

"NEW YEAR, SAME YOU?"
(LEARNING FROM THE GALATIANS)
"The Three Ls"
Galatians 5:1-13

I want to tell you a story. North of Montreal, Canada there are lakes. During the winter months, the lake freezes over to a depth of about 10 feet. The people who live there not only drive their snowmobiles across the lakes but their cars and vans to get to the other villages. It is not only convenient but it's exciting to be able to drive across the water to the villages on the opposite shore. But come late March or early April, when spring arrives, the ice is not so hard and firm. Now the wise people don't even think about driving across so what the villagers do is put an old car on the middle of the ice and when that car starts sinking, dah, they know it's time to stop driving across on the ice. And before you know it, the lake is unfrozen and the boats start operating and if you want to take your car to the other side you put it on the ferry.

Now the reason I told you this story is because it relates to the book of Galatians and the people of God. You see, at the time Paul wrote this letter to the church at Galatia the Jewish people had lived for over 1,000 years with the understanding that their relationship with God had been established through the laws that are found in the first five books of the Old Testament. And it was as if the Jewish people had been living out their lives in the winter season. They knew how to travel in the winter months and when the spring time came they didn't want to give up the winter ways that they traveled. But if the ice melted and you tried to cross by snowmobile or car you might get stuck at the edge of the lake or trying to driving your car across and ending up at the bottom of the lake.

The people who opposed Paul and his message of freedom in Christ and that Gentile Christians did not have to be circumcised said that everybody should cross the lake by car- you must be circumcised to be a true follower of Christ. They were saying no matter what season of the year

you have to drive by car across the lake. They had all these dos and don'ts; all these laws of the road for getting to their destination. It was like they started the engine of their car; they were committing themselves to cross by this route. But Paul was saying that this route is no longer available. Its springtime, the ice has melted and there is a new way over the lake. And this time it is going to remain spring, forever. God, through Jesus Christ, had come into this world and winter will never come again. Jesus Christ has provided a new way across the lake- a fleet of boats that will take anyone across who is ready to leave their old vehicles on the shore.

The Galatian Christians who were non-Jews, they were the Gentiles, where told they needed to get circumcised like the Jews to be a Christian and Paul said NO, because the ice has already melted and you can't make it across the lake; you can't make it into heaven just by getting circumcised and following the laws or religious rituals.

And if you want to come across the lake you get into the boats that Jesus provides and you leave the other ways behind because His way is sure and true and free.

Last Sunday we continued in our study of the book of Galatians and I mentioned that Galatians is Paul's great declaration of religious freedom and Christian liberty. Certain people had infiltrated the church and were saying that in addition to having faith in Jesus Christ a Christian must keep the Law of Moses. And you will recall that Paul's answer is NO. And throughout this letter from Paul he makes his case that **Salvation is the grace-gift from God** and that a person becomes right with God only by faith in Jesus Christ and not by doing good works or following certain religious rituals. The reality is this- we are not worthy of salvation and we cannot earn it but rather we are "justified" or "made right" with God by God's grace and our faith-response to that grace.

And it was Jesus death on the cross where He suffered and died and in His death He purchased our pardon; Jesus did what we could never do ourselves.

This morning I want to talk about three Ls that affected the church in Paul's day and have ever since. The 3 Ls are: 1) LEGALISM; 2) LICENSE and 3) LIBERTY. So let's look at our passage and see what God's Word has to say. **Flood- Screen- Galatians 5:1-13**

There is the first L, **Legalism** which was a Galatian error. You see the Jews had become legalists and believed that if you followed all the laws written in the first 5 books of the Bible then God would accept you. But it was impossible to do all the do's and not do all the don'ts in the Bible. And there were some Jews who had come into the church and told people that in order to be a Christian you had to believe in Christ by faith- which is correct, but they added this- you have to submit to and observe the rituals, the laws of the faith like the males being circumcised.

Listen to this legalistic list of do's and don'ts in Jim Peterson's book, "Living Proof." In response to a young man asking, "What must I give up?" The answer was, "Colored clothes for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don't eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths and shave your beard. To shave is to lie against him who created us, to attempt to improve on his work." Now how old is that list? Over 1,800 years old. OK. So what does modern-day legalism look like? Some people would say that any and all consumption of alcoholic beverages is wrong. Other examples of legalism include the restriction from attending movies, eating meat, and not listening to any type of secular music. There are churches that believe only the old traditional hymns of yesteryear are appropriate and any other music sung in the church is sinful. Some even believe it to be a sin when new mothers do

not breast feed but instead use formula! So legalism wasn't the answer back in Paul's day and the same is true today.

But there is the second L, **License**. The person who welcomes license might be found to say, "I am a Christian and Christ has saved me so I can do whatever I want, whenever I want to because Christ has set me free to do it." And yet Paul asked in Romans 6:1, "So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving?" And then in Romans 6:15-16 he asks, "So, since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want?" And his answer to these questions is, "I should hope not" and hardly!" He goes on to say, "You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom."

