

When the Apostle Paul planted new churches, most of the time, they consisted of Jewish people who came to be a part of Jesus' movement. When they became Christians, they were still Jews, but now believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. **The whole culmination of Judaism WAS Jesus.** Tensions arose when Jewish believers wanted gentile believers to become Jewish in identity through outward observance. This was essentially the law superseding grace.

What "laws" can it be easy to revert to, rather than trusting in the grace found in Jesus?

Many Jewish people said faith and obedience go together and result in salvation, but Paul said **faith and salvation go together and result in obedience.** This distinction is important, and why Paul is adamant about what he teaches. There are not two branches of Christianity (one that centers on law and one that centers on grace); rather, our character is transformed by the Holy Spirit in response to recognizing what God has done on our behalf.

What drives the motivation behind your obedience to Jesus? How do love and gratitude motivate us differently than fear?

There are a couple of wrong places where Christians try to get their identity:

- ♦ **Religious observances:** Paul has been arguing that true circumcision is circumcision of the heart, not an external circumcision that saves us.
- ♦ **How much we are "doing" for God:** our status comes from what God has made true about us in Christ—not our actions.

How do you currently see yourself "in Christ?"

We must start to ask the correct questions in light of grace:

1. What do we submit to? We submit all of our lives to Jesus. J.I. Packer said, *"What matters supremely, therefore, is not...the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that he knows me."*

2. What has real substance? What is the substance behind our observances?

3. What has real value? Rituals do not equate to relationship. The heart of this passage is the call to find true freedom in knowing, and being known by, the true God.

4. What is a true life of devotion? He sets us free from the rule of other gods. Self-made rules and piety do not work.

How would you (truthfully) answer the above four questions?

When life with Jesus gets hard, we are tempted to turn back to our old attachments, "those paltry inanities and mere trifles." Our lives with Christ lie in front of us, not our elemental principles from the past. Let us fix our hearts and minds on Christ and find freedom in the Gospel.