

BIG IDEA: BROKEN RELIGION DEMANDS A BETTER VERSION OF ME. THE GOSPEL FREES US TO LIVE IN A COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED ME.

I. Introduction

- A. If today is your first time here, or you haven't been in a while, we have been spending the last several months in a series entitled *Broken Religion*. And I don't know about you, but as I have been walking through the book of Galatians, I have come to the realization that I am naturally drawn to *religion*. I find comfort in the type of broken religion that allows me to check off the things I am supposed to do and stay away from the things I am not supposed to.
1. I wish I could live in the gospel like my three year old daughter lives every day. Dianna, my wife, and I tell her, daily, the things she needs to do (you need to eat, you need to pick up your toys, you need to take nap). We also tell her, daily, what not to do (you need to stop throwing food on the floor, you need to stop rolling toys down the stairs trying to hit your brother as he crawls up the stairs, you need to stop licking the window)...you know very valuable lessons of life. But the point is, I often long for this type of religion. And the truth, for me, is I struggle with living in the freedom of Christ.
- B. There is something about freedom that stirs us. I think we would all agree, in this room, that freedom is of great value to our culture. It is something that many of us would, have, and are fighting for. Its that feeling at the end of Braveheart, when William Wallace is being tortured and his torturer tells him, "It can all end...right now...peace...live...just cry out...mercy." And as the huge crowd is watching this they begin crying out mercy in hopes that William will just say it. "Cry out...just say it...mercy." And as the crowd continues to plead with William to say it, he gathers what breath he has and yells, "FREEDOM!" There is something about that scene that moves us to something. We become empowered by stories of freedom. We become encouraged by stories of freedom. If we are honest, at times, we can become frustrated by the displays of freedom. But here is the reality for us, we struggle to fit freedom into our broken view of Christianity. And not even just that, we struggle to simply define "Freedom." In our culture, there are so many differing definitions of Freedom, that it has entirely clouded what gospel freedom is. I looked this week, here are a few examples of how some people define "Freedom."
1. If you were to take out your iPhone in this moment, and got to the world's most knowledgeable woman, Siri, and asked her what is "freedom," she would tell you, it is **the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance.**
 2. If you look Google this question, you find a bunch of different articles, written by different people, from all over the world and how they would define this word. For most people, it usually has something to do with equality for everyone and usually talks about freedom to say what you want.
 3. When I was searching for the answer to this question, I came across a site called The Experience Project, and they asked people all over the internet to define Freedom in their own words. Here are some of the responses:
 - a) **-Freedom is being yourself**
 - b) **-Freedom is that feeling you get whenever you decide that you need a change of pace, and just leave without guilt or doubt, and that your meals are guaranteed.**
 - c) **-Doing what I want, when I want, and with who I want and by my rules**
 - d) **-Freedom is the thing humans want the most, and yet, we come to find it will never be achieved. It is one of the things we think is real, but never could happen.**
 4. And its important to say here, this idea of Gospel freedom is so huge, it is going to take us the next few weeks to truly unpack all the aspects of freedom. And so if you leave here this morning with more questions about freedom in Christ than answers, hang with us we're not done.

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- C. Paul in this passage to the Galatians, starts out with a verse that has really challenged me in the last month or so. He says in verse 1 of chapter 5:

For freedom, Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

- D. And when Paul talks about freedom, and when we talk about Gospel freedom, freedom in Christ, in God, in the Spirit...what we are talking about is this, that **We have been freed from a life of trying to “please” God - thru the finished work of Christ, that frees us to a live in the pleasure of God - for God’s fame and glory.**

- E. But the question is, **why do we have such a hard time living out this freedom?** Why is it, that for you and I, even though stories and pictures of freedom move us, we have such a hard time accepting this type of gospel freedom? And the answer, I believe, is that there is a tension that you and I are living in. There is a sort of battle, internally, that is going on inside of us when it comes to living free in Christ. And it all has to do with our broken religion. Because here is the truth that I want to focus on this morning, **“Broken Religion demands a better version of me. The Gospel frees us to live in a completely transformed me.”**

- F. And so what do I mean by that. Let’s look at the text again: **Galatians 5:2-6**

2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

- G. As we have been looking at the past several weeks, Paul is writing to the churches in Galatia because these false teacher, these Judaizers, have come in to their church and are trying to misconstrue the message of the Gospel. But it is important to point out here, they are not preaching a message of “this or that.” It wasn’t about follow the law OR follow Christ. Do the works OR live by faith. Rather, what they were saying was Christ is not enough for a “better you.” He is part of it, sure. But Jesus alone isn’t enough. That really what is demanded is that you become better. John talked last week about our **Actions, Attributes, and Nature**. What these false teachers were saying was that you need to change your actions and your attributes, and not let people see your true nature.

