

Freed by Christ
July 5, 2020

I want to talk about freedom this morning. It is not the freedom we celebrated on yesterday's American Independence Day. The freedom about which I need to share with you is in the Bible. And it is a very important freedom. It plays a major part in how you live your faith in Jesus Christ.

Yet, I find that many Christians are unaware of this freedom. They have not been taught about this freedom. In fact, they have been taught things that are opposed to this freedom. That corrupts the good news of Jesus Christ. And that is a very serious thing to do.

I often encounter people who teach this false gospel, this false good news. They do so in ignorance of the what the New Testament clearly teaches. And many people have not discovered the truth because they do not read the Bible. They read it but do not ask questions of it. Or they blindly accept what they have been taught and read those beliefs into the Bible when they read it.

I usually do not start with the main point in my sermons. I usually present a case for the point before I present it. But I am working this one differently this morning. We are going to start with the main point and then read the prove of it in the Bible. So here is the point of today's sermon.

Christians are free from the Law of Moses.

That may shock some of you. It should not shock anyone in my church because I have preached this before. I stress it often in my Bible Study group.

But someone watching, listening to, or reading this sermon may be shocked by that statement. If so I believe it is likely that you have been taught something different. You may have been taught a corrupted gospel. I urge you to hang with me until we look at the scriptures together.

The question of the relationship of Christians to the Old Testament Law of Moses is not a 20th century issue. It has long been asked by Christians. In fact, it was a divisive issue in the first century of the church.

Let us look at the background for a moment. In the days that Jesus was on earth, the Jews had been living in relationship to God through the Law of Moses for 1,500 years. That is a long, long time. The history of our own nation is short by comparison. In the eyes of the Jews the Law of Moses was forever. And in the first century it had taken on an even greater importance because of the teachings of the Pharisees.

Then Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended up into heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in his followers. At first the question of the Law of Moses and the Christian never came up. All the believers were Jews or Jewish converts. They were all, already observing the Law of Moses. Now their faith in God included faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. I doubt that they saw a conflict.

The question did not come up until non-Jews started becoming Christians. It was at that point that some Jewish believers started raising the question. And they came to the conclusion that these Gentile Christians, these non-Jewish Christians had to follow the Law of Moses in order to be saved, even as

they put their faith in Jesus. They believed this so strongly that they went out of their way to confront these new Christians.

There was a church of mainly non-Jewish Christians in the city of Antioch. Paul and Barnabas had been there for some time, teaching and building up the believers in that place. These Jewish believers decided they needed to go to Antioch and make sure these people were following the Law of Moses.

I had a very interesting phone call while working on this sermon. A stranger to me who said he lives in Crofton called to try to convince me that churches should be ignoring the governor's restrictions on meeting together. He claimed to be a born again believer. He wasn't looking for a church. He went out of his way to call me, a stranger to him, and try to convince me to lead our church to ignore the governor.

These Jewish believers left Judea and traveled all the way to Antioch to present their beliefs to this other church. We see this in Acts 15:1.

Acts 15:1-2, 4-6 (NIV) Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question...

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

Now, as one who is very interested in this question, here was the perfect opportunity to answer the question about the relationship of Christians to the Law of Moses. I have lots of questions about things in the Bible and early Christianity that are never answered. They are not answered in the Bible. They are not answered in history books. They are not answered by Christian writers in the century after Jesus and the apostles lived. But this passage gives an answer to this very important question.

Acts 15:7-11 (NIV) After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Peter reminds them that God initiated taking the Gospel to non-Jews. God confirmed their salvation by having them speak in tongues, just like the apostles did on the Day of Pentecost. Peter points out that no Jew has ever successfully lived out the Law of Moses. And finally, Peter makes the same point as today's sermon, but not in the same words.

Then Paul and Barnabas tell of what God had been doing, thus adding evidence to what Peter had said.

Acts 15:12 (NIV) The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

After this James, one of the elders, assuming they were in agreement about Peter's final point, points out that all of this is a fulfillment of prophecies by Amos and Isaiah.

