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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

"The Effects of a False Gospel"

December 8, 2013

Sermon Text: Galatians 4:8-20

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor 11

Introduction-

This past week I was talking with a lady who had spent many, many years in a small, rather obscure denomination. It ended very badly for her and her family when and essentially they were all ex-communicated from the group for, we could say, "breaking the rules." Oh, not the written doctrine that everyone knew about, but really the man-made unwritten codes that were pressed upon people in those churches. Let me give you a bit of a description of the "climate" there:

1. There is no baptism except the baptism performed by one of the churches in this group. Even if you have been baptized as a believer by immersion, you must be re-baptized to join them.
2. In the communion service, which always includes foot-washing, only people baptized in that church can participate. If you were at their service, you would be required to sit at the back, with the rest of the "Christian friends" group.
3. Women must wear dresses to church, though this rule is not in writing.
4. Young women who are found to be pregnant outside of marriage are put before the church, but

not the young men who acted immorally.

5. An uncaring attitude and lack of empathy toward those suffering in hard situations. If something evil is happening to you, it is really good and you must remain in it and trust God to work it for good.

And yet, in it all, the preaching and teaching "sounded" so biblical, so sound. Yet obviously, looking back, it wasn't.

People like this lady – once they have gotten out – wonder and wonder – "how could I have not seen it? Why didn't I listen to myself all those times I 'felt' something wasn't right?" Well, of course there are many reasons why we don't and why it takes so long to sort this evil out. Evil is cloaked in darkness so often. The enemy is very, very deceptive. His servants can look so "Christian."

We must watch and be alert at all times because our enemy is always on the prowl. And one of his favorite tactics is to replace the gospel with law. That is what was happening to these churches in Galatia. Christ alone was not enough. If they were to be right with God, they had to submit to certain Jewish ceremonies and Paul is telling them, as we saw last time, that to do so would be for them to revert right back to the very same kind of world religion that they were slaves to before he came to them with the gospel. The "elementary principles of the world" is what he called it, you remember. All religion invented by man reflects the very same fundamental principles that are innate in fallen man's thinking. Namely, that we must do things to merit God's approval. Listen as I read and review 4:1-11 –

Gal 4:1-11 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, (2) but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (3) In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. (4) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (8) Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. (9) But now that you have come to know God, or rather

to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? (10) You observe days and months and seasons and years! (11) I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

If the Galatians cave in and listen to the false teachers who were troubling them, if they then embraced the Jewish ceremonial laws like circumcision, observance of various feast days and months and so on, *they would be going right back to the fundamental principles that characterized the false religion they used to be enslaved to.*

Legalism, works-righteousness, you see, is worldly. It is the ABC's of the mindset of fallen man. We do or don't do what a god tells us, and by our performance we appease that god and gain certain benefits from him. Or by our poor performance, we receive his displeasure and even wrath.

But Jesus Christ is our complete righteousness. The faith that God gives us by which we believe the gospel is credited to us as righteousness. We are not considered righteous because we have DONE righteousness! No. But simply because by our faith, Christ's perfect obedience to God and His full and complete payment for our sin is counted/reckoned/regarded/seen as OUR righteousness before God. Done. Finished. Over. And this is foolish nonsense to the world. The fallen man who is programmed by the ABC's of the world simply cannot read nor write nor spell with these new ABC's given us by God. And WE must take care that we don't slide back into that old mode. There will be plenty of false teachers who claim to be Christians coming along, working to get us back into bondage to the old ABC's of works.

<u>Our Assurance</u>

Gal 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Let's spend some more time giving consideration to this Abba, Father work of the Holy Spirit that is in every Christian. It is vital that we know we are the objects of God's love, that Christ's righteousness means there is no condemnation of us by God, that we are His sons, the objects of His love. Listen here to Martin Luther. As usual, I started to quote him briefly but I ended up quoting him at length. He puts it so much better than I ever could and you deserve to hear him:

Next, (4:7) the Holy Ghost is sent forth into the hearts of the believers, as here stated, "God sent the Spirit of his

Son into your hearts." This sending is accomplished by the preaching of the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit inspires us with fervor and light, with new judgment, new desires, and new motives. This happy innovation is not a derivative of reason or personal development, but solely the gift and operation of the Holy Ghost.

This renewal by the Holy Spirit may not be conspicuous to the world, but it is patent (evident) to us by our better judgment, our improved speech, and our unashamed confession of Christ. Formerly we did not confess Christ to be our only merit, as we do now in the light of the Gospel.

