

On Freedom and Persecution

Charles Faupel



What follows is a letter written to several college students who were meeting with my wife and me in a local pub prior to our leaving Alabama to move to Arkansas in 2010. I believe he would have me share this with our readers at this time. If you have never done so, I urge you to spend time meditating on the book of Galatians. It is a life changing book to those struggling with bondage to the law.

Friends:

I need to begin this email with a little context. This message is birthed out of a discussion that took place among several of us who meet at the Olde Auburn Ale House for study of the book of Galatians. My heart has not been this moved to write in such a manner in a very long time. Some of you will be encouraged by these words; others may be angered. But as Jesus said of his disciples when the Pharisees told him to rebuke them for speaking forth His glory on His entry into Jerusalem, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Friends, God is passionate about this word.

Christ came to set us free. Says the apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians, "It is for freedom that we have been set free." God bore the excruciating pain of watching His only begotten Son die a most wretched

death in the most humiliating way possible for one purpose--to set us free. He came to set men free--free from the bondage of sin and free from the bondage of the law. HE WANTS HIS CHILDREN FREE! HE PAID AN INCREDIBLE COST TO SET US FREE! He came for no other purpose than to set us free. Jesus did not come to establish a new philosophy or a new religion. He did not come to set up a new system of rules. He came for one purpose only--to set men free. Period. Yet, we so willingly sacrifice the freedom that has been bought for us for a "bowl of stew"--whether that be in the form of worldly attraction that is so alluring or in the form of succumbing to the law with its empty promise of freedom through adherence to its impossible demands. Can you imagine sending your son or daughter to a foreign land to fight and die for the freedom of a people who don't really want or care about being free? This is how the heart of God is grieved—grieved beyond our capacity to comprehend—when we reject the freedom that was so costly for Him to bring to us.

The question was raised in the meeting last night at the Olde Auburn Ale House, "Why did Paul so zealously persecute the Christians?" Understand that Paul was about as perfect as any man could be with regard to the law. He boldly states in Philippians that he was "as for legalistic righteousness, *faultless*." If anyone could lay claim to moral perfection, Paul could. But he said he regarded it all as rubbish--because he had discovered the freedom that there is in Christ. It was before he discovered this freedom, however, that he was perhaps the most zealous persecutor of the church ever known. Why was it that Paul was so zealous in his persecution? His own message, which consumed his entire life after his encounter with Christ reveals why—It was because of the freedom that these early believers found in Christ. This freedom was an affront to the religious establishment—the establishment to which Paul had devoted his life. Friends, do not be mistaken—It was the religious establishment that instigated the persecution of those early Christians. Oh indeed, they used the secular authorities to help carry out this persecution, and we know that the Roman authorities eventually demanded unqualified loyalty to the Caesar with gruesome forms of execution to take place if they refused. But the spirit of persecution of the Church all began in that little Palestinian land with the religious establishment. These early Christians, following in the path of their Lord, paid dearly for defending the freedom that was their inheritance.

Those who are committed to this gospel message of freedom today will also pay dearly for the freedom that is their inheritance. And from where will our persecution originate? None other than the religious establishment. Religion is all about control. It seeks to destroy the freedom that we have in Christ. And there are costly consequences for anyone who is serious about laying claim to this inheritance. The religious establishment will tell you, "Yes, you are saved by grace alone," but then proceed to lay down rules for how you must live your life. Exactly what those rules are will vary, depending on the particular religious tradition. In the tradition of Paul's day, the rules involved circumcision, and the eating or not eating of certain foods. In the tradition in which I grew up, those rules involved such things as smoking and drinking, and even dancing and playing with face cards. Other religious traditions will tell you that you must engage in social outreach activities. Most religious traditions will tell you that you must get baptized. I must interject something here: I know that believer's baptism is scriptural, but folks, when this is imposed as a rule upon believers as a criterion for membership in the body, it ceases to have the power of the testimony that it had. Some of you have heard the testimony of my baptism. I'm not going to go into that testimony here, except to say that I was in my mid-40's before being baptized. I had joined churches that required baptism for membership, but my conscience would not allow me to be baptized simply as a requirement for membership. Somehow, they let me in anyway. I was baptized only when the Spirit of the Lord came upon me one day and let me know in no uncertain terms that it was now time for me to be baptized. The purpose of my sharing this is not to engage in a theological discussion on baptism. I share this only to give testimony to the fact that God does not want us to do ANYTHING out of obligation to the law.

Those of us who have accepted Christ as our righteousness stand complete in that work that HE did. Hear me very carefully: ANYTHING THAT WE DO TO JUSTIFY OURSELVES BY THE LAW IS AN AFFRONT TO THE CROSS OF CHRIST! I don't care what that work is: be it getting circumcised, or remaining abstinent from alcohol or tobacco, or doing good works in the community, or getting baptized--if it is done out of obligation or in order to conform to a rule or law that has not been written on our heart and ordered by the Spirit of God, it is sin. Paul says in Romans that "everything that does not come from faith is sin."

This word has been incredibly heavy on my heart today. God is calling forth a remnant of believers who are willing to stand firm, no matter what the cost, for this gospel message of the freedom that is in Christ. You WILL be persecuted for this stand. Jesus promised it. But friends, there is no greater honor. I encourage you with every fibre of my being to live free in Christ and in His righteousness that He has cloaked you in.

I am, to those of you who accept Christ's work as complete,

Your brother,

Chuck Faupel