

## Faith or Law - Only one can free you!

Ok, so we carrying on in the letter to the Galatians. And for those who haven't seen this map 2 weeks ago, here is a map of the area. So you can see the Galatia is actually a very large area in modern day Turkey.

I have been reflecting on this letter all week (we have started to look at this in Youth Group too in preparation for Youth Sunday in 4 weeks), and thinking of a point Lance made about this being a long ranting letter, then I have been thinking that this is **a very complicated matter**, and it needed to be **handled with a lot of care** by Paul. So even though he was ranting, he must have sat and thought for a long time before and even during writing this letter. I understand I am speculating a bit here, but it doesn't hurt to try and imagine the effect this whole issue was having on Paul.

I know if I wanted to write a long ranting letter about something I cared about a lot, I would have put a huge amount of thought into it.

### **Legalism**

Paul here is dealing with legalism, and this is a trap that can be very easy to fall into. We can see that they are dealing with the problem from verse 11.

***Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God. because "the righteous will live by faith". (v11)***

SLIDE

noun

1.

strict adherence, or the principle of strict adherence, to law or prescription, especially to the letter rather than the spirit.

2.

Theology.

- a the doctrine that salvation is gained through good works.
- b the judging of conduct in terms of adherence to precise laws.

2.a it takes away the need for grace and suggests salvation can be earned by us.

And with the context of the letter, that there are people claiming that the gentiles need to be circumcised in order to be like the jews so that they can be saved. So here we have a clear example that this is a form of legalism, and doesn't fit in with Pauls writing to the Romans that salvation is by faith alone.

### **Faith and law**

Being a Christian is about relationship with Jesus. On the outside, relationship can be faked, we can force ourselves to just act and say the right things, and be accepted by others (Something Jesus often accuses the religious teachers of doing). But the inside is a mess and is empty of God. It's all for personal gain. That might get us somewhere with the people around us, but where does that really get us with God. **God sees what others don't.**

Or we can focus on being right with God on the inside, focus on our relationship with Him, and see where that takes us on the outside. Letting the Holy Spirit make the transformation in His strength, not our own. But then we need to risk it looking a little messy on the outside while things get sorted.

One thing that I believe is that God loves us for who we are, so much, but He loves us way too much for us not to be transformed, and healed from

everything that has damaged us in some way. We live in a broken world, and we need to see that we all have experienced some pain which hasn't been the best for us and warped how we see the world and even warped how we see God. He wants us to become better versions of ourselves. And it's **in His strength**.

**Common mistake.** But instead of letting Him in to transform us, we try to go it alone and try to get better in our own strength, and just use the rules in the bible as a guide of how to do that. But the Bible is so much more. There is a famous cheesy acronym for the BIBLE, (Basis Instructions Before Leaving Earth), but I don't agree... they are more than instructions, they are the way to life. A way to a relationship.

## **Strength**

Now this strength thing is interesting, and something that I find myself guilty of sometimes, and sometimes end up making myself tired and ill.

Strength has to come from somewhere. **As part of my training for the marathon**, I need to strengthen different parts of my body, mainly my legs, my back, and my core. To build up the muscle, I need to eat the right foods, I need to exercise the muscle in the right way. If I am working out, but don't have the right fuel in me, or don't have any fuel at all, then I am just going to injure myself and burn out. If I rely on the right energy, then I am going to be most effective in building the right muscle.

## **On our own**

And the same can be said for learning to rely on God's strength. When we try to do this in our own strength, and try and just stop doing things we know we

shouldn't, and do it on our own, we stop the deeper work being done, and then when we relax, we are unchanged underneath, and ready to go back to the way it was before. That's not real transformation, and we end up with spiritual burn out.

### **In God's strength**

But when we are in Christ, when we let God do the work through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the transformation happens deep down in our hearts, and that is what brings lasting change. It brings change that we believe it, and are free to make the right choices, not because we are being told to, but because we want to make these choices, and know deep down in our hearts that it is the heart of God.

Paul talks about this in this passage when he says in verse 3.

***I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain-if it really was in vain? (ouch) So again I ask, does God give you His spirit and work miracles among you by works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (vs 2-5)***

### **Miracle of conversion...**

God has started the work when we believed and gave our lives to him, so we need to **let Him finish the work**. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe, and the work starts, but there was no way we could receive the Holy Spirit just by works of the

law. There has to be faith, there has to be a supernatural element of God's Holy Spirit entering our lives.

Entering our lives, so that **we can be sure of our salvation**, so that we can **learn to hear God's voice**, so we can have a **two way personal relationship** with our creator and saviour, and to be **transformed into the best version of ourselves**.

**But when we start trying to transform ourselves in our own strength**, we stop Him doing the work. Elsewhere, Paul calls this quenching the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19) which means to limit what the Holy Spirit is doing.

He appeals to them a bit later on in chapter 5 when he says, '**you were running a good race, who cut in on you (gal 5:7)**'. Which translates to. You were doing so well, what happened? When did you stop trusting God, and look to pleasing each other?...

