

FIGHTING FOR GRACE

THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

FIGHTING FOR GRACE

Read This First

The phrase you keep hearing around Redemption Church is “Gospel Centered / Outward Focused.” This slogan has powerfully shaped who we are and who we are becoming across all of our congregations.

At the heart of the gospel is the grace of God—free, unmerited favor and blessing from God. Though grace is a gift, people have always tried to earn it to get it or repay it once they have it. This is not a new problem, but one that Christians have always had to fight against. A whole book of the Bible—Galatians—is devoted to helping Christians fight their legalism and embrace grace. That’s why we’ve given our study of Galatians the title, “Fighting for Grace.”

It’s a strange concept, isn’t it? Fighting for grace? Almost seems like a contradiction.

But we know that for the grace of the gospel to sink in deep, we must fight for it. This is why Martin Luther, in his influential commentary on Galatians, writes that the doctrine of the gospel of grace “can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough.” Through this series, we will fight to understand, experience, and delight in the grace of the gospel of God.

This study guide, designed for individual study, for use in Redemption Communities, or in other smaller group environments, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply what we learn. Each week’s study contains the following sections:

Study the Text – questions primarily for individual Bible study

For Deeper Reflection – powerful articles challenging you to think seriously about the truth

Discussion Questions – questions for use in group environments

Sermon Notes – space to take notes as you listen to the series’ sermons

As we study this book across all of our congregations, our prayer is that the gospel of grace would electrify us and that God would give us power by his Spirit to more richly understand the gospel and live out its implications.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author and Title

The first word of the letter to the Galatians is “Paul,” and there has been widespread agreement by scholars down through the ages that Paul is indeed the author. The title in most Greek editions of the NT is “To the Galatians,” and the main body of the letter mentions the addressees as “the churches of Galatia” (1:2) and “foolish Galatians!” (3:1).

Setting

Paul’s letter to the Galatians was likely written to the churches he had established during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–14:28). He probably wrote the letter from his home church in Antioch in Syria, sometime before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1–31).

Date

Although the question of the date of Galatians is related to this question of “which Galatians,” some clues can probably be found in the letter itself. The main indicator is the lack of reference to the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). Although this is an argument from silence, many commentators have regarded this as a “deafening silence.” It would have been enormously helpful to Paul’s argument if he could have mentioned the decision of the council that Gentiles should not be circumcised: this, after all, appears to be a major point of contention between Paul and the false teachers influencing the Galatians. Since the council took place in a.d. 48/49, and Paul evangelized South Galatia in a.d. 47/48, some time around a.d. 48 is a plausible date for the composition of Galatians. However, determining dates in Paul’s life is always somewhat uncertain, and so one cannot place too much weight on the date in the interpretation of the letter.

Themes

1. Freedom in the Gospel – In contrast to the bondage that comes from both sin and legalism.

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Galatians 5:1, 13)

2. Justification by Faith Alone – In contrast to trusting in works to be made right with God.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:15–16)

3. Living by the Spirit – In contrast to depending on human effort.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:16, 25)

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

A crisis has hit the church in Galatia. The church came into being as a result of God’s Spirit at work in Paul’s proclamation of the gospel (3:1–5; 4:13–15). But within the short space of time since Paul left (1:6), the church has been visited or infiltrated by false teachers whom Paul calls those “who trouble you” (1:7) or “those who unsettle you” (5:12). These teachers have convinced the Galatians of a false gospel which requires them to be circumcised. Paul sees that these pseudo-Christians merely want to win converts for their own prestige: they want to win approval from the Jewish authorities by showing how effective they are in converting Gentiles to a form of Judaism (6:12). Since the Jewish establishment approves of the fact that they are making Gentiles Jewish, the false teachers have the best of both worlds: they have created a sect of which they are the leaders, and they also escape any Jewish persecution. One further effect of this on the Galatians appears to have been the division within their church, presumably over these issues of circumcision and law that the false teachers have raised (5:15).

Although the Galatians appear to have come under the spell of these teachers and have become convinced of their teaching (1:6), Paul does not regard the situation as hopeless (3:4). Nevertheless, Paul is more critical of his audience here than in any other letter, and he chastises the Galatians for being foolish (3:1) and provides numerous reasons why they should return to the truth.

The less important question, which makes little difference to how one interprets the letter, is, which Galatians? There was a people group of

Galatians who lived in the northern part of what is now Turkey, but there was a Roman province called Galatia that extended into southern Turkey. The Galatians in the letter are probably those in the Roman province, especially the southern part, because Paul did much less in the way of missionary activity in the north, and he usually refers to places by their Roman imperial names.

Important Truths

1. In his sin-bearing death, Christ is a substitute for all Christians, whom he brings into a new realm of freedom and life. (1:4; 2:20; 3:13)
2. This gospel of Christ is for humanity, but there is no sense in which it has its origin in humanity: it comes only from God. Paul is himself an illustration of this: his conversion to Christ and his apostleship were not through human consultation but through the direct revelation of Christ. (1:1, 11–12, 15–20)
3. The gospel is appropriated not by works of law but by faith, which is the route to justification. (2:16)
4. To require circumcision and other Mosaic ceremonies such as dietary laws and Jewish holidays as a supplement to faith is to fall back from the realm of grace, faith, and freedom, and to come under the whole law and its curse, since comprehensive observance of the law is impossible. (2:12–14, 16; 3:10; 4:10; 5:3)
5. OT Scripture itself testifies to the truth of justification by faith, both in the life of Abraham and in the prophecy of Habakkuk. (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4)
6. The Christian life has its source in the believer having died with Christ to sin, and thereby having renounced the flesh. (5:24; 6:14)
7. The Spirit is the source of power and guidance in the Christian life, and the work of the Spirit produces love and faith. (5:6, 16, 18, 25)
8. The Christian life consists not in pleasing people but in pleasing Christ our master and being willing to suffer persecution for the sake of his cross. (1:10; 6:12, 14)

WEEK ONE: NO OTHER GOSPEL

Galatians 1:1-10

1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— 2 and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. 10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. Why was it important for Paul to emphasize that his apostleship was “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father “?

2. Read Galatians 2:4, 4:17 and 6:13. With these verses in mind, what was the false teachers' motivation in disturbing the Galatians by distorting the gospel?

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3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and Ephesians 2:1-10. Based on these verses, how would you summarize the essentials of the true gospel?

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4. The word translated "accursed" (v. 8, 9) is anáthema meaning "eternally condemned, doomed to destruction, forever cursed." Why does preaching a distorted gospel carry such a serious consequence?

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5. Why is "trying to please man" diametrically opposed to being "a servant of Christ" (v. 10)?

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FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Luther's Introduction to Galatians

Abridgment and paraphrase by Timothy Keller

1. The Most Important Thing in the World

The one doctrine that I have supremely in my heart is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth, day and night. This rock, which we call the doctrine of justification through faith, was shaken by Satan in paradise when he persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God. Ever since then the whole world has invented innumerable religions and ways through which, without the aid of Christ, use their works to redeem themselves from evil and sins.

The devil our adversary, who continually rages about seeking to devour us, is not dead. Likewise our flesh and old man is yet alive. Besides this, all kinds of temptations vex and oppress us on every side, so that this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough. If this doctrine is lost, then is also the whole knowledge of truth, life and salvation lost; if this doctrine flourish, then all good things flourish.

When Paul discusses the biblical doctrine of justification by faith he explains that there are several kinds of "righteousness." First, there is political or civil righteousness — the nation's public laws — which magistrates and lawyers may defend and teach. Second, there is cultural righteousness — the standards of our family and social grouping or class — which parents and schools may teach. Third, there is ethical righteousness — the Ten Commandments and law of God — which the church may teach but only in light of Christian righteousness. So all these may be received without danger, as long as we attribute to them no power to satisfy for sin, to please God, or to deserve grace. These kinds of righteousness are gifts of God, like all good things we enjoy.

Yet there is another righteousness, far above the others, which Paul calls "the righteousness of faith" — Christian righteousness. God imputes it to us apart from our works — in other words, it is passive righteousness, as the others are active. For we do nothing for it, and we give nothing for it. We only receive it.

2. The Need for Christian Righteousness

This “passive” righteousness is a mystery that the world cannot understand. Indeed, Christians never completely understand it themselves, and thus do not take advantage of it when they are troubled and tempted. So we have to constantly teach it, repeat it, and work it out in practice. Anyone who does not understand this righteousness or cherish it in the heart and conscience will continually be pummeled by fears and depression. Nothing gives peace like this passive righteousness.

For human beings by nature, when they get near either danger or death itself, will of necessity examine their own worthiness. We defend ourselves before all threats by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of sins and flaws inevitably comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think, “How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done! Please God, let me live so I can fix and amend them.” We become obsessed with our active righteousness and are terrified by its imperfections. But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see what Christ has done for us. So the troubled conscience has no cure for its desperation and feeling of unworthiness unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by grace, offered free of charge in Jesus Christ, which is this passive or Christian righteousness. If I tried to fulfill the law myself, I could not trust in what I had accomplished, neither could it stand up to the judgment of God. So...I rest only upon the righteousness of Christ... which I do not produce but receive, God the Father freely giving it to us through Jesus Christ.

3. Law and Grace

It is an absolute and unique teaching in all the world, to teach people, through Christ, to live as if there were no law or wrath or punishment. In a sense, they do not exist any longer for the Christian, but only total grace and mercy for Christ’s sake. Once you are in Christ, the law is the greatest guide for your life, but until you have Christian righteousness, all the law can do is to show you how sinful and condemned you are. In fact, to those outside of Christian righteousness, the law needs to be expounded in all its force. Why? So that people who think they have power to be righteous before God will be humbled by the law and understand they are sinners.

Therefore we must be careful to use the law appropriately. If we used the law in order to be accepted by God through obedience, then Christian

righteousness becomes mixed up with earned or moral righteousness in our minds. If we try to earn our righteousness by doing many good deeds, we actually do nothing. We neither please God through our works-righteousness nor do we honor the purpose for which the law was given. But if we first receive Christian righteousness, then we can use the law, not for our salvation, but for his honor and glory, and to lovingly show our gratitude.

“The most destructive dangers to the church have never been atheism, pagan religions, or cults that openly deny Scripture, but rather supposedly Christian movements that accept so much biblical truth that their unscriptural doctrines seem relatively insignificant and harmless. But a single drop of poison in a large container can make all the water lethal. And a single false idea that in any way undercuts God’s grace poisons the whole system of belief.”

- John MacArthur

So then, have we nothing to do to obtain this righteousness? No, nothing at all! For this righteousness comes by doing nothing, hearing nothing, knowing nothing, but rather in knowing and believing this only — that Christ has gone to the right hand of the Father, not to become our judge, but to become for us our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our salvation! Now God sees no sin in us, for in this heavenly righteousness sin has no place. So now we may certainly think, “Although I still sin, I don’t despair, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my eternal life.” In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life of mine and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life.

4. Living in the gospel

While we live here on earth, we will be accused, exercised with temptations, oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, and bruised by the law with its demands of active righteousness. Because of this, Paul sets out in this letter of Galatians to teach us, to comfort us, and to keep us constantly aware of this Christian righteousness. For if the truth of being justified by Christ alone (not by our works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost. For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ, you must build your confidence on your own work. On this truth and only on this truth the church is built and has its being.

This distinction is easy to utter in words, but in use and experience it is very hard. So I challenge you to exercise yourselves continually in these matters through study, reading, meditation on the Word and prayer, so that in the time of trial you will be able to both inform and comfort both your consciences and others, to bring them from law to grace, from active/works-righteousness to passive/Christ's righteousness. In times of struggle, the devil will seek to terrify us by using against us our past record and the wrath and law of God. So if we cannot see the differences between the two kinds of righteousness, and if we do not take hold of Christ by faith, sitting at the right hand of God (Heb.7:25) and pleading our case as sinners to the Father, then we are under the law, not under grace. Christ is no savior, but a lawgiver, and no longer our salvation, but an eternal despair.

So learn to "speak the gospel" to your heart. For example, when the law creeps into your conscience, learn to be a cunning logician — learn to use arguments of the gospel against it. Say:

O law! You would climb up into the kingdom of my conscience, and there reign and condemn me for sin, and would take from me the joy of my heart which I have by faith in Christ, and drive me to desperation, that I might be without hope. You have overstepped your bounds. Know your place! You are a guide for my behavior, but you are not Savior and Lord of my heart. For I am baptized, and through the gospel am called to receive righteousness and eternal life... So trouble me not! For I will not allow you, so intolerable a tyrant and tormentor, to reign in my heart and conscience — for they are the seat and temple of Christ the Son of God, who is the king of righteousness and peace, and my most sweet savior and mediator. He shall keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound and pure doctrine of the gospel, through the

knowledge of this passive and heavenly righteousness.

When we are assured of this righteousness, we not only cheerfully work well in our vocations, but we submit to all manner of burdens and dangers in this present life, because we know that this is the will of God, and that this obedience pleases him. This then is the argument of this Epistle, which Paul expounds against the false teachers who had darkened the Galatians' understanding of this righteousness by faith.

Historical Note on Luther's Preface

In the 1730's a small group of English men and women were meeting together to seek spiritual reality. John and Charles Wesley and a number of friends were meeting in homes in London for prayer and study, trying to find God and to know what salvation was and how it could be experienced. One of their friends, William Holland, got hold of Martin Luther's Commentary on the Galatians, where he distills the basic argument of Paul's letter. One night Holland and Charles Wesley and some others were reading Luther's book.

"Mr. Charles Wesley read the introduction aloud. At the words where Luther said, 'What, have we then nothing to DO? No! Nothing! But only to accept of Him, who of God is made unto us, our wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.' And there came such a power over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. I almost thought I saw our Savior! My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon."

After that, Holland went around finding other seekers and reading Luther's summary of Galatians everywhere he could, and it changed the lives of many others. Some days later, it was probably William Holland reading from Luther that brought John Wesley himself to faith. The Wesleys went on to spearhead a revival of Biblical religion that not only established the whole Methodist church, but also changed the face of Western society.

Who knows what the book of Galatians could do to you?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Most Christians I know seem to be deeply shaped by the gospel.” Why?

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2. What makes the gospel different from every other religious or philosophical system of belief?

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3. How do Christians sometimes “add to the gospel” in ways that diminish its power?

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4. How do you feel when you read that the punishment for holding to a false gospel is so severe (1:8-9)?

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5. How could the gospel help us overcome our tendency to be afraid of what people think of us (1:10)?

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6. What “false gospels” or what “gospel additions” are you tempted to functionally believe? How can the true gospel combat those temptations?

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WEEK TWO: PAUL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Galatians 1:11-2:10

11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. 14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. 20 (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they glorified God because of me.

1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. 3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. 6 And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. 7 On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with

the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised 8 (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 9 and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. What does Paul mean when he says that the gospel that he preached “was not man’s gospel”?

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2. Why is Paul putting so much emphasis on the fact that he did not receive his gospel from any man? (hint: remember chapter 1:1-10)

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3. What does it mean that God set Paul apart before he was born?

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4. Why does Paul want to bring Titus on this particular journey?

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5. Why would the false teachers (the Judaizers) want to spy out the church's liberty and bring it into slavery?

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6. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, where Paul explains his desire to do whatever it takes to reach people for Christ. But when dealing with these Judaizers, Paul says, "to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment" (2:5). With those passages in mind, why is Paul so unwilling to compromise on this particular issue of circumcision?

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FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Glorifying God in Unknown Ministry

By Michael Shea

Let us not fail to notice that Paul had a largely unknown ministry, not only for the first three years, but as we learn from the first verse of chapter two, the first fourteen years after his conversion. Paul himself would warn Timothy many years later that elders “must not be recent converts, lest they become conceited” (1 Timothy 3:6). And what a refreshing difference this is from the contemporary phenomena of rushing celebrity converts to be conference speakers.

It seems to be God’s way to make use of long periods, even years, of preparation in our lives before giving us seasons of great fruitfulness. And if we are impatient with this process, it is a sign that our focus is no longer on the glory of God working in us and through us. Rather, it is a sign that we are full of anxious striving and selfish ambition.

God’s revelation of his Son is a personal, inward experience of the heart, but it was not meant to be kept private. The purpose of revelation is evangelism. The fruit of true conversion is mission. Evangelism is not some optional extra, an elective course that may or may not be taken. It is the inevitable result of real conversion.

- G. Walter Hansen

Paul wants the Galatians to know about his unknown ministry because he is defending the claim that he is not a man pleaser. If he were trying to please men, he’d hang his shingle in Judea, where the action is, to win the approval of the religious movers and shakers. But Paul tells us that he was content to pray and study and faithfully preach in his hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia and the surrounding vicinity for many

years before the Lord led him to a larger ministry.

Now how are you doing by this standard? Are you content to glorify God in an unknown ministry, or do you have to be appreciated? Do you know who you are and serve for God's approval, or are you lost in the "hall of mirrors" that is the praise of men?