Acts 15:14-15 (NIV) Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: The conclusion of the apostles and elders was that Christians were no longer required to live the Law of Moses. That is point one of today's sermon. Like I said, here was the perfect place in the Bible to answer this all important question. And God did so for our benefit.

The conclusion is that Peter is right. Christians are free from the Law of Moses. The apostles and elders agree.

James went on to make a recommendation to the rest of the group about what answer Paul and Barnabas should take back with them to Antioch. He recognized the cultural difficulties of Jews and non-Jews trying to serve Jesus together as one church. He recommends four restrictions from the Law of Moses that the non-Jews should adhere to. Here is what James recommended and the group adopted.

Acts 15:20 (NIV) "... we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood."

But these four restrictions have nothing to do with salvation. They concern bringing two different cultures to serving Jesus together. This takes away nothing from the conclusion that Christians were not required to live the Law of Moses.

This was a game changer. This was huge. This was so big a question and so important an answer that you would expect to see it pop up again in the New Testament. And indeed it does. Paul often made mention of this fact in his letters. Let's look at some of these passages.

Romans 6:15 (NIV) Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

In the next chapter, Paul goes into some detail about this issue. He points out that a person was under the Law of Moses until they died. The Law condemned sinners to death. Paul then reminds his readers that Christians DID die. He writes that we died with Jesus when we became his followers. This death of ours is pictured in our baptism. We were buried and then raised to a new life, free from the Law that condemned us, free now to serve God.

Romans 7:4 (NIV) So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Christians have died to the Law. As you look at the context, there is no way to allegorize what Paul is saying to make it mean something else. It means exactly what it appears to mean. Christians are not under the Law of Moses.

It should be pointed out that the group who taught that non-Jews had to obey the Law of Moses did not accept the ruling of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. And they continued to stir up trouble among the non-Jewish Christians. One group of these men brought their heresy to the church in Galatia. Paul confronts this teaching again in his letter to the church there.

Galatians 2:15-16 (NIV) "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 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.

He reiterates the point in the next chapter and also tells us the purpose of the Law of Moses.

Galatians 3:23-24 (NIV) Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

He makes the case even more emphatic later in the letter.

Galatians 5:2 (NIV) Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

This is the second point of today's sermon.

You cannot add "obedience to the Law of Moses" to Jesus and be saved.

You cannot combine them. So what? You aren't trying to live out the Law of Moses. And yet, there are people in churches today who attempt to do so. Most are not teaching obedience to the whole law of Moses. I don't know of any who teach that men have to be circumcised. But there are many who teach obedience to one or both of two of the Laws of Moses. These two concern the Sabbath and the Tithe.

I know of some who teach that tithing to the church is required by God. They teach that God will discipline you if you fail to tithe your income to the church.

This is heresy. It has no basis in the New Testament. It isn't even a legitimate interpretation of the Law of Moses on the tithe.

The Bible clearly teaches that Christians are free from the Law of Moses. Salvation comes by faith in the blood of Jesus, shed in his death on the cross. God applied our sins to him applies his righteousness to us. Faith in that and only that is the basis for our salvation. Period, end.

But some will complain that Sabbath observance and tithing are acts of gratitude for salvation. They should be. But to require them makes them no longer an offering of thanksgiving but a demanded condition, one which God does not command of Christians.

No, we are free from the demands of the Law of Moses as a path to righteousness with God. Let's look at two other passages that declare this.

Ephesians 2:14-15 (NIV) For he himself (Christ) is our peace, who has made the two (Jewish and non-Jewish Christians) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

Colossians 2:13-14 (NIV) When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.
(Philippians 3:8-9; Hebrews 7:18; 8:13; 9:15)

Christian, you need to know that you are not living under the demands of the Law of Moses. You live under grace. You are saved by grace. God justified you by grace. God sanctified you by grace. God saves you entirely by grace. There is nothing you can do to add to what Jesus did.

You who want to be saved from the penalty of your sins, put your faith entirely on Jesus and only on Jesus and you will be saved.