

Dr. David Mathewson, New Testament Literature,

Session 19 - Galatians

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Alright, let's jump into another deep dive. This time, we're taking a look at Dr. Mathewson's lecture on Galatians. Oh, yeah.

You know, the book where Paul pretty much says, hey, Gentile Christians, you don't have to follow Jewish law to be saved. Right. This letter was a huge deal, especially since the early church was really grappling with how these new non-Jewish believers fit in.

Did they have to adopt Jewish customs? It's wild how Paul just tackles this head-on. He was dealing with some serious pushback, you know, from the Judaizers who were all about keeping the Mosaic law. Yeah.

So how does Paul, a former devout Jew himself, go about making this case? I mean, it seems pretty radical. Well, right off the bat, Paul makes it clear that his authority comes straight from Jesus, not from any human leader or anything like that. He's not messing around.

Not at all. It's almost like he's anticipating the arguments against him, you know, preemptively shutting them down. Like, don't even try to question my credentials.

He's pulling a mic drop moment right in the first chapter. Exactly. But here's where Mathewson points out something super interesting.

He says that Paul actually started out pretty content with Judaism. Really? Yeah. You can see it in Galatians 1.3-3.14, where he talks about being totally zealous for the traditions of his fathers.

It challenges the whole assumption that he always had this problem with Jewish law. So it wasn't like he had a grudge against the law or something? No. It sounds like something much deeper shifted his perspective.

To really get Paul's arguments, I think we need to talk about justification. It's a word that gets thrown around a lot in theology. Oh, for sure.

And it can sound kind of intimidating. Yeah, yeah. Maybe we could break it down a bit for our listener.

Absolutely. Think of justification like being declared right in God's eyes. It's about how our relationship with God gets restored, how we're made right with him.

So it's not about being perfect or earning our way into heaven. It's more about how that broken relationship is mended. You got it.

And Paul is so clear that this justification comes through faith in Jesus, not through meticulously following all the rules in the Mosaic law. So why would he make such a bold

claim? Well, Matthewson seems to think that Paul's using some pretty clever tactics to dismantle the Judaizers' arguments. Oh, like what? It's almost as if he's using his skills as a scholar of Jewish law to build his case.

Yet, in Galatians 3.24, he compares the law to a *pedagogos*, basically a guardian or a disciplinarian for young boys in ancient Rome. Yes, the powerful image. Because it paints the law as temporary, right? Right, exactly.

Like someone who guides you until you reach a certain point, like training wheels. And then bam, you don't need that guardian anymore. You're ready to move on to something greater.

And Paul is saying that something greater is Christ. Faith in Christ is what really sets us free. Like graduating from law school and moving on to Grace University.

Uh-huh. I love that. And it's important to remember that Paul isn't saying the law is bad or that it doesn't matter at all.

In fact, he really emphasizes that his gospel is totally in line with the teachings of the other apostles. You know, Peter, James, John, it's like he's walking this tightrope. He has to establish his own authority while also showing that his message isn't completely out there.

Exactly. He's showing everyone that his message is both revolutionary A.N.D. rooted in the tradition of the apostles. It's a delicate balance.

Like he's heading off those critics who might say, well, if your interpretation of the gospel is so great, why didn't any of the other apostles teach it? You know it. Yeah. And that leads us to one of the most debated points in Galatians scholarship.

What exactly did Paul mean by works of the law? Ah, yeah. Works of the law. This is where things get really interesting.

So we have this phrase works of the law, and there are like two main camps on what Paul was really getting at. Right. Exactly.

You've got, like, Martin Luther's classic interpretation, you know, works of the law as trying to earn your salvation. Right. By, like, following every rule, like checking off boxes.

Did I eat the right food? Did I perform the right rituals? Yeah. Like being super legalistic about it all. And Paul is saying, uh, no, that's not how it works at all.

Not even close. Then you have the new perspective, which honestly sounds kind of fascinating. It is pretty interesting.

Can you tell us more about that? Sure. The new perspective says that works of the law aren't really about personal piety. It's more about those actions that, well, kind of mark you as belonging to the Jewish covenant.

Okay. Things like circumcision or following those dietary laws. So for Paul, it's less about legalism and more about rejecting this idea that salvation is, you know, exclusive to one group.

So it's about breaking down those walls between Jews and Gentiles in this new Christian community. Exactly. And Matthewson makes the point that both of these interpretations actually hold some weight.

Like Paul saw dangers in strict legalism, but also in this idea that God's grace was only for a select few. It sounds like Paul is really navigating some complex stuff here. Oh, he definitely is.

And to drive his point home, Paul goes into why the law, in his opinion, just couldn't justify in anyone. In Galatians 3.9, he talks about this curse that comes from not perfectly obeying every single rule. Oh, wow.

