

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

*Living in line with the
truth of the gospel (Gal 2:14)*

Leaders' Guide

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How to Use this Material

This study of Galatians is organized into 13 units. Each unit consists of two sections: 1) a Bible study and 2) a Reflection or Exercise section. The first section studies a portion of the Galatians text, while the second section takes some concept from the Scripture and helps you get a better understanding of it ("Reflection") and/or to apply it practically to your life ("Exercise").

There are three ways to use this material to grow in Christ. I will list the ways in ascending order of profitability and helpfulness.

An individual could use this workbook by first buying a popular commentary. I suggest John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, The Bible Speaks Today Series. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968). Then, reading both the Galatians text and the commentary, go through the whole workbook yourself.

An informal mini-group of two or three people could also decide to do this together. In this case you should buy the Stott commentary and go through the workbook, meeting periodically simply to share the most important things you have been learning. This is much better than the first approach, because it injects a level of accountability and community into your study.

A home fellowship group with an equipped leader is by far the best context for the use of this workbook. A life changed by the Gospel happens best in a balanced community of worship and friendship as well as study. The concepts in this material are life-changing but take a great deal of reflection in order to grasp them. They will be grasped much better in a small group community that meets regularly. If you want to truly understand and grow through the material in this workbook--get thee into a home fellowship group!

Leader's notes:

How to Use this Material

Materials

This study of Galatians includes 1) a **workbook** for every participant and 2) a **leader's guide** (which you are reading) for the group leader and any co-leaders or apprentices. The workbook contains 13 units, each with a Bible study section and a Reflection or Exercise section. The Leader's Guide includes all that is printed in the workbook and also leader's background notes (on the Biblical texts) and suggested answers to all the Biblical study questions.

Planning your Weekly Session

The material assumes that a group has two hours to meet. (If you do not have that amount of time the leader must adapt what is here.) In order to give enough time for worship, sharing, and prayer, don't let the Bible Study and Reflection/Exercise (combined) go more than 1 hour at the most. Forty-five minutes would be better. In general, there is more material in these 13 units than a small group can cover every week. This leads to the following important guidelines:

- If you really want to cover everything:
 - All group members *must* read the Reflection/Exercise and write out their answers to the questions before they come to the meeting. The more studious groups could also read the Galatians text and fill in answers to the Bible study questions.
 - You can then give the majority of the time to discussing the Galatians text using the Bible study questions. After that you can more briefly share and discuss the best things each person got out of the Reflection/Exercise during the week.
 - Occasionally you can reverse this. You may give less time to the Bible study and more time to the Reflection/Exercise. In any case, prep must be completed beforehand if you want to touch every part of the material in your group meetings.
 - Another way to cover all the material is to take more than 13 sessions to get through it.
- If your group cannot make the commitment to prior preparation:
 - Each week the leader should choose to focus on *either* the Bible study *or* the Reflection/Exercise.
 - If on a given week you opt for the Bible Study, you should use the study questions to lead the discussion and then encourage the participants to do the Reflection/Exercise on their own. You may wish to summarize what it is about, pointing out how it fits in with what the Galatians text has been teaching.
 - If you opt to focus on the Reflection/Exercise, you may briefly read the Biblical text for the week and summarize it. Then you can have participants read aloud parts (if it is long) or all (if it is short) of the weekly Reflection/Exercise and use the questions to stimulate and guide the discussion.
 - The following Exercise/Reflection sections are probably the most important. Keep these in mind as you plan your studies.

Lesson 1 - Reflection: Luther's Preface to Galatians

Lesson 3 - Reflection: The Two Prodigals

Lesson 4 - Exercise: "In Line" with the Gospel

Lesson 5 - Reflection: Grace and Growth (Lovelace excerpt)

Lesson 6 - Exercise: Deeds, Words and Heart

Lesson 8 - Exercise: Idols of the Heart

Lesson 10 - Exercise: Son or Slave?

Preparing for the Bible Study.

- Both the Workbook and the Leader's Guide use the New International Version (NIV) translation of the Bible. With minor adaptations the group could use other translations.
- The written study questions are only the starting point for the leader and the group. It is best for the leader to prepare for the session as follows:
 - Answer the questions yourself from the Biblical text. Write down your own answers in a workbook before looking at the Leader's Guide. Then supplement and revise your answers in light of the suggested answers.
 - Finally, it is important to customize and adapt the questions. You know your self and your group. You know which questions might be too difficult and/or uninteresting to them. You may see other themes in the text you want to bring out. So prepare your own questions. Redeemer provides good tools in the Fellowship Group Manual for preparing excellent discussion questions.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

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|---|---------------------------|
| Lesson 1 - The Uniqueness of the Gospel
Reflection: Luther's Preface to Galatians | Galatians 1:1-9 |
| Lesson 2 - A Gospel-Changed Life
Exercise: Testimony | Galatians 1:10-24 |
| Lesson 3 - Unity in the Gospel
Reflection: The Two Prodigals | Galatians 2:1-10 |
| Lesson 4 - Living the Gospel
Exercise: "In Line" with the Gospel | Galatians 2:11-21 |
| Lesson 5 - The Gospel and Faith
Reflection: Grace and Growth | Galatians 3:1-14 |
| Lesson 6 - The Gospel and the Law
Exercise: Deeds, Words and Heart | Galatians 3:15-25 |
| Lesson 7 - Children of God
Reflection: Adoption in Christ | Galatians 3:26-4:7 |
| Lesson 8 - Gospel-Centered Ministry
Exercise: Idols of the Heart | Galatians 4:8-20 |
| Lesson 9 - Grace to the Barren
Exercise: Gospel Forgiveness | Galatians 4:21-31 |
| Lesson 10 - Gospel Freedom
Exercise: Son or Slave? | Galatians 5:1-15 |
| Lesson 11 - Gospel Character
Exercise: Fruit of the Spirit | Galatians 5:16-25 |
| Lesson 12 - Gospel Relationships
Exercise: Gospel Relationships | Galatians 5:26-6:5 |
| Lesson 13 - Sowing and Reaping
Reflection: Luther Re-visited | Galatians 6:6-18 |

Introduction to Galatians

Historical Setting of the Letter to the Galatians

The apostle Paul was a church-planting missionary. After he planted a church and left a region, he continued to supervise new congregations through his letters. One of these letters is this Epistle to the Christian churches in the area of Galatia in Asia Minor. Most scholars agree that this letter was written by Paul around 50 A.D. (only 15-20 years after the death of Christ). It is helpful to recognize the following three things from the historical setting which will help us understand this epistle:

- This letter addresses a social and racial division in the churches of Galatia. The first Christians in Jerusalem were Jewish, but as the gospel spread out from that center, increasing numbers of Gentiles began to receive Christ. However, a group of teachers in Galatia were now insisting that the Gentile Christians practice all the traditional Mosaic ceremonial customs as the Jewish Christians did. They taught that the Gentiles had to observe all the dietary laws and be circumcised for full acceptance and to be completely pleasing to God.
- Although this specific controversy may seem remote to us today, Paul addressed it with an abiding, all-important truth. He taught that the cultural divisions and disunity in the Galatian churches were due to a confusion about the nature of the gospel. By insisting on Christ-*plus*-anything-else as requirement for full acceptance by God, these teachers were presenting a whole different way of relating to God (a “*different gospel*” 1:6) from the one Paul had given them (“*the gospel I preached*” 1:8). It is this different gospel that was creating the cultural division and strife. Paul forcefully and unapologetically fought the “different gospel” because to lose one’s grip of the true gospel is to desert and lose Christ himself (1:6). Therefore, everything was at stake in this debate.
- The most obvious fact about the historical setting is often the most overlooked. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul expounds in detail what the gospel is and how it works. But the intended audience of this exposition of the gospel are all professing *Christians*. It is not simply non-Christians, but believers who continually relearn and reapply the gospel to their lives.

The Abiding Importance of the Gospel

It is very common in Christian circles to assume that “the gospel” is something just for non-Christians. We presume that the gospel is a set of basic “A-B-C” doctrines that Christians do not need to hear or study once they are converted. Rather, they should move beyond the gospel to more “advanced” doctrines. But the great declaration of the gospel of grace in Galatians was written to believers who did not see the implications of the gospel for life-issues confronting them. Paul solves the disunity and racial exclusivity not with a simple exhortation to “be better Christians.” but by calling them to live out the implications of the gospel. So Christians need the gospel as much as non-Christians do. Their problems come because they tend to lose and forget the gospel. They make progress only as they continually grasp and apply the gospel in deeper ways.

The gospel shows us that our spiritual problem lies not only in failing to obey God, but also in *relying* on our obedience to make us fully acceptable to God, ourselves and others. Every kind of character flaw comes from this natural impulse to be our own savior through our performance and achievement. On the one hand, proud and disdainful personalities come from basing your identity on your performance and thinking you are succeeding. But on the other hand, discouraged and self-loathing personalities *also* come from basing your identity on your performance and thinking you are failing.

Belief in the gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom of God; it is the way to address every obstacle and grow in every aspect. The gospel is not just the "ABCs" but the "A-to-Z" of the Christian life. The gospel is the way that anything is renewed and transformed by Christ--whether a heart, a relationship, a church, or a community. All our problems come from a lack of orientation to the gospel. Put positively, the gospel transforms our hearts, our thinking and our approach to absolutely everything.

The gospel of justifying faith means that while Christians are, in themselves still sinful and sinning, yet in Christ, in God's sight, they are accepted and righteous. So we can say that *we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope--at the very same time*. This creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth. It means that the more you see your own flaws and sins, the more precious, electrifying, and amazing God's grace appears to you. But on the other hand, the more aware you are of God's grace and acceptance in Christ, the more able you are to drop your denials and self-defenses and admit the true dimensions and character of your sin.

This also creates a radical new dynamic for discipline and obedience. First, the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ makes it *easier* to admit we are flawed because we know we won't be cast off if we confess the true depths of our sinfulness. Second, it makes the law of God a thing of beauty instead of a burden. We can use it to delight and imitate the one who has saved us rather than to get his attention or procure his favor. We now run the race "for the joy that is set before us" rather than "for the fear that comes behind us."

What was the most helpful to you in this brief background/overview and why?

Leader's background notes:

Introduction to Galatians and "The Works of the Law"

Historically, Galatians has been understood as Paul's debate against the Galatian teachers who have often been called the "Judaizers." The classic understanding of the debate was outlined like this: 1) The Judaizers taught Jewish legalism, namely that the Galatians had to earn their salvation through good deeds. 2) Paul, on the other hand, argued that no one can be saved by obeying the law of God (through *works of the law*). Rather, we are pardoned and justified by faith in Christ alone, not by our good works. In this view, the term *works of the law* in Galatians is defined as good deeds and moral effort in general.

Over the last several years a new perspective has developed over what the term *works of the law* means in Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10. Many interpreters believe Paul is talking about the Mosaic ceremonial law only--circumcision, the dietary laws, the other "clean" laws. In this view, *works of the law* is not moral performance in general, but the adoption of Jewish cultural customs and ethnic boundary markers. Thus the Judaizers are not pressing a works-righteousness system of salvation on the Galatians but rather are insisting that Gentile Christians take on the ethnic markers and become culturally Jewish. In this new perspective the Judaizers are not legalists, but nationalists. Paul is therefore not opposing salvation-by-works but rather racial and ethnic exclusivity. Paul's purpose in the book of Galatians is to insist that all races and classes sit down equally at the "table of God" because we are all one in Christ.

In this book study I have taken extensive time to weigh the pros and cons of this new perspective, and I believe it is very helpful in several ways, but that it cannot overthrow the essence of the historic, classic approach.¹ Here are my conclusions:

You cannot ultimately drive a wedge between nationalism and legalism as if they are two separate things. Indeed, the book of Galatians addresses a controversy that had at its heart a racial/ethnic pride and superiority. Peter in 2:11-15 is clearly in the grip of this, and in this he surely has been affected by the Judaizers (2:12). These teachers *were* pressing Jewish cultural boundary markers on Gentile Christian converts. And so, *works of the law* probably does include them. But nationalism *is* a form of legalism. Legalism is adding *anything* to Jesus Christ as a requirement for full acceptance with God. A moral superiority that comes from good works or from racial and cultural pedigree grows out of the same spiritual root. The gospel is that we are saved through what Christ does and not by what we do or are. So when the Judaizers called the Gentile converts to *the works of the law*, they were calling them to adopt Jewish cultural identity, but they were also pulling them into a form of self-salvation with human achievement as a basis for their standing with God.

This is seen in how Paul speaks of the *works of the law* in Romans (where the term is used in Rom 3:20, 27, 28.) On the one hand, this term does bear ethnic significance for Jews. It was by works that Israel sought to establish itself in its relationship with God (Rom 9:30-10:3). But on the other hand, Paul associates the *works of the law* with "boasting" (Rom 3:27-28). Paul draws the term boasting from the Scriptures, where it means reliance and pride in one's wisdom, might or wealth (Jer. 9:23-24; cf. 1 Cor. 1:30). This clearly shows that while *works of the law* does mean nationalism it also means spiritual pride, self-salvation, i.e. legalism.

So, ultimately, we must still read the book of Galatians as Paul's defense of the gospel of free grace against winning God's favor by human accomplishment or status. The new perspective

¹ This is not really a *new* perspective. (Very few ideas in theology are truly new.) Many who opposed the Reformation of Luther and Calvin insisted that *works of the law* in Galatians only referred to the Mosaic ceremonial law. They said Christians did not have to obey Mosaic regulations, but they did have to obey the moral law in order to be pleasing to God. Calvin argued very effectively that Paul was denying the whole law as a system of earning one's salvation before God. See *Institutes* Book III, 19-20.

can't dislodge the classical understanding of Galatians. But this debate over the term *works of the law* is nonetheless helpful to us in two ways.

First, it shows us how subtly the gospel can be undermined from within the Christian church and community. The new perspective shows us that the Judaizers were not full-bore legalists who flatly rejected Christ. They were not saying, "You don't need Jesus. If you are a good person, you will go to heaven anyway." It is highly unlikely the Galatians would have been duped by such a blatant contradiction of the gospel message that saved them. Instead, the Judaizers were saying, "Jesus was critical and crucial to getting you saved, of course, but faith in him alone is not enough to grow you into full acceptance with God. You will now have to adopt the full range of Mosaic ceremonial and cultural customs." This is much more subtle. It is like saying, "You were related to God by grace, but now you have to grow in him by trying very, very hard to obey all these particular rules" (cf. 3:1-5). In the same way, spirit-deadening moralism would not grow in our churches by blatant, overt denials of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It is much more likely to be undermined in new forms of demanding cultural conformity or other approaches just as subtle as the Judaizers were.

Second, it shows us that the book of Galatians has been read too much as a rather academic debate about doctrine. But Paul is not only concerned about a breakdown in the doctrinal beliefs of individuals. He also has a deep concern about a breakdown in Christian unity and community. Of course, Paul believes that the divisions have been caused by a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel, but it is important to see how much Galatians is addressed to the problems of racial and cultural exclusivity and other social aspects of Christian living.

Why provide this background note? First, many study group leaders will consult commentaries and the differences between them will be hard to understand unless you grasp the fundamental features of this debate. Second, some of the participants in your groups may have heard snatches of these debates and their questions may be difficult to answer unless you grasp the fundamentals of this debate.

Annotated bibliography on Galatians.

Traditional viewpoint

The following commentaries take the traditional interpretation of Galatians, assuming that Paul was mainly addressing false teaching about the doctrine of justification. There is little or no emphasis on the social and racial divisions in the church of Galatia. The commentary by John Stott is written at a very popular level and is accessible to the average reader.

Bruce, F.F, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1982)

Boice, James Montgomery, "Galatians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976)

Guthrie, Donald, *Galatians*. New Century Bible Commentary Series. (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1973)

Morris, Leon, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1996)

*Stott, John R.W. *The Message of Galatians*. The Bible Speaks Today Series. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968)

New Perspective

The following commentaries and works take the view that Paul was addressing social division and racial exclusivity more than doctrine and legalism. They see Paul's concerns having to do less with individual salvation and more how God's saving purposes must now be manifested in Christian community.

Baker, Mark, *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace and Freedom* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1999)

Dunn, J.D.G., *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Hendrickson, 1993)

Hansen, *Galatians*, Inter-Varsity New Testament Commentary (Inter-Varsity Press, 1994)

McKnight, Scot, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 1995)

Blended insights

The following commentaries take the traditional view that Paul was addressing the doctrine of justification as opposed to legalistic teaching. However, they give far more weight to the social and communal implications of the gospel and of the racial division that was the historical context for the letter.

Longenecker, R.N., *Galatians* Word Biblical Commentary (Word, 1990).

Silva, Moises, "Galatians" in *The New Bible Commentary: Twenty-First Century Edition*, eds. G.Wenham, A.Motyer, D.Carson, R.France (Inter-Varsity Press, 1994)

Silva, Moises, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case* (Baker, 1996). See Chapter 9 on the debate about *the works of the law* in Galatians.

Seifrid, Mark, *Christ Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Apollos, 2000). See Chapter 4 on the debate about the term *the works of the law* in Galatians.

Lesson 1 - The Uniqueness of the Gospel

In most of his letters to churches, Paul follows his salutation with a paragraph of thanksgiving and appreciation for the lives of the people. But news has reached him about the church in Galatia that has moved him deeply. His emotions almost immediately express themselves. He gets immediately into the substance of his argument.

Leader's background notes:

The Outline of Galatians

The letter to the Galatians can be broken down into the following outline. (It is helpful to have this outline in your mind as you travel through the material.)

- 1:1-9 - Introduction to the Gospel and the occasion for the letter
- 1:10-2:21 - Paul's Personal Defense of his gospel ministry
- 3:1-4:31 - Paul's Theological Defense of the gospel message
- 5:1-6:18 - Paul's Practical Application of the gospel message to our lives

Read Galatians 1:1-9

1. Describe Paul's mood or frame of mind when he wrote this. What caused this attitude? Does it seem justified?

First, Paul is surprised--*astonished* (1:6a). Along with the shock comes anxiety and worry. They are taking hold of a gospel that isn't really a gospel (1:7), so they are in enormous danger. They are in *confusion* (1:7b).

Second, Paul also seems angry. His language is remarkably strong. He is directly angry at the ones who are misleading the converts of the church. He refers to them as *some people* who are *trying to pervert* the gospel (v.7b). He calls down a *condemnation* on them (v.9). More indirectly, he is also angry at the Galatians themselves, warning them that they are *quickly deserting* the God who called them (1:6b)--a serious charge! They are personally turning their backs on God.

We saw in the introduction that what caused this concerned, strong outburst was a group of teachers who were teaching Gentile Christian converts that they were obliged to keep the Jewish cultural customs of the Mosaic law--the dietary laws, circumcision and the rest of the ceremonial law. Then they would be truly pleasing to God. Probably, this did not appear to the Galatians to be such a radical departure from what they had been taught. Surely the whole point of the Christian life is to be pleasing to God! But Paul writes: "This is an absolute repudiation of all that I have been telling you!"

If we believe what Paul believed about the gospel, then we will find his attitude justifiable. If the Galatians are really turning their backs on God and taking hold of a gospel that isn't a gospel at all, then their condition is dangerous. The anxiety and anger that Paul expresses is the same that any loving parent or friend would experience if a child or companion was going seriously astray. Even his strong assertions of his authority are motivated by love, not arrogance.

2. Paul calls himself an apostle. What can you learn from vv.1-9 that an apostle is or does?

First, in vv.1-2, Paul says he has been *sent with immediate divine authority*. The Greek word *apostolos* means to be "sent." Paul's doubly strong phrase *not from men nor by man* drives

home the uniqueness of the first apostles. Those today who are “called” to ministry by the Holy Spirit are not “from men” either--since the ultimate cause of their ministry is Jesus’ call. But they *are* “by man.” (The Greek word here--*dia*--means “by” or “through,” as in our word *diameter*.) This means that though ministers ultimately receive their call from God, they are called through the intermediaries of other human ministers, through the election of a congregation, and so on. But Paul is claiming something more. He is saying that he did not receive his apostolic commission through anyone else at all. No other apostles commissioned him. He was commissioned and taught directly by the risen Jesus himself. (Possibly, this is why he mentions the resurrection in v.1 during his own introduction, and not down in vv.3-5 where he is summarizing the work of Christ.)

Second, in vv.8-9, Paul says he was *sent with a particular divine message*--the gospel. Paul thus can use *his* divine teaching as the standard for judging who is orthodox and who is heretical (Cf. 1:9-- *If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*) We will look again below at what he says here, but it is clear that even an apostle cannot alter, revise or add to the message of Christ. His message is not the result of his study, research, reflection and wisdom. Even *he* cannot change the message.

Note: *Something that may come up:* Some people may ask if there are any more apostles today. The best answer is this: “Not in the full way of Paul and the Twelve.” In the early church, we see that there were others besides Paul and the Twelve called “apostles of the churches” (see 2 Cor. 9:3, for example). Also, Barnabas was “sent” and thus an “apostle” to Antioch (Acts 11:22) and is later called an “apostle” (Acts 14:14). However, while they were sent out as missionaries, they were commissioned by the other, original apostles or by the churches. Barnabas never met the risen Christ and was never taught and tutored in the gospel directly by the bodily-present Christ as were Paul and the Twelve. Thus we can call people (then and now) with unusual leadership gifts, “small-a” apostles. But Paul is claiming to be a “capital-A” apostle. Because of their *immediate* commission by Christ, the “capital-A” apostles had absolute authority. (Thus their writings are Scripture.)

3. Paul offers an outline of the gospel in the early verses. No outline can be complete, but does this one seem complete to you?

First, we learn that we are helpless and lost; that is what the word “*rescue*” implies in v.4. Other founders of religions came primarily to teach, not to rescue. Jesus of course was a great teacher, but when Paul here gives us a nutshell version of Jesus’ ministry, he makes no mention of that at all. The average person on the street believes that a Christian is someone who follows Christ’s teaching and example. But Paul shows us here that this is impossible. You don’t rescue people unless they are in a lost/perishing condition and a helpless condition. They are perishing and unable to recover themselves. So this word *rescue* teaches what theologians call “spiritual inability.”

Second, we learn what was done to rescue us.

What Jesus did: Jesus made a sacrifice (*gave himself*-v.4a) which was substitutionary in nature. The word *for* means “on behalf of” or “in place of.” (The NIV translation gets this across with the word “himself”--*he gave himself for our sins*-v.4a). The principle of substitution will be brought out later, but it is the reason why the gospel is so revolutionary. Christ’s death was not just a general sacrifice, but a substitutionary one. This means that he did not merely “buy us a second chance,” but that *he* did all *we* needed to do. If Jesus’ death really paid for our sins on our behalf, then we can never fall back into condemnation. Why? Because God would then be getting two payments for the same sin, which is unjust! Jesus did all we should have done, in our place, so when he becomes our Savior, we are absolutely free from penalty or condemnation.

What the Father did: God accepted the work of Christ on our behalf by raising him “*from the dead*” (v.1) and by giving the “*grace and peace*” (v.3) that Christ won and achieved for us.

Third, we learn *why God did it*. It was all done out of grace--not because of anything we have done, but *according to the will of our God and Father*-v.4d. (We are also *called by the grace of Christ*. v.6) We did not even deserve or ask for rescue but Jesus came *according to the will of the Father*. There is no indication of any other motivation or cause for Christ’s mission except the will of God. Therefore salvation is sheer unmerited grace. That is why the only one who gets “*glory forever*” for our salvation is God alone (v.5).

4. According to vv.6-7, any change to the gospel makes it null and void. Why?

In v.6 we are told that they were “*called by the grace of Christ*.” This means that God called us, we didn’t call him. And God accepted us right away despite our lack of merit. That is the order of the gospel. God accepts us and then we follow (not *desert*) him. But other religious systems have it the other way around. We must give God something and then he accepts us.

The people who suggested that the Galatians simply add the Mosaic ceremonial law to Christ were not simply suggesting a revision of the gospel but a complete reversal. In v.7, we are told that this teaching “*perverts*” or literally “*reverses*” the gospel. This is illuminating. If you add *anything* to Christ (the grace of Christ *plus* something else) as a requirement for acceptance with God, you completely reverse the “order” of the gospel and make it null and void. That is why in verse 6 Paul says that the false teachers are producing “*a different gospel*,” which he quickly qualifies in v.7 as “*really no gospel at all*.” Literally, Paul says “*another gospel, which is not another*.” This is strikingly crystal clear. Another gospel is not another gospel. To change the gospel the tiniest bit is to lose it so completely that the new teaching has no right to be called a “gospel.” Later you will find this passage in Luther’s Preface to the Galatians:

“For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ you must build your confidence on your own work. (Martin Luther, Preface)

5. How do people “add to the gospel” today in ways that diminish it’s power?

There are many examples of this. Spend time as a group thinking about and discussing this. Overall, Paul condemns any teaching that is not based on the fact that:

- We are too sinful to contribute to our salvation (we need a complete *rescue*),
- therefore, we are saved by belief in Jesus work, (the *grace of Christ*) plus nothing else.

Here are three examples of current views that deny one or both of these two truths:

(1) In some churches, it is implicitly or explicitly taught that you are saved through your “surrender” to Christ plus right beliefs and behavior. This is a fairly typical mistake in evangelical churches. People are challenged to “give your life to Jesus” and/or to “ask him into your life.” This sounds very biblical, but it still can reject the grace-first principle fairly easily. Most people think that it means that we are saved by a strong belief and trust in and love for God, along with a life committed to him. Therefore, they feel they must begin by generating a high degree of spiritual sorrow, hunger, and love in order to get Christ’s presence. Then they must somehow maintain this if they are going to “stay saved.” In other words, many conservative churches functionally teach the idea that we are saved *because* of (the level of) our faith. But the gospel says that we are saved *through* our faith. The first approach really makes

our performance the savior, and the second makes Christ's performance the Savior. It is not the *level* but the *object* of our faith that saves us.

(2) In other churches, it is taught that it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you are a loving and good person. This is a typical mistake in "liberal" churches. This view teaches that all good persons, regardless of their religion (or lack of one), will find God. This sounds extremely open-minded on the surface, but it rejects the grace-first principle in two ways.

First, it teaches that good works are enough to get to God. (If all good people can know God, then Jesus' death was not really necessary; all it takes is virtue.) The trouble is, this means that bad people have no hope, contradicting the gospel, which invites "*both good and bad*" to God's feast (Matt. 22:10). If you say that people are not saved by faith in Christ, but by being good, then you will only invite "the good" into God's feast.

Second, it sets up tolerance, openness and love as the ultimate virtues, rather than a scrupulously moral life. Though it sounds flexible, it is moralistic in another sense. It indirectly encourages people to feel that if they are tolerant and open, that will please God. The gospel, however, challenges people to see their radical sin. Without that sense of one's own evil, the knowledge of God's grace will not be transforming.

(3) A third example is found in churches that are extremely intolerant of small differences of dress or custom. Most of us immediately will think of these kinds of churches when we read about the false teachers of Galatia. They wanted (as we will see) to impose many old rules and regulations having to do with dress, diet and ritual observances. It is natural for us to associate them with highly regulated churches and religious communities, which control their members very tightly and direct them into the "right" way to eat, dress, date, schedule their time, and so on. Or they may insist on a detailed observance of many complicated rituals. So, modern day examples of the Galatian heresy would be highly authoritarian churches, highly ritualized churches, highly legalistic churches. However, I listed legalistic churches third because their problems are so obvious to most people and therefore less dangerous. The first and second examples are much more prevalent and perilous.

A close cousin of the third kind of ministry would be missionaries who plant churches in new cultures and insist that all the converts adopt the same dress, eating, and cultural patterns of the missionaries' home country in order to be baptized. We often insist that other people "become like us" in their cultural styles and preferences if we are going to consider them "real" Christians. Different cultures express joy and reverence differently. They often have different levels of tolerance for different sins. It is too easy to read a Christian from another culture negatively. Later we will see how a lack of gospel orientation leads directly to cultural narrowness.

6. What is Paul's attitude toward those who distort the gospel (vv.8-9)? How can we ensure that the gospel we believe is "true?"

Paul lays down, in the strongest possible language, a plumb line for judging all truth claims, whether external (from teachers, writers, thinkers, preachers) or internal (feelings, sensations, experience). That standard is the gospel that he (and all the other apostles) received from Christ and taught, and which is found in this book and the rest of the Bible.

(1) Paul says, "*If we...should preach a gospel other than the one...let him be eternally condemned*" (v.8). Here Paul tells us how to judge external authorities such as human teachers, or human institutional leaders, or even ordained officers in a church hierarchy. It is remarkable that by saying *we*, Paul includes himself as a human authority. He is saying that

he must be rejected if he ever says, "I've changed my mind about the gospel." His whole argument in chapters 1 and 2 is that the gospel did not come to him through a process of reasoning and reflection; it was *received*, not arrived at. Therefore, he is not free to alter it through reasoning and reflecting. In chapter 2, Paul tells us that he had his gospel confirmed by others who had also gotten the message by revelation from the risen Christ. This apostolic consensus, this original "gospel deposit," is therefore the touchstone for judging all truth claims, from the outside and the inside.

This is very important. Paul is saying in v.8 that even his apostolic authority derives from the gospel's authority, not the other way around. He is an apostle because his gospel is true. The gospel is not true because he is an apostle. Here Paul is telling the Galatians to evaluate and judge *him*, an apostle, and his teaching with the biblical gospel. In other words, the Bible judges the church; the church does not judge the Bible. The Bible is the foundation for and the creator of the church; the church is not the foundation for or creator of the Bible. Paul says that the church and its hierarchy *must* be evaluated by the believer with the biblical gospel as the touchstone or plumb line for judging all truth claims.

(2) In v.8, Paul says that even if we had a vision, and an angel of light literally appeared to us and gave us a message that deviates from the gospel of grace, we could safely attribute that experience to invalid psychological or demonic (or some other) sources. Our experience must be judged by the gospel, not the gospel by our experience. This is an astonishing claim as well. It means that the final plumb line for truth is not our personal experience, but the apostolic teaching found in the Bible. We do not judge the Bible by our experiences, feelings or convictions; we judge our experiences by the Bible. It means that if an angel literally showed up before a crowd of people and taught that salvation was by good works (or anything except faith alone in Christ alone), you should literally kick the angel out! So when Paul says, "*If we or an angel...*," he gives a sweeping summary of proper Christian "epistemology"--how we know what is true.

(3) Why is Paul so uncompromising? He gives three reasons:

You are deserting the one who called you (v.6).

Paul's argument is that to abandon gospel theology is to abandon Christ personally. What you do in theology eventually affects your experience. In other words, a difference in your understanding of doctrine leads to a difference in your understanding of who Jesus is.

A different gospel is no gospel at all (v.6b-7).

This means that the gospel message, by its very nature, cannot be changed even slightly without being lost. It's like a vacuum. You can't allow in some air and say that it is now a 90 percent vacuum or an "air enriched vacuum." It is either a complete vacuum or no vacuum at all. In the same way, the message of the gospel is that you are saved by grace through Christ's work and nothing else at all. As soon as you add anything to it, you have lost it entirely.

A different gospel brings condemnation (vv.8,9).

Later in the book he says that different gospels bring a "curse" with them. This means, ultimately, that to alter the gospel is to play with eternal life and death. But it also means very practically that fear, anxiety and guilt (the sense of condemnation and curse) will always be attached to different gospels even in this life. As we will see later in the book, even Christians sometimes experience a sense of condemnation. When they do, it is because they are functionally trusting in different gospels, different ways to earn salvation. The "*present age*" (v.4) can still influence believers.

In light of these three things, we can understand the severity and intensity of Paul's language.

7. Write the gospel in your own words to the best of your current understanding. Share and discuss. Later, return to this answer and compare it with your understanding at the end of the course.

Lesson 1 - Reading and Reflection

MARTIN LUTHER'S PREFACE TO GALATIANS

(Abridgement and paraphrase by Tim Keller)

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” - for something that raised a question

1. The most important thing in the world

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

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

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

2. The need for Christian righteousness

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

For human beings by nature, when they get near either danger or death itself, will of necessity examine their own worthiness. We defend ourselves before all threats by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of sins and flaws inevitably comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think, "How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done! Please God, let me live so I can fix and amend

them." We become obsessed with our *active* righteousness and are terrified by its imperfections. But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see what Christ has done *for* us....So the troubled conscience has no cure for its desperation and feeling of unworthiness unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by *grace*, offered free of charge in Jesus Christ, which is this passive or Christian righteousness....If I tried to fulfill the law myself, I could not trust in what I had accomplished, neither could it stand up to the judgment of God. So...*I rest only upon the righteousness of Christ...which I do not produce but receive, God the Father freely giving it to us through Jesus Christ.*

3. Law and grace

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

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

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

4. Living the gospel

While we live here on earth, we will be accused, exercised with temptations, oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, and bruised by the law with its demands of active righteousness. Because of this, Paul sets out in this letter of Galatians to teach us, to comfort us, and to keep us constantly aware of this Christian righteousness. For if the truth of being *justified by Christ alone* (not by our works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost. For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and

works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness *but* works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ, you must build your confidence on your own work. On this truth and *only* on this truth the church is built and has its being.

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

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

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the key difference between Christian righteousness and all other kinds?
2. What do we mean by passive righteousness?
3. Why is the difference between passive righteousness and active righteousness so important?
4. What is the single best thing you learned from Luther? How would it make you different if you really understood and applied it?

Lesson 2 - A Gospel-Changed Life

Galatians 1:10-2:21 is often called the autobiographical section of the epistle, since Paul does much recounting of his conversion and early Christian experience. But Paul is not sharing his testimony for general inspiration. We saw last week that '*some people*' (1:7) had come to the Galatian Christians with certain claims and teachings which diverged from the message Paul had originally presented to them. In this section he uses his personal testimony to refute some of those claims.

Read Galatians 1:10-24 and Acts 9:1-9.

1. What kind of claims or assertions does Paul appear to be refuting in this account of his conversion and early Christian experience?

First, in this account Paul refutes the claim that his gospel message was derived from others, particularly from the Christian leaders in Jerusalem. He says "*I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was.*" (vv.16-17) Again in vv.18-19 he claims that after three years he finally went up to Jerusalem, but he did not get instructed by them in any methodical way. His repeated references to the apostles at Jerusalem leads us to infer that "*some people*" (1:7) were claiming that Paul had simply gotten his gospel message from this "headquarters." We surmise that they did so in order to say something like this: "We have also been trained at the Jerusalem headquarters. And we say that Paul did not give you the whole story. There are other things you must do in order to be pleasing to God."

Second, Paul refutes the idea that he came to his gospel message through his own reflection, reasoning and thinking. He recounts that he was "*intensely*" hostile to the church and to Christianity (v.13) until just before his conversion. There was no evolution of thought through a process of formulation, discussion, presentation, interaction with others, and revision. Paul points out that there was no way that his Christian message was the product of his own line of thinking. Rather, it was the exact, polar opposite of where he had been going. His previous life of overt hostility to the gospel was common knowledge. How then could his Christianity be the product of simply a rational or cultural process? He was so violently opposed to Christ that no one could get near him to "witness" to him; he was so intensely hostile that he did not give anything the Christians said a moment's reflection. Therefore, his experience is strong evidence that his teaching is via revelation.

Third, Paul shows that while he did not come to his gospel either by his own reason or by instruction from any church leader, nevertheless, his gospel did "check out" with the message that the other apostles had received from God. This occurred informally in vv.18-19, but, as we shall see, Paul's apostleship received a formal recognition in 2:7-9. As Acts 9 shows us, the risen Jesus met and instructed Paul directly. Paul did not have simply a trance or a dream. He was there in time and space since even the other men with Paul recognized the presence (Acts 9:7). In this sense he became an apostle just like *those who were apostles before he was* (v.17). He did not receive his commission or his message from the other apostles, but his message squared with the one the other apostles received from the risen Lord (Luke 24:45-49).

So Paul's account of his Christian experience eliminates claims such as: "Paul's message is fine, but incomplete;" "Paul's message is simply *his*--we are teachers of the gospel too."

2. Paul's account does not simply establish his authority as a teacher of the gospel. It also illustrates some aspects of what the gospel is. How does it do so?

First, this account tells them that he has already spent years seeking to live according to the Jewish customs and traditions. He says that he had beaten out almost everyone of his own generation ("*of my own age*" v.14) at being zealous for moral righteousness (v.14). And yet it had not made him "right with God." Up until this point in the book we have not been told the nature of the teaching of '*some people*' who were '*trying to pervert the gospel*' (1:7), but here is the first hint. Later we will see that they were encouraging the Gentile Christians to become full converts to Judaism, assuming all the Mosaic laws of diet and dress, including circumcision (Gal 2:12, 3:5, 6:12). But Paul's account, says: "I've already been there! I've already done that! I know all about this subject! You cannot make yourself acceptable to God by the most zealous and fastidious compliance to moral, ethical, cultural codes."

Second, this account shows that he had also done many terrible deeds. "*Intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it*" (v.13). Paul had already killed many innocent people. He was filled with hate and pride. And yet, despite all this, he was not only saved by Christ, but also called to be a preacher and leader of the faith. Grace has been described as the free, unmerited favor of God, working powerfully on the mind and heart to change lives. There is no clearer example than Paul that salvation is by grace alone, not through our moral and religious performance. Though Paul's sins were very deep, he was invited in.

So Paul's experience proves in the most vivid way that the gospel is not simply "religion" as it is generally understood. On the one hand, he was incredibly moral and righteous, yet he was not good enough to be right with God. On the other hand, he was so incredibly evil and yet he was not so bad that the gospel of grace could not redeem him. No one is so good that they don't *need* the grace of the gospel, nor so bad that they can't *receive* the grace of the gospel. Paul shows us here in the most vivid way that the gospel calls us out of religion as much as it calls us out of irreligion. Paul was deeply religious, but he needed the gospel. As C.S. Lewis once said, Christianity must be from God, for who else could have thought it up?

3. How does Paul indicate that God's grace was working in his life before his conversion? In what ways can you see how God worked in your life before your conversion?

Paul now can recognize that God's sovereign grace was working in his life long before his actual conversion. When Paul says God "*set me apart from birth*," (v.15) he means that the grace of God had been shaping and preparing him all his life for the things God was going to call him to do. Though he had been resisting God and doing much wrong (cf. Acts 26:14), God overruled all *his* intentions and used his past experiences and even his failures to prepare him first for his conversion, and then to be a preacher to the Gentiles (v.16). His knowledge of the Old Testament, zeal, training and work was all used by God to break him and to prepare him to be God's instrument. So the calling of God was not a last-minute intervention by God to stop an enemy. Rather, he had been working all along to use Paul to establish the very faith he had opposed (v.23).

This is a major theme in the Bible. Joseph told his brothers that their very effort to avoid Joseph as God's chosen deliverer (Gen.37:5-8, 19-20) had actually been the means to establish Joseph as such (Gen.50:19-20). The apostles insisted that the people who tried to oppose Jesus only served to further God's purposes (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). All opposition to God will be seen in the end as having done nothing but confirm and further God's design.

In chapter 9 of his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis tells of his school teacher Kirkpatrick. Nicknamed "The Great Knock," he was a furious debater and logician who

taught Lewis how to build a case and make strong arguments. Kirkpatrick was an atheist, and he intended to strengthen Lewis in his own unbelief. But years later, when CSL became a Christian believer, it turned out that "The Great Knock" had trained him well to become one of the greatest defenders of the Christian faith in the 20th century.

The gospel gives us a pair of spectacles through which we can review our own lives and see God preparing us and shaping us, even through our own failures and sins, to become vessels of his grace in the world.

4. What happened to Paul in and after his conversion that facilitated his growth as a believer and equipped him for ministry? How do these factors apply to us?

We read that Paul realized he was "*called...by his grace*" because God "*was pleased..to reveal*" it to him. (v.15) First and foremost, he came to understand *grace*. He had an experience of the unmerited nature of God's love, as we see in the phrases "*called by his grace*" and especially "*it pleased God....*" Despite his terrible record of evil, God does not invite him into a second class situation, but into being a preacher of the gospel. God's favor is not given in accord with Paul's past but in *contradiction* to it. That is grace. But even more telling is the second phrase, "*it pleased God.*" Why did God choose and call Paul? Was it because Paul was pleasing to God? No, it was simply because God was pleased to do so. In other words, God shed his love on Paul not because he was worthy of it, but simply because God took delight or pleasure in doing so. Compare this with Deuteronomy 7:7-8, which says, "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you...." In other words, God does not love us because we are serviceable; he loves us simply because he loves us. This is the only kind of love we can ever be secure in, of course, since it is the only kind of love we cannot possibly lose.

Second, we read that God was pleased "*to reveal his Son in me, so that I might preach*" (v.16). What Paul means here is not immediately clear. What does it mean that God revealed Jesus "in" Paul? The best interpretation is that Paul is combining two experiences in one. On the one hand, God obviously revealed Jesus *to* Paul on the road to Damascus. There Paul finally realized who Jesus was. He had a personal encounter with the living Christ. But secondly, (as the rest of the sentence in v.16 shows) Paul immediately realized that he was being called to show others who Jesus was. So we can say that God revealed Christ *to* Paul so that he could reveal Christ *through* Paul. This shows us a critical difference between a mere religious/moral person and a Christian. A Christian has more than an intellectual belief in Christ; he or she senses a personal relationship. But this relationship is not given to us for our own personal comfort and joy. We have a responsibility to reveal Christ to others through what we are, what we do, and what we say.

Third, we see something of Paul's path of growth and discipleship.

(1) Paul had solitary time with God. During his three years in Arabia we assume he learned from God much that he later taught. Though we should not think that his time in Arabia was spent simply in solitude (there were thriving cities there), we do learn about the importance of study and reflection and the development of our own personal acquaintance with God. We live in a time that puts too much emphasis on activity and accomplishment, and not enough on reflection and contemplation.

(2) Even the hand-picked apostle Paul does not conduct solitary ministry. He goes up to Jerusalem not for instruction but for both accountability and unity (v.18). Even Paul must work on unity with the other apostles and must demonstrate that his message squares with theirs. How much more do we have the same responsibility? We too must be deeply rooted in

church communities. We have to avoid picking what we need here and there without ever becoming grafted into a cohesive community of other believers.

(3) Paul's life led other people to see the glory of God (v.24). The use of an imperfect tense here seems to mean that the preaching and the glorifying went on continually. The change in Paul's life and his service to others did not lead people to lionize Paul, but to praise God.

Note: This reference to Arabia is unique in the New Testament. Nowhere else does the Bible mention it. And if we press the word "*immediately*" (v.17) too literally, it seems to conflict with what Acts 9:19-22 tells us about how Paul did some synagogue preaching immediately after his baptism. But Paul's point in this account is that he went to Arabia for his first sustained time of reflection and preparation *rather* than Jerusalem.

5. Read v.10 and vv.23-24. What results do you see here of a gospel-changed life?

We see in v. 10 that the gospel removes a "man-pleasing" spirit. Its synonym is "*winning the approval of men*" in v.10a. Its opposite is also implied--not needing to win or seek human approval for what you do. In other words, it is to be confident and fearless, doing what is right without concern for the approval and good opinion of others. Paul says that he couldn't be a "*servant of Christ*" if he were a "man-pleaser." That certainly underscores its importance!

The Bible talks about this sin under a number of different headings and phrases. When you put them all together, there is a surprising amount of material on it. Proverbs 29:25 says, "*The fear of man will prove a snare.*" In the Old Testament, the "*fear of God*" does not simply mean to be frightened by him, but to be filled with awe and wonder and attraction before his greatness. Therefore, the "*fear of man*" must refer to a view of people (or a particular person or group of people) that causes you to elevate their importance, to hold them in awe, to crave their approval and to fear their disapproval. It is a situation in which your desire for their blessing amounts to adoration and worship, and in which you give some form of human approval the rights and power over your heart that only God should have. It means you will be as devastated by the loss of this approval as if you felt damned and lost.

Manifestations of the fear of man are almost innumerable. When Saul disobeyed God in 1 Samuel 15:24, it was because he was afraid of public opinion. When Samson gave in to Delilah, it was because he was afraid of losing her sexual attention. Paul mentions another very common form--"*eye-service*" in Ephesians 6:6-7 and Colossians 3:22-23. It means to do a job only to the degree that you get the approval/reward from those over you. If you work that way, you will do inconsistent, shoddy, and half-hearted work. You will never create anything for the excellence and joy of creation and a job well done.

