



## Sermon, Sunday August 20, 2023

### "The Freedom We Have in Christ Jesus"

**SCRIPTURE: Galatians 1:1-10** <sup>1</sup> Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— <sup>2</sup> and all the brothers and sisters with me, to the churches of Galatia: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. <sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— <sup>7</sup> not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed! <sup>10</sup> Am I now seeking human approval or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

#### Introduction: The Identity of the Gospel

Today is the 12th Sunday after Pentecost. Jesus was known to have twelve disciples We call the 12 disciples of Jesus the apostles. (The early church officially acknowledged Matthias as a disciple of Jesus instead of Kerioth Judas, who betrayed the Lord.) However, when we talk about disciples of the Lord, that is, apostles, there is a person who is controversial. He is Paul. He was a self-styled apostle. For this reason, he consistently emphasized his apostleship in his letters to the churches. The basis for Paul's claim to his apostleship was that he experienced the resurrected Jesus.

Despite the weakness of his apostleship, Paul speaks about the uncompromising truth about the identity of the gospel in today's text. As Christians, we must seriously reflect on the **'identity of the gospel'**. By the way, our reflection on the identity of the gospel does not end once but must continue until we go before the judgment seat of the Lord. Because the moment we stop reflecting on the identity of the gospel, we lose the **'freedom of the gospel'**.

#### Body: No Other Gospel

The Apostle Paul says in **today's text 1:6, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel."** As we can see from this verse, Paul's situation seems urgent. **Paul goes on to say in verse 7, "Not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ."** Going further, in verses 8 and 9 of today's text, Paul says he hopes that a curse will come upon those who follow a different gospel or disrupt the gospel.

The Apostle Paul tells the story of how he became an apostle and took charge of the gospel ministry in Galatians 1:11-24. He said that he was a persecutor of Christianity, and he experienced the Lord of resurrection. Three years after this happened, Paul went up to Jerusalem and met Peter and James, the younger brother of Jesus. And 14 years go by. Meanwhile, Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles. The results of the gospel ministry also appeared. However, people who thought there was something wrong with Paul's teachings began



to hinder Paul's missionary work. They went to the church Paul had planted and claimed that Paul's teachings were wrong.

Paul describes this situation in **Galatians 2:4**: **“This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.”**

Those who oppose Paul in this verse are not heretics, but instead belong to orthodox Christianity. They are the core members of the Jerusalem church. Some of them were given authority by the apostles to administer the Church in Asia Minor and elsewhere.

However, the reason Paul had no choice but to fight them was because he saw them as violating the religious freedom of Gentile Christians. Those who were against Paul insisted that in addition to being righteous by faith in Jesus, the Torah (Jewish law) and circumcision should be kept. Paul rejected their argument in one word. **Paul says, “know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:16).**

Also, Paul introduced an episode in Antioch in Galatians 2:11-21 as to why this could not be yielded or compromised on in the Christian faith.

When Peter was eating with Gentiles in Antioch, he heard that people sent by James from the Jerusalem church were coming to their table, so he avoided eating with them. Then, Barnabas and other Jews followed Peter and avoided eating with Gentiles. The reason they acted like that was because according to the law, a devout Jew should not eat with a Gentile. In other words, Peter and Barnabas avoided eating with Gentiles because they were afraid that their actions would be criticized by the people from the Jerusalem church. Paul called their behavior hypocrisy and criticized them for not following the truth of the gospel. (Galatians 2:14)

Then, what is the truth of the gospel that Paul tried to defend by criticizing even the great apostle and co-worker in the faith? It is freedom in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:4). Those who believe in Jesus Christ are free from the law. Christians did not have to see the world based on the law. Paul says that Christians who give up the freedom of the gospel are doing Jesus' crucifixion in vain. (Galatians 2:21)

However, the existential problem in our life of faith is that it is not easy for us to enjoy the **‘freedom of the gospel’** in our daily lives. The same was true of the Galatian Church. They thought that if they believed in Jesus Christ, they would become a new person, but not much changed. They came to the idea that the gospel alone was not enough. In this situation, the people who were sent from the Jerusalem church and to the Galatian church emphasized keeping the law.

The reason Christians get confused in the matter of the gospel and the law in their life of faith is that the line between the gospel and the law is not clear. In fact, the gospel is the essence of the Christian faith, and the law is the form. Therefore, the two cannot be completely separated.

Faith, the essence of our religious life, is expressed through the form of the law. That is why **James 1:25** says, **“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.”** But what is it to love the fulfillment of the law that sets us free in this verse? That is the love of Jesus Christ. So the Apostle Paul says in **Romans 13:8 and 10**: **“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. (v.8) Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (v.10)”** The passages in the book of James illustrate the relationship between faith and the law.

However, the argument of the circumcised legalists, who were criticized by Paul in Galatians, is not to fulfill the law through the power of Jesus' love, but to fulfill the law through their own efforts and



righteousness. This is to completely reject the love of the cross of Jesus and the power of resurrection allowed through it.

A legalistic life in this sense is much easier to carry out than a life of faith. However, in doing so, we cannot enjoy freedom. Because these actions are self-satisfied with how I may be a better person than the other person, I expect others' recognition of my actions.

So, for our life of faith to enjoy the **“freedom of the gospel,”** we always need to reflect on our identity of faith. This reflection does not end just once but must continue until the day we stand before the Lord.

German theologian Karl Barth was aware of our existence, so he quoted St. Augustine's words 'Ecclesia semper reformanda est (the church must always be reformed) and popularized it.

As the spiritual body of Christ, the head of the church, we must not neglect our efforts to preserve our religious identity through the help of the Holy Spirit.

### **Conclusion: Are You Enjoying the Freedom of the Gospel?**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Now let's summarize today's message. In today's text, Paul very strongly criticized the Jewish Christians who insisted on circumcision. Apostle Paul's anger was because of his pure passion to keep the identity of the gospel.

Today, we face strong challenges to the identity of our Christian faith. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Look at the essence of faith and do not give up on your efforts to keep it. If we lose even a little bit of spiritual tension, we will be burdened with the yoke of slavery rather than freedom.

Please remember, the greatest benefit of our life of faith is to enjoy the freedom provided by the gospel. Even if our lives do not meet the standards of worldly success, if we are spiritually healthy and lead a rich life of faith, it means that we are enjoying the freedom that the gospel provides. I pray that our lives will be filled with an abundance of Christians who enjoy the freedom of the gospel, not the formal religious look.

