

# FREE in FAITH

## *Introduction and Overview of Galatians*

### SERIES DIRECTION

Over the last two months we have seen that the [traits we desire to distinguish our church family](#) are produced through a life of faith. Specifically faith in the Lordship and Living Presence of Jesus Christ. Our faith in the foundational truth that Jesus has overcome sin and death and is reigning as King now in the intimate and ordinary context of our daily lives' transforms us. Such [faith transforms](#) our *composition*—how we structure our days, weeks, and even affections—our *appearance*—how we behave, treat one another and those outside of our faith—and our *character*—our essence, our identity as individuals and as a community of faith.

When our eyes are open to the loving and wondrous beauty of Jesus' Lordship and Living Presence, faith reorients our world, helps us see things as they really are and see ourselves as we truly are. Yet faith does not come to us fully mature. We recognize and respond to the living Lordship of Jesus as faith, in faith. The longer we walk in faith we realize that our faith is actually changing. It is deepening and expanding, shrinking back and causing internal and external conflict, taking on characteristics of the day to day context in which we breathe.

Remember, our faith is not a general feeling or hope, but rather something—indeed someone—specific, concrete, and genuine. Thus the author of Hebrews could write,

'Now **faith** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by [**faith**] the people of old received their commendation...Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our **faith**, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.' (11:1, 12:1-3)

When we are honest, following Jesus at times feels like a trek through a dense fog. While we confess that Jesus is Lord, raised from the dead after conquering our greatest enemy and now ruling at the right hand of the Father; we often see with dimly lit eyes, skewing our vision with our perception of Jesus being primarily a future reality or an even non-real or 'spiritual' presence. Following Jesus in-between life of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...work, school, relationships...seems more often than not an exercise in blind, or at least semi-blind, faith.

Faith is not merely confession, but action based on that confession. It is assurance and conviction. A way of life by which we receive commendation or approval. Faith is not blindness; rather clarity. If we actually live by faith, we will discover that our eyes become more and more adjusted to a world that we missed, or at least failed to recognize, before faith. This is the power of faith to transform us!

*Yet, our tendency as people of faith and as a faith family has always been to compromise living in faith for something less powerful but more tactile.*

Rather than walking in faith through the shadow of the valley of death, fearing no evil; we try and pierce the dimness with forged sticks of light or cower in protective stances amid the darkness. What we often fail to recognize is that our substitutions for faith lead us not to lie down near still waters but rather into a form of slavery.

A concrete life of faith is reduced to a way of living in step with the mathematics of religion or through the satisfaction of our perceptible longings. Both, in the “churchy” terminology, legalism and licentiousness are substitutions for a life of faith. And, in reality both are forms of slavery that the person in whom we have faith has come to remove us from,

‘For **freedom** Christ has come to set us **free**; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.’ (Gal. 5:1)

Freedom. The very thing we gain by faith is spied out in order to bring us into slavery (Gal. 2:4) by our propensity to live by something else, to compromise our specific faith for lessor tangibles. Indeed, a life of faith in the Lordship and Living Presence of Jesus is free. Yet, do we feel free? Do our anxious hearts and fearful minds demonstrate freedom? Do the ways we spend our time, money and energy reflect a free soul? How about the way we relate to others? Are do we possess a confidence in our limitations and gifting without comparison?

If we see clearly, if our eyes are open to the truth of Christ’s glorious resurrection and graciously powerful rule, then why do we often feel and live as if we are bound by something else, confused, distorted, fearful, arrogant or even ambivalent? Could it be that our freedom in Christ has been pilfered or distorted?

The apostle Paul writes Galatians to enlighten his faith family to the freedom being stolen from them in their compromised life and exhorts them to be **FREE IN FAITH**, by faith. We need the same enlightenment and exhortation in our journey to be transformed by faith. So, over the summer, we will look at both our propensity as people of faith to live by something less and how we might be ones whose faith matures into a life of freedom in Jesus.

*In this document*, you will find:

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## SERIES OUTLINE

When we think about freedom, most of us generally think of ‘no strings attached’. We are free to move about the cabin without seat belts! Freedom as no connection is a human centered concept. Your definition of freedom always reveals who or what is your centering orientation. Whatever or whomever our world revolves around will ultimately be the gravitational limitation to our freedom.

Such truth is no less formative for those outside of our specific faith as it is for those inside. Ultimately, how we express or fail to express the freedom which is ours in Christ Jesus reflects what or whom our faith is built on. Therefore, to be **FREE IN FAITH** requires that we recognize what we are freed from, who we are freed by, and how we remain free as compromising people in a compromised context.

Paul addresses these three areas throughout his letter, helping the Galatians recognize that they are freed from different gospels (1:1-10), freed from racial and religious bigotry (1:11-2:14), freed from a life of immaturity through works (3:1-4:7, 4:21-31), and freed from a life of selfish disappointment and destruction (5:1-15). Likewise, he is consistent in reminding the Galatians that freedom is found in one person and by one person only: Jesus (1:1-2; 2:15-21; 3:1-4:31; 5:1; 6:11-18). Finally, he gives the Galatians the “how to” of being **FREE IN FAITH**, what every day freedom in faith entails (5:13-6:10).

Each sermon during the Gathering will take a section of Paul’s letter, engaging in the Spirit to see how we might be *enlightened*, *encouraged* and *exhorted* to be **FREE IN FAITH**. Below are the dates and texts for our summer in Galatians.

Intro & Galatians 1:1-10	June 5 <sup>th</sup>
Galatians 1:11-2:10	June 12 <sup>th</sup>
Galatians 2:11-3:6	June 19 <sup>th</sup>
Galatians 3:7-4:7	July 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Galatians 4:8-5:6	July 10 <sup>th</sup>
Galatians 5:7-5:25	July 13 <sup>th</sup>
Galatians 5:26-6:5	August 7 <sup>th</sup>
Galatians 6:6-10	August 14 <sup>th</sup>
Galatians 6:11-18	August 21 <sup>st</sup>

## HOPES & PLAN FOR THE SERIES

Our hopes for the ***Free in Faith*** Series are:

- 1) Our primary hope is that the Spirit would give each of us as individuals and every Gospel Community the *eyes to see and hears to hear how we are compromising freedom in Jesus* for something less; leading us to repentance and the fruit that is born from repentance.
- 2) Our second hope is that, as we recognize what freedom in Jesus actually produces, we would, as Gospel Communities, be better *equipped* and more *consistent* in 'doing good'.
- 3) Lastly, we hope that the voices that enlighten, encourage, and exhort us of both our propensity to compromise and our true freedom in faith would be *expanded*.

In order to achieve these hopes, we are planning on doing two things. The first is having a host of voices 'preach' Christ to us in Galatians. This summer there will be several men, in addition to a few regular voices, who have never preached during a Gathering, opening the Scripture to show us our need and provision in Jesus!

Secondly, we have put together a couple of tools for discussions in Gospel Community and DNA groups. On the following page you will find a *conversation guide* to help you progress through each section in the series. Also, on page 6, we have included a brief *commentary*<sup>1</sup> on Galatians to help inform your individual time in Scripture.

We hope the multiple perspectives on Galatians along with the conversation guide and commentary will allow the enlightening, encouragement, and exhortations to stay fresh throughout the summer. May we 'not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up'!

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<sup>1</sup> The commentary was taken out of a course on learning to read and live Scripture called "*Eat this Book*" we taught a few years ago. If you want full access to the course material, email [Jeremy](#).

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

Below is a step by step conversation guide. The questions within the conversation guide are the same for each week and passage of the series.

- 1 |** Read aloud the passage from Galatians from that week's sermon.
  
- 2 |** Begin your time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to grant eyes to see and hears to hear how you (as individuals and a Gospel Community) are compromising your freedom and how you are living free in faith.
  
- 3 |** Discuss what stood out to each other in the sermon and why.
  
- 4 |** After several minutes of discussion, begin to transition the conversation by asking the following questions:
  - 1) How would you describe being *free in faith* from this passage?
  - 2) In what way(s) is freedom compromised in this passage?
  - 3) Describe Jesus as the freedom giver from this passage.
  - 4) In what ways can be live *free in faith* from this passage?
  
- 5 |** After the discussion, spend some time in smaller groups (if discussion is with the entire Gospel Community) *praying your confessions* of compromise together, repenting, and receiving the free life we have through faith in Christ. This would be a great time for communion!
  
- 6 |** End your time together with someone speaking this exhortation over the entire group, "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery...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.*" (Gal. 5:1; 2:20).

# COMMENTARY

## Introduction to Galatians

There is one “Gospel” that Christ (the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity) entered into history, lived a perfect life according to the law of God, died upon the cross as a payment for the sins of God’s people, and rose again on the third day restoring God’s chosen ones to the Father. The gospel is both a person (Jesus Christ) and an event (the life, death, and resurrection of Christ). Christ’s life, death, and resurrection occurred at a specific time in history and in a specific geographic place in the world. The gospel, as a person and an event is real, defined, and explicit; thus it cannot be added to or subtracted from without some form of perverting reality.

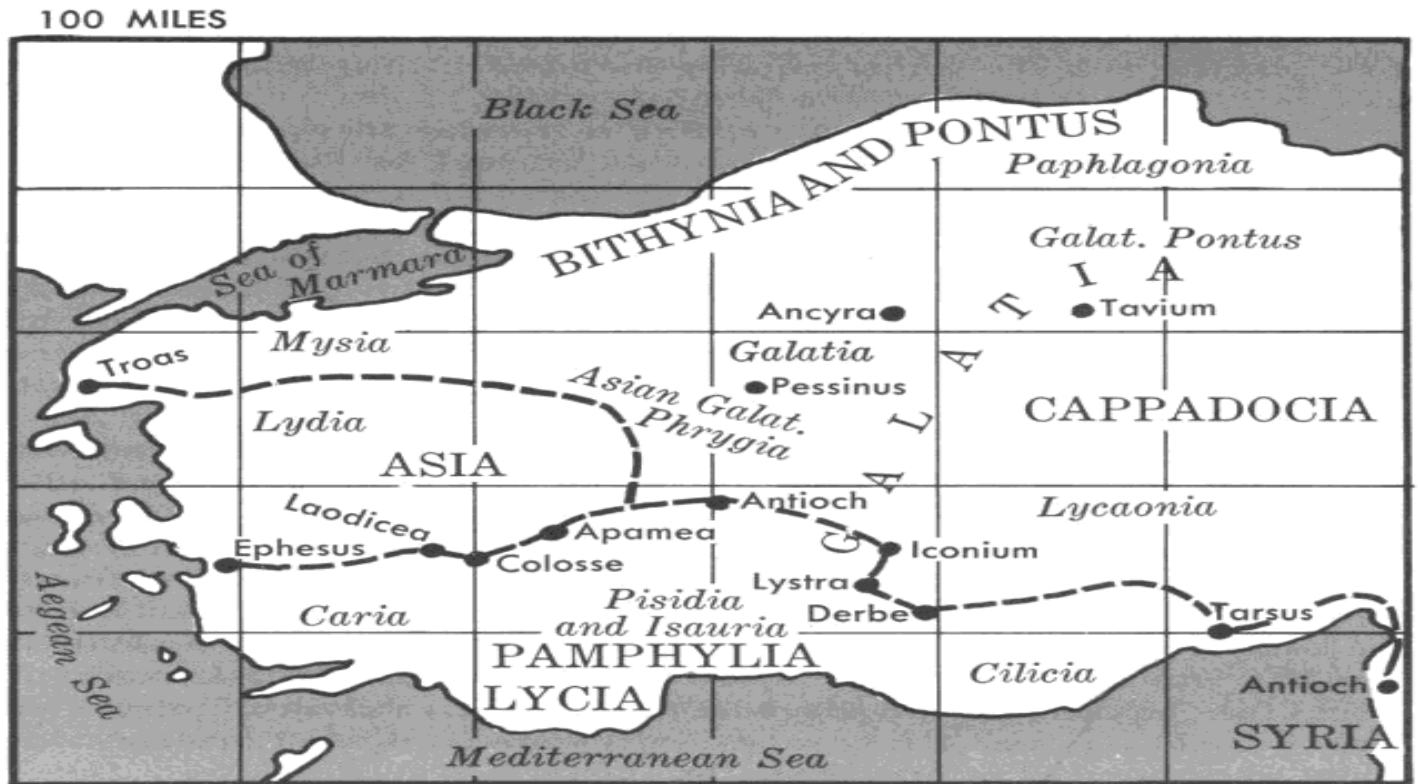
Paul writes to the churches in Galatia that he is “astonished” that they are “turning to a different gospel” that some people within and outside the church family are trying to “distort the gospel of Christ” (1:6-7). The Galatians, like you and I today, are faced with the persistent appeal to follow a “different gospel” a distorted gospel. Paul is not writing to these Christ followers to simply provide them additional information about the gospel, though he certainly does. Rather, he is writing with the “anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in [them]” (4:19). Paul is writing Galatians in order that the Galatians may live in God’s story: past, present, and future.

“With at least ten formal citations in six chapters, Galatians is second only to Romans, proportionately speaking, in its explicit appeals to Scripture” (Beale & Carson, 785). In an effort to ground the Galatians in their faith today, Paul makes special use of what we call the Old Testament. He connects the gospel of Christ to the story of God in history and the promises of God in eternity. Because Paul is concerned as much with living as he is with knowing, and because he makes direct use of the banquet of Scripture; Galatians provides a perfect “test kitchen” to learn to Eat This Book; to read and live God’s story.

## Galatians in Context

Before you dive into Galatians, it is important to get a better view of the context in which you will be walking.

What is “Galatia?”



“About the year 278 B.C. a large body of Gauls or Kelts, who had previously invaded and ravaged Greece, Macedonia, and Thrace, crossed over into Asia Minor. Their coming was not—at least not altogether—an unwarranted intrusion, for they arrived as a result of an invitation that had been extended to them by Nicomedes, king of Bithynia. So, here they were, with their wives and children, occupying the very heart-land of Asia Minor, a broad belt extending northward from the center [see sketch above].

They belonged to three tribes: the Trochmi, Tectosages, and Tolisbogii, with whom are associated the cities, respectively, of Tavium, Ancyra, and Pessinus. All three of these tribes were *Galli*, that is, Gauls (“warriors”), also called *Galatae*, that is, Galatians (“nobles”). They rapidly gained the mastery over the native population of ‘Phrygians,’ of mixed ancestry, devotees of the ancient and impressive religion of Cybele. For a long time, due to constant raids into adjacent districts, the boundaries of the Gallic domain remained fluid, but the newcomers were finally forced by the Romans to live in peace with their neighbors and to remain within the limits of their own territory. In course of time, as happens often in such cases, the Gauls amalgamated [merged] with the earlier population, adopted their religion, but in most other respects remained the dominant strain.

Since the Gallic rulers were gifted with shrewdness they generally allied themselves with whoever happened to be ‘on top’ in Rome. The latter reciprocated by allowing the former to be treated more as an ally than as a

conquered nation. They were considered a 'kingdom.' During the reign of their last king, Amyntas IV, their realm was even extended southward. Upon the death of Amyntas (25 B.C.) the Romans fell heir to this already somewhat enlarged kingdom and converted it into the Roman 'province of Galatia,' which soon comprised, in addition to the *central and northern* territory, *to the south*: parts of Phrygia, Lycaonia, Pisidia, and Isauria [see sketch above]." (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 4-6)

The province of Galatia was a "Gentile" land. A land not previously dominated by those of Jewish heritage. The Galatian history was of mixed origins and included the acceptance of many foreign deities as new lands and people were conquered and assimilated. It was into this land that Paul took the Gospel as Christ had commanded, to the entire world (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). The Galatian culture was not a Jewish or "Christian" culture, but one influenced by the popular thoughts of the day and by the many "gods" and spirituality of the past (Galatians 4:8-9). It was a world not too dissimilar from the Western world today.

