

# PRIVILEGE OR OBLIGATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God?" Paul in Galatians 2:21 (The Message.)

A friend has the verse above pasted at the bottom of his emails. Perhaps it is a reminder to him and others that Christianity at its essence is not a system of morals, activities, or religious ideals. This scripture is the conclusion of the confrontation that Paul had with Peter and the elders at Jerusalem when the influence of the Judaizers followed Paul into the churches in Galatia, evidently with the approval, or at least the knowledge of James and the elders in Jerusalem. The Judaizers were Jews who agreed that Jesus was the Messiah, but taught that circumcision and the keeping of the Feasts, etc. was a requirement of salvation for the Gentile Christians as well as the Jewish ones. Paul's message to the Galatians refuted this strongly and he confronted Peter to his face when Peter came to Antioch (Gal. 2:11.)

It is interesting to note that the letter to the Galatians was one of the first that Paul wrote (some say it was the first.) So we might conclude that its message of correction was directed toward some of the first problems which surfaced in the infant church. We might also observe that some of these very same problems continue to spread through the body of believers today, and that the effects of this leaven are still the same.

## THE PRIVILEGE

It is a privilege to be a believer in Jesus Christ. It is a privilege to have the power by the Holy Spirit to love the Lord and one another, to lay our life down, to die to self, to pick up our cross daily. It is a privilege to serve God, and to serve his people, the "church." In the kingdom of God, we are called to all of these "ministries," but we are not forced into any of them by God. They are free choices on our part. We can choose to walk by the Spirit, hence not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, or we can choose to walk in other paths, which may not be as fruitful. We can choose to build up, or edify one another, we can choose to read the Word and pray, or not. We are free to be the fullness of God's heart in this world. *But we are not free to expect others to understand or to walk in the same manner as we understand or walk.*

## OBLIGATION

God can relate to people in such a way as to change their hearts or to draw them to Himself by His Spirit. He alone can regenerate a person with His resurrection power and receive their love, allegiance and worship for the rest of their lives. It is His good pleasure to do this. But He doesn't *demand* that we love Him or serve Him. It must be *our* good pleasure to place *Him* first in our life.

When Gods people walk in this freedom, and extend the same to one another, the Holy Spirit is unhindered in the work of building the Kingdom into the lives of His people. But when the Holy Spirit is relegated to a set of rules or the expectations of man, things can deteriorate quickly.

When relationships in the body are based on love and respect, they can bloom into wonderful extensions of Gods life. When they are based on obligation, they often last only as long as the person or persons continue under the obligation. For example, if a group of people relate together because they live under the obligation of supporting a church building or ministry, they might appear to be friends and family as long as the building or ministry was the center of their relationship. But when some of the people leave the church, they often find that the people whom they considered to be friends and family have become adversaries and that the relationships are broken.

When God shows us something, we have the privilege of obligating ourselves to pursue it if we wish. But we do not have the privilege to obligate anyone else to our vision, philosophy, doctrine, tradition or needs. We are free to share these things, but if we obligate others, then we have moved from the arena of Spirit control into the arena of manipulation, or in other words, witchcraft or sorcery.

Jesus said that He had come to preach freedom to the captives (Lk. 4:18). He presented His gospel to the people and offered them the way of deliverance from their sins, and right standing before God.

The body of Christ is the extension of Jesus' life. His heart has not changed. He is still into saving and delivering people from judgment, sin, lifestyles, religion, demonic activity, etc. The ministry of the gospel is about freeing people, not about obligating them to a doctrine, tradition, service, mission, etc. When God's people speak liberty to the captive, the environment for the Holy Spirit to move and touch is released. And how much better it is when He is allowed to do His work of healing, delivering, saving, releasing, unbinding, liberating, and providing, and we are just agreeing with God and speaking it to one another.

When the body moves by the power of obligation, it is only as powerful as the weakest commitment of man. But when the body catches the vision of privilege, it becomes unstoppable in the power of God's own Holy Spirit.