Paul's outrageous confidence in ministry came from a personal encounter with Christ. And so our ministry must flow out of our call, and the remembrance of our call, and the cultivation of a private communion with God, so that we serve not for the praise of men but for the reward of our Father, who sees what is done in secret.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was a time in your life that you experienced a significant change or transformation? What factors contributed to this change?

2. Paul says that he received his gospel "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:12). It is not uncommon in today's world to hear that somebody "received a revelation from God." What is an appropriate way to think about and respond to such claims?

3. Paul spent the first few years of his ministry learning from Jesus and preaching with relative anonymity. On the other hand, many in today's Christian culture want to have very public influence very soon after becoming a Christian. Why, in your opinion, does God often have his people labor in behind-the-scenes ways before placing them in positions of leadership?

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4. One of the key issues addressed in Galatians is that the Judiazers were teaching that circumcision had to be added to faith in Jesus, which is legalism. Today you will run into very few Christians who insist that believers be circumcised in order to be saved but who are just as legalistic. What are some restrictions that people today incorrectly try to make a mandatory part of following Jesus?

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5. Who are two people that you could never imagine being saved? Spend some time praying that, like Paul, those people would be eternally changed by the love of Christ.

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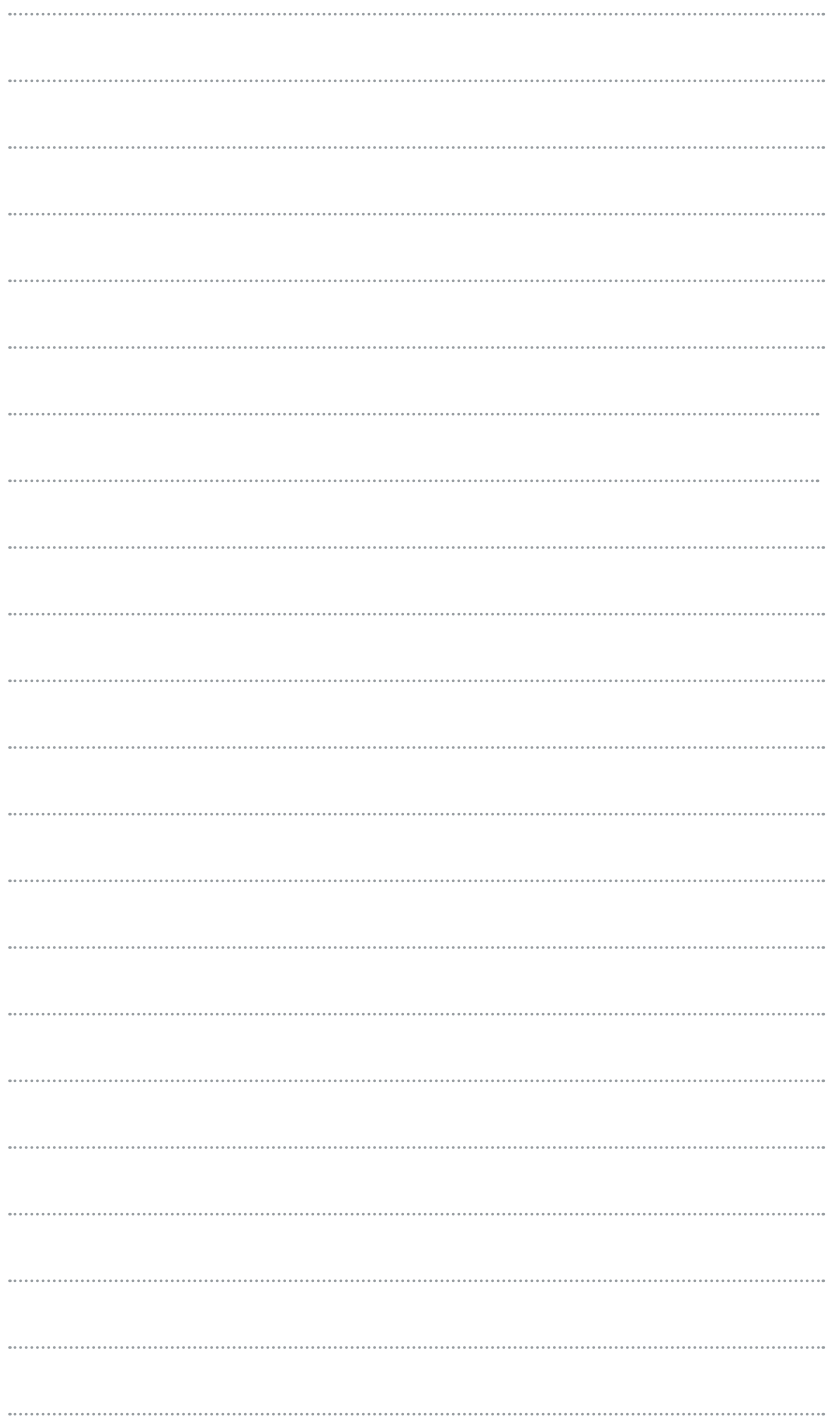
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SERMON NOTES

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WEEK THREE: LIVING IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

Galatians 2:11-14

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. Read Acts 15:1-29. Based on that passage, who were these men who "came from James"?

2. Verse 12 says that Peter was "afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group." Why would Peter be afraid of these men?

3. Verse 12 says that Peter “began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles,” indicating that this withdrawal was a gradual process. What is the implication of this?

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4. Read Mark 7:14-22 and Acts 10:9-33. Based on these passages, why would Peter’s actions be considered inexcusable? What should Peter have learned from these experiences?

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5. Why does Paul go so far as to say that Peter’s actions were not in line with the “truth of the gospel”?

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6. Based on the passage you read in Acts 15, how did Peter respond to Paul’s rebuke?

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FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Living “In Line” with the Gospel

By Timothy Keller

In Galatians 2:14, Paul lays down a powerful principle. He deals with Peter’s racial pride and cowardice by declaring that he was not living “in line with the truth of the gospel.” From this we see that the Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of our lives — spiritual, psychological, corporate, social — by living out the ramifications of the gospel. The gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating and behaving. The implications and applications of Galatians 2:14 are vast.

Implication #1: The Power of the Gospel

First, Paul is showing us that we are changed by the power of God when we bring the gospel truth to bear on every area of life. The gospel is described in the Bible in the most astounding terms. Angels constantly long to look into it (1 Peter 1:12). It does not simply bring us power, but it is the power of God itself, for Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation” (Rom.1:16). It is also the blessing of God, with benefits for anyone who comes near (1Cor.9:23). It is even called the light of the glory of God (2 Cor.4:4,6). Finally, the gospel has the life of God. Paul said to the Corinthians, “I gave you birth through the gospel!” (1 Cor 4:15)

Implication #2: The Sufficiency of the Gospel

Second, Paul is showing that we never “get beyond the gospel” in our Christian life to something more “advanced.” It is not just the A-B-C’s but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine for entrance into the kingdom, but the way we make all of our progress in the kingdom. We are not made right with God through faith in the gospel and then sanctified and matured through mere moral effort. Faith in the gospel is also the way to grow (Gal.3:1-3; Col. 1:3-6). It is common to think, “The gospel is for non-Christians. But once we are saved, we grow through work and obedience.” But work that is not “in line” with the gospel will not sanctify — it will strangle. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. The gospel changes every area of our lives. How?

The Two “Thieves” of the Gospel

Since Paul speaks of being “in line” with the gospel, we can extend the metaphor by saying that gospel renewal occurs when we keep from walking “offline” either to the right or to the left. The key to understanding the implications of the gospel is to see the gospel as a “third” way between two mistaken opposites. However, this does not mean that the gospel is a compromise midway between two poles. It does not produce something in the middle, but something different from both. Specifically, the gospel critiques both religion and irreligion (Matt.21:31; 22:10).

Paul’s opposition to Peter was winsome. Why? Because Paul did not simply say, “Repent of the sin of racism,” but “Repent of the sin of forgetting your gracious welcome.” Paul did not focus so much on the behavior-sin as the root of self-righteousness underneath it. This is a very different way of “opposing” someone. When you are trying to motivate people by urging them to see their riches and love in Christ, then you personally are pointing to their value and dignity as you appeal. But when you try to motivate people by threatening them, you will probably feel little re-spect for them as you do so, and they will (rightly) sense that you are not on their side. When we use God’s grace as a motivator, we can criticize sharply and directly, but the other person will generally be able to perceive that we are nonetheless for him. No wonder Paul was winsome in this situation!

- Timothy Keller

Tertullian said, “Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors.” Tertullian meant that there were two basic false ways of thinking, each of which steals the power and the distinctiveness of the gospel by pulling us “off the gospel line” to one side or the other. These “thieves” can be called moralism or legalism on the one hand, and hedonism or relativism on the other. Another way to put it is that the gospel opposes both religion and irreligion. On the one hand, “moralism/religion” stresses truth without grace, for it says that we must obey the truth in order to be saved. On the other hand, “relativists/irreligion” stress grace without truth, for they say that we are all acceptable and have to decide what is true for us. But truth without grace is not really truth, and grace without truth is not really grace. Jesus was “full of grace and truth.” Any philosophy of life that deemphasizes or loses one or the other falls into legalism or license. Either way, the joy, power, and release of the gospel is stolen by one thief or the other.

The gospel teaches us to say:

“I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe” (vs. lawlessness).

“I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope” (vs. legalism).

How Both ‘Thieves’ Differ

How does moralism/religion steal joy and power? Moralism is the view that you are acceptable (to God, the world, others, yourself) through your attainments. Moralists do not have to be religious, but often are. When they are, their religion is pretty conservative and filled with rules that focus on behavior. Often moralists view God as very holy and just. This view will lead either to self-hatred (because you can’t live up to the standards), or self-inflation (because you think you have lived up to the standards). It is ironic to realize that inferiority and superiority complexes have the very same root! Whether the moralist ends up smug and superior or crushed and guilty depends on how high the standards are and on a person’s natural advantages (such as family, intelligence, looks, will power). Moralistic people can be deeply religious — but there is no transforming joy or power.

How does relativism steal joy and power? Relativists are usually irreligious, or else prefer “liberal” religion. On the surface, they are often more tolerant than moralist/religious people. They believe that everyone needs to determine what is right and wrong individually. Often they view God as a loving and/or impersonal force. They may talk a great deal about God’s love, but since they do not think of themselves

as sinners, God's love for us costs him nothing. If God accepts us, it is because he is so welcoming, or because we are not so bad. The concept of God's love in the gospel is far more rich, deep, and electrifying.

How Both “Thieves” are the Same

They both seek to avoid Jesus as savior and keep control of their lives. Irreligious people obviously seek to be their own spiritual lords (“No one tells me how to live or what to do, so I determine what is right and wrong for me!”). But moralistic religious people subtly do the same thing. They have become their own saviors (“I am more moral and spiritual than other people, so God owes it to me to listen to my prayers and take me to heaven. God cannot let just anything happen to me — he owes me a happy life. I've earned it!”).

They are both based on distorted views of the real God. The irreligious person loses sight of the law and holiness of God and the religious person loses sight of the love and grace of God. Only the gospel message — that we are so sinful that we need to be saved completely by grace — allows a person to see God as he really is. The gospel shows us a God far more holy than the legalist can bear (Jesus had to die because we could not satisfy God's holy demands) and yet far more merciful than a humanist can conceive (Jesus had to die because he loved us).

In contrast to both, Christians are those who have adopted a whole new system of approaching God. They may have had both religious phases and irreligious phases in their lives, but they have come to see that their reason for both their irreligion and their religion was essentially the same and essentially wrong! Christians come to see that both their sins and their best deeds have all really been ways of avoiding Jesus as savior. A Christian says, “Though I have often failed to obey the moral law, the deeper problem was why I was trying to obey it! Even my efforts to obey it were just a way of seeking to be my own savior. With that mindset, even if I obey or ask for forgiveness, I am really resisting the gospel and setting myself up as my own savior.” To “get the gospel” is to turn from self-justification to rely on Jesus' record for a relationship with God. The irreligious don't repent at all, and the religious only repent of sins. But Christians also repent of their righteousness. That is the distinction between the three groups — Christian, moralists (religious), and pragmatists (irreligious).

Case Studies

Paul's point is that we must not simply ask in every area of life, “What

is the moral way to act?” but “What is the way that is inline with the gospel?” The gospel must be continually applied to our lives to keep us from moving into our habitual moralistic or individualistic directions. We must bring everything “into line” with the gospel.

Case Study #1 – Racism

Since Paul applied the gospel to racism (in Galatians 2:11-14), let’s use it as an example. Moralistic persons will tend to be very proud of their culture. They easily fall into cultural imperialism. They try to attach spiritual significance to their cultural styles to make themselves feel morally superior to other peoples. This happens because moralistic people are very insecure, since they look a lot at the eternal law and know deep down that they cannot keep it. They use cultural differences to buttress their sense of righteousness.

Relativistic/hedonistic persons will tend not to cultural imperialism but cultural relativism. This approach says, “Yes, traditional people are racists because they believe in absolute truth. But truth is relative. Every culture is beautiful in itself. Every culture must be accepted on its own terms.” This, however, makes it impossible to make distinctions between evil and right in culture. Note: Relativists are ultimately moralistic. Since their identity (like anyone who does not grasp the gospel) is based on some human quality or achievement, they can be respectful only of other people who believe everything is relative! They will feel superior to all those they don’t feel are openminded. But Christians cannot feel morally superior to relativists or moralists or anyone.

The gospel approach to race. Racism is rooted in a failure to believe in grace. The gospel leads us to be somewhat critical of all cultures, including our own (since there is truth), yet we can feel morally superior to no one. After all, we are saved by grace alone, and therefore a non-Christian neighbor may be more moral and wise than we are. This gives the Christian a radically different posture from either moralists or relativists.

Case Study #2 – Suffering

Moralistic persons have a major problem when suffering strikes them. Why? The whole point of moralism is to put God in one’s debt. Moralistic people feel that God owes them a safe life because of their goodness. So when suffering hits us, the moralistic heart is forced to either feel terrific anger toward God (if you feel you have been living

up to moral standards) or terrific anger toward yourself (if you feel you haven't been living up.) You will either think, "I hate God" or "I hate myself" or you will swing back and forth between both poles.

Relativistic/hedonistic persons are more likely to become bitter against life or God, since they don't feel they deserve troubles in life.

The gospel approach to suffering is different. On the one hand the gospel humbles us out of being mad at God. Jesus, the very best person who ever lived, suffered terribly. This demolishes the idea that good people should have good lives and bad people should have bad lives. If God himself was willing to become involved in terrible suffering of life out of love, then we should not think ourselves exempt. On the other hand, the gospel affirms us out of feeling guilty or mad at ourselves. Jesus suffered and died for us, "while we were yet sinners." The trouble we are experiencing at the moment might be designed to wake us up, but it can't be a quid pro quo punishment for our sins. Jesus got the punishment for our sins. If we realize that we are accepted in Christ, then (and only then) will suffering humble us and strengthen us rather than embitter and weaken us. As others have said: Jesus suffered, not that we might not suffer, but that when we suffer we could become like him.

Conclusion

The main problem in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel. We fail to grasp and believe it through and through. Luther said, "The truth of the Gospel is the principal article of all Christian doctrine... Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually" (Luther on Galatians 2:14f). We live around the truth of the gospel but to some degree do not "get" it. So the key to continual, deeper spiritual renewal is the continual rediscovery of the gospel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you become a "social chameleon," eager to fit in with whoever was around you? What motivated this behavior?

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2. The essence of hypocrisy is external. It is the intention to create a false impression. It is trying to look on the outside what you are not on the inside. Why is hypocrisy so dangerous?