Paul gives us a very broad hint about how the gospel destroys "man-pleasing" or "the fear of man." In v.10a, Paul says that he is fearless and confident because he only seeks God's approval. In other words, if we know God's approval, we will never fear any other disapproval. And, as we will see, the gospel tells us that God's full and complete favor and approval are already ours.

In vv.23-24, we see that Paul's life led people to see God as great and powerful and glorious. The basic change in the direction of his life was one reason why. His willingness to speak up unashamedly was another. How do we apply this to ourselves? This is a question designed to get you to think about two things:

(a) Whom has God placed in your life to encourage you, and for whom you should be praising him? Are there people for whom you are not thankful enough? If you are discouraged, is there anyone that God has put in your life to help lift you up?

(b) How could you live your life so that people would glorify God more because of you? In other words, what could you change about your life that would encourage those around you to respect your God?

6. Why has Paul shared his testimony? How can Paul give us guidance about why, when, and how to share our own testimony of God's grace with others?

The reason Paul shares his testimony is to convince the people about the truth of the gospel that he has given them. He does this because he believes strongly that if they lose the purity of this gospel message they will actually desert and lose God himself (1:6). In short, Paul does not share his testimony out of habit, nor for general inspirational purposes, nor because he enjoys putting a spotlight on his personal experiences. He only shares his testimony because he believes it will help his hearers find Christ. He has no desire for attention or acclaim. He is completely focused on his listeners. He is not using his hearers to boost his ego, but using his testimony to help his friends.

Paul is a good example to us here. He shows us that we must have the courage to be vulnerable and speak personally about what the gospel means to us. Why? (1) Because Christianity is an appeal to bring our whole life, mind and heart, to Christ. To leave out the cognitive *or* the experiential is to give an incomplete picture of how comprehensive Christian commitment is. (2) But if we leave out our testimony, it also gives an incomplete picture of how comprehensive Christian fulfillment is. Christ not only appeals to our minds, he fills our hearts. (3) Different cultures and personalities have different emphases on the cognitive and the experiential. If you leave your testimony out, the more experientially oriented cultures and temperaments will not see the attractiveness of Christianity.

At the same time, Paul also reminds us that we must only share our testimony if it is helpful to others. It is very easy to use our testimony in a way that obscures the gospel. If we put the emphasis on dramatic, gory, or salacious details, we may only be sending the message, "Look at what an amazing case I am!" Paul gets personal only to make the gospel clear. We are not sharing our story for ourselves, but to help others understand and find Christ.

Unit 2- Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” -for something that raised a question

Testimony

The 'doctrine' of workmanship

One of the glories of Christianity is the assurance that “*we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10). This statement by Paul that we are “*created*” does not simply refer to our physical formation, as God has, of course, created all human beings (see Genesis 1:26-27). Rather, Paul is talking about being “*created in Christ*.” It means that every person who believes in Christ does so because she or he is the object of a process of God’s “*spiritual creation*.” The word *workmanship* is very important; it is the Greek word *poema* from which we get our word “*poem*.” It means that every believer is essentially a work of art--God’s art! Consider how artists work, whether they are writers, musicians, painters, sculptors, etc. They labor long and hard and with the utmost care and detailed attention. Sometimes they do very little, only a stroke here or there. Other times they make massive changes. But always they seek to bring the raw material into line with an artistic vision. Thus Paul is telling us that God labors over all believers throughout our entire lives, intervening and guiding and shaping us to bring us into line with a vision he has for us. This is mentioned also in Ephesians 2:10--“*created to...good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*.” Thus, God has a particular set of “*good works*” for us to do, for which he prepares us our whole lives.

Looking at our lives

It is therefore of utmost importance to look back on our lives and see everything that has happened through this grid, namely that:

- **God has been at work through the various influences of our lives-** “*created in Christ*.” All of our experiences and troubles and our family and friends must be seen as the instruments of an artist used to mold and shape us. He has been at work all of our lives!
- **God has been at work to make us something beautiful** – “*workmanship*.” God is out to make our *beings* something great--to give us characters of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, integrity, humility and self-control.
- **God has been at work to make us something useful**—“*good works...prepared beforehand*.” God is also out to make our *doings* something great--to make us helpful and able to serve others in special ways.

Paul uses this “*doctrine of workmanship*” like a pair of spectacles through which to view his entire life. In Galatians 1:13-23, he shows us that he now sees God at work throughout his whole life (“*God, who set me apart from birth and called me*,” v.15). Secondly, he now sees that God used the gospel to make him something beautiful. He

had been a fanatically intense person who felt superior in his self-righteousness and only criticized others (*“intensely I persecuted...extremely zealous for the traditions,”* v.14). But God humbled him and showed him he was nothing apart from undeserved grace (*“called me by his grace and was pleased to reveal his Son in me”*) so that now he loves to lead people to praise and thanks (*“they praised God because of me,”* v.24). Thirdly, he realizes that though his obsessive study of the Bible and theology (*“the traditions”*) was originally motivated by self-righteousness and the need to feel superior, he was now, as a Christian, uniquely equipped to be a preacher, teacher and evangelist (*“so that I might preach him among the Gentiles”*). His scholarship and knowledge of the Bible enabled him to bridge the gap between Christianity and various pagan philosophies and religions.

DISCUSSION

1. What most helped you? What were your biggest [“!”] exclamation points?

2. What questions did this raise? What were your [“?”] question marks?

RE-EXAMINING YOUR LIFE

Let’s take time to look back at your own life, using three questions based on the three aspects of Paul’s teaching. Take several minutes to individually answer each of the questions below. Then go through each question as a group. Encourage all who feel free to share their answers.

1. As you look back on your life, how can you see that God was working, even though you didn’t know it at the time:

a. To protect you?

b. To wake you up to things you denied?

c. To show you weaknesses or flaws in yourself?

d. To show you your value to him?

Note: There may be some overlap between these categories. i.e., God may have worked to wake you up (b.) to a particular flaw in yourself (c.)

2. How did God help you to see that salvation was by grace, not good works? Or how has he been doing so? (You may still be in process!)

3. What practical difference in your character has God made with his grace? (In other words, in what way would you be a fundamentally different personality had God not shown you his love?)

4. How has God prepared you to be of service and help to others? What has he equipped you to do in service to God, your loved ones, your neighbor?

Lesson 3 - Unity in the Gospel

The rite of circumcision refers to what has been called the Old Testament “ceremonial law.” This was not what we might call the *moral principles* of the Old Testament, such as the Ten Commandments against lying, murder, and adultery. Rather, these were very detailed prescriptions about food, dress, and other daily practices that, under the Mosaic code, made one “ritually clean” and acceptable for God’s presence in temple worship. Thus they were called the “clean laws.” Under this code, the Gentiles as a whole were “unclean” and unfit for the presence of God unless they were circumcised and adopted the entire Mosaic code for daily living.

The ceremonial law had two practical purposes. First, it served to keep the Jews a culturally distinct group and kept them from being assimilated into the larger, idol-worshipping cultures around them. This was the cultural purpose of the law--to make it hard for the Jews to form partnerships and marriages with unbelievers. Thus these rules were boundary markers that distinguished the Jews ethnically and culturally. Second, the ceremonial law served to demonstrate that God is a holy God, and we can only come into his presence if we are cleansed of our impurities. This was the didactic purpose of the law-- to teach us we are not naturally clean or acceptable in God’s sight.

Leader's Background notes:

The two main points of the passage are: a) without anything “*added*” besides faith in Christ, we are fully accepted by God, and b) if so, then we should, without anything added besides faith in Christ, accept other Christians fully.

The answer to question #7 may require more background. You may wish to copy the material in the leader’s guide for everyone and concentrate on the second, application part of the question.

Read Galatians 2:1-10

1. If Paul did not need human authorization to preach the gospel, why did he present his gospel to the leaders in Jerusalem in 2:1-2?

At first glance, a reader might think that Paul went to Jerusalem because he was afraid he had been wrong in his message or his method. But that is impossible for several reasons. First, he says he went to Jerusalem because of a “*revelation*” from God (2:1). This shows that he was an apostle with direct access to God. It makes no sense for someone getting revelations from God to go and get authorization from someone else! Second, Paul had already stated in 1:12 that he had received the gospel from the very lips of the visible, risen Christ, and that in his initial receiving of the gospel he did “*not consult...any man, nor...see apostles before I was.*” Why would he consult such people now to confirm his message and mission when he did not do so then? After these many years, he also has the evidence of life-transforming fruit under the proclamation of his message. He had been preaching for fourteen years--surely if he had been uncertain he would have gone to Jerusalem sooner. Thus everything Paul wrote in chapter 1 argues against the idea that he needed (or got) any training from the other apostles for his gospel message and mission (1:1, 16-19). Third, Paul said in 1:8 that the Galatians should reject even Paul himself (“*we*”) if he should come and say he’d changed his mind about the gospel. Even an angel from heaven could not change the gospel (1:8). In summary, Paul could

not be going up to Jerusalem for authorization, nor to discover if his gospel was authentic, since he just spent 1:12-24 showing why he didn't need such confirmation.

Nothing was threatening Paul's certainty, but something was threatening his fruitfulness. If the other apostles did not confirm him and renounce the false teachers, it would be very hard for him to retain his converts. False teachers were telling his converts that Paul was preaching a gospel that was inadequate and not as full as the original apostolic gospel preached by the Jerusalem leaders. They insisted that Paul was too permissive, that the gospel was "you are saved by *both* faith in Jesus *and* obedience to the law." They insisted that Paul taught an "easy believism" that was his own very eccentric message. Paul would not be able to keep his churches in sound gospel teaching if he could not disprove this falsehood. That is why Paul was in danger of "*running his race in vain*." He was afraid of a ministry that would be stymied and relatively fruitless.

2. Why was it very significant that Titus (a non-Jew) was not required by the Jerusalem leaders to take on the Jewish mark of circumcision in 2:3-5? What are the implications of this?

In a day when communication was slow and piecemeal, it could have been very difficult for Paul to convince some people that the Jerusalem apostles had really agreed that the Gentiles were fully acceptable without obeying all the Mosaic ceremonial code. But Paul had brought Titus as a test case. Instead of just allowing James, Peter, and John to talk in the abstract about accepting and eating with Christian Gentiles, Paul actually confronts them with a flesh-and-blood uncircumcised Greek Christian. By God's grace, the Jerusalem apostles rose to the occasion and "walked the walk" rather than just "talking the talk." They did not insist on Titus's circumcision before having fellowship with him (2:3). It would be common knowledge that Titus had been received, and it was also a simple fact that he was uncircumcised. This was proof that they had accepted Paul's ministry and these radical implications of the gospel. Paul triumphantly says: they *added nothing to my message* (v.6). The Jerusalem apostles did not add anything. That means they agreed that it is faith in Christ alone, and not any other performance or ritual, that is necessary for salvation.

What are those implications? The innumerable regulations for "cleanliness" in the Mosaic code were designed (among other things) to show us how impossible it was to make ourselves perfectly acceptable before a holy God. But these teachers used the regulations in order to teach the exact opposite--namely, that we *could* make ourselves pure and more acceptable to God by strict compliance with them. The New Testament talks about this mistake: "*..the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order*" (Heb.9:9-10; cf. Col.2:16). Only in Christ can we become "*holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation*" (Col.1:22). In other words, these ceremonial laws have not been so much abolished as fulfilled. They are fulfilled in Christ; it is *Christ* who makes us clean (cf. Mark 7)!

So the acceptance of Titus by Jewish believers was a vivid illustration of the principle that an individual becomes spiritually clean and acceptable through Christ and not through any deeds or rituals. A related corporate implication is that Gentiles could become full members of the people of God without becoming Jewish in custom or culture. Membership in the people of God was now open to members of all cultures. So both on the personal and corporate level, the acceptance of Titus was a radical public statement of the implications of the gospel.

3. What, then, was at stake in this meeting in Jerusalem? How might “the truth of the gospel” been lost (2:5)? Imagine the bad things that could have happened so you can appreciate what God did for us all that day.

Paul was not afraid that he didn't have the true gospel or that the Jerusalem apostles didn't have the true gospel. What did he *fear* (v.2)? Since the apostles were sinful human beings, there was a possibility that they might not be true to the gospel they had received from Christ. They might not stand up to the false teachers, but would let them make the claims they did because of their own cultural prejudices. This would have split the church in two, with neither side accepting the other fully, questioning if the others were saved! Think of it. Paul's Gentile churches would doubt that the Jewish churches really had faith in Christ, and the Jewish churches would also doubt the salvation of the Gentiles. That's why Paul says that the very “*truth of the gospel*” was at stake (v.5) and in particular “*the freedom that we have in Christ*” (v.4). John Stott, in his commentary on Galatians, says that what was at stake was “*the freedom of the gospel from legalism and cultural accretion.*” In his Acts commentary, Stott says:

It was one thing for the Jerusalem leaders to give their approval to the conversion of the Gentiles, but could they approve of...commitment to the Messiah without inclusion in Judaism? Was their vision big enough to see the gospel of Christ not as a reform movement within Judaism but as good news for the whole world, and the church of Christ...as the international family of God? These were the revolutionary questions....
(Stott, p.241)

In other words, Paul's opponents were saying, “Not all Jewish persons are Christians, but all Christians must also be Jewish.” Paul was saying that the gospel is for every culture. It was a brilliant move by Paul to come to Jerusalem, though frightening and risky. That is why Paul was afraid and why it took a revelation from God to get him to do it. If the Jerusalem apostles had not had the courage and clear-headedness that they had that day, the unity of the church would have been split, and at such an early stage that two virtually different religions would have emerged. The Orthodox-Catholic and Catholic-Protestant splits have been bad enough, but they came only after centuries of consensus about the basic doctrines of the faith. Had *this* split occurred, the false teachers would have hijacked much of the church into a legalistic religion that was alien to the gospel. No wonder Paul was scared. We should read this passage with great fear and gratitude--think of what was at stake! Yet God protected you and me on that day. “*We did not give in to them...so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you*” (2:5).

The stakes could not have been higher. The other apostles had stayed in Jerusalem, and they had not worked out the implications of the gospel for Gentiles converting from paganism. They simply had not confronted most of these issues practically. It would have been extremely easy for them to miss the implications of the gospel for cultural and spiritual freedom. It would have been very easy to say, “Of course all Christians should eat kosher!” or something similar. But the ramifications of such a “small” mistake would have been enormous. There would have been two opposing parties within Christianity that were hostile to each other on this most fundamental point. The other party would have taught that we must add external behaviors to Christ in order to be saved.

4. Paul says that the false teachers were threatening the “freedom we have in Christ Jesus” (2:4). In what ways does the gospel give us freedom that normal “earn-your-salvation” religions do not?

First, the gospel leads to “cultural freedom.” Almost always, moralistic religion presses its members to adopt very specific rules and regulations for dress and daily behavior. Why? If your salvation depends upon obeying the rules, then you want your rules very specific, do-able and clear. You don't want, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” an impossibly high standard that has

endless implications! You want, "Don't go to movies" or "Don't drink alcohol" or "Don't eat this or that." But rules and regulations like this get into the area of daily cultural life. If the false teachers had had their way, an Italian or African could not become a Christian without becoming culturally Jewish. Christians would have to form little cultural ghettos in every city. It would have meant far too much emphasis on external cultural separation rather than on internal distinctiveness of spirit, motive, outlook and perspective. Elevating cultural propriety to the level of spiritual virtue would lead Christians to a slavish emphasis on being culturally "nice" and "proper," as well as to grossly intolerant and prejudiced attitudes.

Second, the gospel leads to "psychological-emotional" freedom. Anyone who believes that our relationship with God is based on keeping up moral behavior is on an endless treadmill of guilt and insecurity. As we know from Paul's letters, he did *not* free Gentile believers from the moral imperative of the Ten Commandments. Christians could not lie, steal, commit adultery and so on. But though not free from the content of the moral law, Christians are free from the law as a system of salvation. We obey not in the fear and insecurity of hoping to earn our salvation, but in the freedom and security of knowing we are already saved in Christ. We obey in the freedom of gratitude. So both the false teachers *and* Paul told Christians to obey the Ten Commandments, but for totally different reasons and motives. And unless your motive for obeying God's law is the grace-gratitude motive of the gospel, you are in slavery.

So the gospel provides enormous freedom, both in our cultural-societal relationships and in our interior emotional-psychological life. The "other gospel" of the false teachers would destroy both.

5. What are some common ways that people today lose the freedom of the gospel and try to add to the gospel (2:6)?

How do we *add* to the gospel? Some churches insist that we must believe in Christ plus be baptized in order to be saved. Some churches insist that we must belong to their church in order to be saved. Many types of Christianity add their distinctions, such as belief in predestination, abstinence from alcohol or speaking in tongues, to the gospel as ways we can be sure we are Christians. In other words, many churches will say that we are saved by faith alone, but we only can be sure that we are real Christians if we have these distinctions. Many churches and Christian groups add cultural rules on things like dress and amusements to the Bible and insist that no one who violates these standards could possibly be a Christian. Many individual Christians have emotional-spiritual idols that we functionally add to Jesus as things that are essential for being happy or receiving life joyfully or accepting ourselves as accepted by God. We will explore this in much more detail later in the course.

How do we *fail to adapt or preserve*? Some churches and Christians have adapted the gospel to the modern world by removing "offensive" elements like miracles of any sort or the demand that we can only come to God through Christ. But then the gospel itself is gone, since we are left in a position of having to save ourselves by being good. That is a failure to preserve. On the other hand, many churches and Christians are so wedded to their music or organization or language/jargon that they are not willing to make changes to incorporate the tastes and sensibilities of outsiders. Ironically, if you under-adapt OR over-adapt, you "lose" the gospel. If you raise your traditions to the place of non-negotiables, you essentially create a legalism. You are saying, "*Real* Christians always do things this way." So both conservatism and legalism can threaten the gospel badly, just as liberalism does.

How do we *fail to accept people God has accepted*? One major way is to sneer at Christians from other social classes, whose tastes and manner we consider tacky or snooty. It is so easy to reject people on the other side of a cultural barrier. Another major way is seen when churches

refuse to recognize the baptisms or the Lord's Supper tables of other churches. (I.e., Catholics don't recognize Protestant baptism, and Baptists don't recognize Presbyterian, etc.) Some of this is not done with ill will, yet it doesn't seem to square with this passage. To consider some churches as being sub-churches is to repeat what the false teachers were trying to do to Paul's Gentile churches.

6. In 2:7-10 we see not only that there should be unity among gospel believers, but also unity among gospel proclaimers. How is this unity expressed?

First, the apostles recognized different gifts and callings. They "*saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, as Peter had been to the Jews (v.7).*" Though Peter and Paul are preaching the *same* gospel (2:7), they recognize that there are different ways to go about it. Some people have a gift and ability to communicate the gospel to one group of people, and others to another group. The implication of this is that we can *adapt* the gospel to different people without *changing* its essence. This is an important implication for mission. If we fail to adapt the gospel at all to the interests of people or if we over adapt it and lose its essence, we will fail to persuade and win people into its joy and freedom.

Second, they formed a relationship of cooperation based on shared gospel truth. Paul and his companions all received "*the right hand of fellowship.*" (2:9). "Giving the right hand" was just as much a sign of friendship, cooperation, and approval in the ancient world as it is today. This was more than a gesture of courtesy. This act had the effect of isolating and discrediting the false teachers. They could no longer claim to represent James, Peter, and John (as they evidently had, cf. 2:12). Most importantly, Paul established the principle that we must accept anyone Christ accepted. Fellowship with Christ is the sufficient and only basis for fellowship with one another.

7. Why do you think the Jerusalem apostles stressed that Paul "remember the poor" (2:10)? Does your personal life reflect the importance of this?

There are two reasons for this admonition: a general one and a particular one. The particular reason was that the Jewish churches were much poorer than the churches Paul was planting in Gentile areas. One commentary puts it this way: "*The condition of the Judean Christians...their poverty called forth the sympathy of the Gentile churches (cf. Rom.15:25ff; 1 Cor.16:1ff; 2 Cor.8:1ff; 9:1ff)*" (Guthrie, p.83). The Jerusalem apostles were therefore urging that the Gentile and Jewish churches stay tightly interconnected, sharing their resources with each other just as they are shared within the local congregation (Acts 4:32ff).

The general reason is that care for the poor is a constant in the Bible. The following is a very condensed summary of biblical teaching on this matter. (You may wish to reproduce this for the group).

Jesus proves to John the Baptist that he is the Christ by pointing out that he heals bodies and preaches to the poor (Matt 11:1-6) even as the prophets said he would (Is. 11:1-4; 61:1-2; cf. Luke 1:52-53). Jesus teaches that anyone who has truly been touched by the grace of a merciful God will be vigorous in helping the needy (Luke 6:35-36; Matt. 5:43-48). God will judge whether we have justifying faith or not by looking at our service to the poor, the refugee, the sick, the prisoner (Matt. 25:44-46). Jesus, in his incarnation, "moved in" with the poor (Luke 2:24; 2 Cor. 8:9). He lived, ate, and associated with the lowest class of society. He called this "mercy" (Matt. 9:13). The Bible demands that we emulate him in this (2 Cor. 8:8-15). Christians are to open their hands to the needy as far as there is need (1 John 3:16-17; cf. Deut. 15:7-8). Within the church, wealth is to be shared very generously between rich and poor (2 Cor. 8:13-15; cf. Lev. 25). Following the prophets, the apostles teach that true faith will

inevitably show itself through deeds of mercy (James 2:1-23). Materialism is still a grievous sin (James 5:1-6; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). Not only do all believers have these responsibilities, but also a special class of officers--deacons--are established to coordinate the church's ministry of mercy. This shows that the ministry of mercy is a required, mandated work of the church just as is the ministry of the word and discipline (cf. Rom. 15:23-29). Paul tells the Ephesian elders in his farewell address that he has taught them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). It is highly significant, then, that in his very last words, Paul exhorts them to give to the weak and poor (v.35). Not only did Paul consider mercy to the poor as part of the whole counsel of God, but he also deemed it so crucial as to make it the very last piece of teaching he gave them.

Unit 3 - Reading and Reflection

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” - for something that raised a question

The Two Prodigal Sons

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

(A Sermon by Tim Keller)

Introduction

This parable is nearly always called, “The Parable of the Prodigal Son,” but not by Jesus. When he begins the story, he says, “A man had two sons” (v.11); the story is a comparison and contrast of *both* brothers. We have sentimentalized this parable because of our almost complete concentration on the middle of the story regarding the younger brother. We imagine that the hearers’ eyes welled with tears as they heard how God will always love and welcome us, no matter what we’ve done. But if we truly come to understand why Jesus told this parable and what he meant, we will come to see that the listeners were actually thunderstruck, offended, and furious. For Jesus’ purpose here was not to warm hearts, but to explode the normal human categories of how to approach God. He does this by showing us *two* kinds of people, and thus *two* kinds of “lostness” and running from God, but still just *one* way home.

Two Kinds of People

At the beginning of the chapter, Luke gives us the setting of the parable. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were muttering and complaining about Jesus (v.2) but *tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him* (v.1). These two kinds of people correspond to the two brothers later in the parable. Tax collectors and sinners are like the younger brother in the parable. They have engaged in immoral, irreligious *wild living* (v.13). They have left the traditional morality of their families. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law, however, are like the elder brother in the parable. They have stayed with the traditional morality of their upbringing. They are deeply devoted to studying and obeying the Word of God. They pray and worship constantly.

The religious and moral elder brothers were shocked by Jesus’ ministry. The Greek tense of the verb (*were gathering round*) and the context indicate that the prevailing trend and pattern in Jesus’ ministry was to attract the very people who most hated and despised religion! Moral people were put off by Jesus, but those socially and morally out of the mainstream were strongly attracted to him. We see this continuously in the gospels. When there is a religious person with a political outcast (Zaccheus-Luke 19), or a sexual outcast (the “fallen” woman-Luke 7) or a racial outcast (Samaritan woman-John 4), it is always the “younger brother” who connects with Jesus and the “elder brother” who does not.

Jesus is continually saying to the respectable and upright, “*The tax collectors and the prostitutes enter the kingdom before you*” (Matt.21:31). Thus, the puzzled and angry reaction of the moral and religious people is not surprising. They are saying, “Why, these kinds of people *never* come to *our* services! They despise our meetings and

organizations. They are completely turned off to religion. Therefore, there is something wrong with this. He *must* just be telling them what they want to hear!”

The point? *When the message of the gospel is clear, moral people tend to dislike it, while irreligious people are intrigued and attracted.* The way to know that you are communicating and living the same gospel message as Jesus is that “younger brothers” are more attracted to you than elder brothers. This is a very searching test, because almost always, our churches are not like that. The kinds of people that were attracted to Jesus are not attracted to us. We only attract conservative, buttoned-down, moral people. The licentious, the “liberated,” the broken, the people out of the mainstream very much despise us. That can only mean one thing. We may think we understand the gospel of Jesus, but we don’t. If we don’t see the same *effect* Jesus saw, then we lack the same *message* Jesus had. If our churches aren’t filled with younger brothers, then we must be more like the elder brother than we’d like to think.

Two Kinds of Approaches

Jesus’ story of the two sons demolishes the natural human categories for salvation and how we are to approach God. The world has only two “grids” through which it understands spiritual issues (though there are an infinite number of variations on each one!). First, there is a *moralistic* grid. This says that “salvation” is finding God by obeying his law, or by living up to standards of some kind. Though God may forgive if the repentance is very sincere, we must measure up with our goodness. The second grid is a *relativistic* grid. This says that “salvation” is finding ourselves by following our hearts. In this view, there may be a God or there may not, but if there is, he will accept us as long as we are sincerely seeking what we feel to be our principles.

Both grids then divide the world into two basic groups, one seen favorably and the other unfavorably. The moralistic sees the religious people as “in” and the immoral as “out.” But the relativistic sees the free spirits as “in” and the judgmental people as “out.”

How does Jesus’ story address these views? Well, if the last eight verses were left out, if the story were mainly about the younger brother, this parable could be taken by *either* moralists or relativists as confirming their grid! The relativistic grid could appropriate it for itself, saying, “Ah, see! The son returned home after all that sin, and he was just accepted! There was no need for punishment, no need for atonement, no need for payment. There’s the ticket--God accepts us no matter what we do.” The moralistic grid could appropriate it for *itself*, saying, “Ah, see! The son ruined his life when he didn’t do the father’s will, but when he came back to live a good life, then he was received. There’s the ticket--God only welcomes you if you are good.”

But the parable’s ending completely changes all that. For one thing, the story mightily challenges the urban “liberated” grid that sees evil as mainly a lack of personal freedom. We see the ruin of such a life. And there is a final, hidden argument against the relativistic view that we will get to later.

However, Jesus’ *main* target here is the moralistic grid. And here is the shocking heart of the parable. Jesus shows us a father with *two* sons, and actually *both* are equally alienated from his heart. One has expressed alienation by running far away, but the elder brother is just as angry and just as much a stranger to the father. The father

must “go out” to each of them to urge them to come in (vv.20, 28). But here’s the remarkable part. One of his sons is a very good person, one is a very wicked person, but in the end, it is the evil son who comes in to the father’s feast and dance, and it is the good son who absolutely will not. The listeners knew what that meant. They were utterly stunned. It was a complete reversal of everything they believed. You can almost hear them gasp as the story ended. The lover of prostitutes enters the kingdom of God, and the moral man does not.

But notice--what is keeping the elder brother out? Why does he stay out when the younger brother goes in? He tells us: It is because *all these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed...* (v.29). It is not his badness keeping him out, but his “goodness.” It is not his sins that are keeping him from sharing in the feast of the father so much as his “righteousness.” The elder brother in the end is lost, not despite his good record, but because of it. Now we are getting to the heart of how the gospel differs from the moral grid. As one writer put it, “*The main thing between you and God is not your sins, but your damnable good works.*”

The gospel is neither simply religion nor irreligion; it is neither simple morality nor immorality. Most everyone thinks that the moralistic grid seems to be the Christian one, yet the gospel is a radically different approach. The moralistic grid says, “The good are in and the bad are out,” and the relativistic grid says, “The liberated are in and the oppressive are out,” but the gospel says, “The humble are in and the proud are out.” And Jesus is telling us here (as we see throughout the gospels) that when the elder-types and the younger-types clearly hear this new gospel “grid,” the younger types are generally more open and less offended. That is why the real gospel faith is one that religious people by definition do not like.

Two Kinds of Running

So what *is* this gospel “grid” for approaching God? The parable of the Two Prodigals gives us several important planks.

First, we learn that the gospel provides a radically deeper view of the concept of sin than either of the other two grids. Of course, the relativistic view of sin is well known to be shallow, yet ultimately it does not really differ from the moralistic. They both think of sin as basically “breaking the rules”--they just differ in what the rules are! But the governing theme in this parable (and all the stories of Luke 15) is that *sin is running from God--avoiding, escaping, saying, “I don’t need you!”*

This is a much more profound concept than “breaking rules.” Why? Flannery O’Connor grasped this when she said of one of her characters, “*There was a deep, black, wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin.*” How could that be? Here is a man who knows that the only way to avoid Jesus *as Savior* is to avoid sin. If I feel I am a good person, I may look to Jesus as Example, or as Helper, or as Strength--but I won’t need to utterly rely on him for every breath and obey him unconditionally. If I am a good person, then I have rights--Jesus owes it to me to listen to my prayers, to protect me and reward me.

This is clearly the attitude of the elder brother. Why is he so angry with the father? He feels he has the right to tell the father what he should do with his robes, rings, and calves. It shows that he is just as resentful of the father’s control of his goods as was

the younger brother. The younger brother went away to get out from under the father's control of his wealth, but the older brother stayed home and "*never disobeyed*" as *his* way to do the same thing. At heart they were absolutely the same. Both were trying to escape the authority of the father, both resented his control and rebelled. But one did it by breaking all the father's rules, and the other did it by keeping them.

Now we see why "running from God" is a deeper definition of sin than "breaking the rules of God," because *you can run from God either by breaking his rules or by keeping them*. The difference between a religious person and a true Christian is that the religious person obeys God to get control over God, and to get things from God, but the Christian obeys just to get *God*. Religious persons obey to get leverage over God, to control him, to put him in a position where they think he owes them. Therefore, despite their moral and religious fastidiousness, they are actually attempting to be their own saviors. Christians, who know they are only saved by grace and can never control God, obey him out of a desire to love and please and draw closer to the one who saved them.

Another way to understand this is to ask, "Why do we obey *or* sin?" Until the gospel changes our hearts, the basic reason for either is exactly the same. The younger brother and the elder brother had the wealth of the father as their main goal. They wanted his things, but not him. The younger brother's sins allowed him to get his money and do what he wanted with it. The older brother's righteousness was motivated by the same thing. Thus their real trust was not in the father, but in the things that were their ultimate joy. Their real joy and sense of worth resided in these things, not in the father. So, sins against the father's will and "good deeds" done to get control over the father, are both ways to obtain things other than God. They are both ways to become your own Savior and Lord.

Now we can see one more reason why younger brothers are generally more open to the gospel than elder brothers. Younger brothers have literally run from the father physically and morally. It's easier for them to see their need. Older brothers have not. They are running away from God while they have physically and morally stayed close. See how hard it is for religious people to believe they are running from God! But they are.

The gospel does not agree that there are spiritually two kinds of people in the world-- "good" and "bad." Instead, it says there are just two different kinds of "running from God." You can run away by breaking the rules or by keeping them. But you are running nonetheless.

Two Kinds of "Lostness"

Not only does the gospel give us a deeper definition of sin, but it also provides a deeper understanding of "lostness." It is typical for people to think of "lost" people as wild and out of control. And there is a kind of person whose body and spirit are very broken through wild and riotous living. It would not be difficult to take this text, look at the breakdown of the younger brother's life, and spend time showing the signs and remedies for "younger brother lostness."

But because there are two kinds of "running from God," there are also two sets of "lostness" traits. We will concentrate here on "elder brother lostness" because it is

much more insidious (as we have seen) and misunderstood. Not only are there many, many people in churches who are not Christians because they are “elder brothers,” there are also many Christians who are deeply affected by the elder brother spirit. These are people who still have not grasped the gospel well, who maintain a moralistic grid through which they look at themselves and read the Bible. Richard Lovelace says that many Christians “*base their justification on their sanctification*” and thus are very touchy, unhappy, and insecure. We need to recognize the marks of “elder brother lostness.”

(1) One sign of the “elder brother” spirit is that *he is filled with anger about how his life is going* (v.28--*became angry*). One sign of a moralistic spirit is a feeling that God owes me a good and comfortable life if I live up to his standards. Now that will continually lead to anger whenever your life takes a bad turn. If you feel you have been living right, you will be angry at God; if you feel that you have not been living right, you will be angry at yourself. Either way, your life will be filled with anger because you have been trying to control God through your goodness.

(2) A second sign of the “elder brother” spirit is a *joyless, mechanical obedience*. Notice that the older son “lets his slip show” when he says, “*I’ve been slaving for you*” (v.29). Look at it this way: There are two ways to listen to Mozart. You may listen to Mozart because it is instrumental (a means) to something else you love for its own sake. For example, you may listen to Mozart to get an “A” in music appreciation class so that you can get your degree and a good job. Or you may listen to Mozart so you can feel (and look) like a cultured person. But you can also listen to Mozart because it is beautiful for its own sake. It gives you pleasure just for what it is in itself. Elder brother obedience treats God as instrumental—a means to an end. You don’t do good out of a delight in goodness for its own sake or for the pleasure of God. Instead, you do it joylessly and slavishly. But Christians are filled with amazement at the grace of God and so obey out of a delight in pleasing him for his own sake.

(3) A third sign of the “elder brother” spirit is *a coldness to younger brother-types*. And especially, elder brothers are *disdainful of or ineffective in evangelism*. The older son will not even “own” or acknowledge his brother—“*this son of yours*” (v.30). The person changed by the real gospel is always disposed toward evangelism. For one thing, if you believe you are a sinner saved by grace alone, you will not feel superior to anyone else, not to other cultural or racial groups, not to other faiths, not to immoral people. You will treat them with respect because you know that your morality has been as sinful and “God-escaping” as their immorality. Secondly, if you understand the gospel, you will treat others with hope. You will never look at anyone and say, “Here’s someone who could never become a Christian,” because now you know that all “types” of people are equally unlikely to find God. Thirdly, if you understand the gospel, you will be very courageous in your witness. You will not be bound by what people think of you.

(4) A fourth sign of the “elder brother” spirit is a *lack of assurance of the father’s love*. The son says, “*You never threw me a party*” (v.29). There is no dancing or festiveness in the elder brother’s relationship with his father. As long as you try to earn your salvation by controlling God through your goodness, you will never, ever be sure you have “made it.” There will always be anxiety and fear and uncertainty in your relationship. No wonder there is no intimacy in the prayer life of the “elder brother”--

no joy or closeness-- though the elder brother may be very diligent in "saying his prayers."

(5) A fifth sign of "elder brother" spirit is an *unforgiving, judgmental spirit*. If you are an elder brother, you lack two things necessary to forgive. First, you lack the emotional humility to say, "I'm no different." You instead look at the sinner and say, "I would never do that!" Second, you lack the emotional "wealth" to say, "I am so loved and forgiven by my father, what does it matter that I was slighted or wronged by him?"

One Way Home

If there are two kinds of running and two kinds of "lostness," are there two ways home? No--there is only one, though it must be applied in different ways. Not only is there one way home for both younger-brother and older-brother non-Christians, but there is one way for believers to grow out of the immaturity and old "false grids" that still bedevil us.

First, we need the father to come out to us. Even the younger brother gets the father's kiss *before* he repents (v.20). The father's kiss is not a response to our repentance, but the action that brings it about. With the older brother, the father must come out and plead with him (v.28), just as he pleads today with hardened religious people! We all need God's grace to come to us first. We need him to seek us, or we will never seek him.

Second, we must repent, not just of our sins, but also of our righteousness. We need a deeper, more comprehensive repentance. We must recognize that the *reasons* for our righteous deeds have been the same as the reasons for our sins. We must admit that other things besides God are operating as our functional trusts and joy, and that our *main* sin has been our efforts at self-salvation, at trying to be our own Savior. Repentance means to admit that the reason we did right was to put God in our debt, so that we could have some say in the kind of life we "deserve," and keep control of our lives.

Third, we must rely on and rejoice in what the father has provided for our salvation. We said earlier that, at first glance, the welcome of the younger brother seems "cheap." There is no punishment, no atonement--he is just taken in! Does this mean that the relativists are right, that God just accepts us whatever we do, as long as we are sorry? No. Think: How was the younger brother put back in the family? He got a robe, a ring, he got a place back in the inheritance. But the only way the father could do this *is* at great expense. It is at the expense of the elder brother. The younger brother had already taken away his rightful portion of the inheritance, and now every cent of the father belongs by right to the elder. When he says, "*Everything I have is yours*" (v.31), he is speaking the literal truth. Every robe, every ring, every fatted calf is the elder brother's. The salvation of the younger son is *not* free--it will be extremely expensive. The father *cannot* do it, except at the expense of his other son.

So are we stuck? No, *we* are not stuck. We have a different elder brother. That is the point of the parable. Jesus has shown the Pharisees what they look like; absolutely stuck in their self-righteous spirit, absolutely alienated from the gracious heart of the father. But *Jesus* is not. Hebrews 2:11 says, "*Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them*

brothers. He says [to God], 'I will declare your name to my brothers'." Jesus Christ is the true elder brother. By way of contrast with *this* elder brother, he is revealed to us. He came to earth and truly obeyed his father and never disobeyed his orders. He truly has the right to all the father owns. But instead, he came out and searched for us, and found us in the pigsty, and carried us home on his shoulders singing with joy. And he gave us his robe, his ring, his place, his wealth--all at his own expense.

Understanding this truth is essential and will transform you. We'll never stop being elder brothers until we rejoice in the work of our true elder brother.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you been more of a younger brother in your thinking and living or an elder brother?

2. What convicted you the most in this sermon?

3. What helped you most?

4. What questions did it raise?

Lesson 4 - Living the Gospel

In this section Paul for the first time lays out his gospel as “justification by faith.” And he also introduces a principle that will surprise many--that Christians need the gospel as well as non-Christians. In 2:14 he insists that all of life must be continually thought out and lived out by believers "in line" with the gospel.

Leader's background notes:

Here for the first time Paul explains the gospel as '*justification by faith.*' Though the meaning of the word “justification” can be inferred from the English text, it is helpful to share with the group the “word study” which I’ve appended at the end. It should be read after answering question #5.

Verses 15-21 include a couple of obscure and difficult statements, but that should not obscure the clarity of Paul's basic teaching in this passage. It is best to understand v.17 like this--“If, while we are seeking to live by faith that Christ justifies us, we find ourselves falling into sin, is it because salvation-by-grace has promoted sin? Not at all!” The term “*while we seek to be justified in Christ*” (v.17-NIV) may lead some to think that these are people who are not saved yet but who are seeking. But the term “*we*” has meant Peter and Paul since the beginning of v.15. There is not reason to understand it differently now. So Paul’s term “*we*” must mean he himself and other Christians who are seeking to “live” justified--not those seeking to “become” justified.

Verse 18 is also difficult. One possible meaning: “If someone keeps on with the same lifestyle after supposedly receiving Christ, it proves they really did not grasp the gospel, but were only looking for an excuse to disobey God.” But since vv.19-21 are so powerful and bear most of the freight of his argument, it is not crucial to understand v.18. Tell your group that it is possible to skip v.18 and still understand Paul's answer to the objection in v.17.

Read Galatians 2:11-21

1. Read Acts 11:1-18. Why did Peter originally begin “eating with Gentiles” (v.12a)? What led him to stop (v.12b)?

Why did Peter originally begin eating with Gentiles? Peter began eating with Gentiles because God had shown him that no one is “unclean” in Christ.

The Old Testament instituted the “clean laws,” a complicated series of regulations for worshippers to follow in order to be “ceremonially clean” and acceptable for the presence of God in worship. Persons could not draw near to God if they ate certain “unclean” foods, if they had touched dead things, if they had a disease or touched someone who did, and so on (see Leviticus 11, 15, 20). This “ceremonial” law was a teaching method by which God showed that sinful people cannot go into the presence of a holy God without cleansing. Despite Jesus' allusions to the obsolescence of the ceremonial laws (Matt. 15:3-20), God had to send Peter a vision to show him why the ceremonial law was finished. He saw a great sheet full of animals forbidden for eating in the OT, and he heard a voice saying “*Kill and eat*” (Acts 11:7). Peter replied that he would not eat unclean animals. Then God said, “*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*” (Acts 11:9). Immediately thereafter, Peter meets a repentant Gentile (Cornelius) who receives Christ and is born again. Then Peter realizes, “*God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him....*” (Acts 10:34-35). Afterwards he eats with Gentiles despite criticism (Acts 11:2). Even later he asserts that the Gentiles have been “*purified [made clean] by faith*” (Acts 15:7-9). Through Christ (and only through Christ) all believers were “clean” and acceptable to God, for now it is Christ who makes us “*holy and*

blameless in his sight" (Col. 1:23) and *"without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless"* (Eph.5:27).

What led him to stop?

When Peter withdrew from the Gentiles, it was not just cowardice but *"hypocrisy."* Peter could not have forgotten something as momentous as the vision at Joppa and the conversion of Cornelius. He did not really change his mind or convictions. He still believed the gospel--that we are "clean" through Jesus alone--but he did not act in accord with his deepest understanding and convictions. What then led Peter to act as he did? We are told *"He was afraid"* (v.12). Perhaps he was simply afraid of criticism. But in addition, certainly racial pride must have entered into it. Peter and all the Jews had been drilled since their youth that Gentiles were "unclean." While hiding beneath the facade of religious observance, Peter and other Jewish Christians were probably still feeling disdain for Christians from "inferior" national and racial backgrounds. Peter was allowing cultural differences to become more important than gospel unity.

2. What do you think Paul meant when he said that Peter was not "acting in line with the truth of the gospel" (v.14)?

The NIV translation gives a very good literal sense of Paul's Greek words. He says that they were "not *ortho*-walking with the gospel." (The prefix *ortho* means to be straight.) This means, first, that the gospel is a truth--it is a message, a set of claims. It includes the fact that we are weak and sinful, that we seek to control our lives by being our own Saviors and Lords, that God's law was fulfilled by Christ for us, that we are now accepted completely though we are still very sinful and flawed, and so on. This means, second, that this gospel truth has a vast number of implications for all of life. It is our job to bring everything in our lives "in line" with "the thrust" or direction of the gospel. We are to think out its implications in every area of our lives, and seek to bring our thinking, feeling, and behavior "in line."

The gospel "truth" is radically opposed to the assumptions of the world. But since we live in the world, we have embraced many of the world's assumptions. Christian living is therefore a continual realignment process of bringing everything in line with the truth of the gospel.

3. Why was Peter being particularly "hypocritical" in his attitudes toward Gentile Christians (v.13-14)?

Paul reminds Peter that he *"lives like a Gentile"* (v.14). It is unlikely that this means that Peter simply had thrown off all of the Jewish customs of diet and dress and other cultural customs. Actually there is no need for anyone who becomes a Christian to completely abandon his or her culture. But this must mean that Peter at least had become more sporadic in his observance of Jewish food laws and other observances. Why would that be? He would have come to realize that the food and dress laws were only cultural *Jewish customs* (v.14; literally the word is "Judaizing"--living in a Jewish fashion). The gospel 'de-moted' Peter's cultural customs in his mind and heart. Why did this change happen to Peter? Because, Paul says, *"we who are Jews...not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law"* (v.15). While he still may have seen these behaviors as wise (with his mind) and deeply satisfying and familiar (with his emotions), he now would have known that they weren't the basis of his relationship with God. That necessarily would have made the observance of them less a matter of great pride ('look at how good I am!') or of great fear ('if I don't keep these, I'll be spiritually lost'). His national and cultural distinctions would have ceased to have the same amount of moral and spiritual significance.

Nevertheless, now Peter is insisting that Gentile Christians adopt culturally foreign customs and live like Jews (v.16). He was forcing them to take on the very customs that Peter had been freed from! Despite the fact that he personally had become less culturally bound and limited, he was refusing Gentiles the same cultural freedom that comes with the gospel of justification through Christ alone.

4. How can we make the same kind of mistake that Peter did? How can we focus on non-essentials? How can we fail to “eat” with other Christians?

