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Session 19 - Galatians

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So, what happens when a message of radical, world-changing freedom gets completely hijacked? Well, today we're diving head-first into one of the most passionate, fiery, and honestly angry letters ever written, the New Testament Book of Galatians. And trust me, this is not some dusty old document. It's an urgent, high-stakes defense of an idea that literally changed the world.

Let's get into it. The entire firestorm in this letter, all the passion and frustration, really just boils down to one single question. Is faith enough? Is trusting in Jesus all you need to be made right with God? Or is there something else? Do you need to add rules, rituals, your family heritage? The answer to that question was going to define the future of Christianity, and the Apostle Paul is about to build an absolutely ironclad case.

So here's how we're going to follow Paul's argument. First we'll look at the crisis that kicked this whole thing off. Then we'll get into the two competing worldviews that are clashing here.

After that, you'll see Paul actually has to defend his own credibility before he can even make his case. And finally, he lays out his evidence, all leading to this incredible conclusion about what true freedom really looks like. Okay, so our story starts with a full-blown emergency.

Paul, who founded these churches in a region called Galatia, gets some devastating news. The people he taught, the people he cared about, are turning their backs on the core message he gave them. He is shocked.

You can feel it in his writing. And this letter is his urgent, desperate attempt to pull them back from the edge. So what's the problem? Well, a group of outside teachers showed up right after Paul left.

And Paul doesn't see them as colleagues who just have a different opinion. No, to him, they're dangerous agitators. They're twisting the very heart of the gospel and leading his people down a disastrous path.

So who were these guys? Well, scholars have nicknamed them the Judaizers. And their core teaching was pretty simple, but in Paul's eyes, it was absolutely deadly. They argued that for a non-Jew to become a true Christian, they had to essentially become Jewish first.

They had to adopt the laws of Moses; we're talking circumcision, observing the Sabbath, following all the strict dietary codes, the whole shebang. And it all comes down to one tiny little word: plus. You see, Paul preached that faith in Jesus alone was enough.

The Judaizers came along and insisted it was faith plus obedience to the law. And for Paul, adding that plus didn't just tweak the gospel. It was a completely different gospel.

It was a poison pill that destroyed the whole thing. Now, to really get why Paul is so fired up about this little word, plus, we have to get inside his head. We have to understand the fundamental way he sees the world.

For him, all of reality is divided into two completely separate competing spheres. Alright, so on one side, you have what he calls this present evil age. It's a realm that's dominated by sin and ultimately death.

Now, here's the crucial part. Paul places the law of Moses right there in that sphere. Now that doesn't mean the law is evil.

Not at all. It just means that in his view, the law belongs to the old way of doing things and is ultimately powerless to defeat sin. Then, on the other side, you have life in Christ, a totally new reality defined by life, real righteousness, and the Spirit of God.

And look, right from the very beginning of his letter, Paul says the entire point of Jesus' sacrifice was to rescue people out of that first sphere. This makes his question to the Galatians just devastatingly simple. If you've already been rescued from that old world, why on earth would you choose to go back and live by its old rules? Now these troublemakers, the Judaizers, they weren't just attacking Paul's message.

They were attacking him. It's a classic move, right? To discredit the teaching, you discredit the teacher. They were probably questioning his authority, saying he wasn't a real apostle.

So, before Paul can defend his gospel, he first has to defend himself. And Paul has to walk this incredibly fine line here. It's like a tightrope.

On one hand, he has to prove his message came directly from God, that it's not some hand-me-down from other people. But on the other hand, he also has to show he's not some lone wolf, and that the original apostles back in Jerusalem, guys like Peter and James, are actually on his side. So he lays out his resume, and it is a wild one.

He starts by reminding them he was this super devout Pharisee, so committed to the law that he was literally persecuting Christians. Then, boom, his conversion. And here's the key.

He points out that right after that, he didn't run off to Jerusalem to get trained by the other apostles. No. He went to Arabia.

His point is just undeniable. How could I have learned this from them if I wasn't even there? He just puts it as plainly as possible. The gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin.

I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. He's making it crystal clear that his credentials, and more importantly, his message, come straight from the top. Okay.

So, Paul's established his authority. He's laid the groundwork. Now it's time to bring the evidence.

He's going to present two major proofs to completely dismantle the Judaizers' argument. And he starts by appealing to something very personal: the Galatians' own experience. This is his opening salvo, and it's just a brilliant question.

See, in the Old Testament, the gift of God's Spirit was the ultimate sign of the new age, the new covenant. So Paul just asks them, hey, think back for a second. How did you get that? How did you receive the Spirit? Was it because you started following all the rules of Moses, or was it simply because you heard the good news about Jesus and you believed it? The answer was obvious.

They knew it was by faith alone. All right. For his second piece of evidence, Paul pivots from their personal experience to the grand sweep of history, to Scripture itself.

And he builds this entire historical case around one single powerful number, 430. And this number, he argues, changes absolutely everything. Okay.

Here's the logic, and it's pretty sharp. The foundational promise of salvation from God was given to Abraham, and it was based on faith. The law of Moses, Paul points out, didn't show up on the scene until 430 years after that promise was made.

So his argument is basically a legal one. A contract that's signed 430 years later can't possibly cancel out the terms of the original agreement. The promise came first, and the promise stands.

The law was just a temporary addition. So if the law can't save you, and it was just temporary, then what was its point? What was its purpose? This is where Paul moves into the climax of his argument, and he uses two powerful metaphors from their everyday world to explain the law's proper and very limited role. First, he says the law acted like a prison guard.

Its job was to hold God's people in custody, to sort of confine and protect them. Now you can hear the restrictive nature of that, right? But the key thing about a guard is that their job is temporary. They're only on duty until the moment of release finally arrives.

His second metaphor would have been even clearer to his audience. In a wealthy family back then, a disciplinarian, often a trusted slave, was put in charge of the heir, the young son. Their job was to keep him out of trouble, to manage his behavior until he finally came of age.

Paul's message is that the law was like a guardian for humanity's childhood. But now that Christ has arrived, humanity has reached spiritual adulthood, and that guardian's job is over. So here it is, Paul's final verdict.

The law can't save you, because to be declared righteous by the law, you'd have to obey it perfectly, and, let's be honest, nobody can do that. Its role was always meant to be temporary, and now that Christ has come, that role is finished. So for the Galatians to go back under the law now would be like a grown man choosing to go back and live under the authority of his childhood babysitter.

It's not just unnecessary; it's a huge step backward into bondage. Paul's case is now complete. He's made his fiery argument for faith.

But you know, it leaves the Galatians, and it leaves us, with this massive, hanging question. If we are truly free from the old law of Moses, does that just mean we are free to do whatever we want? If the old rulebook is gone, what guides us now? That is the exact question Paul is going to turn to next, and it sets the stage for the whole second half of his incredible letter.