### Why Write to the Churches of Galatia?

Paul's missionary journeys in Acts 13-14 document his travel through Galatia, leaving the church in Antioch to start churches in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra. It is to these new believers that Paul writes.

Paul and Barnabas left these young converts with stories of Jesus continuing his promised work through them to bring into the family those who were outside of the Jewish heritage (Matthew 28:18-20; John 10:16, 14:12; Acts 1:8). These missionaries return to Antioch in Syria celebrating all that God had done (Acts 14:24-28). Soon after they receive word that there are "men come down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" (Acts 15:1).

"...Antioch's joy because of the return of the missionaries and the tidings which they had brought, about multitudes of people, especially *Gentiles*, having embraced Christ and salvation in him, did not remain a secret. It spread far and wide. Jerusalem, too, heard about it. Also there, we may well believe, the church rejoiced. But this joy was not universal. In this Judean city among those who heard the news there were also some nominal converts from the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5). In common with the disciples of the Lord, *all* Pharisees believed in the resurrection from the dead. In addition, the Pharisees mentioned here in Acts 15:5 may have been impressed by the strength of the evidence for *Christ's* resurrection, and by the indisputable grandeur of his miracles, and may for these reasons have joined the followers of the Nazarene. But at heart they had remained Jewish legalists. **They were convinced that it took more than simple faith in Jesus to be saved; and that strict observance of Jewish ceremonies, particularly circumcision, was also necessary**...So, when news of the conversion of the Gentiles *apart from the work of the law, and especially apart from the necessity of receiving circumcision*, reached the ears of these men, off to Antioch they went, with a protest in their hearts and an ultimatum on their lips. Arrived in the city, they hesitated not a moment to announce to the startled, mostly Gentile, congregation, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' (Acts 15:1). This stern pronouncement, whereby the majority of the congregation was relegated to the limbo of the lost, must have caused considerable consternation and alarm." (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 16-20)

The young church would not stand for such an assault on their newest family members, so they convened a council in Jerusalem, of which Paul and Barnabas were a part, to decide the best way to handle the situation. Peter recounted the witness of Christ's testimony that through his disciples Jesus would form a people of God of every tribe, tongue and nation; and that he would do so through the same gospel of grace by which the disciples of Jewish origin were saved (Acts 15:7-11). Paul and Barnabas once again recounted to the council the testimony of all that had gone on in



Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia (Acts 15:12) and James connected the starting of these churches to the promises of God throughout history, specifically Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:13-18).

The council decided to write to these new believers, to encourage them in their faith and counter the teaching of these “men from Judea” (Acts 15:19-20). Their letter, along with Judas and Silas, accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to deliver the letter and proclaim a gospel of grace that is neither bound by Jewish tradition nor should it be diluted by any other religious ritual (Acts 15:23-35).

“The decision of the Conference was made known in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:23), and also in the cities of South Galatia (Acts 16:1–4). ‘So the churches were strengthened in faith, and increased in number daily’ (Acts 16:5).

The Judaizers, however, are not about to give up the fight. They follow Paul at his heels in order to destroy the results of his labors. In Antioch they are partly to blame for Peter’s reprehensible conduct (Galatians 2:11, 12). They traverse Galatia, insisting that the Gentiles be circumcised as a means unto salvation (Galatians 5:2, 3; 6:12). They do not deny that faith in Christ is necessary, but they loudly proclaim that circumcision and obedience to certain additional legal requirements are **also** necessary (Galatians 4:9, 10)...In order to bolster their cause they cast suspicion on Paul. They attempt to discredit him, claiming that his apostleship is not from God but from men, and that his gospel is second-hand, therefore (Galatians 1:1; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:1ff.); that he is simply striving to win the favor of men (Galatians 1:10), and that when it suits him he himself preaches circumcision (Galatians 5:11).

Paul knew that these trouble-makers were Christians in name only. They were insincere and inconsistent, for while trying to force others to observe the law, they themselves failed to keep it (Galatians 6:13)...Strange to say, *many* of the Galatians listen attentively to these usurpers... ***the occasion*** which prompted Paul to write this letter was the sinister and, to some extent, successful influence which Judaistic trouble-makers were exerting upon the churches of South Galatia. And ***the purpose*** was to counteract this dangerous error by re-emphasizing the glorious gospel of free grace in Christ Jesus: justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law, and to urge those addressed to adorn their faith and prove its genuine character by means of a life in which the fruit of the Spirit would abound.” (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 16-20)

Paul writes to a people who are being led into legalism and protesting through licentiousness on the other end. The gospel has no room for either, but **when embraced and lived brings a free life**. In order to ground the churches of Galatia in gospel lives, he connects their story to God’s story—past, present, and future.

## Galatians in Perspective

Galatians has been a powerful and influential book throughout the history of the church. Some credit the work of the Spirit through Galatians as a spark of the Great Awakening...

“**Galatians is like a little bomb**. It’s not a very long book. It’s six chapters. They’re not very long chapters, but it’s a bomb. **There’s dynamite in it**. Just to give you an example of this, back in the late 1730s there was a little group of believers who changed the world (this is something of a summary) led by John and Charles Wesley, who established the Methodist church.

There was a great movement in which hundreds of thousands of people on both sides of the Atlantic, Europe and the British Isles and America, during that time ... It’s sometimes called the Great Awakening by historians.

It was a tremendous movement that really changed the face of Western society. There were hundreds of thousands of people who met Christ, were converted, came into churches, and started new churches. It was astounding.

In the beginning, that little group was searching for God. They were seekers. John and Charles Wesley and other friends, they were seeking. They were trying to find God. They were trying to have an experience of his reality. They were trying to connect with him, and what happened ... One night it began to break through when one of the number, a man named William Holland, got ahold of Martin Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*.

In the very beginning of Martin Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, there's a preface in which he tries to distill the basic argument of Paul in the Galatians. He tries to summarize it and put it down. So William Holland brought it to Charles Wesley and he said, "Let's read it to each other." So the two of them and a few other people got together and they began to read it to each other. William Holland later on wrote down this is what happened that night.

He said, '... Mr. Charles Wesley [read] the Preface aloud.' At a certain point he says, '... 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.'

Huge, huge moment. The turning point of his life was listening to the distillation of Paul's message and his basic theme in the Galatians. We do know that after that what William Holland did was what any rational person would do. He took the preface of Martin Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, and every night he went to somebody's house and sat down and said, 'Let me read this to you.'

He went around to men and women, people he knew, and from what we can tell, though it's not totally sure, but historians believe John Wesley himself was listening to William Holland read Luther's preface to the Galatians. He says, '... my heart [was] strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ ...' Galatians is a bomb. There's dynamite in it." (Keller, *The Rescue*)

Why were Luther's comments on Galatians so life giving? Why were they used to propel people into freedom that sparked one of the most prolific evangelistic movements in Christian history? Timothy George comments,

"...on the crucial matter of justification by faith alone [the one gospel that Paul encourages the Galatians to be grounded upon], Luther was a careful and faithful interpreter of Paul. The words he wrote in the preface to his 1535 commentary still ring true today:

"This doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough. If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time. **But if it flourishes, everything good flourishes—religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions.** There is clear and present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions. It is very necessary, therefore, that this doctrine of faith be continually read and heard in public." (George, 69-70, emphasis added)

Much like our world today, the world of Paul and the world of early 1700's was full of "different gospel[s]". Different gospels spurred by social and ethnic disunity. Different gospels birthing because of cultural pressures and history. Gospels that add or take away from the good news that our identity with Christ is completely dependent upon him. That we do nothing and God in Christ does everything. **Rather, we are prone to follow**

**gospels that manifest as enslavement to religion or enslavement to desires. Gospels that did not bring freedom; rather oppression.**

Paul's letter to the Galatians is an awakening letter. It is meant to reignite in these young believers the power and freedom that comes from being sons and daughters of God, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Galatians 4:6-7).

The tension of legalism and licentiousness is a real tension for you and I today; perhaps even more so than in recent generations. Will our response to an ever increasing pluralistic culture drive us to justification through religious works and behaviors; a life of seclusion and judgment? Or, will we be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, being pulled not by God's revelation and our identity in him, but by the desires of our heart? **Both are enslavement masquerading as freedom.**

Only the true Gospel of Jesus Christ brings freedom. It is Christ's person and work that is the starting and forming point of the Christian life. This is why **Galatians is a like "a little bomb"; for in it "Paul outlines the bombshell truth that the gospel is the A to Z of the Christian life."** (Keller, 9)

**Galatians is more than simply a book to be studied. It is an invitation to a free and full life in Christ.**

## Galatians | Chapter One

Philip Ryken, in his commentary on Galatians (3) titles his opening chapter "Dear Recovering Pharisee". Ryken states,

"The Pharisees who lived during and after the time of Christ were religious. They were regular in their worship, orthodox in their theology, and moral in their conduct. Yet something was missing. Although God was in their minds and in their actions, he was not in their hearts...they thought that what God would do for them depended on what they did for God. So they read their Bibles, prayed, tithed, and kept the Sabbath as if their salvation depended on it. What they failed to understand is that God's grace cannot be earned; it only comes free." (3)

You have read Galatians twice and by now—Lord willing—you are beginning to realize that Paul is writing to free his young church family members from the bonds of religion that fail to accept that God's grace is not "earned; it only comes free". At the same time, he is helping them **walk in the freedom of limitations** found in an immediate relationship with God, through Jesus, in the Spirit.

In order to live free from religion and free from self-absorbed consumption, we need to find a different story than the one of humanity. The general consensus of theologians, scientists, scholars, philosophers, and the average-Joe is that the human story is a story of death. Every human story ends the same. Therefore, every human story is set within the same confining box (pardon the pun) and thus cannot offer perspective on how to find true freedom. To search for freedom by searching in the mind, soul, and experience of humanity is like trying to discover life in a corpse (Peterson, *Traveling Light (TL)*, 18-19). What we need is a story bigger than humanity. What we need is to be included in God's story, a story that starts with the creating of life.

### *God's Story, Paul's Story, Your Story*

We will discuss in greater detail God's story in Unit 3, but for now we need to recognize that in God's story he is always the central figure. Humanity is certainly involved, but we never take center stage. Scripture is an invitation to know and live in a reality in which all of life flows from God, through God and to God (Rom. 11:36).

Paul's introduction (verses 1-5) is full of freedom declarations. Freedom found in who God has created and called him to be (v. 1) and freedom found in the community God has created for him to be a part of (v.2). Freedom that comes through a revelation of the good news of God in Jesus (v. 11-12) that changes Paul, the recovering Pharisee (v. 13-24).

Perhaps we would prefer freedom to come in a formula (God does A + I do B = C, free life), but to do so would only encourage our disposition to depersonalize. Following Jesus' (Jn. 13-17) and Peter's model (2 Pet. 1), Paul does not offer us a formula for freedom but rather participation in God's story.

Peterson (*TL*, 47-54) and Keller (31-34) both correlate Paul's story, with God's story, and each of our stories. In Paul's account of the gospel changing his life, there are five elements that connect these stories together:

- 1) **The Former Life.** Paul says in verses 13, "For you have heard of my former life in Judaism..." Paul was a zealous, well behaved, and even gifted "religious" man. Unfortunately, his seeking of God through religious obedience showed the shallowness and self-centeredness of his pursuits (v.14). Pursuits which led him to miss God and misunderstand himself as he was being distracted by the things of God.

Just like Paul, God's story begins with the reality of a former life. It is not God's former life, but a rather a life that was perfect for humanity in which sin destroyed (Gen. 3); thus causing every one of us to have to make the same claim as Paul "my former life..." Paul thought God's grace was an extension of Paul's behaviors and therefore he lived a self-righteous former life.

How would you describe your "former life"?

- 2) **The Great Reversal.** Fortunately for Paul he can say "former" because, "when [God] who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me..."(v. 15-16) Paul's relationship with God was reversed. Referring to his encounter with Jesus in Acts 9, Paul no longer was a self-righteous user of God, he was one who receive God's grace as the apostle most untimely born (1 Cor. 15:8). God reversed the relational trajectory of Paul's life and in turn, reversed his misunderstanding of himself.

God's story begins with a perfect relationship, is interrupted by the self-sovereignty of humanity, but continues with the great reversal. Genesis 3:15 recounts God's immediate declaration that he will make right what has been wronged, that he will restore what has been broken, and that he will do so personally and fully. Like Paul, the gospel opens our eyes to see God's reversal for our lives. While it begins in a moment, we see that indeed God has "set [us] apart before [we were] born and...called [us] by his grace" through Jesus!

Commenting on verses 15-16, Peterson says,

"Now [Paul] realized that the central reality was **not what he knew about God, but what God knew about him** and **willed for him** and **showed him** and **commanded him.**"

The great reversal actually restores the proper perspective of reality—God at the center and you and I as participants in his story.

How has the gospel changed your perspective on your past? How does it shape your perspective of the future?

- 3) **Assimilation to Reality.** Verse 17 lets us into Paul’s assimilation into this “new” reality. He leaves and goes to Arabia for three years (v. 18). Peterson comments that,

“A meeting with God requires assimilation and reflection. We are not used to living with God at the center; we are not used to living by grace; we are not used to the feelings of forgiveness.”

Keller argues that we live in a time in which we put too much emphasis on doing and accomplishing, on activity; especially as Christians. Paul’s response to the gospel propelled him into a season of assimilating and reflecting, on learning to live by grace and not by works—for he was a good worker (v. 13-14).

God’s story continues with a great reversal which leads—not into the “new heavens and new earth” that most of us long for—but rather into a time of assimilation to reality. *A time when the reversal becomes tangible in the ordinary everyday lives of humanity; where it seeps into every cell of our bodies and every crevasse of our imaginations.*

Many of us, myself included, want God’s story sped up from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22, but there is a lot in-between! Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 3 that this in-between is not without consequence. In fact, it is for the very purpose of our assimilating to God’s reality, to living in Grace with his person, purpose, and plan being the center of our lives.

We all need some time in “Arabia” both practically (i.e. time alone with God, to hear him, speak with him, center ourselves on his grace and will) and temporally (the time between our salvation manifested and Christ’s return). It is in this time and space that we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18) as our “calling and election [is made] sure” (2 Pet. 1:10).

How are you regularly assimilating to God’s reality? What does it look like practically? What keeps you from “Arabia”?

- 4) **Sharing Our Stories.** Paul does not stay in Arabia forever, he eventually ventures back to Jerusalem to “visit Cephas [Peter]” (v. 18). Assimilation has its solitary moments but “the Christian life is not a solitary one” (Keller). The verb “to visit” in the Greek is where we get our word for “history”. Paul and Peter exchange histories. Each looking to see and hear the same gospel story played out in unique scenes and backgrounds—but nonetheless the same story.

Inherent within God’s story is the inclusion of our stories. Both the grand story of humanity as well as our unique individual stories “from before we were born”, when we were “fearfully and wonderfully made”. Shared individual gospel stories within the overarching God story is actually the way the Bible is laid out. In God’s story we find specific stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaiah, Esther, David, Samuel, Peter, Mary, Thomas, Martha, Paul, and many, many more. All the human stories coming together to help us see and remember the one God story.

Why is it important “to visit”, to “history” with other believers? How does doing so help us keep perspective in our culture and context?