Peter's sin was basically the sin of nationalism. He insists that Christians can't be really pleasing to God unless they become Jewish. But nationalism is just one form of legalism. Legalism is looking to something besides Jesus Christ in order to be acceptable and clean before God. Legalism always results in pride and fear, psychologically, and exclusion and strife, socially.

There are many possible examples today of similar sorts of exclusive social behavior based on a lack of orientation to justification by faith. Here are just a few.

One way is to be sectarian. Every Christian group or denomination necessarily has many distinctions of belief and practice that has less to do with the core gospel beliefs and more to do with specific convictions about ethical behavior or church policy. It is extremely easy to stress our distinctions in order to demonstrate to ourselves and others that our church is the superior or best one.

Another way is to bring classist, nationalistic, or racist attitudes from the world into the church. Many Christians belong to classes, groups, or personality types that we had always disdained in our lives outside the church. Working class Christians may have a distaste for Christians from wealthier or more socially “refined” backgrounds and vice versa. Christians from one political persuasion may be upset by the presence of those from the other end of the spectrum. Very talented Christians may feel unhappy that people they have always considered mediocre are part of the church. Socially polished Christians feel uncomfortable around believers who are socially awkward or marginal (and again vice versa). If we have fairly strong ties to an ethnic group (e.g. WASP, Hispanic, Chinese, African American), we may feel uncomfortable around people whose cultural emphases are different. We may respond to all this as Peter did. We will sit by “those other people” in church, but we won’t “eat” with them. In other words, we won’t really become friends with them. We won’t socialize with them, sharing our lives and homes and things with them. We will keep relationships formal and see them at official church meetings only. This, of course, is a serious lapse. It stems from a general feeling of superiority. Our hearts, without the gospel, have to manufacture self-esteem by comparing our group with other groups. But the gospel tells us we are *all* unclean without Christ and *all* clean in him.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, the sharing of a meal had more significance than it does today. “To sup with” was a synonym for fellowship and unity. (See Rev.3:20, where Jesus offers to “sup with” us, a metaphor for intimacy.) Therefore, to refuse a meal was an act of personal rejection. It was a failure to treat someone as an equal. For Christians, eating together has additional significance. Jesus adopted the custom of fellowship/supping and raised it to a new level when he instituted the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It was in a common meal that Christians were to renew intimacy with God and each other. It represented our equality before Christ.

Lastly, the most subtle way to lapse into Peter's sin is simply to take our own preferences too seriously and endow with moral significance what is only cultural. For example, it is very hard

for Christians from churches with emotional expressiveness and modern music not to feel superior to churches with emotional reserve and classical music, and vice versa. We cannot just see that we are different; we believe that our style and customs are spiritually *better*. This leads to all sorts of divisions in the Body of Christ.

5. How is nationalism/racism "not in line with the gospel?" What difference does it make that Paul takes this approach rather than simply saying that it is wrong?

How it is not 'in line' with the gospel.

Paul's basic argument to Peter is this: God did not have fellowship with you on the basis of your race and culture (v.15). Though you were good and devout, your race and customs had nothing to do with it (v.16). Therefore, how can *you* have fellowship on the basis of race and culture (v.14)? Put another way: "You know that Jewish customs have no spiritual significance for you, so how can you treat Gentiles as if they have spiritual significance for them?"

What difference does it make?

The difference intellectually: Paul's analysis of racism is extremely significant and unique. He does not simply say that racism is a sin, which it is. He uses the gospel to show us its spiritual roots. Without this knowledge, we can't do anything about it. Paul says the roots of racism are a resistance to the gospel of salvation. In other words, racism is a continuation of works-righteousness in one part of our lives. It is a failure to bring our relationships with other cultures in line with grace-salvation. Racism arises because our hearts still oppose grace and seek to find ways of self-justification. We try to devise ways to feel superior to others, to feel "cleaner" than others. One of the ways we do this is by making our culture an idol. Extreme cases of this result in militarism and fascism. But to some degree all of us try to use our culture and race to feel superior to others.

Note: If you are member of a racial majority, your race's cultural pride is fairly easy to see. If you are a member of a racial minority that is often put down, discernment of "justification-through-racial pride" is a bit more complex. But it surfaces when you begin to think, "I'm more noble than you of the dominant race. I have suffered more and I'm not an oppressor like you."

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

Keep this in mind, too. Peter's racial pride was grounded in fear (v.12 - *he was afraid*). When our sin is rooted in fear, we need to be loved and strengthened in order to get the courage to do right in spite of our fear. Not only was Peter's racism "out of line" with the gospel, but his cowardice was too. If he is justified in *God's* eyes (v.15-16), why does he need to be justified in theirs? If Paul only said, "Your racism is a violation of the rules of God," that cowardice would not have been addressed. But when Paul said, "Your racism is a violation of the grace and mercy of God to you," he was also addressing Peter's fear. He appealed, "You've forgotten Christ's love for *you*, Peter."

Do we normally appeal to each other in this way?

No, of course we don't. That is why there is so little of what Paul describes in Galatians 6:1-2. We do not provide each other with winsome, grace-based, loving rebukes. And more basic than that, Christians tend to motivate others with guilt. We tend to say, "You would do this if you were really committed Christians," indicating that we *are* committed and we hope that others are as good as we are! This is the reason why so many churches quench the motivation of people for ministry.

6. In verses 15-16, he begins to talk of being "justified" by Christ. How does the discussion with Peter shed light on the meaning of the word "justification?"

Here Paul introduces the term "justification" for the first time. Why does he do it here? We should connect this concept with Paul's controversy with Peter. Traditionally, Jews did not eat with Gentiles because they were "unclean." When Peter refrained from eating with Gentiles, Paul reminded him of what he had learned through revelation (Acts 11:8-10; 15:8-9), that in Christ we are "clean." This is what circumcision and the food laws and all the ceremonial laws were about in the Old Testament. *You had to be "clean" to go to worship, to be acceptable in the eyes and presence of God.* Though the word "clean" does not show up in Galatians 2:11-13, that is what "circumcision" (v.12) and eating and all the rules and regulations were about. *Now* Paul introduces "justification" (v.15-16). This can only mean that "justification" is essentially the same thing as being "clean" and acceptable for the presence and fellowship of God.

Addendum:

The actual word "justification" has a legal reference, and therefore it provides a different perspective on our salvation in Christ. The opposite of "clean" is "polluted," and therefore, that word would not be sufficient to convey what Christ does for us. It would be easy to think that God accepts us because Christ "cleanses" and gets rid of our sinful thoughts and habits. In other words, we might conclude that we become acceptable to God by actually becoming righteous. But the opposite of "justified" is "condemned." This means that in Christ, though we are actually sinners, we are not under condemnation. God accepts us despite our sin. So we are not acceptable to God because we actually become righteous. We become actually righteous because we are acceptable to God.

"'Justification' is a legal term borrowed from the law courts. It is the exact opposite of 'condemnation' (cf. Deut.25:1; Prov.17:15; Rom.8:33,34). 'To condemn' is to declare somebody guilty; 'to justify' is to declare him...righteous. In the Bible it refers to God's act of unmerited favor by which He puts a sinner right with himself, not only pardoning or acquitting him, but accepting and treating him as righteous." (Stott, p.60)

"To justify" in the Bible means...to declare...of a man on trial, that he is not liable to any penalty, but is entitled to all the privileges due to those who have kept the law. Justifying is the act of a judge pronouncing the opposite sentence to condemnation--that of acquittal and legal immunity." -- J.I. Packer, *God's Words* (IVP, 1981)

7. What do you think it means that he "died" to the law? What do you think it means that he died to the law through the law? Though he was a law-keeping Pharisee, why was it only after "dying to the law" that Paul began to live for God?

(a) *What do you think it means that he “died to the law?”*

It can't mean that we no longer obey the law of God. Consider all the rest of Paul's writings. Doesn't he tell Christians that they must obey the law? For example, Paul tells the Corinthians that sexual immorality is wrong, and he bases this on what Genesis says about marriage (1 Cor. 6:15-16). That (and many other places) means that Paul is not saying that we no longer have to obey the law of God.

What it must therefore mean is that he died to the law *as a way of being saved*. It also means he *died to the law's condemnation*. If we are not justified by the law, but by Christ (v.16), then that means the law cannot condemn us. If I am feeling condemned and if I fear that God will no longer hear my prayers or care for me, then I have simply forgotten that I am dead to the law. I've forgotten that it can't harm me. (Note: In Romans 7 we see Paul saying the same thing, though in greater detail. In Romans 7:1-5, Paul likens the law to a spouse, saying, "Just as when one marriage partner dies, the marriage is over, so when we die to our law-spouse, we are no longer bound to it." Thus, when we are justified by faith, in Paul's view, it is like dying, and the old bond--that we must obey the law perfectly or be lost forever--is broken.)

(b) *Supplement question: What does Paul mean by saying that he died to the law “through” the law? (Consider this phrase in light of Romans 7:7-13.)*

Romans 7 explains what Paul means. There Paul says, “I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’” Paul means that, as he was trying to obey the law, he came to see how impossible it was to obey it! He says he was “*alive*” until the “*commandment came*” and “*put him to death*” (vv.9, 12). That probably means that one day the commandment “Thou shalt not covet” hit home with him and he began to understand it and see that he could never obey it. Probably, like a good Pharisee, he had previously felt “*alive*” morally, that is, he felt that he was doing well, “*in the running*” for salvation, because he concentrated on external behavior codes. But then he saw that he would never obey it, that he was spiritually as good as dead. What happened to him was akin to what Francis Schaeffer writes:

However, eventually the Christian life and true spirituality are not to be seen as outward at all, but inward. The climax of the Ten Commandments is the Tenth Commandment in Exodus 20:17: “Thou shalt not covet...” The commandment not to covet is an entirely inward thing...This...is the hub of the whole matter....Actually we break the last commandment before we break any of the others....Coveting is the negative side of the positive commandment “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.....”..I am to love God enough to be contented...A quiet disposition and a heart giving thanks at any given moment is the real test of the extent to which we love God at that moment....In Romans 7:7-9 Paul states very clearly that this was the commandment which gave him a sense of being sinful...”

--F.Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*

Therefore, we see that Paul does not “die to the law” by dishonoring it and disdaining it. Not at all! In fact, it is only when we realize that we cannot be justified by works that we are free to admit the full weight of what the law demands! And it is only by admitting the full weight of what the law demands that we can see our need for a gospel of grace. Thus it is “*through*” the law, not by doing an end run around the law, that Paul was converted. It was by really listening to the law that he saw he needed a savior.

(c) *Why was it only after he “died to the law” that he began to live for God?*

The inescapable point of the contrast is that Paul is saying that he never really lived for God when he was trying to save himself through obedience to the law. He was being very moral and good, but it was for Paul, not for God. If you obey God without knowing you are accepted, then

you are obeying to get a reward--for what you get from God, not out of sheer love for God himself. Now that he is justified and accepted, Paul has a new motive for obedience that is far more wholesome and powerful. He wants simply to live for the one "who loved me and gave himself for me" (v.20). We will see much more about this in Galatians 5. Now we need to acknowledge the simple assertion that my acceptance gives me a new and stronger motive for obeying God than justification by works.

Here, then, is a paraphrase of v.19.

Through the law I died to the law =

"The law itself showed me that I could never make myself acceptable through it. So I stopped 'living to it.' I died to it as savior."

that I might live for God =

"Though I obeyed God before, it was simply to get something from him; it was for *my* sake. Now I obey him simply to please him. I now live for him."

8. Put vv.20-21 in your own words. What seeming contradiction is there between the two sentences of v.20? What mistakes does this "tension" help us avoid in the Christian life?

I was crucified with Christ:

God treats me just as if I died on the cross and paid for every last sin. I am not liable. So the law has no claim on me. I owe the law nothing. I have paid it in full.

I no longer live, but Christ:

God sees Christ's perfection and beauty when he sees me. In a sense, I am "gone."

And the life I live is by faith in the One who loved me:

Yet I am very active in the Christian life. My job: to live 'in line' with (i.e. by faith in) the truth that I am completely loved.

If righteousness could come by faith, Christ died for nothing:

If anyone could be saved by being good, Christ's death is senseless and pointless.

The "tension" is that first Paul says, "I don't live--Christ lives in me," but in the very next sentence, he says, "The life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God." If we only had the first sentence, it would be possible to fall into a very "super-spiritual" view of the Christian life. Some people believe that we are not to exert ourselves at all to fight against sin, etc., but we are to "let Christ do it through you." That often means that we are not to work at forgiveness, but wait until Christ just comes and takes away our anger; that we are not to fight against temptation, but just wait until Christ comes and takes away the wrong desires. Some people read v.20a in very subjective terms and counsel people to "let go" and "lose control." But Paul cannot mean this, because he turns right around and says that it is most definitely he himself who is living the life. If we only had the second sentence, we might think, however, that the main way we become like Christ is by trying very hard.

The two sentences (which are one sentence in Greek) together show us that we are to live our life out *on the basis of who we are in Christ*. In other words, v.20 is just a restatement of v.14, namely, that we need to live our lives "in line" with the truth of the gospel. "*I no longer live*," in light of v.19, "*I died to the law*," should be taken not as a subjective experience but as the objective reality of justification. Now Christ's life is my life, Christ's past is my past. I am "*in*

Christ” v.17, which means that I am as free from condemnation before God as if I *had* already died, as if I paid the debt. And I am as loved by God as if I *had* lived the life Christ lived. So “*It is not me that lives, but Christ*” is a triumphant statement that, though “*we ourselves*” are sinners, in Christ we are righteous. Then v.21 comes immediately to say, “Now when I live my life and make my choices and do my work, I do so remembering who I am by faith in Christ, who loved me so much!” The inner dynamic for living the Christian life is right here! Only when I see myself as completely loved and holy in Christ will I have the power to repent with joy, conquer my fears, and obey the one who did all this for me.

The last verse, v.21, is said by Machen to be the key verse of the epistle. It means Christ will do everything for you or nothing. You cannot combine merit and grace. If justification is by the law at all, Christ’s death is meaningless in history and meaningless to you personally. Dr. Roger Nicole used to tell this story:

If your house was burning down but your whole family escaped, and I came to you and said, “Let me show you how much I love you!” and ran into the fiery house and died, you would say, “What an idiot!” But if one of your children was still in the house, and I said, “Let me show you how much I love you!” and ran into the fiery house and saved your child but died myself, you would say, “Behold, how he loved us!” Now if you can save yourself by works, Jesus death is not loving; it is pure stupidity. If, however, you are lost and dying and unable to save yourself, his death means everything.

Which is it? Does Jesus’ death mean everything or nothing? If we can be saved by our good deeds, Christ died for nothing.

Endnote: Here is a way to weave the argument of vv.18-21 into a single line:

The fundamental problem is: what are we really living *for*? Both the lawbreaker (v.18) and the law-truster (v.19a) are really obeying God to get things from him. They are both living *for* themselves. But if we listen to the law truly (v.19a), we see we must stop trusting it, and when we listen to the gospel, we see we can be loved completely in him. Now the entire direction of our lives changes. Since I have in embryo all my heart could desire, I now obey God *for* God. I live to please him and delight in him for who he is, not what he can give me.

9. What is the best and most helpful thing you learned today? What verse is the most special to you? Why?

Unit 4 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” -for something that raised a question

Living "In-Line" With The Gospel

PRINCIPLE

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

IMPLICATIONS

Implication #1: The power of the gospel

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

Implication #2: The sufficiency of the gospel

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

APPLICATIONS

The two "thieves" of the gospel

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

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

The gospel teaches us to say:

"I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe" (vs. antinomianism).

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

How both 'thieves' differ.

How does moralism/religion steal joy and power?

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

How does relativism steal joy and power? Relativists are usually irreligious, or else prefer "liberal" religion. On the surface, they are often more tolerant than moralist/religious people. They believe that everyone needs to determine what is right and wrong individually. Often they view God as a loving and/or impersonal force. They may talk a great deal about God's love, but since they do not think of themselves as sinners, God's love for us costs him *nothing*. If God accepts us, it is because he is so welcoming, or because we are not so bad. The concept of God's love in the gospel is far more rich, deep, and electrifying.

How both "thieves" are the same.

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

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

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

CASE STUDIES

Paul's point is that we must not simply ask in every area of life, "What is the moral way to act?" but "What is the way that is in-line with the gospel?" The gospel must be continually applied to our lives to keep us from moving into our habitual moralistic or individualistic directions. We must bring *everything* "into line" with the gospel.

Case Study #1 - Racism

Moralistic persons will tend to be very proud of their culture. They easily fall into cultural imperialism. They try to attach spiritual significance to their cultural styles to make themselves feel morally superior to other peoples. This happens because moralistic people are very insecure, since they look a lot at the eternal law and know deep down that they cannot keep it. They use cultural differences to buttress their sense of righteousness.

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

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

are. This gives the Christian a radically different posture from either moralists or relativists.

Case Study #2 - Suffering

Moralistic persons have a major problem when suffering strikes them. Why? The whole point of moralism is to put God in one's debt. Moralistic people feel that God owes them a safe life because of their goodness. So when suffering hits us, the moralistic heart is forced to either feel terrific anger toward God (if you feel you have been living up to moral standards) or terrific anger toward yourself (if you feel you haven't been living up.) You will either think "I hate God" or "I hate myself" or you will swing back and forth between both poles.

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Generally, what helped you most? What puzzled you?

2. Select one personal problem or issue in your life. During the next week, pray, reflect, and determine your answers to the following:

a. The moralistic way to handle this.

b. The hedonistic way to handle this.

c. The gospel way to handle this.

Leader's Notes:

Living "In-Line" with the Gospel--More Case Studies

The following case studies include some suggestions for how the gospel could be applied to various issues and areas of life. Consult this document to help those in your group answer discussion question #2 at the end of the exercise: "In Line With the Gospel."

KEY TO EVERYTHING

We have seen that the gospel is the way that anything is renewed and transformed by Christ, whether a heart, a relationship, a church, or a community. It is the key to all doctrine and our view of our lives in this world. Therefore, all our problems come from a lack of orientation to the gospel. Put positively, the gospel transforms our hearts and thinking and approaches to absolutely everything.

A. The Gospel and the individual.

1. Approach to discouragement. When a person is depressed, the moralist says, "You are breaking the rules. Repent!" On the other hand, the relativist says, "You just need to love and accept yourself." But (assuming there is no physiological base of the depression) the gospel leads us to examine ourselves and say: "Something in my life has become more important than God, whether a pseudo-savior or a form of works-righteousness." The gospel leads us to repentance, but not to merely setting our will against superficialities. It is without the gospel that superficialities will be addressed instead of the heart. The moralist will work on behavior and the relativist will work on the emotions themselves.

2. Approach to the physical world. Some moralists are indifferent to the physical world, They see it as unimportant, while many others are downright afraid of physical pleasure. Since they are seeking to earn their salvation, they prefer to focus on sins of the physical like sex and the other appetites. These are easier to avoid than sins of the spirit like pride. Therefore, they prefer to see sins of the body as worse than other kinds. As a result, legalism usually leads to a distaste of pleasure. On the other hand, the relativist is often a hedonist, someone who is controlled by pleasure, and who makes it an idol. The gospel leads us to see that God has invented both body and soul and so will redeem both body and soul, though under sin both body and soul are broken. Thus the gospel leads us to enjoy the physical and to fight against physical brokenness, such as sickness and poverty, yet to be moderate in our use of material things.

3. Approach to love and relationships. Moralism often makes relationships into a "blame game." This is because a moralist is traumatized by criticism that is too severe, and maintains a self-image as a good person by blaming others. On the other hand, moralism can use the procuring of love as the way to earn our salvation and convince ourselves that we are worthy persons. That often creates what is called codependency, a form of self-salvation through needing people or needing people to need you (i.e. saving yourself by saving others). On the other hand, much relativism/liberalism reduces love to a negotiated partnership for mutual benefit. You only relate as long as it is not costing you anything. So the choice (without the gospel) is to selfishly use others or to selfishly let yourself be used by others. But the gospel leads us to do neither. We do sacrifice and commit, but not out of a need to convince ourselves or others we are acceptable. So we can love the person enough to confront, yet stay with the person when it does not benefit us.

4. Approach to sexuality. The secularist/pragmatist sees sex as merely a biological and physical appetite. The moralist tends to see sex as dirty or at least a dangerous impulse that leads constantly to sin. But the gospel shows us that sexuality is to reflect the self-giving of Christ. He gave himself completely without conditions. So we are not to seek intimacy but hold back control of our lives. If we give ourselves sexually we are to give ourselves legally, socially, personally, utterly. Sex is only to happen in a totally committed, permanent relationship of marriage.

5. Approach to one's family. Moralism can make you a slave to parental expectations, while pragmatism sees no need for family loyalty or the keeping of promises and covenants if they do not "meet my needs." The gospel frees you from making parental approval an absolute or psychological salvation, pointing out how God becomes the ultimate father. Then you will neither be too dependent or too hostile to your parents.

6. Approach to self-control. Moralists tell us to control our passions out of fear of punishment. This is a volition-based approach. Liberalism tells us to express ourselves and find out what is right for us. This is an emotion-based approach. The gospel tells us that the free, unloseable grace of God "teaches us to say no" to our passions (Titus 2:13) if we listen to it. This is a whole-person based approach, starting with the truth descending into the heart.

7. Approach to other races and cultures. The liberal approach is to relativize all cultures. ("We can all get along because there is no truth.") The conservatives believe there is truth for evaluation of cultures, and so they choose some culture as superior and then they idolize it, feeling superior to others in the impulse of self-justifying pride. The gospel leads us to be somewhat critical of all cultures including our own (since there is truth), but to be morally superior to no one. After all, we are saved by grace alone. Christians will exhibit both moral conviction and compassion and flexibility. For example, gays are used to being either hated or completely accepted. They never see anything else.

8. Approach to witness to non-Christians. The liberal/pragmatist approach is to deny the legitimacy of evangelism altogether. The conservative/moralist person does believe in proselytizing, because "we are right and they are wrong." Such proselytizing is almost always offensive. But the gospel produces a constellation of traits in us. First, we are compelled to share the gospel out of generosity and love, not guilt. Second, we are freed from fear of being ridiculed or hurt by others, since we already have the favor of God by grace. Third, there is a humility in our dealings with others, because we know we are saved only by grace alone, not because of our superior insight or character. Fourth, we are hopeful about anyone, even the "hard cases," because we were saved only because of grace, not because we were likely people to be Christians. Fifth, we are courteous and careful with people. We don't have to push or coerce them, for it is only God's grace that opens hearts, not our eloquence or persistence or even their openness. All these traits not only create a winsome evangelist but an excellent neighbor in a multi-cultural society.

9. Approach to human authority. Moralists will tend to obey human authorities (family, tribe, government, cultural customs) too much, since they rely so heavily on their self-image of being moral and decent. Pragmatists will either obey human authority too much (since they have no higher authority by which they can judge their culture) or else too little (since they may only obey when they know they won't get caught). This leads to either authoritarianism or anarchy. But the gospel gives you both a standard by which to oppose human authority if it contradicts the gospel, and incentives to obey the civil authorities from the heart, even when you could get away with disobedience.

10. Approach to human dignity. Moralists often have a pretty low view of human nature. They mainly see human sin and depravity. Pragmatists, on the other hand, have no good basis for

treating people with dignity. Usually they have no religious beliefs about what human beings are. "If they are just chance products of evolution, how do we know they are more valuable than a rock?" But the gospel shows us that every human being is infinitely fallen (lost in sin) and infinitely exalted (in the image of God). So we treat every human being as precious, yet dangerous!

11. Approach to guilt. When someone says, "I can't forgive myself," it means there is some standard or condition or person that is more central to your identity than the grace of God. God is the only God who forgives; no other "god" will. If you cannot forgive yourself, it is because you have failed your real God, your real righteousness, and it is holding you captive. The moralist's false god is usually a God of their imagination which is holy and demanding but not gracious. The pragmatist's false god is usually some achievement or relationship.

12. Approach to self-image. Without the gospel, your self-image is based upon living up to some standards, whether yours or someone else's imposed upon you. If you live up to those standards, you will be confident but not humble. If you don't live up to them, you will be humble but not confident. Only in the gospel can you be both enormously bold and utterly sensitive and humble. For you are both perfect and a sinner!

13. Approach to joy and humor. Moralism has to eat away at real joy and humor because the system of legalism forces you to take yourself (your image, your appearance, your reputation) very seriously. Pragmatism on the other hand will tend toward cynicism as life goes on because of the inevitable cynicism that grows. This cynicism grows from a lack of hope for the world. In the end, evil will triumph--there is no judgment or divine justice. But if we are saved by grace alone, then the very fact of our being Christians is a constant source of amazed delight. There is nothing matter-of-fact about our lives, no "of course" to our lives. It is a miracle we are Christians, and we have hope. So the gospel which creates bold humility should give us a far deeper sense of humor. We don't have to take ourselves seriously, and we are full of hope for the world.

14. Approach to "right living." Jonathan Edwards points out that "true virtue" is only possible for those who have experienced the grace of the gospel. Any person who is trying to earn their salvation does the right thing in order to get into heaven, or in order to better their self-esteem. In other words, the ultimate motive is self-interest. But persons who know they are totally accepted already do the right thing out of sheer delight in righteousness for its own sake. Only in the gospel do you obey God for God's sake, and not for what God will give you. Only in the gospel do you love people for their sake (not yours), do good for its own sake (not yours), and obey God for his sake (not yours). Only the gospel makes "doing the right thing" a joy and delight, not a burden or a means to an end.

B. The Gospel and the church.

1. Approach to ministry in the world. Legalism tends to place all the emphasis on the individual human soul. Legalistic religion will insist on converting others to their faith and church, but will ignore social needs of the broader community. On the other hand, liberalism will tend to emphasize only amelioration of social conditions and minimize the need for repentance and conversion. The gospel leads to love which in turn moves us to give our neighbor *whatever* is needed--conversion or a cup of cold water, evangelism and social concern.

2. Approach to worship. Moralism leads to a dour and somber worship which may be long on dignity but short on joy. A shallow understanding of acceptance without a sense of God's holiness can lead to frothy or casual worship. (A sense of neither God's love nor his holiness leads to a worship service that feels like a committee meeting.) But the gospel leads us to see that God is both transcendent yet immanent. His immanence makes his transcendence

comforting, while his transcendence makes his immanence amazing. The gospel leads to both awe and intimacy in worship, for the Holy One is now our Father.

3. Approach to the poor. The liberal/pragmatist tend to scorn the religion of the poor and see them as helpless victims needing expertise. This is born out of a disbelief in God's common grace or special grace to all. Ironically, the secular mindset also disbelieves in sin, and thus anyone who is poor must be oppressed, a helpless victim. The conservative/moralists on the other hand tend to scorn the poor as failures and weaklings. They see them as somehow to blame for their situation. But the gospel leads us to be: humble, without moral superiority knowing you were "spiritually bankrupt" but saved by Christ's free generosity; gracious, not worried too much about "deservingness," since you didn't deserve Christ's grace; and respectful of believing poor Christians as brothers and sisters from whom to learn. The gospel alone can bring "knowledge workers" into a sense of humble respect for and solidarity with the poor.

4. Approach to doctrinal distinctions. The "already" of the New Testament means more boldness in proclamation. We can most definitely be sure of the central doctrines that support the gospel. But, the "not yet" means charity and humility in non-essential beliefs. In other words, we must be moderate about what we teach except when it comes to the cross, grace and sin. In our views, especially those that Christians cannot agree on, we must be less unbending and triumphalistic ("believing we have arrived intellectually"). It also means that our discernment of God's call and his will for us and others must not be propagated with overweening assurance that your insight cannot be wrong. Versus pragmatism, we must be willing to die for our belief in the gospel. Versus moralism, we must not fight to the death over every one of our beliefs.

5. Approach to holiness. The "already" means we should not tolerate sin. The presence of the kingdom includes the fact that we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:3). The gospel brings us the confidence that anyone can be changed, that any enslaving habit can be overcome. But the "not yet" means our sin remains in us and will never be eliminated until the fullness of the kingdom comes in. So we must avoid pat answers, and we must not expect quick fixes" Unlike the moralists, we must be patient with slow growth or lapses and realize the complexity of change and growth in grace. Unlike the pragmatists and cynics, we must insist that miraculous change is possible.

6. Approach to miracles. The "already" of the kingdom means power for miracles and healing is available. Jesus showed the kingdom by healing the sick and raising the dead. But the "not yet" means nature (including us) is still subject to decay (Rom.8:22-23) and thus sickness and death is still inevitable until the final consummation. We cannot expect miracles and the elimination of suffering to be such a normal part of the Christian life that pain and suffering will be eliminated from the lives of faithful people. Versus moralists, we know that God can heal and do miracles. Versus pragmatists, we do not aim to press God into eliminating suffering.

7. Approach to church health. The "already" of the kingdom means that the church is the community now of kingdom power. It therefore is capable of mightily transforming its community. Evangelism that adds "daily to the number of those being saved" (Acts 2:47) is possible! Loving fellowship which "*destroyed...the dividing wall of hostility*" between different races and classes is possible! But the "not yet" of sin means Jesus has not yet presented his bride, the church, "*as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish*" (Eph.5:27). We must not then be harshly critical of imperfect congregations, nor jump impatiently from church to church over perceived blemishes. Error will never be completely eradicated from the church. The "not yet" means to avoid the overly severe use of church discipline and other means to seek to bring about a perfect church today.

8. Approach to social change. We must not forget that Christ is even now ruling, in a sense, over history (Eph.1:22ff). The "already" of grace means that Christians can expect to use God's power to change social conditions and communities. But the "not yet" of sin means there will be "wars and rumors of wars." Selfishness, cruelty, terrorism and oppression will continue. Christians harbor no illusions about politics or expect utopian conditions. The "not yet" means that Christians will trust any political or social agenda to bring about righteousness here on earth. So the gospel keeps us from the over-pessimism of fundamentalism (moralism) about social change, and also from the over-optimism of liberalism (pragmatism).

Conclusion

All problems, personal or social, come from a failure to use the gospel in a radical way, to get "*in line with the truth of the gospel*" (Gal.2:14). All pathologies in the church and all its ineffectiveness come from a failure to use the gospel in a radical way. We believe that if the gospel is expounded and applied in its fullness in any church, that church will look very unique. People will find both moral conviction yet compassion and flexibility.

Lesson 5 - The Gospel and Faith

The first two chapters of Galatians have been called Paul's *personal* defense. It consists mainly of citations from his personal history and early church history that are given to prove that the gospel he preaches is a direct revelation from God, not a derivative of either his own wisdom or the teaching of others. Now in chapters 3 and 4 we get Paul's *theological* defense of the gospel. Here he clearly expounds the essential content of the gospel message itself and defends it with several arguments.

Leader's background notes:

In Galatians 2:15-21, Paul clearly shows that we are saved when we stop trusting in our moral efforts or the law (we die to it) and trust in the work of Christ, which creates a whole new motivation for everything we do (we live to God). Now 3:1-5 follows with a remarkable claim. We are not only saved by the gospel, but we also now grow through the gospel. Paul is saying that we don't begin by faith and then proceed and grow through our works. We are not only justified by faith in Christ, but we are also sanctified by faith in Christ. The gospel is sufficient not only to get us into the kingdom but to advance us through the kingdom of God.

Paul begins by stating his basic thesis in 3:1-5; both acceptance with God *and* growth in that relationship is based on God's grace, not our practice or pedigree. Then:

- 3:6-14 makes a case for this from the Scriptures, showing how the entire history of God's revelation to his people has been simply an unfolding of this message.
- 3:15-25 makes a case from the example of a last will and testament. This leads to a discussion of the role of the law of God.
- 3:26-4:20 makes a case from a second example, that of adult adoption. This leads to a discussion of the privileges of being in God's family.
- 4:21-31 makes a case from the life of Abraham and his two sons. This is the climactic argument which pulls together many of the threads of the two chapters.

Read Galatians 3:1-5.

1. What can we learn from 3:1-3 about how the Galatians came to Christ from paganism? (What was presented to them? How did they respond? What was the result?)

What was presented to them (v.1)

First the Galatians had Jesus "*clearly portrayed as crucified*"(v.1) to them. What does this phrase tell us? Paul is referring to his own preaching of the gospel (or someone else's), because he repeatedly refers to "*what you heard*" (v.2, 5). He is not referring to any literal sight or portrayal. What then does the metaphor convey?

- a) There was a message communicated- "*Jesus Christ...as crucified*" Notice that the essence of this message is not how to live, but what Jesus has done for us on the cross. The gospel is an announcement of historical events before it is instruction on how to live. It is the proclamation of what has been done for us before it is a direction of what we must do.
- b) But it also means that this message gripped the heart. Jesus was "*clearly portrayed*." The NIV translates a Greek word "clearly" which also means "graphically" or "vividly." This probably is a reference to the power of the preaching. It was not dry and lecture-like. It did not simply enunciate principles, but "painted a picture" of Christ, giving the hearers a moving view of what Christ did for us. (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:4 "*We know that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but with*

power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction). A Christian is not just someone who knows about Jesus, but one who has “seen” him on the cross. Our hearts are moved when we see not just that he died in general, but that he *had* to die for *us*. When that knowledge becomes affecting and life-changing, we are Christians. We see the meaning of his work for us. We can only be saved by a heart-moving but rationally clear presentation of Christ’s work on our behalf.

How they responded (vv.2-3).

The Galatians “*believed what [they] heard*”(v.2b). What does this saving faith entail? In v.2, “*believing*” is contrasted with “*observing the law.*” In v.3, in a parallel sentence, we see an analogous term, “*attaining through human effort.*” Therefore, to “believe” the gospel is not merely to assent to assertions about Christ (e.g. he died, he rose) but to stop trying to attain salvation by observing the law. The word Paul uses for “attaining your goal” in v.3 is *epi-teleo*, “completion.” He is describing our normal course of life. We all are striving to “complete” ourselves, to make ourselves acceptable to God, ourselves, and others and we trust our efforts to attain that through moral, vocational, and relational achievements. But Paul says that to believe the gospel (“*what you heard*”) is to abandon that entire approach to life, to ourselves, and to God. We “*believe*” rather than “*observing the law*” (v.2) or “*trying to attain completion*” (v.3). Thus, before we became Christians, we trusted various projects of personal effort to make us feel complete. But to “believe” in Christ is to enact a revolution in what we trust for our sense of *epi-teleo*, completion or perfection.

This is a reminder of a verse of a famous hymn:

LAY YOUR DEADLY “DOING” DOWN--
DOWN AT JESUS’ FEET.
STAND IN HIM, IN HIM ALONE--
GLORIOUSLY COMPLETE.

What was the result (v.2-3)

Finally, we see that the result of believing the vividly portrayed gospel of Christ was that the Galatians “*received the Spirit*” (v.2). The Holy Spirit enters a life through belief in salvation by grace alone through Christ alone. Paul says, “*You receive the Spirit...by believing.*” This shows that the new birth Paul is describing is directly and inextricably connected to believing the gospel. This is why Jesus can say that we are given new birth through the Spirit (John 3:5), yet James (1:18) and Peter (1 Peter 1:23) can say we are given new birth through the Word of God. They are indivisibly linked. The Spirit does not work apart from the gospel. In Romans 1:16, Paul says that the gospel does not bring the power of God, but *is* the power of God. Thus the gospel is how the power of God comes to us. It is the channel and form of the Spirit’s power.

In summary: When heart faith receives the truth, we begin our new spiritual life. We are not converted by faith in God in general, or a spiritual experience of some vague sort, or by subscribing to doctrinal truth in general. We are converted, or spiritually reborn, when:

- (a) we hear the work of Christ expounded to us, so that
- (b) we transfer our trust from our works to Christ’s work, and
- (c) we receive the Holy Spirit and are regenerated from the inside out.

2. What can we learn from 3:3-5 about how the Galatians are to grow spiritually, now that they are Christians? How are the Galatians to grow?

In verses 1 and 2, Paul reminds them that the Spirit entered their lives through the vivid depiction of Christ’s work and their abandoning of self-trusting efforts to complete themselves and make themselves acceptable. Then in verse 3 he comes to his major “beef” with them and

the false teachers. He says that the way the Spirit *entered* your life should be the very same way the Spirit *advances* in your life. He says this twice, strongly.

First, in v.3 he asks, “*After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*” The Greek word used in v.3 is *sarki* or flesh. (“*Are you trying to attain your goal through the flesh?*”) Since this term is parallel to “observing the law” in v.2, the NIV translators rightly conclude that to be “in the flesh” means to fail to remember/believe (present tense) the gospel and to seek completion through self-trusting efforts. Put another way, Paul is saying, “Having begun with the Spirit-through-trust-transfer, are you now trying to grow through some other dynamic? It cannot be!” As Dick Kaufmann likes to say, “Christians think that we are saved by the gospel, but then we grow by applying biblical principles to every area of life. But we are not just saved by the gospel, we grow by applying the *gospel* to every area of life.”

Then in v. 5, Paul is even stronger. He moves into the present tense and says that right now, the works of the Spirit--even miracles--occur “*because you believe*” (not because you “*believed*”) and because you no longer “*observe the law.*” This does not mean, of course, that Christians are not obeying the law (see Galatians 2:1-18). It must mean that the Spirit works only as/because Christians are not relying on works/attainment, and are consciously and continuously resting in Christ alone for their acceptability and completeness. Paul links the Spirit and the gospel in the most inseparable terms. When he says that the gospel is the power of God (Romans 1:17) and here says that the Spirit works only as you believe the gospel, he is saying that the power of God works in and through us only as the gospel is applied and used.

We will see as we progress through Galatians that our failure to obey and conform to Christ’s character is not a matter of simple willfulness and that we cannot treat our failures simply by “trying harder.” At the root of all our disobedience are particular ways in which we continue to seek control of our lives through systems of works-righteousness. The way to progress as a Christian is to continually repent and uproot these systems the same way we became Christians, namely by the vivid depiction (and re-depiction) of Christ’s saving work for us, and the abandoning of self-trusting efforts to complete ourselves. We must go back again and again to the gospel of Christ-crucified, so that our hearts are more deeply gripped by the reality of what he did and who we are in him.

3. Paul is warning the Galatian Christians that it is easy to fall back into works-righteousness as we try to overcome sin and live the Christian life. Give some examples of how we must deal with sin through “believing the gospel” rather than just “human attainment.”

For example, we should not simply say, “Lord, I have a problem with anger. Please remove it by your power! Give me the power to forgive.” Rather, we should apply the gospel to ourselves at that point. Using Paul’s paradigm, uncontrolled bitterness--and a lack of spiritual power--*must* be coming from “*the flesh.*” It means that though we began with Jesus as Savior, something now is becoming our functional Savior instead of Jesus. Instead of believing that Christ is our hope and goodness, we are looking to something else as a hope, to some other way to make us feel good and complete.

So instead of just hoping God will remove our anger or simply exercising will-power against it, we should ask, “If I am being too angry and unforgiving, what is it that I think I need so much? What is being withheld that I feel I must have to feel complete, to have hope, to feel like a person of worth?” Usually, deep anger is because of something like that. Notice how a “Comfort” person or an “Approval” person might have different things he feels he needs for meaning. These are functional saviors. When they are blocked, we get bitter. But the answer to the bitterness is not simply trying harder to directly control anger. Instead, we need to repent

for the self-righteousness and the lack of rejoicing in the finished work of Christ which is at the root of the anger. Remember, the gospel is the power of God; the miracles of the Spirit are a function of rejoicing and resting and “working out” the gospel.

Read Galatians 3:6-14.

4. Read Genesis 15:1-19 as background to v.6. What does it mean that Abraham's faith was credited? On what basis does God credit righteousness to Abraham?

The Greek word Paul uses is *elogisthan*, from the word *logos*, to speak. It means to be *declared* righteous or *accounted* as righteous. It was usually an accounting term that meant that money was being received and counted as payment toward some end. In general, the English term “credited” means the same thing--to confer a status on something that was not there before. If a college registrar gives credit for life experience in the marketplace, she is conferring a status and a value on that work that was not there previously. If you “lease to buy” a house, it means that your payments of rent can be used to purchase the house if you later so choose. At the moment that decision is made, your rent payments are credited to you as mortgage payments. A new status is conferred on them.

What then does it mean that Abram's faith was “*credited to him as righteousness?*” It is common sense that faith in God's word and promise *results* in righteousness. If we believe God exists, and that we owe him our obedience and life, and that he is worthy of worship, etc, then out of that faith will flow righteous living. But here we have something unique, surprising, and counter-intuitive. Here we have faith counted as righteousness. When the Bible tells us that God *credits* Abram's faith *as* righteousness, it is saying that God is treating Abram as if he were living a righteous life.

To be sure, faith when genuine issues in righteous deeds, but that is not what the text says: faith counts for (instead of) righteousness. It is therefore natural and right for the NT writers to refer to this text in describing how salvation is available in Christ.” (G.Wenham Genesis 1-15, p. 335)

Over the years many commentators have resisted the remarkable implications of Genesis 15:6. Many have said that we are being told that Abram's faith is itself a form of righteousness that pleases God. In that interpretation, his faith was an act of obedience that warranted God's favor. It was a kind of righteousness. But the text doesn't say that his faith *was* righteousness, rather it was counted as (*if*) it was righteousness.

“If we compare other verses in which the same grammatical construction is used as in Gen 15:6 we arrive at the conclusion...that the [crediting] of Abram's faith as righteousness means 'to account him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him.’” (D.Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p.262)

Paul makes explicit that when God “credits righteousness,” he is conferring a legal position or status or standing. To have righteousness credited to people means that they are treated legally *as if* they were actually righteous and free from condemnation even though actually in themselves they are still unrighteous in their heart and behavior. This flies in the face of all traditional religion, which tells us that we are either living righteously and are therefore pleasing and acceptable to God or we are living unrighteously and are therefore alienated from God. But this says it is possible to be both loved and accepted by God while we are ourselves sinful and imperfect. Luther's famous phrase is that Christians are *simul justus et peccator*—“simultaneously righteous and sinful.” If there is any doubt that this is the Biblical teaching,

Paul makes a striking statement in Romans 4:5, where he speaks of the *God who justifies the wicked*. The word translated *wicked* by the NIV is the word *asebas* which means literally "one who refuses to worship." Here is the boldest possible statement that the moment a person receives credited righteousness (*justifies*) he or she is still wicked! The justified status is not given to them because they have gotten their hearts into a certain level of submission and worship. You don't clean up your life in order to earn credited righteousness. Then it wouldn't be credited. Rather, you receive it even while you are a sinner.

5. How was Abraham's saving faith a model for us?

First, he shows us that *saving faith is believing the gospel-promise*. "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (v.6). Notice that it does not say that Abraham believed in God (though he certainly did!). Believing in God is not saving faith. (James 2:19 says that "the devils believe.") Rather, he had to believe what God actually said in his promise to save. You can't believe God without believing in God, but you can believe in God without believing God! Saving faith is therefore something different (more specific) than generic general faith in the existence of God or even in the doctrines and teachings of the Bible in general.

Second, he shows that *saving faith is faith in God's provision, not our performance*. Abraham did not know much at all about *how* God would provide salvation for the world. But in two very clear ways, God showed that this salvation would have nothing to do with Abraham's performance, but with God's action. First, God showed that the birth of Abraham's son would be a miracle. God would come down into history and do a mighty deed that did not depend on human ability at all. Second, by the mysterious "oath" between the animal pieces, God showed that he would accomplish his salvation even if it meant his own death! He did not make Abraham take an oath or pass through the pieces, which would have been customary. That is the strongest possible statement that the promise depended wholly on God, not on Abraham at all. Abraham knew he could never attain this; he did not have the physical ability to produce a child. He did not have the moral ability to produce faithfulness in his life. So he had to believe the promise completely. And he did.

6. How does the experience of gospel faith contrast with that of a person who seeks to earn God's acceptance? (vv.10-12)

Paul speaks of two kinds of people in these verses. First, there are those who "live by faith." Second, there are those who "rely on observing the law (v.10)." They "live by them [the law]" (v.12). To "live by" something means to rely on it for our happiness and fulfillment. Whatever we live by is essentially the bottom line of our lives, whatever gives us meaning, confidence, and definition. It is very illuminating to ask, "What do I *live* by? What is my life based on? What, if I lost it, would make me feel as if I had no life left?" These are all questions that lay bare the foundation of your life.