Why, then, should we feel bad if the world looks upon us as ravagers of religion and insurgents against constituted authority? We confess Christ and our conscience approves of it. Then, too, we live in the fear of God. If we sin, we sin not on purpose, but unwittingly, and we are sorry for it. Sin sticks in our flesh, and the flesh gets us into sin even after we have been imbued by the Holy Ghost. Outwardly there is no great difference between a Christian and any honest man.

The activities of a Christian are not sensational. He performs his duty according to his vocation. He takes good care of his family, and is kind and helpful to others. Such homely, everyday performances are not much admired. But the setting-up exercises of the monks draw great applause. Holy works, you know. Only the acts of a Christian are truly good and acceptable to God, because they are done in faith, with a cheerful heart, out of gratitude to Christ.

We ought to have no misgivings about whether the Holy Ghost dwells in us. We are "the temple of the Holy Ghost." (I Cor. 3: 16.) When we have a love for the Word of God, and gladly hear, talk, write, and think of Christ, we are to know that this inclination toward Christ is the gift and work of the Holy Ghost. Where you come across contempt for the Word of God, there is the devil. We meet with such contempt for the Word of God mostly among the common people. They act as though the Word of God does not concern them. Wherever you find a love for the Word, thank God for the Holy Spirit who infuses this love into the hearts of men. We never come by this love naturally, neither can it be enforced by laws. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Roman theologians teach that no man can know for a certainty whether he stands in the favor of God or not. This teaching forms one of the chief articles of their faith. With this teaching they tormented men's

consciences, excommunicated Christ from the Church, and limited the operations of the Holy Ghost. St. Augustine observed that "every man is certain of his faith, if he has faith." This the Romanists deny. "God forbid," they exclaim piously, "that I should ever be so arrogant as to think that I stand in grace, that I am holy, or that I have the Holy Ghost."

We ought to feel sure that we stand in the grace of God, not in view of our own worthiness, but through the good services of Christ. *As certain as we are that Christ pleases God, so sure ought we to be that we also please God, because Christ is in us*. And although we daily offend God by our sins, yet as often as we sin, God's mercy bends over us. Therefore sin cannot get us to doubt the grace of God. Our certainty is of Christ, that mighty Hero who overcame the Law, sin, death, and all evils. So long as He sits at the right hand of God to intercede for us, we have nothing to fear from the anger of God.

This inner assurance of the grace of God is accompanied by outward indications such as gladly hearing, preaching, praising, and confessing Christ, to do one's duty in the station in which God has placed us, to aid the needy, and to comfort the sorrowing. These are the affidavits of the Holy Spirit testifying to our favorable standing with God.

If we could be fully persuaded that we are in the good grace of God, that our sins are forgiven, that we have the Spirit of Christ, that we are the beloved children of God, we would be ever so happy and grateful to God. But because we often feel fear and doubt we cannot come to that happy certainty. Train your conscience to believe that God approves of you. Fight it out with doubt. Gain assurance through the Word of God. Say -

"I am all right with God. I have the Holy Ghost. Christ, in whom I do believe, makes me worthy. I gladly hear, read, sing, and write of Him. I would like nothing better than that Christ's Gospel be known throughout the world and that many, many be brought to faith in Him."

Crying, Abba, Father.

Paul might have written, "God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, calling Abba, Father." Instead, he wrote, "Crying, Abba, Father." In the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans the Apostle describes this crying of the Spirit as "groanings which cannot be uttered." He writes in the 26th verse: "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know

not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."
The fact that the Spirit of Christ in our hearts cries unto God and makes intercession for us with groanings should reassure us greatly. However, there are many factors that prevent such full reassurance on our part.

We are born in sin. To doubt the good will of God is an inborn suspicion of God with all of us. Besides, the devil, our adversary, goes about seeking to devour us by roaring: "God is angry at you and is going to destroy you forever." In all these difficulties we have only one support, the Gospel of Christ. To hold on to it, that is the trick.

Christ cannot be perceived with the senses. We cannot see Him. The heart does not feel His helpful presence. Especially in times of trials a Christian feels the power of sin, the infirmity of his flesh, the goading darts of the devil, the agues [a fever with chills and aching] of death, the scowl and judgment of God. All these things cry out against us. The Law scolds us, sin screams at us, death thunders at us, the devil roars at us.

In the midst of the clamor the Spirit of Christ cries in our hearts: "Abba, Father." And this little cry of the Spirit transcends the hullabaloo of the Law, sin, death, and the devil, and finds a hearing with God. The Spirit cries in us because of our weakness. Because of our infirmity the Holy Ghost is sent forth into our hearts to pray for us according to the will of God and to assure us of the grace of God. Let the Law, sin, and the devil cry out against us until their outcry fills heaven and earth. The Spirit of God outcries them all. Our feeble groans, "Abba, Father," will be heard of God sooner than the combined racket of hell, sin, and the Law.