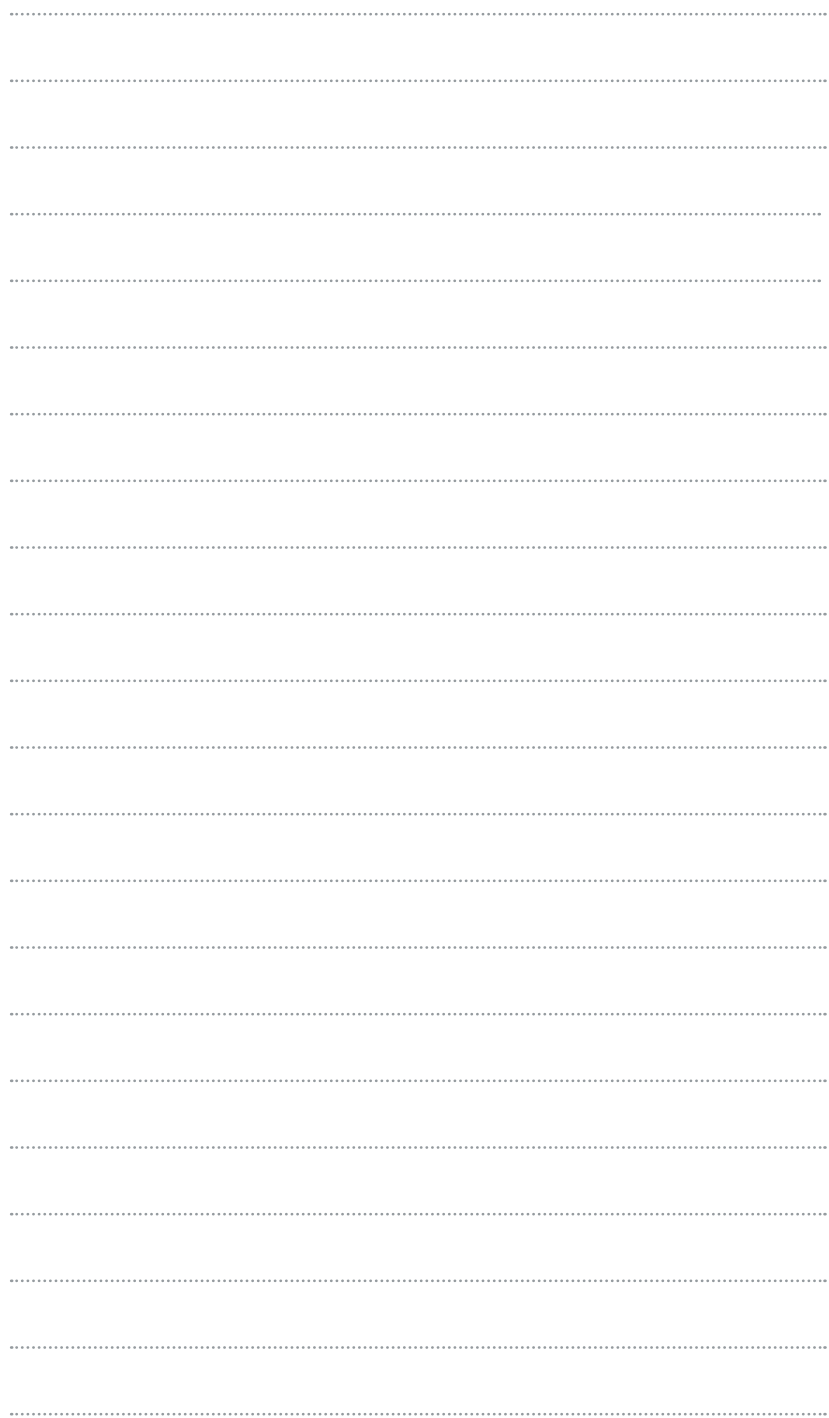
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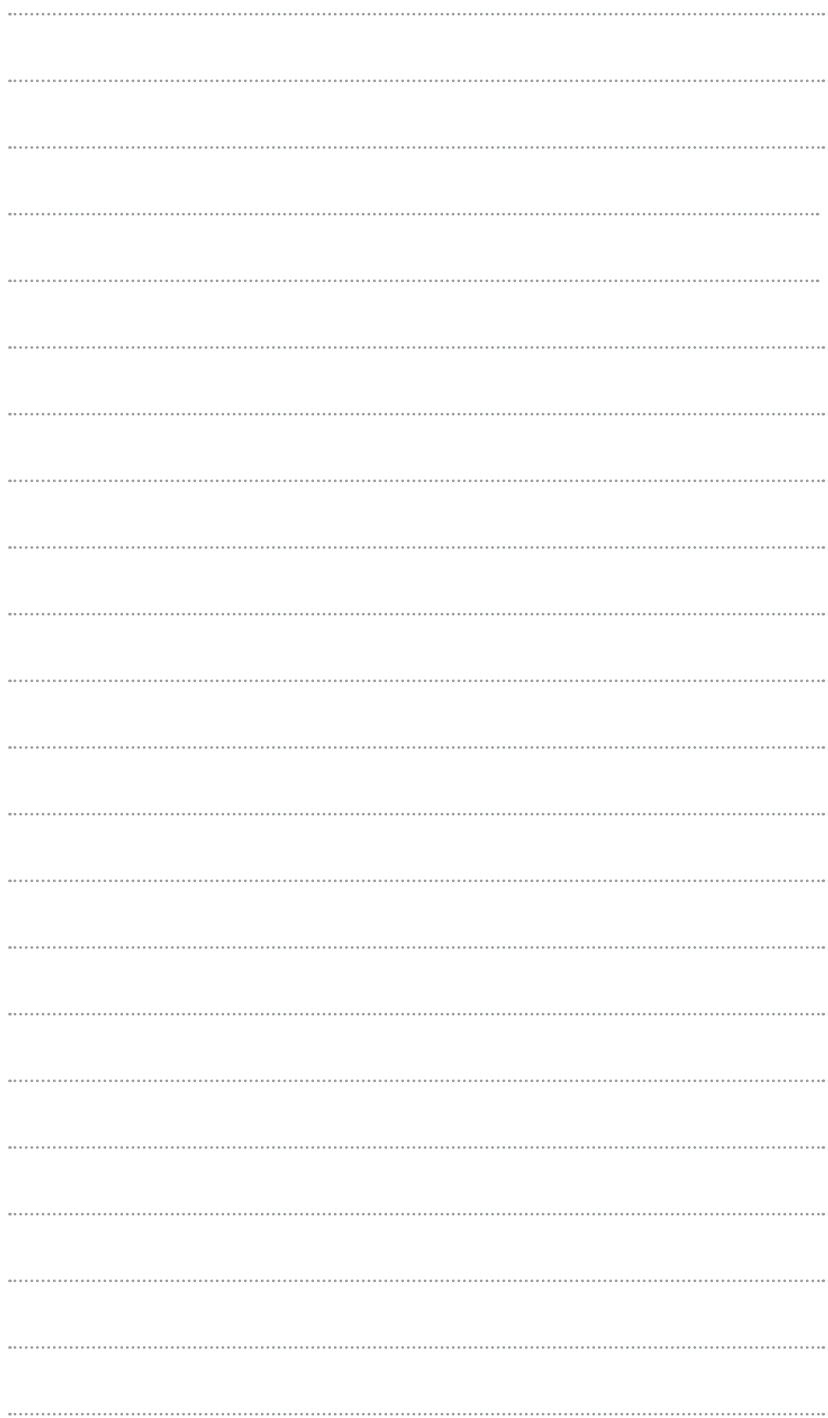
3. What are some ways that Christians are prone to hypocrisy (trying to look on the outside what you are not on the inside)? What about you?

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4. Paul does not rebuke Peter for breaking the no-racism rule, but for not conducting himself “in step with the truth of the gospel.” How is Peter’s gradual slide into racism actually a slide away from the gospel?

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WEEK FOUR: JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

Galatians 2:15-21

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. 17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. What does it seem Paul means by “works of the law”?

2. The New Bible Dictionary says that the word justify “is a forensic (legal) term meaning ‘acquit’, ‘declare righteous’, the opposite of ‘condemn.’” Romans 3:20 says, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Explain in your own words why it is impossible for a person to be justified (declared righteous) by works.

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3. Paul says three times in verse 16 that it is impossible to be justified by works of the law. He says that “a person,” “we also,” and “no one” will be justified by works of the law. Why does Paul make this such a point of emphasis?

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4. How do you define faith?

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5. Read Romans 7:1-7, which gives a good picture of what it means to “die to the law.” Now explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “When a believer is united to Christ by faith, he dies to the law because Christ died to the law on the cross. Christ’s experience becomes his experience. He is now dead to the law and alive to God, as is Christ.”

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6. Verse 21 punctuates this whole section about justification by faith. Explain the logic behind Paul's statement that "if justification were through the law, then Christ died for nothing."

FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Theological Building Blocks: Substitution & Justification

By Timothy Keller and Dick Kauffman

In order to understand the gospel deeply and comprehensively it is important to understand various doctrinal "building blocks" which the Bible teaches.

Alienation From God

And [God] passed in front of Moses proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he by no means clears the guilty; he punishes the children and their children's children, for the sins of the fathers to the 3rd and 4th generations." (Exodus 34:6)

Point: In this declaration of his character, God puts most starkly the apparent "contradiction" between his holiness and his mercy, his law and his love. On the one hand, he cannot clear people who are guilty and be unjust. On the other hand, he cannot bear to see us perish. He says all debts must be paid, yet he wants us to be free from condemnation. He swears that he hates the death of a sinner (Ezek.33:11) yet he has also sworn that the soul that sins must die (Ezek.18:4). It seems he cannot keep both oaths! As Horatius Bonar put it: "Law and love must be reconciled ... the one cannot give way to the other. Both must stand, else the pillars of the universe will be shaken."

Substitution

“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18)

“The Son of man came ... to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45).

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.” (Galatians 3:13)

Two-fold concept. If God must be judged and the law fulfilled, what can be done? The Bible tells us that Jesus came as our substitute. 1) He lived the life we should have lived in our place, and 2) he died the death we should have died in our place.

Life-substitute. From the beginning of his life he did everything that is required of a human being. When John the Baptist showed a hesitation to baptize Jesus, he replies, “it is necessary for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:13). Jesus was sinless in himself—so why was it “necessary” to be baptized? It was necessary for our substitute. In our place, he was perfectly fulfilling the law wholly and fully. He was doing everything that a human being needed to do to be acceptable to God. He was loving God with all his mind and soul and strength; he was loving his neighbor as himself (Luke 10:27). He was perfectly obedient to the law for us, “by one man’s obedience many shall be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

Death substitute. When he died he did not simply experience physical pain, but also the punishment and rejection of God. He gave ‘propitiation’ for sin, he took all God’s wrath (Rom. 3:25). Jesus carried our identity upon the cross. Matthew (in 8:17) applies Isaiah 53 to Jesus. There it says, “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him... the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:4-6)

“Our most merciful Father...sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him the sins of all men, saying, ‘Be thou Peter, that denier, Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner that did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief that hanged upon the cross; and, be thou the person which hath committed the sins of all; see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them.’” (Martin Luther,

Commentary on Galatians [On Gal. 3: 13]

“The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.” (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*)

If you are still entertaining any hope of standing before God on the basis of your good conduct in this world—on the basis of your efforts to keep the law—then you have not begun to understand the law of God... If you think you can keep the law, what you need is to be killed by the law.

- Michael Shea

Law and Love fulfilled. It is by Christ's substitution, and especially at the moment of his death upon the cross that God's love and law are both satisfied. He was smitten to satisfy the justice of God (it pays for sins), and yet at the same time the love of God (it secures our salvation) – “that God might be both just and justifier of those who believe” (Rom.3:26).

“Both love and law have triumphed. The one has not given way to the other. Each has kept its ground; nay, each has come from the conflict honored and glorified. Never has there been love like this love of God, so large, so lofty, so intense, so self-sacrificing. [Yet] never has the law been seen so pure, so broad, so glorious, so inexorable. There has been no compromise. Law and love have both had their full scope. Not one jot or tittle has been surrendered to the full; the one in all its severity, the other in all its tenderness. Love has never been more truly love, and the law has never been more truly law, than in this conjunction of the two. (Horatius Bonar, *The Everlasting Righteousness*)

Justification

Justified. To be “justified” is to be right with someone, without any blame or liability. “Justification” is a legal act in which a person who trusts in Christ is declared to be completely righteous in God’s sight. “A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 2:16) In Colossians 1:23 Paul tells us that through the gospel “he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through his death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” The word “present” is a legal term, meaning to appear in court. The two sides of justification are pardon (as if we never sinned) and acceptance (as if we lived a perfectly righteous life) because of the double imputation.

“Such are we in the sight of God the Father as is the very Son of God Himself. Let it be counted as folly or frenzy or fury whatsoever, it is our comfort and our wisdom; we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God hath made Himself the sin of man, and that men are made the righteousness of God.” (Richard Hooker, On Justification)

Intercession. The Christian’s position is now more certain and sure than we can imagine. We are told that Christ stands before the Father as our legal representative, our advocate (1 John 2:2; Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:33-34). What this means is that the law, once our enemy that “demanded” our punishment, now becomes our friend, “demanding” our acceptance. How so? The law has been perfectly fulfilled in our substitute, and so now it would be unjust for God to turn on us! For God to punish us for any sin would be to exact two payments for the same debt (since Jesus paid it). Now Jesus stands before the Father, in a sense, demanding not mercy but justice for us. We have both his law and his love for us. We could not be more loved or secure.

If thou my pardon hast secured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First from my bleeding surety’s hand
And then again from mine.

– Augustus Toplady

“Now the Lord Jesus Christ does not merely ask God to overlook our sin or forget it. He stands [before the Father]...as it were, to say to God... ‘I am here to just remind you that the law has been fulfilled, that the

death has been died, that the punishment has been enacted; they are free because I died for them.’ I say it with trembling and yet I say it with confidence, God would be unjust if He did not forgive my sin. Christ has died for me... “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...” (1 John 1:9). God’s acceptance of us is now a matter of justice. It is Jesus who enables God to be at one and the same time just and justifier of the ungodly (Rom. 3:26).” (D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Walking with God*)

Martin Luther wrote:

“I labored and diligently and anxiously as to how to understand Paul’s word [in Romans 1:17], where he says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. I sought long and knocked anxiously, for the expression ‘the righteousness of God’ blocked the way, because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a righteous and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

...Then I grasped that “the righteousness of God” is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. When I saw the difference, that law is one thing and gospel another, I broke through. And as I had formerly hated the expression “the righteousness of God,” I now began to regard it as my dearest and most comforting word. So that this expression of Paul’s became to me in very truth a gate of paradise.”

...If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God’s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but only looks upon a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.”

A Practical Statement of the Gospel

The gospel is that you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe; yet, you can be more accepted and loved than you ever dared

hope at the very same time because Jesus Christ lived and died in your place.

The determining factor in our relationship with God is not our past or present, but Christ's past and present.

D.M. Lloyd-Jones, in *Spiritual Depression*, wrote:

How then does it work? It works like this. God accepts this righteousness of Christ, this perfect righteousness face to face with the Law, which He honored in every respect. He has kept it and given obedience to it [through his perfect life], and he has borne its penalty [through his death]. The Law is fully satisfied. God's way of salvation, says Paul, is that. He gives to us the righteousness of Christ. If we have seen our need and go to God and confess it, God will give us his own Son's righteousness. He imputes Christ's righteousness to us, who believe in Him, and regards us as righteous, and declares and pronounces us to be righteous in Him. That is the way of salvation, the Christian way of salvation...

To make it quite practical let me say that there is a very simple way of testing yourself to know whether you believe that... [After] I have explained the way of justification...to them, then I say: 'Well, then, you are now ready to say that you are a Christian?' And they hesitate. And I know they have not understood. Then I say: 'What is the matter, why are you hesitating?' And they say: 'I do not feel that I am good enough.' At once I know that in a sense I have been wasting my breath. They are still thinking in terms of themselves; their idea still is that they have to make themselves good enough to be a Christian, good enough to be accepted with Christ. They have to do it! 'I am not good enough.' It sounds very modest, but it is the lie of the devil, it is a denial of the faith... The essence of the Christian faith is to say that He is good enough and that I am in Him!

As long as you go on thinking about yourself and saying: 'Ah, yes, I would like to, but I am not good enough; I am a sinner, a great sinner,' you are denying God and you will never be happy. You will continue to be cast down and disquieted. You will think you are better at times and then again you will find that you are not as good as you thought you were... How can I put this plainly? It does not matter if you have almost entered into the depths of hell, if you are guilty of murder as well as every other vile sin, it does not matter from the standpoint of being justified before God. You are no more hopeless than the most respectable person in the world. Do you believe that?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you were growing up, what was a rule or expectation (from parents, family, teachers, coaches, etc) that you thought was ridiculous and over-the-top? Why?

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2. What are the differences between seeking to be “justified by works of the law” and seeking to be “justified by faith in Christ”? Try to think of at least four differences.

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3. How would you answer someone who asks you, “I’m told that I can’t be made right with God by doing good works and that I can only be justified by faith. But it sometimes seems like faith is a work too—is faith in Christ actually a ‘work’?”

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4. Explain why people dishonor God when they think they can be saved by their own works.

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5. You've probably heard the phrase, "rules are made to be broken." Why do you think the application of rules and laws to our lives tends to agitate and worsen our sin?

