

FREE – Galatians, Part 2

It's hard to believe, but slavery in North America was socially acceptable less than 150 years ago. These precious people were born free in villages across Africa, but captured by slave traders, herded onto ships and brought to North America. Many of them did not survive the six-week voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, and for those who did survive, far worse was yet to come. Plantation owners used whips to force them to work from sunup to sundown. Most slaves simply worked until they died under the lash or from disease and exhaustion. In the 250 years that slavery lasted, millions of people were sold into bondage.

It took a civil war to break the yoke of slavery. It called for a courageous president named Abraham Lincoln to stand in the gap, to be misunderstood and maligned and ultimately assassinated for a cause that he believed was not only worth fighting for but worth dying for.

The Emancipation Proclamation was a presidential order announced on September 22, 1862 and enforced 100 days later on January 1, 1863 declaring the freedom of all slaves. It was not a law passed by a Congress but a proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln, based on the war powers given to him by the Constitution. As his Union armies advanced into the south, thousands of slaves were liberated each day, until nearly all 4 million of them were free by the summer of 1865. The emancipation was made permanent by **the Thirteenth Amendment** that was ratified in December of 1865. But by then, Abraham Lincoln had paid for that document with his life on April 14 of the same year.

Booker T. Washington was 9, as he tells it in “Up From Slavery” ... “As the great day drew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom ... Some man who seemed to be a stranger (a United States officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a rather long paper — the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go when and where we pleased. My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but fearing that she would never live to see.”

Headlines on newspapers in virtually every state trumpeted the same message: **“SLAVERY LEGALLY ABOLISHED.”** And yet, something happened that many would have never expected. The vast majority of the slaves in the south who were legally freed continued to live on as slaves, as though nothing had happened. **What a tragedy!**

And here's a document that the Apostle Paul essentially gave his life to write – the Christian's “Emancipation Proclamation” – the book of Galatians. He was hated, persecuted, and eventually killed for preaching that we are FREE in Christ – not bound by religion, and not merely “free” to do what we think is best, but FREE to live in relationship with God!

And yet, although Jesus gave His life to set us free, and though men like Paul gave their lives to preach that message, many Christians still live like they were in bondage – either to RELIGION or to the WORLD.

Paul had no problem teaching that Christians should have a RADICAL, separated lifestyle – that's why “Christian” was originally a pejorative used in disdain (“little Christ”). He knew the greatest threat to the church was never from persecution WITHOUT, but from compromise WITHIN.

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Paul's conversion and calling had been nothing less than RADICAL, and that caused him a lot of problems. From the beginning, he was apart from all the other apostles – so some said he was not an apostle at all!

Galatians 1:11-12 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You don't get this by REGULATION (religious Christians) or by REPUTATION (worldly Christians) – only by REVELATION!

Paul pulled no punches – he called these people “false brethren” – he didn't even consider them Christians! He wasn't talking about young believers who were struggling, but people who were always trying to draw away a little clique to criticize what was going on in the church.

Galatians 2:4-5 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: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

On one side Paul had the LEGALISTS who were trying to add the LAW to the gospel. On the other side Paul had the LIBERTARIANS who were trying to add the WORLD to the gospel. On one side was FALSE RIGHTEOUSNESS; on the other side was FALSE FREEDOM. And Paul considered BOTH extremes ENEMIES of the cross of Christ.

Romans 11:28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

Philippians 3:18-19 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

ILLUSTRATION: SEESAW

On one side we have the CONSERVATIVES – they believe that both principles and methods should be RIGID – and they are wrong.

On the other side we have the LIBERALS – they believe that both principles and methods should be FLEXIBLE – and they are wrong.

In the middle, we have the BIBLE – it teaches us that PRINCIPLES ARE RIGID, but METHODS ARE FLEXIBLE – and the Bible is right!

As we talked about last week, both sides had added a FILTER to the gospel – it affected the way they perceived everything about God! And even good people – like Peter – were affected by this tension ...

Acts 15:7-9 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; **And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.** *(DO YOU SEE THE BALANCE IN THAT VERSE?)*

GOD MADE NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JEW AND GENTILE, BUT NOW PETER HIMSELF WAS MAKING A DIFFERENCE OVER IT!

Galatians 2:11-12 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

Paul corrected Peter because he was out of BALANCE and bowing to human PRESSURE – that hurts the church and it hurts individuals.

Galatians 2:20-21 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.