Let us not fail to thank God for delivering us from the doctrine of doubt. The Gospel commands us to look away from our own good works to the promises of God in Christ, the Mediator. The pope commands us to look away from the promises of God in Christ to our own merit. No wonder they are the eternal prey of doubt and despair. We depend upon God for salvation. No wonder that our doctrine is certified, because it does not rest in our own strength, our own conscience, our own feelings, our own person, our own works. It is built on a better foundation. *It is built on the promises and truth of God*.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 2133-2205). . Kindle Edition.

The Promise! There it is.

Gal 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"-- (14) so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Promise is what God does and which we receive simply by faith. Law is what WE do.

The Dividing, Alienating Work of a False Gospel

Listen now to Paul as he opens up his heart to these people and we see the real motive he has in all of this is to rescue and protect his flock –

Gal 4:12-20 Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. (13) You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, (14) and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. (15) What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. (16) Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? (17) They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. (18) It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, (19) my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! (20) I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul is fearful for them. *"I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."* Any true pastor or really any true Christian knows something of this fear. You put your life and energies and heart into someone to show them Christ and you see promising signs and it seems all is well as they take off following Christ. But is it real? Only time will tell. Will they finish the race? There are SO many things that work on us to get us to stop running. The racetrack of church history is littered with the dropouts. William Hendriksen comments on Paul's heart for his people:

"It is characteristic of Paul, the tactful shepherd of souls, the warm-hearted master-psychologist, that his rather

sharp reproof (vss 8-11) is followed immediately by tender, urgent, intensely personal appeal. This paragraph is one of the most gripping in all of Paul's epistles. The apostle implores and agonizes, because he cannot endure the thought that those whom he addresses and who at one time had treated him with such sympathetic consideration and had accepted his gospel with such enthusiasm would now continue to wander farther and father away from home. Hence, lovingly, as a parent speaking to children, for such in a sense they are, he writes this." [New Testament Commentary]

Let's just look at a few of the things Paul says here as he is trying to speak to their hearts:

1. vs 12 – become as I am…I have become as you are. Imagine Martin Luther saying this to them. "I was once a monk. I once fasted until it almost killed me. I abused my body. I believed in the indulgences and the Pope's authority. But I have been found by Christ and all of that I have now rejected. I have married a wife! My trust is in Christ alone. Now you do the same!"

And I think that is Paul's meaning here. The false teachers came and said "you must become as we are." Paul did not. He came eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners among the Gentiles, trusting in Christ alone. This is what he is calling them to.

"Cast aside all thought of being able, by means of law-works, to become righteous in the sight of God, for that is exactly what I by grace was taught to do. At one time, I, a proud Jew, imagined that I would be able to achieve my own righteousness before God. But I became as you Gentiles are, by nature condemnable in his sight, with nothing of self to appeal to." [Hendriksen]

Now, consider carefully what a false gospel does. What happens when people are deceived and drawn into the lie of works-based merit with God? What can we expect in a local church where this happens? This:

> Gal 5:14-15 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (15) But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

A false gospel, a religion based on the ABC's of this world, does not produce love. It turns people into wolves. Wolves bite and devour. That is all you can expect from a wolf pack.

Wolves divide the flock. They turn people into their image and likeness.

That was the threat here. The Galatians had already had their relationship with Paul damaged. So he reminds them of how they had received him so warmly and kindly and how they had loved the message of Christ. And all this even though he had come to them in weakness – he was ill with some kind of ailment. He didn't come in some impressive show.

False teachers creep into the church and into our lives and into our relationships with other believers, and they divide. They necessarily divide because they want us to follow *them.* And when such division happens, it is very hurtful. Here may be some people you have invested years in and you were encouraged by them and they received you warmly and then suddenly everything turns frigid. What happened? Well, so often it is some other person that has entered the picture, coming with another "gospel," who has lured them in.

Look at how Paul describes the process here –

> Gal 4:16-17 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? (17) They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

Well, the fact is that the truth of Christ divides, doesn't it? And often we will become the enemy of people just because we told them the truth. But we don't want to fall into the trap ourselves of being drawn TO a false teacher who "makes much of us" (ie, flatters us) and alienated FROM a true shepherd or brother in Christ.

Notice very carefully how Paul reveals the tactics of the false teachers. It still happens today.

