

Freedom is strongly emphasized in the letter to the Galatians: "*For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*" (Gal. 5:1) [John 8:31-32: *Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*]. "*For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.* (Gal. 5:13). In brief, "the Gospel means freedom." For us, freedom is an important value. Our own understanding of freedom associates with "freedom of the individual; freedom of speech; freedom of religion; political freedom. We speak of freedom as a right, that is, as something we have from birth, as something which is an intrinsic part of our human nature. For us, the lack of freedom (in whatever situation) means that we have been deprived of our freedom, of our (human) right. These remarks are made only as a hint that Paul might have a quite different view of freedom and that when we find such a key term we should not assume that we understand it.¹

Paul associates freedom with the Law; Gospel means freedom from the Law. We need to understand what Paul meant by considering the term "Law." ...² He addressed the churches of Galatia. The Galatians (a people who moved into Asia Minor several centuries earlier) were thoroughly Hellenized - at least in towns; they were fully integrated in the Hellenistic culture; Creek traditions had been blended with the local traditions and customs as well as with traditions originating in Eastern regions such as Mesopotamia and Egypt.³

The occasion of the letter: Paul established these churches by preaching a "Gospel free from the Law." Then he departed to continue his missionary work elsewhere. After an unknown length of time, other missionaries came to Galatia preaching "another gospel" and demanding that the Galatian Christians be circumcised and follow the Law. These were Paul's opponents. These opponents were Judaizers, Christians of Jewish origin who demanded all Christians, including those of Hellenistic origin, follow the Law and thus, in effect, become Jews as well as Christians. For Paul, this type of teaching was in contradiction of the Gospel.⁴

In Gal. 1:11-2:14, we find a long biographical statement through which Paul intends to demonstrate in a general way the validity of his teaching - a Gospel without the Law for the Gentiles: He was a devoted Jew (more precisely, a Pharisee, as is expressed in Phil. 3:5-6) who persecuted the church. After his conversion, he began his ministry without consulting the leaders of the church in Judea. He nevertheless claims that he was approved by them (Gal. 1:23-24). Paul's Gospel did not demand that the Gentiles (non-Jew) convert be circumcised and follow the Law. It is a fundamental issue which could have divided the early church into two separate churches.⁵ Despite the objections of "false brethren" (possibly related to the "circumcision party" [Gal. 2:12], which might have been behind Paul's opponents in Galatia), the "pillars," that is, James, Peter (Cephas), and John, decided to recognize both forms of the Gospel as valid. An agreement thus reached concerning the division of the missionary work. James, Peter, and John would preach to the Jew a Gospel with the Law. Paul and Barnabas would preach to the Gentiles a Gospel without the Law. In addition, the Gentile churches would provide financial support the Jerusalem church (called the "poor," although we do not whether they were poor because of harsh economic situation, persecutions, or special religious vows). The collection, in which the Galatians participated (1 Cor. 16:1) was important for Paul because it was a visible sign of the unity of the church in spite of the two forms of the Gospel. It was also a tangible reminder that the Jerusalem church had recognized the validity the Gospel without the Law.⁶

There was strife or at least tension between them [Jerusalem Church and Gentile church]. Besides the issue of the Law, the Galatians had other problems. There also people led an immoral life. In such a situation, the Law would

¹ Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 32.

² Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 33.

³ Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 35.

⁴ Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 36.

⁵ Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 36.

⁶ Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 37.

complement the Gospel by providing clear ethical guidelines and thus a basis for rebuking immoral people, while a Gospel without the Law would allow these people to say that in the Spirit they were totally free to act in whatever way they were moved.⁷

As Christians of Hellenistic origin they would not follow the Law and receive circumcision, because that would be contradiction to the Gospel, which signifies freedom from any yoke and thus from the Law. They are justified by faith, "for the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness"(5:5), and thus they should reject those who demand that they be circumcised and observe the Law. Then what are the guidelines for a good Christian life without the Law? Paul answers: bearing the fruit of the Spirit, the first of which is love (Gal. 5:21-23; cf. also 5:13). This is another law, "the Law of Christ (6:2). Conclusion: They should not follow the Law, "for neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15).⁸

⁷ Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 38.

⁸ Daniel Patte. *PAUL'S FAITH and the POWER OF the GOSPEL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 39.