought to busy themselves serving the Lord because if they did—they wouldn't have the time or the temerity to judge or condemn other Christians.

I'm a firm believer that troublemakers are idle Christians who have nothing better to do with their time than to gossip and sow discord and division in churches. People who are busy winning souls to Jesus and serving Him have more important things to do than to spend their time criticizing and gossiping about others.

1 Corinthians 4:3–5 (NLT)

³ As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. ⁵ So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due.

Matthew 7:1 (NLT)

¹ "Do not judge others [their motives], and you will not be judged.

And yet the Lord goes on to tell us in John's Gospel, Chapter 7—

John 7:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

There are things we must judge as wrong—but it must always be with 'righteous' judgment—in other words, things that God has clearly said are wrong and sinful in His Word—

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Word of Warning—don't take what Paul says in this section of Romans 14 about 'diets' and 'days' (and other non-essential doctrines)—and treat them like they *are* essential doctrines (as in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and other Scriptures).

We need to understand that these principles apply only to matters that are morally *neutral*. By the same token, when it comes to *fundamental* doctrines (the essential and universal N.T. doctrines) of the Christian faith—we cannot make them a matter of personal conviction either—

“I can live with my girlfriend because it’s my personal conviction, because we love each other, that it isn’t wrong.”

Once again, the issue that Paul is addressing here are non-essential, gray areas of the faith.

Let me read to you Romans 14:1-6 one more time out of the New Living Translation—

Romans 14:1–6 (NLT)

¹ Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don’t argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. ² For instance, one person believes it’s all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. ³ Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don’t. And those who don’t eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to condemn someone else’s servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord’s help, they will stand and receive his approval. ⁵ In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. ⁶ Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God.

In non-specific, non-essential gray areas, the Bible admonishes us to let our conscience be our guide. But it also admonishes us to respect the conscience and convictions of other believers who you don’t agree with because they are trying to honor God in their lives also.

Don’t play Holy Spirit—Don’t push your convictions onto others.

To quote Augustine again—*“On essentials—unity; on non-essentials—liberty; in all things—charity.”*

Galatians 4:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ **I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.**

Let me paraphrase, *“I am fearful for you lest I have worked to the point of exhaustion to bring you the gospel of grace for nothing—I feel like I’ve wasted my time with you.”*

- Is Paul saying that he is afraid because, by going back to the law, they were proving they were never really saved?

That’s unlikely since in verse 9 he talks about them knowing God **intimately** (which speaks of genuine salvation) and in verse 12 he addresses them as **‘brethren’**.

I believe he is saying that even though they are saved, by going back to the law, they will remain spiritual babies incapable of growing up in their faith to full maturity and usefulness for God.

The goal of Christianity isn’t just salvation—it’s sanctification which includes maturity and fruit bearing. In that regard, legalism is used by the devil to keep young Christians in an arrested state of spiritual development so that they never mature and go on to be a threat to His Kingdom.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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