- They begin by making much of us. Flattery. They are lying to us.
- But their goal/purpose is not good
- They want to alienate us from the truth and from God's true people
- So that we, in the end, worship and praise them.

So you see it. "They want to shut you out." Perhaps this is best explained by Paul's own words in the next chapter –

> Gal 5:2-4 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. (3) I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. (4) You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified

by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

They want to shut us out, to isolate us from Christ and from the free grace of the gospel, so that they bring us into a realm where man's performance is what matters. And in that realm, these false teachers have already made themselves the big shots.

One of the most common tactics of an evil, controlling person is to isolate those he wants to control. This is how Hendriksen translates this verse:

"These people are zealously courting you for no commendable purpose; on the contrary, they want to isolate you, in order that you may zealously court them."

He goes on to explain:

"The Judaizers are trying to curry favor with the Galatians, ostensibly being deeply concerned about them. However, their purpose is not commendable, their motivation is not honorable. Literally Paul says 'not properly,' 'not in the right way.' Their real object is *to exclude* the Galatians, that is, to shut them out from all influences except their own; particularly, of course, to isolate them from any effect Paul and his associates might have upon them….Once these opponents have succeeded in deluding the minds of the Galatians with an untrue image of Paul and of his message, the sadly deluded ones will then become wholly dependent upon these detractors of the only true gospel. Accordingly, the apostle states, 'They want to isolate you, in order that you may zealously court them…and bestow much attention upon them."

So Paul is jealous for his children! You see his anguish, as a mother in labor wanting them to be born and grow into maturity in Christ. He hopes for a good outcome, but it is still in doubt.

Conclusion

Let me close with an example of the danger of drifting from careful adherence to the Scripture. Specifically this letter to the Galatians. False teachers are evil. Paul deals with them in harsh terms here. They are wolves. Paul is a shepherd and shepherds guard the flock against savage wolves. We know that he has already pronounced them anathema. He has told us that they are false brothers who secretly creep in to enslave us. That they want us to exalt and worship them. They hinder us from the truth. He says (5:12) that he wishes they would just emasculate themselves!

Now, with those things in mind, taken straight out of this epistle, listen to these statements I came across in an

article I read this last week. It was written by a seminary professor who decided he needed to give some instruction to pastors:

False teaching often comes from imposters who are not really Christians (2 Tim. 3:8). Sometimes error comes from those who are Christians (Gal. 2:11). At other times, it comes from those whose spiritual condition is not altogether clear. In any case, pastors have a responsibility to refute error whatever its source (Titus 1:9).

So here's the question we have to ask and answer anytime we are refuting error. What are our motives in the confrontation? What should our motive be in bringing confrontation? There's much that could be said here, but I think the scripture tells us that we ought to have in mind the best interests of both the flock and the false teachers. Public confrontation ought to be animated by a desire to protect God's people from being led astray by teaching that is spiritually and morally harmful to them (Acts 20:28).

But it should also be motivated by a desire to see false teachers come to repentance and faith. Paul told Timothy in no uncertain terms to "command" false teachers not to teach "strange doctrines" to God's people (1 Tim. 1:3). These erroneous "teachers of the law" made confident assertions about things that they did not really understand (1 Tim. 1:7). Nevertheless, Paul says that the "goal" of Timothy's "command" was to produce in the false teachers "love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). In other words, Paul didn't want Timothy merely to triumph over the false teachers. Paul wanted Timothy—if possible—to win them over to the truth. [The Aquila Report, Denny Burk, 12-05-2013]

Now, this is just wrong. And it is dangerous. It sounds soooo good and after all some well-known Christian professor is saying it. But held up to

the light of Scripture, it is false. Nowhere in Galatians do we find any indication that Paul was concerned to save the false teachers. To somehow reach their hearts. Not the types that he was dealing with here. We can also think also of Christ's dealings with the Pharisees – "woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites!" No, his concern like Paul's was for the sheep.

This is just another line of false teaching that would bring us into bondage to a false gospel. Paul speaks as a loving father to his children when he admonishes and reasons with the Galatians. He does nothing of the sort in respect to the false teachers. If he had, he would be endangering his flock. No, if we are going to stand firm against false teachers who want to exalt themselves and enslave us, then we must know what they are. They are wolves. They are not poor sheep who have strayed a bit off the right path.

And to treat them otherwise is dangerous. Which is all to say, KNOW God's Word! Carefully compare what people are trying to tell you is the gospel with what Scripture says the gospel is. Otherwise you may well find yourself shut out from Christ's truth and His people, and following along behind a wolf in wool.