

HIS SIDE VERSUS OUR SIDE - OVERVIEW OF GALATIANS

Or, What is a TRUE Christian?

by Norman Harrison

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CHAPTER 10

FREEDOM VERSUS BONDAGE - GALATIANS 4:9

What is spiritual bondage? What can cause a Christian to lose his spiritual freedom?

This study will answer that question - and in so doing, bring assurance and security to the heart of GOD's people.

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" -- Galatians 4:9

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" -- II Corinthians 3:17.

Freedom! What a word! Yet, sad to say, millions upon millions of human beings are utter strangers to it.

Liberty! How priceless! Yet how hardly do men attain it and retain it. Well runs the adage, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

The Christian faith is a liberating faith. It sees men in a state of servitude, and says, **"I have come to set you free."** Its promise is, **"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"; "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"** (John 8:32,36).

These Galatians were accustomed to pagan slavery. Now that they are freed, they are like the Israelites who, brought out of years of bondage by the power and intervention of GOD, were often tempted to return to Egypt that could offer them nothing but a severer servitude. **"How turn ye again"** and **"desire again to be in bondage?"** Fickle Galatians! But merely samples of fickle Christians. When will we learn the full and blessed freedom of being on His Side? and the peril of being drawn back again to Our Side?

The World A System of Enslavement

Viewed from whatever angle, political, industrial, moral, social, spiritual, even mental, man has lived for these millenniums in a state of servitude. The history of mankind, truly written, is one prolonged yet vain struggle with the forces that enslave the race. How came men to be barbarians? Why should any one be pagan? Whence the degradation we witness, whether in the heart of Africa or in the heart of civilized Europe? The answer is that men have gone down before forces that have wrought for their enslavement.

Who built the pyramids of Egypt? Gangs of "citizens" serving as the slaves of their Pharaoh. Who carried on the conquests of a Babylonian or a Roman civilization? Citizens reduced to military servitude. We all know the serf system of the Middle Ages. What means the industrial strife of our day? Men chafing under a yoke of service, even though it is well paid.

The much-heralded Atlantic Charter, with its Four Freedoms guaranteed by the two leading liberty-loving peoples of the earth -- where is it today? A by-word of wishful thinking and planning! A devastating World War, fought to avert tyranny and ward off threatening despotism, fought to establish freedom for all people -- where is the freedom? Sin and selfishness are again in the saddle, enslaving men.

Then there are the personal habits that enslave. A man feels free to take a drink; soon he has lost his freedom not to take a drink. A person feels at liberty to smoke a cigarette; soon he discovers he must have another, and another. The little cigarette has robbed that person of his freedom.

Religious Slavery Man's Worst Enemy

The vast, vast millions of earth's population are in a state of religious enslavement. It is appalling. Who are those devotees at the shrines of Shintoism and Buddhism? Slaves to religious fear and superstition, vainly seeking to pierce an impenetrable veil of darkness. Who are those marching multitude to Hinduism? Or those men and women crawling along the ground? Perhaps they are headed for the polluted waters of the Ganges in the vain effort to wash away their sins. What of those people in countries where they crawl along gravel-laden streets and climb steps on their knees to kiss the foot of a Catholic statue? These are religious slaves, victims of a system that dictates doing something to merit favor with their gods.

Jesus saw the men of His day in a like bondage. Their scribes had divided the law into some seven hundred enactments, as I recall: they must do this; they must not do that. Jesus said, "**You are slaves to your law.**" They resented it: "**We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?**" (John 8:33).

LOSING OUR LIBERTY

What happened to the Galatian Christians under Judaizing influences can easily happen to us under the influences of formalism, legalism or mere disregard for the liberating power of the cross and the principle of justification by faith alone.

We are all subject to self-esteem. Unconsciously and unwarily we slip back from His Side with

its provisions of grace and all-sufficiency, back to Our Side -- back to dependence upon self-effort and various forms of self-commendation and self-sufficiency.

We return to "**the elements**" suggesting that which is elementary, or the mere "**rudiments of the world**" (Colossians 2:8). That is, as the Greek word means, we are going back to first principles, back to our ABC's, back to the things we learned as children. Which means this: we are giving up our position as sons and all the privileges of our majority, to place ourselves once more as mere children under a pedagogue, under a child trainer, subject to rules and regulations. How foolish!

