

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

July 9, 2023 "Galatians: The Call Back...to Grace"

I Intro.

We're fully into summer. Even though some of our regular activities are slowing down we still have things you're going to want to participate in. By now you've seen the appeal to address some building and financial needs we're having to fix. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Sunday.

If you joined us last Sunday for our church-wide fellowship, we hope you enjoyed some time to just hang out together. We were designed and built for community. And sometimes we just just need a relaxed time of gathering and enjoying each other. And we all had a great time.

So, now we're back in it. We did our June 'book book' series. And now we're in July and doing a book of the bible. And that book is Galatians. Let me tell you a little about the church and what they were facing. The church in Galatia was a fairly new church, and it found itself right in the middle of a culture that the people found challenging. There was rampant pleasure seeking, a strong emphasis on a formal higher education, a multiplicity of gods and idols (not all the idols were statues, but just important non religious values people were pursuing). And the people of the church were drawn towards the values of the society to the detriment of the church. We should be able to relate to this. Our society feels unfriendly to the church. We're often uncomfortable in it, and feel like things are getting out of control. And we don't know exactly how to respond to it. I want you to deeply feel your own reaction to what you see happening in our society so we can understand this church better..

What is your internal reaction to things happening in society?

What do you think should be the church's response to what's happening?

What you're feeling is identical to what the people in Galatia were feeling when they saw the power the values of society had over everyone, even in their church. And this letter to the church from Paul, was to address their reaction and response to what they were experiencing and feeling. We're only going to dip into Chapter 1 of Galatians today. But it's a strong word from Paul about their reaction. So, read **Galatians 1:6-10**. And we'll unpack what Paul was saying to the church.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What do you think the people were trying to do in response to the culture?

And this one is obvious, but we need to start here. What was Paul's reaction to how the church was trying to address some of their issues with the culture?

Paul pulled no punches addressing how the church at Galatia had responded poorly to the messiness of the culture it was in. He said their reactions were; *“turning away from God”*, *“practicing something different than the real ‘good news’”*, *“twisting the truth”*. These are harsh words for how the people were trying to fix what was happening in culture. The leaders of the church at Galatia were trying to enforce obedience to The Law, rather than let the Spirit work in people through grace. So, let’s talk about this enforcement of obeying The Law first.

What would be the draw or attraction to use rules and laws to control behavior?

And now the hard question. Why would Paul call doing that *“turning away from God”*?

We have to wrestle with the tension of what this church was ‘feeling’, how they responded, and how Paul is calling them back to the real gospel. Yes, we can understand the tension we also feel living in a culture that doesn’t feel friendly to Christianity. Living in a pluralistic society (one that has a rich diversity of beliefs and practices) can feel threatening and scary. Our country is becoming more diverse, in every conceivable way. And we have to learn to live as followers of Jesus in the same way that Jesus did. And that’s what Paul was challenging them to do.

Paul’s admonition is that the gospel is not about making everyone be good, and follow all the rules. In fact, Paul said two powerful things about The Law.

1. The Law’s role was to be a strict teacher, helping us know right from wrong, until Jesus came.
2. And...The Law doesn’t work like we think it does. The Law didn’t drive people to God. It didn’t make the nation of Israel more holy or more obedient. It just showed them how continually short they fell from being the people God called them to be.

How do you respond and wrestle with these two truths from Paul?

In this day and age, the lure and attraction to just making people follow rules and laws is strong...very strong. And an attraction to rule based religion is because The Law clearly defines what’s right and what’s wrong. It’s easy to make laws that divide good from bad. The problem with making The Law the foundation of what it means to follow Jesus, is that the only way The Law works is if you enforce it. And the only way to enforce The Law is to assign, appoint, people whose job is to monitor everyone’s behavior, reward those who obey, and punish those who don’t. And Paul was saying that’s not good news, the gospel, and not what Jesus came to do.

So, where does that leave us in a culture that makes it hard to be a follower of Jesus? We have to work on ourselves to be salt and light (sound familiar?) reflecting the love and kindness of God, rather than yielding to the natural urge of trying to make people live like we think they should.

III Challenge.

The first thing we need to say is that scripture has so much more relevance for us today than we often believe. The church at Galatia was facing the same world and culture we’re facing today. Very pluralistic, and secular. Being a follower of Jesus was just as difficult for them as it feels like for us. And their default was to make people do right by enforcing obedience to The Law. And Paul called this out as *“turning away from God”*, *“practicing something different than the real ‘good news’”*, *“twisting the truth”*. Pretty harsh words. But ones we need to wrestle with in an honest way.

So, as we wrap up this first Sunday let me close with this question.

How can you, each of us, live and practice our faith in such a way that we stay true to the...true gospel like Paul encouraged the church at Galatia to do?