- 5) **Sharing THE Story.** Paul's story does not end with a joyous recounting with Peter, rather it propels him into a life of work with God, "Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia...preaching the faith [I] once tried to destroy" (v. 21, 23). Paul finds a way to share with others what has been shared with him by Jesus (v. 12) and Peter (v. 18); not his story, but the gospel, God's story.

"No life of faith can be lived privately... [God's story and our] story of faith always opens out into the everyday and takes shape in the world of work, involving other persons in its freely lived love." (Peterson)

God's story is not meant to be held onto like a fragile crystal, but rather lived within and shared with reckless abandon. God's story is not simply one of information being transmitted that reveals to you a new existence. Rather, it is revelation that invites participation in God's person, purpose, and plan. Like Paul, to find our story within God's story means that we are given work to be done, lives to live (2 Cor. 5:14-21; Eph. 2:10).

Has God's story encompassed and envisioned your story to the point where it is more than history but life today? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

God's story encompasses our story. Our story is found only in God's story of gracious rescue; not in right behaviour or self-centered conjuring of spirituality. **Human stories end in death. God's story begins and ends in life** (Rev. 22).

### *The Gospel in Five Verses*

Before Paul, in astonishment, remarks on the Galatians quick departure from the gospel, from God's story, he provides them a reminder of what this good news really is in the first five verses. Keller (15-17) comments that Paul outlines the gospel by addressing:

**Who we are:** Helpless and lost and thus in need of rescue (v. 4)

**What Jesus did:** He gave his life for our sins (v. 4)

**What the Father did:** He sent the Son to do what we could not do (v. 1, 4)

**Why God did it:** To establish his family (v.2), out of grace and not our merit (v. 3) which is why it is to the Father's glory (v. 5)

This is the "secret" power behind Galatians; these five little verses. Remember the introduction and the story of Galatians in the Great Awakening? That's not the only story in our Christian history related to this little letter; countless other "movements", individual lives, and prolific Christian voices have been ignited by this letter of freedom. Galatians "little bomb" is this:

"God in His grace planned what we didn't realize we needed, and Christ by His grace came to achieve the rescue we could never achieve ourselves." (Keller, 16)

No religious behaviors, no historical heritage, no morality could achieve what only God achieved through Christ—though most of us are convinced otherwise!



## Missing God, Misunderstanding Us | The Law

**“This is the humbling truth that lies at the heart of Christianity. We love to be our own saviors.** Our hearts love to manufacture glory for themselves. So we find messages of self-salvation extremely attractive, whether they are religious (*Keep these rules and you earn eternal blessing*) or secular (*Grab hold of these things and you’ll experience blessing now*). The gospel comes and turns them upside down. It says: *You are in such a hopeless position that you need a rescue that has nothing to do with you at all.* And then it says: *God in Jesus provides a rescue which gives you far more than any false salvation your heart may love to chase.*” (Keller, 17)

Paul generally begins his letters with a salutation that includes some form of gospel remembering (as in verses 1-5), but also includes a thanksgiving to and in God for the people he is writing. Galatians does not contain such salutation. Rather, Paul jumps directly into confronting their dire issue,

“Paul is signalling his extreme distress at the situation of the Galatian Christians. **He cannot thank God for them when their spiritual status is so uncertain.** Why is it so uncertain? Because “some people” have confused the Galatians about the meaning of the true gospel of Christ.” (Moo, 75)

Having read through Galatians, you know that the “different gospel” that is causing Paul such exasperation over his young Galatian brothers and sisters is that “some men...from Judea” (Acts 15:1) were teaching that true salvation came through belief in Jesus and subscribing to the Mosaic Law, specifically circumcision (Gal. 5:2-4).

These teachers wanted to “distort” (v. 7) the gospel. Ryken (19) translates this word “pervert” meaning to revise, reverse, or turn something up-side-down. If the gospel is meant to turn our propensity to seek self-salvation up-side-down (see Keller quote above); then what Ryken is arguing is that these teachers were reversing the gospel! Essentially the Galatians were no better off, see the world no more clearly than before they recognized Jesus! This is why Paul is so harsh, cursing—twice (!)—those who do such a thing (v. 8-9).

This particular “perverting” of the gospel, used Scripture and history to do so. Adding to the person and work of Jesus the religious behaviors and sacred practices of God’s historical people, makes this perversion that much more devastating and dangerous to the life of freedom that is brought through the one and only Gospel of grace.

The thing is, the Mosaic Law was never meant to be a religious system of do’s and don’ts. Rather, it was a relational overflow of grace from God to an unworthy people.

“the concept of law in the Hebrew Bible should not be removed from its **relational and covenantal setting**. In speaking of the covenant and the ‘law’ given at Sinai...’was a God-directed relationship. It began with an *act of divine grace*, with the Lord bringing Israel out of Egypt’ (Vanhoozer, *DTIB*, 442). Law in the Hebrew Bible can be understood as relational, grace dependent, and far broader in meaning than the English term ‘law.’” (Johnson)

Perhaps this is why these “Judaizers”—the name given to those in early Christianity who required adherence to the Jewish laws along with belief in Christ to be a true believer—were so willing to make the connection between belief in Jesus and the keeping of the Mosaic Law. Was not the gospel in fact a relational overflow of grace from God the Father to an unworthy people? So why would there not be a set of rules and behaviors to follow if that were true, and why would those rules and behaviors not be the ones that God had given to his people, the Jews?

Paul will answer many of these questions throughout his letter, but what is important for you and I to understand is that missing God and misunderstanding us often comes through historical and even biblical perversions. The irony of the situation lies in Paul’s own understanding of his role in God’s story. Paul’s declaration that God had set him apart before he was born in order that he might preach Jesus amongst the Gentiles (v. 15-16) is an illusion to Jeremiah 1:5 and Isaiah 49:1-6, in which these early prophets of God were set apart to declare the good news of God’s gracious

plan for the salvation of the world through “the Servant”—God’s Son. So, as Paul confronts a “different gospel” that attempts to use history and Scripture as its ally to keep tradition from fading; Paul sees “his own ministry as integrally related to the work of the OT prophets, and in some sense even as its culmination.” (Silva, 787)

What these Judaizers seek will not be found in religious tradition, but only in Jesus. They missed God’s story and misunderstood who they were in it. This is why in chapter one, Paul says that even if he or an angel should preach a different gospel—one in which God is not the initiator, fulfiller, and sustainer of our rescue—then they are to be accursed. In the same way God laid down curses for those who failed to keep his gracious, relational law to Moses (Deut. 28), Paul is laying out curses applied to those who fail to keep the Gospel of Jesus explicitly and exclusively the Gospel of Jesus. Such is the severity of “turning to a different gospel”.

Why do you think that is? Why does any change to the gospel that Paul preached, however small, historically applicable, or biblically parallel, make it null and void (Gal. 5:4)? In what way(s) is the gospel being made void in churches today? How do we avoid such perversions in our church family and our Gospel Communities?

## Galatians | Chapter Two

Quoting the old Negro spiritual, Dr. Martin Luther King closed his famous 1963 address with the words, “Free at last! Free at Last! Thank God Almighty, we’re free at last”. Nearly one hundred years earlier slavery was abolished in the United States, yet a century of continued prejudice and injustice had kept a people enslaved that had been declared free. One commentator notes that,

“Our experience with slavery in America teaches that proclaiming emancipation and possessing liberty are two very different things. Freedom is not easily gained, and once gained, it is easily lost.” (Ryken, 38)

### *The Issue of Freedom*

Paul is fighting for freedom. Documented in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem with Titus to ensure that “the truth of the gospel might be preserved” (v. 5).

As noted in the Introduction to Galatians, there were those in the early church who were claiming that all Christ followers must practice the Jewish customs in order to be true believers. Paul calls these men, “false brothers” who slipped in for the purpose to enslave those who had found freedom in Christ Jesus (v. 4). Having already doubly cursed the same type of men misleading the Galatian believers (1:8-9), Paul now gives a personal experience that emphasizes the importance of what is happening within the Galatian churches.

Confirmed by their experience with the apostles and pillars of the Christian church in Jerusalem, (v. 7-9) Paul exhorts the Galatians to fight for the same freedom and not yield to those who would suppress freedom. But why would anyone want to suppress freedom?

“**For the best reasons: to protect tradition and to preserve morality.** The Jews had a highly developed appreciation for tradition and the finest moral sense of any people in the history of civilization. Freedom was a threat to both tradition and morality. There was always the possibility that a free person would decide to be free from tradition and live completely immersed in the present. There was always the danger that a free person would disregard moral wisdom and only accept the trail-and-error results of experience...So the anxiety of the people who came in to spy out Paul’s freedom was not irrational.” (Peterson, *TL*, 59-60)



Yet, freedom is at the very heart of the Gospel. Freedom to live as creatures in intimate and immediate relationship to the Creator. Freedom that allows us to overcome the enslavement of our self-sovereignty to our Wants, Needs, and Feelings. Freedom that was not easily won but could be easily lost if it suppressed out of fear. So Paul tells his personal experience of freedom in chapter one and now Titus' freedom in chapter two.

Titus was an uncircumcised, Greek Christian, and his inclusion in Paul's crew was no accident. It would have been easier for the leaders in Jerusalem to discuss the issue of circumcision and the necessity of adherence to Jewish laws and customs with just Jews in the room. Yet, "The Jerusalem meeting could not be an abstract discussion. Would they require Titus to be circumcised or not?" (Keller, 40).

Essentially, what was being argued by the Judaizers was that every Christian had to physically and practically become a Jew. Peterson provides a helpful inclusion in the argument,

"Circumcision [argues the Judaizers] is a Jewish ritual that we have been practicing for two thousand years now that provides physical evidence that you are serious about living by faith. It is a simple operation performed on the most private member of your body to show that at the most intimate level of your life you are separated from the world and joined to God. The pain is momentary, but circumcision will be a permanent sign of your faith. Further, it will identify you with the people who have the most extensive and deepest experience with God, the Jewish people. God will not accept you until you accept this condition. God loves you, true; Christ saves you, yes; but you aren't thoroughly accepted until you begin at the beginning, the way every Jew begins, with circumcision." (TL, 60)

The question for Titus entering Jerusalem, interacting with the pillars of the Christian church was, "Would they accept me as God does—a repentant sinner in love with and dependent on Jesus?" Or, would they require something more to be included in the family?

The good news for you and I is that the early church leaders recognized the freedom found in the grace of Christ's gospel. They recognized that nothing else needed to be added to Paul's gospel message (the same one he proclaims in 1:1-5) to Titus (v. 6) and that Titus was indeed free from the requirements of others to enter into the family of God.

"Circumcision is no longer a hot topic in the church, but the deeper issue here is still relevant. Paul regarded circumcision as a synecdoche [using a part of something to describe the entire thing] for the entire law (see Phil. 3:2-9); it represented law-keeping in general. Thus **the apostle was fighting for something fundamental to Christianity at all times and in all places: *What does it take to become a first-class member of God's family?*** Is it simply a matter of faith in Christ, or is there something else, too?" (Ryken, 44)

The unfortunate reality is that many of us and many churches still fear freedom. We fear the acceptance of those whose traditions might not completely align with ours. We fear those whose morality is still in formation and influenced by different historical values. **We fear and so we create environments in which the gospel is squelched in order to "protect" the purity of our family.** We create traditions and moralities shaped not out of freedom in relationship to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, lives lived in congruency with who God is and what he is doing. Rather, shaped out of fear, out of desire to protect, and ultimately out of self-righteousness.

Perhaps the Judaizers' desire to protect tradition and morality came from good motives. Perhaps they really did desire to honor God in the way they lived. Yet, in adding to the gospel tradition and cultural morality they enslaved those who were made free in Christ (v. 4).

How have you seen the fear of freedom manifested in the church? How does it show itself in your own life—especially with those around you who are different? How can we as a church family and Gospel Communities help ensure that we do not “bring into slavery” those who have been made “free in Christ”?

### *Freedom to Live for Others*

Paul’s issue with freedom doesn’t stop with Titus’ story. He faces another issue. Is his gospel message to those outside of the Jewish heritage legitimate? He enters Jerusalem wanting to make sure that he was in step with God’s purpose and plan (v. 2). Again, his message is affirmed (v. 6). The gospel he is preaching to the Gentiles is indeed in line with God’s purpose and plan for the salvation of the world.

If you read Paul’s letters, you notice that it often seems like he is having to defend himself, his calling as an apostle, and his ministry to the Gentiles at every turn. It is understandable to some extent why Paul was challenged the way he was. His apostleship was not like the apostleship of the others. He did not walk with Jesus for three years. He was not in the upper room at Pentecost. His ministry did not flow out of Jerusalem, but rather Antioch. He was a Pharisee by birth and training, a Jew of Jews, so it would be odd for him to not focus on taking the gospel to the people he knew most intimately. Preconceived notions of ministry and service bombarded Paul’s life.

**Paul’s calling was not different than the calling of the other apostles, it was just *distinct*.** The affirmation of Peter, James and the other council members of Paul’s ministry communicates a fundamental implication of the gospel for our lives. **Our calling as Christ followers is not different, but it is *distinct*.** God has uniquely designed each of us to participate in his family for his glory (Eph. 4:1-16). There is great freedom in following God’s design for our lives, pouring out our lives in congruence with how God made us to function individually in community for the fame of Jesus amongst all the world!

Indeed, it is the freedom of the gospel that propels the Jerusalem leadership to exhort Paul in only one thing other than remaining steadfast in his distinct ministry: “remember the poor” (v. 10).

**“Our attitude towards the poor is still one of the surest tests of the health of freedom.** The moment freedom is used to avoid acts of mercy or help or compassion, it is exposed as fraud. A free person who finds ways to enhance the lives of the poor demonstrates the truest and most mature freedom. A free person who diminishes the lives of the poor by dealing out ridicule or withholding gifts is himself diminished, is herself diminished.” (Peterson, *TL*, 66)

Freedom in Christ produces a freedom to live for others. To use our gifts, our stories, our struggles, our hopes, our finances, our time, our energy, our friendships, and more; for the benefit of those around us and those God is leading us to share our lives with. Freedom in Christ is not an excuse to avoid different kinds of people or to dismiss those in need for the sake of “religion” or purity. In fact, to live in such a manner is to remain bound by the very disposition that Christ came to change in us.

A free life in Christ begins with finding that God requires only faith in Christ and no other prerequisite to live as a member of God’s family. A **free life in Christ continues as we discover freedom to live for others**, to be less controlled by our own desires and preferences, our own self-interest, but to be propelled by the gracious love of God for us and those around us (2 Cor. 5:14).

How has God wired you to contribute to his family, specifically to your Gospel Community and to our church family? In what ways are you still bound by preconceived ideas of “ministry” and “service”? How are you and your Gospel Community caring for the poor? Is doing so a difficult thing for you? Why? In what ways is God leading you to experience and express freedom in living for others?

### *In Step with the Gospel*

In chapters one and two, Paul is laying the groundwork for freedom in Christ, freedom that comes through the one and only Gospel of Jesus Christ. He began by proclaiming the gospel of grace (1:1-5), then demonstrates that gospel of grace in his own story (1:11-24). He continues in chapter two by providing two practical examples of how the church leadership in Jerusalem agreed with and desired the same freedom in Jesus that Paul was proclaiming (2:1-10). Now (2:11-14) he provides one last story of how to make sure freedom remains before he launches into the doctrinal issues in detail.

Peter, who had been one who declared the necessity of a gospel of freedom at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) and who had even lived that freedom amongst the Gentile believers in Antioch, was now acting hypocritically (v. 13) when a certain group of so called Christians, the “circumcision party” (v. 12), entered town. No longer would Peter associate with, eat with, those who were different.