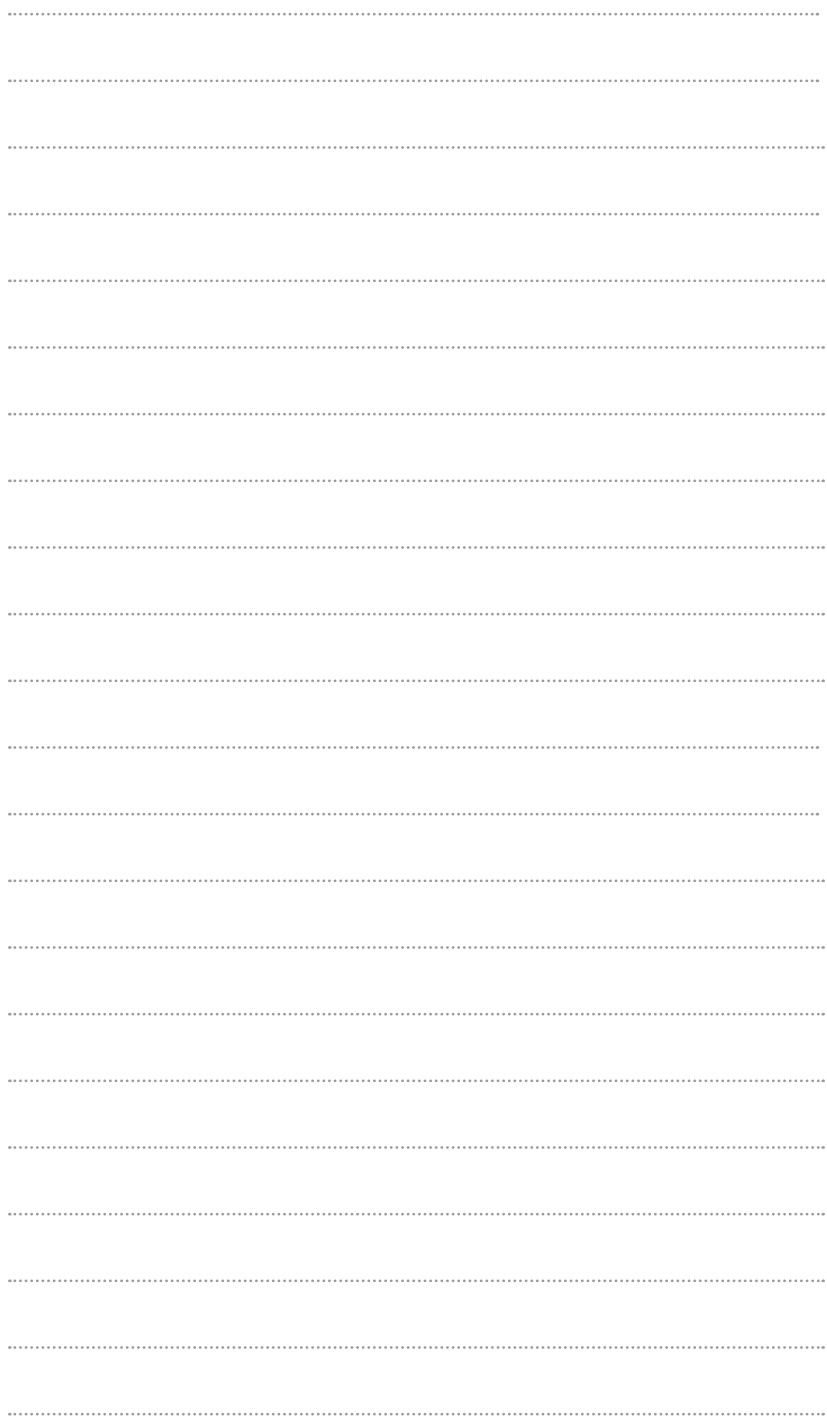
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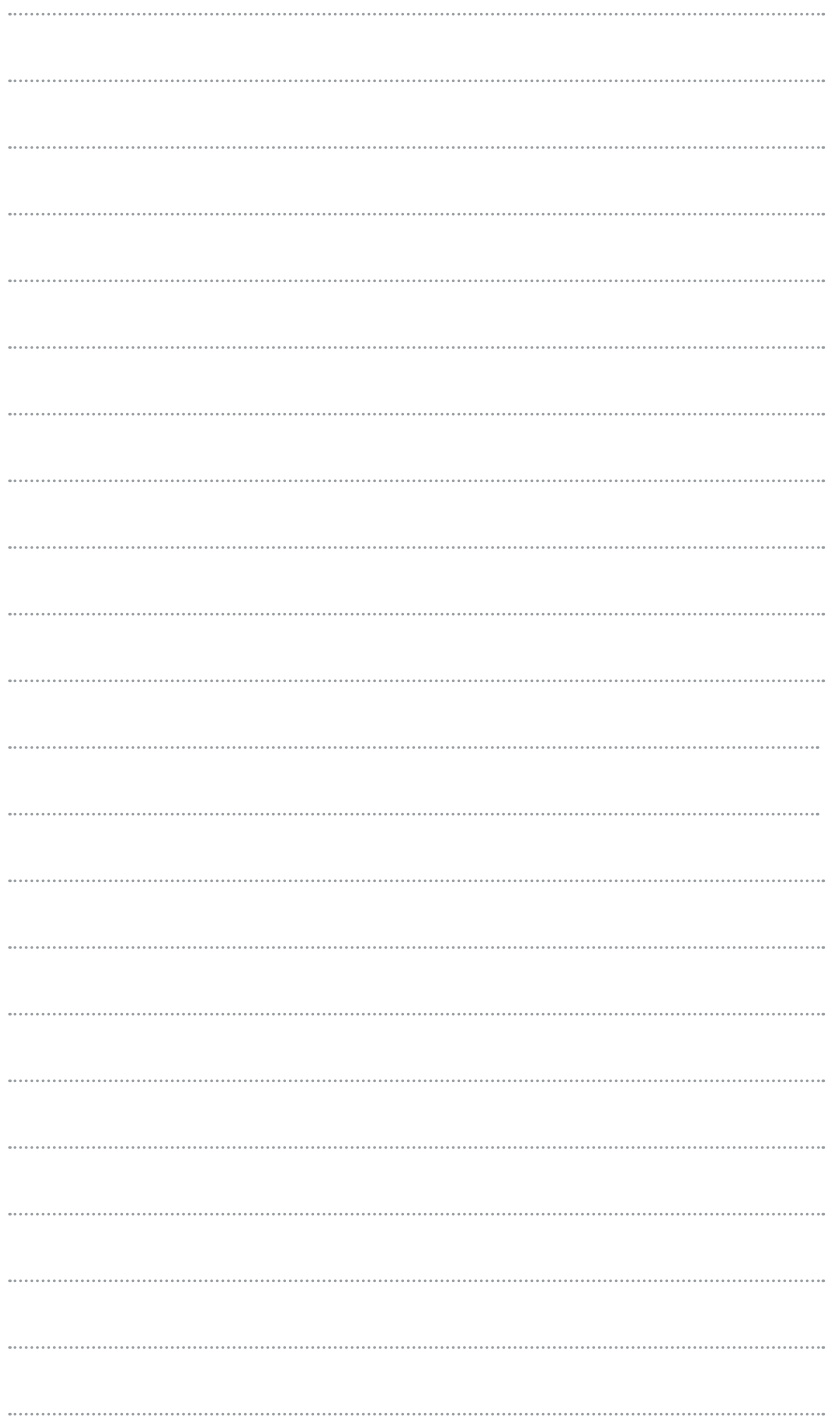
6. How would you describe somebody who lives "by faith in the Son of God"?

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SERMON NOTES

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WEEK FIVE: BY FAITH OR WORKS OF THE LAW?

Galatians 3:1-9

1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. Paul says some strong things in this passage including the following:

...foolish Galatians! (v. 1)

Who has bewitched you? (v. 1)

Are you so foolish? (v. 3)

Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? (v. 4)

Why does Paul take on such a scolding tone in verses 1-5?

2. The meaning of the word for “foolish” is used by Jesus (post-resurrection) as he speaks with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:25—”And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’” What have the Galatians done that has earned them the title of “foolish”?

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3. “Being perfected” in verse 3 literally means “to complete, to finish, to end, to accomplish.” It brings to mind the idea of sanctification, which is defined in the Westminster Shorter Catechism as “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” Why is it foolish to try to become sanctified (perfected, completed) “by the flesh” or “by works of the law”?

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4. Look at verses 3 and 5. Verse 3 says, “Did you receive the Spirit by...” (past tense) while verse 5 says, “Does he who supplies the Spirit to you...” (present tense). What does it mean that God supplies (present tense) the Spirit to believers as they hear with faith?

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5. Paul says that it is “those of faith who are the (true) sons of Abraham.” Why would Paul use Abraham as an example of one who was justified by faith? (Hint: remember the context and see Romans 4 for a more thorough argument).

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FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Gospel-Driven Sanctification

By Jerry Bridges

Early in my Christian life I heard someone say, “The Bible was not given to increase your knowledge but to guide your conduct.” Later I came to realize that this statement was simplistic at best and erroneous at worst. The Bible is far more than a rulebook to follow. It is primarily the message of God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ, with everything in Scripture before the cross pointing to God’s redemptive work and everything after the cross--including our sanctification--flowing from that work.

There is an element of truth in this statement, however, and the Holy Spirit used it to help me to see that the Bible is not to be read just to gain knowledge. It is, indeed, to be obeyed and practically applied in our daily lives. As James says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

With my new insight, I prayed that God would use the Bible to guide my conduct. Then I began diligently to seek to obey it. I had never heard the phrase “the pursuit of holiness,” but that became my primary goal in life. Unfortunately, I made two mistakes. First, I assumed the Bible was something of a rulebook and that all I needed to do was to learn what it says and go do it. I knew nothing of the necessity of depending on the Holy Spirit for his guidance and enablement.

Still worse, I assumed that God’s acceptance of me and his blessing in

my life depended on how well I did. I knew I was saved by grace through faith in Christ apart from any works. I had assurance of my salvation and expected to go to heaven when I died. But in my daily life, I thought God's blessing depended on the practice of certain spiritual disciplines, such as having a daily quiet time and not knowingly committing any sin. I did not think this out but just unconsciously assumed it, given the Christian culture in which I lived. Yet it determined my attitude toward the Christian life.

Let me put this question to you: How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God's Message to you? Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it? Did you go through this whole painful learning process for nothing? It is not yet a total loss, but it certainly will be if you keep this up!

- Eugene Peterson (Paraphrase of Gal. 3:2-5)

Performance-Based Discipleship

My story is not unusual. Evangelicals commonly think today that the gospel is only for unbelievers. Once we're inside the kingdom's door, we need the gospel only in order to share it with those who are still outside. Now, as believers, we need to hear the message of discipleship. We need to learn how to live the Christian life and be challenged to go do it. That's what I believed and practiced in my life and ministry for some time. It is what most Christians seem to believe.

As I see it, the Christian community is largely a performance-based culture today. And the more deeply committed we are to following Jesus, the more deeply ingrained the performance mindset is. We think we earn God's blessing or forfeit it by how well we live the Christian life.

Most Christians have a baseline of acceptable performance by which they gauge their acceptance by God. For many, this baseline is no more than regular church attendance and the avoidance of major sins. Such Christians are often characterized by some degree of self-righteousness. After all, they don't indulge in the major sins we see happening around us. Such Christians would not think they need the gospel anymore. They would say the gospel is only for sinners.

For committed Christians, the baseline is much higher. It includes regular practice of spiritual disciplines, obedience to God's Word, and involvement in some form of ministry. Here again, if we focus on outward behavior, many score fairly well. But these Christians are even more vulnerable to self-righteousness, for they can look down their spiritual noses not only at the sinful society around them but even at other believers who are not as committed as they are. These Christians don't need the gospel either. For them, Christian growth means more discipline and more commitment.

Then there is a third group. The baseline of this group includes more than the outward performance of disciplines, obedience, and ministry. These Christians also recognize the need to deal with sins of the heart like a critical spirit, pride, selfishness, envy, resentment, and anxiety. They see their inconsistency in having their quiet times, their failure to witness at every opportunity, and their frequent failures in dealing with sins of the heart. This group of Christians is far more likely to be plagued by a sense of guilt because group members have not met their own expectations. And because they think God's acceptance of them is based on their performance, they have little joy in their Christian lives. For them, life is like a treadmill on which they keep slipping farther and farther behind. This group needs the gospel, but they don't realize it is for them. I know, because I was in this group.

The Gospel Is for Believers

Gradually over time, and from a deep sense of need, I came to realize that the gospel is for believers, too. When I finally realized this, every morning I would pray over a Scripture such as Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all," and then say, "Lord, I

have gone astray. I have turned to my own way, but you have laid all my sin on Christ and because of that I approach you and feel accepted by you.”

I came to see that Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:20, “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me,” was made in the context of justification (see vv. 15-21). Yet Paul was speaking in the present tense: “The life I now live” Because of the context, I realized Paul was not speaking about his sanctification but about his justification. For Paul, then, justification (being declared righteous by God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ) was not only a past tense experience but also a present day reality.

Paul lived every day by faith in the shed blood and righteousness of Christ. Every day he looked to Christ alone for his acceptance with the Father. He believed, like Peter (see 1 Pet. 2:4-5), that even our best deeds – our spiritual sacrifices – are acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ. Perhaps no one apart from Jesus himself has ever been as committed a disciple both in life and ministry as the Apostle Paul. Yet he did not look to his own performance but to Christ’s “performance” as the sole basis of his acceptance with God.

So I learned that Christians need to hear the gospel all of their lives because it is the gospel that continues to remind us that our day-to-day acceptance with the Father is not based on what we do for God but upon what Christ did for us in his sinless life and sin-bearing death. I began to see that we stand before God today as righteous as we ever will be, even in heaven, because he has clothed us with the righteousness of his Son. Therefore, I don’t have to perform to be accepted by God. Now I am free to obey him and serve him because I am already accepted in Christ (see Rom. 8:1). My driving motivation now is not guilt but gratitude.

Yet even when we understand that our acceptance with God is based on Christ’s work, we still naturally tend to drift back into a performance mindset. Consequently, we must continually return to the gospel. To use an expression of the late Jack Miller, we must “preach the gospel to ourselves every day.” For me that means I keep going back to Scriptures such as Isaiah 53:6, Galatians 2:20, and Romans 8:1. It means I frequently repeat the words from an old hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

No “Easy Believism”

But doesn't this idea that our acceptance with God is based solely on Christ's work apart from our performance lead to a type of “easy believism”? In its most basic form, this is the notion that “Since I asked Christ to be my Savior, I am on my way to heaven regardless of how I live. It doesn't matter if I continue in my sinful lifestyle. God loves and will accept me anyway.”

The Apostle Paul anticipated such “easy believism” in Romans 6:1 when he wrote, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” His response in Romans 6:2, “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” answers the question, “Why bother?” Paul was not responding with “How could you be so ungrateful as to think such a thing?” No, instead he is saying, in effect, “You don't understand the gospel. Don't you realize that you died to sin and if you died to sin, it's impossible for you to continue to live in it” (see Rom. 6:3-14).

Progressive Sanctification

Warring against our sinful habits and seeking to put on Christlike character is usually called sanctification. But because the term definitive sanctification is used to describe the point-in-time deliverance from the dominion of sin, it is helpful to speak of Christian growth in holiness as progressive sanctification. Additionally, the word progressive indicates continual growth in holiness over time. The New Testament writers both assume growth (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 2:19-21; Col. 2:19; 2 Thess. 1:3); and continually urge us to pursue it (see 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:14; 2 Pet. 3:18). There is no place in authentic Christianity for stagnant, self-satisfied, and self-righteous Christians. Rather we should be seeking to grow in Christlikeness until we die.

This progressive sanctification always involves our practice of spiritual disciplines, such as reading Scripture, praying, and regularly fellowshiping with other believers. It also involves putting to death the sinful deeds of the body (see Rom. 8:13) and putting on Christlike character (see Col. 3:12-14). And very importantly it involves a desperate dependence on Christ for the power to do these things, for we cannot grow by our own strength.

So sanctification involves hard work and dependence on Christ; what I call dependent effort. And it will always mean we are dissatisfied with our performance. For a growing Christian, desire will always outstrip performance or, at least, perceived performance. What is it

then that will keep us going in the face of this tension between desire and performance? The answer is the gospel. It is the assurance in the gospel that we have indeed died to the guilt of sin and that there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus that will motivate us and keep us going even in the face of this tension.

We must always keep focused on the gospel because it is in the nature of sanctification that as we grow, we see more and more of our sinfulness. Instead of driving us to discouragement, though, this should drive us to the gospel. It is the gospel believed every day that is the only enduring motivation to pursue progressive sanctification even in those times when we don't seem to see progress. That is why I use the expression "gospel- driven sanctification" and that is why we need to "preach the gospel to ourselves every day."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been confronted about a problem you had? How did it feel? What would make you more or less receptive to the critique?

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2. All true believers desire to be growing in holiness and godliness (Hebrews 12:14). What matters is how we attempt to grow in these areas. Nowadays, what are some ways that people who have the Holy Spirit (genuine believers) try to be "perfected by the flesh?"

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3. Verse 5 says that God supplies the Spirit (present tense) to us by hearing with faith. Describe what it would look like in a person's life to hear with faith on a day-to-day basis.