The result of this kind of life is life "under a curse" (v.10). This is a profound theological and psychological argument. Theologically, anyone who says, "I can be saved by obeying the law," must then be prepared to really look at what the law commands. To love God wholly, we would have to obey the law *wholly* and that cannot be done. So Paul is saying to the self-justifiers, "Have you really looked at *everything* in the law? Have you really seen what it requires? How will you satisfy it if you use it as a means of salvation?" It is also a profound psychological insight to say that everyone who is trying to be "saved through performance" will be under a "curse" (v.10), a sense of condemnation. At the very least, salvation through works will lead to profound anxiety and insecurity, because you can never be sure that you are living up to your standards sufficiently, whatever they may be. This makes you sensitive to criticism, jealous and intimidated by others who outshine you. It makes you nervous and timid (because you are

unsure of where you stand) or else swaggering and boastful (because you are unsure of where you stand). Either way, you live with a sense of curse and condemnation.

7. If v.10 is true, how can God credit us as righteous and not be unjust (vv. 13-14)? What does it mean that Jesus did not simply take our curse but “became a curse” for us?

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in 3:10, which teaches that everyone is required to keep all the law if we are to avoid condemnation. How then can we escape the curse of v.10 and v.13 and enjoy the blessing of 3:14? Of course, it is all because of what Jesus did. But what exactly *did* Jesus do for us? Paul lays it out here, with crystal clarity yet deep mystery; Jesus “*became a curse for us.*” Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23, which says, “*Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.*” When a person was executed in the Old Testament, it was usually by stoning. Then the body was hung on a tree as a symbol of divine rejection. It was not that the man was cursed because he was hung, but rather he was hung as a sign of his curse. Paul draws the connection to Christ, whose execution was on a cross-tree to show that he experienced the curse of divine rejection. There he freed us (“*redeemed us*”) from the curse of the law by taking it *for us*. The word “for” means—“on behalf of” or “in the place of.” In other words, he was our substitute. *He received the curse we earned (v.13) that we might receive the blessing he earned (v.14).* It is a two-fold imputation. Our sins and curse are imputed to him; his righteousness and blessing are imputed to us.

The idea of imputation is underscored by the curious term “*became a curse.*” We should notice that he “became” a curse, which is even stronger language than “taking” a curse. In what way did he *become* a curse?

John Stott says, “[*This verse*] is parallel to ‘*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him*’ (2 Cor.5:21)” (*The Cross of Christ*, p.345). How did Christ “become” a curse or “become” sin for us? Clearly, it cannot mean that Christ actually became wicked in his person. He did not become selfish, cruel, rebellious, and evil in his heart on the cross. Then how did he “become” a sinner? He was *treated legally as if he were a sinner; he was treated as liable for all that a wicked person would be liable for.* Thus he became sin legally. Why is that so important to realize? Because it shows the stunning claim regarding what happens to us when we believe. If Jesus “becomes” a sinner for us, then we “become” righteous in the same way. If his taking the curse means that he is regarded by God as a sinner, then our receiving the blessing means that we are regarded by God as if we are perfectly righteous and flawless.

In short, this means that salvation means much more than forgiveness. We do not simply have our slate wiped clean; rather, we become perfect in God’s sight. Now there is no more condemnation for those who are in Jesus (Rom.8:1).

There is probably another sense in which Christ “*became a curse.*” When God poured out his justice on Christ, he was not only destroying his Son, but destroying the barrier between himself and us. How amazing! The more God vented his holiness on Jesus, the more he was venting his love for us. On the cross, the holiness and love of God, otherwise in tension, were in complete, brilliant cooperation. The more his holiness expressed itself, the more his love was satisfied; the more his love expressed itself, the more his holiness was satisfied.

Unit 5 - Reading and Reflection

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” - for something that raised a question

Grace And Growth

Richard Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.:IVP, 1979)

1. Justification and sanctification.

In the New Testament...*justification* (the acceptance of believers as righteous in the sight of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ accounted to them) and *sanctification* (progress in *actual* holiness expressed in their lives) are often closely intertwined.... However, they are quite distinct: justification is the perfect righteousness of Christ reckoned to us, covering the remaining imperfections in our lives like a robe of stainless holiness; sanctification is the process of removing those imperfections as we are enabled more and more to put off the bondages of sin and put on new life in Christ....

2. Justification reversed with sanctification.

a. Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many have so light an apprehension of God's holiness and of the extent and guilt of their sin that consciously they see little need for justification, although below the surface of their lives they are deeply guilt-ridden and insecure. Many others have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for their justification...drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience. Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther's platform: *you are accepted*, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance, relaxing in that quality of trust which will produce increasing sanctification as faith is active in love and gratitude....

b. A conscience which is not fully enlightened both to the seriousness of its condition before God, and to the grandeur of God's merciful provision of redemption, will inevitably fall prey to anxiety, pride, sensuality and all the other expressions of that unconscious despair which Kierkegaard called "the sickness unto death." [So] we start each day with our personal security resting not on...the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements.... Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace.

3. Justification as the basis for all sanctification.

a. Much that we have interpreted as a defect of sanctification in church people is really an outgrowth of their loss of bearing with respect to justification. Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons--much less secure than non-Christians, because of the constant bulletins they receive from their

Christian environment about the holiness of God and the righteousness they are supposed to have. Their insecurity shows itself in pride, a fierce, defensive assertion of their own righteousness and defensive criticism of others. They come naturally to hate other cultural styles and other races in order to bolster their own security and discharge their suppressed anger. They cling desperately to legal, pharisaical righteousness, but envy, jealousy and other branches on the tree of sin grow out of their fundamental insecurity....

b. It is often said today, in circles which blend popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others....But no realistic human beings find it easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ....[There is much evidence in our experience against the idea that we are children of God, but] *the faith that surmounts the evidence and is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness....*

c. Presented in this context, even the demand for sanctification becomes part of the good news. It offers understanding of the bondage that has distorted our lives and the promise of release into a life of Spirit-empowered freedom and beauty. Ministries that attack only the surface of sin and fail to ground spiritual growth in the believer's union with Christ produce either self-righteousness or despair....

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What helped you the most? What questions did this raise?

2. In 2a, Lovelace mentions two equal but opposite ways you can fail to draw on the benefits of justification. What are they? (Note: They are mentioned also at the very end of 2b and 3c.)

3. In what specific ways do you "reverse" justification and sanctification (i.e., reverse the gospel)?

4. From what sources do you try to "steal love and acceptance" instead of "warming yourself at the fire of God's love" (section 3b)? How do these things "distort our lives" and deny you "Spirit-empowered freedom" (section 3c)?

Lesson 6 - The Gospel and the Law

Introduction

There is no more practical question than that of the relationship of a Christian to the law of God. Whenever we hear the radical claims of salvation-by-grace, we immediately ask the following questions. "If we are 'free from the law' does that mean I don't have to obey the law of God?" "Why then should I strive to live a holy life?" "What is the nature of my obligation (if any) to God's law?" Paul addresses these important questions here.

Leader's background notes:

The Greek word in verses 15 and 17 is translated "covenant" in the NIV, and it was the word used in the Old Testament for the "covenants" God made with us. However, it was most commonly used in Paul's day to refer to a last will and testament. Paul here uses the idea of a "will" in Greco-Roman law to teach about God's dealings with us. He explains that a will cannot be changed once death has occurred. The bequest will go to the recipients regardless of what they do.

Verses 19b-20 are extremely cryptic. "*The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party, but God is one.*" No one is sure what Paul means or how this fits into the argument. Fortunately, the thrust of Paul's argument and its other supporting points are clear, so it is not urgent that we decode these sentences to understand him. Some commentators think Paul is saying that God spoke the law to the people through a mediator, namely Moses, but that he spoke the promise directly to Abraham. But this is not at all certain.

Verse 24 says that the law was "*put in charge*" of us, that we were under its "*supervision.*" The Greek words here are more specific than the English translation can convey. Paul says that the law is our tutor, a *paidagogos*. In the homes of Paul's day, the tutor or guardian was usually a slave who supervised the children on the parents' behalf.

READ Galatians 3:15-25.

1. What principle is laid down in v. 18a? Compare and contrast what it means to receive something by promise vs. receiving something by law?

The principle is that the very concepts of "promise" and "law" are mutually exclusive. If I give you something because of what I have promised, it is *not* because of your performance. If I give you something because of what you have done, it is *not* because of my promise. Paul is adamant: either something comes by grace or works, because of the giver's promise or the receiver's performance. It is either one or the other.

This takes some reflection. For a promise to bring a result, it needs only to be believed, but for a law to bring a result, it has to be obeyed. For example, if I say to you: "My uncle Jack wants to meet you and give you \$10M dollars," the only way you can probably fail to receive the \$10M is to fail to believe the claim. If you just laugh and go home, rather than going to see Uncle Jack, you may never get the money. But if, on the other hand, I say to you: "My uncle Jack is willing to leave you his inheritance of \$10M dollars, but you have to go live with him and take care of him in his old age," then you have to fulfill the requirement and condition if you are to get the money. A gift-promise needs only to be believed to be received, but a law-wage must be obeyed to be received.

2. Why was the law of Moses not able to set aside or add to the promises spoken to Abraham? (You may wish to review Genesis 15:9-18.)

Paul knows that some might see that Moses' law arrived *after* God's promises of salvation to Abraham and conclude, "Ah! This changes things! If we are to get the blessing of Abraham, we will now have to obey the law of Moses." But Paul demonstrates that this is a false conclusion.

He makes his case using an example from human law. He points out that human contracts are binding and difficult or impossible to void. "*As no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.*" (v.15). The word Paul uses is *diatheke* (translated "covenant" in the NIV), a word for a legal will. This, of course, is a good example, since once a will is duly and legally made, we consider it binding no matter what changes in conditions may occur. So it is with God's promises. For example, if a woman leaves her poor daughter more money than her rich daughter, that legal document will be binding even if the rich daughter loses all her wealth the day after her mother dies. The will holds despite new conditions.

The example of a human *diatheke* in v.15 and the "either-or" principle of v.18 (see question #1 above) together make Paul's case. "*The law... does not...do away with the promise*" (v.17). The law of Moses cannot turn God's promise to Abraham into something other than what it is--a promise. How can the coming of the law change the very nature of God's promise to Abraham that there would be a supernatural intervention, a savior, and that it would be by grace, even if it cost God dearly (Gen. 15:9-18)? This is a powerful argument. *If the law of Moses came as a way of salvation, then it means that God had changed his mind.* It would mean that God had decided that we didn't need a savior, and that he would give out his blessing on the basis of performance, not promise. But that could not be.

To summarize the argument: If the law of Moses was intended to be the means for salvation, then the promise to Abraham would not have been a real promise. Therefore, the law of Moses has a different purpose.

4. What, then, is the purpose of the law? (vv.19-22) [Key: What do you think it means that we are "prisoners of sin?"]

Paul shows that the law was "*added because of transgressions*" (v.19) until Christ came. He explains this idea in v.22 when he says: "*The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin.*" Paul's Greek is a bit more vivid than the English here. He says, literally, "Scripture imprisoned all the world to sin." He probably remembers his own experience just prior to conversion (see Romans 7:7ff). He had been a self-satisfied Pharisee until the law against coveting and envy really hit home. (Romans 7 says "*the commandment came [home.]*") The law made him see (and feel) morally helpless. He realized not simply that he was a sinner, but a prisoner of sin, helpless to free or cure himself. This is the purpose of the law: It shows us that we do not just "fall short" of God's will, but that we are completely under sin's power.

Andrew Jukes put it this way: "Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners" (quoted in Stott, p.90). This is almost certainly the meaning of the phrase "*because of transgressions*" (v.19). The law did not come to tell us about salvation, but about sin (transgression). The law was not sent as a way of salvation because it could not "*impart life*" (v.21b). It cannot give us the power to be righteous. It can only show us that we do *not* have that power. Therefore "*righteousness*" cannot "*come by the law*" (v.21b). Ironically, if we think we can be righteous by the law, we have missed the main point of the law.

In summary, Paul says, "The law shows us our sin *so that what is promised...might be given to those who believe*" (v.22b). In other words, the law does its work to lead us toward recognition

of our need for salvation-by-grace. The law, then, does not oppose the promise but supports it. Indeed (as we see below), the promise only comes home to us because of the work of the law.

5. In vv.23-25, how does Paul explain that the law “leads a person to Christ?”

Paul uses two metaphors to characterize the way the law works in a Christian’s life. 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 prisoner” and “locked up” mean to be protected by military guards. Second, Paul says that the law is a tutor, a *paidagogos*. “*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 parents’ behalf. We will see this metaphor again in chapter 4.

In both cases, 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. Thus Paul describes all non-gospel based religion as being characterized by:

- (a) a sense of bondage
- (b) an impersonal relationship with the divine, motivated by a desire for rewards and a fear of punishments
- (c) anxiety about one’s standing with God

But the second metaphor (unlike the first) shows us that the law’s true purpose is instructive. It points beyond itself, just as the tutor seeks to prepare the children for lives as adults, as free persons. The law points to a life:

- (a) not of confinement, but of freedom
- (b) not an impersonal, but a personal relationship with God
- (c) not immaturity, but maturity of character

There are many places in the Bible where it does so, demanding that we “love God with all our soul” and “have the law written on our hearts.” It seeks to show us our need for salvation by grace (because we cannot obey it). It even indicates our need to move beyond rewards and punishments into a motivation of gratitude and love toward God as the basis for our obedience. So the law continually emphasizes (if we are really listening to it) that we need a righteousness, a power, a love for God beyond ourselves and beyond the law. We need salvation-by-grace.

John Stott puts it this way:

After God gave the promise to Abraham, he gave the law to Moses. Why? He had to make things worse before He could make them better. The law exposed sin, provoked sin, condemned sin. The purpose of the law was to lift the lid off man’s respectability and disclose what he is really underneath--sinful, rebellious, guilty, under the judgment of God and helpless to save himself.

And the law must still be allowed to do its God-given duty today. One of the great faults of the contemporary church is the tendency to soft-pedal sin and judgment....We must never bypass the law and come straight to the gospel. To do so is to contradict the plan of God in biblical history....No man has ever appreciated the gospel until the law has first revealed him to himself. It is only against the inky blackness of the night sky that the stars begin to appear, and it is only against the dark background of sin and judgment that the gospel shines forth.” -- John Stott, Galatians, pp. 92-93.

Note: Many Christians (though not all) testify that when they first became aware of their need for God, they went through a time of immaturity in which they became extremely religious. They diligently sought to mend their ways and do religious duties to “clean up their lives.” They

made tearful “surrenders” to God at church services. They “gave their lives to Jesus” and “asked him into their hearts.” But so often they were only just resolving to be very good and very religious, hoping that this would procure the favor and blessing of God. At this stage, they tended to have a lot of emotional ups and downs (like children), feeling good when they made a spiritual commitment and despondent when they failed to keep a promise to God. They felt a great deal of anxiety. They were, as Paul says here, like children under a “tutor.” They were on their way to discovering God in the gospel, but they were not there yet!

6. If we are not under the law’s “supervision” (v.25), does that imply that we can live any way we wish? Imagine the features of a relationship with the law based on salvation-by-grace rather than one based on fear and salvation-by-performance?

Our efforts to please God by obedience to that law have shown us that we must go beyond the law for a system of salvation. Thus we learned the lesson the law sought to teach us as tutor/guardian. Does this mean we no longer have to obey it? No.

As we saw above, the law was our “supervisor” until we found Christ, and was thus like a guardian over a child until he or she reaches maturity. But let’s draw out the analogy. Is it the design of child-rearing that when the child grows to maturity he or she then casts off all the values of the parent or guardian and lives in a totally different way? No. If all goes well the adult child no longer is coerced into obedience as before, but now has internalized the basic values and lives in a like manner because he or she *wants* to.

So Paul is indicating not that we no longer have any relation to the values of God’s law, but it no longer is a system of salvation. It no longer forces obedience through coercion and fear. The gospel means that we no longer obey the law out of fear of rejection and hope of salvation-by-performance. But when we grasp salvation-by-promise, our hearts are filled with gratitude and a desire to please and be like our Savior. The only way to do that is through obeying the law. But once we come to it with this new motivation, we now are better in our obedience than ever. Why?

- A) If we think that the law-obedience will save us, we become emotionally incapable of admitting just how searching and demanding it is. For example, Jesus says that to resent or disdain anyone is a form of murder in Matt. 5:21ff. Only if you know that you cannot fulfill it completely, and that Christ did it for you, will you be able to admit just how broad and deep this command is.
- B) Secondly, grateful joy is a motive that will lead to much more endurance in obedience than fearful compliance. Fearful compliance makes obedience a drudgery that can’t take adversity. In short, the gospel allows us to truly honor the law in a way that legalistic people cannot. Without the gospel, we may obey the law, but we will hate it. We will use it, but we will not truly love it. In Galatians 2:17-20 (see comments, Week 2), Paul says now we “*live for God.*” In other words, we do not obey God any longer for *our* sake, by using the law-salvation-system to get things from God. Rather, we now obey God for *his* sake, using the law’s content to please and delight our Father. There is much more on this motivation in Galatians 5:1ff (Week 19).

Law and grace work together in Christian salvation. Many people want a sense of joy and acceptance but they will not admit the seriousness of their sin. They will not listen to the law’s searching and painful analysis of their lives and hearts. But unless we see how helpless and profoundly sinful we are, the message of salvation will not be exhilarating and liberating. Unless we know how big our debt is, we cannot have any idea of how great Christ’s payment was. If we do not think that we are all that bad, the idea of grace will not change us.

Unit 6 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” -for something that raised a question

Deeds, Words, and Heart

This exercise introduces an important concept: that underneath our *behavioral* sins lies a fundamental refusal to rest in Christ’s salvation and the drive instead to find our own. That is the point of Lovelace’s reading last week.

The 'Sin underneath the Sins'

Here is an excerpt from Martin Luther *Treatise Concerning Good Works* (1520)

All those who do not in all their works or sufferings, life and death, trust in God's favor, grace and good-will, but rather seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep the [First] Commandment, and practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments, and in addition had all the prayers, fasting, obedience, patience, chastity, and innocence of all the saints combined.

Comment: Luther says if you look to your moral performance as the basis of your relationship with God, then you are breaking the first of the Ten Commandments: "Have no other gods before me." If you fail to grasp and believe the gospel of free justification through Christ's work you violate the first command. How could this be?

"If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious and pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him through our works, then all [our compliance with the law] is pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior]... .Note for yourself, then, how far apart these two are: keeping the First Commandment with outward works only, and keeping it with inward [justifying faith]. For this last makes true, living children of God, the other only makes worse idolatry and the most mischievous hypocrites on earth..."

Comment: Luther says that if we obey God's law without a belief that we are already accepted and loved in Christ, then in all our “doing-good” we are really looking to something more than Jesus to be the *real* source of our meaning, and happiness. We are trusting in our being a good parent, or being a good spouse, or our moral uprightness, or our spiritual performance, or our service to other people as our *real* "Saviors." If we aren't sure God already loves us in Christ we will be looking to something else as our foundational significance and worth. This is why Luther says that we are committing idolatry (breaking the First commandment) if we don't thoroughly trust in Christ for our acceptability, even if we are otherwise totally moral and obedient to God.

And as this Commandment is the very first, highest and best, from which all the others proceed, in which they exist, and by which they are directed and

measured, so also its work, that is, the faith or confidence in God's favor at all times, is the very first, highest and best, from which all others must proceed, exist, remain, be directed and measured...."

Comment: All people sin in general because we are sinners, but why do we sin in any particular instance? Luther indicates the First Commandment is foundational to all the others. Why? Because we will not break Commandments 2-10 unless we are in some way breaking Commandment One and serving some idol. Every sin is rooted in the inordinate lust for something which comes because we are trusting in that thing rather than in Christ for our righteousness or salvation. At the moment we sin it is because we are looking to something to give us what only Jesus can give us. Beneath any particular sin is the general sin of rejecting Christ-salvation and indulging in self-salvation.

Case study - A Lie

What if you find that you have a habit of lying? What do you do about it?

Moralistic ways to stop lying:

- *Fear:* "I must stop doing this because God will punish me, he won't bless me."
- *Pride:* "I must stop doing this, because I'm a good Christian. I don't want to be like the kind of person who lies."

In general, you will find that the more you simply lay Biblical principles on your heart, the more your heart resists it. (Rom.7:21--Paul says "*When I [most] want to do good, evil lies close at hand..*")

The gospel way to stop lying:

First, ask the question: "Why am I lying in this particular situation?" The reason we lie (or ever do any sin) is because at that moment there is something we feel that we simply must have and so we lie. One typical reason that we lie (though it is by no means the only one) is because we are deeply fearful of losing face or someone's approval. That means, that the "sin under the sin" of lying is the idolatry of (at that moment) human approval. If we break the commandment against false witness it is because we are breaking the first commandment against idolatry. We are looking more to human approval than to Jesus as a source of worth, meaning and happiness. Under the sin of lying is the failure to rejoice in and believe in our acceptance in Christ. Under the sin of lying is a kind of heart-unbelief in the gospel, whatever we may tell ourselves intellectually. As we will see below, anything you add to Jesus Christ as a requirement for a happy life is a functional salvation, a pseudo-lord, and it is controlling you, whether it be power, approval, comfort or control. The only way to change your habit of lying is to repent of your failure to believe the gospel, that you are not saved and acceptable by pursuing this goal and serving this master, but through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Consider this case study in light of this excerpt from the Belgic Confession (1561):

Therefore it is so far from being true that his justifying faith makes us remiss in a holy life, that on the contrary without it we would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation.

Comment: Unless we believe the gospel, we will be driven in all we do, whether obeying or disobeying, by pride (“self-love”) or fear (“of damnation”). Mere moral effort without the gospel may restrain the heart but cannot truly change the heart. It “jury rigs” the evil of the heart to produce moral behavior out of self-interest. It would be possible to use fear and pride as ways to motivate a person to be honest, but since fear and pride is also the root for lying, it is only a matter of time before such a thin tissue collapses. Luther was right. If you are obeying the law without deep joy in your acceptance in Christ, you are not *loving God with all your heart*. You are not obeying God *for God*. You are being moral so that you can put God in your debt, so he owes you a comfortable life. You are being moral so that you can feel secure in your uprightness. You are being moral in the service of self-salvation, out of the fear and pride that arise without an identity built on Christ in the gospel.

Other kinds of word-sins and what they reveal

1. Which of these three kinds of “mouth-sin” is the biggest problem for you? In which area do you struggle most?

- **TALKING ABOUT MYSELF.** Defensiveness rather than taking criticism graciously. Bragging rather than focusing on and complementing others. (cf. Gal. 6:14 *“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord...”*)
- **TALKING ABOUT OTHERS.** Talking unkindly about others more often than affirming and sincerely praising. Harsh or sarcastic when giving criticism. (cf. Gal. 5:15- *“biting and devouring one another”*)
- **TALKING ABOUT LIFE.** Complaining and murmuring more than expressing gratitude and praise. More emphasis on the injustices rather than the mercies of life. (cf. Gal.5:22- *“the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, patience...gentleness.”*)

2. Review the following quote from Richard Lovelace:

“The faith that surmounts the evidence and is able to warm itself at the fire of God’s love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness....”

Without a deep grasp of the gospel, we believe that salvation/happiness/blessing depends conditionally on something we are or do. Thus everyone builds their identity on something besides Jesus. **Review one psychologist’s categories of four basic ways in which people seek meaning and self-acceptance.** Each of the following four things can become something we depend on to establish our adequacy and worth instead of depending on Jesus.

<u>What We Seek</u>	<u>Price We Will Pay</u>	<u>Greatest Nightmare</u>	<u>Others Often Feel</u>	<u>Problem Emotion</u>
COMFORT (<i>Privacy, lack of stress, freedom</i>)	Reduced productivity	Stress, demands	Hurt	Boredom
APPROVAL (<i>Affirmation, love, relationship</i>)	Less independence	Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice
CONTROL (<i>Self-discipline, certainty, standards</i>)	Loneliness; spontaneity	Uncertainty	Condemned	Worry
POWER (<i>Success, winning, influence</i>)	Burdened; responsibility	Humiliation	Used	Anger

3. Now look at the circumstances surrounding your typical mouth sins. Answer this question: “When I [commit this particular sin], what is it that I am after? What do I feel I must have for self-acceptance?”

(a) If you need to defend yourself against criticism, where are you “warming yourself?” (*Is it to get comfort, approval, control, power or something else?*)

(b) If you need to run other people down or make them look bad, where are you “warming yourself?” (*Is it to get comfort, approval, control, power or something else?*)

(c) If you cannot be grateful and happy unless life is going according to your plan, where are you “warming yourself?” (*Is it to get comfort, approval, control, power, or something else?*)

4. Imagine how you could draw on your hope and standing in Christ at these moments and get control of your tongue?

Lesson 7 - Children of God

Paul began his theological defense of the gospel in chapter 3 by demonstrating how the law of Moses was not a contradiction of the promise of salvation by grace, which God gave to Abraham. Rather, the law prepared us for grace, showing us how much we need a salvation-by-God's promise rather than by our works. Now, in this passage, Paul shows how the law and the gospel are not just stages in the world's redemptive history, but they are also stages in an individual's journey toward salvation in Christ.

Leader's background notes:

A summary of the passage.

Verses 26-29 are the climax of all Paul has said so far. If Jesus as “the Seed” (3:19) gets all of Abraham’s promised blessings, then anyone, Jew or Gentile, who belongs to Christ through faith automatically becomes an heir of the promises to Abraham. How does this sonship and inheritance come to us? Through the Son we become God’s children legally (4:4-5), receiving a new status, but through the Spirit we become God's children experientially (4:6-7).

Why call women “sons?”

Many may take offense at using the masculine word “sons” to refer to all Christians, male and female. Some would prefer to translate verse 26 “*You are all children of God.*” But if we are too quick to correct the Biblical language we might miss the revolutionary (egalitarian!) nature of what Paul is saying. In most ancient cultures, daughters could not inherit property. Therefore, “son” meant “legal heir” and was a status forbidden to women. But the gospel tells us we are *all* sons of God in Christ. If we don’t let Paul say to women, “*In Christ, you too are sons; you too are heirs,*” then we miss how radical a claim this is.

What are “the basic principles of the world” in v.3?

In both verse 3 and 9 of chapter 4 Paul refers to the “*stoichea* of the cosmos”—a notoriously difficult phrase to interpret or even to translate. In this week's passage the meaning of the term may not come up as an issue in the discussion. The phrase is treated in the leader's notes of the next unit, where the term is more crucial to an understanding of Paul's thesis. If the question does come up this week, I suggest you put the subject off until your study of 4:8-20. If you want to equip yourself for the discussion this week, refer to the notes for Unit 8.

READ Galatians 3:26-4:7

1. What do we learn about our “sonship” from verses 26-27 and from the illustration of 4:1-2?

The principle of v.26. We immediately learn two things from v.26. First, we notice that we already are sons. It is not something we are aiming at, it is not a future attainment. It is something that we have already, in our present state. Second, we notice that our “sonship” is not a universal given. We are not “children of God” in some general way by virtue of having been created by him. There is a sense in which all human beings are God's *offspring* by virtue of being made in his image (Acts 17:29.) But Paul is speaking of a much deeper kind of relationship here. The second half of v.26 tells us we are only his sons when we have “*faith in Christ*” (v.26). It is through faith in Christ that God adopts us.

Sonship in light of 4:1-2. To illustrate our sonship, Paul uses the illustration of a young child who is the heir of a great estate. When he is a minor he is *de facto* like a slave, since he has to listen to guardians and trustees. But when he comes of age he “comes into his inheritance.” He gets the wealth and the freedom to use it, what Paul refers to later as “*full rights of sons*” (v.5). This has two implications: First, our sonship is at least a legal status. When we become sons we are legal heirs to the wealth and estate of our Father. Second, our sonship is a fruit of

grace. The inheritance is not earned. It is not a wage. It comes automatically to the child because of his legal status. It means we have both present blessings and a future of glory that is guaranteed for us by grace.

2. Verse 27 says all Christians have "clothed themselves" with Christ. Meditate on this image. What are the implications of the metaphor? What does it tell us about being in Christ?

"This is a favorite metaphor of Paul's (cf. Rom.13:12; Eph.4:24; Col.3:12f.). But here (and in Romans 13:14) is his most daring use of it, in which he likens Christ himself to a garment. The expression conveys a striking suggestion of the closeness which exists between Christ and the believer. Those who put on Christ can do no other than act in accordance with the Spirit of Christ....The metaphor conveys essentially a new kind of life. Everything is now to be related to Christ." --D.Guthrie, Galatians, p. 110.

The idea of "putting on" Christ like a garment implies:

- a) Our primary identity is in Christ. Our clothing tells people who we are. Nearly every kind of clothing is actually a uniform showing that we are identified with others of the same gender, social class national group. But to say that Christ is our clothing is to say that our ultimate identity is found, not in any of these classifications, but in Christ. (Paul spells this out in the next verses.)
- b) The closeness of our relationship to Christ. Your clothes are kept closer to you than any other possession. You rely on them for shelter every moment. They go everywhere with you. So to say Christ is our clothing is to call us to moment-by-moment dependence and existential awareness of Christ. We are to spiritually "practice his presence."
- c) The imitation of Christ. To practice the presence of Christ entails that we continually think and act as if we were directly before his face. A similar Biblical phrase is to "walk before him." It means to take Jesus into every area of life and change it in accordance with his will and Spirit. We are to "put on" his virtues and actions. We are to "dress up like Jesus."
- d) Our acceptability to God. Finally, clothing is worn as adornment. It covers our nakedness (cf. Gen 3.) To say that Christ is our clothing is to say that in God's sight we are loved because of Jesus' work and salvation.

In summary, it is a daring and comprehensive metaphor for a whole new life. It means to think of Christ constantly, to have his spirit and his character infuse and permeate everything you think, say, and do. This goes so far beyond the keeping of rules and regulations. This goes even beyond simple obedience. This is virtually to be in love with him, bathed in him, awash in him. So Paul counters the teaching that a baptized Christian needs some additional commitment to the Mosaic law in order to receive or maintain full acceptance with God.

3. 4:1-2. Paul imagines a child-heir of a very rich family. Meditate on this image. In what ways does this illustrate the condition of a person who is under the law?

In 3:23-25, Paul referred to the function of guardians and tutors in the lives of Roman children. They cared for the child in the father's name, yet kept him away from intimate dealings with his father. Paul used this to illustrate how the law both points us toward God by showing us our sin and need yet separates us and makes us feel remote from God by showing us our sin and need.

Now in 4:1-2, Paul takes up the illustration again, but this time brings out a new aspect. The child in his illustration is an heir (*kleronomos*) of a great fortune and estate. In Paul's day, a young child-heir (*nepios*) was, in principle, wealthy and powerful, but in actual practice he was

no more than a slave. In other words, he had a wealth that was his by promise but not his by experience. “*He is no different [in experience] than a slave.*” (v.1) He must “come of age” in order to actually appropriate that which was promised.

In ancient times, the process of “coming of age” was an important and well-defined process. A Roman child-heir was a minor under guardians until age 14, and was still to some degree under trustees until age 25. Not until then could the youth exercise complete independent control over his estate.

How does this illustrate the condition of a person who is under the law? Paul begins the illustration, “*What I am saying is that...*” (4:1). The illustration refers at least to all that Paul has been saying in chapter 3 about the incompleteness of the Mosaic dispensation. But it also sets up what he is going to say in 4:8ff. about how the Galatians are losing their “freedom.” Therefore, Paul’s example probably applies to us spiritually on several different levels. (Different commentators choose different levels, but I think they are all implied by the text.)

First, it shows that, during the Mosaic era, the people of God had spiritual liberty promised to them in their covenant with God made at Mt.Sinai, but they had not yet come to appropriate and experience it. God said to and through Moses, “*You will be my people, and I will be your God.*” (Exod.6:6,7; cf.Exod.19:5). But with a few exceptions, people under the Mosaic covenant did not experience the intimacy and the freedom, because the means and assurance of forgiveness was general and vague (cf.Heb.10:1ff).

On a second level, this is a picture of all human beings. The cryptic reference in 4:3 says, “*So also*” (referring to the illustration of being a slave) “*when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.*” We will not look at this in detail until Week 6, pairing v.3 with vv.8-11, which illuminate it. But since most of the pre-Christian Galatians were not Jews under the Mosaic law, Paul is saying that all human beings are spiritual “slaves” before coming to Christ. They are all in a sense, “under the law,” even if they never heard of the Bible or Moses. We are all desperately trying to live up to some standards. We are anxious and burdened. Our relationship with the divine is remote or non-existent.

Finally, on a third level, this is a picture even of how Christians may to some degree fail to experience the freedom and joy of their salvation. Just as, under Moses, the people’s relationship to God was somewhat remote and burdensome, so Christians can fail to realize the intimacy and freedom of the gospel. They may continue in some ways to live as slaves instead of as adopted sons of God. “*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves....do you wish to be enslaved...again?*” (4:8,9). “*Stand firm, then, and don’t let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*” (5:1). In other words, though we are rich in the gospel, full adopted children of God, with complete and direct access to the Father, we can go back to relating to him only through our record and moral merits. We can fail to realize our inheritance.

The basic over-arching point is that the gospel makes us “come of age,” and brings us the full experience of things that otherwise are only promised to us. These first two verses signal that Paul is now moving from his theological formulation into practical application. He is going to show us how to experience what the gospel promises us.

4. What is Paul saying in verse 28 and how does the radical unity of verse 28 flow from verse 26?

What is he saying?

This stunning passage does not say we are all identical, that all distinctions have been obliterated. It does not mean, for example, that Greeks should not keep their distinct Greek culture and consciousness and must become identical to Jews. (That is one of the main points

of the book!) It cannot mean, therefore, that there should be no distinctions between male and female in the way we live. Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5-6 and Colossians 3 shows he did not mean this statement to obliterate distinctive duties and practices for different cultures, classes, and genders. (Some believe Galatians 3:28 contradicts Ephesians and Colossians, but it is fairly easy to read them all in a way that their meanings do not cancel each other out.)

He does not say we are all identical or interchangeable but rather that we are all "*one*." Here we see most clearly the radical social implications of the gospel. It is a radical statement. It means any two people who are Christians have more in common with each other than with non-Christians of their own genders, social status, or race. It means I am a Christian before I am any race, etc. It means that all the barriers that separate people in the world into warring factions come down in Christ.

There are three barriers that usually divide people but are broken down in Christ by the gospel:

- a) The cultural barrier – "Jew nor Greek" Cultural divisions are to have no part in the church of Christ. People of one culture do not need to become like another culture in order to be accepted by God. So we should accept one another without one group feeling or declaring the superiority of its cultural ways over another. Inside the church we should associate and love one another across racial and cultural barriers.
- b) The class barrier – "slave nor free" Again, economic stratification should not extend into the church. People should not associate (as in the world) according to class but across such barriers. The poor or modestly paid worker must not be made to feel inferior in any way. On the other hand, the well-off must not be resented or shunned.
- c) The gender barrier – "male nor female" This was perhaps the strongest barrier of Paul's day. Women were considered absolutely inferior to men. Even in our day, the application of this principle is the most explosive and controversial. But, in any case, it was clearly revolutionary. Because women are equal in Christ before God, they must be seen as equally gifted and able in every way to men.

Note: It is natural to ask: What was Paul's understanding of the implications of v.28 for society in general? Was "*neither...slave nor free*," a call for the abolition of slavery? If so, why does he tell slaves to be diligent in their work in Eph 6 and Col 3? The best answer is to notice that his thesis in v.28 is that this radical equality is for those *in Christ*. The implications of this for broader society were just that--implications that have had to work themselves out over the years. For example, most of ancient society followed the law of "primogeniture," namely that the oldest son inherited virtually the whole family estate. Now in this passage Paul plays off of this custom to tell *every* Christian, male *and* female, that he or she is equally God's *heir*, heir of all of which Jesus is heir. Obviously, Paul is not forbidding the law of primogeniture in this text. That is not his direct concern. But just as obviously, Christian families who begin to think in this way, so subversive to pagan social attitudes, will have a tendency to drop the practice of primogeniture. In the long run, this truth of Paul's was bound to have an effect on how Christians lived in society at large. The freedom of the gospel has to change our attitude toward everything in life. But broader social change was not Paul's immediate concern in this teaching. He wants the gospel to bring down barriers within the Christian community.

How does the unity of v.28 flow from v.26?

The gospel of grace leads to this unity. How? First, the good news of the gospel creates unity. The privileges we get in the gospel (sonship--3:26, the Spirit--3:14, perfect righteousness--3:10) are so stupendous that they surpass the greatest earthly merited or inherited advantages. Second, the bad news of the gospel creates unity. As recipients of grace, we know that our blessings come unmerited, and so our pride in our race, status, or gender is removed. We know we are sinners like everyone else.

5. 4:4-5. What two basic things did God send his Son to accomplish? How are the two things alike? What happens if we only remember the first but forget the second?

First, he “redeemed those under the law” v.5, removing all liability, penalty, or debt. For Paul, the word “under” is a loaded term. It connotes that we are first, “under” it legally in that we are obligated to be righteous before God or we are lost. But we are also “under” it spiritually in that our hearts are helplessly fixated on trying to fulfill it in order to win God’s favor. It is a burden, an insatiable standard, impossible to satisfy. So in a sense we “belong” to the law--we are under its mastery.

Paul says Jesus is “born of a woman.” He came as a real human being. But Paul immediately adds “born under law.” The reason Paul brings up Jesus’ human incarnation here is to assert that he was born, as all human beings are, into a state of obligation to God’s law. But Jesus completely “redeems those under the law.” This is the same word that is used for “redeem” in 3:13. It means to release a slave from his or her owner by paying the slave’s full price. Here the “slave master” is clearly the Law. Jesus releases us from it as a slave is released from a master; Jesus pays our full price to the law. That must mean that Jesus completely fulfills all the law’s demands on us. Jesus has fulfilled anything and everything that we owe. There is nothing left to do or pay.

Second, as a result, Jesus procures for us “the full rights of sons” v.5 (NIV translation). The RSV translation renders this “adoption as sons.” These phrases are efforts to convey the sense of a single word. Literally, through Christ we receive “the sonship.” Both the NIV (with the word “rights”) and the RSV (with the term “adoption”) help us see that this is a legal term. This refers to a Graeco-Roman (but not Jewish) legal process in which a childless wealthy man could take one of his servants and adopt him. When that occurred, he ceased to be a slave and received all the financial and legal privileges within the estate and outside in the world as the son and heir. Though by birth and nature he is a slave without a relationship with the father, he now receives the legal status of son. It is a remarkable metaphor.

"The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and placed in a new relationship of son to his new father....All his old debts are canceled, and in effect the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family....[On the one hand, the new father] owned all the [new offspring's] property, controlled his personal relationships, and had the rights of discipline. On the other hand, the father was liable for the actions of the adoptee, and each owed the other reciprocal duties of support and maintenance."

-- Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, and Sons*

How are these two things, freedom from liability and rights as sons, the same? They are simply two sides of the same coin. If you realize how it was accomplished, with our record being legally transferred to Jesus and his to us, then we see that they must come together. In order to remove our legal status as sinners deserving condemnation, he gave us legal status as sons deserving great wealth and honor! They’ve come together through him, and only together do they give us a complete picture of what Christ has accomplished for us.

Yet it is very easy and common to think of our salvation only in terms of the first and not the second, only as the transfer *off* of our sins, but not as the transfer *on* of his rights and privileges. We tend to think only that Christ has pardoned us and removed our legal liability. When we do that, we are really only “half-saved by grace.” We can get pardon, but now we have to live a good life to earn and maintain God’s favor and rewards. But this text shows us that not only did Christ remove the curse we deserved, but he also gives us the blessing he

deserved. God's honor and reward is just as secure and guaranteed as our pardon. To use another image. Jesus' salvation is not just like receiving a pardon and release from death row and prison. Then we'd be free, but on our own. Jesus has also put on us the Congressional Medal of Honor. We are received and welcomed as heroes, as if we had accomplished extraordinary deeds.

Unless we remember this we will be anxious and even despairing when we sin or fail. We think our slate has been wiped clean, but now God's opinion and acceptance of us is based on our record. That is not the case. When a son becomes heir, that inheritance is guaranteed. It is not a prize to be won. It is his. So is our salvation.

6. 4:6-7. What are the privileges of sonship which are suggested by these two verses?

The two basic categories of rights or privileges are first, intimacy of relationship. We cry out "Abba," *Father*. "Abba" is an Aramaic word for "father," but it is a diminutive form. It means "Papa" or "Daddy." Such an address is only appropriate for the most intimate and open relationship between a parent and a child. The second privilege is authority over possessions. A son is "*then an heir*." The only reason a servant would be adopted as a son would be because the father had no heir. Therefore, the person in Paul's illustration has a legal title to all the father's estate, as if an "only begotten." With a little reflection we can draw out some implications of each category of privilege.

Intimacy of relationship

- *There is assurance and security in his love for us.* Just as a child does not worry about getting "fired" for disobeying the rules, just as a child knows that, if anything, a father's heart goes out more to a troubled child, not less, so we know that God's affection for us is deep and not based on our performance.
- *There is access to God in prayer.* Christ has won for us the nearness of God. We can speak to him intimately, and we can experience access to his presence and heart in prayer.

Authority of possession

- There is a confidence and boldness. We don't walk in fear of anyone or anything, for our father owns the place! God will honor us as he honors his only begotten Son. Thus we live with "heads held high." Christians also have a new authority over sin and the devil, as we will see worked out in later passages. Our sonship removes the fear that is at the root of much of our disobedience.
- There's a guarantee of sharing God's glory.
"The doctrine of our adoption tells us that the sum and substance of our promised inheritance is a share in the glory of Christ. We shall be made like our elder brother at every point, and sin and mortality, the double corruption of God's good work in the moral and spiritual spheres respectively, will be things of the past. 'Co-heirs with Christ...that we may also share in his glory' (Rom.8:170. 'Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.' (I Jn.3:2)."

-- J.I.Packer, Knowing God, chap 19

The astonishing bottom line of sonship is that God now treats us as if we have done everything Jesus has done. We are treated as if we are "only sons," like Jesus. Jesus very literally says this in his High Priestly prayer in the gospel of John. "*Father...let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...*" (John 17:23-24) Actually, this is all implied in the very use of the word "Abba." The use of the term here has a strong reference to Christ. Why would Paul use an

Aramaic idiomatic phrase in a letter to Greek speaking Galatians, who probably don't know Aramaic. (Aramaic was the common language of Palestine. That is why Paul includes a Greek translation of the word, writing "Abba, Father.") The significance of the word is that Christ used it in talking to his father. See Mark 14:36. It was a daringly familiar term that Jesus used to draw near the Living God. When Paul says that we should use it, he is vividly asserting that we have legally inherited the rights of Jesus Himself. We can approach God as if we were as beautiful, heroic, and faithful as Jesus himself. We are joint-heirs with him (Romans 8:17). Now, we "look like Him" to the Father.

7. 4:6-7. What has the Spirit been sent to do? How is it different from what the Son was sent to do? (Read the parallel passage Rom.8:15-16.)

There is a parallelism of v.4, "sent forth God his Son," with v.6, "sent forth God the Spirit." We have seen that the Son's purpose was to secure for us the legal status of our sonship. By contrast, we see that the Spirit's purpose is to secure for us the actual experience of our sonship. This is not like the work of the Son. The work of the Son brings us an objective legal condition that we can claim whether we feel it or not. But this work of the Spirit is not like that at all. The Spirit brings us a radically subjective experience. What are its marks, its characteristics?

- First, Paul tells us that the Spirit leads us to "call out" (often translated "cry out") "Abba." The Greek word *krazdon* is a very strong word that means a rending, loud cry. It refers to deep and profound passion and feeling.
- Second, the "calls out" refers to our prayer life. Just as a child does not prepare speeches to his or her parents, so Christians experiencing this work of the Spirit find a great spontaneity and reality in prayer. Praying is no longer mechanical or formal, but filled with warmth, passion, freedom, maybe even surprising eloquence.
- Third, the "calls out" connotes a sense of God's real presence. Just as a child calls out automatically to the nearby daddy when there's a problem or a question, so Christians experiencing this work of the Spirit feel a nearness, a remarkable reality to God.
- Fourth, "Abba" means a confidence of love, and assurance of welcome. Just as a child does not doubt the security and openness of daddy's strong arms, so Christians experiencing this work have an overwhelming boldness and certainty that God loves them endlessly.