Peter and others who believed in the freedom found in Christ (Acts 10), were afraid, “fearing” the rejection and ridicule of those who considered themselves superior Christians (v. 12). Once again, fear instead of freedom propelled the church’s practices.

Paul recognized what was going on. He recognized that Peter and the others were treating the Gentile believers in a manner that was unkind, non-hospitable, full of self-righteousness, and ultimately racist. Yet, Paul does not address the manifestations of their behavior, but rather he goes to the heart of the issue. Their “conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (v. 14).

Why did the Judaizers not like Paul? Because, unlike some of the other leaders in the early church, he was not afraid of them. He said in chapter one,

“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.” (v. 10)

Jesus was rejected and opposed for the same reason. He did and said things that confronted the life style and beliefs of the religious people (Jn. 5:41-42). Jesus’ words and actions came from God the Father for the reason to align the people with God’s person, purpose and plan—they were words and actions of hope and grace. His words were meant to form the people into lives congruent with who God is and what God is doing. At the same time, such words were offensive to humanities self-sovereignty (Jn. 3:19-20).

Paul’s response to Peter has the same intent as Jesus’ words. **He confronts Peter’s behavior not with quilt but with the gospel.** He reminds Peter and the others that **the gracious and costly gospel of Jesus Christ does not lead to prejudice and self-righteousness, but to humility and self-sacrifice.** Paul’s hope for Peter was that he would live in congruency with who God is and what God is doing as he remembered the gospel, as he let the truth of the gospel shape his attitudes and actions.

Keller (53), says that “Christian living is...a continual realignment process—one of bringing everything in line with the truth of the gospel.” The gospel reorients our lives so that we might live rightly as image bears of God, in communion with God. Yet the reorientation is not a one-and-done action. It is a continual life in the presence of God, with others in a similar state, being formed into our identity as saints.

“Paul’s approach makes all the difference. Paul did not simply say: *You’re breaking the rules* (even through Peter was), but: *You’ve forgotten the gospel: your own gracious welcome in Christ...Peter, you don’t need approval from these men. You’ve already got Christ’s*” (Keller, 56-57)

Living in step with the gospel is twofold. First, it means letting the truth of the gospel reorient the way you think, the way you behave, and the way you repent. Second, it also means letting the gospel be the means of confronting sin in its various forms as we mature in our identity in Christ.

“In our shoes, Paul would say: *Remember the grace God has showered on you* [the gospel]—*what does living out and enjoying that grace look like in this situation?*” (Keller, 57). Are there people who, like Peter, you avoid because you fear association with them will not be positive? What lies are behind your avoidance? How does the gospel change the way you think, behave, and repent? How can you use the gospel to motivate your Gospel Community, spouse, neighbour, co-worker, or friend this week to live in congruency with the grace showered on them in Jesus?

### God’s Story, Our Reality | Living Sane

“‘Justified by faith’ is central to the Christian faith. **It is Paul’s nutshell summary of the gospel.**” (Keller, 58). Justification by faith is a recognition that what brings me into the family of God and sustains me in the family of God is not my actions but Christ’s. His life, death, and resurrection given to deliver us according to the will of the Father and for his glory (Gal. 1:4-5). Life begins as we are awakened to the reality that we are created and embrace our need of rescue; a life of faith in God’s sovereignty and not our own.

Eugene Peterson recounts a story of Peter Gynt by the Norwegian dramatist, Ibsen,

“Peter Gynt [wound up in] a mental hospital and surprised that no one in the place seemed crazy. They all talked so sensibly and discussed their plans with such precision and concern that he felt sure they must be sane. He spoke to the doctor about it. ‘They’re mad,’ said the doctor. ‘They talk very sensibly, I admit, but it is all about themselves. They are in fact, most intelligently obsessed with self. It’s self-morning, noon, and night. We can’t get away from self here. We lug it along with us, even through our dreams. O yes, young sir, we talk sensibly, but we’re mad right enough.’” (TL, 69)

Peterson comments that **the “world is much like the hospital visited by Peter Gynt. It seems sane enough until we realize that it is possessed with itself.”** (TL, 69). Paul sees the insanity of those who live as if justification came by “works of the law” (v. 16). He understands that traditions and morality, religious behaviors and sacred spaces seem sane enough, but Paul also realizes that to live as if those things are the means for entrance and continuance in the family of God is actually insane—i.e. missing reality and replacing it with a non-real concept.

Forgive the extended quote, but I think Peterson’s translation of this passage in *The Message* is helpful to understand what Paul is saying here.

“We Jews know that we have no advantage of birth over ‘non-Jewish sinners.’ We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. How do we know? We tried it—and we had the best system of rules the world has ever seen! Convinced that no human being can please God by self-improvement, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah [Lord and Savior] so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good.

Have some of you noticed that we are not yet perfect? (No great surprise, right?) And are you ready to make the accusation that since people like me, who go through Christ in order to get things right with God, aren’t perfectly virtuous, Christ must therefore be an accessory to sin? The accusation is frivolous. If I was ‘trying to be good,’ I would be rebuilding the same old barn that I tore down. I would be acting as a charlatan.

What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn’t work. So I quit being a ‘law man’ so that I could be God’s man. Christ’s life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God.

Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.

Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God’s grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily.”

Insanity, by definition is missing reality, replacing reality with non-real concepts. It has various manifestations, but it ultimately boils down to being one who is deranged in mind, out of step with what is really going on in the world. By biblical definition, that is the state of the self-sovereign world (Rom. 1-2). A world that, like Peter Gynt’s asylum appears sane but is so consumed with self that it misses reality. The danger of insanity, of missing reality is not simply for those outside of the family of God, it seems—Peter and Barnabas being great examples (Gal. 2:11-14)—that even those of us who have been awoken to God’s story, to our true reality, need regular aids to remain sane.

Re-read *The Message* translation of Galatians 2:15-21 again. What is insane about living as if entrance and/or continuance in the family of God is by “works of the law”? How does Paul describe sanity in living a life in Christ? How does your story reflect Paul’s? How are you trying to live justified by the works of the law rather than in the gracious, free life in Christ?

### *The Necessity of Christ*

God gave his people, free now from the Egyptians, trying to be distinctly God’s people in a land full of those who lived and believed different, and a way in which to distinguish themselves. The Jewish people referred to these distinguishing marks—behaviors, rules, and worship practices—as “the law”.

Found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the law was meant to keep the people of God in line with his person, purpose, and plan until God would fulfil his promise to dwell amongst them and sacrifice his life in order that they and the world might live (Gen. 12-15). Specifically, the “ceremonial” law for the Jewish people shaped the way they interacted with God and became the standard by which they judged one another’s’ standing before God. “This ‘ceremonial law’ was a teaching method by which the holy God showed that sinful people cannot go into His presence without cleansing” (Keller, 52).

Jesus’ first sign (turning water into wine) in John 2:1-11 demonstrates that he is the fulfilment of the ceremonial law, that he is establishing a new way to interact with God and others. It is no insignificant detail that John tells us what kind of jars were being used to hold the wine (v.6). These jars represent the religious rituals of the day—the ceremonial law—used to encounter God, to purify one to meet, worship, and live rightly before God. Jesus reorients, replaces, and fills up to the brim (v.7) these jars signifying that they have fulfilled their usefulness, but **what is about to come cannot be contained in them.** Then he has the servants draw water (v.8) for the new wine, a new way of meeting, worshipping, and living with God: himself.

Christ is the “fullness of God” (Jn. 1:16-18) and it is Christ who fills the wine jars, and more so. It is Christ’s fullness through which God’s purpose, his Kingdom comes. God cannot be contained in our religious structures. His Kingdom comes not through religious behavior or sacred spaces, but through a person and through his people. Jesus’ subtle sign reorients us to God’s plan, that just as the wine had to be drawn out and served to fully be appreciated and for the sign to be complete; so too must Jesus’ life be poured out for you and I to meet, worship, and have life with God. Jesus is the purification ritual for you and me to enter into God’s presence. His sacrificial death and powerful resurrection are our means of salvation. It is no longer what we do—keeping the ceremonial law—that determines are standing before God and others. It is what Christ has done. The law given to Israel was not a set of behaviors and sacred spaces meant to find salvation in (Gal. 2:16); rather it was meant to be a tutor, a path that kept



the people of God living in congruency with God's person, purpose, and plan; preparing them for Christ (Gal. 2:19; Jn. 5:45-47).

If Christ is our purification ritual, our way of living in relationship with God (Gal. 2:20), then to live as if a set of rules and behaviors is our means of justification means that Christ's life, death, and resurrection had no purpose (Gal. 2:21). That is a strong statement!

Paul is not saying that the law is useless, that behaviors do not matter; rather, he says God gave the people of Israel the law as an expression of grace but not as justification. Yet, for those who teach and live that more is needed than faith in Jesus—trusting in Christ's life and work to bring us into the family and keep us, mature us in the family—they are actually making God's purpose and plan obsolete.

Paul will go more into the law and his view of the law in chapter 3, but it is import for us to take seriously what Paul took seriously. Keller (62) says it this way,

**“We must go on as Christians as we started as Christians.** After all, if at any point and in any way ‘righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!’ (v. 21). ***Christ will do everything for you, or nothing.*** You cannot combine merit and grace. If justification is by the law in any way, Christ's death is meaningless in history and meaningless to you personally...If we realize we cannot save ourselves, Christ's death will mean everything to us.” (emphasis added)

What does it mean that “Christ will do everything for you, or nothing”? How does that truth translate into the way in which you interact with God, with your family, your neighbors, your co-workers, and your church family? What are you trying to do that only Christ can do?

## Galatians | Chapter Three

### *Progressing Through God's Story*

The Bible is a thick and complex book. It tells the stories of hundreds of lives from the vantage point of a multitude of authors who employ a variety of forms (poems, narratives, law codes, parables, etc.) to communicate God's revelation over hundreds and thousands of years. Learning to dine on this book can be an overwhelming undertaking, not unlike the 72 oz. steak challenge! You may feel it necessary to gorge yourself on information in order to achieve the prize; in our case accurate and lived understanding of all that is contained in this book.

Rather than a 72 oz. steak that is meant to be devoured for the purpose of prideful fulfilment; this book is more like a well-designed and meticulous progressive dinner; each course building on, completing, or preparing for the next for the purpose of enriching; of making the life of the participants more full and joyous.

Admittedly, there is much in our progressive dinner that is difficult to digest and it seems many of the courses are completely foreign to our culture and context. However, if we can begin to see each course building on, complementing or preparing for the next as our meal moves towards a singular conclusion of life enriched, full and joyous in the presence and rule of God for eternity (Rev. 21-22); then the courses begin to become “self-interpreting”. Standing alone, any one course is confusing, but put together in view of the purpose of the dinner, each course helps us understand the surrounding.

Perhaps no greater density of direct citations and clear allusions to the Old Testament texts exists in the New Testament than that found in Galatians 3:6-4:30; especially 3:6-14. It is here that Paul teaches us the progressive nature of biblical revelation; that what has come before has been in preparation for what is now as each course has built up and complemented the other towards a specific end. In Unit 3, we called this progressive continuity “redemptive history”.

Paul’s argument for justification by faith and not works; for freedom in Christ is not one solely based on his own experience of God’s mercy (1:11-24), the apostles validation of his teaching and Titus’ life (2:1-10), the example set by Peter to be rebuked by the gospel (2:11-15), nor even the logical conclusions of the Galatians experience with the Gospel (2:17-3:5). Rather, **“the apostle grounds his argument in redemptive history”** (Silva, 804), in God’s story through what we now call the Old Testament and its continuation and climax in Christ.

In order to both understand this passage and demonstrate how the whole of Scripture helps interpret each component of Scripture, let’s walk through Galatians 3:6-29 looking specifically how Paul uses Scripture to ground his understanding of justification by faith and not works.

Remember the context. Paul is writing to a group of young “Gentile” believers. These men and women are not of Jewish origin, but have come into faith in Christ through Jewish (Paul and Barnabas) witnesses telling the story of God through the people of Israel and ultimately in the Jew, Christ Jesus. Having come to know Christ through Jewish witnesses, they are now falling prey to Jewish “semi-converts” (explained later) called Judaizers who desire the non-Jewish believers to become Jews who happen to believe in Jesus as the Messiah; ones who still find their primary identity in being an ethnic people of God who keep a specific set of rules (the Law) rather than spiritual children of God born through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection alone.

Having laid immediate and experiential evidence for his opposition to these Judaizers (1:6-2:16), Paul now begins to demonstrate that **the history of God’s redemption has always been broader than any one ethnic people and has always been based on faith in who God is and what God will/has done rather than humanity’s ability to keep a specific set of regulations.** Like the Galatians, our temporal issues that can often be couched in “preference”, “methodology”, “philosophy” or “religious” language, are often more historical (connected to God’s story) and theological (having to do with our relationship and understanding of God) than we perceive. In other words, when we think of “who” we are as the people of God and “how” we live as the people of God in our time and context, we are actually dealing with historical and theological issues and not merely how we prefer to label ourselves, how we decide to “do” church, neutral values that shape our actions, or behaviors and spaces that define our identity.

“[Paul] goes on to assert (in 3:7,9) that believers [in Christ] are the true descendants and heirs of Abraham, supporting this statement with another citation (3:8); brings up again the reception of the Abrahamic blessing at the conclusion of the next paragraph (3:14); contrasts the Abrahamic covenant [Gen. 12-15] with the Sinaitic covenant (3:15-18) [Ex. 19-31; i.e. “the Law”], supporting this paragraph with a quotation regarding the seed of Abraham (3:16); expands on the redemptive-historical significance of the Sinaitic covenant (3:19-25); brings this part of the argument to summation by emphasizing that the true children of God are made up of Abraham’s seed (3:26-29); recapitulates his argument on the basis of the history of salvation (4:1-7); and after another appeal to the experience of the Galatians (4:8-20), concludes the theological section of the letter with his tour-de-force appeal to the ‘free/slave’ distinction in Abraham’s two children (4:21-31), supporting the final paragraph with two more explicitly quotations (4:27, 30).” (Silva, 793)

**The Galatians were being led into the right hope by the wrong means,** “...they were hoping for incorporation into the people of God (Abraham’s descendants) through the wrong means (works of law).” (Silva, 793). So Paul walks them through a concise redemptive history to demonstrate that the means for their hope has never been—even for the Jewish people—the works of law but faith in Jesus. Let’s look at how Paul does this.

### 3:6-9

When Paul references Abraham's belief in God as his credit for righteousness (v. 6), he is referring back to Genesis 15:6,

“And he [Abraham] believed the Lord, and he [the Lord] counted it to him [Abraham] as righteousness.”

What did Abraham believe? Genesis 12:1-18:19 is the account of God choosing a man to birth a people for himself. That man was Abraham. God spoke with Abraham, called him to leave his own land and people in order to become the people of God in the land of God. Though he and his wife were childless, God promised Abraham that his descendants would bring forth a great nation that worshiped God and blessed the entire earth. In Genesis 15 God is restating his promise to Abraham, in the midst of Abraham's doubt, that he would be the father of a nation that outnumbered the stars in the heavens (15:5) through the offspring that God would provide this unlikely patriarch a lineage. What did Abraham believe? He believed that God would do what God had promised to do in Genesis 3:15 that God would use Abraham and his wife Sarah to bring about the formation of people that would worship God and bless the earth. He believed God would redeem the earth through their child, their offspring.