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4. How can you ensure that you're hearing the word of God "with faith" as opposed to just hearing?

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5. Right now, what are you facing that will require a fresh supply of the Spirit?

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SERMON NOTES

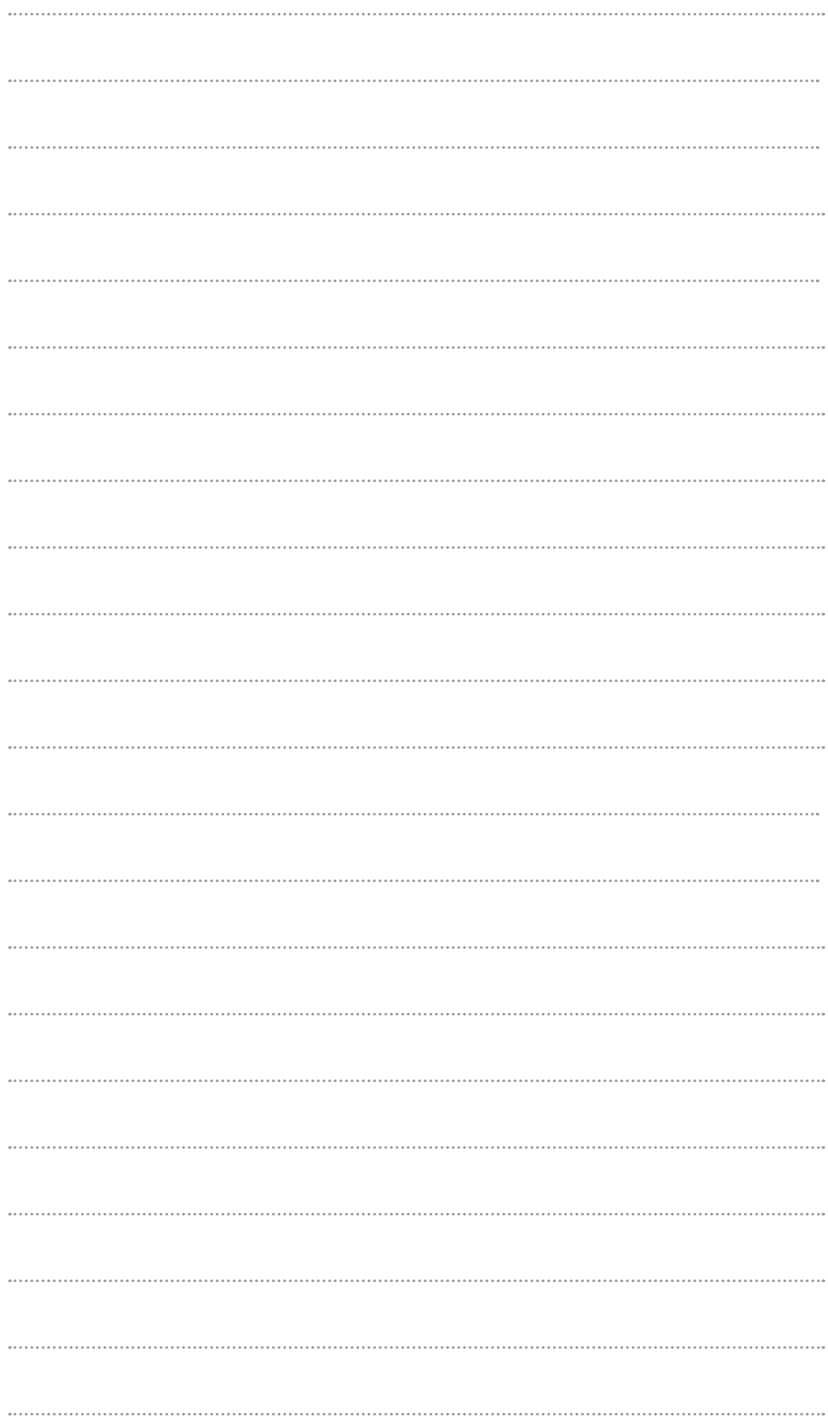
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WEEK SIX: THE LAW AND THE PROMISE

Galatians 3:10-29

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. 15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. 16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. 17 This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. 18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. 19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. 21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

In verses 9-14 Paul has used a literary device in these verses known as a chiasm, where he arranges his content in the form A, B, C, C, B, A. This structure highlights the “C” point by making it central—it is the main point, like the summit of a mountain. Keep this structure in mind as you answer the following questions.

A - 3:9 So then, those who are of faith are **blessed along with Abraham**, the man of faith.

B - 3:10 For all who rely on works of the law are **under a curse**; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

C - 3:11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the **law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”**

C - 3:12 **But the law is not of faith**, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

B - 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by **becoming a curse for us**—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

A - 3:14 so that in Christ Jesus the **blessing of Abraham** might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

1. Verse 10 states that “all who rely on works of the law are under a curse.” Then it gives the reason: “it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law...’” Based on this reason, explain in your own words why those who rely on works of the law are under a curse. (Hint: See James 2:10-11 for a similar passage)

2. Paul asserts in verse 11 that “no one is justified before God by the law,” which is similar to what he said in Galatians 2:16. In verse 11, he supports his assertion by quoting from Habakkuk 2:4. Why does Paul quote this Old Testament verse to support his argument?

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3. Habakkuk 2:4, in its entirety, says, “Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith” (NASB). Why is trusting in Christ by faith the opposite of being proud?

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4. Notice how Paul’s tone changes in verse 15 (where he calls the Galatians “brothers”) compared to how he addressed them in 3:1 (“O foolish Galatians!”). Why does Paul change his tone in this way?

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5. How would you summarize Paul's argument in verses 15-18? (If possible, try to also think of an example of a real-life contract that cannot be changed after the fact.)

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6. Verse 24 says that "the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith." Here are some alternate translations of the same verse:

"So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." (NIV)

"Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith." (NASB95)

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (NKJV)

"Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came. So now, through faith in Christ, we are made right with God." (NLT)

What does Paul mean that the law was a guardian (or tutor/teacher) until Christ came?

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7. What is the difference between being a student (under the instruction, tutorship, and guardianship of the law in verse 24) and being a son of God (verse 26)?

HISTORICAL STUDY

“Faith Alone” and Roman Catholicism

Undoubtedly, you have some friends, family members, or acquaintances that are Roman Catholic. Perhaps you were even raised in a Catholic background. If so, you may have wondered how Catholic teaching on justification is different from Protestant teaching. Are you familiar with the council of Trent? If not, here’s a description of it by John MacArthur:

The Roman Catholic Church defined its views on justification at the Council of Trent. That Council began its work in 1545 and continued for nearly twenty years. The doctrine of justification was high on the Council’s list of priorities. The canons and decrees on justification were written in 1547 at the Council’s sixth session.

Trent was the Catholic Church’s answer to the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, attacking the sale of indulgences, he “cut a vein of medieval Catholicism.” The bleeding continued for at least three decades. The Council of Trent was a desperate attempt to stanch the flow.

Below are some direct quotes from the Council of Trent as it relates to justification. Read each one and then answer how it does not line up with Paul’s teaching in Galatians or elsewhere. Try to use Scripture to defend your answer.

“If anyone says that by faith alone the sinner is justified, so as to mean

that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification ... let him be anathema” (Trent, sess. 6, canon 9).

“If anyone says that the righteousness received is not preserved and also not increased before God by good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a cause of its increase, let him be anathema” (Trent, sess. 6, canon 24).

“If anyone says that the guilt is remitted to every penitent sinner after the grace of justification has been received, and that the debt of eternal punishment is so blotted out that there remains no debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened—let him be anathema” (Trent, sess. 6, canon 30).

FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

The Law & The Gospel

By Bob Thune and Will Walker

Even a casual reader can see that the Bible is full of commands, prohibitions, and expectations. It tells us what to do and what not to do. These rules or laws often present an obstacle to faith. Non-Christians object to Christianity because it seems like “just a bunch of rules and regulations.” And even faithful Christians struggle to understand how the law of God and the gospel of God relate to each other. After all, if we are reconciled to God by grace and not by works, does it really matter whether we obey or not?

When we misunderstand the relationship between law and gospel, it leads to two opposite but equally destructive errors: legalism and license. Legalists continue to live under the law, believing that God’s approval is somehow dependent on their right conduct. Licentious people dismiss the law, believing that since they are “under grace,” God’s rules don’t matter much. These two errors have been around since the days of the apostles. The book of Galatians is written to combat the error of legalism: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Gal. 3:3). The book of Romans addresses the error of license: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (Rom. 6:15).

Both legalism and license are destructive to the gospel. To avoid these pitfalls, we must understand the biblical relationship between law and gospel. In a nutshell, here's how God designed it to work: the law drives us to the gospel and the gospel frees us to obey the law. Realizing all that God expects of us should drive us in despair to Christ. And once we are united with Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit causes us to delight in God's law and gives us power to obey it. In his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther summarized it this way: "The law, rightly understood and thoroughly comprehended, does nothing more than remind us of our sin and slay us by it, and make us liable to eternal wrath...The law is not kept by man's own power, but solely through Christ who pours the Holy Spirit into our hearts. To fulfill the law...is to do its works with pleasure and love...[which are] put into the heart by the Holy Ghost."*

Read that last sentence again: "To fulfill the law...is to do its works with pleasure and love." Just knowing what God requires is not enough. Obeying him "because it's what we're supposed to do" is not sufficient. Truly fulfilling the law means obeying God out of pleasure and love: "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8).

How do we become the kind of people who love God and delight in his law? Answer: through the gospel.

First, it is through the gospel that we become aware of our disobedience to God's law. The first step of the gospel journey is to become aware that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and that our disobedience to God's law places us under his curse: "For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Gal. 3:10).

Second, it is through the gospel that we are freed from the curse of the law. The gospel is the good news that God is willing to forgive us if we turn to Jesus and are justified—declared "not guilty" in God's sight—by faith in him. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that...through Christ Jesus...by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:13–14). Jesus has both atoned for our imperfection and attained our perfection through his work on the cross. The law no longer stands in judgment over us. In biblical language, we are no longer "under the law" (Rom. 6:14).

Third, it is through the gospel that God sends his indwelling Holy Spirit into us, transforming our hearts and enabling us to truly love God and

others. As a result of our justification by faith, “God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us” (Rom. 5:5). We commonly read the phrase “the love of God” in this verse as God’s love for us. But contextually and linguistically this phrase also has the sense of “love from God” or “love for God.” Because God loves us, he has poured into our hearts his own capacity to love and delight in himself. Jesus prayed that the very love that God the Father has for his Son would be in us: “I have made you known to them...in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:26).

A true Christian obeys God’s law, then, not out of obligation or duty, but out of love, for “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10). Both legalism and license are fundamentally self-centered. They are not concerned with delight in God or in his law, but with self: “I keep the rules” or “I break the rules.” But the gospel frees us from our self-concern and turns us outward. We see that God’s law is not constraining but freeing: it is a “law of liberty” (James 1:25 ESV). It is a law that points us to Jesus.

The [function], therefore, of the law is to kill, and yet so that God may revive and quicken again. So it is not given only to kill: but because man is proud, and dreams that he is wise, righteous, and holy, it is necessary that he should be humbled by the law, that so the beast, the opinion of righteousness, might be slain: for otherwise no man can obtain life.

- Martin Luther

Romans 10:4 says, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” In other words, the end, the goal, the point of the law is to drive us to Jesus. When we really “get” what this verse is saying, we begin to see that every command in Scripture points us in some way to Jesus, who fulfills that command for us and in us. He is our righteousness. We no longer need to construct our own.

We are unable to do what the law commands us to do, but Jesus did it for us. And because he lives in us by his Spirit, we are enabled to do it, not from obligation, but from delight. So every command in Scripture points us to our own inadequacy (the bottom line of the Cross Chart), magnifies the good and holy nature of God (the top line of the Cross Chart), and causes us to look to Jesus as the One who forgives our disobedience and enables our obedience. In other words, the law drives us to Jesus and Jesus frees us to obey the law.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is an upcoming event that you are looking forward to in your life? Why are you looking forward to it? What difference does it make on your present outlook to know that this is coming?

2. If we were to survey random people at the local grocery store, it is likely that we would encounter people who would say that they should go to heaven because they sincerely try to do good or that they are better than most people. How might Paul respond to a statement like that?

3. In what way did Jesus become a curse for us (v. 13)? How does that make you feel?

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4. We have clearly seen that the function of the law was to convict us of sin and to drive us to faith in Christ. The law never has had the power to save us. Does this then mean that as believers we ought to disregard the law and not read, study, or seek to obey it? Why or why not?

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5. What is an area where you feel particularly aware of your sin and guilt? What would it look like to fight for obedience by using the promise of the gospel? How would this be different from using the law?

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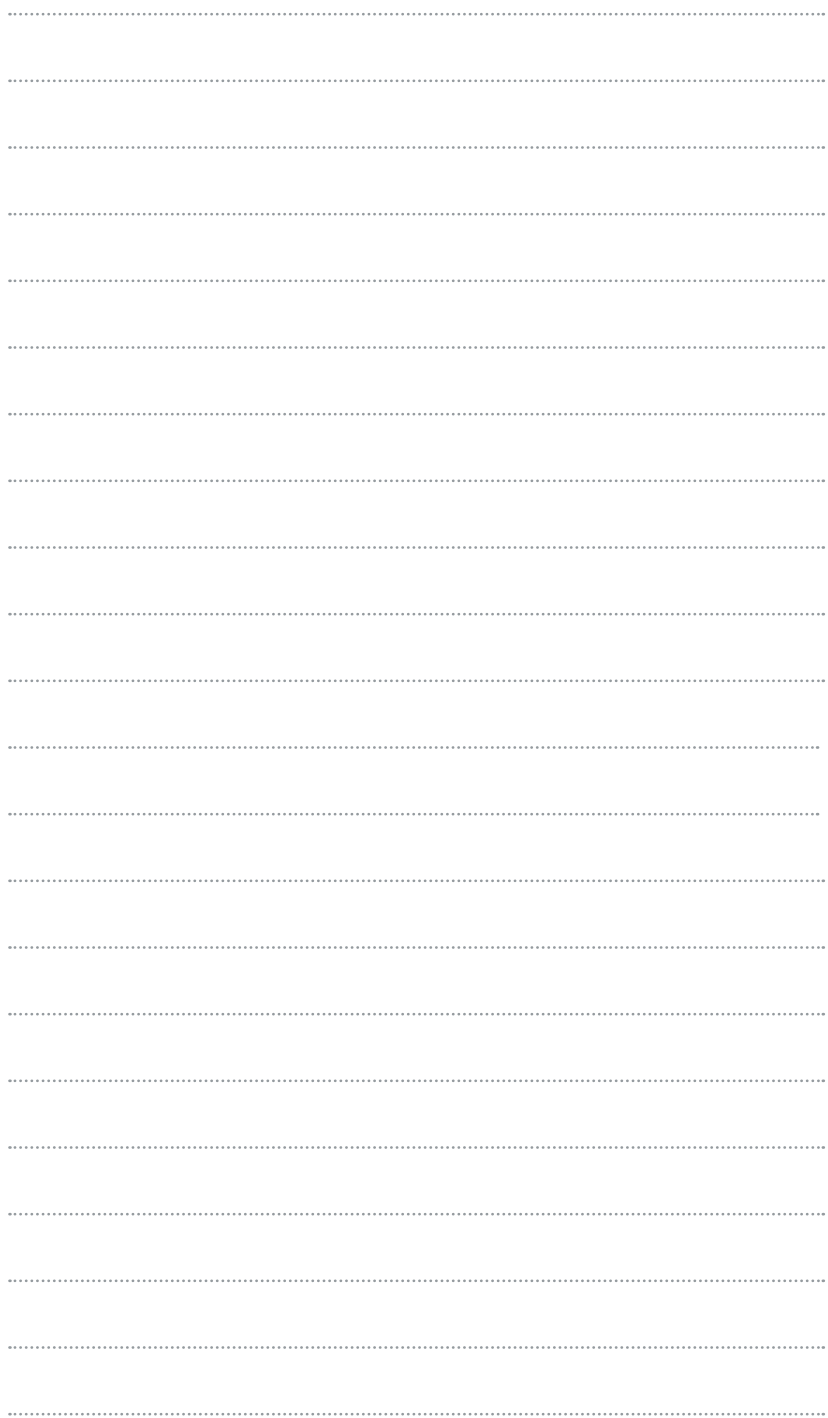
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SERMON NOTES

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WEEK SEVEN: SONS AND HEIRS

Galatians 4:1-7

1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. Verse 3 says that “when we were children, (we) were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” Based on the context, what do you think Paul means by “elementary principles”?