Yeah. So even if you dedicated your entire life to following the law perfectly, one slip up and it's all over seems like an impossible standard to meet. And that's exactly Paul's point.

You know, he's highlighting how we as humans just mess up. Yeah. We're not capable of perfectly upholding the law.

So trying to find justification through that is, well, a lost cause. Which is why faith in Christ is so radical. It's not about what we do, but about who we trust.

Right. And Matthewson points out that Paul saw the law as having this specific temporary purpose, almost like a placeholder until Christ came along. Like, you know, training wheels on a bike.

OK, I like that. Once you learn how to ride, you don't need them anymore. So Jesus is like the ultimate training wheel remover.

Exactly. He fulfills the purpose of the law and opens the door to this whole new way of relating to God based on faith and grace. But that raises some questions, doesn't it? If we're not bound by the Mosaic law, does that mean we can just ignore it? Yeah, that's a common question.

I mean, does it even matter for Christians today? Such great questions. And Matthewson doesn't give us a simple answer in his lecture. But he does imply that Paul sees value in the law, even if it's not the main way we're justified.

What kind of value? Well, for one, it reveals God's character, like his heart for justice. It provides a framework for how we're supposed to live, even if we're not trying to earn our salvation through rule-following. So it's like this moral compass guiding us in the right direction.

You got it. But remember, Matthewson also mentioned how Paul was battling this idea that salvation was only for the Jews. Right.

He was tearing down those walls. Yeah. Saying God's grace is for everyone.

It makes me wonder: what would happen if those Judaizers had won that argument? Oh, man. How different would Christianity look today? Imagine if it had stayed super

intertwined with all those Jewish customs. Could it have spread so quickly across all those different cultures? Wow, that's crazy to think about.

It's hard to even imagine how different history would be. I know, right? Mm-hmm. And it just shows that this debate wasn't just some like abstract theological argument.

It had huge consequences for how Christianity developed and spread. It was a pivotal moment, for sure. So where does that leave us now? Well, Matthewson leaves us with a question to think about.

He asks, what implications does all this have for how we approach the Old Testament today? That's a big one. It is. Do we just treat it like a history book? Or can we still learn from it? Exactly.

Assign wisdom in it, even if we're not bound by all those laws. It challenges us to really grapple with the text, engage with it, but also to try and figure out how those principles can inform our lives today. And that's not an easy thing to do.

There are so many different interpretations out there. It feels like we need a whole other deep dive just to unpack the Old Testament. Uh-huh.

Yeah, you and me both. But I think what Matthewson does with Galatians gives us a really good starting point. He pushes us to see the law as more than just a set of rules.

It's like a window into God's character and what he wants for us. So instead of getting hung up on the details of each law, we should try to see the bigger picture, right? Yeah. Like, what's it trying to teach us about God and ourselves? Exactly.

And that leads to this really interesting question that Matthewson kind of hints at. What's the purpose of the law in the lives of people who already believe? I mean, if it's not about getting into heaven, then what's the point? Yeah, that's something I've always wondered about. If we're saved by grace, not by following the rules, where does that leave the law? Well, Matthewson suggests that even though we're not under the law as a way to get right with God, it can still be a guide for us.

It can shape our character and our actions, like a moral compass, showing us the kind of people God wants us to be. So it's not about rigidly following every single rule. It's more about letting those principles of justice and mercy and love shape our lives.

That's it. And honestly, I think that's one of the most important things for our listeners to take away. This whole debate about the law in Galatians, it's not just some ancient theological thing.

It has so much to do with how we understand our faith and how we live it out today. You know, it reminds me of what you were saying earlier about how Paul was fighting against this idea of exclusivity. Oh, yeah.

It wasn't enough for him to just say, "Hey, Gentiles, you don't have to follow all the Jewish customs. He was making a much bigger point. God's grace is for everyone, not just a select group.

Absolutely. And I think that message is more relevant now than ever. We live in a world where everyone's drawing lines and building walls, trying to decide who's in and who's out.

But Paul's letter reminds us that God's love breaks down all those barriers. Man, that's powerful stuff, especially in today's world. It is.

And I think Matthewson would encourage us to keep asking those tough questions. Don't shy away from them. Don't be afraid to challenge what you think you know.

He's basically saying, dive in, explore the text, see what you find, and let it change you. Uh-huh. Yeah.

So as we wrap up this deep dive on Galatians, I hope our listener feels a little more equipped to engage with this letter and the whole Old Testament in a more thoughtful way, you know, with more nuance. And who knows? Maybe this will inspire them to do their own deep dive into the Bible. Maybe they'll discover something that changes their whole perspective on faith and life.

That's the best part. There's always something new to learn, something new to explore. It's a never-ending journey.

Well said. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive. We'll see you next time.

Until then, happy reading.