So legalism is not Biblical and license is not Biblical. Which brings us to the third L, **Liberty** or another word is Freedom. This is the Christ-like way that brings together faith and works.

Jews were held captive by the Law and all that the Law required. And Paul is saying that to be a Christian you don't have to perform all the works of the law like circumcision and not eating pork and on-and-on in order to then become a follower of Jesus. That is why Paul says in Galatians 2:19, "... I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a 'law man' so that I could be God's man." And in Galatians 5:13 Paul says, "You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another." Now let me make this very clear, **liberty does not mean there is no need for the law.** We read in our US Constitution about our "liberty" but that does not mean we have a green light to go out and break the laws. You and I can never enjoy true freedom without some laws, some rules by which to live by.

So what does this freedom mean that Christ gives and what does it look like? First, **it is a freedom from being held captive to the law.**

Galatians 4:4-5 says, "God sent his Son...so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law." Paul wanted everyone to know that the law is not what saves us from our sins; the law cannot put us in a right relationship with God. That is why Paul says in Galatians 5:6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working or made effective through love." And that faith is in Jesus Christ because He is the only one who can save us from our sins; the only one who, through His death on a cross, can put us in a right relationship with God where we can even stand before Him. So there was this release from being a slave and held captive to the law all because God sent His Son, Jesus.

Second, **this freedom is not about us trying to earn God's love and acceptance.** God's love has already been shown to us in Jesus and what He did for us on the cross. So we don't have to hold a clipboard checking off all the good things we do, as if we can do enough to get a free

pass to heaven. No! What we need to do is believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Third, **this freedom encourages us to be the kind of believers**

God wants us to be. As believers, as followers of Jesus we are called to be disciples. What is a disciple? A disciple is someone who follows a teacher and models him or herself after the teacher. They seek to pattern their lives after the teacher. They will do whatever the teacher asks. This is exactly what Christ is asking of us. He is asking us to love Him and, as Paul says in Galatians 2:19-20, "identify ... completely with him." He is asking us to be, "crucified with [Him]" so that "Christ lives in [us]."

Christ not only wants us to be disciples but to make disciples- to come along side others and help them on their spiritual journey so that they become sold out to Jesus. But remember this- We must be a disciple before we can make a disciple- this is what Christ commands us to be and do.

We don't have to be, and God doesn't want us to be, timid when it comes to our faith. So there should be nothing stopping us in growing and maturing in our faith, that is, unless we want to be selfish and less than mature and hold back when it comes to our faith because we say, "faith is a private thing" which is the furthest thing from the truth. Faith is a personal thing but our Christian faith is not private especially when Christ commanded us in Matthew 28:19 to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And fourth, **this freedom given to us by Jesus Christ frees us from whatever it is that holds us hostage.** What holds you hostage today? Maybe it is an addiction of some sort- to cigarettes, or alcohol, or pornography or to food. Maybe it is living a life style that we know is unhealthy- Paul lists the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 when he says, "It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own

way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom."

The good news is that Christ sets us free. And the freedom that Paul was proclaiming to the Galatians is the same freedom we have today. Christian freedom doesn't mean that, now you believe, you can do what you like because life is a battlefield where the flesh and the spirit oppose one another. But what we are free from is our past; we are free from trying to

be good enough and do enough good things; we are free to be all that God wants us to be for Him.

Our identity is that of a true child of God, who has the Spirit of God within and we are free to be lead by the spirit into a new way of life that is living for Jesus. Legalism, License or Liberty? For freedom, Christ has set us free. Amen and Amen.

**“NEW YEAR, SAME YOU?”
(LEARNING FROM THE GALATIANS)**

“The Three Ls”

Galatians 5:1-13

Introduction: North of Montreal, Canada are lakes...

Galatians- Paul makes the case that **salvation is the grace-gift from God**

The three Ls

First, _____ - a Galatian error

What does modern-day _____ look like?

Second, _____

“I am a Christian; Christ has saved me so I can do whatever I want,
Whenever I want...”

Romans 6:1, 15-16

Third, _____ - another word is Freedom

Gal. 2:19; 5:13

_____ **does not mean there is no need for the law**

What does this freedom mean and what does it look like?

First, **it is a freedom from being held _____
to the law** Gal. 4:4-5; 5:6

Second, **this freedom is not about us trying to _____
God’s love and _____**

Third, **this freedom encourages us to ____ the kind of
believers God wants us to be** Gal. 2:19-20; Matt. 28:19

Fourth, **this freedom given to us by Christ frees us from
whatever it is that holds us hostage** Gal. 5:19-21

Conclusion: Our identity is that of a true child of God who has the Spirit of God within and we are free to be lead by the Spirit into a new way of life that is living for Jesus