2. Verse 4 says that God sent Jesus into the world “the fullness of time had come.” John MacArthur adds some helpful insight on that verse:

When Jesus was born, everything was right for the coming of the Messiah. First of all, the time was right religiously. During the Babylonian captivity, Israel once and for all forsook the idolatry into which she had so often fallen. Despite their many other sins and

failures, including the national rejection of their own Messiah, no significant number of Jews has ever again turned to idolatry. Also during the Exile, Jews developed synagogues, which they used as places of worship, as schools, and as courts. In addition to that, they at last had the completed Old Testament, assembled by Ezra and others after the return from Babylon. Those features facilitated the proclaiming of the Messiah's gospel among the people of Israel.

Second, the time was right culturally. Christians who propagated the gospel during the first several centuries had a common language with those to whom they witnessed and with whom they worshiped. Alexander the Great had thoroughly established Greek culture and language throughout the known world, and these continued their dominating influence long after Rome succeeded Greece as world ruler.

Third, the time was right politically. Rome had instituted the pax Romana (Roman peace), which provided economic and political stability. The apostles and other early preachers and teachers could travel freely and safely throughout the empire and could do so on the magnificent system of roads built by the Romans.

Each of those factors was in some unique way a key to the spread of the gospel. God's timing was perfect.

What does this idea of God sending Jesus at the perfect time teach us about God's character?

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3. Paul says that God's Son was "born of woman" and "born under the law." Why are both of those things significant?

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4. Verse 4 says that Jesus redeemed us “so that we might receive adoption as sons.” The theme of adoption is significant throughout Paul’s writings (see Rom. 8:15, 23 and Eph. 1:5). What does it mean that God adopted us?

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**To see the law by Christ fulfilled, to hear
his pardoning voice, changes a slave into a
child and duty into choice.**

- William Cowper

5. How does God’s Spirit confirm that we were adopted into his family?

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FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Adoption

By Tim Keller and Dick Kaufmann

There is a “higher” benefit of Christ’s grace than even justification. We are also adopted into God’s family as his children. This is implied in substitution. God now loves us as if we had done all Jesus had done. He loves us even as he loves his own son (John 17:23). Therefore, he adopts us into his family (Romans 8:14-16). Like justification, adoption is fundamentally not a change in nature, but a change in status. As in civil adoption, we not only become a loved member of a family, but certain rights and duties come to us legally. But adoption is distinct and beyond justification, for it brings us into the most intimate position possible with the God of the universe.

“According to the Scriptures, pardon, acceptance, and adoption are distinct privileges, the one rising above the other in the order in which they have been stated...while the first two properly belong to (the sinner’s) justification, as being both founded on the same relation [with God] as a Ruler-and-Subject, the third is radically distinct from them, as being founded on a nearer, more tender, more endearing relation [with God] as Father-and-child... The privilege of adoption presupposes pardon and acceptance, but is higher than either.”

- James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*

To see the law by Christ fulfilled
And hear his pard’ning voice
Transforms a slave into a child
And duty into choice.

- William Cowper, *Olney Hymns*

Self-Assessment: Orphans vs. Children

This is a practical exercise to reveal our sinful tendencies to manipulate life and our daily need to return to Christ. This exercise will humble you, which is one of the first steps in serving Christ and others. Under *The Orphan*, check the box if you see that tendency in yourself. Underline the words that most apply. Under *The Son/Daughter*, check the boxes that describe where you most want to grow, underlining the key words.

The Orphan

- Lacks a vital daily intimacy with God
- Anxious about friends, money, school, grades, etc
- Feels as if no one cares about you
- Lives on success/fail basis
- Needs to look good
- Feels guilty and condemned
- Struggles to trust things to God
- Has to fix your problems
- Not very teachable
- Is defensive when accused of error or weakness
- Needs to be right
- Looks for satisfaction in “possessions”
- Tends to be motivated by obligation and duty, not love
- Lacks confidence
- Feels discouraged and defeated
- Strong-willed with ideas, agendas and opinions
- Solution to failure: “Try harder”
- Has a critical spirit (complaining and bitterness)
- Tears others down
- A “competent analyst” of others’ weaknesses
- Tends to compare yourself with others
- Feels powerless to defeat the flesh
- Looks for satisfaction in “positions”
- Needs to be in control of situations and others

The Son/Daughter

- Feels freed from worry because of God’s love for you
- Learning to live in daily partnership with God
- Not fearful of God
- Feel forgiven and totally accepted
- A daily trust in God’s sovereign plan for your life
- Prayer is a first resort
- Content in relationships because you are accepted by God
- Freedom from making a name for yourself
- Is teachable by others
- Open to criticism because you rest on Christ’s perfection
- Able to examine your deeper motives
- Able to take risks—even to fail
- Encouraged by the Spirit working in you
- Able to see God’s goodness in dark times

- Content with what Christ has provided
- Trusting less in self and more in Holy Spirit
- Aware of inability to fix life, people, and problems
- Is able to freely confess your faults to others
- Doesn't always have to be right
- Does not gain value from man-made "props"
- Experiences more and more victory over the flesh.
- Prayer is a vital, ongoing part of the day
- Jesus is more and more the subject of conversation
- God truly satisfies your soul

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the differences between how a parent typically feels about his or her own children and other people's children? What might account for this difference?

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2. Why is the truth about adoption so key in the process of fighting for grace and avoiding legalism (God will love you if you obey)?

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3. Verse 6 says that “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.” Do you think most Christians live as though the Spirit of Jesus were in them? If not, why do you think that is?

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4. Do you sense the Holy Spirit within you bearing witness with your spirit that you are a child of God (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6)? Can you describe what that sense is like?

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5. Think of the people who are a part of Redemption Church. Does this truth about adoption help you to think of them more as your brothers and sisters (or if they are older, as those who are like “fathers” and “mothers” to you)? How do you think an added appreciation of this idea of the church as a family would be helpful to the church?

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SERMON NOTES

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WEEK EIGHT: SLAVE OR FREE?

Galatians 4:8-31

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years! 11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. 12 Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. 13 You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, 14 and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. 15 What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. 18 It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, 19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! 20 I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. 21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. 23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. 24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. 30 But what does the Scripture say?

“Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” 31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. What does it mean that the Galatians were “enslaved to those that by nature are not gods”?

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2. In verse 9 Paul says “But now that you have come to know God” and then qualifies his statement with “or rather to be known by God.” Why do you think Paul makes this qualification? (Hint: it will help to think about the context of the book and the nature of legalism)

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3. Paul describes the “elementary principles of the world” (the system of trying to be made right with God through working to earn his favor) as “weak and worthless.” Why do these two words so accurately describe a legalistic mindset?

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4. What does it mean that the “son of the slave (Ishmael) was born according to the flesh”? How is it different from the son of the free woman (Isaac) who “was born through the promise”?

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5. Verse 30 says, “But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.’” What is the inheritance for the sons of promise?

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The essence of Christianity is the miracle of new birth. The hallmark of the Isaac-types is that we have been converted, changed, transformed at the center of our lives so that we desire to rest in God’s sovereign grace. We hate the remaining tendencies in us to be proud and to trust in our-selves or other people instead of God.

- John Piper

FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Privileges of God's Adopted Children

By Tim Keller

Here are all the privileges or blessings of the Christian life recast and understood in terms of sonship:

1. Assurance

“Social experts drum into us these days that the family unit needs to be stable and secure, and that any unsteadiness in the parent-child relationship takes its toll in strain, neurosis and arrested development in the child himself. The depressions, randomness and immaturities that mark children of broken homes are known to us all. But...in God's family...you have absolute stability and security. The very concept of adoption is itself proof and guarantee of the preservation of the saints, for only bad fathers throw their children out of the family, even under provocation...” (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*)

“Although [the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15] is probably the best known and loved of all Christ's parables, the lesson it teaches us...is often overlooked. Jesus was underlining the fact that... The reality of the love of God for us is often the last thing in the world to dawn on us. As we fix our eyes upon ourselves, our past failures, our present guilt, it seems impossible that the Father should love us. Many Christians go through much of their life with the prodigal's suspicion. Their concentration is upon their sin and failure; all their thoughts are introspective. That is why in the Greek text John's statement about the Father's love begins...Behold! Look and see. [“Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God!” 1 John 3:11]. (Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*)

2. Prayer and Intimacy

“‘Abba’ was the word that was used familiarly by children talking to their fathers... A child does not always address his father as ‘father’; he uses terms such as ‘Papa,’ ‘Dad.’ That is the kind of meaning represented by this word ‘Abba’ . It was a...word lisped by a little child... But let us notice the word cry...we cry ‘Abba, Father’ . It is a very strong word, and clearly the Apostle has used it quite deliberately. It means a loud cry...it expresses deep emotion... What then does it imply? Obviously... real knowledge of God. God is no longer to us a distant God. He is

not merely a God in whom we believe intellectually, theologically, theoretically, doctrinally only, which are all possible to one who is not a child of God at all. [Our] worship and praying are spontaneous; it is the spontaneity of the child who sees the father...and not only spontaneity, but confidence. "A little child has confidence. He does not analyze it... he knows that 'Abba' is his father. Grownups may be standing back at a distance and being very formal [with some great personage]; but the little child comes running in, rushes right in, and holds on to his father's legs. He has a right that noone else has... It is instinctive...we cry 'Abba Father'." (D.M. Lloyd Jones, Romans 8:5-17)

"This is what prayer really means: knowing that we have a secure relationship with God in which we can address him in the knowledge that he cares, and has the power to aid us. Jesus encourages us to pray simply. This distinguishes the child of God from the hypocrite. The hypocrite is so unsure of his relationship with God (and rightly so!) that he thinks of prayer in terms of its length and eloquence; the child of God knows he is speaking to the Father, and talks simply and directly... Jesus also encourages us to pray boldly... Boldness [Which is] impudence in a neighbor is the privilege of the children of the family." (Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God)

3. Freedom and Confidence

"The parable of the prodigal son epitomizes the disposition of some Christians, even when they are restored to fellowship with God. Lurking in their hearts there often remains this sneaking suspicion: 'I am not worthy to be God's son, but perhaps I can struggle through as one of his hired servants' [see Luke 15:19]. At the root of such thinking is an inability to believe that salvation is entirely of God's grace and love. We contribute nothing to it; we can do nothing to earn it in any way. We are often slow to realize the implications of that. We are sons, but we are [always] in danger of having the mindset of hired servants...the Devil...will try to produce in us what our forefathers called 'a bondage frame of spirit'...[When Paul says in Romans 8:15 that God sends us 'a Spirit of sonship' rather than a spirit of fear, he means] God sends His Spirit into our hearts, bringing us the deep spiritual and psychological security that rests on the objective fact that...we belong to the Lord." (Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God)

4. Fellowship and Connection

"We are to learn to accept and appreciate one another, no matter what natural differences might separate us... Rich and poor alike are

to be treated as brothers...[We are to never give up on one another, to both confront and forgive in proportions as great as required.] Such a mixture of discipline and forgiveness is conceivable only within a family context...No family finds failure easy to handle...[But] only when we realize that the Church is a family, that we are brothers and sisters in that family, will we have a right perspective from which to view those who fail badly, and a right motive to see them disciplined faithfully, and welcomed back with many reaffirmations of our love... These are all part of what it means to ‘keep on loving each other as brothers.’ (Heb. 13:1)” (Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God)

5. Inheritance

“Adoption is incomplete in this world. John says that...we are God’s children, but it does “not yet appear what we shall be” in the future... (I John 3:1-3). Similarly, Paul teaches that although we have already received the Spirit of adoption...(Romans 8:15), we are still waiting for the full experience of our sonship, for ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God’ (Romans 8:21). The redemption of our bodies, our adoption in all its glory, takes place at the final resurrection. Then... the image [family resemblance] now under repair will be completed.” (Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God)

“The doctrine of our adoption tells us that the sum and substance of our promised inheritance is a share in the glory of Christ. We shall be made like our elder brother at every point, and sin and mortality, the double corruption of God’s good work in the moral and spiritual spheres respectively, will be things of the past. ‘Coheirs with Christ... that we may also share in his glory’ (Rom.8:17). ‘Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.’ (I Jn.3:2).” (J.I.Packer, Knowing God)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a bad habit that you had in the past and found difficult to break? What made it difficult?

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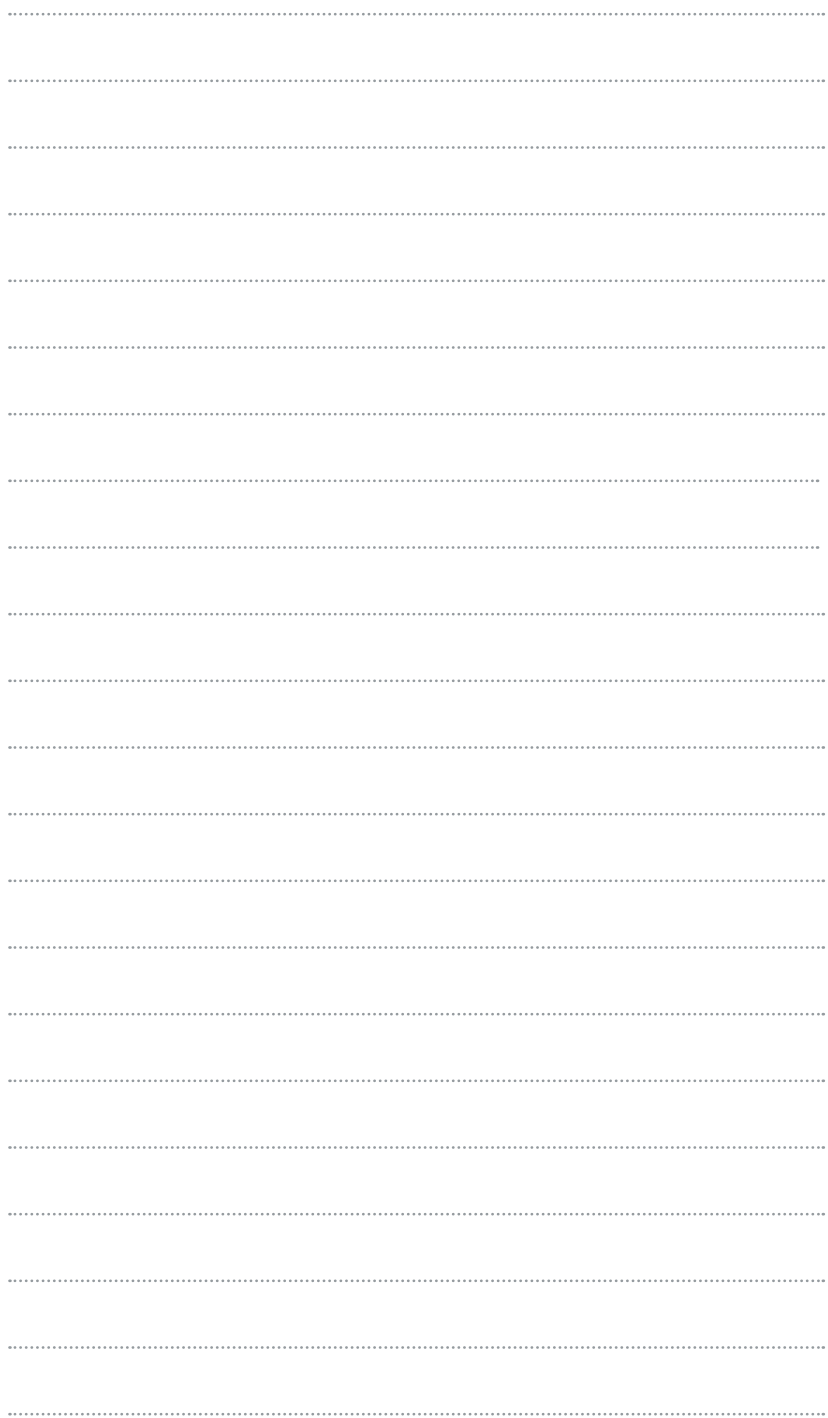
2. What are some common idols (v. 8 - “those that by nature are not gods”) that Christians seem to continue to serve?

3. Think a moment about why speakers and writers generally use illustrations when they communicate. With that in mind, why do you think Paul decided that this story that compares Ishmael (Hagar’s son) with Isaac (Sarah’s son) would be a good illustration?

4. As a group, read through the following distinctions between being a “child” and a “slave.” Which of the following comparisons applies to you most? Why?

Slave	Child
“Grace” is God’s maintaining your strength and power to live a better life.	“Grace” is God’s transforming power, to be melted by spiritual understandings of Gospel truth.
“Faith” is trying hard to do good and be better, establishing your own record (righteousness) so God and others (and yourself) will accept you.	“Faith” is a discipline of remembering and living every moment as an accepted child of God.