Abraham's righteousness was not in his actions or even in the strength of his resolve (as Gen. 15:2-3 is one of the many times in which Abraham's faith is shown to be weak). No, Abraham is counted righteous simply because he believed God—though he doubted at times and though he tried to bring about God's plan in his own power at times—he believed God would bless the earth through raising up a people to know, worship, and obey him. You see, Abraham's righteousness was not the strength of his faith, the resoluteness of his confidence; but rather the merciful grace of God extended to him. Keller (72) comments that,

“When the Bible tells us God credits Abraham's faith as righteousness, it means that **God is treating Abraham as if he were living a righteous life.** Many commentators have resisted the remarkable implications of Genesis 15:6 [but not Paul!], and argued that we are being told that [Abraham's] faith is itself a form of righteousness that pleases God; that his faith is an act of obedience that merited God's favour, a kind of righteousness. **But the text doesn't say that his faith was righteousness; rather it was counted as (i.e.: as if it were) righteousness.**”

Paul is addressing the very foundation of the Jewish tradition and claiming that it is not about doing works of the law and not primarily about being an ethnic people. The “father” of Jewish faith, of whom Abraham is, was not a man whose right standing with God came through obedience to a set of rules and regulations, nor was the promise to him for him alone, but for the entire world (v.7), all tribes, tongues, and nations.

The promise to Abraham, a promise of God's faithfulness through Abraham to bless the world, is what Paul calls a “preached gospel” (v.7), hundreds of years before Jesus ever entered into history! It is that gospel that Abraham believed and found righteousness through God. The confident hope in the promise of God to do all he has said he would do to restore the broken relationship with humanity in his timing for his glory. A righteousness—right standing with God—granted by grace. This is the hope of Abraham and the faith of Abraham that Jesus preached during his ministry on earth (Matt. 22:23-32; Jn. 8:56).

Paul is saying, that the foundation of Judaism is the historical heritage of all of God's people, Jew or otherwise. **For, the foundation of Judaism was not the laws, the rules, the regulations, the rituals or even the lineage; but the promise of God to restore a broken world through a people, ultimately a person (Matt. 1:17).** That is why Paul can say that “it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham...those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (v. 7, 9).

Paul moves the Galatians beyond their own, real and important experience with God (Gal. 3:1-5), to ground the Galatians inclusion in the family of God in redemptive history. Their faith in Jesus is the same faith that Abraham



possessed, the same hope that he waited for and was overjoyed to see in Jesus (Jn. 8:56). The gospel that Paul preaches is not a new gospel nor one to be added to, but the same gospel of Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12-18, the gospel that Jesus preached and lived, and was now being made manifest in the lives of the Gentile Galatians.

“Paul places Abraham ‘in the same arena as the Gentiles’ even though Abraham, having converted from paganism, ‘was the perfect model for the Jewish missionaries.’ He [Garlington] concludes, ‘It is just this un-Jewishness of Paul’s use of Abraham that provides the bridge into his cursing of his opponents [1:8-9]; that is, in the salvation-historical purposes of God, the paradigm of eschatological justification [eternal] is provided not by the Torah [first 5 books of the Old Testament, i.e. “the law”], but by Abraham, who had nothing to do with the Torah.’” (Silva, 795)

### *Questions to Progress Through...*

1. How does grounding the Galatians hope of Christ in redemptive history bring them freedom?
2. How does it bring you freedom, or how about your neighbors, co-workers, family members and friends?
3. Why does Paul not just stay with the logical progression argument (v. 1-5), but moves into a historical argument against the Judaizers?
4. What impact does that have on how we address our issues of legalism and licentiousness?
5. How does Paul’s connection of Genesis to Jesus impact the way in which you read the Old Testament?
6. How does “counted” righteous differ from “making” righteous? How does that change the way you think of your own faith?

### **3:10-14**

This section contains four quotations; two from Deuteronomy (v. 10, 13), one from Habakkuk (v. 11) and one from Leviticus (v. 12).

The Deuteronomy references encapsulate the main idea of these verses and set a tone for understanding the middle verses (v. 11-12). In verse 10 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 which says,

“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of the law by doing them...”

And then in verse 13, he references Deuteronomy 21:23,

“his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God...”

Paul’s argument now moves from the preconditions of the Judaizers’ heritage to the very integrity of their claims. According to those who had “slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus”, the way to justification was through obedience to the law: the Mosaic covenant, the rules and regulations set out to distinguish the people of Israel as God’s people from the rest of the world. Paul is going right at their foundations. He declares that they are not in step with their forefather (v. 6-9) and now claims that they have missed the foundational truth of what their law brings. It does not bring life or righteousness, but a curse (v. 10). If it is faith that justifies us before God, then all the law can do is prove us condemned; for who can live up to every word, action, and attitude within it? No one. And that is Paul’s point, that even the Judaizers are themselves guilty.

Paul’s reference to Deuteronomy 27:26 is his way of explaining to the Gentile Christians that these Judaizers are not only missing the purpose of the law in redemptive history, they are themselves guilty through the law. Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 7:1-2

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”

The Judaizers made their standard for righteousness—right living with God—as the rules, regulations, and rituals of Judaism. Yet, these very actions on which they gained their confident standing before God became the very measurement by which they could not live up to (Matt. 5-7). Paul is in line with Jesus when he says that the heart of the law was not meant to bring life, but demonstrate the necessity of faith in salvation through God alone,

“If I had not spoken to them [the Jewish people], they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hastes my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no none else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” (Jn. 15:22-25)

Jesus is saying that his life and ministry confirmed the curse of the Law that righteousness does not come from obedience but rather in a relationship through faith. The men in Galatia were men under the curse of the very law they were setting as the measurement for true Christianity. They were “semi-converts”, not really Christ followers. They did not hate Christ like many of the Jews, but they did not see his righteousness, Christ’s keeping of the law, as their righteousness. They believed themselves to be ones who were indeed justified by their right behavior, and in doing so found themselves outside of the true family of God.

“In short, the quotation functions as Paul’s way of informing or reminding the Galatians of how the Judaizers should be regarded” (Silva, 799)

Such is the disparity between works and faith. Works, even when claimed in the name of Jesus do nothing to justify, but rather curse. Faith, when grounded in the person and work of Jesus, brings life with God through his Spirit (v. 14).

The irony of the Judaizers is that they confessed a need to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but failed to embrace the reality that Christ’s death on the cross made him a “cursed Messiah”,

“The issue at question was that the law does pronounce a curse...and that Christ has delivered ‘us’ from it by himself falling under that curse...Since the notion of a ‘cursed Messiah’ must have been offensive to many (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23), Paul presents evidence by quoting a clause from Deut. 21:23.” (Silva, 797)

Paul’s reference to Deuteronomy 21:23 is interesting and informative on several levels. First, he shows the seeming absurdity of our Christian message; that God made himself suffer his own curse in order that those who believe in him might not. Second, he affirms the fruition of Genesis 3:15, which required that the curse be overcome by one who was human (Christ being both fully God and fully man). Third, and perhaps most important for this context, he demonstrates that the law was originally purposed—with its blessings and curses—to be fulfilled in Jesus alone.

“...one needs to acknowledge that this verse, which originally had no messianic overtones, is here applied in a surprising manner.” (Silva, 798) Paul does not merely take from the Old Testament explicit connections to the Messiah and apply them to Jesus, he understands every verse to find its culmination in Jesus (2 Tim. 3:14-17). The Law was never meant to be kept in full as means to salvation and right standing with God. It was meant to be “a guardian” (v. 24) that kept the people of Israel living by faith in a manner that lead them along in God’s redemptive plan. The blessings of the law come only through Christ’s obedience and by his taking on the curses of the law. The Mosaic Law was a clear, everyday picture of the same promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 15:7-21; by his own life would God fulfil his promise to bless the nations, to redeem a people for himself (v. 14). Paul says it another way in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Jesus was cursed, exiled and but to death (the very curses laid down in the Mosaic Law for disobedience). Jesus also finds full and abundant life in the Father, is blessed by the Father, and lives with the Father in peace for the joy of the world. (the very blessings laid out in the Mosaic Law for obedience). Jesus becomes both the blessing and the curse of the law for those who have faith like Abraham, faith given by God in God.

Verses 10 and 13 provide insight into how Paul’s opponents should be viewed and how skewed their understanding of the law really was. Verses 11 and 12 make explicit the vast difference between works and faith, law and grace. Once again, Paul uses the Old Testament to show God’s person, purpose and plan in his readers’ moment in history and in ours.

Here Paul reminds the Galatian believers that it should be “evident” that righteousness does not come through the law, but only death. How could one be declared righteous, looked on by God as holy, by attempting—and always failing—to keep a set of rules, regulations and rituals? No, something else is needed that is different than the law, that is faith—God given, gracious faith.

Quoting Habakkuk 2:4,

“...but the righteous shall live by his faith”

, and Leviticus 18:5,

“You shall keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.”

Paul once again connects the history of God’s people to God’s work amongst the Gentiles in Galatia. In the Habakkuk passage, “faith” is more accurately translated as “faithfulness”, but not faithfulness like we might initially suspect. Faithfulness that is like the faith of Hebrews 11, specifically verses 1 and 2,

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation [reward, blessing].”

Faithfulness not marked by obedience (though indeed they were), but marked by belief. Belief in who God is, what he is doing, and their part in his story; as the remainder of Hebrews 11 details.

Silva (802), suggest that Habakkuk is actually looking back at Abraham, similarly to Paul, as a way to exhort the people of Judah to,

“follow the footsteps of Abraham, whose **faith was not a momentary act, but rather a whole life of persevering in obedience** (see esp. Gen. 22, which is the basis for James 2:21-24). **Faith involves waiting for fulfilment and thus is always in danger of being shaken; therefore, steadiness and constancy [faithfulness] are of its essence.**”

The writer of Hebrews 11, having given the so named “roll call of faith”, ends with this reminder,

“And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

The faith of the God's people before the Gentiles of Galatia was not realized in their time, but their belief was steadfast so that in God's time, now in our time, we might look,

“to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2)

Such faith is not built on actions but on belief. It is not grounded in what I can do or have done, but who God is and what he has done and is doing. The very opposite of what the Judaizers were claiming about the law which Paul demonstrates with his quote of Leviticus 18:5.

The law, by its very nature was meant not to be a means to righteousness but a mode by which to walk in faith, in congruency with God's purpose and plan. That's how Peter understood obedience, as a “supplement” to faith (2 Pet. 1:5) However, the Jewish people made it more than that; **they made the law their life and thus missed life in Jesus** (Jn. 5:39-40). The law does not oppose faith, as Paul will explain later, but **the law magnifies our self-sovereign view of reality.**

“verse 12, while tied logically to verse 11, also has an important relationship to verse 10. In both verses Paul quotes texts that emphasize that the law makes promises and issues threats on the basis of ‘doing.’ Dependence on doing the law brings not ‘life,’ but a curse, because (1) principally life comes by faith (v. 11), and (2) practically the law cannot be done (v. 10). This argument is deployed to convince the Galatians not to succumb to the agitators’ insistence that they add law observance to their faith in Christ. Faith, Paul implies, is the only instrument by which justification/life can be attained: whether at the beginning of one’s Christian experience or at its end.” (Moo, 209)

Paul is doing exactly what Jesus said he would do through the Holy Spirit in John 16,

“I [Jesus] will send him [the Holy Spirit] to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer, concerning judgment because the ruler of this world will be judged...he [the Holy Spirit] will declare to you the things that are to come.” (v. 7-11, 13)

Paul is writing to the Galatians by the power of the Spirit and in the words of the Spirit (his and the Old Testament) to convict them and the Judaizers or their sin skewed perception of what righteousness really is. Together, verses 10-13 get to the heart of Paul's issue with those trying to lead the Galatians towards another gospel: There is no saving righteousness in the law, there never was; it has always been meant to keep Abraham's offspring in line with God's purpose and plan so that in God's time we would get to Jesus and from Jesus to you and I (v. 14).

### *Questions to Progress Through...*

7. How do the Judaizers miss the purpose of the law? What implications does that have for how you understand and practice “religious” behaviors (rules, regulations, and rituals)?
8. How does Paul distinguish between law and faith? How does his quotations of Deuteronomy help you understand the differences?
9. How is Jesus both the blessings and the curses of the Mosaic Law? What implications does that have for how you read the Old Testament, understand Jesus' interactions with the Jewish people in the Gospels, and interpret the “do's and don'ts” of the New Testament letters?
10. How does verse 14 help explain Paul's progression verses 6-13?
11. How does this section impact the way you think about the gospel, live in light of the gospel, and share the gospel with those in your Gospel Community and outside the church family?

### **3:15-29**

Paul has laid his argument in redemptive history against the claims of the Judaizers. He has shown that their understanding of the purpose and plan of God through the Jewish people and Mosaic Law is skewed by self-sovereignty. He now gives detail as to how the law is practically and theologically binding and not freeing. Again, he keeps his arguments not simply in the experience of the Galatians but also in the context of God's person, purpose and plan.

While there is only one direct quote from the Old Testament in this section (v. 16), it is important to understand that Paul's dependence on God's story in the Old Testament is no less prevalent in the second half of chapter three than in the first half,

“In fact, 3:17-19...serves as a prime example of the principle that the absence of formal citations is, in itself, no indication whatsoever of the degree to which the apostle [Paul] depends on and interacts with the Hebrew Scriptures [Old Testament]. There is hardly a clause in this section...that does not allude to the OT in a fairly explicit manner.” (Silva, 804)

What we can learn from the way Paul interacts with Scripture in this section is that he views and interprets Scripture like a progressive dinner; each course building on, complementing or preparing for the next as our meal moves towards a singular conclusion of life enriched, full and joyous in the presence and rule of God for eternity through Jesus. He is not merely making up Christian living as he goes, nor being “held captive” to set of behaviors without purpose, nor even confused by the variety of courses that have come before. Rather, Paul is grounding his life, his ministry, his hope in the redemptive history of God's story from beginning to end and into eternity. Thus Scripture can become,

“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Scripture might become lived, shaping our lives in congruency within a relationship to God through faith in Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).

Paul sees God's revealed history forming congruent lives for the Galatian people, lives meant to be lived in freedom, without racism or inequality, as God's children through Jesus (v. 27-29). To demonstrate his reasoning, Paul brings into everyday terms what the Judaizers are really claiming. He argues that that by emphasizing obedience to the law as the means of righteousness, the Judaizers are actually betraying the very foundation of their heritage: the promise God made to Abraham to bring into existence the nation of Israel.

Paul argues that even in a human contract, a person cannot add to it once it has been agreed upon and signed by both parties; how much more true of a promise of God? Paul reminds the Galatians that what came before the Mosaic Law was the promise of God to Abraham to raise up a people that would worship God and bless the earth through the “seed” of Abraham. The promise was not contingent on Abraham, but on God. God would be the one who would take on the penalty should the promise be broken. God's gracious and unconditional promise is the foundation of the Jewish religion, and ours. So, to add to it a condition of rules and regulations is to nullify the initial agreement.

Again, the only direct reference to the Old Testament is found in verse 16, in which Paul uses the phrase “and to his offspring”. The same wording is used in reference by God to Abraham in Genesis 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8, 22:18 and 24:7. It is the summation of God's promise to Abraham, and here Paul explains that promise to be not merely for Abraham's immediate “offspring” (Isaac), but ultimately for Christ Jesus.

Many commentators understand Paul's Christological interpretation of the Genesis text to be a parenthesis in the flow of his current argument, though vital to his overall argument. The most interesting point of Paul's analysis is that he does not feel the need to justify his interpretation of "seed" singular and not plural.

