

GALATINS 1:6 – 2:14
PART 4

(September 26, 1899)

In a previous study on this subject—the fourth one—we remarked that while it is true that "the ceremonial law is the chief subject, *as to law*, in the book of Galatians," yet even then it is not the ceremonial law as given by the Lord; that even where the ceremonial law as given by the Lord is involved, it is such a perversion of it as to make it altogether another thing than what it was in truth; and consequently that the great subject, as to law, as to works, is more ceremonialism—ceremonialism entire—than it is the true ceremonial law itself in any phase of it.

That *traditionalism* was an essential part of the teaching of those who had driven back the Galatian Christians is certain from the fact that Paul cites it as a thing in his own experience, and shows how he had been delivered from it by the gospel, which he preached. "Ye have heard of my conversation [manner of life] in time past in the Jews' religion,... and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of *the traditions of my fathers*. BUT when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, *to reveal his Son in me*, THAT I MIGHT PREACH HIM among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Gal. 1:13-16.

That is to say: This very thing that these disturbers are trying to fasten upon you, I myself once held even more zealously than they; for "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it." But from that I was delivered and redeemed by the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ—by the revelation of the Son of God in me. I have preached to you, and am now preaching to you, simply what I know through my own heart's experience and the revelation of the gospel of Christ. I *know* that the gospel of Christ, the gospel which I preach, delivers the soul from all the burden and the toil of the traditions that those men bring to you, and sets the soul free in the light and liberty and joy of a perfect righteousness. I *know* that all that they seek by the many toilsome exactions of their traditions is found unto perfect and soul-rejoicing fullness in Jesus Christ, and that it is obtained simply by faith alone in him.

That one passage, in the connection in which it is placed, even if there were no more, would be sufficient to show that, whatever else was included, the ceremonies of "the traditions" of the Jews were assuredly involved.

But that is not all: the thing which brought the crisis at Antioch in the case of Peter, and which is the crisis in the introduction to the real subject in the book of Galatians, was the question of *eating with the Gentiles*, with men uncircumcised. This too, was the thing which marked the crisis in the work of Peter as to Jew and Gentile, as is shown in his experience in the vision at Joppa, and at the home of Cornelius; and which he himself summed up in the words, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a

Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Acts 10:28.

But eating with the Gentiles was not an unlawful thing at all, *except by their own traditionalism*. This exclusiveness was never enjoined nor inculcated by anything which the Lord had ever committed to the Jews. The Scriptures, which they themselves had, were against it. That exclusiveness was altogether of their own construction, built up from their own exclusive self-righteousness. Yet this was a vital point and an essential element in the contention of the "Pharisees which believed," that called forth the letter to the Galatians. And this being so, it is certain that the *traditional* ceremonial law of the Jews was an essential part of the ceremonial law that is the chief subject, *as to law*, in the book of Galatians.

It is true that the ceremonial law that God gave is also included in the controversy that called forth the letter to the Galatians; and yet even that, *as God gave it*, is not included. Circumcision is included; but so far perverted from its true intent and meaning as God gave it, and so laden with traditionalism, as to be only another phase of sheer pharisaic ceremonialism.

From the history of James in this connection, especially in Acts 21, it is plain that the rest of the true ceremonial law was also included—even to self-contradiction in the offering of sacrifices for sin while professing to believe in Christ. For one of the offerings made in purification of the Nazarite was a "lamb of the first year without blemish *for a SIN OFFERING*." Num. 6:14. And when Paul, out of deference to the brethren at Jerusalem, especially to James the brother of Jesus, had yielded so far *for appearance's sake* as to accompany some men who were actually practicing this, to a believer in Jesus, self-contradictory, ceremony, it was *while*, "*he was conversing with the priest concerning the sacrifices to be offered*," that the mob broke loose, and dragged Paul away. However it is not strictly correct to say that just then the mob broke loose: the truth is that just then God *let loose* the mob to save Paul from the effect of his deference to the ill advice of the compromising brethren.

"When we consider Paul's great desire to be in harmony with his brethren, his tenderness of spirit toward the weak in faith, his reverence for the apostles who had been with Christ, and for James the brother of the Lord, and his purpose to become all things to all men as far as he could do this and not sacrifice principle,—when we consider all this, it is less surprising that he was constrained to deviate from his firm, decided course of action. But instead of accomplishing the desired object, these efforts for conciliation only precipitated the crisis, hastened the predicted sufferings of Paul, separated him from his brethren in his labors, deprived the church of one of its strongest pillars, and brought sorrow to Christian hearts in every land.

"The Saviour's words of reproof to the men of Nazareth apply in the case of Paul, not only to the unbelieving Jews, but *to his own brethren in the faith*. Had the leaders in the church fully surrendered their feelings of bitterness toward the

apostle, and accepted him as one specially called of God to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, the Lord would have spared him to them still to labor for the salvation of souls. He who sees the end from the beginning, and who understands the hearts of all, saw what would be the result of the envy and jealousy cherished toward Paul. God had not in his providence ordained that Paul's labors should so soon end; but he did not work a miracle to counteract the train of circumstances to which their own course gave rise.