- H. To say it another way, let me ask you...**why do you obey God?** Have you ever asked yourself that? Why? Let’s get really practical and specific in this moment, why are you here this morning? Why do you have your devotion time every morning? **Parents, why do you want your kids to come to church?** That is a question I have been wrestling with a lot. In my mind, I believe it is because I desire for them to hear the gospel, to be moved by the gospel, and transformed by the work of Christ, and I do desire those things for my kids. But, if I am honest, the majority of Sunday mornings, I am seeking some sort of change of behavior. Right? Its easy to get caught in that trap. My wife and I joke at times when we get home from Sunday mornings, and one of us will do something contrary to the message that was preached and we will say something like, “Didn’t you listen this morning!?” And in a sense, what we are really saying is, “Didn’t that message cause you to change anything about your behavior?” Parents,

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how many of you want your kids involved in church merely because you want to teach them to be respectful, to be more obedient, to be better? And not that those things are entirely wrong, but for many of us that becomes the primary motive and goal for what we do. **We believe that in order to be pleasing to God, we need to become better. God demands us to become better. We have a hard time believing that, as John said last week, “In the Gospel, we are FULLY LOVED AND FULLY PLEASING.” We can accept that we are loved, but surely there is something we have to do to become pleasing. And that is broken religion.**

- I. The heart of this passage is verse 6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision count for anything, but **only faith working through love.**” Paul is teaching these churches, and us, that there is something about living in the faith and freedom of Christ that moves us to love. There is something about the freedom of Christ that allows us to be completely transformed by something other than ourselves. And the tension that is coming up in this passage is the motives behind why we obey. Because, let’s be honest, **most of us don’t necessarily want to live lives of sacrificial love.**
1. Maybe I am the only one, but there are times that I sacrifice for my wife not because I *want* to, but because she is my wife and I know what will happen if I don’t.
 2. Parents, I do not think I have ever joyfully gotten up in the middle of the night to change a diaper in the past three years we have had kids. Now, maybe some of you are much better parents than I am in that aspect, but the reason I do it is because, yes I absolutely love my kids, but the reason why I get up in the middle of the night is I want them to stop crying and go back to sleep, so that I can go back to sleep. You see the motive? Its not really about them, its about me.
- J. But Paul is urging us to have a desire to live lives of sacrificial love, lives that desire to serve others. But why is this so important? I mean, Paul is serious about this. He uses strong language in this passage to make it clear that he is not messing around. He says when we don’t live this way, we are *severed* from Christ. I don’t know about you, but severed usually doesn’t bring good images to my mind. **Paul is pointing out how important faith working through love is, because he realizes the hopelessness that exists without it.** Listen, if we live in this broken religion mentality that is constantly demanding that we become better...we will quickly realize how hopeless we truly are. We can try to change our actions. We can stop doing the wrong things, for a season, until we fall back into it, or replace it with some other sin. **Because the reality is, our power is hopeless to bring about the gospel freedom we desire.**
- K. Tim Keller tells a story of a woman named Beatrice Webb. She and her husband lived in the late nineteenth century in Britain, and they’re considered the founders of the social welfare structure of Britain. They decided, though they had been raised in the church, they renounced Christianity. In 1925, near the end of her life, Beatrice Webb, wrote this in an essay, “Somewhere in my diary, I wrote, ‘I have staked everything on the essential goodness of human nature,’ but now 35 years later I realize how permanent are the evil impulses and instincts in man and how little we can change these, for example, the greed of wealth and of power. We must continually be asking for better things from our own and from other persons human nature, but shall we ever get any response? Without a response, how can we shift social institutions from brutal struggle for existence and power to that of fellowship? No amount of knowledge or science will be of any avail unless we can curb these evil impulses and set free ourselves for good. Can this be done without the authoritative ethics associated with faith and a spirit of love at work in the universe?”

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- L. Beatrice worked the majority of her life to help people because, at the beginning she was investing in the goodness of people's hearts and wanted to serve them. After 35 years, she came to a very startling, dark, and truthful realization: each and every human on the planet is, as she puts it, evil. And she is correct when she describes that many of us have this quest for power or wealth or status, and that becomes our motives for life. And sadly, she formed this belief that nothing could stop this evil. What Beatrice Webb experienced is that **the human heart is in desperate need of transformation. You and I are in desperate need of transformation.**
- M. The problem for us is that we would rather believe that only external evil exists. In other words, that you and I, even though we make mistakes, our nature is not truly evil. That evil is not rooted in our hearts. Think about the emotions and the thoughts that go through your heart when you hear, "Your heart is evil." Or parents, when you face the reality that your child is evil. It's a hard truth to wrap your mind around. And the reason we tend to live in broken religion is because we believe that all we have to do is change our actions and become better.
- N. But Paul is revealing the problem of the human heart. He is saying that it is possible to change our actions, it may even be possible to change some of our attributes, but when it comes to our nature, there is a deep rooted evil that we will never be able to change.