The reasons for a non-defence are that (1) his readers, even the Judaizers did acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and thus were in agreement that he is the seed of Abraham, (2) Paul makes clear in verses 27-29 that he understands that Abraham's seed would be more than one person; ultimately a people, (3) Paul is in line with how God's promise has been interpreted throughout God's history (2 Sam. 7:12 and Isa. 11:1 as examples). In other words, Paul is letting the entire God story of the Old Testament and the witness of Jesus interpret his understanding of Genesis.

Paul concludes his analogy in verses 17 and 18. Paraphrasing, Paul is saying,

"Even a human arrangement, if ratified, cannot be altered; similarly, God ratified his promises to Abraham and his seed (and, by the way, we know that 'the seed' refers to Christ, as the singular should remind us). Let us be clearer: the law cannot alter the Abrahamic covenant." (Silva, 807)

"Friends, let me give you an example from everyday affairs of the free life I am talking about. Once a person's will has been ratified, no one else can annul it or add to it. Now, the promises were made to Abraham and to his descendant. You will observe that Scripture, in the careful language of a legal document, does not say "to descendants," referring to everybody in general, but 'to your descendant' (the noun, note, is singular), referring to Christ. This is the way I interpret this: A will, earlier ratified by God, is not annulled by an addendum attached 430 years later, thereby negating the promise of the will. No, this addendum, with its instructions and regulations, has nothing to do with the promised inheritance in the will." (the Message)

Keller (78) comments that Paul is saying, "If the law was a way of salvation, it would mean that God had decided we didn't need a savior." So what is the point of the law given to Moses hundreds of years after God's promise to Abraham?

Paul answers that question in two stages. First he gives the reason for why the law came into existence in the first place. Then secondly, he gives the functions of the law in light of the reasoning behind it. Both the reason and the function demonstrate the binding nature of the law and the freedom that comes in Christ's fulfilment of it.

In verses 19a Paul gives the reason why the law is needed,

"It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made..."

The promise came to Abraham out of God's grace, not because of Abraham. God knew full well that Abraham and his descendants would struggle with the same issue as the rest of the world: self-sovereignty. Read Genesis 4-11. It is evident that even just a few generations after Adam took of the fruit, the entire world was consumed by the brokenness of relationship with its Creator. Yet, God still desired to bring about redemption and so he chose Abraham. Read Genesis 12-50 and Exodus 1:1-7 and see that Abraham's descendants grew in number, yet still struggled with the same issues of self-sovereignty (within themselves and oppressed them from without (Ex. 1:8-22)). So, God chose Moses (Ex. 3) to continue the fulfilment of his promise to Adam (Gen. 3:15) and to Abraham (Gen. 12-15).

Moses, another unlikely leader, leads God's people out of oppression and into...the wilderness (Ex. 4-18). God's people are less than pleased and often struggle with issues stemming from self-sovereignty along the way, so God gives Moses the law (Ex. 19-31). The law was given so that the inconsistent, temperamental, and still sinful people of



God would remain in line with God's purpose and plan until Christ, the Messiah, would come. Therefore, the law was temporary not eternal. The law was given not as a means to righteousness; rather it was given as a way to remind these sinful people that they were God's people, by God's grace. They were a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and holy nation; though they often longed to look and live like the rest of the self-sovereign world.

Paul then adds this caveat to the law given to Moses,

“...and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.” (V. 19b-20)

What is Paul saying here? Paul is essentially showing the Galatians that the Mosaic Law has always been secondary to God's promise of salvation through Jesus.

“Paul is claiming not that the ‘the law was put in place *by* angels’ but that ‘the law was ordained *through* angels.’ The idea that angels were involved in the giving of the law is not taught anywhere in the OT (though see Deut. 33:2), but it is a common Jewish tradition...that has left its mark on the NT elsewhere (Acts 7:38, 53; Heb. 2:2). In none of these texts does the mention of angels suggest any question about its divine origin; on the contrary, the emphasis, if anything, is on the holiness and majesty of the law...” (Moo, 235)

Paul is simultaneously affirming the divine communication and intent of the law and yet putting the law in its proper perspective in redemptive history, as something put in place by an “intermediary”. Intermediary in this context is the instrument by which the law is delivered to the people. The law was given by God to Moses to give to the people. And here is the key difference, the gospel promise was not given through an intermediary or even an angelic divine being; it was given to the people through God himself—ultimately through the Word of God who is God who is Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:1). Therefore, the law is secondary both in history as well as significance to the gospel promise that God would himself redeem the world (v. 20).

Yet, the law is not garbage, something to be tossed out as a contradiction to the gracious promise of God, but is important for the Galatians to understand the role of the law in redemptive history. If the law could have brought life then it certainly would have done so without the need for Jesus to die and rise again (v. 21). Yet, Jesus did die and rise again, so “Scripture”, God's story, demonstrates the reality that humanity is indeed “imprisoned...under sin” and in need of rescuing by faith in Jesus Christ (v. 22)! Scripture, remember Unit 3, awakens us to God's story and our reality. Thus Scripture reveals our sin skewed self-sovereign perspective of the world and even God, and also reveals God's person, purpose and plan to restore reality for those who believe.

This is why the law came into existence: to keep a sinful people aligned to God's graciousness and power, purpose and plan for their salvation through Jesus. So how did the law functionally keep God's people moving forward in his story with him? Paul's answer is twofold: (1) the law guards, and (2) the law tutors. Keller (83) explains it this way,

“First, the law is a guard. ‘Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed’ (v 23). The Greek words for ‘held prisoners’ and ‘locked up’ mean to be protected by military guard.

Second, the law is a tutor, a *paidagogos*, under whose ‘supervision’ (i.e. tuition) we live. ‘The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ’ (v 24). In the homes of Paul's day, the tutor or guardian was usually a slave who supervised the children on the parent's behalf...the guard and the tutor remove freedom.

In both cases, the relationship with the ‘law’ is not intimate or personal; it is based on rewards and punishments. And in both cases, we are treated as children or worse.”

**The law guards:** it protected the people of Israel from being “conformed to the world” around them by giving them a distinct way of living, organizing, worshipping and interacting. *It made them a distinct people.*

**The law tutors:** it gave the people of Israel direction and oversight in the midst of changing leaders, varying landscapes, and meddling forces. *It kept them moving forward in alignment with God’s purpose and plan.*

**What the law *did not* do was restore intimate and immediate relationship with God.** The law still kept the people of God at a distance because it could not create righteous or holy people. The law was meant to guide the nation of Israel forward as distinctly God’s people towards God’s purpose and plan in Jesus Christ who could form a righteous and holy people (v. 24; 1 Pet. 2:9-10).

There is a duality to the law: from one perspective our fight against it or our over emphasis on it demonstrates our sinfulness (self-sovereignty), and the other side of the coin is that the law’s purpose was to guard and lead us in the midst of our sinfulness and a sinful world; yet only temporarily. When Christ lived, died, and rose again; we found ourselves no longer under a guardian for now we are under Christ, God himself (v. 25-26).

Like children, we have grown up (except our growing up has come through Christ) and now no longer need a tutor. **To fall back into enslavement under the tutor is actually to regress not to mature** as the Judaizers claimed.

“Paul is indicating not that we no longer have any relation to the values of God’s law, but that we no longer view it as a system of salvation.” (Keller, 86)

Paul’s point to the Galatians is that our relationship to God is fuller, surer, and mature through Christ than through any law. It is more intimate—as we immersed into Christ—and immediate—as we put on Christ—than obedience to the law could have ever achieved (v. 27). The foundation of the Jewish faith had always been in salvation through a promise and not a law, salvation through a person for the entire world and not through acceptance into an ethnic culture (v. 28-29). The Galatians are not merely children of Abraham, they are now children of God through Christ Jesus! Why settle for what is less?!

*Questions to Progress Through...*

12. How does Paul describe the usefulness and limitation of the Mosaic Law in redemptive history? What implications does that have for the Galatian readers and for you and me?
13. How is faith in Christ more intimate and immediate than religious rules, rituals, and regulations?
14. How does Paul use the Old Testament in this section? What implications does that have for how we let Scripture inform the way we talk about God, his story and the gospel?



## Galatians | Chapter Four

Chapter three ends (v. 25-29) with the foundational—often abused, missed, and perplexing—truth of Christianity: faith alone saves. More so, **faith alones unites us to Christ Jesus so that we might enjoy what is rightfully his.**

“...the keynote of this paragraph, which again echoes texts (vv. 14, 16) is **union with Christ**. Each verse in the paragraph makes the point: ‘in Christ Jesus’ all believers are sons of God (v. 26); those who are baptized ‘into Christ’ have ‘put on Christ’ (v. 27); ‘in Christ Jesus’ believers are one (v. 28); those who are ‘of Christ’ are the seed of Abraham (v. 29). In contrast to the law and the works that it demands, faith is the way any person, Jew or Gentle, can join the people of God. But **faith accomplishes what it does only because it is the means by which we are brought into union with Christ**. This is the critical focus of Galatians...verses 26-29 are the heart of Paul’s argument in chapters 3-4...and perhaps of the letter as a whole.” (Moo, 248)

### *Sons of God*

Pastor and Professor Sinclair Ferguson comments that,

“The notion that we are children of God, His own sons and daughters...is the meaning of Christian living...Our sonship to God is the apex [highest point] of creation and the goal of redemption.” (Keller, 89)

Paul has brought the Galatians through a journey in God’s story to the top of the resurrection mountain, “the goal of redemption”: “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (3:26). Nationality does not determine kinship with Abraham and inclusion in God’s family, nor does social standing, economic position, religious background, or even gender. It is our relationship with Jesus Christ that determines our standing and our inclusion in God’s family (3:27-29).

To fail to see that faith in Christ—union with Christ, the love of God and work of God through Jesus—is what brings us into God’s family is to miss the fact that it is not us who have come to God—earned favor with God through works or right with God through birth—but rather we are “known by God” (4:9). To emphasize this all-encompassing identity (as we are “clothed” and “baptized” in Christ—3:27) Paul provides an analogy in 4:1-7 that encourages an embrace of our identity as sons of God and the inherent relationship and benefits that come with being ones who can cry out with great intimacy “Abba! Father!” (4:6).

Paul specifically uses the label “sons of God through faith” in 3:26. In many places in Scripture “son” is an inclusive term that can mean sons & daughters; but here Paul uses a word that is purely masculine. Paul is calling all Christ followers—males and females—sons. But why? The analogy in 4:1-7 helps answer the question. To be an “heir” (4:1) in the day of Paul meant one had to be a male. Females could not inherit from their fathers, even if they had no brothers to pass the property, wealth, or name. What God has done through the person and work of Jesus is quite radical. **He has said that inheritance is not based on gender (3:28), but on a relationship to Jesus** who is Lord and Savior (3:29). **He is making the gospel an inclusive reality that extends beyond cultural limitations!**

**Sonship, inheritance based on faith in the person and work of Jesus, is the key to freedom in the gospel.** *What we gain from the gospel is not taken, but given.* Thus Paul’s encouragement to the Galatians is that they live in the freedom that is given, received as theirs through Jesus and not remain enslaved to the task of “taking”.

Paul uses the term “redeem” in 4:5 to describe what Christ has done for us. This term describes the process of freeing a slave; seeing someone for who they are (human) and not for what they do (slave). Redemption is what has happened to each of us that know and love Jesus. A price has been paid to free us, to see us for who we are (sons of God) and not for what we do.

“When I hear [the gospel story of redemption] I realize what worth I have. I am valuable beyond calculation. God singled me out and paid the price to set me free from slavery [a position of no real value]. Now that I am a son I am treated with all the undivided attention and special care that is inherent in such a relationship. There is no one quite like me. That doesn’t mean that I am better than any others, but it does mean that I am unique. **With such a sense of worth I experience freedom in deeper and wider dimensions than ever before.**” (Peterson, *TL*, 116)

What Paul says in these verses is that to live as ones who need the law to be “true Christians” is to remain as immature children of the Master who do not get to experience the full benefits and blessings of being the Master’s heir—no more than a slave does.

“Implicit in Paul’s position here [4:1-9] is that if we are ignorant of the real situation regarding ourselves and Christ, we will fail to live freely. If we are ignorant of ourselves—misconceive ourselves as slaves rather than as sons and daughters—we will either feel powerless or live in apathy, or we will fight every step of the way in a hopeless kind of fury that knows the chances of liberation are slim. If we are ignorant of Christ, even though we have a high regard of ourselves, we will not know that the time of our emancipation has come, and so we will live in reverie and fantasy, dreaming of future conquests. Everything of significance will be deferred to the future when we come of age. We will see ourselves perhaps as sons and daughters, but as minors nonetheless, incapable of responsible activity, inexperienced in acts of risk, fearful of suffering and pain. We will live in a narrow, albeit comfortable, world of secure convention.” (Peterson, *TL*, 112-113)

We are not someday going to be sons of God, we are now (4:4)! What is true of Christ is true of us—we live as he lives. This is the identity and reality Paul prays we realize and participate in when he cries out for us in Ephesians 1:15-23 and again in 3:14-19. We are God’s children because of Jesus now! We are free now! We have intimacy with the Father in the Spirit now! Why then be enslaved to regulations and ideologies that bind up hope and freedom from the present?

Do you ever wonder why so many Christians and churches lack joy and life? Perhaps one of the reasons is that they have failed to grasp the reality that in Christ they have all that they will ever need to be sons of God. They strive to follow all the religious regulations, behaviors, and practices that are required by their tradition, their culture, or even their own conscience; yet they never seem to have a Spirit that can cry out like a free, unabashed, fully loved and accepted child, “Abba! Father!”

In their pursuit of righteous living they have replaced relationship in Jesus with obedience to a set of rules and regulations and thus have remained enslaved in a perpetual life of immaturity (4:7-9). If they would only embraced their identity as heirs through God (4:7) and not by their works, then they could enjoy the immediate and intimate benefits and blessings of a relationship with their Father and not simply a master or employer. Fear, boredom, and fantasy would be replaced with freedom!

### *Questions to Chew On...*

1. If our relationship with Jesus is the means to our inheritance as heirs, then why is the Judaizers’ attempt to keep the Galatians under the law as a means of being “more mature Christians”, actually keeping them from maturing?
2. In what ways have you seen this form of perpetual immaturity manifest in the local church? How do you, your Gospel Community, and our church family avoid enslavement and live in our position as heirs through God?
3. How does this section help you better understand and articulate the gospel to those around you?

### *Out of Step with the Gospel | Manipulation & Unkindness*

Having grounded the Galatians in their current reality as sons of God, Paul exhorts them to not move from freedom to enslavement through the forms of religious observances (4:8-11). He notices that they are being manipulated by the Judaizers for, “They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them” (4:17).

Peterson tells the story of a man who enters a car dealership enticed by the idea of a new car. Unsettled in his decision process, really only browsing, he is greeted by the dealership staff with warmth and even friendship. He relaxes in a comfortable and expensive chair as he and the salesman talk life and cars. Every apprehension in buying is addressed and put asunder by the assurance of his new friend that he is not alone in this process and is buying into a family. Confident he purchases a new car and drives away satisfied in his purchase and standing.

A few weeks later his car begins to express unusual noises. Remembering his friend from the dealership, he returns to this new family to get the problem looked at. Instead of being greeted with warmth and friendship, he is addressed with frustration because he does not know what the issue might be. He finds himself not in a comfortable chair but in a cold waiting room with four other “family” members ahead of him in line. He leaves this time without confidence, satisfaction, or friendship.

