

Lesson 11

"Freedom in Christ"

A yoke was used in ancient times to control a slave. The hands and neck were placed in a stock resting upon the shoulders. Thus restricted, the poor prisoner was led about by the master.

The "yoke of bondage" is the old covenant. "The liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" is the new covenant (Gal. 5:1). The two covenants are *two different understandings of God's people* through the ages, two opposite perceptions of God's plan of salvation.

The Galatians were being deceived by advocates of a counterfeit method of salvation. You must be "circumcised" in order to be saved. A "debtor" must "do the whole law" (vs. 3). The Galatians' error was the old covenant. You promise to obey and live.

The Galatians expelled themselves from the school of Christ. Having initially been motivated by God's "unspeakable gift" of "grace," they have now entered a do-it-yourself works program of being "justified by the law" (vs. 4). The problem isn't the law. The problem is their faulty doctrinal understanding.

A gourmet chef may put on a seven-course meal, ever so appetizing. But should there be a drop of arsenic in the food, if it doesn't kill you, it will certainly paralyze you. If there's a pinch of yeast in the dough, it will permeate the loaf (vs. 9). In other words, if there's a drop of legalistic self-centeredness in one's understanding of the gospel, then there's a fall from God's grace and a loss of the first love.

The problem of lukewarmness in the last of the seven churches of Revelation is that Laodicea has lost her first love. She has dragged herself into the error of Galatianism. Her old covenant promises to do everything just right is a fall from grace.

When she teaches her children stories that they must obey to be saved, or her youth are led to make promises to obey, their failure causes them to think that God cannot accept them. They leave the church. Their parents weep their eyes out wondering what has gone wrong. It's because they've been taught to "trust and obey" God and themselves.

It is no different in principle (except for reincarnation) than the doctrine of *karma* in Hinduism. If you do well in this life, you'll come back in an exalted afterlife. The old

covenant is the pagan principle that one can earn salvation and eternal life through his works with God's help. It is the source of spiritual apathy.

It is little wonder that the book of Galatians was the spark plug for the 1888 message. It is the message to Laodicea. "The most precious message" honors and uplifts the grand sacrifice of Jesus with the cleansing of the sanctuary truth. So did Paul in the book of Galatians.

Paul realized that the only cure for the self-centeredness of Galatianism was "the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:5, 14). Paul taught them to "obey ["listen" *hupokeo*] the truth" (Gal. 3:1, 5:7). When Paul was in their midst the Galatians bowed down low to listen, as he proclaimed Christ and Him crucified. Their "ears" became "eyes," as it were, so that they "saw" Christ "evidently" "crucified among" them (Gal. 3:1).

The Galatians forgot who Paul was, who they were, where they were. Their hardened hearts were melted by the reconciling love of Jesus' sacrifice paid to them. It is one thing for the Jews to crucify one of their own. But for you to murder the Son of God is quite another. Christ takes your grave in hell which you deserve and in exchange gives you His eternal life which He deserves.

This heart-humbling truth is "the offence of the cross" (Gal. 5:11). There is no offence in preaching good legalistic sermons. One will never be persecuted for telling people that they must obey. However, appealing for sinners to come to the foot of the cross facing pride smothered in the dust will expose the preacher to "suffer persecution" (vs. 11).

Peter and the disciples loved Jesus, and so declared their devotion to a man. Jesus told them that there was a cross in their future. Peter promised he would never forsake Jesus. But Peter never calculated "the offence of the cross," and when fear overtook him and the others, they all forsook Him and fled. There was not one disciple that honored their Saviour by declaring to the Romans, "If you crucify Him, then you crucify me too!"

The only cure for such fear of preserving self at all costs is "faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). "Balance" between faith and works is not the equation. Strictly speaking we are not saved by our faith, much less by our works. If that were the case, we would have something of which to boast, that we were so smart as to see a good bargain for salvation.

We are saved by "the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12; Gal. 2:16). "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). It is a sin for one to say he has no faith. If he will take one tiny step and put his finger in the electrical socket, he'll find there is a spark. If one chooses to believe that Jesus is his Saviour, that tiny step of learning how to believe

will grow. And there is no end to the amount of "good works" that "faith [which] worketh by love [*agape*]" can produce.

There is only one place in the whole of the Bible where this "faith which worketh by love" is called "righteousness by faith," and it is in Galatians 5:5. "Righteousness by faith" is God's gift to every man. It is waiting to be recognized. It is "seeing" the reconciling love of Jesus' sacrifice which moves the soul to choose to say "No" to ungodliness, and "Yes" to the mighty Holy Spirit.

Righteousness is the power of Jesus Christ overcoming temptation to sin and straightening out that which is crooked. Christ is the only source of "the righteousness of God." Christ's righteousness is the preparation that is necessary to obtain "the hope" of the eternal inheritance of the land promised to Abraham (2 Peter 3:13; Acts 26:6, 7; Heb. 11:9, 10).

Paul expresses positive words regarding the law: "Love your neighbor as you *used* to find it natural to love yourself" (Gal. 5:14). It is illogical to teach, as does the self-esteem gospel, that you can only love your neighbor as you learn to love yourself. If you make yourself number one, you'll never love anyone else the same way--that is the gospel according to Lucifer.

Rather, the gospel of the Crucified Lamb teaches that Christ loves you. He paid an infinite price by taking your grave. You thus learn to appreciate your value in view of this Divine-human currency. Christ bestows upon you the gift of self-respect. It is truly heart-humbling!

--*Paul E. Penno*