

GALATIANS: CHARTER OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (study 3)

FALLING FROM GRACE

Legalism and Liberty

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

GALATIANS 2:20, 21 (NASB)

LEGALISM & CHRISTIAN CRITICAL FREEDOM (2:11-19)

2:11-13 What may we learn about the peril of sectarianism (and papal infallibility) from the Antioch defection

[1] [2:11-16] If Paul had not taken his stand against Peter that day either the whole Christian church would have drifted into a Jewish backwater and stagnated, or there would have been a permanent rift between Gentile and Jewish Christendom, 'one Lord, but two Lord's tables'. Paul's outstanding courage on that occasion in resisting Peter preserved both the truth of the gospel and the international brotherhood of the church. [Stott 52]



[2] [2:13-14] It has been asked why Paul did not follow the injunction of Mt. 18:15, 'If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone' Paul may or may not have known this injunction in its Matthean form, but he certainly knew the spirit of it, for he reproduces it in 6:1 below. For aught we know, he may have remonstrated with Cephas privately before rebuking him publicly. But perhaps he would have said that, since the offence was public, the rebuke had also to be public. Even Augustine confessed, in another connexion,

Paul's denial of Jerusalem's dominance

The power of the Apostles of the Circumcision, and the precedence of the mother Church, had been unduly and exclusively exalted by the Judaizers in Galatia at the expense of St Paul's authority. The Epistle to the Galatians is from beginning to end a protest against these exaggerated claims. He refuses to acknowledge any human interference, he takes his stand throughout upon his direct commission from the Lord. By appealing to a decree of a Council held at Jerusalem for sanction on a point on which his own decision as an Apostle was final, he would have made the very concession which his enemies insisted upon. [Lightfoot 128]

that he had difficulty at times in deciding whether to follow Mt. 18:15 or 1 Tim. 5:20, 'Those who sin (or who persist in sinning) ... rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest may stand in fear' [Bruce 132]

[3] [2:11] This is another thunderbolt which strikes the Papacy of Rome. It exposes the impudent pretensions of the Roman Antichrist, who boasts that he is not bound to assign a reason, and sets at defiance the judgment of the whole Church. Without rashness, without undue boldness, but in the exercise of the power granted him by God, this single individual chastises Peter, in the presence of the whole Church; and Peter submissively bows to the chastisement. [Calvin 62]

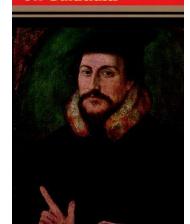
[4] [2:13] From this it is abundantly clear that Paul did not rebuke Peter for some trivial reason, but that he rebuked him for the sake of the most important doctrine of Christianity, which was being threatened by Peter's pretense. [Luther 114]

2:14 Though Peter & Paul might be seen as different 'denominations' in the 1st century church (perhaps we may call them 'Jerusalem moderate' and 'Antiochian anti-legalist' respectively), what does this incident reveal about their common loyalty? (2 Peter 3:15, 16)

[5] [2:14-16] Peter's withdrawal from the Gentile believers had caused a public scandal; he had to be opposed in public too. So Paul's opposition to Peter was both 'to his face' (verse 11) and 'before them all' (verse 14). It was just the kind of open head-on collision which the church would seek at any price to avoid today. [Stott 53]

[6] [2:14] Let love bear all things, believe all things, hope all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Let faith, by contrast, bear absolutely nothing; but let it rule, command, triumph, and do everything. For love and faith are exact opposites in their intentions, their tasks, and their values. Love yields even in trifles and says: "I bear everything and yield to everyone." But faith says: "I yield to no one; everything must yield to me – people, nations, kings, princes, and judges of the earth." [Luther 119]

John Calvin's
Sermons
on Galatians



2:15-19 If we cannot be justified (declared righteous) by God's

Luther: Does security lead to a life of sin?

Therefore we conclude with Paul that we are justified solely by faith in Christ, without the Law and works. But after a man is justified by faith, now possesses Christ by faith, and knows that He is his righteousness and life, he will certainly not be idle but, like a sound tree, will bear good fruit (Matt. 7:17). For the believer has the Holy Spirit; and where He is, He does not permit a man to be idle but drives him to all the exercises of devotion, to the love of God, to patience in affliction, to prayer, to thanksgiving, and to the practice of love toward all men. Therefore we, too, say that faith without works is worthless and useless. The papist and the fanatics take this to mean that faith without works does not justify, or that if faith does not have works it is of no avail, no matter how true it is. That is false. But faith without works – that is, a fantastic idea and mere vanity and a dream of the heart – is a false faith and does not justify. [Luther 154]

revealed Law, how much less by the strictures of human organizations (i.e. faithfulness or loyalty to men)

