

*“Don’t Throw Away Your Freedom”*

Galatians Overview

July 3, 2011

Freedom illus: Emancipation Proclamation (a very similar scenario was taking place in Galatia regarding the believer’s spiritual freedom).

Our scripture challenge for July is the book of Galatians. If you were to sit down, open up your Bible to the book of Galatians and just begin to read, you might find yourself suddenly getting lost in the Jewish language of law and circumcision. So this morning I want to give you an introduction to the book of Galatians that I am praying will help you build a bridge from Galatians to your daily life.

**Background:**

The book of Galatians was written to combat a group of false teachers called Judaizers. These are Jews that embraced Christ but falsely taught that Gentiles (non-Jews) had to first become a Jew before they could become a Christian. They insisted on keeping all of the old law including circumcision. They added Christ to all their religious ways but failed to see Him as the fulfillment of God’s plan. After Paul had spread the gospel to Galatia, these Judaizers came in behind him and began teaching that a person was not just saved by grace through faith in Christ but was also required to shoulder all the burden of Judaism’s ceremonial law.

The book of Galatians was written as a defense of the most fundamental doctrine at the heart of the gospel: ***Justification by Faith—that we are made right before God only on the basis of faith in Christ.***

Now you might be thinking, “Okay, as a Gentile myself, I should really appreciate the fact that I don’t have to go through all the rites of Judaism and can just follow Christ by faith. But I’ve never even had to think about how circumcision and ceremonial law relates to my spiritual life. Isn’t this a pretty outdated issue?” Well, let me present the benefit of Galatians to you in a different way.

**Extremes:**

There are two extremes to which people might err in their faith regarding God’s grace.

1. **Presuming upon God’s grace** (i.e. James challenge).

To presume upon God’s grace means to take it for granted. We assume that God’s grace will be there to bail us out, in spite of the fact that we are not taking responsibility for our own choices before God.

There are a lot of people in this camp. They are the people who say, “Well, I’m saved by grace so I just have to believe in Jesus” yet they give very little serious consideration to the quality of their spiritual life or their daily relationship with the Lord.

Any of us can get caught in this trap. For example, we stare temptation in the face and we want to talk ourselves into it by saying, “no one will know and God will forgive me.” Yet we are setting ourselves up for God’s loving yet painful discipline.

A person who doesn’t cherish grace probably hasn’t truly grasped grace.

The extreme of presumption is a deceptive and dangerous slope. But the book of James stands as a corrective to this extreme. James says, “faith without works is dead!” (James 2:17-26). James warned us about being hearers of the word and not doers of the word. The message of James is that true saving faith produces real change in our lives. God’s grace never undermines the fear of the Lord.

2. **Working for God’s favor** (i.e. Galatians challenge).

There are a lot of people in this camp too. But these individuals are conscious of their spiritual lives and their choices. They do all kinds of wonderful things (going to church; helping others; making moral

choices). But the problem is that they are doing all of those things as an attempt to earn God's favor. These folks work really hard at living a "good life" because they want God to accept them, but they fail to understand that it's impossible to please God without utter dependence and trust in Jesus Christ.

Illus: Trip to Colorado. You can pack all your belongings in the car then get behind it and push as hard as you can. You may be initially impressed with your ability to push the car. Of all the other cars on the freeway you are working the hardest, but you'll never be able to push that car up the Colorado mountains. You need to get in the car and be carried to Colorado. In the same way, many people try to push their spiritual car when they need to get into the car of grace and be carried to their destination of heaven.

Illus: trowel

This extreme of human effort is also very dangerous because we can present ourselves as very religious people and yet be trusting in ourselves and our own efforts rather than in the grace of Jesus Christ which alone can save us.

The book of Galatians is a corrective to this extreme. It brings us back to the reality that we are not acceptable to God on the basis of what we do for Him but on the basis of what He has done for us. It is an essential reminder for us to not lean on our own human effort, performance, or even our religious rituals. Our trust should singularly lean on Jesus Christ Himself.

Paul goes right to the heart of this argument in Galatians 2:16: "*And yet we Jewish Christians know that we become right with God, not by doing what the law commands, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be accepted by God because of our faith in Christ-- and not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be saved by obeying the law*" (NLT).

Both extremes miss the centrality of Christ and His gospel. Paul's message in Galatians is that we are justified by faith. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone—He's the center and He's sufficient.