### **SLIDE We need to Let Go and Let God**

We **need** to Let God do the work in us, and this means that we need to let go of the worry of whether we are going to mess up or not. It doesn't mean that sin isn't a problem, it doesn't excuse us from sin (**We are not free to Sin, but from Sin**) but when we try so hard to not sin, we take our focus off of the relationship. **We take our focus off of God, and we focus on what we should or shouldn't be trying to do**. Then people looking on see Christianity as legalistic, judgmental, and full of rules, and don't see it being about the relationship with Jesus that validates someones salvation in the first place. And it makes me sad when that happens.

So back in the context of this letter, when the Gentiles agree to be circumcised to be seen as the same as the Jewish Christians, they are stopping themselves from wanting to be Christ like, and end up wanting to be jew-like... and miss the point completely. They are putting their identity in the Jews, not in Christ, who died for both Jew and gentile and to bring everyone together, and the focus comes away from Christ and on to what they should look like.

This is very dangerous, and can do a lot of damage to a church, as we can see started to happen in Galatia. In these actions, they stop worshipping God, and they worship how good they are being and keeping the law... "How Great, Am I. I have not sinned...". Where is the cross in that...? Where is Grace there? It's not about us, its about what He did for us.

It is God who does the work in us, through the Holy Spirit in our lives, so that we would lose the desire to sin, or to fall for the same traps. **Yes, we need to practise self control, yes, we need to protect our hearts**, but not that we focus on what we can and cant do, but to focus on what God wants us to transform us into. He wants us to have the big picture.

### **The place for the law**

SLIDE *vs 21. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? absolutely not!* (so law and faith aren't opposites). *For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.* (If the law could make us right with God, then we wouldn't need faith, or a saviour).

Christianity is not about rules, it is about relationship with our creator. As we see in this passage for today, He created the law still, and the law still stands, and before Jesus, it had a very important role in Old Testament times. But the law could never save. The role of the law, or as we know them, the 10 Commandments, was to reveal sin, so that we could identify that sin existed, and there was in fact a 'wall' between us and God. It never saved. Back then they had burned offerings and sacrifices to atone for sin.

But Jesus fulfilled the law in His death and resurrection. Jesus even explained this in Matthew when He was preaching to the 5000 on the mount.

***SLIDE "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5:17)***

Being free in Christ doesn't mean we can go on sinning, but we are free from the power sin has over us, and we have to let God do the work by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He's there to help us, to do it with us. To transform us.

**So what can we do** then to make sure we don't fall into this trap and be victims of legalism.... How can we make sure we do stay away from this problem, and help God do the work in us. Because even though He does the work, there are things we can do to help or hinder what He does.

And you have probably seen this exact list many times before. But that's because these are important parts of our relationship.

Spend time with Him,  
Read His Word  
Listen to His voice  
Talk to Him (Pray).  
Worship Him! Through voice and action.

And this is different for every person, and you have to remember that God knows us personally, and knows that we will have different ways to pray, different places we go to to find peace, different ways to study the bible, different methods of worship and music styles.

I heard a story about a pastor who would get up at 5am every morning to pray, and he would love it, and it would be enriching. And a woman in his church heard that and wanted to enrich her relationship with God and her prayer life. So she tried getting up at 5am before work, and really struggled to even start praying that early. So she called him up and asked how he got to this place. The problem wasn't her desire to pray, but that she was trying to do it in a style that wasn't her. Taking 30 minutes out after work worked better for her than torturing herself to wake up early.

Sometimes we need to try things out, and maybe a 5 am prayer time would work for some of you, or a silent retreat time... **but we don't know until we give them a go.** I have found that I pray more effectively in bed at night, or cycling or walking. I am also a night owl, so evenings are so much better for me to spend time with God. **I tried an early morning prayer time once...**



## **all God got out of me was a few grunts before falling asleep mid-prayer...**

What I am trying to say is that we don't know until we get into it, and try out a few times. But without taking time out to spend with God, we don't allow Him to transform us, to work in us, and then we end up going through the motions, and just following the rules rather than living in the relationship. And its not that if we don't do it, we are sinning, but more if we don't let Him in, He can't do the work. So do this for yourselves. Get people around you to love you and help you when it looks messy.

### **Conclusion**

I am going to finish by saying something I said at the start. This can be very easy to fall into. We can't let ourselves be ashamed when we do end up being legalistic, but admit that we have, and turn around. And maybe in the final song, you might want to light a candle, or sit and ask God to forgive you and help you rely on Him more.

Keeping a fresh relationship with God isn't the easiest thing either. Life too easily gets in the way, and when we get tired it is easy to rely on the do's and don'ts. They feel safe after all. It seems clearer, like a to do list on a Monday morning. But they don't produce life, not how God wants life. The law was there for a reason, and the law isn't there to just be forgotten, but the law cannot ever save. It was never meant to, but to make us realise that we need saving.

So when Jesus came to fulfil the law, he pointed out two commandments that can help us live in faith, and not fall into this trap.

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul.
2. Love your neighbour as your self. (Matt 22:37-40)

It means God is number one, and it is about Love. And to respond to this, we are going to have one more worship song, so we can say to God that we do love Him with all our heart mind and soul, and then we can go and do the second in the next room when we share fika together.