O. Look at what Paul says:

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

- P. Every Sunday night, there is a group of High School students that gather here to hang out and to dive into Scripture with the goal of helping prepare them for the plans that await them after high school. And as we have been walking through the book of Galatians, last week I asked them this question, "How would you describe yourself?" It's a very broad and somewhat complicated question, and I would encourage you even now to think about it. How would you describe yourself? And there were a range of answers from athletic, to friend, to nerd. And I was thinking about that question for me this week. And if someone were to ask me, I would probably say something like, "I am a hard working minister, husband, father of two. I am a fairly outgoing person who has a desire for people to like me. I work hard to provide for my family and lead them in the best way I know how." Something like that. And what I have realized through this passage and through that question is, in some instances, I have used my broken idea of freedom as opportunity for the flesh. Here is what I mean: For me, being a husband and a father is my bottom line at times...it is what I am living for. I wake up in the morning so that I can give my family a good life and help my wife raise our kids the best way we can. Now, what that means for me at times, is that the reason we do certain things with our kids (read Bible stories, pray before meals, etc) is not necessarily out of this faith working through love, it's out of that desire that our kids would grow up to be obedient. It's because, as a parent, I want to become a better version of me. I want to be a better dad. I want to be a better husband. It's not because I am living in the gospel and have experienced the transforming love of God and I want to pour it out on my kids and on my wife. And that is a hard truth to face. **That the reality of my life is I think God demands that I become better as a dad and as a**

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husband and a follower, that the pressure is all on me to change. That's the only way I will be pleasing.

- Q. But what Paul says is “through love serve.” He is saying there needs to be a rebirth in our motivation for the things we do. He is not saying, “Well now that you know Christ, you don’t have to obey.” Rather, it is the freedom Christ has brought us that transforms, not only our actions and attributes, but our very evil nature. Just because we are following the rules, does not mean our hearts are reflecting our actions. And Paul tells us that when we live constantly trying to be better, we have made a huge sacrifice. Look again at verse 4:
- R. Listen, **when we try to make ourselves pleasing to God, all the burden is on us.** It demands us to do better. And Paul says, we have taken the work that Christ has done and given it up. We begin to bite and devour one another by comparing ourselves to each other. As long as the evil in us is less than the evil in them, then we are justified. As long as our good actions outweigh ours, we are living in freedom. And what God is calling us to is the belief that Christ has done all the work to bring us freedom. That **the purpose we love and serve is out of a desire to worship, not a desire to gain.** Faith working through love.
- S. How does that look for us? For me, the story of Steve Saint has always been a good example of this. Probably, many of you, have never heard of Steve Saint, but he is the son of Nate Saint. Nate was a missionary with Jim Elliot. And these two men, along with a few others, had a strong desire to go to Ecuador and share the gospel with one of the unreached tribes in the jungle. And, as probably many of you know, or you’ve seen the movie, these men tried to build a relationship with this tribe, did several fly by’s in their plane and brought them supplies. When they landed the first time in the region, they met three of the tribes men, even took one of them, George, on a plane ride. However, when they returned, they were ambushed by those same three men, along with several others, and speared to death. The bodies of these missionaries were found floating down the river a little while later. But what amazes me, is captured in this picture  On the right is Steve Saint, the son of Nate Saint, one of the men who were killed. And on the left, is “George” one of the men that killed his dad. There is a lot that speaks to my heart in this picture: (1) The smiles on their face, (2) Steve’s arm around George, (3) you can tell that this picture was taken in the same jungle that Nate and the others were killed. Steve was only five years old when his father was killed. Five years old when he became fatherless at the hands of people who his father was only trying to help. Steve would come to find out later that George was the one who gave the final spear that killed his dad. But when Steve was 9 years old, he made his first trip to this tribe. And today, Steve and George have, what would seem to you and I, a strange relationship. George would eventually come to faith in Christ, and Steve said in a recent interview, “I can’t imagine not loving George, a man who has adopted me as his own...” He goes on to say, “What these men meant for evil, God used for good. Given the chance to rewrite the story, I would not be willing to change it.”
- T. What strikes us about this story, isn’t that Steve was able to *forgive* George. Rather, what strikes us as odd about this story is that Steve was able to *love* him. Steve remembers as a young boy standing on the bank of dirt that separated his house from the sand and gravel airstrip. He watched his dad take off

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to fly in the jungle each morning, and then anxiously wait for his return. After a few days, his father didn't return. Finally one day, Steve's mom told him his father would never come home. But years since this tragedy, Steve has said this, "I have personally paid a high price for what happened, but I have also had a front row seat as the rest of the story has been unfolding for half a century. I believe only God could have fashioned such an incredible story from such a tragic event," That is gospel transformation. By me just becoming better, I wouldn't have to talk to the guy who killed my dad. I could say I forgive him and never have to see him. But the gospel, that brings a **powerful transformation to my very nature.**

- U. For us, faith working through love is not seeing the wickedness in the hearts of others, but it is seeing it within ourselves and realizing that the only true freedom is that which came at the cost of Christ. That gospel freedom allows us to love others with such a powerfully strange love that desires others to know Christ. Its the thing that Beatrice Webb struggled to find and what made others think strange of Steve Saint. That you and I, now, at this moment, get to live in the freedom that **We have been freed from a life of trying to "please" God - thru the finished work of Christ, that frees us to a live in the pleasure of God - for God's fame and glory.**