Slave	Child
<p>“Obedience” focuses nearly completely on external duties. Examination of motivations is too traumatic and is ignored.</p>	<p>“Obedience” is seeking to please God first in our attitude of love, then obeying his will. Concentration on principles and attitude.</p>
<p>Fear-based life</p>	<p>Faith working through love</p>
<p>Compulsive obedience. Obeys God and moral codes out of fear of rejection—a compulsive, driven moralism. “Drivenness.” Unrealistic goals. Often a lot of self-criticism.</p>	<p>Obeys out of joy in your Father and out of gratitude for the certainty of his love. “How can I live so ungratefully to one who will never reject me?”</p>
<p>Controlled by people. Expectations and opinions of others become the real moral standard. We are controlled by what people think.</p>	<p>Integrity and courage is easier. “The only person whose opinion counts is my Father! Who cares what the rest think?”</p>
<p>Hiding. Lots of strategies to hide our inner and outer failings from one another and ourselves. Including: gossip, blame-shifting, anger at other races/classes, obsessions, overwork, etc.</p>	<p>Open and transparent. Freedom from having to put up a front. Able to appreciate people who are different and hurting.</p>
<p>Isolation. Growing feeling that no one understands, that no one cares, no one can be trusted.</p>	<p>Because of openness and transparency, and a lack of self-pity.</p>
<p>Despair in troubles. Sees difficulties as “pay backs” from God. Result is either guilt (because there’s an awareness of moral failure) or bitterness (because there’s a feeling of moral accomplishment).</p>	<p>Learns to see discipline as fatherly, loving instruction, preparing us for future tests. Learns lessons and shows patience.</p>
<p>Begrudging repentance. Admitting failure is destructive of one’s very basis for living (that being a sense of moral adequacy). So repentance is galling, last resort.</p>	<p>Admitting failures is the basis of a Christian’s self-image as adopted child. Repentance reminds anew of magnitude of his love. Repentance quick, willing.</p>





WEEK NINE: FREEDOM TO LOVE

Galatians 5:1-15

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. 7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. 11 But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. How do you define freedom?

2. Verse 1 commands two things: to stand firm (in freedom) and to not submit again to a yoke of slavery. How would the Galatians obey these two commands?

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3. Look at verses 2-4. What three negative results of accepting circumcision (or legalism) does Paul give?

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4. Verse 6 indicates that faith works through love (“faith expressing itself through love”-NIV). Why is love the natural outflow of faith?

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5. How does Paul summarize the law? Whose words is he echoing here?

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6. Verse 13 commands the Galatians to serve one another. What does it mean to serve one another?

FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Freed to Love

By John Piper

The logic of Gal. 5:13-15 is simple. First, Paul restates the foundation of the Christian life: “You were called to freedom, brethren.” Then, based on that divine call, he gives a twofold command. Negatively: “Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.” Positively: “Through love be servants of one another.” Then to support this twofold command he gives a positive and a negative incentive to love. Positively: “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” And negatively: “If you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.” The main point of the text is, “through love be servants of one another.” If you do this, you fulfill the whole law; if you don’t, you destroy yourselves.

Let’s focus first on the positive command in verse 13: “Through love be servants of one another.” Listen to what happens when you put this command together with the first part of the verse: “You were called to freedom ... through love serve one another.” You were called to freedom from servitude, now in love submit to servitude! Here’s the question we should ask: Why is love which serves the needs of others the only way Christian freedom can express itself? Why are the call to freedom and the call to love synonymous? When Paul says, “Don’t use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,” he means that if you try, you lose your freedom. As verse 1 says, you “submit again to a yoke of slavery.” The works of the flesh and the fruit of love are not two different optional ways to live in freedom. When you live according to the flesh you are in slavery. But when you serve each other in love you are in freedom.

Why?

Because love is motivated by the joy of having our fullness, but the works of the flesh are motivated by the desire to fill our emptiness. The meaning of “flesh” in the book of Galatians is not the physical part of man, but man’s ego which feels a deep emptiness and uses the means within its own power to fill that emptiness. If it is religious it may use law; if it is irreligious it may use booze. But one thing is sure: the flesh is not free. It is enslaved to one futile desire after another in its effort to fill an emptiness which only Christ can fill. So when Paul says in verse 13, “Don’t use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,” he means, don’t surrender the freedom that you have in the all-satisfying Christ to return to the unsatisfying desires for mere physical pleasures or self-exaltation...

We love other people when we stop using them as means to supply our deficiencies and instead rejoice in the divine enablement for us to supply their deficiencies.

- John Piper

There is no more fulfilling way to live than to draw daily on God’s all-satisfying grace and let it flow through us to meet the needs of others. Verses 14 and 15 give us a positive and a negative incentive to live like this. First, verse 14: Live like this “for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” In spite of all the negative things that Paul has said about “works of the law” it is not a matter of indifference whether Christians fulfill the law in their behavior. The good news is that love, which is an overflow of God’s grace, is what fulfills the law. All God was after in the law was people who are so satisfied by his grace that their lives are a spill-spout of love...

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is not a command to love yourself. It is a command to take your natural, already existing love of self and make it the measuring rod of your love for others. There is not a harder command in the Bible than this one. It means: Want to feed the hungry as much as you want to feed yourself when you get hungry. It means: Want to find your neighbor a job as much as you are glad you have a job.

Want to help your fellow student get A's as much as you want to get A's. Want to help the person stalled on the freeway as much as you are glad you are not stalled on the freeway. Want to give the poor softball player a chance to play as much as you want to play the whole game. Want to share Christ with your neighbor as much as you are glad you know Christ yourself. Use all the creativity and energy and perseverance to do good things for others as you use in doing good things for yourself. Care about what happens to others as much as you care about what happens to yourself. Can you imagine what the church would be like if we were all like that: looking at the person to the right and to the left and feeling the same longing for their happiness that we feel for our own. Not only would the law be fulfilled, this place would be iridescent with joy and the glory of God would be unmistakably present in our midst. And people would be converted! Let's be like that in the power of the Holy Spirit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you felt a greater-than-usual sense of freedom? What was it like?

2. Verse 1, the hinge verse between the doctrinal section (ch. 3-4) and the application section (ch. 5-6), says "For freedom Christ has set us free." There are other things that Paul could have said, such as "it is for the glory of God that Christ has set us free" or "it is so that we would have eternal life in relationship with God that Christ has set us free." But God, through Paul, emphasizes freedom. Why do you think this is the emphasis?

3. How would you respond to somebody who read Galatians 5:1 and said “I guess this means that Christ died primarily so that I could do whatever I want”?

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4. John Piper defines love like this: “We love other people when we stop using them as means to supply our deficiencies and instead rejoice in the divine enablement for us to supply their deficiencies.” What comes to mind as you read that definition?

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5. Who is somebody that God is calling you to love? How can you use your freedom in Christ as an opportunity to serve him or her?

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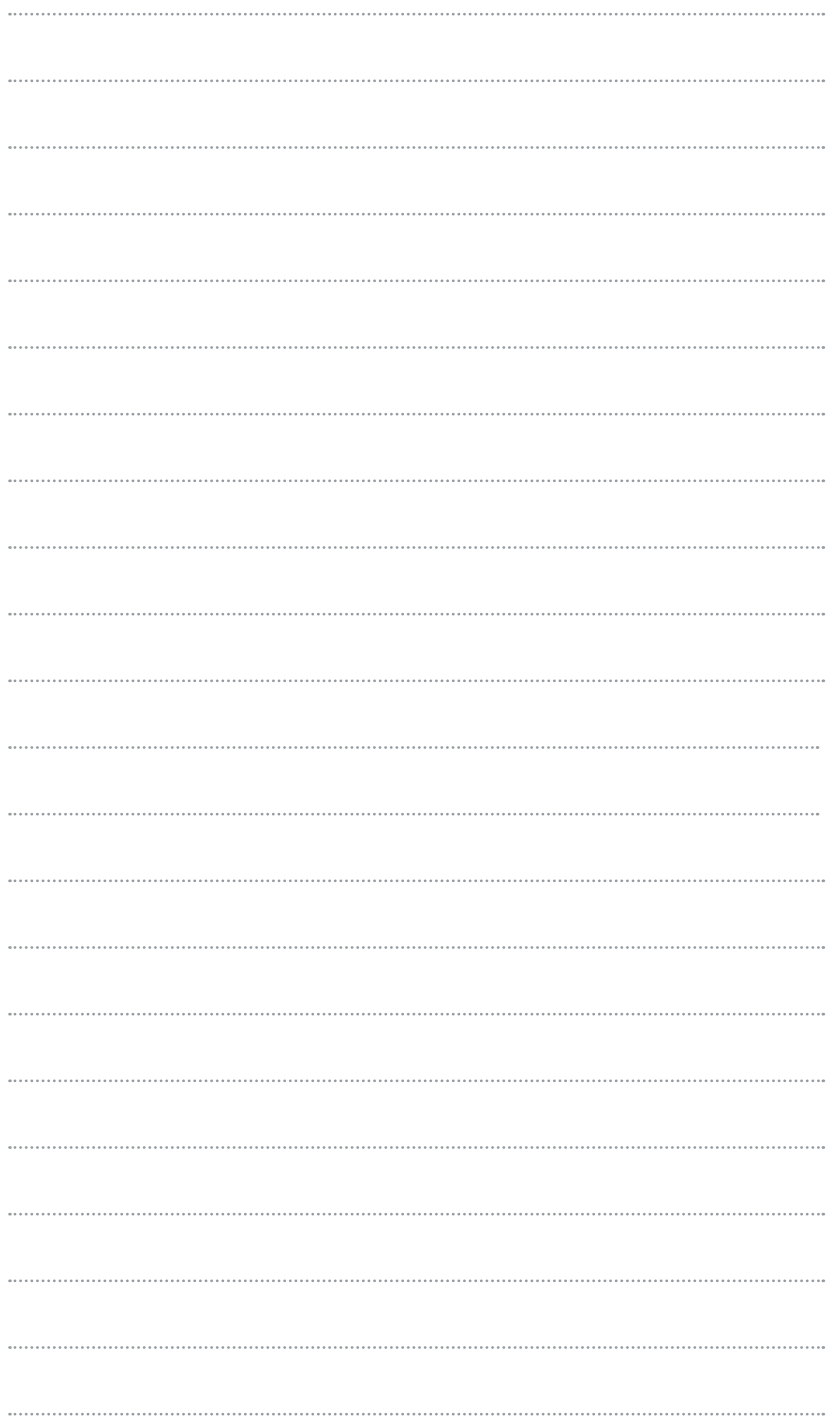
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SERMON NOTES

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WEEK TEN: WALK BY THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16-26

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. What is the one command in this passage?

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2. The word translated “walk” means “to live or behave in a customary manner, with possible focus upon continuity of action—’to live, to behave, to go about doing.’” Based on this definition, does it seem that

walking by the Spirit is a moment by moment activity or a lifestyle?

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3. Read Ephesians 5:18. Based on this passage and all the verses in Galatians 5:16-26 that refer to the Spirit (18, 22, 25), describe what it is to “walk by the Spirit”.

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4. Based on the context, how do you define the word “flesh”?

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5. How do you define the following words? (Give a very brief definition)

- sexual immorality
- fits of anger
- impurity
- rivalries
- sensuality
- dissensions
- idolatry

divisions
sorcery
envy
enmity
drunkenness
strife
orgies
love
goodness
joy
faithfulness
peace
gentleness
patience
self-control
kindness

**So, every healthy tree bears good fruit,
but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A
healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a
diseased tree bear good fruit.**

- Jesus, Matthew 7:17-18

6. What does it mean that the above qualities are fruit?

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FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Idols of the Heart

By Tim Keller

A. THE DEFINITION OF IDOLS

Romans 1:25 tells us that idols are not sinful things, but good and basic things elevated into being ultimate things (v.25 – worshipped... created things rather than the Creator) We look to them for meaning in life, for covering our sense of insignificance, for developing a “righteousness” or worth.

“An idol is anything in our lives that occupies the place that should be occupied by God alone. Anything that... is central in my life, anything that seems to me... essential... An idol is anything by which I live and on which I depend, anything that... holds such a controlling position in my life that... it moves and rouses and attracts so much of my time and attention, my energy and money.” (D.M.Lloyd-Jones, “Idolatry” in *Life in God: Studies in 1 John*)

“[Each person] acts as if God could not make him happy without the addition of something else. Thus the glutton makes a god of his dainties; the ambitious man of his honor; the incontinent man of his lust; the covetous man his wealth; and consequently esteems them as his chiefest good, and the most noble end to which he directs his thoughts... All men worship some golden calf, set up by education, custom, natural inclination and the like... When a general is taken, the army runs. [Even so] this [the main ‘idol’] is the great stream, and other sins but rivulets which bring supply... this is the strongest chain wherein the devil holds the man, the main fort...” (Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*)

“...that most basic question which God poses to each human heart: “Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart’s functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?” Questions... bring some of people’s idol systems to the surface. “To who or what do you look for life-sustaining stability, security and acceptance? ...What do you really want and expect [out of life]? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success?” These questions or similar ones tease out whether we serve God or idols, whether we look for salvation from Christ or from false saviors. [This bears] on the immediate motivation of my behavior, thoughts, feelings. In the Bible’s

conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question: who or what “rules my behavior, the Lord or an idol?” (David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”)

B. THE EFFECTS OF IDOLS

1. Distorted thinking

Romans 1:21 tells us each idol creates a delusional field, a whole set of assumptions and false definitions of success and failure which are distortions of reality brought on by the idol (v.21 - their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened).

“[Your] idols define good and evil in ways contrary to God’s definitions. [They spin out a whole false belief system.] They establish a locus of control that is earth-bound: either in objects (e.g. lust for money), other people (e.g. ‘I need to please my father’), or myself (e.g. attainment of my personal goals). Such false gods create false laws, false definitions of success and failure, of values and stigma. Idols promise blessings and warn of curses for those who succeed or fail [their standards]. ‘If I [make enough money], I will be secure. If I can get these certain people to like and respect me, then my life will be valid.’” (David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”)

2. Emotional Bondage

Romans 1:25 tells us that each idol “darkens the heart” and enslaves us (v.25 - worshipped and served created things). Whatever we worship we must serve. The way the idol enslaves is that it creates over-desires, inordinate longings.

“Idols of the heart are graphically portrayed in Ezekiel 14:1-8... If ‘idolatry’ is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then ‘lust’ [inordinate desires], epithumiai is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for that same drift. (See summary statements by Paul, Peter, John, and James as Gal.5:16ff; Eph.2:3, 4:22; I Pet.2:11, 4:2; I John 2:16; James 1:14ff, where epithumiai is the catch-all for what is wrong with us.) The tenth commandment [against ‘coveting,’ which is idolatrous, inordinate desire for something] also... makes sin ‘psychodynamic.’ It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes in Romans 7... the NT merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires... for lust, demandingness, craving and yearning are specifically termed ‘idolatry’ (Eph.5:5 and Colossians 3:5).” (David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”)

3. The Sin Under Every Sin

The Ten Commandments begin with two commandments against idolatry. Then comes commandments three to ten. Why this order? It is because the fundamental problem is always idolatry. In other words, we never break commandments 3-10 without first breaking 1-2.

“A careful reading of the Old and New Testaments shows that idolatry is nothing like the crude, simplistic picture that springs to mind of an idol sculpture in some distant country. As the main category to describe unbelief, the idea is highly sophisticated, drawing together the complexities of motivation in individual psychology, the social environment, and also the unseen world. Idols are not just on pagan altars, but in well-educated human hearts and minds (Ezekiel 14). The apostle associates the dynamics of human greed, lust, craving, and coveting with idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). The Bible does not allow us to marginalize idolatry to the fringes of life... it is found on center stage.” (R. Keyes, “The Idol Factory” in *No God but God*)

This means then, that idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong. Why do we ever lie, or fail to love or keep promises or live unselfishly? Of course, the general answer is “because we are weak and sinful,” but the specific answer is always that there is something besides Jesus Christ that you feel you must have to be happy, something that is more important to your heart than God, something that is spinning out a delusional field and enslaving the heart through inordinate desires. So the secret to change is always to identify the idols of the heart. The Bible does not consider idolatry to be one sin among many (and thus now a very rare sin only among primitive people). Rather, the only alternative to true, full faith in the living God is idolatry. All our failures to trust God wholly or to live rightly are due at root to idolatry — something we make more important than God. There is always a reason for a sin. Under our sins are idolatrous desires.

C. IDENTIFYING OUR IDOLS

1. Every self exists in relation to values perceived as making life worth living. A value is anything good in the created order — any idea, relation, object or person in which one has an interest, from which one derives significance...

2. These values compete... In time, one is prone to choose a center of value by which other values are judged... [which] comes to exercise power or preeminence over other values.

3. When a finite value has been elevated to centrality and imagined as a final source of meaning, then one has chosen... a god... One has a god when a finite value is... viewed as that without which one cannot receive life joyfully. (To be worshipped as a god, something must be sufficiently good... Were my daughter not a source of exceptional affection and delight, she would not be a potential idolatry for me, but I am tempted to adore her in a way... disproportional.)