In summary, the work of the Son is done externally to us, and is something we can have without feeling. But the work of the Spirit is done internally to us, and consists in being completely moved--intellectually, emotionally, volitionally--by the love of the Father. The fullness of the Spirit cannot then, really be "claimed." It is an experience.

8. What is the connection of the work of the Son and the Spirit (v.6)? How can we experience more of the Spirit's work? Share your own encounters with this work of the Spirit.

First, we must remember a basic principle. The Spirit's work occurs because of the work of the Son (v.6). In other words, the profound subjective experience is based on the objective truth, not the other way around. Why is it important to understand that? Because that is the nature of Christian experience: "The truth begins to shine." In Ephesians 1:17, Paul prays that the Ephesians will have a "Spirit of revelation, so that you may know him better." How does that come? "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know..." We see the very same structure in his other prayer for the Ephesians in 3:16-19. The Spirit's job is to take doctrinal truths and make them "shine" in the "eyes of our heart."

Practically speaking, it means that we should not just sit and ask God to send us an experience of his assurance. We should not simply try to work up feelings directly. That is to disconnect, as it were, vv.6-7 from vv.4-5. On the other hand, we should never study the Word of God academically, just looking for information. We should never study it without a desire to come under its power. That would be to disconnect, as it were, vv.4-5 from vv.6-7. Rather, it is as we ponder doctrinal truth worshipfully, continually applying what we read, that the work of the Spirit occurs. It is as we reflect and study and work through and rejoice in the truths of God's word that the Holy Spirit begins to make them thrilling, melting, disturbing, healing, shining.

Jonathan Edwards taught that the root of all human action is what he called the "affections." By affections, he meant something deeper than feelings. He saw them as the fundamental loves and hates of the whole person. The "affections" in the long run are the source waters of our feelings and behavior. Therefore, it is the work of the Spirit to take the truths of the gospel and slowly burn them into the roots of our souls, shaping the affections, so that the Lord's beauty and love become more precious to us than any alternative.

What specific steps can we take in order to have a deeper experience of our sonship? Look at what is implied in the text itself.

1) We must put aside significant time to study the work of the Son, asking the Spirit to illuminate us and make it real to us. The close connection of vv.4-5 to vv.6-7 means we must learn to meditate on the Bible. This is an intersection of prayer and study. See the Project, below.

2) We must "cry out" to the Father-love of God spontaneously, throughout the day. We must, in other words, analyze and address the issues of everyday life by remembering his Father-love. It means asking, moment-by-moment: "Am I acting like a slave who is afraid of God, or like a child who is assured of my Father's love?" Often, when we cry out during the day, the Spirit "comes along side" (Rom.8:16) and fills our hearts with help and assurance.

Unit 7 - Reading and Reflection

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” -for something that raised a question

Adoption In Christ

PART I. - UNDERSTANDING OUR ADOPTION.

A. The importance of adoption.

"The notion that we are children of God, His own sons and daughters...is the mainspring of Christian living....Our sonship to God is the apex of Creation and the goal of redemption."

-- Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how he much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. [Adoption] is the highest privilege the gospel offers....I have heard it seriously argued that the thought of divine fatherhood can mean nothing to those whose human father was inadequate, lacking wisdom, affection or both, nor to those many more whose misfortune it was to have a fatherless upbringing....But this is silly. For it is just not true to suggest that in the realm of personal relations, positive concepts cannot be formed by contrast....The truth is that all of us have a positive ideal of fatherhood by which we judge our own and others' fathers [how else could we be unhappy with our bad fathers?], and it can safely be said that the person for whom the thought of God's perfect fatherhood is meaningless or repellant does not exist."

-- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

B. Objections to and distortions of adoption.

"The idea that all are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere....The gift of sonship to God becomes ours not through being born, but through being born again. 'To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but born of God.' (Jn. 1:12-13) Sonship to God, then, is a gift of grace. It is not a natural but an adoptive sonship, and so the New Testament explicitly pictures it."

-- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

C. Adoption defined.

"Adoption is not a change in nature, but a change in status. If we fail to see this truth, we will reject the power of our adoption....Adoption is a declaration God makes about us. It is irreversible, dependent entirely upon His gracious choice, in which He says: 'You are my son, today I have brought you into my family.'"

-- Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

"The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and placed in a new relationship of son to his new father....All his old debts are cancelled, and in effect the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family....[On the one hand, the new father] owned all the [new offspring's] property, controlled his personal relationships, and had the rights of discipline. On the other hand, the father was liable for the actions of the adoptee, and each owed the other reciprocal duties of support and maintenance."

-- Francis Lyall, Slaves, Citizens, and Sons

D. Biblical theology of adoption.

"God and religion are not less than they were; the Old Testament revelation of the holiness of God, and its demand for humility in man, is presupposed throughout, but something has been added. A new factor has come in. New Testament believers deal with God as their Father.

-- J.I. Packer, Knowing God, chap 19

"According to our Lord's own testimony in John's Gospel, God's fatherly relation to him implied four things.

- *First, fatherhood implied authority. The Father commands and disposes; the initiative which he calls his Son to exercise is the initiative of resolute obedience to his Father's will...(6:38; 17:4; 5:19; 4:34).*
- *Second, fatherhood implied affection. 'The Father loves the Son.' 'The Father hath loved me...' (5:20; 15:9-10).*
- *Third, fatherhood implied fellowship. 'I am not alone, for my Father is with me.' 'The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone...' (16:32; 8:29).*
- *Fourth, fatherhood implied honor. God wills to exalt his Son. 'Father...Glorify your Son.' 'The Father...has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son....' (17:1; 5:22-23).*

*All this extends to his adopted children. In, through, and under Jesus Christ their Lord, they are ruled, loved, accompanied, and honored by their heavenly Father...." [Father...let the world know that you sent me and have loved them **even as** you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...'] (17:23-24).*

-- -- J.I. Packer, Knowing God, Chapter 19

PART II. - EXPERIENCING OUR ADOPTION

A. The status Christians have

"God sent his son...to redeem those under the law that we might receive the adoption [lit. the sonship]." Galatians 4:4-5

B. The experience Christians can have

"Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Galatians 4:6

“You did not receive the spirit of slavery again to fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are children of God.” Romans 8:15-16

C. What is the experience of sonship?

"[We all have a native] inability to believe that salvation is entirely of God's grace and love.... We are slow to realize the implications of that. We are sons, but we are in danger of having the mindset of hired servants. Furthermore, if there is nothing else the Devil can do to mar our joy in Christ, he will try to produce in us what our forefathers used to call a 'bondage frame of spirit'.... That is why he sends us the Spirit of adoption. What is [that]? Paul says,

'You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15-16)

....Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit...[which] brings us into a deep-seated persuasion that we really are the sons of God. If it is a fact that...God has adopted us into his family, then the Spirit assures us this is true, and enables us to live in the enjoyment of such a rich spiritual blessing....He sends his Spirit into our hearts, bringing us the deep spiritual and psychological security that rests on the objective fact that our sins are forgiven and we belong to the Lord."

-- Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God

*“ ‘Abba’ was the word that was used familiarly by children talking to their fathers....A child does not always address his father as ‘father;’ he uses terms such as ‘Papa,’ ‘Dad.’ That is the kind of meaning represented by this word ‘Abba.’ It was a...word lisped by a little child....But let us notice the word ‘cry’...we **cry** ‘Abba, Father.’ It is a very strong word, and clearly the Apostle has used it quite deliberately. It means a loud cry...it expresses deep emotion....What then does it imply? Obviously...real knowledge of God. God is no longer to us a distant God. He is not merely a God in whom we believe intellectually, theologically, theoretically, doctrinally only. All this is possible to one who is not a child of God at all...[Our] worship and praying are spontaneous; it is the spontaneity of the child who sees the father...and not only spontaneity, but confidence. A little child has confidence. He does not analyze it...he **knows** that ‘Abba’ is his father. Grown-ups may be standing back at a distance and being very formal [with some great personage]; but the little child comes running in, rushes right in, and holds on to his father's legs. He has a right that no-one else has....It is instinctive....we **cry** ‘Abba, Father.’”*

-- D.M. Lloyd-Jones, Romans 8:5-17

D. An example of the experience (“spirit”) of sonship.

The problem: *"Because I did not believe God loved me on the basis of Christ's life, death, and resurrection--*

The result: *[therefore] I could not face the risk of seeing my sins as my own responsibility. So having tried to clear my conscience by blaming others, I turned on the afterburners and made myself busy with work and duty. Or to use Luther's analogy, I was full of active righteousness. I looked to my outward*

activity to feel good about myself, and judged others by my own active standards....

The turning: *But now I understood what Luther was talking about: 'In the righteousness of faith we work nothing, we render nothing to God, but we only receive and allow another to work in us.' This is what he called a "passive righteousness"--a righteousness that is credited to our account through faith. This was Christ's righteousness, bought with the price of his blood on the cross. This I received by faith. The reason it had been so difficult for me to have a personal faith in Christ was that I had not experienced total forgiveness. But I had now brought real sins--including my attitudes of self-dependence and blame-shifting--to a real Savior, and they had been forgivenHow awesome it is to be loved unconditionally by a holy, righteous God.*

-- Rose M. Miller, From Fear to Freedom

PART III. - LIVING OUT OUR ADOPTION.

To live "by faith" is not a general "positive attitude," but a deliberate attempt to fire the heart with a knowledge of who we are in Christ and to live consistently with that knowledge.

"Sonship, [therefore] must be the controlling thought--the normative category, if you like--at every point." (J.I.Packer).

Here are all the responsibilities or duties of the Christian life recast and understood in terms of sonship:

A. Responsibilities of adopted children:

1. New motivation.

"If the love of a father will not make a child delight in him, what will?"

-- John Owen, Communion with God

"A perfect man would never act from sense of duty; he'd always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love (of God and of other people) like a crutch which is a substitute for a [healthy] leg. Most of us need the crutch at times; but of course it is idiotic to use the crutch when our own legs (our own loves, tastes, habits, etc.) can do the journey on their own."

-- C.S. Lewis Letters 18 July 1957

2. Obedience.

"[The Sermon on the Mount] teaches Christian conduct not by giving a full scheme of rules and a detailed casuistry, to be followed with mechanical precision, but by indicating a broad and general way the spirit, direction and objectives, the guiding principles and ideals, by which the Christian must steer his course. It is often noted that this is...quite different from the tax-consultant type of instruction which was the stock-in-trade of Jewish lawyers and scribes in our Lord's day. What is less often noticed is that it is precisely the kind of moral instruction that parents are constantly trying to give their children--concrete, imaginative, teaching general principles from particular instances,

and seeking all the time to bring the children to appreciate and share the parent's own attitudes and view of life....The all-embracing principles of conduct: [1] imitating the Father...(Mt.5:44-45,48)...[2] glorifying the Father [bringing him honor and credit before others] (Mt. 5:16; 6:9)...[3] pleasing the Father...(Mt.6:1).

-- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

3. Family resemblance.

*"Gospel holiness'...was Puritan shorthand for authentic Christian living, springing from love and gratitude to God, in contrast with the spurious 'legal holiness' that consisted merely of forms, routines and outward appearances, maintained from self-regarding motives....[Gospel holiness] is simply a matter of a child of God being true to type, [resembling the Father]...expressing one's adoption in one's life....while it is certainly true that justification frees one forever from the need to keep the law as a means of earning life, it is equally true that adoption obliges us to keep the law as the means of pleasing one's newfound Father. Law-keeping [is transformed now, it is] **the family likeness of God's children**....[Now] the sins of God's children do not destroy their justification or nullify their adoption, but they mar the children's fellowship with [and their family likeness to] the Father...."*

-- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

4. Trust.

"All Christians are, in fact, called to a life of faith, in the sense of following God's will at whatever cost and trusting him for the consequences. But all are tempted to put status and security, in human terms, before loyalty to God; and then, if they resist that temptation, they are at once tempted to worry about the likely effect of their stand....On those thus tempted in the life of faith, Jesus brings the truth of their adoption to bear....'Do not worry about your life...your heavenly Father knows what you need...' (Mt.6:31-33)

5. Acceptance of discipline.

"In this world, royal children have to undergo extra training and discipline which other children escape, in order to fit them for their high destiny. It is the same with the children of the King of kings. The clue to understanding all his dealings with them is to remember that throughout their lives he is training them for what awaits them, and chiseling them into the image of Christ."

-- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

B. Privileges of adopted children:

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

1. Assurance

"Social experts drum into us these days that the family unit needs to be stable and secure, and that any unsteadiness in the parent-child relationship takes its toll in strain, neurosis and arrested development in the child himself. The depressions, randomness

and immaturities that mark children of broken homes are known to us all. But...in God's family...you have absolute stability and security. The very concept of adoption is itself proof and guarantee of the preservation of the saints, for only bad fathers throw their children out of the family, even under provocation..."

-- J.I. Packer, Knowing God, chap 19

2. Prayer and intimacy

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

-- Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God

3. Freedom and confidence

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

-- Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God

4. Fellowship and connection

"We are to learn to accept and appreciate one another, no matter what natural differences might separate us....Rich and poor alike are to be treated as brothers....[We are to never give up on one another--to both confront and forgive in proportions as great as required.] Such a mixture of discipline and forgiveness is conceivable only within a family context....No family finds failure easy to handle....[But] only when we realize that the Church is a family, that we are brothers and sisters in that family, will we have a right perspective from which to view those who fail badly, and a right motive to see them disciplined faithfully, and welcomed back with many reaffirmations of our love....These are all part of what it means to 'keep on loving each other as brothers.' (Heb. 13:1)"

-- Sinclair Ferguson, Children of the Living God

5. Inheritance

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

-- Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Explain adoption in your own words.**
- 2. What are some of the ways that this truth (if grasped and lived) would change your life?**
- 3. What was the most helpful or encouraging thing you read?**

Lesson 8 - Gospel-Centered Ministry

The reason for the letter to the Galatian churches was the appearance of false teachers. Paul has been contrasting *his* teaching with their teaching. In this passage Paul contrasts not so much his doctrine with their doctrine, but his ministry with their ministry. As a result, we get insights about how the gospel practically affects our relationships with others.

Leader's background notes:

What are the "basic principles of the world?"

In 4:3 Paul says that the Galatians were enslaved to the *stoichea tou kosmou*, "the basic elements of the universe." Then in 4:9 he warns them that they are going back to being enslaved by them (this time adding the negative adjectives "*weak and miserable.*")

What does this term mean? Often this word in ancient Greek referred to the elements of the material, visible world that make up nature: fire, water, air, and earth. This word also often referred to the pagan belief that spiritual forces or gods lay behind and worked through these elements to control our lives and destinies. Thus these beings had to be worshipped and appeased. So farmers sacrificed to a weather-god, sailors prayed to a sea-god, soldiers to the god of military success (Ares), lovers to the god of physical beauty (Aphrodite) etc.

Both in Gal 4:3,9 and Col 2:8,15 Paul speaks as if these were personal beings that can enslave and control us. Does this mean he really believed that the pagan gods existed? No and yes! In 1 Cor 8:4 and 10:19, he states boldly that there is no God but the true God. Zeus and Apollos and Poseidon don't exist. Yet Paul immediately says, "*But the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons*" (1 Cor. 10:20). And he warns the Galatians that they can go back to being enslaved to the "elements' of the world" (Gal 4:9). Why? Paul is saying that though the "gods" do not exist as such, we can become subject to enslavement by evil spiritual forces if we worship anything other than Jesus Christ. For example, if we put our greatest hope in accomplishments in business, agriculture, etc, we will be controlled and enslaved. We will be completely under the power of money. If we are not doing well, we will be devastated. In other words, if we deify and serve the things of this world, which are not truly gods, but treated as if they were, we become slaves to them spiritually. Paul hints that there are evil spiritual forces in the world that will help you worship and serve created things--'elements'--rather than the creator, so that you will experience this enslavement.

What was Paul's illness?

There has been much speculation about the malady that Paul suffered. But the best educated guess is (see v.15) that it had to do with Paul's eyes. That is almost certainly what he means when he says, "*If you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.*" Another very strong hint is found at the end of Galatians (6:11). Paul takes the pen from his secretary and says, "*See what large letters I use as I write to you in my own hand.*" This is possibly the result of bad eyesight. There are other indications that this was not a one-time flare-up, but a chronic condition. In Acts 23:1-5, Paul speaks sharply to the High Priest and then confesses that he did not know that it was the High Priest. That does not make much sense unless he suffered from very poor eyesight. Also, in 2 Cor.12:7 Paul speaks of a "*thorn in the flesh,*" an *astheneia*, which refers to a physical handicap or weakness. So it is possible that what brought him to Galatia was a chronic condition that "flared up."

READ Galatians 4:8-20

1. What kind of religion did the Greek Galatians have before they heard the gospel--a Biblical one or an idolatrous one? What kind of religion are they in danger of turning to now? What are the implications of Paul calling a prospective lapse a "turning back" to idolatry?

The answer to this question may take some time to reach, but it is one of the most important and remarkable insights of the book.

Unless we stop and think, vv.8-11 seem to be a warning to the Galatians not to go back to pagan idol-worship. Doubtless, many of them were part of the many idol-worshipping temples and thus lived the very licentious and immoral lifestyles which went along with those religions. But then we remember that the whole point of Galatians is a warning not to adopt a Biblical legalism. The false teachers urged the Gentile Christians to adopt all the Old Testament Mosaic law, in order to be justified and pleasing to God (Gal.2:14-16). This is what 4:10 is referring to; the "*special days and months and seasons*" means they were taking on all the festivals and ceremonies of the Old Testament.

Therefore, Paul is saying this--that earning one's own salvation through scrupulous Biblical morality and religion is just as much enslavement to idols as outright paganism and all its immoral practices! In the end, the religious person is as lost and enslaved as the irreligious person. Why? Both are trying to be their own savior and lord, but in different ways. So how can a turn to works-salvation be considered an enslavement to false gods? There are an infinite number of different ways that we can choose to earn our salvation through works, even if we don't think of it as earning our salvation at all. But whatever we choose to use, whether it is achievement or morality or religion or serving our family, we turn that thing into a savior, and thus into a "god." So works-righteousness always creates idols, even if those idols become our religion, our church, even our ministry to others!

Martin Luther said:

All those who do not in all their works...trust in God's favor, grace and good-will, but rather seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep the [First] Commandment, and practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments. If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious and pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him through our works, then all [our compliance with the law] is pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior]... " ("Treatise on Good Works" See Unit 6- Exercise "Deeds, Words, and Heart)

Notice that Luther says that any effort to redeem oneself from sin without Christ always results in the setting up of some other savior-god instead, which we then must placate and satisfy with our works. If we are trying to get our security, identity, and power from our beauty, or some skill, or our accomplishments, or from fitting in to our culture, then we are enslaved to those things. We must "placate" the god. If we cannot we are in despair.

In the case of the Galatians, they are about to turn the law, and thus their own moral purity, into a savior. As John Stott puts it: "*How can a bondage to the law be called a bondage to evil spirits [false gods]?... What Paul means is that the devil took this good thing (the law) and twisted it to his own evil purpose, in order to enslave men and women...*" (Stott, p.105) We must realize Paul's emphasis on "enslavement." If anything but Jesus is a requirement for being happy or worthy, that thing will become our slavemaster.

The perfect example of this is Jesus' story of the two brothers in Luke 15. A father had one very immoral, younger prodigal son, and one very moral elder son. Both of them wanted control of the father's wealth but did not want the father. Both were alienated from the father's heart. In the end of the story, though, the immoral son repents and goes in to the father, while the moral one stays outside in anger. If anything, the idolatry/slavery of religion is more dangerous than the idolatry/slavery of irreligion. Why? The irreligious person *knows* he is away from God, but the religious person does not. Now we see why Paul was so afraid for the Galatians. The new slavery to "non-gods" would be worse than the old. They would not know they were away from the Father.

2. In verse 9, Paul says that they know God and then seems to correct himself and says, "...or rather are known by God." Why does Paul add this correction? What principle is he getting across? How is this an antidote for works-righteousness?

At first sight, Paul seems to be correct himself and say that they don't know God. But that is not likely. Anyone who has eternal life knows God (John 17:3), and Paul does not question that the Galatians have "*put on Christ*" (3:26). So the word "rather," probably means "more importantly." Paul is saying, "How can you turn back to idols since you know God and, more importantly, you *are known* by God." What Paul is saying is that what makes a person a Christian is not so much your knowing God but his knowing of you. "To know" in the Bible means more than intellectual awareness. To know someone is to enter into a personal relationship with him or her. So then Paul is saying not so much our regard and love for God but rather his regard and love of you is what really makes you a Christian. Paul says in I Cor.8:3, anyone who loves God does so because God knows you. That is, he has set his love on us in Jesus. Now our knowing of God will rise and fall depending on many things. But God's knowing of us is absolutely fixed and solid.

Why is this an antidote to idolatry? Because as Richard Lovelace (see Unit 5 Exercise) has written:

Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons, much less secure than non-Christians, because of the constant bulletins they receive from their Christian environment about the holiness of God and the righteousness they are supposed to have. Their insecurity shows itself in pride, a fierce defensive assertion of their own righteousness and defensive criticism of others. They come naturally to hate other cultural styles and other races in order to bolster their own security and discharge their suppressed anger. They cling desperately to legal, pharisaical righteousness, but envy, jealousy and other branches on the tree of sin grow out of their fundamental insecurity...

So it is our insecurity regarding our acceptance with God which is the reason we make idols. We look at our knowing of him (which fluctuates so much) instead of his knowing of us, in Christ. We are desperately trying to firm up a positive self-image by using our idols. Paul reminds us that in the gospel we don't need to make ourselves beautiful or lovable to God; he already knows us. If this is the case, we don't need to make an idol out of other people's approval or even our own self-approval.

The classic statement of this is in I Cor.4:3-4. There Paul says that he does not only not care about other people's evaluation of him, he does not even care for his *own* evaluation of himself. Rather, all that counts is God's evaluation or "*judgment*" of him. But all of Galatians is about

how in Jesus Christ God's judgement is that we are *justified*; we are regarded by God as wholly perfect and righteous. So Paul is saying, "Since God knows me, I don't care what you think about me, and I don't even care what I think."

In summary, Paul calls the Galatians to get rid of their works-righteousness by remembering that the great and central thing is not how much our hearts are set on God, but how much his heart is set on us.

3. What brought Paul to the Galatians? What does that teach us about suffering and thwarted plans (Cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10)? Can you provide personal illustrations of this in your own life?

Verse 13 indicates that a physical ailment was the cause of Paul's preaching the gospel to the Galatians at all. "*It was because of an illness that I first preached...to you.*" That most likely means that he was in Galatia because of either a detour from his planned itinerary or because of a delay in his planned schedule. Either way, he was not planning on preaching the gospel to them. But the illness caused it to happen.

What does this teach us about suffering?

We are immediately confronted with one of the most challenging and most troubling parts of Christian teaching, namely that God allows the suffering and difficulties of the world into the lives of Christians. Romans 8:28 insists that everything that happens to us, both pleasant and painful, is "worked together" by God for our best interest. In this case, we see that hundreds of lives were changed because God allowed a painful illness to overtake Paul. Also, in this case, we have an example of how God thwarted well-laid plans in order to bring enormous good, though through suffering. So the first thing we learn is that God does not promise to bless Christians by avoiding suffering, but to bless Christians through suffering. "He suffered not that we might not suffer, but so that in our suffering we would become like him."

Additional note: We must be careful not to define the good that God brings out of suffering always in terms of circumstances. In this case, Paul's illness brought him many new friends and much fulfillment in a successful ministry. It is tempting to think that the Romans 8:28 promise means that if we lose a certain amount of money now, we will make more later, etc. But 2 Cor. 12:7-10 gives a deeper perspective. Paul talks about a great unnamed painful "thorn" which God would not remove despite repeated prayers. But Paul says that the "thorn" is meant for good because it has humbled him (v.7- "*to keep me from being conceited*") and it has strengthened him (v.9- "*that Christ's power may rest on me*"). The relentless pain and sense of weakness (whatever its cause) has brought Paul to a deeper dependence on and vision of the sufficiency of grace (v.9). "*My grace* [i.e. my unmerited love for you alone] *is sufficient for you.*" This has absolutely nothing to do with circumstances. Paul actually "*delights*" now in weaknesses and hardships (v.10 because he knows it is working an inner transformation. He does not say, "Well, though I failed in ministry here, God is preparing me for successful ministry over there." That is likely to be true, but Paul does not say that. The benefits of suffering are the inner transformation into greater Christlikeness of character and therefore a deep joy that is independent of circumstances.

What does it teach us about thwarted plans?

A second thing this teaches us is that ministry does not happen strictly according to human plan. Paul had not targeted Galatia in his strategic planning sessions, but God brought him there. Now we cannot infer from this text that strategic planning is wrong. (Paul did not repent and stop making plans for his missionary journeys! We see, for example, that he continued to target the largest cities of every region as a way to reach the region.) We must use the wisdom that we have to make plans. We must be stewards of our time and resources, and must plan to

use them in the way that will best produce fruit. But this does teach that we must be very relaxed and willing to let God edit our plans greatly. When we begin a Bible study for certain people, we may find a whole different set of people being reached. When we advertise an event, we may find that most of the people whose lives are changed came by some strange coincidence or by some very remote chance conversation with a stranger, etc.

Most of us can provide personal illustrations of how God worked in our lives or the lives around us through mistakes, “disasters,” troubles, and thwarted plans, often far more than through our deliberate actions and goals.

4. How and why had the Galatians' relationship with Paul changed (vv. 14-16)? What is Paul's purpose in bringing up this change?

The Galatians very warmly received Paul. In v. 14, he says that his illness was a trial or a test for them, because it would have been easy to have treated Paul with “contempt or scorn.” This probably means that his illness was very disfiguring and disgusting to look at. One translation renders this: “*You resisted the temptation to show scorn or disgust at the state of my poor body*” (NEB Bible). But despite his unimpressive and even repulsive appearance, they received him, “...as if I were an angel, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself” (v. 14b), that is, with honor. In addition, they heard him with joy (v. 15). But now we have a great change. The joy and satisfaction they used to feel for him is gone. (“*What has happened to all your joy?*”) Now, they have begun to see Paul as a hostile agent. When he says, “*Have I become your enemy?*” he means they are now beginning to treat him as an adversary. There has been alienation over the doctrines of faith and good works at issue in the letter. As he has been telling them “*the truth,*” their friendship has cooled drastically.

Why is Paul bringing this up?

On the one hand, Paul brings this up because he simply feels a great deal of love for the Galatians and because he is hurting from the loss of the relationship. This, then, is a genuine cry of the heart, a personal expression of sorrow. He is saying, “I remember the wonderful times we had together--and I miss you.” There is no agenda in doing this.

On the other hand, Paul's love and concern for them motivates him to seek to persuade them of their dangerous error. And that is probably the second reason he is talking of this. He reminds them that at one time they received his message despite the unpleasantness of his body. Now he is asking them to receive his message despite the unpleasantness of his *tone* (v. 20). He is saying, “You listened to me once before in difficult circumstances. Please listen again! You treated me as an angel once. Have I changed? Am I your enemy now? I am not, I still love you as my children” (v. 19)

This leads into the next question. Paul adds this section to the letter so that he can mix love with this truth, so that he can both affirm and confront, so he can show that all his hard and even strident language is born out of deep love, concern and a personal relationship.

5. (vv. 16-17, 19-20) How does Paul's ministry differ from the ministry of the false teachers as to its goal and means?

This question can be answered without the following note, but I think this insight will make things clearer. The general sense of Paul's meaning is discernible in the NIV translation, though it misses some of the nuances of his sentence. The phrase “*zealous to win you over*” renders a word that means literally “to build up” or even “puff up.” Some translate better as, “*They are flattering and making much of you, so that you will flatter and make much of them.*”

Goal

First, we see a difference in the goal of the ministry. The false teachers' goal is, "...that you may be zealous for them" (v.17). The gospel-energized ministry does not need to have fans who are emotionally dependent on the leaders. These 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--in particular, through their ministry to the Galatians.) This means that they emotionally need to have people emotionally need them. They need their converts and their disciples to be wrapped up in their leaders, obeying and adoring them. Only this can assure them that they are good and great believers, blessed and favored by God.

By contrast, Paul's goal is in v.19: " *till Christ be formed in you.*" This is very critical. Despite Paul's appeal in v.12 to "*become like me,*" Paul is only being an example to the Galatians in order for them to be changed into the likeness of Christ. (And Paul does not say "like me," but "become like me." He is not trying to get fans but to get people to follow Christ as he does.) Paul wants people not to become dependent on him but on Christ. So here is the first contrast between a ministry based on the gospel and one that is not. He wants them to grow up as quickly as possible and become partners. This goal is reinforced by the fascinating image of v.19. He says that he is like a mother, laboring in the pains of childbirth over his disciples. A mother in labor desperately wants her child to get out and on his/her own! A child grows inside the mother personally. The mother suffers tremendously in order to give life to a child, but the mother does not want the child to stay in the womb but to get out and become a distinct person. It is a remarkable image for a healthy, gospel-based ministry.

Means:

Second, we see a difference in the means to that goal. The false teachers are "*zealous to win you over.*" This is a way of saying, "They are telling you what you want to hear; they are tickling your ears, pandering to you in order to get your loyalty." On the other hand, Paul is not telling them such flattering things. He is telling them "*the truth*" (v.16) and is being vilified for it. Yet (as we alluded under the last question) Paul is putting his truth-telling in the context of many affirmations of his love for them. Paul clearly expresses his agony to have to say things that upset and anger the Galatians. He hates it, as we see in v.20 where he says, "*How I wish I could be with you and change my tone...*" Here is a man speaking the truth (v.16) in love (v.19-20), by making many overt expressions of affection.

The gospel frees us from the need for people's approval and adoration so that we can confront and anger the people we love, if that is what is best for them. And although it does not always work, this is the only kind of communication that really changes people. If you love a person so selfishly that you cannot risk their anger, you won't ever tell them the truth they need to hear. If, on the other hand, you tell a person the truth they need, but with harshness and not with the agony of a lover, they won't listen to it. But if you speak the truth with lots of love evident at the same time, there is a great chance that what you say will penetrate the heart and heal. A gospel-based ministry is marked by *loving honesty, not spin, image and flattery.*

6. (vv.12-14,19-20) What other characteristics of healthy relationships can you draw from these five verses? Does this characterize your small group fellowship?

Gospel ministry is culturally flexible (v.12) "*I became like you.*"

A ministry energized by the gospel is *flexible and adaptable*. It is not tied to every specific of culture and custom. Its leaders can come and truly live among the people they are seeking to reach and adopt their ways and love them. Compare this with I Cor.9:20-22. One of the marks of a legalistic, works-righteous mindset is that it is inflexible, and makes a "federal case" out of

details. Such a person wants the converts to dress and act “just like us.” Rather, Paul is a model of someone who (like Christ) truly comes close and enters into the lives of the people he is seeking to reach. He not only got to know them personally, but he lived with them, ate with them, played with them, talked and walked with them. He got to know their world and lived in it appreciatively even though it was not his world. He entered in as far as he could to their questions and problems and their hopes and fears and sensitivities and adapted his life and speech and message to them without, of course changing the gospel itself.

Gospel ministry is transparent (v.12) “Become like me.”

John Stott marvels that Paul has been so personally open about his own heart and so consistent in his own life that he can invite the Galatians to emulate him.

“In the context, following his agonized complaint that the Galatians were turning back to the old bondage from which Christ had redeemed them [v.10-11], this appeal can mean only one thing. Paul longed for them to...become like him in his Christian freedom.....All Christians should be able to say something like this, especially to unbelievers, namely that we are so satisfied with Jesus Christ, with his freedom, joy and salvation, that we want other people to become like us.” J.Stott The Message of Galatians, p.112.

Our words are not sufficient for (or maybe not even primary in) persuading others about the truth of Christ. People have to be able to look into our hearts and lives, to assess how we handle trouble, how we deal with disappointment and interruptions, how we conduct our relationships, how we feel and act so that they can see whether Christ is real and how the gospel affects a day-to-day human life. Generally, we find faith mainly through relationships with joyful, flawed-but honest, loving Christians, not through arguments, information and books. (Note: This is not arrogance. If Paul had only said “be like me” without becoming “like them,” then this would be an indicator of pride. But Paul is not urging them to be as “right” as he is, but as joyful as he is.)

Gospel ministry is based on authoritative truth (v.14) “You welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.”

The Greek word *angelos* was originally the word for “messenger” or “representative.” At first glance, Paul could be read as speaking in hyperbole. But rather, he is commending them for recognizing that he, a minister of the gospel, was almost literally an “angel,” and that his message was not his but one of divine authority (cf.Gal.1:8-12). Though Paul was physically unimpressive and unauthoritative looking, they had recognized the impressive authority of what he was saying. John Stott writes:

“This is an extraordinary expression. It is another plain indication of Paul’s self-conscious apostolic authority. Paul sees nothing incongruous about the Galatians receiving him as if he were one of God’s angels, or [even] as if he were Christ Jesus....Although personally he knew that he was only their fellow-sinner, indeed ‘the foremost of sinners’ (I Tim. 1:15), yet officially he was an apostle...invested with the authority of Christ...and the message of Christ.” (p.114-115).

So, after the principles of v.12 which show us that lives can only be changed through personal relationships, now we see that the human element alone is not enough. There must be an authoritative, divine message, not of human origin at all.

Gospel ministry expects to suffer that others may grow (v.19) “I am in the pains of child-birth until Christ is formed in you.”

This vivid and remarkable image shows us three things about a ministry mindset:

- 1) Paul wants to see the Galatians “formed” and so he has a vision of something great they can be. His goal in each relationship is growth. In the greatest of ministry relationships,

each spouse's goal is to "present" the other to God "radiant..without stain or wrinkle or...blemish." It is the same in any spiritual friendship.

- 2) Paul wants them (as we said above) to specifically become like Christ, "...till Christ be formed in you." He does not want his "children" to resemble him, but to resemble Christ.
- 3) Paul expects to go through labor pains in order to do this. Any mother expects to hurt--maybe hurt very badly--in order to birth a child. It is considered very unusual and "lucky" for a birth to not be filled with pain and danger. So Paul's image tells us that any minister or friend who hopes to see another person come to Christ and become like Christ should expect there to be lots of struggle and hurt and pain. We should expect to be misunderstood, disappointed, drained.

So any ministry should: have a growth goal, have Christlikeness as the growth goal, and expect there to be an emotional cost to the spiritual "mother."

Conclusion

In a healthy ministry, your own life is so consistent and your heart so satisfied with Jesus Christ that you can genuinely long for others to have what you have. And if you are truly living in community with people (see the first "difference," above), then people will see your motives and your joy, and will be attracted by it. If you are enslaved to idols through works-righteousness, you will demand that people live just like you, but out of a desire to justify yourself and deal with your own anxiety and need to believe you are "all right." But if you are free from idols and self-righteousness, you will simply want others to share your freedom. Your efforts at ministry will be warm and personal and self-revealing ("*become like me!*") not condemning and harsh and impersonal.

Unit 8 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” - for something that raised a question

Idols of the Heart

A. THE DEFINITION OF IDOLS

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

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

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

“...that most basic question which God poses to each human heart: “Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart's functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?”

Questions...bring some of people's idol systems to the surface. 'To who or what do you look for life-sustaining stability, security and acceptance?...What do you really want and expect [out of life]? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success?' These questions or similar ones tease out whether we serve God or idols, whether we look for salvation from Christ or from false saviors.

[This bears] on the immediate motivation of my behavior, thoughts, feelings. In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question: who or what “rules my behavior, the Lord or an idol?” -- David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”

B. THE EFFECTS OF IDOLS.

1. Distorted thinking.

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

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

2. Emotional bondage.

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

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

3. The sin under every sin.

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

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

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

C. IDENTIFYING OUR IDOLS.

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

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

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

Anxiety [Idolatry and the future]

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

Guilt/Bitterness [Idolatry and the past]

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

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

Boredom/Emptiness [Idolatry and the present]

[8. To be bored is to feel empty, [meaningless.] Boredom is an anticipatory form of being dead. To the extent to which limited values are exalted to idolatries...[when any of those values are lost], boredom becomes pathological and compulsive....My subjectively experienced boredom may then become infinitely projected toward the whole cosmos....This picture of the self is called despair [The milder forms are disappointment, disillusionment, cynicism.]"

-- Thomas C. Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia* Chap. 6

Answer the following:

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

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

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

Circle the thoughts that are lodged in your heart:

Power idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I have power and influence over others.

Approval idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am loved and respected by _____"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Religion idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am adhering to my religion's moral codes and accomplished in it's activities."

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

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

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

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

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

Relationship idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--Mr. or Ms. 'Right' is in love with me."

Suffering idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am hurting, in a problem--only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt."

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

Answer these diagnostic questions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY:

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

E. HEALING IDOLATRY WITH THE GOSPEL.

1. Avoid the “Moralyzing” Approach.

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

2. Avoid the “Psychologizing” Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among more liberal religious groups can best be called the "psychologizing" approach. Basic analysis: **Your problem is that you don't see that God loves you as you are. Rejoice!** This focuses on feelings, which seem to be deeper than behavior but it also fails to go deep enough. We must also find out the why of our feelings. *Why* do I have such strong feelings of despair (or fear, or anger) when this or that happens? What are the inordinate desires that are being frustrated? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an

unhappy person (or yourself), “God loves you--rejoice!” is insufficient. The unhappiness is coming from a belief that says, “Even if God loves you, but you don't have *this*, then you are still a failure.” You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all--your particular idolatry.

3. Adopt the “Gospel” Approach.

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

"The faith that...is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness...It is often said today, in circles which blend popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others....But no realistic human beings find it easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ. There is a sense in which the strongest self-love that we can have...is merely the mirror image of the lively conviction we have that God loves us. Moralism, whether it takes the form of either denunciation or "pep talks," can ultimately only create an awareness of sin and guilt or manufactured virtues built on will power....We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted, it inevitably focuses our attention not on Christ but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security not resting on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christians life. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness [some form of idolatry] which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace...-- Richard Lovelace, The Dynamics of Spiritual Life

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What helped you most?

2. What questions were raised?

Lesson 9 - Grace to the Barren

Paul has taught the Galatian Christians (ex-pagans) that they were fully children of Abraham the moment they believed in Christ (3:7; 4:7). The false teachers on the other hand had taught the Galatians that they had to submit to all the Mosaic legislation, including circumcision, in order to be children of Abraham. Now he uses the illustration of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, to make his point in a final, dramatic way. The basic teaching is that the gospel not only makes absolutely anyone a child of God, but that the most proud and moral and religiously "able" often are the ones left out of God's family. The gospel reverses the world's values.

Leader's background notes:

This passage raises questions of how we interpret the Bible. Ordinarily the best way to read the Bible is to seek to discern *the original intent of the original author*. Since we believe God inspired the original authors (and not the later readers!) this is the safest way to interpret the text. Paul, here, however says in v.24 that *this may be taken figuratively*. He reads the Genesis account of Sarah and Hagar as a symbol of two approaches to God--faith and works. Does this mean we can ignore the original writer's concerns?

The answer is that yes, Paul is using rhetorical flourish when he uses Sarah's "throw out the slave woman" (Gen.21:10; Gal.4:30) to advise people to get rid of those teachers who deny the gospel of grace! (Sarah was not telling us to love the gospel--she was just jealous!) But Paul's interpretation of the Sarah-Hagar passage is not fanciful. It is a simple fact that for Abraham to get a son through Hagar took no faith at all. It was something he had the human capacity to perform, but for Abraham to get a son through Sarah took enormous faith that God would miraculously give what Abraham had no ability to produce. So in these two women Abraham was faced with the two approaches of living by faith or trusting in his own efforts. Paul recognizes this as he reads the story, taking it quite seriously and literally. Paul's teaching on faith and works is just one way to apply the passage to our lives today.

If you do get into a discussion about what the "rules for interpretation" of the Bible are, you should know that there are two classic and historic principles.

The first is: interpret the text by discerning as closely as possible how the original author wished to be understood by the audience he wrote to. That takes understanding of language, history, and culture. This has been traditionally called the "grammatico-historical" interpretation (also, the *sensus literalis*).

The second is: interpret the text in light of the whole of the rest of Scripture. Don't interpret one text in such a way that flatly contradicts the rest of the Bible. This is called the "theological interpretation" (also, the *analogia fidei*). The first principle arises out of the fact that the Bible had real human authors, but the second principle arises from the fact that the Bible also has one divine author behind all the rest.

READ Galatians 4:21-31

1. (v.21) What does it mean to want to be "under the law?" (Compare with 4:4-5, and 5:16-20)

Here we look both forward (to chapter 5) and backward (to chapter 4) in order to get a good idea of the basic concept Paul is seeking to illustrate with his story of Hagar and Sarah in 4:21-31.

To be “under the law” cannot mean obeying the law. That would mean that a Christian, who is “free from the law” does not have to obey it. But this is not the case. Gal 5:16-20 is a strong example. Paul lists all the actions that are forbidden to a Christian--immorality, hatred, selfishness, etc. (5:19-20). These are all things that God’s law forbids. Paul everywhere in his letters assumes that Christians must tell the truth, love others, live pure lives, and so on, as God’s law requires. But in a shocking turnaround, Paul actually attributes such disobedient attitudes and actions to being “under the law!” Notice how in 5:16 Paul contrasts being *led by the Spirit* against the desires of the *sinful nature/flesh*, but in 5:18 he contrasts being *led-by-Spirit* with being *under-law*. Essentially, he sees being under law and being caught by our sinful nature as being very closely related. Thus his list of forbidden things comes from being under the law. It is a remarkable way to show that Paul does not encourage disobedience to the law. (We will look more into this remarkable equation of “under law” and “lusts of the flesh” in chapter 5).

If “under the law” does not mean obeying the law, what does it mean? It means relying on the law for your standing with God.

“The message of these verses is right up to date and is specially relevant to religious people. According to verse 21 it is addressed to those who desire to be under law. There are many such today. They are not Judaizers to whom Paul was writing, but people whose religion is legalistic, who imagine that the way to God is by observance of certain rules...They suppose that their relationship to God depends on adherence to regulations. They are [thus] in bondage to them” John Stott, The Message of Galatians, p.122.

We can see this clearly in 4:4-5, where Paul says that Christ redeemed those “under the law” by giving them “full rights as sons.” Without Christ, we have to rely on the law to win acceptance into God’s family (i.e. to win “rights as sons”). But Christ came “under the law” (4:4), which means he came and obeyed and completely fulfilled the law for us, so that now our “sonship” is not based on our law-performance, but Christ’s law-performance. Christians have the full rights as sons now. We do not wait until the end of our lives to receive it, hoping that we have lived well enough.

This means there are four kinds of persons in the world:

#1 Law-obeying, Law-relying.

These people are under the law, and are usually very smug, self-righteous and pharisaical. Externally, they are very sure they are right with God, but deep down, they have a lot of insecurity, since no one can truly be assured they are living up to standards. This makes them touchy, sensitive to criticism and devastated when their prayers aren’t answered. [This includes members of other religions but here I am thinking mainly of people who go to church.]

#2 Law-disobeying, Law-relying.

These people have a religious conscience of strong works-righteousness, but they are not living consistently with it. As a result, they are more humble and more tolerant of others than the Pharisees above, but they are also much more guilt-ridden, subject to mood swings and sometimes very afraid of religious topics. [Some of these people may go to church but stay on the periphery because of their low spiritual self-esteem.]

#3 Law-disobeying, Not Law-relying.

These are the people who have thrown off the concept of the Law of God. They are intellectually secular or rather relativistic, or have a very vague spirituality. They largely choose their own moral standards and insist they are meeting them. But Paul in Romans 1 says that at a sub-conscious level, they know there is a God who they should be obeying. [Such people are usually happier and more tolerant than either of the above groups. But usually there is a strong liberal self-righteousness They are definitely earning their own salvation by feeling superior to others. It is usually a less overt kind of self-righteousness.]

#4 Law-obeying, Not Law-relying.

These are Christians who understand the gospel and are living out of the freedom of it. They obey the law of God out of grateful joy that comes from the knowledge of their sonship and out of the freedom from the fear and selfishness that false idols had generated. They are more tolerant than #3, more sympathetic than #2, and more confident than #1. [Most real Christians tend toward the errors of #1, #2, and even #3. But to the degree that they do, they are impoverished spiritually.]