Once more we remind ourselves that GOD has but two ways of dealing with men: by law and by grace. Grace gives life, gives the HOLY SPIRIT for living the life. Law appeals to what man has for obeying it, to the "flesh," to self-effort.

So again Paul's crucial question confronts us: "**Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?**" (Galatians 3:3).

("Whoever goes back to the Law loses the knowledge of the truth, fails in the recognition of his sinfulness, does not know GOD, nor the devil, nor himself, and does not understand the meaning and purpose of the Law. Without the knowledge of CHRIST a man will always argue that the Law is necessary for salvation, that it will strengthen the weak and enrich the poor. Wherever this opinion holds sway the promises of GOD are denied, CHRIST is demoted, hypocrisy and idolatry are established" (Martin Luther's Commentary).

"The Rudiments of the World"

The issue is perfectly clear. Either stay on His Side, where His grace provides Himself as the motivating control of life -- "**the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus**"; or go back to Our Side, to the self-discipline of law, which has only rules and regulations to offer. Which means this: you are back under the world's system; for law, whether civil or religious, is the best the world can do to control human life.

Then these elementary religious regulations are enumerated: "**Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years**" (Galatians 4:10). What are they? Badges, such as one wears upon his lapel, indicating his connections, the things for which he stands. These are badges of religious bondage. Such a badge makes us no better than a Hindu; in fact, he may be far more devoted in his religious observances than we. They are the badge, unblushingly worn, that we have left His Side and gone back to Our Side.

(Some friend may fear that this teaching is carrying Christian liberty to the point of license -- a license to ignore customs sacred to GOD's people. Not so. The test in these matters is not merely what we do, but why we do it. Christian freedom observes a holy day because it is holy to the Lord - the Lord's day.)

Against all these rudimentary religious observances Paul warns the Colossians by showing that the cross ushered us into a new sphere of life where these things have no claim and are altogether out of place; that with CHRIST we died, were buried, were raised to newness of life. Thus He

was taking us out from the bondage of these things:

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." -- Colossians 2:14-17

The circumcision advocated by ordinance is now superseded by "**the circumcision made without hands ... the circumcision of Christ**" (Colossians 2:11), even that of the heart, which makes a man responsive to the mind and will of GOD. It is the cross-attained control of the Spirit.

Re-gaining Our Freedom

To the Apostle Paul this lapse into legalism is exceeding serious. With great depth of feeling and agitation of spirit he pleads with his readers to recover themselves to the Lord's Side and to the freedom of life there is in Him. For such recovery He has this one plea, this one remedy as all-sufficient:

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."
-- Galatians 4:19

The Christian life is, virtually, the re-incarnation of CHRIST. Nothing short of this will meet the case. The Son of GOD, formed in one body by the Spirit, now formed in the believer's body by the power of the same Spirit.

How bold! The Creator come to live in the creature, to be his life and to Himself control that life. GOD knows no other way. Nothing short of this is really Christian.

Now we see the affront these elementary religious rites offer Him. They not only bring us under their bondage; they put the inliving CHRIST under bondage. To think of the indwelling CHRIST having to go through this rigmarole of law-performances with us!

To give this in-formed, inliving CHRIST His full freedom the practical effectiveness of the cross must also be considered. It is thus Paul concludes his discussion of this matter with the Colossians: **"If ye be dead with Christ ... If ye then be risen with Christ."** Does this make any difference? Ah, yes. The cross has put us on the other side, on His Side, with the cross between us and our old mode of living. Listen!

"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." -- Colossians 2:20-23

The Christian life is a set-free life, lived on a higher plane, above the do-this and don't-do-that considerations. Its one aim is to please a Person in a life conformed to His controlling presence.

When we come to understand the true nature of the Christian life, that it is Christ-centered and Christ-controlled, we discover a freedom and joy we have never known before, and the heart sings for very gladness:

"Now none but CHRIST can satisfy,
None other name for me;
There's love, and life, and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee."

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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