4. Anxiety becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose my god is sex or my physical health or the Democratic Party. If I experience any of these under genuine threat, then I feel myself shaken to the depths.

5. Guilt becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose I value my ability to teach and communicate clearly... If clear communication has become an absolute value for me, a center of value that makes all my other values valuable... then if I [fail in teaching well] I am stricken with neurotic guilt.

6. Bitterness becomes neurotically intensified when someone or something stands between me and something that is my ultimate value.

7. "To be bored is to feel empty, [meaningless.] Boredom is an anticipatory form of being dead. To the extent to which limited values are exalted to idolatries... [when any of those values are lost], boredom becomes pathological and compulsive... My subjectively experienced boredom may then become infinitely projected toward the whole cosmos... This picture of the self is called despair [The milder forms are disappointment, disillusionment, cynicism.]" (Thomas C. Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia*)

Answer the following:

a. If you are angry, ask: "Is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am angry, because I am being blocked from having something I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:

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b. If you are fearful or badly worried, ask: “Is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so scared, because something is being threatened which I think is a necessity when it is not?” Write down what that might be:

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c. If you are despondent or hating yourself, ask: “Is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so ‘down,’ because I have lost or failed at something which I think is a necessity when it is not?” Write down what that might be:

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Circle the thoughts that are lodged in your heart:

Power idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I have power and influence over others.”

Approval idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am loved and respected by _____”

Comfort idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life.”

Image idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I have a particular kind of look or body image.”

Control idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____.”

Helping idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — people are dependent on me and need me.”

Dependence idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – someone is there to protect me and keep me safe.”

Independence idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.”

Work idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I am highly productive getting a lot done.”

Achievement idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I am being recognized for my accomplishments, if I am excelling in my career.”

Materialism idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.”

Religion idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in it’s activities.”

Individual person idolatry: “Life only has meaning/ I only have worth if – this one person is in my life and happy there and/or happy with me.”

Irreligion idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and with a self-made morality.”

Racial/cultural idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior.”

Inner ring idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in.”

Family idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – my children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me.”

Relationship idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – Mr. or Ms. ‘Right’ is in love with me.”

Suffering idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I

am hurting, in a problem — only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt.”

Ideology idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in influence or power.”

Answer these diagnostic questions:

a. What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?

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b. What, if I failed or lost it, would cause me to feel that I did not even want to live? What keeps me going?

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c. What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things go bad or get difficult?

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d. What do I think most easily about? What does my mind go to when I am free? What preoccupies me?

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e. What unanswered prayer would make me seriously think about turning away from God?

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f. What makes me feel the most self-worth? What am I the proudest of?

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g. What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?

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Summary:

Now that you've answered the questions above, look for common themes. Write below what you think are your functional masters? What things tend to be too important to you?

E. HEALING IDOLATRY WITH THE GOSPEL

1. Avoid the “Moralizing” Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among orthodox and conservative Christians can best be called the “moralizing” approach. Basic analysis: Your problem is that you are doing wrong. Repent! This focuses on behavior but doesn't go deep enough. We must find out the why of our behavior. Why do I find I want to do the wrong things? What inordinate desires are drawing me to do so? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself) to repent and change their behavior is insufficient, because the lack of self-control is coming from a belief that says, “Even if you live up to moral standards but don't have this, then you are still a failure.” You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all — your particular idolatry.

2. Avoid the “Psychologizing” Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among more liberal

religious groups can best be called the “psychologizing” approach. Basic analysis: Your problem is that you don’t see that God loves you as you are. Rejoice! This focuses on feelings, which seem to be deeper than behavior but it also fails to go deep enough. We must also find out the why of our feelings. Why do I have such strong feelings of despair (or fear, or anger) when this or that happens? What are the inordinate desires that are being frustrated? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself), “God loves you — rejoice!” is insufficient. The unhappiness is coming from a belief that says, “Even if God loves you, but you don’t have this, then you are still a failure.” You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all — your particular idolatry.

3. Adopt the “Gospel” Approach.

Basic Analysis: Your problem is that you are looking to something besides Christ for your happiness. Repent and rejoice! This confronts a person with the real sin under the sins and behind the bad feelings. Our problem is that we have given ourselves over to idols. Every idol-system is a way of our-works-salvation, and thus it keeps us “under the law.” Paul tells us that the bondage of sin is broken when we come out from under the law — when we begin to believe the gospel of Christ’s-work-salvation. Only when we realize in a new way that we are righteous in Christ will the idol’s power over us be broken. “Sin shall not be your master for you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom.6:14). You will only be “under grace” and free from the controlling effects of idols to the degree that you have both repented for your idols and rested and rejoiced in the saving work and love of Christ instead.

“The faith that... is able to warm itself at the fire of God’s love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness... It is often said today, in circles which blend popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others... But no realistic human beings find it easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ. There is a sense in which the strongest self-love that we can have... is merely the mirror image of the lively conviction we have that God loves us. Moralism, whether it takes the form of either denunciation or “pep talks,” can ultimately only create an awareness of sin and guilt or manufactured virtues built on will power... We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted, it inevitably focuses our attention not on Christ but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security not

resting on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christians life. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness [some form of idolatry] which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace...” (Richard Lovelace, The Dynamics of Spiritual Life)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you like to take walks? If so, where do you most like to walk? If not, why not?

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2. Explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Although Bible study, prayer, worship, witnessing, and certain behavior standards are commanded of believers and are essential to faithful Christian living, spirituality cannot be measured by how often or how intensely we are involved in such things.”

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3. Though all true believers would acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is a member of the Trinity, many believers live as if he were nonexistent. In fact, there’s even a book about the Holy Spirit entitled The Forgotten God. Why do you think that is?

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4. Verse 17 says that believers have an internal struggle as the desires of the flesh war against the desires of the Spirit. In your own experience, what are some things that have helped decide which side of the battle wins?

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5. How do you know when you are walking in the Spirit? Is there a way to know for sure?

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6. Practically speaking, how do you walk by the Spirit?

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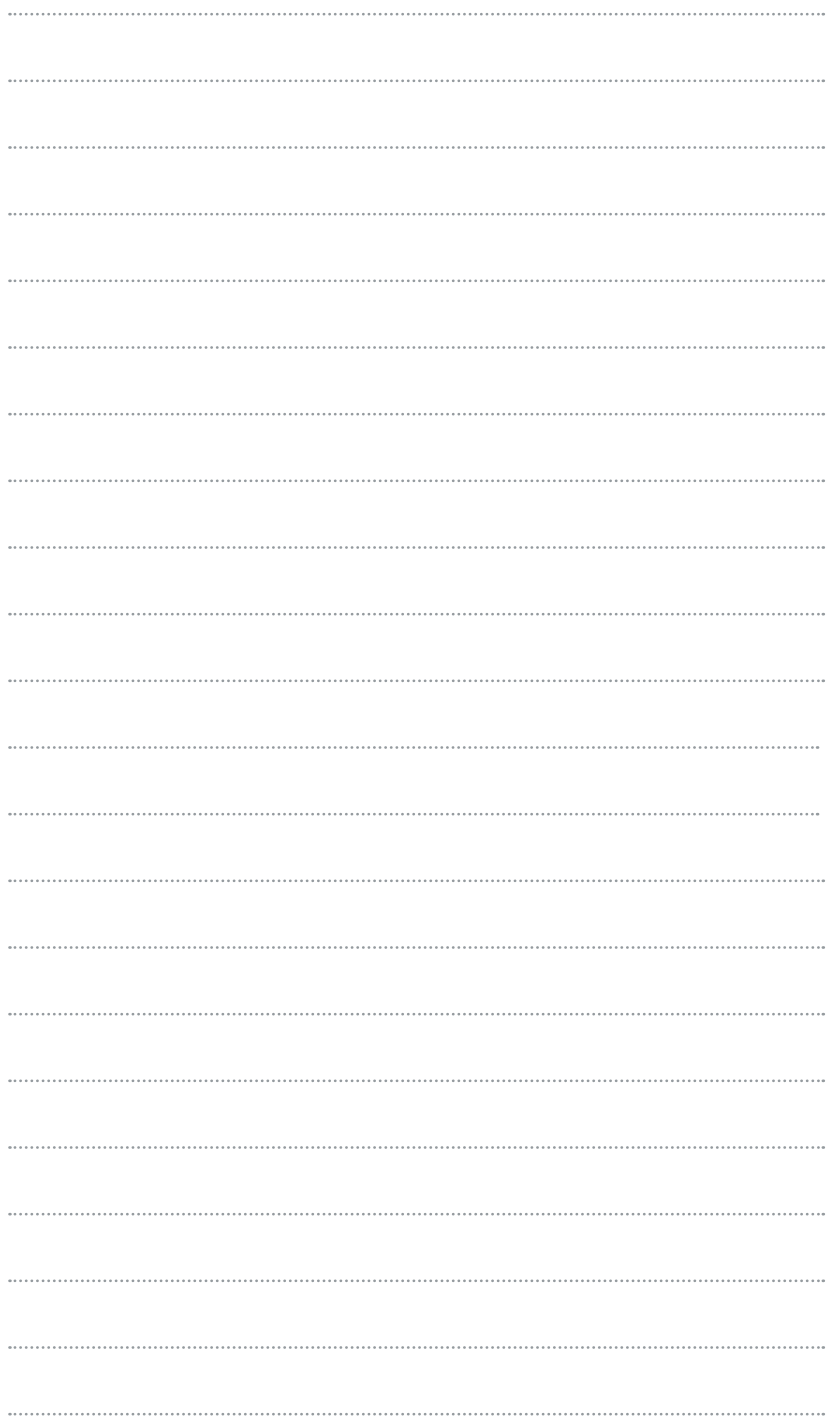
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SERMON NOTES

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WEEK ELEVEN: BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Galatians 6:1-10

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load. 6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. At first glance, it is difficult to discern whether “caught” (v. 1) is referring to somebody getting discovered in a sinful act or if it means that somebody is snagged or tripped up by sin. Look at the various translations below and then answer which meaning seems to fit best.

(ESV): Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

(NASB95): Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

(NIV): Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual

should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

(NKJV): Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

(NLT): Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

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2. The word for “restore” (v. 1) is also used in Matthew 4:21 to describe fishermen mending their nets. With that picture in mind, what does it mean to restore your brother/sister who is in sin?

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3. Do you think that “you who are spiritual” means “you who are the super-committed and don’t struggle as much as other people” or “you who are filled, led and walking by the Spirit”? Why?

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4. Paul says in verse 2 that bearing each other's burdens fulfills the law of Christ. How can this be? (Keep the context of Galatians 5 in mind)

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Here is a vocation that will bring you more satisfaction than if you became a millionaire ten times over: Develop the extraordinary skill for detecting the burdens of others and devote yourself daily to making them lighter.

- John Piper

5. What do you think Paul's point is in verses 3-5? (Remember the context of restoring a brother who is in sin)

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FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

The Law of Christ

By John Piper

The main point of Gal. 6:1-5 is given in a general way in verse 2 and a specific way in verse 1. Verse 2: “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” If a Christian brother or sister is weighed down or menaced by some burden or threat, be alert to that and quickly do something to help. Don’t let them be crushed. Don’t let them be destroyed. Don’t be like the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said, “They bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger” (Mt. 23:4). Don’t increase burdens. Make them lighter for people. Some of you wonder what you are supposed to do with your life. Here is a vocation that will bring you more satisfaction than if you became a millionaire ten times over: Develop the extraordinary skill for detecting the burdens of others and devote yourself daily to making them lighter...

That’s the main point of the passage, then: Bear each other’s burdens; specifically, take on the trouble of helping people realize their sin and get it repaired. If it seems easy for you to help a person bear the burden of sickness, or unemployment, or loss of a loved one, or loneliness or rejection, but too hard for you to bear the burden of confronting a person because of sin, meditate on this thought: a sinful attitude or a sinful habit is much more harmful to a person than any of those other burdens. Therefore if we really care about a person’s ultimate welfare we will confront them with their sin as well as comfort them in their trouble. Wouldn’t it be great to belong to a family of believers who loved each other so much that they simply could not look the other way while a brother or sister hardens into a habit of sin! Let’s be that family! If we are not, we do not fulfill the law of Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you been physically, emotionally, or spiritually “needy” and somebody met that need? What was it like?

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2. It's not uncommon to see people who have an attitude that says about a brother or sister's sin, "It's none of my business. I don't have to have to add that to my burdens. It's his problem, not mine." Why is that an unacceptable attitude for people who are controlled by the love of Christ?

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3. When it comes to confronting fellow believers who are in sin, people generally make one of two mistakes. The first mistake is to just ignore the person's sin and act as though it doesn't exist or affect us. The second mistake is to put on your "Junior Holy Spirit" badge and try to point out everyone's sin all the time. How does Galatians 6:1-5 correct both mistakes?

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4. Verse 9 tells us not to "grow weary in doing good" because we will reap blessing if we endure. In what areas of serving and loving people are you prone to growing weary? Why?

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WEEK TWELVE: BOASTING ONLY IN THE CROSS

Galatians 6:11-18

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

STUDY THE TEXT

This is where we try to understand the original meaning. What is the author trying to communicate?

1. Why does Paul make a big deal about his own handwriting? (Hint: remember the overall context of the book. 2 Thessalonians 2:2 might also help)

2. Verse 12 describes the legalistic Judaizers as “those who want to make a good showing in the flesh.” What are 3 additional characteristics of these people that you can pull out of verses 12-13?

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3. What does it mean to “boast?”

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4. Paul says that the “world” was crucified to him by the cross. What is “world” referring to?

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5. Paul says that the only thing that counts is “a new creation” (v.15). Look up these verses that speak to the idea of new creation: Romans 6:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17, John 3:3-7. How does “new creation” take place?

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6. How is Paul's boasting different than the boasting of the legalist?

FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

May It Never Be That I Should Boast

By Michael Shea

How can Paul say that he never boasts except in the cross, when in fact he does boast in other things elsewhere in the Scripture? For example he boasts in what the Lord has accomplished through him in his ministry in 2 Corinthians. He boasts in the hope of the glory of God in Romans 5. And even just a few verses earlier in Galatians 6:4 he said we should boast in ourselves and not in another. So sometimes we do boast or exult in regard to other things—how do we make sure all that boasting is in the cross?

The key is in realizing that every good gift is from above, and that it all comes to you through the cross of Christ. When something good happens to you like, you graduate from college, or you get a new car, or you find a wife, have a baby, or just enjoy a beautiful day in the park, your heart will rightly exult in these things. Here is how you glory in the cross: You think, “How can it be that I who deserve hell, got an A on my final?” “How is the mystery to be explained that I who deserve nothing but wrath, have a wonderful wife and four delightful kids?” The problem of evil is nothing compared to the problem of good. “What can account for the spring sun shining down and warming the face of a sinner like me? Nothing but the cross of Christ. I can enjoy and praise God for his gifts only because I have been reconciled to him by the death of his Son.” So may it never be that I should boast in my merit, or exult in any good gift except in the cross of Christ...

I will just make one final point to capture what has been the most significant lesson for me from Galatians.

The word “walk” in verse 16 is the same word used in 5:25 for walking by the Spirit. The doctrines of grace beget a certain kind of walking. When you are established in the gospel, when you understand justification by grace alone, it results in forsaking a life of regulations and willpower, and instead embracing a life of walking by the Spirit; a walk of communing with Christ in his Word by hearing with faith; a walk of receiving strength from the Spirit by singing the praises of Christ with trust in his person and his promises.

One of the reasons we are not as Christ-centered and cross-saturated as we should be is that we have not realized that everything – everything good and everything bad that God turns for the good of his redeemed children was purchased by the death of Christ for us.

- John Piper

I have long felt the centrality of communion with Christ in our Christian life, but now through Galatians I feel doctrinally established in that conviction. Now I understand the reason for insisting on walking by the Spirit. It is because any other kind of legalistic walking allows for an occasion of boasting, puts the focus on my work instead of God's work, and robs glory from Christ.

So let us not just be a church that is reformed in doctrine, but let us allow the doctrines of grace to influence literally every step of our Christian walk. Every day let the doctrines of grace lead you to choose communion with Christ and reliance on the strength the Spirit supplies, instead of trying to grind out a man-made legalistic righteousness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the single most impressive achievement of your life thus far? (No false humility here...tell the truth!)

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2. Not only is the cross an instrument of torture and death, but it is also described as “an offense” (Gal 5:11), a cause of “persecution” (Gal 6:12), and “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). Considering that none of these are positive descriptions, why does Paul say that the only thing he will boast in is the cross?

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3. What are some things that a Christian might be tempted to boast in besides the cross?

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4. Describe how the church might be different if it was filled with people who had no interest in making “a good showing in the flesh,” but only boasted in what Christ accomplished on the cross.

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5. As this day ends, how will you be able to tell whether you boasted only in the cross?

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Week Eleven: The Law of Christ

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Used Extensively

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