2. Why do you think Paul can say that those under the law don't really listen to what the law says?

In v.21, Paul says, "*You who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law [actually] says?*" This is an argument *ad hominem*, showing that a position is untenable on its own grounds. Paul is saying, "The very law you purport to follow contradicts you." Paul may be using the word "law" to simply mean the Old Testament record of the will of God. So he is going back to the story of Hagar and Sarah which likely was used by the false teachers, who told the Galatians, "You are not really children of Abraham unless you obey all the Mosaic Law."

Paul is turning the tables on them and showing that Abraham had *two* sons, and therefore there are two ways of being related to Abraham; one right one and one wrong one. It is a brilliant argument. The basic point of the false teachers was: "Yes, it is good that you believe in Christ, but you will have to obey the whole law before you can be considered the children of Abraham." Paul's basic point is: "The moment you believed in Christ, you *were* the children of Abraham, the heirs of all the promises of God!"

3. Read the story behind this passage in Genesis 16:1-4; 18:10-14; 21:1-10. What are the differences in the births of these two sons (v.23)?

Abraham had two sons--Ishmael and Isaac--by two different women. Hagar, the slave of Sarah, bore Ishmael to Abraham, while Sarah, the wife of Abraham, bore Isaac. Paul sums up the differences in births in v.23 when he says, "*The son of the slave woman*

was born in the *ordinary* way, but the son of the free woman was born as the result of the promise.” Abraham was told that he would have a child who would be his heir and the bearer of the line which would bring salvation into the world. And God told him that it would be a child of Sarah. But Sarah was a barren woman and very old, and it would take an *extraordinary*, supernatural act of God for a son to come that way. On the other hand, Sarah had a maidservant, Hagar, who was young and fertile. By the customs of the time, it would be perfectly legal to have a son through her. (See Note 1 at the end of this Question & Answer.) Therefore, Abraham decided not to get his son through God’s supernatural act. Rather he decided to get his son through human attainment, through what he was capable of doing and what Hagar was capable of doing.

4. What does Paul say each birth mother represents (v.24-26)? Why?

Paul says clearly that Ishmael and Hagar represent the law covenant of Sinai and the earthly city of Jerusalem, which by and large consists of persons that have not accepted Christ, and who are therefore “*in slavery*” (v.25). This almost surely refers to those who are “*under law*” since that was the phrase with which Paul opened this passage. Paul has been referring to works-righteousness and salvation-by-law all through chapter 3 and 4 as slavery. So Hagar represents being saved by works while Isaac and Sarah represent being saved by grace--“*the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.*” The heavenly Jerusalem is the kingdom of all those who believe.

Why?

First, we must realize that Paul is using the story only as an allegory. Some people are disturbed that Hagar (who in the actual story is an innocent victim) represents something negative, while Sarah (who in the actual story is an unbelieving collaborator with Abraham) represents something positive. But we must remember that Paul himself says in verse 24, “*These things may be taken figuratively.*” In other words, though we must read the account as a literally true story and learn the moral and theological lessons of it, that is not what Paul is doing here. He finds the story to be a good symbolic illustration of grace and works. It also turns the tables on his opponents. (See question #3 below.)

Why is it such a good illustration of grace and works? Mainly because of the choices of Abraham. Abraham had two choices before him. He could wait to receive what only God was capable of doing or he could go out and attain what he was capable of doing. Put another way, he could choose to have faith in God’s promise and wait to receive the son, or have faith in his own ability and work to attain the son. Either way, he was exercising faith but the choice was between which “savior” he would rest on. He chose the latter and the immediate result was disaster! Sarah became terribly jealous of Hagar and the family was wracked with division and sadness. (This is not surprising, since the Bible uniformly condemns polygamy and concubines.) And as history went on, strife and warfare between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael continued. Ishmael is traditionally the father of the Arab peoples and Isaac of the Jews.

See how interesting this analogy is. The gospel is that we do not try to attain a righteousness that our abilities can develop. Rather we are to receive a righteousness provided through supernatural acts of God in history, the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection of Christ. Abraham did not rely on God’s grace through his supernatural

action in history but rather on his own ability. When we fail to rest in God but seek to be our own savior, the result is havoc and disintegration--spiritually, psychologically, and relationally. So we see why Paul chose the two sons as a good illustration of the two ways to approach God.

Note: Many Christian readers question how Abraham could have had relations with his wife's maidservant, in contradiction to Biblical sex ethics against one wife and against sex outside marriage. Many Old Testament saints were polygamists or had concubines. This does not mean, however, that God "changed his mind" or had a different standard in former days than he gives us now. Genesis 2:24 and its context clearly state that God's will was for there to be only two persons in any marriage and "one flesh" is to be between those two only. What then is the answer? The answer is that God revealed his will progressively and in stages throughout history. Abraham and Sarah did not have the books of the Bible. (Obviously, since the first book of the Bible written was about them!) God had not chosen to reveal fully his mind in many areas. Abraham and Sarah were following the laws and customs of the time. It was considered both legal and proper for a husband to bear children through the wife's servantwomen. (It doesn't take a trained sociologist or psychologist to imagine what dysfunctional families that would create!) Abraham's sin was not the breaking of the laws he knew but of failing to believe in the promise he knew.

5. The residents of Jerusalem would regard Sarah as their mother and Hagar as the mother of the Gentiles. Why does Paul reverse things? How does this bolster his argument in 3:7 and 4:7-9?

Paul's reference to Hagar representing "Arabia" refers to the ancient tradition that Ishmael's descendants were Arabic people, Gentiles. (Joseph is sold into slavery through Ishmaelite traders in Gen.37:27. Already Ishmaelites are seen as Gentiles, unbelievers.) So this mention of Arabia is Paul's way of emphasizing this tradition. But then he says that Hagar is the spiritual mother of all those in Jerusalem. This would have been an absolutely shocking interpretation, not only to the false legalistic teachers, but to any Jew at all. But Paul is emphatic when he says, "This present Jerusalem" (v.25).

Why did Paul do this? He is making the point that those who are under law, who rely on the law, are as much in spiritual slavery as Hagar was in literal slavery. In v.24-25, Paul is linking together the Sinai covenant of law, the present Jerusalem, Hagar and all who make the law the means of justification with God and the main principle of life. All along, Paul has been saying that it is those "under law" who are enslaved. In 4:7-9, he says that people seeking to justify themselves through the law are as enslaved as pagans are to their gods. Legalism means you are never sure of yourself; you are always dogged by a sense of guilt and inadequacy, or else by a need to feel superior.

But though he has been saying it all along, he has now brilliantly and dramatically made his point afresh. Though the false teachers proudly consider themselves related to Abraham by Sarah and Isaac, Paul says that they are spiritually descended from the slave woman, the Gentile, the outcast. Their heart and approach to God is like Abraham with Hagar and the fruit in their lives is like Ishmael--just more slavery! Though they

are racially from Sarah, in their soul and heart they are like the people they despise. They rely on their own ability rather than the supernatural grace of God.

So in a rhetorical flourish, Paul says to the Galatians: “*Oh friends, you Gentiles are the real sons of Isaac, and those who lord it over you as ‘true sons’ are really the sons of Ishmael. If you believe the gospel--you are the free, and they are the slaves. Don’t give up your freedom!*” It is (of course) a brilliant ending.

6. Read verse 27. What does Paul imply by quoting Isaiah 54:1? How does Sarah serve as an encouraging picture to all who consider themselves to have failed or have been disappointed?

Why does Paul quote Isaiah 54:1?

Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1, which declares that “*the barren and desolate woman will be more fruitful than the woman with husband.*” Originally this prophetic word was for the Jewish exiles in Babylon. The remaining Israelites thought their national life was over, that they would never return home, or have their own country again. They seemed like failures, weak and helpless (their exile was a punishment), while other nations seemed strong and able. But God says to them, through Isaiah, “*Now that you are helpless you will see that it is the weak in whose lives my grace works! The strong are too busy relying on themselves. I will make you numerous and great.*” The prophecy of Isaiah looks back to Genesis 16, in which God looks down on two women, one beautiful and fertile, the other barren and old, and he chooses to save the world through the barren one. Through her, all the peoples of the world are blessed. That is how God’s grace works.

Now Paul takes up the same story that Isaiah used, and gives it an even more full and wonderful application. The Galatians are being “beaten up” by the false teachers. They are being told that they are too polluted and flawed to simply consider themselves loved children of God the moment they believe. But now Paul turns the tables and comforts the Galatians powerfully. They are the “barren woman.” If salvation is by works, then only the “fertile” can have “children.” Only the morally able and strong, the people from good families, the folk with good records can be spiritually fruitful, enjoy the love and joy of God and transform the lives of others. But if the gospel is true, it does not matter who you are or were. You may be a spiritual and moral outcast, as marginal as the single barren woman was in those ancient days. It does not matter. You will bear fruit, the kind that lasts. The gospel says, “Grace is not just for fertile Hagar, but for barren Sarahs. If Sarah can bear, anyone can!”

In fact, is Paul not saying that the gospel of grace is *especially* for the barren? Is he not saying that the able and the “fertile” think they can attain without God, and so they reject the gospel of grace? So Paul is saying what Jesus says in the parable of the prodigal and elder brother in Luke 15. The gospel shows us that it is the “strong,” moral, good, religious, and self-righteous who, in the end, are the slaves.

How is Sarah an encouragement to those failures? To those disappointed?

We have to remember that in those ancient times, a woman’s worth essentially consisted entirely in her ability to bear children. Of course, this is not something the Bible condoned. In fact, this very passage completely undermines the terrible mistake that so many societies make. Ancient cultures told a woman that her worth and

“righteousness” was her ability to produce children, and that if she could not bear children her life was useless to the tribe. (To a great degree, even in our modern society, unmarried women often feel very stigmatized and useless.) But the Bible shows us here that we should not make children our life and worth anymore than we should make career or money or power or approval our worth. The gospel cries out that the people who have most had their false strategies of self-worth collapse--the “barren, the poor, the marginal”--can be more fruitful, rich, and powerful than all the rest. They can bear great fruit if they begin to live out of the gospel and serve others.

The pastor of a Black church in Harlem tells how over 80 years ago, their congregation was founded by a German lady who lived in Manhattan. She was a dedicated Christian, and through her Bible study, two African-American women from Harlem came to Christ. They asked her to begin a ministry up in Harlem to reach more of their friends. The German lady was engaged at the time, and her fiancée was very much against her doing such a ministry. He said he would call off the wedding if she went. As she agonized over the competing call she felt from God over against her desire to be married, she came upon Isaiah 54:1--“*More are the children of the desolate woman than of she who has a husband.*” She followed God’s call, lost her husband, and the new church was born which today is Bethel Gospel. This is just one example of the principle.

Religion and philosophy in general says that God and salvation are only for those who are good. The gospel is also exclusive. It says that God and salvation are only for those who know they are not good and can only be saved by grace. But the gospel has a far more inclusive exclusivity! Anyone can belong to God through the gospel at once, regardless of record and background, regardless of who you have been or what you have done or how weak you are. Religion is for the noble, the able, the moral, the strong, but the gospel is for anyone. Jesus actually said that the able, moral and strong are in general farther from the kingdom than the moral failures and the spiritually weak (Matt.21:31).

7. Why do religious people need the gospel? Why do irreligious people need the gospel? Why do religious people persecute the gospel-bearers?

Everyone, even the most irreligious, is trying to earn their salvation by worshipping something. All persons need a sense of worth or value. Thus everyone has a worshipful faith in *something* from which they must derive that value. But these things control and disappoint us if we find them, and devastate us if we lose them.

Everyone, even the most religious, is rejecting Jesus as Savior. Even our religion and morality are efforts to merit God’s favor, to put him in our debt and to maintain control of our lives. We may use Jesus as Example or Helper, but we are our own Savior. So in our natural state, the motives for *both* serving God *and* rejecting God are identical. In both cases we seek to maintain independence from God by denying that we were so sinful that we needed to be saved totally by grace. Instead we seek to earn our own value.

“Ishmaels” are always in bondage. That is what self-reliance always leads to. “Isaacs” live in freedom.

Persecution

Paul's warning is rather important. He flatly states in v.29 that the children of the slave will always persecute the children of the free woman. Why? Because the gospel is more threatening to religious people than irreligious people. Religious people are very touchy and nervous about their standing with God. Their insecurity makes them hostile to the gospel, which insists that their best deeds are useless before God. One of the ways we know that our self-image is based on justification by Christ is that we are not hateful and hostile to people who differ with us; one of the ways we know that our self-image is based on justification by works is that we persecute! That is the principle.

“The persecution of the true church...is not always by the world, who are strangers...but by our half-brothers, religious people, the nominal church. It has always been so. The Lord Jesus was bitterly opposed, rejected, mocked, and condemned by His own nation. The fiercest opponents of the apostle Paul were the official [religious leaders]. The greatest enemies of evangelical faith today are not unbelievers....but the church, the establishment, the hierarchy. Isaac is always mocked and persecuted by Ishmael.” J.Stott, p.127.

Unit 9 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” - for something that raised a question

Gospel Forgiveness

Introduction: In Galatians 4:12-20, Paul’s forgiveness of the Galatians for their betrayal of him is so automatic that we can hardly notice it. It is only because his appeal to them (as strong as it is) is so affectionate and free from resentment that we realize the strength of Paul’s forgiving spirit. Later he cautions the Galatians against a growing spirit of resentment and back-biting (Gal.5:15). The more they lose touch with the gospel, the more resentments and grudges grow.

Below is a guide to how the gospel helps us reconcile our relationships with a balance of truth and love. (At times you can see that this project has been used in seminars for married couples! But the principles are basic to all relationships.)

A. THE RESOURCES FOR FORGIVENESS.

1. We need enough humility.

Jesus ties our ability to forgive to our ability to repent. (*“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”* Matt.6:12.) This doesn't mean that God forgives our sins because we forgive others. It means that in general we are as forgiven by God as we are forgiving to others because unforgiving people are unrepentant people. The more we hold grudges the less we see ourselves as having done wrong and needing forgiveness; the more we see ourselves as needing forgiveness, the more likely we are to forgive others. Why? Resentment requires a person to sit in the position of Judge (Rom.12:19-20). We can only hold grudges if we feel superior to the other person. Jesus very directly and bluntly tells us that, if we hold a grudge against another person, we are ignorant of how much we owe God. So the first thing we have to see is our own need for forgiveness. We need enough humility to forgive.

Transition: But this is not enough! Because though pride is one reason that we cannot forgive, emotional insecurity is another. So in addition:

2. We need enough “emotional wealth.”

Why is it that we can forgive some wrongs easily but not others? It is because everyone draws a sense of self-worth (a sense that we are worthy of love and respect) from certain objects. No one can validate themselves. We all look to certain people or things to convince us that we are significant. The more certain we are of this, the more “emotionally wealthy” we are--confident, poised, at peace. What are the things that we look to? Steven Covey calls them “personal centers” and Victor Frankl calls them your “meaning centers.” They may be career, possessions, appearance, romance, peer groups, achievement, good

causes, moral character, religion, marriage, children, friendships or a combination of several. However, this means that these things are things that we absolutely must have or we face emotional bankruptcy and death. And all our most powerful feelings are connected to them. We respond in deep guilt if we fail to attain them or in deep anger if someone blocks them from us, or in deep anxiety if they are threatened, or in major drivenness since we must have them, or in despair if we ever lose them completely.

For example. A husband and a wife discovered that a school teacher had been emotionally abusive to their daughter and had fairly ruined her academic year and sent her into counseling. They are both angry at the teacher but the husband has less trouble "getting past" the anger than the wife. Why? Is the husband a less angry person? No, in general he tends to be angrier temperamentally. Does he love his daughter less? No. The issue is that the wife has tied her own self-image and sense of self-worth to her daughter's progress and happiness while the husband does this with his career. As a result, her anger is far deeper, since she is going "bankrupt." She feels, "If my daughter doesn't turn out well, what good am I?" So her anger toward the teacher is powerful.

Ironically, it is both a sense of superiority and a sense of inferiority that makes it hard to forgive. Paradoxically, the two can often go together. We often deal with our own inferiority and insecurity by taking a superior, judgmental position toward someone else.

3. The Character of Forgiveness.

A definition What is forgiveness? When someone has wronged you, it means they owe you; they have a debt with you. Forgiveness is to absorb the cost of the debt yourself. You pay the price yourself, and you refuse to exact the price out of the person in any way. Forgiveness means you free the person from penalty for a sin by paying the price yourself.

The ultimate example We are told that our forgiveness must imitate God's forgiveness in Christ. *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you* (Eph.4:32).

How did God forgive? We are told that he does not *remember* them. That cannot mean that God literally forgets what has happened. It means he "sends away" the penalty for them. He does not bring the incidents to mind, and does not let them affect the way he deals with us.

How did God forgive "*in Christ*?" We are told that Jesus pays the price for the sins. "*It is finished*" means "It has been paid in full" (John 19:30). The Father gave up his Son, and the Son gave up his life. God absorbed the cost in himself.

B. PRACTICAL STEPS FOR FORGIVENESS.

1. Distinguish between granting and feeling.

Realize that forgiveness is granted (often for a long time) before it is felt. Forgiveness is granted first, and felt later (Luke 17:3-10). Forgiveness is not primarily a feeling, but a set of actions and disciplines. In summary, forgiveness is a promise not to exact the price of the sin from the person who wronged you.

This promise means a repeated set of "payments" in which you relinquish revenge. It is hard and (for a while) constant. If this promise is kept actively, eventually the feeling of anger subsides. It is critical to realize at the outset, then, that forgiveness is not the forcing or denying of feelings, but a promise to make and keep despite our feelings.

2. Determine to never exact the price, but to pay the price ourselves.

"[Forgiveness] is to deal with our emotions by sending them away--by denying ourselves the dark pleasures of venting them or fondling them in our minds...."

"Once upon a time, I was engaged to a young woman who changed her mind. I forgave her...but [only] in small sums over a year...[They were made] whenever I spoke to her and refrained from rehashing the past, whenever I renounced jealousy and self-pity, whenever [I saw her] with another man, whenever I praised her to others when I wanted to slice away at her reputation. Those were the payments--but she never saw them. And her own payment was unseen by me...but I do know that she forgave me...[Forgiveness] is more than a matter of refusing to hate someone. It is also a matter of choosing to demonstrate love and acceptance to the offender...Pain is the consequence of sin; there is no easy way to deal with it. Wood, nails and pain are the currency of forgiveness, the love that heals."

-- Dan Hamilton, *Forgiveness*

3. Take two inventories: ways to exact the price; ways to pay the price.

This quote shows us that there are numerous ways that we can "exact" and take payment from the offender, but each time we refrain, we are absorbing the cost ourselves and "making payments." Below are the ways in which we tend to try to exact payments:

a) In our dealing with the offender:

- (1) We can make cutting remarks and drag out the past.
- (2) We can be far more demanding and controlling with the person than we are with others, all because "they owe us."
- (3) We can punish with self-righteous "mercy" which makes them feel small.
- (4) We can avoid them, be cold to them in overt and/or subtle ways.
- (5) We can actively seek and scheme to hurt or harm them, taking from them something valuable to them.

b) In our dealing with others:

- (1) We can run them down to others, under the guise of "warning" people about them.
- (2) We can run them down to others, under the guise of seeking sympathy and sharing our hurt.

c) In our dealing with ourselves:

- (1) We can replay the tapes of what they did to us, to justify our anger and hostility.

(2) We can "root" for their failure or fall or pain.

Forgiveness is a promise, to not "bring the matter up" to the person, others, or even ourselves. At each point when we are tempted to exact payment, we refuse, and though it hurts, that is a payment:

a) With the person

In our dealings with the person we are courteous and warm as possible. If the person is repentant, we seek to restore the relationship as much as possible. Why say "as much as possible?" If the person has done grievous wrong, it may mean the trust can only be restored in degrees. If the person is continuing in a hostile manner, you must not make it easy for them to sin against you. And there are other circumstances. (E.g. If the person is a former "love interest," then to re-create the same relationship may be inappropriate.)

The speed and degree of this restoration entails the re-creation of trust, and that takes time, depending on the nature and severity of the offenses involved. Part of real repentance usually means asking: "What could I do that would make you trust me?" and being willing to accept the answer. Part of real forgiveness means being open to the possibility of lasting change in the offender and being truly unbiased and willing to offer more trust little by little.

b) With others

We must not criticize the offender to others. We should be careful, when seeking support for our "burdens" (Galatians 6:1-6) that we aren't using them as an excuse to get others to justify us by agreeing how horrible the other person is! We must be reasonable. This is not to say you can never say anything that casts a bad light on someone else, but you must watch your motives. If the person stays in a hostile and unrepentant mode, it may be necessary to "warn" someone about him or her, but again, motives must be watched.

c) With yourself

What does it mean to "not bring it up yourself? It means not to dwell on it in the heart, and not to re-play the "videotapes" of the wrong in your imagination, in order to keep the sense of loss and hurt fresh and real to you. It means, when you are ready to do so, you should pray for the person and yourself, remind yourself of the cross (see below) and turn your mind to other things.

4. "Will the good" of the other, not only for his/her sake but also for yours!

Notice that on the cross Jesus says, "*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.*" (Luke 23:34) He doesn't actually say "I forgive you." He does forgive, of course, but by turning to the Father and praying for them, he shows us an important method of forgiveness. He admits that they are sinning (otherwise they would not need forgiveness!) but he sees them as needy and

weak (*they don't know*). He seeks their enlightenment and forgiveness from God. He prays for them.

When we identify "evil" too closely with the "evildoer," we get pulled into the same cycle of hurt pride and revenge and self-absorption and then more hurt pride and more revenge.

The secret of overcoming evil is for us to see evil as something above and distinct from the evildoer. When we do that, there are two results:

1) The spread of evil is checked toward us. Its hatred and pride do not infect us. Consider this: The only way to truly beat the ill-will of the other is to forgive him/her. If you don't, you are still being controlled by the other. Even if you are reacting against them, you are still being dominated and affected by them.

2) The spread of evil may be checked in the evildoer. He or she may be softened and helped by our love. We don't know that for certain but it is almost the only way that can happen. This is, then, an act of the will. We determine to wish them good and will their growth and healing. We determine to pray for them.

Note: It needs to be said here that in general, it is not loving to let another person go about sinning and doing wrong. Forgiveness does not therefore mean you cannot criticize, oppose or contend against continued destructive behavior. Forgiveness that turns away from confrontation is not loving at all; it is self-serving.

The ordinary approach is to stay angry inside (exact payment) and say nothing on the outside. That lets evil spread in both your life and the life of the other. Instead, the right thing to do is completely forgive inside (make payment) and confront lovingly on the outside. That checks the spread of evil all around. Also, it is impossible to speak lovingly and winsomely to a person doing wrong unless you have gotten control of your anger through forgiveness steps. The model for this is Christ, of course, who spoke out enough to get crucified, but who forgave his crucifiers every step of the way. The result of his perfect conformity to this model was the triumph of grace both in his own life and in that of his crucifiers.

D. PRE-CONDITIONS FOR FORGIVENESS.

1. Getting Humility.

The Bible is explicit in telling us to forgive as God in Christ forgave you (Eph.4:32). There is no better way to get the humility necessary for forgiveness than to accept what the gospel says about us. It tells us that we were made by God and owe him, therefore, everything. We owe it to him to put him first in our life. Even religious people ordinarily only relate to God when we need him in times of trouble. None of us love him as we owe, "with all our heart, soul, strength and mind." Jesus himself shows us vividly how to do this in Matthew 18:21-35. When Peter asks about forgiveness, Jesus tells the parable of a servant who is forgiven a debt of an infinite sum (*10,000 talents*--roughly equivalent to about \$300,000,000 dollars) but who then refuses to forgive a debt to him of a few dollars. Jesus calls the servant "*wicked*" and says, in effect, to him, "*Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?*"(18:33) This is a challenge to us. We must compare our debt to God with people's debts to us AND we are to compare Christ's payment for our forgiveness to our payment for their forgiveness. We are to say, "Lord, you did

not exact payment for my debts from me, but Jesus paid for them with his life. Now what right do I have to exact payments for their debts to me? And for me to forgive would not take a payment anything like Christ's payment!"

Paul in Romans 12 shows us another way to think of resentment and forgiveness. He says, "*Leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: 'Vengeance is mine...says the Lord'*" v.19. What we are being reminded is that all resentment and vengeance is taking on God's role as judge. It is playing God.

- But only God is qualified to be judge (we are imperfect and deserve judgment ourselves).
- Only God knows enough to be judge (we don't know all about the offender, what he/she has faced and deserves).
- Jesus took the judgment of God.

So Paul is saying: "Think about this! Either these people you are angry at will repent some day and Jesus will take their judgment or they will not and God will deal with it. But in either process, you are not involved." "Pride won't allow forgiveness; forgiveness won't allow pride." If you cannot forgive, it is because you are sure that you are not as sinful as the person you are mad at.

2. Getting "emotional wealth."

Anger is the result of love. It is energy for defense of something you love when it is threatened. If you don't love something at all, you are not angry when it is threatened. If you love something a little, you get a little angry when it is threatened. If something you love is an "ultimate concern," if it is something that gives you meaning in life, then when it is threatened you will get uncontrollably angry.

When anything in life is an absolute requirement for your happiness and self-worth, it is essentially an "idol," something you are actually worshipping. When such a thing is threatened, your anger is absolute. Your anger is actually the way the idol keeps you in its service, in its chains. Therefore, if you find that, despite all the efforts to forgive (using 0.-4. above), your anger and bitterness cannot subside, you may need to look deeper and ask, "What am I defending? What is so important that I cannot live without?" It may be that, until some inordinate desire is identified and confronted, you will not be able to master your anger.

Here is a real example. A woman in her late 30's had never married. Her family and her part of the country believed that there was something radically wrong with any woman of that age who was still single. She wrestled greatly with shame and unworthiness. She also had tremendous unresolved anger against a man she had dated for many years but who had not married her. She went to a counselor. The therapist rightly told her that she had taken to heart her family's approach to personal value and worth. They taught that a woman had to have a husband and children if she was to have any value or worth. She was bitter against this man only because he had come between her and the thing she felt she needed to have to have value. The counselor then proposed that she throw off such an unenlightened view and throw herself into a career.

About this time she was going to a church where she was clearly hearing the gospel for the first time. She heard that the gospel is *not* that we live a worthy life and then give it to God and then he owes us but that in Jesus Christ he has already lived a worthy life. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. When we believe, he gives it to us. Then we are completely accepted and loved by the only One in the universe who counts. This gives us the ultimate emotional wealth, a sense of being loved so deep that we can afford to forgive anyone. She realized that the well-meaning counselor was asking her to throw off a politically incorrect system of works-righteousness for a politically correct one! She said, “Why should I leave the ranks of the many women who make family their worth and value to join the ranks of the many men who make career the same thing? Would I not be as devastated then by career setbacks as I have been by romantic ones? Yes. But instead, I will receive the righteousness of Christ and learn to rejoice in it. Then I can look at either men or a career and say, ‘What makes me beautiful to God is Jesus, not these things.’ Only then will I have power and freedom. And power to forgive” She found the “pre-conditions” for forgiveness.

Note: It will become clear that one of the most typical idols we can have is our spouse! We may need his or her approval and respect in idolatrous ways. We may look to the other person to be a “savior,” the source of our self-worth. However, no human being can bear that pressure. Your spouse is a finite human being with limitations. He or she *cannot* love you consistently. And if you try to get from your spouse what only the Lord can give, you will be locked in a vicious cycle. You will not be able to forgive your spouse for his/her failures unless you find a Spouse whose love and forgiveness is perfect.

E. Steps for Repentance.

Why wait until now to talk about repentance? And why give it so little space? Repentance and forgiveness are really different ways of looking at the same thing. We could just as easily have spent the lion’s share of this essay on repentance, and then added this note on forgiveness. Both are the same in all of these ways:

- 1) The pre-conditions are identical. Both are blocked by pride and emotional bankruptcy. Both require humility and emotional wealth.
- 2) The character is identical. Both are just ways of saying, “I am willing to absorb the payment for what I have done.”
- 3) Even the steps are nearly the same. See below.

1. An honest admission of your part of the wrong. Maybe in the disagreement you are only 10% wrong, or 30% or 80%. You just confess your part without any blame-shifting or excuses. Even if the other person believes you are guiltier than you think you are, admit the truth. Only offer to analyze and describe the part of the mess that you are responsible.

2. Make no excuses. Do not explain it away as blame-shifting. Treat other trigger factors as occasions not causes. Your own selfishness or insensitivity etc., was the real cause, and what other people did to you only released those things out into the expressions that you did. If you don’t do this, your repentance can actually be a way to not repent at all.

3. Be willing to listen to a realistic account of what your wrong cost the other. It is possible to use repentance to say “shut up” to another person. How?

a) If your repentance is very dramatic and emotional, you are saying, “Look at how bad I feel! Don’t tell me anything more about how I made you feel” Or even, “Look at how bad I feel! Don’t you want to take back what you said?”

b) If your repentance is very quick and analytical, it may make the other person feel that she or he cannot share what he/she was feeling. It can be a way to say, “I’m not interested in hearing how you feel at all.”

4. Provide fruits of repentance, rather than just an expression of sorrow.

- Offer to make changes that would restore or remunerate in some way for the damage done.
- Offer to make changes in behavior that would make it very unlikely for the incident at issue to happen again. If you can’t do this, your partner has the right to think you haven’t repented.

If competent repentance and competent forgiveness coincide, the experience is almost a joyful revival of your relationship each time. It is a bit like a conversion experience, with the reality and sweetness of your relationship appreciated in new ways. You see the marriage as a gift. You find new emotional wealth since the love of the other person actually points you to the forgiving Lord himself. But if your spouse is not repenting, you should still forgive, since it is the only way to keep evil from spreading in the both of you. (See above.) And you *can* still forgive if you meet the pre-conditions. (See above.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What helped you most?

2. What questions were raised?

3. Where will you begin to start using what you've learned?

Lesson 10 - Gospel Freedom

In 5:1, Paul re-introduces the idea of Christian freedom that he mentioned in Gal. 2:4. The concept of Christian "freedom" is easy to misunderstand. Paul says we are free from the "supervision" of the law (3:25) and we are no longer "under" the law (5:18). But does that mean we are free to disobey or disregard it? And if not, of what does this freedom consist? Paul answers this indirectly in 5:2-6, and directly in 5:13-15.

Leaders' background notes:

This is a critical passage. Paul tells us that Christians need not fear any condemnation from the law because we are righteous in Christ. When many people hear this, they say, "Boy! If I believed that, I'd be able to live any way I wanted!" At first sight, the gospel seems to remove all incentive to live a holy life. This is why over the centuries, churches have felt the need to tone down the radical claims of the gospel. This leads however to the loss of the true freedom in the gospel that Paul says is a very great incentive to holy living. How does Paul show that our gospel freedom from fear and condemnation leads us nonetheless to obey God?

In summary, he says that out of our objective freedom from the penalty of sin and from having to obey the law to be saved, there comes a new subjective freedom which consists of a whole new motivation and reason for doing everything. The common sense definition of freedom is to be able to do what you most want to do. Paul is saying that in the gospel and only in the gospel, pleasing and obeying God finally becomes what we most want to do. That is freedom! At last, our deepest desires conform to the realities of the universe and our own nature.

When we were under the law and trying to save ourselves, obeying God was something we had to do, not what we wanted to do. We obeyed out of fear of rejection and punishment. We obeyed to get things from God, i.e. out of love for our interests, not love for God. This motivation can change behavior externally, but not our actual hearts. It creates a life of mechanical discipline and conformity to rules. But now we no longer are obeying out of burdensome, slavish fear, but out of assured, grateful love (cf. Romans 8:15). The reason so many people say, "if I believed the gospel, I'd live any way I want" is because the only motivation for obedience they know is fear of consequences.

READ Galatians 5:1-15

1. The thesis of Paul's last chapters is stated in 5:1. What does Paul teach in these two sentences?

There are two parts to Paul's thesis:

First, Paul tells us that we have a profound freedom in Christ Paul's initial sentence is even stronger and more emphatic in Greek than it comes across in English. He literally says: "*For freedom Christ freed you.*" Both the noun and the verb is the word "freedom." Freedom is both the means *and* the end of the Christian life! Everything about the Christian gospel is freedom. Jesus' whole mission was an operation of liberation. And the verb translated "*has set us free*" is in the aorist tense. In Greek this refers to a single, past action that is now completed. So in the most definitive way, Paul tells us that Christians have been set free.

Nevertheless, secondly Paul tells us that this freedom we have in the gospel can be lost. It is important that Paul mention this, because the emphatic, triumphant declaration of 5:1a might lead us to believe this gospel freedom is so great and strong that it can't be lost. Paul says, though, that despite its divine source it is fragile and can slip from our grasp.

There are two implications (at least) of this thesis. First, to keep our freedom we must "*stand fast*." There is an interesting parallel here to political freedom. It is a well-observed fact that it takes vigilance and responsibility for a nation or group of people to maintain their political independence. Paul says that this is just as true with regard to this spiritual freedom. He uses a term that he uses elsewhere (1 Cor 16:13, Phil 1:27, 4:1). To *stand fast* is essentially a military word, mixing together the ideas of keeping alert, being strong, resisting attack and sticking together. In short, despite the indicative of Christianity that we already have been saved by Christ, there is an imperative that we must be continually diligent to remember, preserve, rejoice in and live in accord with our salvation.

The second implication looks back to the radical thesis in chapter 4 that we have already discussed. Paul exhorts them not to become "*burdened...by a yoke*." It was common in Judaism of the time to talk about taking on the study and practice of the whole Mosaic code as coming under the "yoke." But both Christ and the early church saw the Pharisees and teachers of the law as enslaving people with this yoke (cf. Acts 15:10; Matt 11:29-30). The Galatians were in danger of going under this yoke. But the startling word in this last sentence is the word again. The Galatian Christians had been pagans, who were under the slavery of literal idolatry--'*the basic principles of the world*' (4:3,8-9). But here Paul again makes his radical claim that overt pagan idolatry and Biblically ethical moralism are basically the same thing. The Galatians had been amoral liberals and now they were about to become very moral conservatives. Paul is saying that these boil down to the same spiritual slavery!

Why is religion just as much a yoke of slavery as licentious paganism? We've seen that idolatry always enslaves. First, if we fail an idol it *will not forgive*, but will "curse" us. How? If they are threatened by circumstances, we become uncontrollably anxious. If they are blocked by individuals, we become uncontrollably resentful. If we lose them through personal failure we become uncontrollably self-loathing.

Second, if we largely succeed in fulfilling them, they *will not fulfill us*, they will fail to "bless" us in the long run. All this is because idols are *non-gods*. As great as it is to be a good parent, if you make your children's happiness the main thing in your life--an idol--you will be a slave. If you fail as a parent, you won't ever feel forgiven; if you succeed it won't be enough for total fulfillment. Why? Because your family, as important as it is, is a non-god. It isn't the true God. Only he can forgive and fulfill.

But very moral and religious people who don't understand the gospel are practicing a form of idolatry. According to Luther, "They set themselves up as Savior" Instead of work, family or achievement being the idols which we serve and placate, we have religion and moral practice. Through them they are convincing themselves and others that they are worthy and significant. Our goal now is ministry effectiveness and moral accomplishment. But when we fail to achieve it in any way, we become just as anxious and guilty. For example, when we say, "I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself," we are really saying, "I have failed my *real* god and savior--my moral record--and I am under its curse. It won't forgive me." Thus religious moralism can come in and nullify the power and value of grace in our lives. In 5:1b, Paul is saying that under circumcision, the Galatians will experience again the anxiety, guilt and *burdened* life they knew before as pagans. They will never be sure that they are "living up." Their lives will be as fear-based and proud and guilt-ridden as it was before. Probably, more so! They will fall into the touchiness, insecurity, pride, discouragement and weariness of people who are never sure that they have worth (righteousness).

2. What is Paul warning the Galatians against in verses 2-4? Is Paul saying here that the Galatians who are real Christians are going to lose their salvation (v.4)? How does v.10 shed light on v.4?

Verses 2-4 are an extremely strong warning from Paul. The teaching of the Judaizers was: "Unless you are circumcised and keep the law, you cannot be saved" (see Acts 15:1,5). Paul retorts that, on the contrary, if they adopt this teaching and follow it, *then* they cannot be saved. Christ will "*be of no value*" to them (v.2), they will be "*obligated to obey the whole law*" (v.3), and they will "*fall away from grace*" (v.4). Paul is setting up the same either-or argument he used in the first chapter. You can't add to Christ without subtracting Christ. If you decide that you are saved through Christ-plus-obedience, then you are obligating yourself to obey the *whole* of the law (v.3) in order to be justified before God (v.4). This is simply impossible since no one obeys the law properly (3:10-11). If you even try to do that, you are making yourself the Savior and are alienated from Christ. This is a very severe warning that, in the end, good works cannot save a person, and anyone who prevails in the effort will be lost.

In short, v.1 reminds us of our subjective freedom in Christ, that we are no longer obeying God under a burdened, coerced, enslaved motivation. Verses 2-4 remind us of our objective freedom in Christ, that we are freed from the obligation to obey the whole law in order to be justified before God. In summary, then, Paul says that the gospel frees us from both the guilt and slavery of sin, from both the condemnation of sin and the motivation to sin

Is he saying that Galatians who are real Christians will lose salvation? (cf.v.10)

Does v.4 mean that real Christians can lose their salvation? It is very unlikely that this verse is saying that (though we admit it can appear that way). As we will see immediately below, Christians base their whole lives on the assurance and certainty of their present and future acceptance with God (v.5-6). Assurance of salvation is not possible if we think we must earn or even maintain our salvation through our efforts. If we keep ourselves saved by good living, how could we ever be sure we were being good enough to retain God's favor? No thoughtful or self-aware person could ever be assured of their standing with God. Yet the Bible often says that Christians can know we are safe and saved (cf.1 John 2:3). In other words, if we can lose our salvation, we are earning it. That militates against everything Paul is saying. Elsewhere Paul says that once we are in Christ Jesus we can never come again into condemnation (Rom.8:1). The end of Romans 8 (see vv.31-38) is a most emphatic declaration that we cannot lose the love of God. John says of anyone who forsakes the faith permanently, "*They were not of us, for if they were of us, they would have continued with us.*" (1 John 2:19)

Also, Paul tells the Galatians that despite his warning, he is confident that they are *not* going to turn their back on the gospel (v.10). How could he say that unless he believes that they are real Christians. Their positive response to his warning will show that they do believe the gospel from the heart.

What is Paul saying in v.4? We need to realize that Paul is laying down a general principle. He is saying, "Those who trust their efforts for salvation are lost--period. That goes for everyone." He means, "No matter that you insist you've been converted or you say you feel Christ has changed your life. If you deny salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, you can't be saved by him." He is saying that this is an acid test about whether someone is a Christian or not.

3. Why do you think Paul would say we hope for righteousness (v.5) when in 3:6 and elsewhere he says we have righteousness? How can we wait for it practically?

Why does he tell us to hope and wait?

The Biblical word *elpida* translated "hope" does not have the much weaker connotations that it has in English. Cf. Hebrews 11:1- "*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.*" In the Bible, "hope" does not mean "hope so." It means a powerful assurance and certainty of something. This is a major problem for the reader of the English

Bible. The very word that means “assurance” in Greek means “not so sure” in English! It is hard then to understand many passages.

The true sense of the word “hope” is indicated in the very verse we have in front of us, because Paul says that we simply “*await*” for this righteousness. We don’t work or strive for it. We know it is coming, on its way. In fact, we *eagerly* await it, not anxiously. What is it that we await? *Righteousness* means more than goodness, but rather, a completely right record and right relationship with God. Paul is saying that we can live today in light of our certain, guaranteed future glorification and welcome by God into his arms. He already said it in 4:7: “*Since you are a son, God has made you an heir.*” No one else, no secular person, no adherent of any other religion, can look at their future like this! Irreligious people have no idea where they will be a million years from now, and religious people without the gospel are anxiously striving for it and cannot relax nor eagerly await it. (We do not say this to put others down, but to give our own hearts a due sense of our privilege.) The certainty of our future with God is a fruit of the gospel. (Note: See why this does not comport well with the idea that we can lose our salvation if we don't "keep up" our Christians lives?)

By referring to the future, Paul turns our imaginations to what it will mean to be radiant, glorious, beautiful and perfect. Elsewhere Paul says that Jesus lives to present us to himself “...*radiant...without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (Eph.4:27). We know that this is guaranteed, and therefore, is essentially true now. What Paul is saying in v.5 he says eloquently in Colossians 1:22. “*But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*” We are to live today knowing we are, and always will be, an absolute beauty in the eyes of God. Put another way, we are as loved and honored by God now as we will be when we are perfectly radiant in heaven.

How can we practically wait for this righteousness?

Verse 5 tells us that we are to, *by faith* and *through the Spirit*, proceed to *eagerly await* our certain glory. What is he talking about? Is it simply a mental assent to the proposition that we are going to heaven when we die? No. The language is too vivid and the results too powerful to be describing only that. Paul is talking about a spiritual discipline. It is the development of a frame of heart, an eager, passionate delight in all that we have been given in Christ. It involves meditation and reflection on our justification, adoption, and future glorification and then bringing our actions into line with that. It is to ask: “How should it affect me now that I am his, beloved eternally, rich as a secure heir of the Father?” Paul is talking about turning our minds to who we are and what we have in Christ so often that our hearts are stirred and our behavior brought into line with these unseen realities. Only *the Spirit* can help us do this (cf. both Eph.1:18ff. and 3:16ff.) He alone can make Christ glorious to our hearts (John 16:14).

4. What does it mean that the gospel makes both “circumcision and uncircumcision” (religion and irreligion) both equally valueless? (vv.5-6)?

The word translated in v.6, “*of value,*” when used of persons means “to have power,” but when used of things means “to be serviceable” or “to make a profit.” Circumcision, in a sense, represents the whole round of religious disciplines and duties while uncircumcision represents paganism, disobedience and immoral practices. Therefore, Paul’s statement is breathtaking. He says neither moral exertion nor moral failure counts. In what way? Two ways are implied here.

First, neither religion nor irreligion *count toward establishing a relationship with God*. In verse 5, Paul has just said that our future acceptance with God is already certain through the work of Christ. In this context, when he says neither religion nor irreligion “count,” he means they don't count toward our rightness and standing with God. Paul is saying, “My good performance

does not make me right with God, nor does my bad performance really make me any more lost and hopeless. All stand equally lost and equally able to be saved. A Christian, when he or she has just experienced a success, should say, "But this success does not increase his love for me. In fact, it is only because of his love for me that this happened, not the other way around!" And a Christian, when he or she has just experienced a failure, should say, "But if I had not failed in this way, that would not make me any more loved and accepted by God than I am this moment! This is irrelevant. In fact, it is only because of his love for me, not his lack of love, that he has allowed this to happen (cf. Rom. 8:28)!" What a radical principle! This should lead to tremendous peace and balance in a Christian life; it should eliminate huge ups and downs. For we are all in "circumcision" (spiritual success) or "uncircumcision" (spiritual failure) all the time, but Paul says that both conditions don't "count."

Surely, Paul means here what Luther referred to in his preface.

"Human beings by nature, when they get near either danger or death itself, will of necessity view their own worthiness. We defend ourselves before all threats by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of sins and flaws inevitably comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think: 'How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done...' But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see that Christ has done for us...."

Second, neither religion nor irreligion *count toward inner character change and a heart of real love*. Verse 6b says that *faith* literally *energizes* love. Neither religious moralism nor licentious irreligion can do this because both are essentially selfish and insecure. Selfishness and insecurity cannot produce love, which is self-donation. The faith Paul says produces love is that which was just described in v.5. It is the faith that reflects upon the certainty of our righteousness and welcome with the Father. If we do that, Paul tells us that two things will happen:

- a) Negatively, the ups and downs, good performance and bad performance will now neither puff us up nor cast us down (*"neither circumcision nor uncircumcision have any value"*) because our standing in Christ is not effected by either.
- b) Positively, this eagerly-awaiting faith of v.5 now will naturally produce a great deal of love (*"faith expressing itself in love"*). If we are reminding ourselves and living in light of this hope, we will have a heart sloshing over with love. Put another way, if we find our love running dry or cold, we are not by faith looking at our hope.

So vv.5-6 could be paraphrased: "Gospel faith produces a certainty that we are holy and beautiful. The more conscious we are of this certainty, the less we will be subject to ups and downs and the more we will find our hearts melted with love."