The Galatians are in the same position with the Judaizers as this man with the car dealership.

“What appears as friendship is not always friendship at all; it may be a skilfully acted performance designed to put us in the frame of mind in which we will buy a product that will enrich the seller...The Galatian Christians were in the middle of the same experience, and Paul knew it was bound to turn out badly. They were not yet aware of the consequences, but it would not be long before they would be suffering them.” (Peterson, *TL*, 125)

Paul is attempting to warn the Galatians that what lies behind the enticing religious practices, observances, and exhortations of the Judaizers in reality is their desire to take from the Galatians and not be poured out for the Galatians.

Keller (112-113), translates verse 17 this way, “They are flattering and making much of you, so that you will flatter and make much of them...They are telling you what you want to hear; they are tickling your ears, pandering to you in order to get your loyalty.” The false teachers are,

“ministering not because they are sure of their salvation but in order to be sure of and win their salvation. Just as they are calling the Galatians to earn their salvation through works, so they are earning their salvation through works—it is a salvation by ministry.

This means that they needed, emotionally, to have people who emotionally need them. They needed their converts and their disciples to be wrapped up in the leaders, obeying and adoring them. Only this can assure them that they are good and great believers, truly blessed and favored by God.”

Paul did not need the Galatians to love him, but he loved them like a parent, groaning for them know Jesus in full (4:19). How does Paul know that such manipulation is happening? The response of the Galatians to Paul when he first came to them and their response to him now is out of step with the gospel.

In 4:12-16 Paul recounts the unconditional kindness that the Galatians showed Paul in the gospel and now he is their enemy for preaching the same gospel (v.16)! When false teachers manipulate others for their own gain, they often try and turn people from other teachers, friends, and even family (v. 19) in order to force a dependency on themselves. The unkind way in which the Galatians were viewing Paul was out of step with the gospel in which they had come to

know Paul. It showed that at the heart of what they were we being taught was not the love of Jesus but the “rightness” of the false teachers opposed to all others. If the real gospel leads to freedom and love in Jesus, then a false gospel leads to slavery and unkindness—even hatred.

**True freedom comes in trusting, not manipulating or controlling.** The freedom that the Galatians felt to pour themselves out for Paul in the gospel has been replaced with enslavement to self-protection against an “outsider”.

*Questions to Chew On...*

1. In what ways have you experienced the same kind of “manipulation” in the local church? How can you, your Gospel Community, and our church family avoid such manipulation? Why is this manipulation often hard to detect and therefore so dangerous?
2. How does your response to others who do not think like you demonstrate what gospel you are holding on to?
3. How does this section impact the way you pray for our church family and other churches in our area?

*Freedom to Trust*

In Paul’s perplexities with the Galatians (4:20), he recounts that he came to them as a man not in control of his own life and circumstances (4:13). It was only because Paul was ill that he even had the opportunity to preach the gospel to the Galatians. Yet, **what the Judaizers were preaching was that the Christian life was about control.**

Think about it, living by the works of the law put the Galatians in control of their relationship with God. It gave them a standard for living that had more to do with self-determination than dependence. Works allow them to advance in status with one another and with God.

“Such a religion puts us in control. We no longer have to live by faith, trusting God to accept us in mercy. **We no longer have to live in love toward our neighbour, trusting, often against all appearances, that that neighbor is God’s child.** What we are being offered is a security system in which we do not have to live by faith, will not have to trust in God, but can trust instead in ourselves...The mysteries of faith and the vulnerabilities of love are pushed into the background. **Doctrinal formulation, moral codes, emotional rituals function similarly to circumcision.**” (Peterson, *TL*, 128)

The Judaizers were selling a security system that kept them in control, masked with religious overtones and manipulating right behaviors that are fruitful when abiding in Jesus. To counter the Judaizers proposal for controlled religion, Paul reminds the Galatians of the story of Isaac and Ishmael and their mothers, Sarah and Hagar.

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, a people of God who would outnumber the stars and be a blessing to the world for God’s glory (Gen. 12). The problem was that Abraham and his wife Sarah were old and had no children.

As is the case often, the Lord’s promise did not come to fruition in the timing that Abraham and Sarah expected it. So, they decided to help God out, to take control of what was theirs by God’s promise and bring it about. Sarah gave her servant, a young and fertile women, to Abraham for the culturally accepted purpose of bearing an heir. Hagar soon conceived and gave birth to Ishmael. Abraham and Sarah thought they had done the righteous thing, helping God get his plan accomplished!

Soon, God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and Sarah became pregnant and birthed Isaac. Ishmael was born out of doubt, Abraham and Sarah not trusting God and trying to control their future with God. Isaac was born out of a promise by God. Genesis 21 tells us that God had Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael because there is no inheritance for those who take control, but only those who are “heirs according to promise” (3:29).

The Judaizers were using the story of Sarah and Hagar to say that only the nation of Israel, Jews, were truly God’s people; therefore the Galatian Christians must become Jewish Christians in order to receive the inheritance. Yet, **Paul turns their history back on them** and reminds them that behind the story of God’s choosing Abraham and Isaac, was the unfortunate story of taking control that led to the expulsion of a mother and child and ultimately ethnic tension between two people groups. The false teachers failed to recognize that their adherence to the Mosaic Law given out of Mount Sinai was actually putting them in fellowship with Ishmael and not Isaac.

What was being sold to the Galatians was a religion that kept the people in control, but actually excluded them from their inheritance. The unfortunate reality is that **many of us are prone to the same sales pitch.**

“If buying a new car will help us escape, we will buy the car. If anointing ourselves with a new cologne or perfume will banish boredom, we will anoint. If reading a new book will help us assert ourselves, we will read away. If embarking on a new program will put us in control of our relationship with God, we will sign up. Gerald May is blunt: ‘Even religion, the one timeless gate to beyond-the-self, becomes a technique. A means to an end for self-improvement. To create better behavior, to make more abiding happiness, to manufacture holiness. There are times when through religion one comes close to turning over self-control. Offering it up. Giving up. Sacrificing delusion. But even then, most often, it becomes the turning over of a defective self to the ultimate fixer in the sky, in the hopes of getting a rebuilt and perfected self in return. This is not going beyond self, nor is it giving up. **It’s using God to help get back in control.**’” (Peterson, *TL*, 132)

James speaks of being self-deceived when we only hear of the word and not doers (1:22-25). Yet, to be doers who do not “get back in control” we have to keep in mind that it is God who has done it, it is God who is in control and that we are asked to supplement our faith **only after** we have faith and remain in faith (2 Pet. 1:1-11). The Galatians were prone to the sales pitch of “take control”, so are we. Paul will counter their sales pitch with his own in just a few more verses: “walk by the Spirit” (5:16).

*Questions to Chew On...*

1. How can religion become a “security system”? What is the danger of finding security in a system and not a relationship?
2. Have you ever relied on yourself to make God’s promises come to fruition like Abraham? What were the consequences?
3. In what ways are you taking control of your relationship with God right now?
4. Describe the differences in behavior, attitude, and actions between being a child of the flesh—i.e. religious control—and a child of promise. How does that shape the way in which you live as a Gospel Community?

## Galatians | Chapter Five

James calls the perfect law—God’s word and his way for our living—“the law of liberty” and thus encourages you and me to persevere in liberty in such a manner that we become “doers who act” (James 1:25). Paul is encouraging the Galatians in the same way. He is saying, “Don’t forget who you are in Christ! Don’t forget you have been set free. Don’t be like one who looks in the mirror and forgets. Rather, be ones who remembers whose you are and lives in the freedom and blessing of that identity!”

### *Standing Free*

Paul is encouraging us to stand in the freedom we have in Christ. Peterson comments,

“In Christ we are free to take a stand. A space has been cleared in the thick forest and brambles of necessity from which we can freely respond to God, freely grow in the image of God, freely develop in relationships of forgiveness. Having been provided the space, we are free to take a stand there. Taking a stand fights drifting with the tide. Taking a stand contrasts with being carried and coddled by the culture. Taking a stand means standing on our own two feet.” (TL, 135)

But how? How do we live freely in Christ? What does freedom really mean? Paul answers the questions of standing free in two ways: (1) he reminds us what freedom is not, and (2) he provides for us qualifiers of freedom.

### *Disguised Slavery*

There is a way of living that appears free but in reality is actually disguised slavery. For the Galatians, the disguised slavery came in two forms: legalism and licentiousness. Both **religious slavery** and **idolatrous slavery** were making their way into the church family. The same is true today.

The danger of disguised slavery is that when we submit to it, are yoked by it (v. 1), we lose all advantage we have in Christ (v. 2), even severing our relationship with Christ (v. 4). This is why Paul is adamant about his warning against the false teachers, even going so far as to curse them (1:8-9) and hoping that the knife of circumcision would slip and finish the job (v. 12)!

**Religious Slavery.** The first disguised slavery Paul addresses is religious slavery. For Paul, freedom in Christ is not found in taking on the yoke (an oppressive power) of religious behaviors, observances, and festivals summed up in “circumcision”. In fact to take on such actions in order to be “justified by the law” (v. 4) is actually to miss the entire point of the gospel, even removing the purpose of Christ’s death (v. 11). Paul has been addressing this issue from the outset of his letter and he reiterates, if not sums up his point here: it is not by works but by faith through the Spirit that we obtain the righteousness of Christ; nothing else can be added to it.

Religious slavery is easy to fall into (see Galatians | Chapter Four), and it only takes a small number of people and/or a minor addition to gospel freedom to infect the entire church family (v. 9).

### *Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) How does religion enslave? What advantages in Christ are removed when we seek justification by the law?
- 2) What is the “leaven” of religion that you are most susceptible to? Your Gospel Community? Our church family?



**Idolatrous Slavery.** The second disguised slavery Paul address is idolatrous slavery. Part of the issue in the churches of Galatia was that many within the church family had come to faith in Christ out of pagan religions. Likewise, the culture in Galatia emphasized the fulfilment of desires as an expected way of life. Paul knows that when he encourages a renunciation of religious slavery, that there will likely be a tendency for the Galatian Christians to use their “freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” (v. 13). Yet to do so would simply be to trade one slave master (the law) for another (the self).

Idolatrous slavery is often disguised as the “replacement Trinity”. Essentially we are making our wants, needs, and feelings (i.e. “desires of the flesh”) primary in how we view God, interpret his revelation, and interact with him and other humans.

To make one’s own desires paramount, especially in reference to his or her relationship with God, is to make one’s self an idol—something worshiped as equal to or greater than God. Yet, Paul reminds the Galatians that do so is to miss out on a living in relationship with God (v. 21). Seeking the desires of the flesh in whatever manifestation they appear, is to lose the same advantage in Christ lost by religious slavery. Those who are enslaved to the desires of their flesh are no less opposed to the gospel than those who add works to the gospel (v. 17).

#### *Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) How does self-centered idolatry enslave? What advantages in Christ are removed when we pursue the desires of our flesh?
- 2) In what ways does self-centered idolatry find influence in your life? In your Gospel Community? In our church family?

In either case, disguised slavery binds the enslaved from experiencing the freedom that is found in a right relationship with God the Father in Christ Jesus through the Spirit. So how do we ensure that we are not hindered in our running through the open field of freedom in Christ Jesus (v.7)? Paul gives us two qualifiers for standing free that keep us from enslavement.

#### *Qualifying Freedom*

It may seem counterintuitive to put qualifiers on “freedom”. After all, isn’t freedom experienced only when there are no limitations? Paul tells the church in Rome, dealing with a similar issue, that the reality of our existence is that we are all slaves to sin apart from our relationship with God. Having been freed from sin by Christ, we are now enslaved to righteousness.

“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” (Rom. 6:16-18)

Essentially, Paul is saying that true freedom comes not from self-sovereignty which leads to destruction and ultimately temporal and eternal death, but in living a life of obedience, of kingdom living. To be fully human is to be a human in right relationship with our Creator, living as he has uniquely designed you to be for his glory, the good of those he has placed you among, and for your joy. **Sin, self-sovereignty, is actually an enslavement to a less than human existence.**

Our culture tells us that we are limitless, that we can do anything we want to do and become anything we want to become. But hear the lies of the enemy in such thinking. **Such delusion not only encourages self-sovereignty, it**

**also removes the uniqueness and beauty of God's creation.** When everyone can do anything and be anyone then the world become generalized, standardized, and homogenized. We lose the unique way in which God has created each person, with limitation and abilities for a purpose. If you think about it, limitation is actually a quality of uniqueness that demonstrates God's glorious creativity.

*Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) How does sin enslave us into a less than human existence?
- 2) In what ways can embracing limitations help free us?

God has determined our limitations for his glory and our good (Acts 17:26-28). Therefore Paul can put two qualifiers on freedom that actually keep us living in the freedom found in being fully human in relationship to God: love and the Holy Spirit.

**Love.** The first qualifier for freedom that Paul gives the Galatians is found in verses 13-15. Christ has called us to freedom, yet that freedom does not lead us to self-absorbed living but rather to serving one another "through love" (v. 13). After all, loving God and loving others is the summation of law (v. 14) and to fail to love one another demonstrates that we do not understand the gospel (v. 15).

Love for God and love for others qualifies freedom. Freedom that leads to the abuse of others, valuing others only for what they can give you or do for you, or discriminating against others who are different than you; is actually no freedom at all. Such freedom only demonstrates that we are still enslaved to our own lusts and desires. Paul says it another way in his second letter to the Corinthians,

"For the love of Christ controls us...that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (5:14-15, see also Phil. 2:1-11).

To be enslaved to righteousness (Rom 6: 18), means that our love for God and subsequently our love for God's creation, becomes the controlling factor in the decisions we make, in how we treat others, and how we approach difficulty, trials, joys, and abundance.

Because we are free from sin, free from the bondage of self-sovereignty, we can abandon all fear of loss, fear of hurt, fear of no-control and actually serve one another in the same manner in which God served us through love in Jesus (Jn. 13:2-35). Because we are free in God, loved by God, accepted by God, sustained by God; we are free to give of ourselves to others.

*Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) In what ways does freedom in Christ allow us to serve others through love?
- 2) In what ways does love (for God and others) qualify freedom?
- 3) How does this type of freedom look in your home, your Gospel Community, our church family, and our neighborhoods?

**The Spirit.** The second qualifier that Paul gives for freedom is that true freedom, freedom that produces a fullness of our humanity comes only in the Spirit. One scholar notes,

"Now I am free to be who God wants me to be and to do what God wants me to do. There is nothing I have to do to win God's acceptance. Now that God has accepted me through Jesus Christ, I am free in him. And this **freedom is the key to gospel holiness.**" (Ryken, 195)



Freedom is the key to gospel holiness. Freedom in Christ actually produces something in us, it transforms us into our most complete humanity in relation to God. But **only if we are able to *continue to live in such freedom***; which is why Jesus prayed for us to be sanctified in the truth and died so that the Spirit of truth might come to sanctify us (Jn. 17:15-19).

In order for us to truly experience freedom, we have to live in relationship with God; not merely in ideas about God or religious practices for God. The only way we can be in relationship with God, immediately and intimately, is if we “walk by the Spirit” (v. 16), are “led by the Spirit” (v. 18), and “live by the Spirit” (v. 25). Notice the immediacy and intimacy of such a relationship. The Spirit is with us in the midst of every moment struggles (v.16). He goes with us, better, we go with him. He does not come in like a fairy god mother in our times of need, but rather leads us and lives with us in every moment of ordinary life.

We can only experience freedom when we are intimately connected to God by the Spirit. The same Spirit that gives us faith to find life in Christ (v. 5).

*Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) Why can true freedom only be experienced in relationship with God?
- 2) How does the immediacy and the intimacy of the Spirit encourage you?

*Fruit vs. Work*

Notice in Paul’s exhortation to remain free by being tethered to the Holy Spirit that he contrasts the “works of the flesh” (v. 19) with the “fruit of the Spirit” (v. 22). To produce a life that devalues humans by using them (i.e. sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality), that looks to human designed means for a better life (i.e. idolatry, sorcery), that leads to broken relationships (i.e. enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions), and ends in hopeless attempts to fill what is missing (i.e. envy, drunkenness and orgies); is actually laborious—it is work. It is the bi-product of our best pursuits when left alone in the world by God (Rom. 1:18-32).

Yet, a life of peace, love, joy, kindness, fulfilment, and freedom; is actually not something we produce, but is the bi-product of our relationship with God in Jesus through the Spirit (v.24-25). Fruit is produced not by our own labour, even if we plant the seed and water we cannot make the plant grow and yield fruit. Only God can do that.

It seems that a life lived pursuing work, whether manifesting in religious slavery or idolatrous slavery, is tiresome! Yet to live a life of freedom in Christ, while there will indeed be work, is actually joyous! Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when he said,

“Come to me, all who are labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30)

*Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) How does the comparison of fruit vs. work influence the way in which you share the good news of Jesus with those who do not know him?
- 2) In what ways are you labouring and not resting (abiding) in Jesus?

## Galatians | Chapter Six

There are many things in Galatians that at first taste are sweet as honey but eventually cause bitterness once they begin to be digested. Take for example the idea of freedom. Paul tells us that we have freedom in Christ (2:4), freedom to not be controlled by others, by a set of behaviors, by religious practices, by our pasts or even our passions and desires. Free indeed are we in Jesus! How sweet the taste of freedom upon our lips. Yet, as Paul continues he reminds us that freedom is not endless pursuit of whatever satisfies, but is actually limited by our relationship with God (i.e. being “led by the Spirit” -5:18) and our love for others (5:13-15).

Freedom keeps us in dependent relationship with God and with one another. That means freedom actually requires sacrifice and selflessness. Freedom is costly, but worth it. Yet the cost of freedom, the death of our “flesh with its passions and desires” is a difficult reality to digest.

Our tendency when processing this freedom is to either create a set of rules that keep God at a distance from our everyday roles and relationships and that limit how much we give and take from others. Or, to simply use God and others for our own benefit with little-to-no regard for them. In the end, the sweet freedom found in Christ turns out to upset our sin lined stomachs as we keep eating.

Keller comments that if we chew on Galatians long enough, we realize how offensive (i.e. difficult to digest) Paul’s letter really is. He says,

“The thing Paul says here is the hardest thing we possibly can come to grips with; it’s the most difficult thing to really learn. As we’re going to see, what Paul is saying is these Galatians, who **thought they believed the gospel, were losing touch with it.** They were losing it, and they were going back into slavery. They didn’t really understand the gospel. Of course, to say that to people who are professing Christians, who have been baptized ... You say, ‘Of course, I understand the gospel! I’ve been baptized.’

**The point of the book of Galatians is *you think you know the gospel, and you don’t.*** You think you apply the gospel, and you don’t. You think you understand the gospel and have worked it into your heart, but you don’t. In fact, I think we’re going to see this as we go on. Paul is saying, ‘If you think you understand the gospel, that proves you don’t understand the gospel, and if you say, ‘Oh, I hardly understand the gospel,’ that means you’re getting it.’” (*The Rescue*)

Paul concludes his letter with two final morsels to chew on that emphasize Keller’s point. He is saying to the Galatians, to you and me, that if we really get the gospel than we will embrace the paradoxical, costly freedom of Christ. You will press through the indigestion to let the food do its work. If you do not get the gospel, you will keep living in a way to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ; you’ll taste the sweetness but never benefit from the bitterness. We will take an antacid (religion or idolatry), trying to suppress the reaction to what we have been eating, rather than recognizing that we are being transformed, indeed actually need to be discomforted for a bit in order to fully enjoy and profit from our dinner.

### *Free to Be Yourself with Others*

Paul ends his explanation on the limits of freedom in chapter five exhorting us to be ones who “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (5:25). If the gospel came to us by the Spirit and we are ones who find life only in the Spirit, **let us then be ones who walk as if we let our relationship with God influence every aspect of our lives.** This is Paul’s way of repeating Jesus’ “greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:37-40). It is Paul’s way of summing up what freedom in Christ means. It means we are finally able to live in right relationship with God as he has created us to be. We get to finally be ourselves, fully ourselves in God!

And then Paul says, “Let us not become conceited provoking one another, envying one another” (5:26). What? Where did this little random warning come from?

Notice what Paul does 5:26; he moves from the concept of limited freedom (by the Spirit and love) to practical examples of limited freedom in everyday roles and relationships. **5:26-6:10, is Paul helping us practically see what it looks like to have crucified our flesh and have found freedom in walking in the Spirit.** Paul moves from finding yourself in God to being who you are in God with others. This freedom that we have found in Christ always translates into life with other people; particularly those who have found the same freedom in Christ Jesus.

5:26 only seems out of place if we miss what Paul is doing here. But once we see that he is **transitioning from conceptual freedom to lived freedom**, we can begin to understand why he moves from walking in the Spirit to conceit, restoration, watching and testing ourselves, and bearing burdens and loads.

Paul uses a word for conceited (*kenodoxoi*) that means “vain-glorious” or “empty of honor” or “to boast where there is nothing to boast about”. The idea is someone who is prideful but has no bases for pride. Such a person is insecure in their identity and thus has to provoke (challenge) others that they deem weaker in order to gain some reason to boast, **or** be envious of others who are more gifted, talented, happy, righteous, etc. than them (i.e. have something to actually boast about). As Paul makes clear (6:12-13), it is often the most “religious” who actually find themselves conceited; confident without a foundation for their confidence.

A person who is conceited is person who is not free. **Everyone they meet is either someone to dominate or compete against.** They are always in the business of comparing themselves to others. Such a person is unable to truly be themselves, because they are never satisfied in who they are, sure of who they are, and always rediscovering their identity in comparison to others. Their foundation for boasting is empty, vain, and non-existent.

Conceit can manifest as outright hubris or as self-deprecation. Either way, there is deep insecurity in the conceited person that keeps them from being one who finds freedom to selflessly love God and others. **They love God and others like they love themselves, fickle!**

In contrast to conceited person is one who is “spiritual” (6:1), one who is walking in the Spirit. This person is confident in who they are in Jesus because they are filled with all that is necessary to know in both their limitations and strengths that they are loved by God, created by God, and given purpose in relationship with God (5:22-25). Therefore, they are able to see those walking in sin and “restore [them] in a spirit of gentleness”. They do not see a broken brother and seek to dominate him by holding his sin over his head and in so doing giving reason to boast of their superiority. Rather, they walk alongside a sister, bearing her burdens (6:2) thus living in the way which Jesus demonstrated and demanded (Jn. 13:2-35). **A spiritual person is comfortable enough in his or her own skin that he or she is able to involve themselves deeply in the lives of others; not using them for selfish gain or as a means of self-righteousness (6:3).**

In order to carry one another’s burdens, in order to restore; there must be **shared life**. One author writes,

“You cannot help with a burden unless you come very close to the burdened person, standing virtually in their shoes, and putting your strength under the burden so its weight is distributed on both of you, lightening the load of the other.”  
(Keller, 168)

**A conceited person cannot restore in gentleness** (they can ignore or condone as masks of gentleness, but they have no ability to confront without pride or fear) **nor can they share their burdens with others** (though some do “share” but not for encouragement but for identity, to play the victim is the only role they know). Therefore; they can never be free. Their independence keeps them from being who they really are in Jesus, and thus they become nothing

in themselves (6:3). Their boast in serving others is vain-glorious boast; for they can only boast in what God has done in their neighbor's life and not their own (6:4).

At the same time, a spiritual person is one who “tests his own work” (6:4) and “bears his own load” (6:5). On initial reading of this section, many see a contradiction between Paul's exhortation to “Bear one another's burdens” (6:2) and “each will have to bear his own load” (6:5). But when taken in context of distinguishing a spiritual person and a conceited person, the contradiction vanishes.

You see, a conceited person not only seeks to provoke or dominate others to demonstrate their own value and worth, often times they are also envious of others, comparing themselves to others. The insecurity of the conceited person who compares often keeps them from experiencing the relationship and plan God has for their lives. Again, if their “work” (6:4) is done in order to gain righteousness, to find confidence in who they are—whether out of pride or envy—then they actually miss out on what God is doing in and through them. They are so self-absorbed that they cannot see God working through them, despite them. So Paul reminds the conceited person to be yourself with others in verses 5. Keller argues that Paul is telling the conceited, thus non-spiritual, person to “measure ourselves, in a sense, against ourselves” (170).

The Lord has given each person a unique “load” to carry: physically, spiritually, relationally, ethnically, economically, mentally, in our family make up and history, gifting, talent, opportunities, even the time and place of our existence. We need not compare our load with others, but embrace who we are in Jesus—with every limitation and strength that comes in our God-given image and creation. ***To walk in the Spirit is to embrace who God has made us to be in-and-of ourselves and share that life with others for his glory and our mutual good.***

#### *Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) In your own words, describe the difference between a conceited person and a spiritual person based on Galatians 5:26-6:5.
- 2) How does the gospel give you freedom to be yourself with others? What does that freedom look like in your Gospel Community?

#### *Free to Mutually Submit*

Paul continues moving from conceptual freedom to living freedom in verses 6-10. The gospel frees us to be ourselves with others, in relationship with others that keeps us from having to fight one another and always be comparing ourselves to one another. Yet it only does so if we embrace the freedom of mutual submission.

Peterson (*TL*, 174) translates verse 6 this way,

“Be very sure now, you who have been trained to a self-sufficient maturity, that you generously enter into a common life with those who have trained you, sharing all the good things that you experience.”

Law and licentiousness lead to self-sufficiency, or at least the allusion of it. Think about it, one who submits to the slavery of law can become an expert in such a lifestyle. He or she can become so adapt at living “righteously” that they no longer need others or even a personal, immediate, and intimate relationship with God. Life has been reduced to mathematics and they are mathematicians.

Likewise, someone who has submitted to the slavery of unlimited freedom in Jesus soon loses any need for that Jesus or God's family; especially if they inhibit any of their freedoms. Life has been reduced to the bubble of their world and they are the masters of their domain.

But, if someone really gets the gospel, really walks in the Spirit and is led by the Spirit, he or she realizes that,

“Freedom is not self-sufficiency but a shared life. The ideal is not independence but interdependence. The goal is not efficient operating units but freely open and loving, freely giving and receiving human beings...We are no longer imprisoned by our strengths; we are no longer paralyzed by our needs. **We acquire a sense of mutuality as we help and are helped.** We plunge into a reciprocity of giving and receiving.” (Peterson, *TL*, 175)

Paul describes mutual submission most vividly in Ephesians 5:21. In the midst of his exhortation to once again walk in the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), he argues that mutual submission comes out of a “fear of Christ”, a recognition of who Christ is, who we are in Christ and what Christ is calling us into. ***Mutual submission is a decision to die to self, out of love for another stemming from fear of the Lord.*** Such submission does not negate authority structures and roles (see Eph. 5:22-6:9), but rather is the foundational evidence of the Spirit's empowerment that allows for our everyday roles and relationships to be lived faithfully and abundantly. Abundant life is not a life lived completely free in isolation, but ***free in the choice to live for others***, for God first and then our neighbors.

Paul is saying in Galatians 6:6 that when we are confident in who we are in Jesus we can share our strengths and blessings with one another as ones who realize that we need each other. The only way for us to walk in step with such gospel living is to sow the seeds of shared life in Christ (6:8-10) and not the seeds of self-sufficiency (6:7)—also known as selfishness.

Mutual submission is not easy (6:9), but the opportunities are right in front of us each day in the family of God (6:10). Every day we have the opportunity to walk in step with the gospel, to walk in the Spirit as we share life with those around us, as we seek to love God first and then our neighbors in mutual submission. Freedom comes in walking in the “good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

#### *Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) Why is the concept of mutual submission in Christ such a difficult reality to live?
- 2) What opportunities to mutually submit are you failing to take advantage of? Why?

#### *Free to Die and to Live*

Paul offers one final morsel to the Galatians to chew on as they attempt to walk in this free life in Christ. If the limitations of freedom have not been difficult enough to digest up to this point; this final bite will surely do the trick of getting the digestion processes working overtime. Paul says two very important things in this section.

First, he says that he “boasts” in the cross of Jesus. By boast, Paul means glories, finds a foundation for his identity, confidence, hope, and way of life. Peterson argues that,

“Paul extends his boast: not only will he glory in the cross of Christ because there it is revealed that God has entered into this existence where no one is free, where we are all imprisoned in the law of sin and death, but he will also glory in it because the meaning of his own life is revealed there too, for this same cross is that by which ‘the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.’” (*TL*, 189)

If the cross is the glory of God. If the cross is the bases for our identity, confidence, hope and way of life; then no matter what the world throws at us, we are free to receive what God does for us.

“Let the world do its worst, and when it has done its worst, we are free to find and experience what God does. Or let the world do its best, and, when that best turns out not to be good enough, we are free to experience what God does. Let me do my worst, and, when I have done my worst, I experience what God does. Or let me do my best, and, when my best is not good enough, I am free for what God does.” (TL, 190)

***The cross means that God is not scared of our worst nor pleased with our best.*** It means that we cannot do enough to keep him from us nor can we do enough to gain his favor. ***The cross means that all we can do is receive what God has done.*** And in so doing, we are free. Free from guilt and shame. Free from self-righteousness and insecurity.

Free to receive what God has done, and this is Paul’s second profound statement: **what God has done is recreate.** Paul says that boasting in the cross, crucifying the world’s worst and best leads to “a new creation” (6:13).

Dying to the world (6:14) leads to living with God (6:15). We are free to die because of the cross. We are free to live because Jesus lives. Life is only found in death (Jn. 11:25-26, 12:25-26). In the crucifying of our flesh and the living by the Spirit. Law and licentiousness, circumcision and uncircumcised, have nothing to do with life with God. They rob life through enslavement, but when we realize that we cannot do enough to earn or negate the historical fact that Jesus died and rose again; then we are free to live in the peace and mercy of an immediate and intimate relationship with God (6:16).

Perhaps this is why it is so hard for gospel concept to move to gospel living,

“The gospel is offensive to liberal-minded people, who charge the gospel with intolerance, because it states that the only way to be saved is through the cross. The gospel is offensive to the conservative-minded people, because it states that, without the cross, ‘good’ people are in as much trouble as ‘bad’ people. Ultimately the gospel is offensive because the cross stands against all schemes of self-salvation.” (Keller, 180)

Paul ends with the exhortation to die that you might live. Freedom in Christ is freedom to die to the world and to our flesh (to bear the marks of Christ), and now tired of all the nonsense arguments spouted by those who refused to press through the indigestion (6:12), fully believing he has given us all we need to avoid enslavement, he simply says I “will **talk no more about freedom but simply live it**” (Peterson, TL, 195). May we do the same!

*Questions to Chew On...*

- 1) In your own words, explain why you think the gospel is offensive to so many people.
- 2) What does the world being crucified to you and you to the world look like in your everyday roles and relationships?
- 3) How do you move the gospel from concept to lived? How do you help others do the same?
- 4) Write a one paragraph summary of the book of Galatians and share it with those in your Gospel Community.



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