

There Is One Gospel - Week 9

Galatians 5:1-15

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As we continue our series, THERE IS ONE GOSPEL, we pick up today where we left off last week. How do we live out our faith in Christ? How do we hold on to the good news of grace as a true and lasting gift from God? How do we rest in our identity as God's children?

What is at stake when we forget what Christ has done? What happens when we fail to trust that Jesus is enough? Why is it dangerous to take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing?

This is what Paul continues to address in the Galatians church — that Judaizers were insisting that Christians must be circumcised in order to be saved. This “requirement” was far more than a painful surgical procedure — it was a theological symbol. And simply put — they were adding to what is actually required for salvation. If you want to read more, look later at Acts 15. The issue is clear, that some “believers” were saying that circumcision and ordering people to keep the law of Moses were necessary to be saved. A confusing line was being drawn — trust that Jesus is enough or be good enough to save yourself.

In our day — we may see this specific issue as irrelevant, but legalism in many forms still shows up today, where secondary preferences become of ultimate importance, and thus become division lines in the Church.

Let's look at Galatians 5:1

Christ Has Set Us Free

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

John Stott makes this comment — “The Christian freedom Paul describes is freedom of conscience, freedom from the tyranny of the law, the dreadful struggle to keep the law with the aim of winning the favour of God. It is the freedom of acceptance with God and of access to God through Christ.”¹

The next few verses get to the heart of the matter...

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.

Paul's point — if you think that circumcision is required for salvation, then what Jesus has done is of no value to you. You are trading his scars for one of your own. You don't think Jesus is enough.

¹ Stott - The Message of Galatians p102

You may as well try keeping the whole of the law. You are falling away from the doctrine of grace – falling away from the gift of grace that announces THIS IS WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR YOU.

Either you believe that salvation is a gift from God – something He has done for you OR you believe salvation is by some impossible human achievement of good works.

Paul pivots with his pastor's heart – instead aiming at them, he now puts an arm around them and says “we” – people this is what “we believe” this is what “we” are waiting for – this is what “we” are living for...

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.

We ourselves wait eagerly for the hope of righteousness. We wait in hope.

We believe Jesus counts for everything we need.

We work out our faith in love. Our faith – expresses itself in love.

We love because we have faith in Christ.

We obey because we believe Jesus IS enough.

⁷ You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸ This persuasion is not from him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Paul is reminding this church – you were running well. He knew they knew the truth – but false teachers stepped in...

Here are the marks of running well – it looks like people committed to knowing and loving Jesus, people committed to His honor and glory, people who trust in and treasure what Jesus has accomplished for their sake and his glory.

False teachings will change the race – and keep people running, but in the wrong direction. False teachers hinder / distract / discourage / others from obeying the truth.

If Jesus + nothing is not enough... then false teachers will try this

Jesus + prosperity

Jesus + social issues

Jesus + politics

Jesus + nationalism

Jesus + no suffering

Jesus + redefining sexuality

Jesus + secular humanism

Jesus + racism or ethnic elitism

Paul says – this is not from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. In the NT, leaven / yeast is often representative of false teaching and spreading sin. Like yeast that causes all the bread dough to rise – often false teachers will influence many people.

What he says next – is bold and indicative of Paul’s confidence in God, his confidence in the work of Christ, and how angry he is at these false teachers.

¹⁰ I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. ¹¹ But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. ¹² I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

His hope – is that these followers of Jesus would hold fast to what is true, that Jesus is enough. His confidence is that these false teachers will be judged by God – they will bear their own penalty.

His persecution – for preaching the gospel – was ongoing – because the proclamation of what Christ has done, the “offense of the cross” still offends people. It did then and still does now because it stands in victory over human greatness and the false religion of human achievement.

Paul’s anger against these false teachers – was such that he wished they would castrate themselves. That’s anger on another level... Forget the scalpel, here’s an axe...

Then in a perfect segway – he brings it back around to these followers of Christ – he says you were called to freedom brothers. This is what freedom looks like...

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.

(Ga 5:1–15)

True freedom in Christ stands between two extremes: legalism and license
 Legalism is trying to earn salvation with God by works and trying to be good enough
 License is a lazy and permissive misapplication of the doctrine of grace

Freedom is not open range for your flesh – but a blood bought opportunity to serve one another in love.

To be free before God and free from ourselves is a priceless gift that Jesus has given us through his death and resurrection.

When Paul sees his life – he sees Christ living in him – he has too – because he knows this life in the flesh still faces sin on a daily basis. Sin lives in us – but when we live by faith in Jesus we experience true freedom.

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

So when Paul says – brothers – see your freedom to serve one another through love.... He had a gospel community in mind.

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. (Gal 5:13)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer "Thus it must be a decisive rule of all Christian community life that each individual is prohibited from talking about another Christian in secret." Why? As he says, "Often we combat our evil thoughts [i.e., the flesh] most effectively if we absolutely refuse to allow them to be verbalized." He then offers this encouragement: "Where this discipline of the tongue is practiced right from the start, individuals will make an amazing discovery. They will be able to stop constantly keeping an eye on others, judging them, condemning them, and putting them in their places and thus doing violence to them. They can now allow other Christians to live freely, just as God has brought them face to face with each other." ²

Here's how you can see the difference between faith in Jesus versus your flesh to lead you towards sin when we think about life together.

Faith in Jesus says I forgive you to the people who have hurt you.
Flesh looks like unforgiveness and holding grudges.

Faith in Jesus says I won't be easily offended.
Flesh says I cannot overlook minor offenses.

Faith in Jesus says I will believe the best in others because Jesus you are still at work in them.
Flesh says I should speak evil about other brothers and tear other people down.

Faith in Jesus says I will honor other people in humility as you have honored me Jesus.
Flesh says I can gossip, stir up dissension, and be harsh because they hurt me.

Faith in Jesus says I can be angry and yet choose not to sin.
Flesh says I can be angry and therefore do and say whatever I want.

Faith in Jesus says I will love people like you have loved me Jesus.
Flesh says I can choose to remain bitter and withdraw the forgiveness I already gave that person.

² Bonhoeffer, D. Life Together. p94

Trusting in Jesus does not mean that how you live doesn't matter — it matters all the more because of what He has accomplished for you. Grace will lead you to repentance and cause you to obey, grace will compel your faith to be expressed in love.

Todd Wilson makes this observation – *“Americans tend to think of freedom primarily in political or economic terms – Biblically speaking however, freedom is essentially relational. You're free insofar as you're rightly related to God... We were called to freedom when God called us into relationship with himself through his Son Jesus Christ. When God calls us to himself, he frees us from ourselves.”*³

The whole law is fulfilled in this “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

In light of your freedom – how can you serve others in love?
What does faith in Jesus expressing itself in love look like in your life?

Today, who is one person you can honor in the name of Jesus?
Who is one person that you can encourage in the name of Jesus?
Who is one person that you can joyfully serve today?
Who do you need to forgive?
Who do you need to forgive again?
What grievances do you need to leave with Jesus?
What bitterness do you need to let go of?

Again, The whole law is fulfilled in this “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

The Gospel – the announcement of what Jesus has done is astounding.

He has taken on the penalty of our sins so that we can have a right standing with God and now are free to love and serve each other as dearly known, loved, and forgiven children.

This good news that we are saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from ourselves, and will be saved to God forever — truly is good news.

³ Galatians, Todd Willson & Kent Hughes p188