5. From verses 13-15, answer the question: "Why does a Christian obey God?"

If I believe the gospel, then I know that obeying God and serving others will not win me any reward. It does not merit heaven for me, and it does not assure me of my worth.

Before I believed the gospel, then, I obeyed God not for God's sake, but for my own sake; to get heaven and my own worth. And also, I never served people for their sake, but for mine; to get heaven and my own worth. So I never served God just for God's intrinsic greatness, but rather for what God brought me, and I never served people just for their intrinsic value, but rather for what they brought me.

Imagine what you would feel if a person asked to marry you, but you came to realize that they would not want you if you did not come with an inheritance. You would feel used. You would not feel loved at all. Now we all know that we don't feel loved by someone unless we are loved

for who we are, not for what we bring him or her. This analogy helps us to understand the motivation of the gospel. When we thought our works saved us, we were serving God for what we could get from him. We are using him. But after the hope of the gospel settles in, and we see the grace and beauty of God, we love him for who he is.

In the gospel, we see that Christ has died for us and valued us not for what we bring him. We are of no profit to him! We have been loved for our own sakes. And to the degree we see that in gospel faith, we respond in kind. Now we can serve God not for what he brings us, for we already have everything guaranteed, but for who he is and what he has done for us. Finally, we can love God for who he is. Also, now we can serve others not for what they bring us, but for who they are in themselves. Increasingly, as v.5 dawns more and more on us, we live out of v.6. The more joy we have in our gracious salvation, the more we are driven out by love and gratitude to do good for the sheer beauty of good, for the sheer delight in God, for the sheer love of others.

Galatians 5 sheds much light on Gal.2:19: *“Through the law I died to the law that I might live for God.”* The fundamental issue is: What are we really living *for*? Both the religious and irreligious are really obeying God to get things from him. Therefore they are both living *for* themselves, because neither of them have died to the law. Since they are both relying on performance and self-effort, they are doing absolutely everything out of self-interest. They are doing nothing out of simple love and joy. But when in the gospel we “die to the law,” to the whole system of works-righteousness, we begin to obey God *for* God. I live to please him and delight in him for who he is, not what he can give me. We die to the law to live for God--and for others.

A parallel passage would be Titus 2:11-14: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness...”* Notice that we don’t “just say no” to ungodliness! The grace of God teaches us to say know. As we have seen, it undermines all the old motivation to sin. It takes away the old fears and idolatries that drove us to it and it fills us with a new gratitude and ability to love others and God for themselves.

Thus we see that gospel freedom has at least these two aspects.. On the one hand, there is “conscience freedom.” I am free from the guilt of my imperfect performance. But on the other hand, there is “motivational freedom.” I am even free from the old drivenness of why I am performing (or better yet, who I am performing for). I no longer need or want to follow the old pursuits as ways to win my righteousness or assure myself of worth.

6. Compare verses 1 and 13. What two different misuses of gospel freedom does Paul spell out? What are the errors in thinking behind each misuse?

In v.1, Paul says, “Don’t *lose* gospel freedom.” In v.13ff., he says, “Don’t *abuse* gospel freedom.”

In v.1ff. we have seen that it is extremely easy to lose our freedom by slipping back into legalism and works-righteousness. That is really the whole point of the book of Galatians. Though Christians may profess intellectually a belief in the gospel, they do not practice functionally a life based on the gospel.

But in v.13ff, Paul addresses the other main error that Christians can fall into--not legalism, but license and permissiveness. To fall back into legalism means we lose our freedom, to fall into permissiveness means we abuse our freedom. We have seen that gospel freedom is freedom that both takes away the guilt of sin and eats away at the motivation to sin. But Paul knows that such language as “freedom” can be very misleading to people. He knows that when he speaks of being “free from the law,” some immediately think he means that people are now

free to determine their own standards of behavior. So he says in no uncertain terms that the gospel does *not* free you to sin! “Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature” (v.13). That’s pretty clear. Also in v.7 Paul says, “You were running a good race--who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?” So Paul says that Christians do have to obey the truth, and there is a gospel dynamic or gospel motivation for obeying the truth that the Galatians used to have (“were running”) but is now diminishing.

The gospel tells us that God is so holy that nothing short of complete payment for sins and the perfect righteousness of Christ can satisfy him. (Thus he is more holy than a legalist’s God, who is satisfied with imperfect “trying hard.”) On the other hand, the gospel tells us that God is so loving that we can receive this perfect righteousness now and stand complete in God’s sight. (Thus he is more loving than a liberal’s God, who does not suffer and die on the cross.) The gospel therefore neither leads us to live a guilty life (because of God’s loving acceptance) nor an unholy life (because of God’s absolute holiness). To forget one or the other is to fall either into the 5:1 or the 5:13 mistake, and to lose grasp of the gospel.

7. Summarize: In what ways are Christians free from the law and in what ways are they not?

In v.3, Paul says that Christians are freed from obligation to obey the whole law, yet in v.14 he tells them that they must obey “Love your neighbor as yourself” (v.14), which is a simple summary of the law of God. So Paul says bluntly that they must do it. How do we understand this? We are obliged, but not obliged? What is the answer? The answer is that in one way we are obliged to the law but in another way we are not.

If we look at v.3 where he says, “You are obligated to obey the whole law” he immediately follows it with, “You...are trying to be justified by law” (v.4). So the obligation that is gone for the Christian is the obligation to obey the law in order to be saved. Paul says that, if we try to earn our salvation, we must realize that we are then not just obligated to be good, but to be perfect--“the whole law.”

But the gospel frees us from “salvation obligation” to the law. But now that we are saved wholly and freely by grace, if anything, we are more obligated to obey the law! Why? We have more reason to *love* him (v.6) than we ever did before. Love arises from gospel faith (v.5-6), and will then follow the law to love the neighbor (v.13-15). So Christians are freed from the law as a way to merit God, but we are not freed from the law as way to please God. Rather, that obligation is increased. For the law is an expression of God’s nature and heart, and thus we now doubly owe it to him to use it to please and imitate him. On the one hand, we owe it to him as our Creator, since he designed us and thus owns us, and so he has both the right to demand and the wisdom to know how we are to live. On the other hand, we now also owe it to him as our Redeemer, since we gratefully want to please the one who saved us at such inestimable cost.

So it is understandable that people get confused here. We are “free from the law,” we are not “obligated to obey it,” says Paul. The normal human heart then eagerly wonders if that means we are free to determine how we want to live. But Paul says that this is not the case. We are more obligated than before to love God and our neighbor in the way God has prescribed. In light of this, we see now how impossible it is that gospel freedom would be any encouragement to sin, for indeed the gospel devours the very motivation you have for sin. It completely saps your very need and reason to live any way you want. Anyone who insists that the gospel encourages us to sin has simply not understood it yet, nor begun to feel its power.

Take a lie, for example. On the one hand, gospel freedom means that I do not have to fear that I will be cast off from God if I lie. I am free from the legal penalty of that lie. The person who is seeking to be perfectly honest as a way of winning God’s favor will be devastated when they slip

and lie. But the gospel assures us that dishonesty will not damn us. However, let's ask: *Why* did I even *want* to lie? Gospel analysis shows us that we only lie when something we deeply/religiously need to have is at stake. A person who *must* have approval, power, comfort or success to have any joy or worth will lie if this all-important thing is jeopardized or not available. The gospel frees us to say, "I don't *need* this thing. Therefore I can tell the truth."

We can put it another way; the gospel does free you to live anyway you want. But, if the gospel has analyzed your self-righteousness (and thus) your false gods, and has convicted you of both the guilt and danger of your whole approach to God, self, and the world around you, and if it has amazed you with how Jesus did not simply die to make up for your occasional lapses, but has provided an entire perfect record and standing before the Father--then you will ask, "How can I live for him?" And the answer will be--look at the will of God expressed in the law.

So to put 5:1-4 together with 5:13-15, we see Paul saying, the gospel frees us from the law for the law. It takes away our old motivation for obeying it, which made us do it with groaning, and gives us a new motivation for obeying it.

8. Think of one area of your life where you need a lot more love than you have in order to face something or to act rightly? How can Gal.5:5,6 help you?

More Leader's helps:
Paul's View of Gospel Freedom in a Nutshell

The old way or system of bondage. We are free from the obligation to obey the whole law (v.3) in order to be justified and right with God (v.4). If this is your motive for obeying the law, it is a "burdensome," "slavish" experience (v.2), and you find that it makes your "sin nature" stronger (v.13). (This is *subjective bondage* to the power of sin.) Not only that, but you will not reach your goal--you will be lost (v.4) and Jesus cannot save you (v.2). (This is *objective bondage* to the guilt or penalty of sin.)

The new way or system of freedom. We are free for the fulfilling of the law through love (v.14) because we are justified and right with God (v.6a). Now our motive is to eagerly want to be righteous (v.5), so that obedience is becoming a natural expression of our hearts (v.6b). (This is *subjective freedom* from the power of sin.) Not only that, you will reach your goal; your future glory is guaranteed (v.5). (This is *objective freedom* from the penalty of sin.)

Charles Spurgeon on the carrot

"Once upon a time in an old kingdom, there was a gardener who grew an enormous carrot in his garden. Now this man loved his sovereign, so he came and presented the carrot to the king, saying, 'This is the best carrot my garden will ever grow. Receive it as a token of my love.' Now the king discerned his heart of love and devotion and saw that he wanted nothing in return. This moved the king and he then gave the gardener far more land than he currently had for his garden, so the man went home rejoicing. Now a nobleman at court overheard this conversation. He thought to himself, 'If that is the response the lord makes to such a small gift, what will he give in response to a great one?' So the next day he brought the king a fine horse, saying, 'This is the best horse my stables will ever grow. Receive it as a token of my love.' But the King discerned the nobleman's heart, and in response he just received the horse and dismissed the giver. When the king saw the look of confusion on his face, he said, 'The gardener's gift was a gift, indeed, out of love, but you are just trying to make a profit. He gave *me* the carrot, but you gave *yourself* the horse.'" Now do you see what this teaches? If you know God offers you his salvation freely, and that there is nothing to do but to accept the perfect righteousness of his Son, then you can feed the hungry and clothe the naked just for the love of God and for the love of people. But if you think you are getting salvation in return for these deeds, then it is *yourselves* you are feeding, *yourselves* you are clothing.

Martin Luther on our motivation

"Whoever he be that is assuredly persuaded that Christ is his righteousness, does not only cheerfully and gladly work well in his vocation...but submits to all manner of burdens and dangers in his present life, because he knows that this is the will of God, and that this obedience pleases him." (See section 5d) And he also writes: "No one should think we reject the importance of good works or of obeying the Law. When we receive the Christian righteousness, we consequently can live a good life, naturally, out of gratitude. If we try to earn our righteousness by doing many good deeds, we actually do nothing. We neither please God nor do we honor the purpose for which the law was given." (Section 4d, Preface to Galatians commentary)

Luther tells us that without an experience of grace, all our good deeds are essentially self-interested, impersonal and conditional. We do the right thing in order to get into heaven, or in order to better our self-esteem (etc.). But persons who know they are totally accepted already, do the right thing out of grateful love. "Neither [religion] or [irreligion] has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Gal.5:6) Only in the gospel do you obey God for God's sake and not for what God will give you. Therefore only in the gospel do you love people for their sake (not yours), do good for its own sake (not yours), and obey God for his sake (not yours). Only the gospel makes doing the right thing a joy and delight, not a burden or a means to an end.

Unit 10 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” -for something that raised a question

Son or Slave?

THE "DYNAMIC" OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

There is a two-part dynamic to Christian growth. (It is, in a sense, a "combustion cycle." If it is ignited and going in the heart it results in dynamic character growth.) The two parts are a negative and a positive. We see them mentioned in many places:

Colossians 3:

v.1- *Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated...who is your life...*

v.5- *Put to death what belongs to your earthly nature...which is idolatry...*

Hebrews 12:

v.2- *Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...sat down at the right hand of God...*

v.1- *Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...*

Romans 8:

v.5- *their minds set on what the Spirit desires...*
(v.14) *those led of the Spirit are sons of God..*

v.13- *by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live...*

Galatians 5:

v.25 *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*

v.24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

The "negative" side is **repentance**, discovering the particular idolatries of the heart (Col.3:5), our besetting sins (Heb.12:1), and uprooting them at the motivational level (Rom.8:13). The "positive" side is **faith**, to see ourselves as perfect in Christ (Col.3:1), who has done from first to last all that was required for my acceptance (Heb.12:2), so that we could be adopted as children of God (Rom.8:14). This is the dynamic: we uproot the idols of the heart; and we live out of our identity as children of God.

These two elements really are flip sides of each other. As we begin with one, we find that we always pass over into doing the other as well. Each stimulates the other; if either one is de-emphasized it also robs the other of any power. How? On the one hand, without a knowledge of our extreme sin and idolatry, the payment of Christ on the cross seems trivial and the message of it does not electrify or transform. On the other hand, without a knowledge of our complete acceptance and adoption through

Christ, the message of our sin would so crush us that we would deny or repress it. But the more you know of his infallible fatherly love, the more you are able to realistically face yourself, your flaws and faults. The more you see your sin, the more precious and valuable you find his saving love and grace.

In this exercise we will look at how to live as a child of God.

SON OR SLAVE?

Galatians 4:5-9 tells us:

- 1) When we became Christians, we “*receive[d] the adoption [lit. the sonship].*” Galatians 4:4-5. We became sons of God.
- 2) Before, we were “slaves,” but that is true no longer. “*So you are no longer a slave, but a son*” Galatians 4:7
- 3) Nevertheless, it is possible, even if you are a Christian, to return to some degree into a state of slavery, and to lose our “sonship consciousness.” “*Formerly...you were slaves...do you wish to be enslaved...all over again?*” Galatians 4:8,9 (cf. Romans 8:15-*“You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.”* It is possible to fall back into fear/slavery though we are in fact children of God.

Therefore, the two fundamentally different ways to live are *not* as religious or as irreligious, but ***as a slave, full of fear or as a child of God, full of faith working through love.***

SON AND SLAVE COMPARED

Both Galatians 4:1-7 and Romans 8:15-16 contrast slavery with sonship.

Two different understandings - False vs. true definitions

Slave: "Grace" is God's supplemental help as you try hard to live a good life (see "faith").

Child: Grace is God's unmerited work in your life to renew you into the likeness of Christ.

Slave: "Faith" is an effort to believe without doubting and love God so he will accept you.

Child: Faith is a discipline of remembering and living as an accepted child of God.

Slave: "Obedience" is avoiding major sin and following rules of ethical behavior.

Child: Obedience is primarily growth in the fruit of the Spirit and Christ-like character.

Two different life patterns - Fear-based life vs. faith working through love

Slave: Compulsive obedience. Obeys God and moral codes out of fear of rejection--a compulsive, driven moralism. "Drivenness" in work. Unrealistic goals. Lot of self-criticism.

Child: Obeys out of joy in your Father and out of gratitude for the certainty of his love. "How can I live so ungratefully to one who will never reject me?"

Slave: Hiding. Lots of strategies to hide our inner and outer failings from ourselves and one another. Lots of gossip, blame-shifting, anger at other races/classes, defensiveness.

Child: Open and transparent. Freedom from having to put up a front. Able to appreciate people who are different and hurting. Repentance to others is more natural, done with joy.

Slave: Isolation. Feeling that no one understands, that no one cares. An unwillingness to trust *or* intense, idolatrous trust of someone who inevitably disappoints and lets you down.

Child: Because of openness and transparency and a lack of self-absorbed self-pity, a growing circle of friends with whom you are neither too independent or over dependent.

Slave: Controlled by people's opinion. Expectations and approval of others become the real moral standard. When we get away from other Christians, we lapse.

Child: Integrity and courage regardless of who is watching. "The only person whose opinion counts is my Father's! Who cares what the rest think?"

Slave: Despair in troubles. Sees troubles as "paybacks" from God. A 'slave' in trouble either is filled with: *Guilt* (because you feel you deserve it) or *bitterness* (because you feel you don't!)

Child: Sees trouble as the wisdom of Father. You know God won't give you what you deserve (so you aren't guilty) but you deserve far worse than you will ever get (so you aren't bitter).

Slave: Begrudging repentance. Admitting failure is destructive of one's very self-image (one based on a sense of moral adequacy). So repentance to God is galling, a last resort.

Child: Admitting failure strengthens one's very self-image (reminding you that you are forgiven and loved despite your flaws.) Repentance is now based not on fear of being rejected, but on grief that you have dishonored/grieved the one who spent so much so you would *never* be rejected. The grief that comes from wronging an unconditionally loving parent is sharper yet much more filled with hope than the fear that comes from wronging a God you are simply afraid of. Repentance of a slave is rare, forced, traumatic, and produces little long-term change. Repentance of a child is regular, willing, with much sweetness mixed with the grief, and leads to permanent change.

Discussion questions:

1. What helped you most? What questions did it raise?

2. Look at the list of “child” vs. “slave” characteristics. At what point do you need the most work right now?

3. Share a situation--past, present, or future--where the “slave” mentality is a particular problem for you.

Lesson 11 - Gospel Character

In the first half of chapter 5, Paul shows that Christian freedom gives us a whole new motivation for living. Some may say, "If I thought I was accepted by God no matter what I did, I would lose all incentive to lead a holy life." The proper answer is: "If when you lose all fear of rejection you discover that you have lost all incentive for holiness, then the only incentive you had was fear!" In normal religion, the motivation for morality is fear-based. In gospel Christianity, the motivation is a dynamic of love (5:6, 14). Now in this passage Paul spells out just *how* we grow in character through this new dynamic.

Leader's background notes:

Argument of the passage

How does this gospel-freedom specifically result in actual life change? It is through a two-fold discipline:

- 1) Identifying (5:19-21) and destroying (5:24) our particular forms of self-righteousness (5:17-18)
- 2) Testing (5:22-23), strengthening and living out of (5:16, 25) our consciousness of our position in Christ (5:17-18)

READ Galatians 5:16-25

1. According to this passage what are the two natures at work in every Christian? (vv. 16-18)

Paul is contrasting the "*sinful nature*" with the "*Spirit*" (v.16 and v.17). On the one hand, Paul speaks of the *sarx*, which in older translations is rendered the "flesh" and in more modern translations is called the "*sinful nature*." The flesh in the New Testament, when opposed to the Spirit, does not refer to our physical nature as opposed to our spiritual nature, but to the sin-desiring aspect of our whole being as opposed to the God-desiring aspect. How do we know that? Just look at the list of "*the works of the sinful nature [i.e. flesh]*" in v.19. "*Hatred... jealousy... ambition...envy*" (v.19-21) have nothing to do with the physical body at all, but with the spirit. Other works of the flesh do have to do with the body. Therefore, the *sarx* is our sinful heart. It is the part or the aspect of our hearts which is not yet renewed by the Spirit.

On the other hand, Paul speaks of the "*Spirit*." At first sight, it may seem that this is a battle between something inside us (our sinful nature) and outside us (the Holy Spirit). But since Paul talks of each side as producing character qualities within us, and because of his language of two kinds of "*desires*" (v.17), it is evident that this *conflict* takes place within us. Therefore, "*the Spirit*" could be thought of as the renewed Christian heart, renewed by the Holy Spirit. Our sinful nature was there, naturally, before we were Christians. The Spirit, however, entered supernaturally when we first became Christians and has begun a renewal that is now our "new nature." Paul refers to these two natures as "*the old man*" and "*the new man*" (often translated "old self/new self") in Ephesians 4:22-24.

2. What is the main way they influence us? What does the Christian truly "want" and why?

Two times Paul talks about the "*desires*" of each nature.

The "over-desires" of the sinful flesh.

Both in v.16 and in v.24, Paul calls the desires of the flesh "*epithumia*." In the older versions, this word was translated "lust" which led the English reader to think of sexual desire. In

modern translations the word is just translated “desires” but that is maybe even more unhelpful. Literally, *epithumia* means an “over-desire,” an “inordinate desire,” an all-controlling drive and longing. This is crucial. It means that the main problem our heart has is not so much desires for bad things, but our over-desires for good things. When a good thing becomes our “god” or salvation, it creates “over-desires.” Thus Paul says that sinful desires become deep things that drive and control us. Sin creates within us the feeling that we must have this-or-that. Here is a review of this subject:

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

-- David Powlison, *Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair*

The powerful desires of the Spirit.

One of the most intriguing, almost teasing statements is in v.17, which says, “*The flesh over-desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.*” Notice that Paul does not actually say that the Spirit “over-desires” [how could the Spirit inordinately desire something?], yet the construction indicates that the Spirit has passions and yearnings as well, and that they are at least as strong! What is it that the Spirit longs for? Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit will come into the world to “*glorify me*”(John 16:14) While our flesh “glorifies” and adores and lusts after all kinds of created things and conditions and people, the Spirit “glorifies” and yearns for Jesus. The Spirit speaks of the beauty and greatness of Christ. The Spirit, then, longs to show us Christ and to conform us to Christ (cf.James 4:5).

What does the Christian truly "want?"

It is easy to overlook, but Paul makes an extremely telling statement when he says, “*They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want.*” (v.17c) This is a parallel passage to Romans 7:22-23 where he says that “*I delight in the law in my inmost being*” yet he discerned a power “*in my members, at war with the principle of my mind, bringing me captive.*” In other words, the Spirit is what we most deeply “*want,*” yet the sinful nature continues to generate alternate *desires* which we experience and can give in to, but which now contradict our most abiding love and goals. The reborn person then, has both sinful desires and godly desires, but “we” most truly want what the Spirit-nature wants.

This statement is filled with hope and affirmation. Even when we are falling into sin, we can say, with Paul, “This is not the real me; this is not what I really want. I want God and his will.”

3. What is set in opposition to the Spirit in v.16? What is set in opposition to it in v.18? What does this tell us about how the sinful nature or flesh actually operates?

This is a key to the passage. Notice the parallelism:

v.16	"Live by the Spirit"	vs.	"gratify...the flesh"
v.18	"Led by the Spirit"	vs.	"under law"

In v.16, to live by the Spirit is contrasted with the sinful nature, but in v.18, being led by the Spirit is contrasted with being under law. For Paul, then, these two things are either very closely linked or may even be just different ways of speaking about the same thing. This tells us not just something about the actions of the sinful nature, but also about the motives of the sinful nature. (i.e. Not just that it disobeys God, but why it “wants” to.) The sinful nature is that within us which wants us to be our own Savior and Lord. The flesh then, is how the heart continues to function “under law,” how it continues to reject the free gift of Christ's righteousness and salvation and continues to seek its own. Therefore, the sin underneath all sins--the motive for our disobedience--is always a lack of trust in God's grace and goodness, and a desire to protect and guard our own lives through self-salvation.

In light of this, we can see that the two natures Paul speaks of are really two semi-intact motivational systems within us. A motivational system is centered on a goal that the imagination finds beautiful and desirable. This goal generates what we perceive as “needs” and “drives” for it. The sinful nature is really our old motivational system--with its own goals and thus its own needs and drives--still somewhat intact. As we have seen, sin is slavery because its goals (earning worth/righteousness through service to idols) focuses on some object that the flesh turns into an idol by which we seek our salvation (“I can have worth if I am loved” or “If I have a good career” or “If my children love me”), which finally then create drives and over-desires for it.

4. In light of v.18, what does it mean to “crucify the sinful nature” with its “over-desires?” What then, does it mean to “live” or “walk” by the Spirit?

Rather than these mistaken notions, “crucifying the flesh” is really the identification and dismantling of idols. It means to put an end to the ruling and attractive power that idols have in our lives, and thus to destroy their ability to agitate and inflame our thoughts and desires. Verse 24 is about withering sin at the motivational level, rather than simply setting ourselves against sin at the behavioral level. Real changes in our lives cannot proceed without discerning one's “characteristic flesh,” the particular idols and desires that come from it. We have to ask ourselves not just what we do wrong, but why we do it wrong. We disobey God in order to get something we feel we have to have. That's an “over-desire,” *epithumia*. Why do we have to have it? It is because it is a way we are trying to keep “under law.” It is something we have come to believe will authenticate us. To crucify the flesh is to say, “Lord, my heart thinks that I *have* to have this or I have no value. It is a pseudo-Savior. But that is to forget what I mean to you, as I see in Christ. By your Spirit, I will reflect on your love for me in Him until this thing loses its attractive power over my soul.” (Note: Next week, under ‘the cultivation of the Fruit of the Spirit’ we will look at greater length at this subject.)

What does it mean to “walk” (keep in step with) the Spirit?

To “walk by the Spirit,” we then understand something more than simple obedience (though it is not less than simple obedience). Verse 25 literally says we must “keep in step” with the Spirit. The Spirit is a living person, who glories in and magnifies the work of Jesus. (See John 14-16 on the work of the Spirit). Once we specifically find the particular false beliefs of our flesh which generate the “over-desires” and lead us to sin, we must replace them with Christ. This is not just an intellectual exercise. We must worship Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, adoring him until our hearts find him more beautiful than the object we felt we had to have.

This is roughly the same thing we are told to do in Gal. 5:5,6: “By faith eagerly await the righteousness for which we hope” and in Col. 3:1ff: “Set your mind on things which are above”

5. What common mistakes do people make about what it means to "crucify the flesh" (vv.24-25)?

Many people over the years have made the mistake of thinking that v.24 meant to frustrate the fulfillment of our bodily desires. This largely came because the older translation--"crucify the flesh"--sounded like "be hard on yourself, especially the body." For example, it is an old tradition to give up something for Lent. Usually this means to refuse to satisfy some needs for rest, comfort, pleasure. This is a serious mistake. It is obvious from the list of the acts of the sinful nature (vv.19-21) that many of them have nothing to do with the body (e.g. ambition, jealousy, envy). Others have made a less serious mistake by reading the verse as merely a stoic stiffening of the will against sin. In other words, people think they are crucifying the flesh when they "just say no" to sin.

But we have seen that the flesh is the desire to return under law. It is a primordial self-righteousness that rejects salvation by sheer grace and insists on self-salvation and thus turns some good thing into an idol-saviour which we then "over-desire." All our worries, fears, bitterness and entrenched bad habits come from these over-desires. So to "just say no" without examining the motives underneath the behavior can actually be part of a new spiritual slavery. (Remember, the Galatians were about to "just say no" to a lot of things, but in such a way that Paul said would alienate them from Christ!) The "flesh" is idolatrous, over-desires that arise from a heart that is afraid to trust God and desires rather to be its own Saviour and Lord.

There is a third mistake that is sometimes made. Rom.6:6 and Gal.2:20 say, "*We have been crucified with Christ.*" Many people have thought that this is the same thing. But in the former passages, the verb is passive and indicates that we have been crucified; it is something which is done to us. But here "crucifixion" is something that we ourselves do to our sinful nature. In fact, Rom.6:6 and Gal.2:20 refer to the objective status our salvation brings. (We are as free from the condemnation of sin as if we had already paid the penalty ourselves with our own death. This is what it means that we were "crucified with Christ.") Gal.5:24 is talking about the subjective aspect of salvation as we put to death the old nature within us.

6. (Vv. 19-21) Break the works of the flesh into categories. What do you learn about the human heart from the list? About yourself from the list?

There are three words having to do with the works of the flesh in the area of sexuality:

- (1) sexual immorality - "*porneia*" - sexual intercourse between unmarried people
- (2) impurity - "*akatharsia*" - unnatural sexual practices and relationships
- (3) debauchery - "*aselgia*" uncontrolled sexuality

There are two words having to do with the area of religion:

- (1) idolatry - "*eidololatria*"
- (2) witchcraft. "*pharmakeia*"

Because idolatry is paired with witchcraft, it is not referring to the very broad inclusive practice of making good things like career into a "god" (cf. Eph.5:5 and Col.3:5). Rather, he is referring to the very specific occult and pagan religious practices.

"Idolatry and sorcery were examples of the sins of pagan worship, the first providing an inadequate substitute for God, and the second counterfeiting the works of the Spirit"
(D.Guthrie, *Galatians*, p.137).

There are eight words that describe how the flesh destroys relationships:

Four describe destructive attitudes:

- (1) selfish ambition - "*eritheia*" - competitiveness, a self-seeking
- (2) envy - "*phthonoi*" - coveting, a desire for what others have

(3) jealousy - "zhdlos" - the zeal and energy that comes from a hungry ego

(4) hatred. "echthrai," - hostility, an adversarial attitude

Four describe the results of these attitudes in relationships:

(1) discord - "eris" - argumentative, "fight-picking" behavior

(2) fits of rage - "thumoi" - outbursts of anger (leading to #3)

(3) dissensions - "dichostai" - divisions between people

(4) factions - "aireseis" - permanent parties and warring factions

There are two words that refer to substance abuse:

(1) drunkenness

(2) orgies

These two words are linked. Orgies are not "sex-orgies" but "drinking orgies." One of the works of the flesh is addiction to pleasure-creating substances and behavior.

Another way to break down this list into categories is to notice that some of the sins are characteristic of religious people (selfishness, envy, jealousy, factions), while others are more characteristic of irreligious people (immorality, drunkenness). This list shows us that God does not make the kind of distinctions that we commonly do, seeing sex and drink as more sinful than jealousy and ambition.

7. Does the following statement make sense to you? (Why, or why not?) "Joyful repentance for the residual self-righteousness under both our sins and our good deeds is the secret of change."

Paul says that the remaining sin in our hearts, the "flesh" (Gal.5:16), is the drive to continue to live "under law" (Gal.5:17). In other words, underneath every problem and difficulty is a residual self-righteousness, left-over systems of self-salvation. Why are we bitter? Why are we in despair? Why are we worried? Because something more important than Jesus is operating as our functional righteousness and worth. Why do we do many of the good things we do? The same. If we don't repent of the self-righteousness under our sins, we won't be able to wither the real power and dynamic fueling them. If we don't repent of the self-righteousness under our good deeds, we will set ourselves up for anxiety and anger when things don't go well (because we will feel God owes us). The gospel leads us to repentance, but not to merely setting our will against superficialities. Without the gospel, superficialities will be addressed instead of the heart. Some (e.g. the religious) will focus and work simply on changing behavior, while others (e.g. the irreligious) will focus and work simply on changing or accommodating emotions. But repentance for self-righteousness gets at what is under both behavior and feelings.

Thus Luther says that, for a Christian, all of life is continual, joyful repentance.

"This 'passive' righteousness is a mystery that...Christians never completely understand...themselves, and thus do not take advantage of it when they are troubled and tempted. So we have to constantly teach it, repeat it, and work it out in practice. For anyone who does not understand this righteousness or cherish it in the heart and conscience, will continually be buffeted by fears and depression. Nothing gives peace like this passive righteousness." (See section 3a.)

Unit 11 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” -for something that raised a question

Fruit of the Spirit

Part A. - INTRODUCTION TO THE FRUIT

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all behold the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness, from one degree of splendor to the next, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor.3:18)

The purpose of the Spirit.

The ultimate purpose of the Spirit’s operation in the Christian is to change us into the likeness and character of Jesus Christ. (cf. Rom.8:29 – “He predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” and Eph.4:13 – “Till we reach maturity, the fullness of the stature of Christ.”) So the ultimate goal is not some kind of general comfort, strength or power, but concrete, practical change in our character--how we think, feel, and act habitually and naturally.

The method of the Spirit.

The (breathtaking) method of the Spirit is to show us the glory of Christ. The complex verb that Paul uses is *katoptrizdomenoi* which means “to behold in a mirror.” This word combines the ideas of looking long and hard at something, and resembling or reflecting something. We are called to long, contemplative gazing at the Lord Jesus and changing so as to reflect his image. What a vivid image! The more we gaze at and contemplate Jesus, the more the Spirit shows us his glory and we become transformed into the likeness of what we see. What does it mean to “see the glory” of something? It means to realize in your heart its importance, beauty and how it connects and affects you. So the way the Spirit creates character in you is by affecting the heart and life by what you see in the person and work of Christ.

The process of the Spirit.

The Spirit does not enact this Christ-like character in us all at once, but we change gradually, from one degree of likeness on to the next. Therefore, our sanctification is not a crisis as much as a process. Growth does not happen evenly, but in spurts, like botanical growth. (cf. II Peter 3:20)

The experience of the Spirit.

This transforming process of the Spirit is experienced by the individual Christian as “freedom.” This does not mean that effort, pain and hard discipline are not involved, but that primarily and ultimately the development of Christ-like character is liberating. Growing in love, joy, peace, self-control makes you feel you are “becoming yourself.”

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not

love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, rude, self-seeking, easily angered.” (1Cor.13:1-5)

The test of the Spirit.

The Corinthians had miraculous gifts (*prophecy*), teaching gifts (*can fathom all mysteries and knowledge*), vision and leadership gifts (*faith that can move mountains*), social concern (*give...to the poor*), and a willingness to die for the faith. Yet they were impatient, harsh, critical, rude, jealous, ego-centric. Paul bluntly says that the *gifts* of the Spirit (skills-what we do) is far less important than *fruit* of the Spirit (character--what we are). He says that the gifts of the Spirit are talents that the Spirit uses to help others and get things done, but it is possible to have the Spirit use you this way and have little or even no grace in the heart (*I am nothing*). A gift-operation of the Spirit may or may not operate out of a grace-changed heart. Saul and Judas were used by the Spirit to prophecy, do miracles and so on. Gifts can also operate when our love, joy and self-control are very, very low. But the fruit-growth of the Spirit can only happen in a child of God. The only test that the Spirit has really indwelled you as a child of God is the growth in the fruit of the Spirit.

“Many bad men have had these gifts. Many will say on the last day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?’ [Matt.7:21] Such as these have had...gifts of the Spirit but no special and saving work of the Spirit. Gifts of the Spirit are excellent things, but...they are not things which are inherent in the nature, as true grace and holiness [the fruit] are....[Gifts of the Spirit are, as it were, precious jewels which a man carries about him. But true grace in the heart is, as it were, the preciousness of the heart, by which...the soul itself becomes a precious jewel....The Spirit of God may produce effects on many things to which he does not communicate himself. So the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, but not so as to impart himself to the waters. But when the Spirit by his ordinary influences bestows saving grace, he therein imparts himself to the soul....Yea, grace is as it were the holy nature of the Spirit of God imparted to the soul.” (J.Edwards, Charity and Its Fruits. Sermon Two)

The dynamic of the Spirit.

Paul’s reference to gongs and cymbals probably refers to the pagan worship in Corinth at the temples of Demeter and Cybele. Pagan worship was a way of putting on a show to merit and attract the favor of the gods. Paul indicates, then, that it is possible to do Christian ministry in the same way. We can help others and do lots of Christian activities as a way to convince ourselves and others (and God) that we are “something.” This is a form of works-righteousness. When gifts are used that way, there are tell-tale signs of impatience, irritability, pride, hurt feelings, jealousy. The fruit of the Spirit then grows as we remember the gospel, rejoice in our salvation, and use our gifts as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. As a result, our helping others will be done in humility, love, patience, tenderness.

Part B. - THE UNITY OF THE FRUIT

“Love believes all things, hopes all things...” (1 Cor.13:7) “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal.5:22)

These two statements are remarkable. Though Paul talks of “*faith, hope, and love*” in 1 Cor.13:13, in v.7 he says that love has faith and has hope. If you have love you will have faith and hope! In Gal.5:22 he deliberately uses the singular word “fruit” to describe a whole list of character traits. From this we learn a very important point for understanding and discerning the fruit of the Spirit.

This means that the real fruit of the Spirit always grow up together. When we look at the list of traits in the “fruit lists” (1 Cor.13:4-7; Gal.5:22-23) we notice that we are naturally stronger in some rather than others. But our strengths, apart from the Holy Spirit, are due to natural temperament (we have a trait through brain chemistry and early training), or to natural self-interest (we learned a trait in order to handle some issue or condition we met). For example, some people are temperamentally gentle and diplomatic (*gentleness*). But the sign that this is not due so much to the Holy Spirit is that such people are usually not bold or courageous (*faithfulness*). Because of what Paul says about the unity of the fruit, this means that the gentleness is not real spiritual humility, but just temperamental sweetness. John says, “*If a man says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar.*” Notice that he does not say, “If a man loves God but doesn’t love his brother, he is unbalanced.” No, he says he is a liar. True love to God (*love*) goes along with love to others (*kindness*). If they are not all there, they are not there at all.

There are many, many cases of this. Some folks seem happy and bubbly (*joy*) and are good at meeting new people, but are very unreliable and cannot keep friends (*faithfulness*). This is not real joy but just extroversion. Some people seem very unflappable and unbothered--*peaceful*--but they are not *kind* or *gentle*. That is not real peace, but indifference and perhaps cynicism. It enables you to get through the difficulties of life without being always hurt, but it desensitizes you and makes you much less approachable.

Part C. - THE DEFINITIONS OF THE FRUIT

1. Agape - love

Definition - To serve a person for their good and intrinsic value, not for what the person brings you.

Opposite - Fear: self-protection and abusing people.

Counterfeit - Selfish affection. Rescuing someone but really rescuing self. Attracted not to person, but to how this person’s love makes you feel about yourself.

2. Chara - joy

Definition - Delight in God and his salvation for sheer beauty and worth of who he is.

Opposite - Hopelessness, despair.

Counterfeit - Elation that comes with blessings not the Blessor! Mood swings based on circumstances.

3. Irene - peace

Definition - Confidence and rest in the wisdom and sovereignty of God more than your own

Opposite - Anxiety and worry

Counterfeit - Indifference, apathy, not caring about something. "I don't care."

4. Makrothumia - patience

Definition - Ability to take trouble (from others or life) without blowing. To suffer joyfully.

Opposite - Resentment toward God and others.

Counterfeit - Cynicism. Self-righteousness. "This is too small to be bothered about."

5. Chrestotes - kindness

Definition - Practical kindness with vulnerability out of deep inner security.

Opposite - Envy. Unable to rejoice other's joy

Counterfeit - Manipulative good deeds. "Right hand knowing what left hand is doing."

Self-congratulation and self-righteousness.

6. Agathosune - goodness. (integrity)

Definition - Honesty, transparency. Being the same in one situation as another.

Opposite - Phoniness; hypocrisy.

Counterfeit - Truth without love. "Getting it off the chest" for your sake.

7. Pistis - faithfulness.

Definition - Loyalty. Courage. To be principle-driven, committed, utterly reliable. True to one's word.

Opposite - Opportunist. Fair-weather friend.

Counterfeit - Love without truth. Being loyal when you should be willing to confront or challenge.

8. Prautas - gentleness. (humility)

Definition - Self-forgetfulness.

Opposite - Superiority: self-absorbed self-aggrandizement.

Counterfeit - Inferiority: self-absorbed, self-consciousness.

9. Egkrateia - self-control

Definition - Ability to choose the urgent over the important thing.

Opposite - A driven, impulsive, uncontrolled person.

Counterfeit - Willpower through pride or through more "functional" idols.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project is to show you that we are far more in need of growth in the fruit of the Spirit than we thought. In Part A, we saw that we tend to look at our gifts as a sign that we are Christ-like, but that is an error. In Part B, we saw that we tend to look at our natural strengths as a sign we are Christ-like. Though God makes the world a very good place because he gives so many people natural strengths, they are not the same as the fruit of the Spirit. When we look at the nature, unity and definitions of the fruit of the Spirit, we have a much deeper sense of how we lack these things.

Discussion

1. In which one or two have you been growing lately? Spend some time thanking God for the growth.

2. In which one or two do you most need to grow right now?

Lesson 12 - Gospel Relationships

This is a very short passage, but it is bristling with practical principles for relating to others. The gospel creates a whole new self-image (5:26, 6:3-5) which is not based on comparisons with others. Only the gospel makes us neither self-confident nor self-disdaining, but both bold and humble. That works itself out in relationships with everyone. Rather than comparing ourselves with those “above” or “below” (cf..5:26), we look only at our own responsibility to take what we have and are and offer it to God, as sacrifices of gratitude for what Christ has done.

READ Galatians 5:26-6:5

1. Considering the context of 6:1-5, how would you define conceit? According to verse 26, what are the two possible effects of conceit on relationships?

How would you define conceit?

The context of 6:1-5 shows the danger of comparing yourself with others. (See verse 4- *without comparing himself to somebody else.*) This fits in with a study of the Greek word. The word translated "conceit" is "*kenodoxoi*," which means literally "vain-glorious" or "empty of honor." Conceit is then a deep insecurity, a perceived absence of honor and glory, with a concomitant need to prove our worth to ourselves and others. This in turn fixates our mind on comparing ourselves with others. When we seem better than someone else in some trait, our "honor-hunger" puffs us up and overly elates us. When we seem to be inferior to someone else, we are devastated for the same reason. In addition, "honor-hunger" can make us very competitive. This describes the natural state of our heart without the gospel.

What are the two possible effects of conceit on relationships?

The two possible effects of conceit are *provoking* others and *envying* others. The word "*provoke*" is obviously a word denoting hostility. *Prokaleo* literally means "to call out" or "to challenge" someone to a contest. "*Envy*" of course means to be jealous.

It is possible that Paul is simply describing people who are hostile (*provoking*) to people that they envy. But it is just as possible (as the commentator John Stott believes) that Paul is talking of two different relationship pathologies. "Provoking" is the stance of someone who is sure of his or her superiority, looking down on someone perceived to be weaker. "Envy" is the stance of someone who is conscious of inferiority, looking "up" in jealousy at someone they feel is above them.

2. How could conceit and pride lead to both superiority and inferiority complexes?

How are the two effects the same? Paul's statement here is very striking and profound, for he says that both are a form of conceit. How could that be? One way to put it is that both the superior and the inferior person are self-absorbed. Whether you are a condescending person or a shy person, you are being self-centered, for in both cases you are focusing heavily on how the other person makes you look and feel instead of how you make he or she look and feel. Another way to put it is in terms of works-righteousness. Both the superior and the inferior person is trying to gain worth through competition, therefore, at the expense of others. Both are want to gain an identity by beating and surpassing others. Both, therefore, want to be proud and superior. The only difference between the person of arrogance and the person with low self-esteem is that the inferior person has lost at the game, has failed to jump the hurdle. So though provoking and envying seem like exact opposites, they are both forms of conceit. In

short, Paul is saying, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less." Self-flagellation and "low self-esteem" is not gospel humility. It is just as much a rejection of the gospel as is pride and *hubris!*

So both the superiority complex and the inferiority complex are both, at root, born of insecurity and inferiority. They are just two different ways to deal with the glory vacuum. Therefore, v.26 could be paraphrased as saying: "Do not let your hunger for honor make you either despise or envy people."

3. Do you have more of a tendency to provoke or to envy in relationships? How can you use the gospel to overcome your tendency whatever it is?

To answer the question about whether you tend to provoking or envying, ask if:

- (1) you have a tendency to "blow up" or, on the other hand, to "clam up?"
- (2) you tend to pick arguments with people or, on the other hand, to completely avoid confrontation?
- (3) you tend to get very down on individuals and groups of people or, on the other hand, to be embarrassed and intimidated around certain classes or types or kinds of people?

Another way is to look at how you take criticism. On the one hand, do you get very angry and very judgmental--and simply attack right back? Or, on the other hand, do you get very discouraged and very defensive--make lots of excuses, or give right in? Another way is to ask: Do I often feel "I would never, ever do what this person has done?" or do I often look at people and say, "I could never, ever accomplish what this person does?"

The gospel creates a whole new self-image (5:26, 6:3-5) which is not based on comparisons with others. Only the gospel makes us neither self-confident nor self-disdaining, but both bold and humble. That works itself out in relationships with everyone. The gospel is the only thing that addresses conceit, the vain-glory. To the degree I am still functionally earning my worth through performance (i.e. still functioning in works-righteousness), to that degree I will be either operating out of superiority or inferiority. Why? Because if I am saved by my works, then I can either be confident but not humble (if I am living up) or humble but not confident (if I am not living up). In other words, apart from the gospel, I will be forced to be superior or inferior or to swing back and forth or to be one way with some people and another way with others. I am continually caught between these two ways, because of the nature of my self-image.

But the gospel creates a new self-image, as we have seen previously. It humbles me before anyone, telling me I am a sinner saved only by grace. But it emboldens me before anyone, telling me I am loved and honored by the only eyes in the universe that really count. So the gospel gives a boldness and a humility that do not eat each other up, but can increase together.