And it's right here in the center where Paul lives His life. "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal 2:20).

And when we live our lives on the basis of the grace we receive in Jesus, the outcome is a Spirit-filled life. "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*" (Gal. 5:22-23).

#### **Overview:**

The heart of Paul's argument is summed up in Galatians 2:16—"For no one will ever be saved by obeying the law" (NLT).

To drive his point home, Paul takes us all the way back to Abraham who first received a promise from God that He would bring salvation to his descendents. He reminds us in 3:6 that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. In other words, Abraham was made right with God on the basis of faith. This was 430 years before God gave the law to Moses.

Take note of the order of these things:

1. The promise to Abraham which could only be applied through faith.
2. The law.
3. Christ, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and the Savior of those who would put their faith in Him.

So why was the law given in between these two? The Law was given to show us our need for saving faith. The whole point of the law was to reveal God's

holy standards in such a way that we would come to understand that our human effort is completely insufficient.

- 3:19 ~ “**Well then, why was the law given? It was given to show people how guilty they are. But this system of law was to last only until the coming of the child to whom God's promise was made.**” (NLT)
- 3:24 ~ “*The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came.*” (NLT)

So God gave a promise to Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (i.e. Gentiles). That promise was fulfilled in Christ who brought salvation to all who put their faith in Him. But between the promise and the fulfillment God gave us the law to show us just how sinful our hearts are so that we would see our need to put our faith in Christ to save us rather than trusting in our own deficient efforts.

*“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir”* (Gal. 4:4-7).

This is the good news of the Gospel! Christ came to redeem us and give us a new relationship with God. And if He has freed us from sin, then the law is of no consequence to us. (i.e. If you drive the speed limit, you don’t have to worry about the law. If you have violated the law, but justice has been served, then the law is no longer hostile against you).

These Galatians had believed the good news that Christ had died to save them from the penalty of the law. But the false teachers had come in and persuaded them to subject themselves again to the law. This is why Paul says in 5:1, “*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*”

Then Paul goes on to give them a further challenge. If you really want to fulfill the law, it’s not by going back to your former way of life (mastered by

the law). Rather, he says in 5: 13-14, “through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled...in one statement... “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” **Love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Then he goes on in vs. 16-18 to say that the way to avoid condemnation of the law is to walk by the Spirit because “if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law” (vs. 18). **Following the Spirit is the fulfillment of the law.**

Ultimately, it’s the fruit of the Spirit that Paul wants to see in the lives of His readers, because the fruit of the Spirit is the evidence that you stand in the center of God’s grace. Paul contrasts life in the Spirit with life in the flesh in chapter 5. If you go to the extreme of presuming upon God’s grace, you are living your life in the flesh—a life that is in opposition to the Holy Spirit (according to 5:17). The other extreme of seeking to earn God’s favor with religious performance can also be done strictly in the flesh just as the false teachers in Galatia had done. But when you truly stand in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, your life will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In Gal. 5:22-23, Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit. These are the characteristics that we can expect from the Holy Spirit when He is visible in our lives (just like I anticipate a certain disposition from you each time I meet you based on your personality and my experience with you)—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

So Paul’s admonition to the Galatians and to us is to stand in the saving grace of Jesus Christ so that our lives are no longer governed by endless laws and regulations but rather mastered by the Spirit. And the result is a life of love, an extension of lovingkindness to others. That’s why Paul ends his letter with such practical admonitions like...

- “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*” (Gal. 6:2).
- “*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers*” (Gal. 6:9-10).

In Christ you are free—not free to presume upon God’s grace, but free from the bondage of sin, free from the law, free to follow the Spirit, free to love and serve one another. Don’t throw away your freedom!

As we come to the Lord’s table this morning, we don’t want to presume upon God’s grace. So we come examining our hearts in a spirit of repentance. Yet we also recognize that we could never earn God’s grace (even with our repentance) but we must receive His gracious pardon. We come, celebrating life in the Spirit that has been granted to us seeking to walk in His fullness.

*Have you been walking in the flesh or walking by the Spirit? Have you been presuming upon God’s grace? Have you been trying to earn God’s favor? Or are you standing in the grace of what Jesus has done for you?*

#### **Communion:**

##### **Bread:**

*Gal 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.*

*Gal 6:14—“But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

##### **Cup:**

*Gal 5:1—“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”*

*Gal 5:22-23—“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*