[7] [2:16] Faith is strictly speaking only the *means*, not the source of justification. [Lightfoot 115]

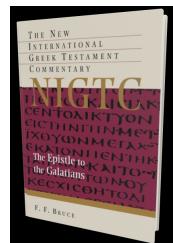
[8] [2:15,16] Such was the position of the Jew and the Judaizer. Paul describes them as 'seeking to establish their own ... righteousness' (Rom. 10:3). It has been the religion of the ordinary man both before and since. It is the religion of the man-in-the-street today. Indeed, it is the fundamental principle of every religious and moral system in the world except New Testament Christianity. It is popular because it is flattering. It tells a man that if he will only pull his socks up a bit higher and try a bit harder, he will succeed in winning his own salvation. [Stott 61]

[9] [2:16] Trying to merit grace by preceding works, therefore, is trying to placate God with sins, which is nothing but heaping sins upon sins, making fun of God, and provoking His wrath. When a man is taught this way by the Law, he is frightened and humbled. Then he really sees the greatness of his sin and finds in himself not one spark of the love of God; thus he justifies God in His Word and confesses that he deserves death and eternal damnation. Thus the first step in Christianity is the preaching of repentance and the knowledge of oneself. [Luther 126]

LIBERTY FROM THE CURSE OF LEGALISM (2:20-3:10)

2:20-21 Why cannot the Christian who truly is saved – and secure in his eternal salvation – be content in a disobedient life? (Phil.2:12,13; 1 John 2:27-29)

[10] [2:20,21] Perhaps Paul is replying to a charge that his law-free gospel led to a misuse of the grace of God. For there are two ways of nullifying God's grace, or receiving it 'in vain' (.... 2 Cor. 6:1): one, by receiving it and then going on as though it made no difference by continuing to live 'under law' (cf. 5:4), and the other, by receiving it and then going on as though it made no difference, by continuing to sin 'that grace may abound' (Rom. 6:1). In neither way does Paul nullify the grace of God: he refuses to return to legal bondage but at the same time he repudiates the suggestion that freedom from law means freedom to sin --- (Rom. 6:15)! [Bruce 146]



[11] [2:17-20] Once we have been united to Christ in His death, our old life is finished; it is ridiculous to suggest that we could ever go back to it. Besides, we have risen to a new life. In one sense, we live this new life through faith in Christ. In another sense, it is not we who live it at all, but Christ who lives it in us. And, living in us, He gives us new desires for holiness, for God, for heaven. It is not that we cannot sin again; we can. But we do not want to. The whole tenor of our life has changed. Everything is different now, because we ourselves are different. See how daringly personal Paul makes it: Christ 'gave himself for me'. 'Christ ... lives in me.' No Christian who has grasped these truths could ever seriously contemplate reverting to the old life. [Stott 66]

[12] [2:20] Let us remember, that we are delivered from the yoke of the law, only by becoming one with Christ, as the twig draws its sap from the root, only by growing into one nature He does not live by his own life, but is animated by the secret power of Christ; so that Christ may be said to live and grow in him; for, as the soul enlivens the body, so Christ imparts life to his members. It is a remarkable sentiment, that believers live out of themselves, that is, they live in Christ; which can only be accomplished by holding real and actual communication with him.

Christ lives in us in two ways. The one life consists in governing us by his Spirit, and directing all our actions; the other, in making us partakers of his righteousness; so that, while we can do nothing of ourselves, we are accepted in the sight of God. The first relates to regeneration, the second to justification by free grace. [Calvin 74]

3:1-5 In what consisted the 'foolishness' of the Galatians?

[13] [3:2-5] This is the difference between them: the law says 'Do this'; the gospel says 'Christ has done it all'. The law requires works of human achievement; the gospel requires faith in Christ's achievement. [Stott 71]

3:6-10 Note the supreme wisdom Paul displays in using the Law against the legalists (cf. Romans 4)

[14] [3:10] ... Paul may be saying that a failure to keep one point of the law is a failure to keep the law *as such* (cf. Jas. 2:10), and therefore incurs the curse invoked on the law-breaker. This is a view popularly ascribed to the school of Shammai, which is said to have reckoned a 99 percent achievement as a failure whereas the school of Hillel in effect treated 51 percent as a pass-mark, carrying entitlement to enter the world to come. [Bruce 159]

[15] [3:10] The sentence of the law is, that all who have transgressed any part of the law are cursed. Let us now see if there be any living man who fulfils the law. But no such person, it is evident, has been or ever can be found. All to a man are here condemned. [Calvin 89]

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