Practically speaking, you have to use the gospel by preaching it to yourself right in the midst of the situations where you are trying to act in newness of life. If, for example, you find yourself being very defensive around someone, you must use the gospel at that very moment, saying, "What you think of me is not the important thing. Jesus Christ's approval of me, not yours, is my righteousness, my identity, my worth."

Case Study

You are a department head and a popular employee you hired is doing poorly, pulling the department's performance down, and richly deserves to be fired. What are the two wrong ways to handle it (the "provoking" way and the "inferiority" way)? And what is the right way? (All in light of 5:26.)

On the one hand, it would be tempting to fire the person in a very public, punitive way, so that he or she could be the scapegoat. It would be a way to minimize your responsibility for the hire, and to put all the blame on the person for the department's failures. Also, it would be a kind of vengeance for the grief caused. This is the provoking response, to rub the employee's nose in it. On the other hand, you might be afraid to fire the person, because you hate confrontation, and because the person's friends will be upset with you. So you put it off. Perhaps you find ways to expose the person to higher-ups so you can say that someone else demanded that you fire the person. Both of these responses come from a "glory vacuum" in ourselves. The right way is to fire the person, but to do so in a respectful, sensitive way, saying directly the reasons for the dismissal face to face, allowing the person to respond verbally to you, privately, and so on.

4. Compare 6:2 with 5:13-14, and decide what "the law of Christ" is and what "bearing burdens" is. How does "bearing burdens" help define our relationship with others?

In the early part of chapter 5, Paul showed us that a Christian, now free from the law as a system of salvation, has a new motivation of grateful love (5:5-6). Then Paul says that the whole of the law is summed up in and fulfilled when we "love our neighbor" (5:13-15). Almost certainly, then, the law of Christ is the principle that we must, because we are freely accepted in the gospel, "*serve one another in love*" (5:14). Here is the parallel:

5:13-14

"serve one another in love" (5:13) [for] "the entire law is...love your neighbor" (5:14)

6:2

"bear one another's burdens" (6:2a) "so fulfill the law of Christ" (6:2b)

So the law of Christ is the law summed up as "love-your-neighbor" Why would the law of love be called the law of Christ? Because Christ is the ultimate and unsurpassable example of this kind of love. In short, we are to love others as Christ loved us (John 13:34; Eph.4:32). Though the whole Old Testament law could be summed up in the command to love, it is Christ's life and death that becomes the supreme embodiment of what this love should be. When we look at his life and attitude and all his dealings, we have, in a sense, "a law," a breath-taking model of the kind of life we should live.

This also means that bearing burdens is parallel to serving one another. What does this tell us? It brings the lofty concept of love down to earth. It means that we are not to let people carry their loads alone. A burden or load is of course anything. It can be a simple responsibility, like raising a child or renovating a living space. Or it can be a difficulty, a problem. By characterizing the responsibilities and problems of life as "burdens," Paul very vividly and practically teaches how a Christian relates to others. To help with a burden, one must come very close to the burdened person, standing virtually in their shoes, and putting one's own strength under the burden so its weight is distributed on both of you, lightening the load of the other. So in the same way, a Christian must listen and understand, and physically, emotionally, spiritually, take up some of the burden with the other person.

It is probable that Paul is taking one more swipe at the "Judaizers," the false teachers who were trying to get the Galatians to come under the Mosaic law. These requirements were called "burden" in the controversy over Gentile Christians and the Jewish ceremonial law (see Acts 15:10, 28; cf. Luke 11:46). Therefore, in an ironic statement, Paul is saying that we should not be going around laying burdens on others to fulfill the law, but lifting burdens off others to fulfill the law! Therefore the term "law of Christ" represents submission of the whole life to the model of Christ out of grateful joy. It is a life centered on a person rather than a code. We have a different kind of obligation upon us than we did before. Now, we bear others' burdens

because Christ bore ours. Thus v.2 could be paraphrased: “Bear others’ burdens, and thus follow in the footsteps of Christ, who bore yours.”

5. From the context of v.2 and v.5, explain why they are not contradictory. How does our view of ourselves (v.3-5) influence how we treat others (v.2)?

Verses 3-5, about a person’s self-view, are an intriguing discussion of humility and pride. It follows upon v.2 closely. (Verse 3 begins with the Greek word “for,” though the NIV translation doesn’t reflect it.) In 5:26 we see that our view of ourselves (“conceit”) affects our relationships with others (“provoking” “envying”). So here we see that we cannot bear others burdens unless we have this proper self view.

First, in v.3, Paul is saying that it takes humility to bear the burdens of others. If you “*think you are [really] something*” (v.3) then you will be too self-important to have a servant heart, to look around and notice the burdens of others and to help them with them (v.2). This is a stern warning, and we should not relativize Paul’s statement, that we are “*nothing*.” Of course, a Christian is filled with hope and confidence, but it is because of Christ. In ourselves, without him, Paul does not mince words. Jesus himself said, “*Without me, you can do nothing*.” (John 15:5)

But then, in v.4, Paul turns and talks about a legitimate kind of “*pride*” which a Christian can take in him or herself. Paul warns that we must not compare ourselves with others (v.4b) When we do compare ourselves, we can fall into either superiority or inferiority (cf. 5:26). On the one hand, we may not be very loving, but if we are surrounded by selfish people, we will have inordinate pride in ourselves and not love as we should. On the other hand, we may be living up to our God-given capacities, but since we are surrounded by very gifted people, we will be inordinately discouraged and not appreciate what God has made us and given us. Instead, we should “*test*” our “*own actions*” (v.4). This means we are to assess our own opportunities (gifts and tests as God has afforded them) and our own responses to them. We should measure ourselves, in a sense, against ourselves.

If we connect v.5 to v.4, we see that the *load* is not the same as *burdens*. The Greek word translated *burdens* means a heavy weight, but the different Greek word translated *load* refers to a kind of backpack. Verse 5 means that God has given each of us a different set of liabilities and opportunities, a different set of weaknesses and gifts. These are our “load”--our responsibility before God. We are therefore not to compare ourselves with others. We must look at our particular tests and duties and respond to them obediently. If we see life in this way, we will judge our life-work today against where we have been. When we see progress, we will take legitimate pride in it, whether or not we are better or worse than someone else. Also, if we see life this way, we will be slow to judge others as well. We will be non-judgmental and generous. For example, if we see someone being irritable, we will think, ‘I don’t know what pressures that person is facing nor what level of emotional self-control he began with. Maybe he is actually obeying God better than me today!’

Therefore, v.2 and v.5 are not contradictory. We are to help others with their tasks and problems. “*But there is one burden that we cannot share...and that is our responsibility to God on the day of judgment. On that day you cannot carry my pack and I cannot carry yours.*” (J.Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p.160)

6. 6:1. What principles does Paul lay down in this verse? How does v.2 shed light on v.1?

We can break Paul’s advice into four principles:

a) The party in need. Paul says that we are not to ignore a situation when we see someone “*caught in a sin*.” This does not mean that we are to confront anyone we see sinning in any way. I Peter 4:8 (“*Love covers a multitude of sins*”) and I Cor.13:5 (“*Love is not easily angered, does not keep a record of wrongs*”) and I Cor.13:7 (“*Love...hopes all things, endures all things.*”) all show that we are not to be quick to criticize and tell people about their faults. Paul’s qualifier is that we must not overlook someone “*caught*” or overtaken in a sin. This indicates that the sinful behavior is a pattern, and one that has, in a sense, gotten the upper hand with this person. It is a habit pattern of sinful behavior that the person will not be able to overcome without help and outside intervention. Therefore, Paul insists that Christians be neither quick to criticize nor afraid to confront.

b) The party responsible. Paul holds “*you who are spiritual*” responsible to address the person caught in sin. It should be obvious that Paul is not referring only to some spiritual elite. We must read this verse in the context of 5:16-18 and 15. He is saying, “If you follow the dictates of the Spirit, the desires of the Spirit, you will do this.” In other words, this responsibility belongs to anyone who is trying to live a Christian life at all.

c) The action required. Paul tells us to “*restore*” the person caught in sin. This word, *katartizo*, is a very instructive Greek word. This term was used widely in Greek for setting a dislocated bone back into place. Now a dislocated bone is extremely painful, because it is not in its designed, natural relationship to the other parts of the body. To put a bone back in place is inevitably to inflict pain, but it is a healing pain. It means we are to confront, but to seek a change of life and heart.

d) The spirit required. Paul warns against a harsh, unwinsome spirit in two ways. First, he says to do this confrontation “*gently*.” Then he also reminds them that this gentleness will only come if they watch themselves, knowing their own susceptibility to temptation. This is very difficult but practical advice. You will not be able to winsomely confront someone if you think that you are not capable of similar or equal sin. If you do feel you are above the person, your air of superiority will come through and the interchange will not *restore* but will rather destroy.

It is extremely important to see the connection between v.1 and v.2. Confronting over sin is a form of service to others, a form of burden bearing. This means on the one hand, that the person listening to the correction must realize that this is the way other members in the Body of Christ are to serve him or her. On the other hand, it means that when we do our confronting, we must profoundly examine our motives. We are supposed to be seeking to serve the person we are criticizing, not to just telling him off. We are seeking to try to bear the person’s troubles, we are not seeking to get rid of the person’s troubles!

“Notice how positive Paul’s instruction is. If we detect somebody doing something wrong, we are not to stand by doing nothing on the pretext that it is none of our business and we have no wish to be involved. Nor are we to despise or condemn him in our hearts and, if he suffers for his misdemeanor, say ‘Serves him right’ or ‘Let him stew in his own juice.’ Nor are we to report him...or gossip about him to our friends....No, we are to ‘restore’...”
(J.Stott, *The Message of Galatians* p.160).

[Applying the text of Gal.6:1] “Run unto him, and reaching out your hand, raise him up again, comfort him with sweet words, and embrace him with motherly arms.” (M.Luther, *Commentary on the Galatians*, p.538)

7. Make a list of the reasons that Christians do so poorly at both 6:2 and 6:1 relationships. How do you think your particular small group or church community is at “restoration” of 6:1? What could you do practically to do better at 6:2? At 6:1?

Unit 12 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” - for something that raised a question

Gospel Relationships

A. Self-view and Others-view

The gospel creates a whole new self-image (Galatians 5:26, 6:3-5) which is not based on comparisons with others. Only the gospel makes us neither self-confident nor self-disdaining, but both bold and humble. Because of the gospel, we neither earn our worth through approval from people nor through power over people, so we are neither over-dependent on others, nor afraid of commitment and vulnerability. That works itself out in relationships with everyone.

The gospel is the only thing that addresses conceit, the vain-glory. To the degree I am still functionally earning my worth through performance (i.e. to the degree I am still functioning in works-righteousness), to that degree I will be either operating out of superiority or inferiority. Why? Because if I am saved by my works, then I can either be confident but not humble (if I am living up) or humble but not confident (if I am not living up). In other words, apart from the gospel, I will be forced to be superior or inferior or to swing back and forth or to be one way with some people and another way with others. I am continually caught between these two ways, because of the nature of my self-image.

But the gospel creates a new self-image, as we have seen previously. It humbles me before anyone, telling me I am a sinner saved only by grace. But it emboldens me before anyone, telling me I am loved and honored by the only eyes in the universe that really count. So the gospel gives a boldness and a humility that do not eat each other up, but can increase together.

B. The “two thieves” and relationships

We have seen previously that there are two equal and opposite errors that oppose the gospel: legalism and antinomianism which we can call here moralism and hedonism:

Legalism

Salvation through self-denial

Emphasis on doing duties

You are a sinner, thus not acceptable

Truth more important than love

Moralism: Do what is right

Antinomianism

Salvation through self-discovery

Emphasis on fulfilling needs

You are acceptable, thus not a sinner

Love more important than truth

Hedonism: Do what makes you happy

How does the gospel provide a “third way” in relationships?

Moralism often makes relationships into a blame-game. Why? The moralist is very consciously trying to earn salvation through performance, and that includes

relationships. Moralists must maintain a self-image of being “a good person.” Now some moralists do so by laying the blame on others, by being very judgmental and by always insisting that they are in the right. There is a lack of teachability, humble admission of error or listening. But moralists can also play the blame-game by laying the blame on themselves. Moralists can “earn their salvation” and convince ourselves we are worthy persons through being very willing to help others. This kind of self-salvation superficially makes the moralist look very open to listen, very humble, very teachable. But this can be co-dependency, a form of self-salvation through severely needing people’s approval or through needing people to need you (i.e. saving yourself by saving others). So moralism works through either blaming others or blaming yourself. Either way, it makes relationships torturous.

On the other hand, hedonism reduces relationships to a negotiated partnership for mutual benefit. Hedonism says: “A relationship is fine as long as both people are helping each other reach their goals.” But as soon as a relationship entails major sacrifice, the hedonist labels it dysfunctional and bails out. (There are dysfunctional relationships but only when the sacrifice is being done out of needy selfishness and not out of fullness of love.) So, for the hedonist, you only relate to another as long as it is not costing you anything. So the choice (without the gospel) is to selfishly use others or to selfishly let yourself be used by others. But the gospel leads us to do neither. We do sacrifice and commit, but not out of a need to convince ourselves or others we are acceptable. So we can love the person enough to confront, yet stay with the person when it does not benefit us.

C. Kinds of relationships

1. The gospel and family relationships

Moralism can make you a slave to parental expectations. The two ways you become a slave under moralism is that either you are so bound to please your parents that you can’t live without continually thinking of them, or you are so mad at them for their control or neglect of your life that you cannot live without thinking of them. To be living either in action OR reaction to them all the time means that you are still a slave to their view of you. You are haunted by it either way. On the other hand, hedonism sees no need for family loyalty or the keeping of promises and covenants if they do not “meet my needs.”

The gospel frees you from making parental approval an absolute or psychological salvation, pointing out how God becomes the ultimate father. Then you will be neither too dependent or too hostile to your parents.

2. The gospel and sexual relationships

The moralist tends to see sex as dirty or at least a dangerous impulse that leads constantly to sin. There will be an approach-avoidance relationship with sex. The uneasy conscience of the moralist will lead to either complete avoidance OR to a very driven, breathless need for sexual experience. Both come from a glory-vacuum within, which makes sex into a way to fill the emptiness. On the other hand, the hedonist sees sex as merely biological and physical appetite. Thus the hedonist may be less convoluted and troubled about sex, yet they have also given up on the deep longing of their heart to have union with someone sexually that is completely, unconditionally, and permanently true to them.

But the gospel shows us that sexuality is to reflect the self-giving of Christ. He gave himself completely without conditions. So we are not to seek intimacy sexually but then hold back control of our lives. If we give ourselves sexually we are to give ourselves legally, socially, personally--utterly. Sex is only to happen in a totally committed, permanent relationship of marriage. Through Christ's transformation of us, that ideal is somewhat realizable even between two sinners.

3. The gospel and other relationships

To other races and cultures. The liberal (hedonist) approach is to relativize all cultures. ("We can all get along because there is no truth.") The conservatives (moralists) believe there is truth for evaluation of cultures, and so they choose some culture as superior and then they idolize it, feeling superior to others in the impulse of self-justifying pride. The gospel leads us to be, on the one hand, somewhat critical of all cultures, including our own (since there is truth), but on the other hand, we are morally superior to no one. After all, we are saved by grace alone. Christians will exhibit both moral conviction yet humility and cultural flexibility.

To non-Christians. The liberal/hedonist approach is to deny the legitimacy of evangelism altogether. The conservative/moralist person does believe in proselytizing, because "we are right and they are wrong." Such proselytizing is almost always offensive. But the gospel produces a constellation of traits in us.

- We are compelled to share the gospel out of generosity and love, not guilt.
- We are freed from fear of being ridiculed or hurt by others, since we already have the favor of God by grace.
- There is humility in our dealings with others, because we know we are saved by grace alone, not because of our superior insight or character.
- We are hopeful about anyone, even the "hard cases," because we were saved only because of grace, not because we were likely people to be Christians.
- We are courteous and careful with people. We don't have to push or coerce them, for it is only God's grace that opens hearts, not our eloquence or persistence or even their openness.

All these traits not only create a winsome evangelist but an excellent neighbor in a multi-cultural society.

To human authority. Moralists will tend to obey human authorities (family, tribe, government, cultural customs) too much, since they rely so heavily on their self-image of being moral and decent. Hedonists will either obey human authority too much (since they have no higher authority by which they can judge their culture) or else too little (since they may only obey when they know they won't get caught). That means either authoritarianism or anarchy. But the gospel gives you both a standard by which to oppose human authority (if it contradicts the gospel), and it gives you incentive to obey the civil authorities from the heart, even when you could get away with disobedience.

Conclusion

Outside the gospel we are either confident (if achieving) or humble (if failing), but in the gospel our new self-image produces a bold humility that changes all relationships.

Without the gospel, your self-image is based upon living up to some standards-- whether yours or someone's imposed upon you. If you live up to those standards, you will be confident but not humble. If you don't live up to them, you will be humble but not confident. Only in the gospel can you be both enormously bold and utterly sensitive and humble, for you are both perfect and a sinner! Paul shows us that this new, unique self-image changes all relationships. *"Don't be conceited--provoking or envying each other."* (Gal.5:26). Because we are humbled by the gospel, we don't "provoke" or approach anyone with a sense of superiority. Because we are powerfully loved in the gospel, we don't "envy" or approach anyone with a sense of inferiority. The gospel keeps us from being either codependent on, or independent of, people. Both approaches are essentially selfish ways to earn our value through relationships. Now we do not need to have people serve our needs nor to serve theirs. So we are free to sacrifice and commit, but also to love the person enough to confront.

Luther writes about this new self-image:

"So now we may certainly think: 'Although I still sin, I don't despair, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my eternal life.' In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life or mine and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life."
(Preface to the Galatians)

Discussion questions:

- 1. What was most helpful to you personally?**
- 2. What questions did it raise?**

Lesson 13 - Sowing and Reaping

These final words of Paul may at first sight seem like a series of disconnected statements, but Paul is actually making a final warning (verses 6-10) and a final invitation (verses 11-18) to the Galatians to live by the gospel.

Leader's background notes:

Outline

- 6:6ff. **Warning: You reap what you sow**
v.6 Listen to the word from your teachers, because...
v.7-8 ...if you reject the gospel, you will reap destruction.
v.9-10 The fruit of the gospel may come slow, but it will come.
- 6:12 **Test 1: Is your religion substantial or superficial?**
v.12a The false teachers put stress on the outward observance instead of the motives and condition of the heart.
v.12b They flatter rather than “insult” with the gospel of free grace.
- 6:13-16 **Test 2: Is your religion self-done or Christ-done?**
v.13 They themselves are using their converts as a way to “boast.” It is (ironically) their own self-salvation strategy.
v.14a The gospel means that we do not “boast”--we do not derive our joy/worth--from anything but what Christ has done.
v.14b If we do that, the world has no more hold over me at all. There’s nothing I “must” have. Nothing controls my heart.
v.15 Then, no status or achievement can make me intimidated or afraid, and no failure can make me discouraged or disdainful.
v.16 This principle is a “canon,” the key to it all. It will bring peace and joy to all that live by it, and it will reveal them to be children of Abraham.
v.17 I have the marks of authority, but they are the marks of loving Jesus that matter. v.18 - God bless you!

READ Galatians 6:6-18

1. Based on the context of vv.4-7, why do you think Paul included v.6? Why did v.6 lead Paul to write, “Do not be deceived?”

The Greek word for “*anyone who receives instruction*” is the word *katechoumenos*, one who is catechized. This shows how important it was for new converts to be given a body of Christian doctrine (*catechism*) which was taught to them by an instructor (here the word “catechizer”).

Why does Paul bring up their catechesis right after vv.4-5? Probably, Paul is making sure he is not misunderstood. He has just said that every individual is responsible before God to respond obediently to the opportunities that God has given him or her. There is no way that such responsibility can be given away. Now, however, Paul wants to make sure that this statement of his is not understood as propounding some kind of radical individualism. As Christians, we cannot accredit nor prepare ourselves. In order to avoid self-deception, we all need to submit ourselves to teachers who in turn had submitted themselves to other teachers.

What is Paul urging in this verse? There is some ambiguity in the verb *koinoneo*, which means “to share” or “to have fellowship.” It could be read very generally to mean that student and teacher must go about their task of instruction as full partners together. Christian discipleship

thus must be done in community, with the student being a full partner (not a passive pawn) and the teacher being a full friend (not an imperious dictator). This certainly is an implication of the word *koinoneo*. But the words “*all good things*” almost certainly means financial support. Thus Paul is saying that it benefits both learner and teacher if the instructor is supported to do the job full-time. Luther comments on this verse that it is impossible for the instructor to “labor day and night to get a living” and still give enough time “to the study of sacred learning as the preaching office requires.” Paul is thinking of himself and other itinerant preachers and evangelists and teachers (cf. Eph. 4:11-12). In this light, the word *koinoneo* becomes even richer, for the salary of a Christian teacher is not to be seen as a payment. Rather, it is a “fellowship.” Just as teachers share the spiritual gifts God has given them with the learner, so the learners share the financial gifts God has given them with the teacher.

How do we practice this today?

- (1) Some of our teachers are church staff--and we should give generously to their support. We should not be “consumers” who come to a church and simply plunder the benefits of it, without doing significant giving to that church.
- (2) But this verse also means that the giving must be accompanied by the right attitude. “Catechesis” is not just one more service to be paid for, but is a rich fellowship and mutual sharing of the gifts of God.
- (3) Also, many Christian teachers who you have benefited from are missionaries and workers with ministries that are not the local church. Such Christian ministries also can not go forward very well if the leaders are supporting themselves with jobs besides their ministry. They need to be supported as well.
- (4) Lastly, we need to practice this idea of discipleship/fellowship at every level. Your small group leader, for example, may not (yet!) need your financial support, but you are to make their job a “partnership.” Compare Heb. 13:17. You should gladly work together with your leader to get the counsel and instruction you need to grow strong. You should work to not only “learn your lessons” but to also open your life and share your needs with him or her.

Lastly, John Stott points out that the word *koinoneo* also can be used to prevent abuse of a congregation by the ministers or the ministers by the congregation. “*If the principle of the congregation paying the minister may encourage the minister to be lazy and neglectful, it may also tempt the congregation to try to control the minister.*” (Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p.168.)

Why did Paul move from verse 6 to “do not be deceived?”

In some ways, “do not be deceived” (v.7) is the theme of the whole epistle of Galatians! They are in great danger of being deceived by these false teachers. Paul has clearly charged that these teachers are not in “fellowship” with the Galatians; they are rather making merchandise of them (4:17-18). They are not “partners in community” with the Galatians as they should be (6:6). So Paul is lifting up the proper teacher-disciple relationship in v.6, and that immediately leads him, of course, to make a final appeal to resist these false teachers and hold to the gospel. So “do not be deceived” is the beginning of Paul’s final, climactic appeal to hold on to the truth.

2. What is this principle in vv. 7-8? How would you put the principle into your own words? How can we observe it practically?

He begins his final appeal section with a stern warning. Some have called it “the law of great returns.” Paul uses one of the most familiar experiences in the history of humankind--the agricultural process of sowing and reaping. “*Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (v.7). In farming or gardening, this is an absolute principle, and Paul appears to want us to see at

least two aspects to it. First, *whatever* you sow, you will reap. That means that if you sow tomato seeds, you will not get corn, no matter how much you want corn to grow. Second, whatever you sow, you *will* reap. That means that, though the seed may lie in the ground to no effect for a long time, it will come up. It is not the reaping that determines the harvest, but the sowing.

Paul clearly says that, as inexorable as the law of returns is in agriculture, so it also is in the moral and spiritual realm. As Moses once put it so delicately, “*If you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord, and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.*” (Numbers 32:23) Paul gives us his own version of this Mosaic statement when he says, “*God is not mocked,*” a word that means to be treated lightly. Then he goes on to say, “*The one who sows to please the sinful nature will reap destruction*” (v.8).

Does this mean that God is a vengeful God who sits in heaven looking to avenge any slights or insults? No, though the reference to “*mocked*” could lend itself to that view. The image of sowing-reaping indicates that the process of moral consequences is much more natural and organic than that. Paul’s reference to natural agriculture indicates that the moral universe also has processes and a “fabric.” Sin against God sets up strains in the fabric of the moral/spiritual universe, just as, say, eating fatty foods sets up strains in the physical fabric of your heart. If you sow seed poorly, you reap a poor crop (and poverty). If you eat fatty foods, you reap a poor heart (and early death). If you give in to your sinful nature, you reap spiritual breakdown and destruction. The word “*corruption*” means just what it says—disintegration. Paul is saying that sin makes things fall apart. Sin in the spiritual realm is exactly like death in the moral realm. Both sin and death make something that once cohered, fall apart and break into pieces.

This metaphor means, therefore, that the destruction we reap comes from the breaking of the “fabric” of the moral universe, just as certain behavior can break the fabric and coherence of the physical. There are innumerable ways that flesh-sowing reaps destruction. The whole Book of Proverbs can be summed up by Galatians 6:7-8! To sow dishonesty breaks the fabric of relationships and creates the destruction of loneliness. To sow envy and jealousy breaks the fabric of contentment and creates the destruction of bitterness. And so on, *ad infinitum*. There we see the two aspects of Paul’s metaphor. *Whatever* you sow, you will reap (sin always bears destruction, not joy and life). Whatever you sow you *will* reap (sins will come home to roost, the consequences cannot be held off).

But Paul’s warning here must be read in light of all the rest of his letter. He means something very specific when he speaks of “*sowing to the flesh*” (“*sowing to please the sinful nature*” NIV). In 5:16-18 he showed that the “flesh” is especially the part of the heart that wants to keep control of our lives by being our own Savior and Lord, and which resists the gospel of free grace and seeks continually to earn our own righteousness. Throughout the letter, Paul has indicated that Christians can and do very often fall back into some kind of slavery to sin and lose their grip on the gospel, but he has also warned that if the gospel is rejected and works-righteousness formally and completely adopted, that slavery and destruction may be complete. Both levels are probably in view here. If we as Christians fail to use the gospel, and live “in the flesh,” trying to earn our salvation by other means, we will find a loss of coherence and joy and strength in our lives. On the other hand, if anyone rejects the gospel and lives completely to the flesh, they will reap eternal destruction, rather than eternal life.

How can we, then, “*sow to the Spirit?*” The whole Book of Galatians has been showing us how and this entire curriculum has been trying to do the same thing. At its simplest, we sow to the Spirit when we obey God out of grateful joy that comes from a high consciousness of our status as children of God. When we do that, the idols which controlled our lives are disempowered

and we are free to live for God. And we sow to the flesh when we either disobey God or obey the letter of the law of God out of a desire to be our own Savior and Lord.

3. Based on the context, what do you think Paul meant by “doing good” (v.9)? Based on your own experience and observations, how do we “reap” from doing good?

This connection is not as hard to discern as the others. There is always a delay between sowing and reaping. Especially, new farmers and gardeners will experience a lot of anxiety, watching over the dormant seed for weeks and weeks, and feeling it will never come up. But it always comes up. In vv.7-8 Paul is warning sinners that, though it doesn't seem that your sin has “found you out”--it will. Now in v.9 he turns from warning to encouragement. He tells people who have been doing good that we will see fruit and benefits eventually. Just like sin eventually “comes up,” so righteous actions eventually “come up,” too. He is saying, “*Don't lose heart,*” because, just as inexperienced gardeners might fail to water and weed in their discouragement over the slow-growing seed, so Christians might fail to persevere in their service and ministry. And a lack of follow through in ministry can stunt the “harvest,” just as it does in gardening.

What is this “doing good” sowing? Verse 10 tells us. We are to “*do good*” to all people, but especially other Christians. This little phrase is very sweeping and comprehensive in its simplicity. First, it shows what the Christian life is all about; it is not primarily about meetings, programs or even conversions. It is about doing good to the person before you, giving him or her what is best for them. It means we do not use people for our good, but we are committed to the good of others. Secondly, the word “*doing*” shows that we are to give them whatever love discerns as their needs. Of course, we share the gospel and evangelize, but only as a means to the end of loving them. (We don't love them as a means to the end of converting them!) But the word “*doing*” means that we must not confine ourselves to evangelism and discipling. We are to love in deed as well as in word. We are to give them any aid that is necessary to meet any need within our power to meet, whether it is material, social or spiritual. This little phrase shows that Christian ministry includes rehabbing homes as well as explaining how to give your life to Christ. To whom do we direct this life of love? To “*all people.*” So we don't get immediately overwhelmed, Paul adds, “*as we have opportunity.*” This not only means that we're not expected to personally meet all the needs in the world; it shows we should be organic in our ministry. We should look around us and see who we are near and where we are. Lastly, this verse tells us that we are to give priority to “*the household of faith,*” a wonderful phrase that shows all Christians are a family. If we are adopted (4:5), then we are all brothers and sisters in God's household. We must do good intensely with those who are in fellowship with us.

How do we “reap” eventually from such a lifestyle? Paul does not tell us; he leaves us to guess. Probably he is so vague because the benefits of such a lifestyle are so infinitely varied and rich. In the short run, such a life entails a tremendous number of sacrifices. You bind your heart up emotionally to people who are unstable, so you experience great distress that you could have avoided. You cut yourself off from many options that you could have if you weren't in ministry relationships. You have less money since you are giving very generously to individuals and ministries and causes. The costs are many, but the rewards, Paul hints, are as much greater as the value of the harvest is greater than the cost of the seed! First, we often get the very direct and deep satisfaction of seeing changed lives (cf. Matt.9:37). Often, we even get gratitude from people for our burden-bearing. That is indeed “icing” on the cake. Second, we may get the direct and deep satisfaction of seeing families and communities, even cities, becoming good and happy places to live. Third, we may even see people whose burdens we've been bearing become burden bearers. We may see changed lives changing other lives.

But we need to realize that there are deeper harvests that happen even when we don't seem to be meeting with much outward success. First, we will find our own character changing deeply through ministry. We will find our consciences clear, our hearts happier since we're less self-indulgent and that we have developed a less selfish and more faithful character which serves us well when we are under pressure. Even more important, there is some kind of inverse proportion between the success our ministry has on earth and the blessing and honor God gives us (Matt.6:1). Even if only one out of a hundred people really respond to our ministry, that is a cause of joy and glory in heaven (Luke 15:7).

4. What does vv. 12-13 reveal about the motives of Paul's opponents? How does Paul use this to contrast the true gospel from "religion?"

In vv.12-13a, Paul tells the Galatians that real Christianity is a matter of inward change, not external observance. Here he tells the Galatians about the motives of the false teachers. They "*want to make a good impression outwardly*" (v.12). This seems to be true in several ways. Paul said in 5:11-12 that the preaching of the gospel is terribly offensive to the human heart. People find it insulting to be told that they are too weak and sinful to do anything to contribute to their salvation. Thus the preaching of the gospel is unpopular; it leads to great ostracism. On the other hand, the world appreciates "religion" and "morality" in general. The world thinks that moral religion is a good thing for society. The Christian gospel, however, has always been seen as too negative and exclusive. Now Paul says that this pressure to conform to the world and be accepted by it is what is going on under the legalistic teaching of the Judaizers. "*The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.*" (v.12b) They "*want to boast*" (v.13b). They have gotten into religion for the fame, prestige and honor it can bring them in the world. In other words, their ministry is a form of their own self-salvation.

As a result of this concern for appearances and acceptance by the world, the false teachers are offering a religion that mainly focuses on externals and behavior (circumcision and the ceremonial law), rather than internal change of heart, motives and character. (The gospel is very concerned about a change of behavior, but only as the fruit of a new inner change of heart. 5:5-15.) Paul again makes the most telling critique of this way of religion: "*Not even those who are circumcised obey the law...*" (v.13a). On its own terms, legalism cannot work. If we really read the law and see what it commands (e.g. "Love your neighbor as yourself" 5:13-14), we will see that we cannot possibly save ourselves by obeying it. So a religion based on externals and behavior as a way of salvation cannot deliver what it promises.

5. Would you agree that vv.14-15 summarize everything Paul has been saying in the letter? Why or why not?

In vv.13b-14, Paul says that the heart of your religion is what you boast in. In other words, what, at bottom, is the reason that you are in a right relationship with God? If the cross is just a help but you have to complete your salvation with good works, it is really your works which make the difference between your being in God or out of God. Therefore, you "*boast about your flesh*" (v.13b), your own efforts. But if you understand the gospel, you "*boast*" exclusively and only in the cross. Here we come very close to the modern category of self-image and to the idea of basing your identity in Christ. Our identity is based on what gives us a sense of dignity and significance--what we boast in. Religion leads us to boast in something about us. The gospel leads us to boast in the cross of Jesus. That means our identity in Jesus is confident and secure--we *do* "boast!"--yet humbly based in a profound sense of our flaws and neediness.

So the gospel can be well summarized in these two remarkable sentences:

“May I never boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ” (v.14a).

This means that I am saved solely and wholly because of Christ’s work, not mine. What does it mean to “never boast *except*?”

- I take no credit for my standing with God.
- What Christ has done is now something I “boast” in.

To boast is to joyously exult, to have high confidence in something. Paul means that, to know you are saved by Christ’s work alone brings a joyous “boasting” confidence, though it is not a self-confidence. [Note: This word “*except*” is why Luther says that Paul teaches we are saved by faith in Christ “alone.”] Now if I boast in Christ alone, then there is a result--

“Through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” (v.14b)

This is really just stunning. John Stott paraphrases it, “*Now that we have seen...Christ crucified as our sin-bearer, we do not care what the world thinks of us or does to us.*” (p.180). Guthrie says that it means, “*The natural world as such has ceased to have any claims on [us].*” (p.151) Guthrie is probably closer than Stott to Paul’s gist. He is not talking only of what the people of the world think, though that is certainly involved. He is saying that there is nothing in the world now that has any power over me. Notice he does not say that the world is dead, but that it is dead to him. The gospel destroys its power. Why? As we have been saying all along, if nothing in the world is my righteousness or salvation, if there is nothing in the world that I boast in, then there is nothing in the world that controls me--nothing that I MUST have.

In this context, Paul is not saying that I have nothing to do with the people and things of the world. Ironically, if I must have nothing to do with the world and must separate from it, then the world still has quite a lot of power over me! If I cannot move about in the world, then it is not crucified to me or I to it. Paul means that he is now free to enjoy the world. He no longer needs to fear it or worship it

Finally, v.15 restates almost exactly what was stated in 5:6. “*Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but a new creation.*” See remarks in Week 7 regarding 5:6.

- “Circumcision nor uncircumcision” means “Religious/moral attainments or religious/moral failure.”
- “Circumcision means nothing” means “In the gospel, I am not intimidated nor do I feel inferior to anyone.”
- “Uncircumcision means nothing” means “in the gospel, I am not scornful nor do I feel superior to anyone.”

This recapitulates 5:26. The gospel gives me a whole new self-image and whole new way or relating to everyone. And by replacing “*faith working by love*” (5:6) with “*a new creation*” (6:15), Paul shows that the two are essentially the same thing. The gospel creates a new motivation for obedience--grateful love arising from a faith view of what Christ has done. This new motivation renews us from the inside out. It is a new birth, a supernatural transformation of character, a new creation. So here he recapitulates all of chapter 5.

So vv.14-15 can be paraphrased:

“The gospel changes what I fundamentally boast in--it changes the whole basis for my identity (v.14a). Therefore, nothing in the whole world has any power over me--I am free at last to enjoy the world, for I do not need the world (v.14b). I feel neither inferior to anyone nor superior to anyone, and I am being made all over into someone and something entirely new (v.15).

6. What is the relationship of the “rule” to peace, mercy and grace (v.16)? What do you think are the “marks of Jesus”? Do you have any?

Notice the little follow up of v.16. Paul calls living by the gospel a “rule.” Anyone who does this will find peace and mercy. He calls all who do so the “*Israel of God.*” That recapitulates what he was saying in chapter 3. We are all Abraham’s children.

What are the “*marks of Jesus*” on Paul’s body? Probably he is referring to the literal scars he had from the torture, imprisonments and beatings he had received for the sake of Christ. It may be that this too is a recapitulation of what he was saying about his apostolic authority in chapters 1 and 2. He is saying, then, “Do not doubt me! I have the real marks of apostolic authority--not my greatness, but the signs of my suffering and weakness.” (cf. II Cor.11 and 12)

Unit 13 - Reading and Reflection

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” -for something that raised a question

Luther Re-visited

(1) Thesis - The gospel offers not just forgiveness for our bad record, but also complete acceptance through Christ’s perfect record.

CHRIST DID NOT ONLY DIE IN OUR PLACE BUT LIVED A PERFECT LIFE IN OUR PLACE. THEREFORE, WE DO NOT SIMPLY GET FORGIVENESS FOR SINS FROM CHRIST, BUT ALSO COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE. HIS PERFECT PAST AND RECORD NOW (IN GOD’S SIGHT) BECOMES OURS.

Luther: *“It is an absolutely unique teaching in the world”* (See section 4a) and again: *“So now we may certainly think: ‘Although I still sin, I don’t despair, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my eternal life.’ In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life of mine and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life.”* (See section 4e) Some other religions teach that God will forgive your failure to produce a good moral record. But no other religion claims that God actually provides an absolutely perfect record for you, whereby he regards you as absolutely holy and acceptable and flawless. Other religions say: “You give God a righteous record, then he will owe you.” But the gospel says: “God (through Jesus Christ) gives you a perfect record, and then you owe him.”

(2) Thesis - There is no alternative to the gospel but works-righteousness. Both religion and irreligion are forms of it.

UN-RELIGIOUS PERSONS ARE STRUGGLING TO ACHIEVE A “RIGHTEOUSNESS” THROUGH THEIR OWN EFFORTS, AND RELIGIOUS PERSONS ARE STRUGGLING TO ACHIEVE A “RIGHTEOUSNESS” THROUGH THEIR OWN EFFORTS. SO FUNDAMENTALLY, THEY ARE NO DIFFERENT.

Luther, Preface to the Galatians: *“Satan in paradise...persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God...Thereafter... everyone went his own way...hoping without the aid of Christ and by his own works to redeem himself from evils and sins.”* (Section 1a). Every person is seeking to achieve a sense of worth and value--a “righteousness” (though seldom called that)--through their striving and efforts, because they have an innate sense of shame and guilt inherited from their sin and the Fall. Also: *“For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ you must build your confidence on your own work.”* (Section 5a) Anyone who does not fully trust Christ’s righteousness for his or her sense of worth (your “confidence”) and standing before God is necessarily seeking to achieve it through works-righteousness, whether that work is religious or not.

(3) Thesis- All sin is ultimately rooted in idolatry caused by works-righteousness.

THE ULTIMATE REASON FOR ANY SIN IS THAT SOMETHING BESIDES CHRIST IS FUNCTIONING AS AN ALTERNATIVE “RIGHTEOUSNESS” OR SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE--AND IS THUS AN “IDOL,” A PSEUDO-SAVIOR, WHICH CREATES INORDINATE DESIRES.

Luther, Preface to the Galatians: “*This rock...the doctrine of justification...was shaken by Satan in paradise, when he persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God....Thereafter the whole world acted like a madman against this faith, inventing innumerable idols and religions with which everyone went his own way, hoping to placate a god or goddess, by his own works; that is, hoping without the aid of Christ and by his own works to redeem himself from evils and sins. All this is sufficiently seen in the practices and records of every culture and nation....* (Section 1a). Also, Luther A Treatise Concerning Good Works: “*Those who do not...trust in His favor, grace, and good-will, but seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [First] Commandment [to have no other gods before Him], and practice real idolatry, even if they do the works of all the other Commandments....*” (Part X.) Any effort to earn our own salvation creates “idols” of necessity. For if we make our career or our morality or our marriage our fundamental “confidence” in life--our “*wisdom*” and “*power*”-- then those things become idols which we look to instead of Christ for our “salvation.” Thus, those “keeping” the other 9 commandments as a way to earn their own salvation are really breaking the 1st commandment *by* and *in* their morality! Therefore, their good works are all done in service to an idol as a way of avoiding Christ as Savior.

(4) Thesis - All of life requires repentance--not primarily for sins, but for our “righteousness.”

ANY FAILURE OF ACTUAL RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ALWAYS A FAILURE TO LIVE IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS. WE MAKE SOMETHING BESIDES JESUS OUR REAL HOPE AND LIFE. SO BELIEVING THE GOSPEL MEANS TO REPENT, NOT JUST OF OUR SINS, BUT OF THE PARTICULAR (SELF) RIGHTEOUSNESS UNDERLYING OUR BEHAVIOR. THAT IS THE SECRET OF CHANGE.

Luther in Preface to Galatians: “*So learn to speak to one’s heart...When the law creeps into your conscience...learn to use arguments of the gospel against it. Say: ‘O law!...trouble me not! For I will not allow you.. to reign in my heart and conscience--for they are the seat and temple of Christ the Son of God, who is the king of righteousness and peace, and my most sweet savior and mediator.’ [Then] he shall keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound and pure doctrine of the Gospel through the knowledge of this passive and heavenly righteousness.*” (See section 5c). He calls this an effort to keep “*this Christian righteousness reigning in my heart.*” (See section 5d). Irreligious people don’t repent at all, and religious people repent only for their sins. But Christians “repent of their righteousness.” That is what makes them become Christians--when they repent not just for being bad, but for having tried in so many ways to be good in order to avoid relying on Christ alone for their hope, worth, and salvation. But this is also what grows them into the likeness of Christ. Every failure to live as we should--all temptation, fear, anger, or despondency--means something besides Christ continues to be too important, to function as an idol, a means of “righteousness.” Thus all growth takes place the way initial conversion did--through repentance for avoiding Christ as Savior.

(5) Thesis - Gospel repentance creates a whole new motivation in our relationship to God, others, ourselves and to our life in the world.

ONLY THROUGH THE GOSPEL IS THERE A NEW SENSE OF DELIGHT IN AND SERVICE TO GOD FOR THE BEAUTY OF WHO HE IS IN HIMSELF, NOT FOR WHAT HE GIVES YOU. THAT FREES US TO LOVE OTHERS AND DO GOOD DEEDS FOR *THEIR OWN SAKE*, AND NOT FOR HOW THEY PROFIT US.

Luther, Preface to Galatians: “Whoever he be that is assuredly persuaded that Christ is his righteousness, does not only cheerfully and gladly work well in his vocation...but submits to all manner of burdens and dangers in his present life, because he knows that this is the will of God, and that this obedience pleases him.” (See section 5d) First, our work is transformed by the gospel--it is done in “gladness”--because our work and career is no longer the way we get our “confidence” and “power.” When we relied on our work for a sense of importance and worth, the work was really only about us. We didn’t do it for the joy of doing it. Second, our relationship to God is now not conditioned by how well our lives go. If we only obey God in order to get a good life from him, then our relationship to him goes up and down depending on our success, prosperity and comfort. If things go wrong, we rejected God, which showed we were only using him to get our real gods. Now the gospel brings stability and an unconditional desire to please him for his own sake. Also Luther writes: “No one should think we reject the importance of good works or of obeying the Law. When we receive the Christian righteousness, we consequently can live a good life, naturally, out of gratitude. If we try to earn our righteousness by doing many good deeds, we actually do nothing. We neither please God through our works-righteousness nor do we honor the purpose for which the law was given.” (See section 4d.) “Good” works done in order to get leverage over God are not “good” at all--they are not done for him or for others, but for ourselves. They are ways of controlling God and saving ourselves. Only when we admit our good works were not good, can they become actually good and pleasing to God!

(6) Thesis - The gospel is not only the way to enter the kingdom, but it is also the way to solve every problem, face every challenge and grow up into Christ.

Luther, Preface to Galatians: “All kinds of temptations vex and oppress us on every side, so that this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough. If this doctrine is lost, then is also the whole knowledge of truth, life and salvation lost; if this doctrine flourish, then all good things flourish...” (See section 1b.) He also says that the gospel is the way to face every trial and difficulty: “This distinction is easy to utter in words, but in use and experience it is very hard. So you who would be teachers and counselors of others I admonish to exercise yourselves continually in these matters through study, reading, meditation on the Word and prayer--that in the time of trial you will be able to both **inform** and **comfort** both your consciences and others, to bring them from law to grace, for active/works-righteousness to passive/Christ’s righteousness.” Many people think the gospel is the way to “get saved” and that then we grow through trying very hard to live according to Biblical principles. But Luther shows us not only that initial salvation happens through the gospel, but that all growth and sanctification happens only with constant re-visitation and re-orientation to the gospel.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What did you notice this time that you didn't notice before?

What is the most helpful thing you read this time?