"The same spirit is still leading to the same results. A neglect to appreciate and improve the provisions of divine grace, has deprived the church of many a blessing. How often would the Lord have prolonged the life of some faithful minister had his labors been appreciated. But if the church permit the enemy of souls to pervert their understanding, so that they misrepresent and misinterpret the words and acts of the servant of Christ; if they allow themselves to stand in his way and hinder his usefulness, the Lord removes from them the blessing which he gave.

"Satan is constantly working through his agents to dishearten and destroy those whom God has chosen to accomplish a great and good work. They may be ready to sacrifice even their own life for the advancement of the cause of Christ, yet the great deceiver will suggest doubts, distrust, jealousy, concerning them, which, if entertained, will undermine confidence in their integrity of character, and thus cripple their usefulness. Too often he succeeds in working through their own brethren, to bring upon them such sorrow and anguish of heart that God graciously interposes to give his persecuted servants rest. After the hands are folded upon the pulseless breast, after the voice of warning and encouragement is silent, then death may accomplish that which life has failed to do; then the obdurate may be aroused to see and prize the blessings they have cast from them." — *"Sketches from the life of Paul," pages 214, 231, 232.*

On the part of the Pharisees who believed, the "false skulking brethren" who confused the Galatian Christians, and even weakened Peter and James, the moral law was not included, except incidentally. But the infinite variety of ceremonial observances, which by "oral tradition" had been invested and set up as hedges about the law, and which were more to them than the God-given law itself,—these *were* included, and were an essential part of *their* side of the controversy. Simply to neglect the washing of hands, etc., as referred to in Mark 7, "was as bad as homicide [murder], and involved a forfeiture of eternal life." — *"Farrar's 'Life of Christ,' chap. 31, under 'ablutions.'*

However, in the book of Galatians, in Paul's setting forth of the only true gospel, the moral law is included, both in showing that it is impossible to be justified by any law whatever, even the moral law, and in showing that the very object of faith in Christ, the very object of the true gospel, is to accomplish in men the righteousness of that law, perfect obedience to the ten commandments.

If anything is needed to make plainer or more certain that ceremonialism altogether is the ceremonial law involved in the book of Galatians, here it is: —

"Tidings had been received at Corinth from the churches in Galatia, revealing a state of great confusion, and even of absolute apostasy. Judaizing teachers were opposing the work of the apostle, and seeking to destroy the fruit of his labors.

"In almost every church there were some members who were Jews by birth. To these converts the Jewish teachers found ready access, and through them gained a foothold in the churches. It was impossible, by Scriptural arguments, to overthrow the doctrines taught by Paul; hence they resorted to the most unscrupulous measures to counteract his influence and weaken his authority. They declared that he had not been a disciple of Jesus, and had received no commission from him; yet he had presumed to teach doctrines directly opposed to those held by Peter, James, and the other apostles. Thus the emissaries of Judaism succeeded in alienating many of the Christian converts from their teacher in the gospel. Having gained this point, they induced them to return to the observance of the ceremonial law as essential to salvation. Faith in Christ, and obedience to the law of ten commandments, were regarded as of *minor importance*. Division, heresy, and sensualism were rapidly gaining ground among the believers in Galatia....

"The *doctrines which the Galatians had received* could not in any sense be called the gospel; they *were the teachings of men*, and were directly opposed to the doctrines taught by Christ.... In the Galatian churches, open, unmasked error was supplanting the faith of the gospel. Christ, the true foundation, was virtually renounced for the obsolete ceremonies of Judaism....

"The apostle urged upon the Galatians, as their only safe course, to leave the false guides by whom they had been misled, and to return to the faith which they had received from the Source of truth and wisdom. Those false teachers were hypocritical, unregenerate men, unholy in heart, and corrupt in life. Their religion consisted in a round of ceremonies, by the performance of which they expected to receive the favor of God. They had no relish for a doctrine which taught, 'Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God.' Such a religion required too great a sacrifice. Hence they clung to their errors, deceiving themselves, and deceiving others.

"To substitute the external forms of religion for holiness of heart and life, is still as pleasing to the unrenewed nature as in the days of the apostles...Paul...describes the visit which he made to Jerusalem to secure a settlement of *the very questions which are now agitating the churches of Galatia*, as to whether the Gentiles should submit to circumcision and keep the ceremonial law." — *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, "pages 188-193.

And of the question considered at Jerusalem, we read: —

"They [certain Jews from Judea] asserted, with great assurance, that none could be saved without being circumcised and keeping *the entire ceremonial law*. Jerusalem was the metropolis of the Jews, and there were found the greatest exclusiveness and bigotry. The Jewish Christians who lived in sight of the temple would naturally allow their minds to revert to the peculiar privileges of the Jews as a nation. As they saw Christianity departing from *the ceremonies and the traditions* of Judaism, and perceived that the peculiar sacredness with which the Jewish customs had been invested would soon be lost sight of in the light of the new faith, many grew indignant against Paul, as one who had, in a great measure, caused this change. Even the disciples were not all prepared willingly to accept the decision of the council. Some were zealous for the ceremonial law, and regarded Paul with jealousy, because they thought his principles were lax in regard to the obligation of the Jewish law." —*Ibid.*, pp. 63, 71.

Thus the ceremonial law that is the chief subject, *as to law*, in the book of Galatians, is the ceremonial law both divine and human, but with the divine so perverted as in its perversion to be only human, and is, in a word, *ceremonialISM* entirely—a dead formalism against a living faith.