

"GALATIANS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

June 28, 2026, 6:00 pm

Text for Sermon: Galatians 1:1-9; 2:15-16, 20-21; 5:22-26

Introduction.

This next weekend will be a great celebration of the 250th anniversary of our independence from England. It marks our freedom from the oppressive British rule under King George III and taxation without representation.

Freedom is tremendous gift, often underappreciated because we have enjoyed it for so long and we have no memory of living without freedom.

Can we even image a scenario where a large group of people started lobbying for the US to return to being under the rule of the British monarchy. Sounds totally crazy, right?

How about another example from closer to our time in history. In the lifetime of many of us we remember the historic occasion in November 1989 of the fall of the Berlin Wall that divided the German capital into communist East Berlin and free democratic West Berlin.

TV news showed the ecstatic joy in the lives of millions to people as there lives suddenly and dramatically change and they were free from lies, oppression and tyranny, from a total lack of freedom.

Could we conceive of there being a lobby among Germans for a return of communist rule and recreating a divided Germany, East and West German and East and West Berlin?

We hear of countries fighting for their independence, we don't ever hear of countries fighting to for dependence.

This is effectively what is going on in the region of Galatia in southern Turkey were Paul and Barnabas had planted churches on his first missionary journey.

Judaizers were early sect of Jewish-Christian believers in the first century who insisted that Gentile (non-Jewish) converts to Christianity had to observe the full Law of Moses—especially circumcision and dietary restrictions—to be saved. They sought to make living under the Mosaic Law and according to Jewish customs a requirement of the Christian faith.

The Letter to the Galatians.

The letter to the Galatians unlike all of Paul's other letters was not written to one individual church or to one individual, but to a group of Gentile churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe.

They say you never forget your first love. These churches were Paul's first love. They hold his first and strongest affection, which explains the strong tone in his writing.

Paul wrote this letter after his first missionary journey after he had returned to Antioch, the mother church that had sent Paul out to plant churches among the Gentiles. This letter may be the earliest of all of Paul's letters and the earliest of all the books of the NT.

He had received reports that false apostles had come in after Paul and were perverting the Gospel and teaching error and lies.

This was the first major controversy to confront the early church and threatened to divide the church. Soon after this letter there was a major council gathered in Jerusalem to address this issue head-on and give a definitive answer. That is the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

It was theological and racial, between Gentile converts and Jewish converts. The Galatians were being taught a false Gospel and they were in grave spiritual danger.

This letter is different from all of Paul's other letters for one notable, outstanding reason. There is no opening thanksgiving, no praise, no attaboy.

Why not? Because Paul is upset, no outraged over the Galatians departure from the true Gospel Paul proclaimed to them. They are becoming

enamored with another Gospel, a false Gospel, a Gospel of works, of self-righteousness. He wastes no time in getting right to the point.

Paul is incensed by the insanity of abandoning the Gospel of grace and going back to trying to earn their salvation through keeping some of the Jewish laws.

And why does that bother Paul so much? Because of what is at stake when you follow another Gospel, a false Gospel. This is a heaven and hell issue.

Paul knows the danger. He has spent much of his life trying to obey the law of Moses.

Philippians 3:4-6 If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

If that were possible, then there would have been no need for Jesus to die on the cross.

Chapter 1

In order to discredit Paul's Gospel, the Judaizers set out to discredit Paul himself and question his apostleship and his authority. They launched an all-out personal attack.

So Paul begins his defense of the Gospel he proclaimed with a defense of his apostleship. In verse one comes out swinging.

Apostleship

1:1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

He is not a secondary apostle, or a second class apostle coming after all the others. He is an apostle in the strongest sense of the word, by God, not from man.

Think about it, why in the world would a professional, career, ladder climbing Pharisee give all that up to follow some crucified criminal, unless God intervened. Why would Paul take up this message, and be persecuted for it?

Gospel

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

Paul sets the stage for a right understanding of that controversy in his comments of verse 4. Grace and peace come from the Lord Jesus, who gave Himself for our sins (v. 4). He did this so that He might deliver us from this present evil age (v. 4), and this was all done in accord with the will of God the Father (v. 4) (Doug Wilson).

The Gospel plain and simple is that we are justified with God, made right with God, only by His grace received through faith in Jesus alone, and in nothing else. Especially not in the works of the law as expressed in the Law of Moses.

Being justified by God's grace means we are free from trying to win God's approval or favor by our own efforts or works. We are no longer in bondage to the laws of the OT.

Paul denounces in the strongest language those who rob God of His glory and try to change the Gospel.

Chapter 2

Paul shows how dangerous and intense this controversy is. The Apostle Peter himself was being influenced by the Judaizers, fearing the circumcision party. Peer pressure got to him.

I hadn't seen this before but Peter was falling into the same sin he fell into before the crucifixion when he denied knowing or having any knowledge of Jesus. Here he denied the Gospel, not with words, but in his actions. He feared the circumcision group and tried to straddle the fence and look good to them.

Paul rebuked Peter and opposed him to his face and puts the issue in the clearest light.

Galatians 2:16 *We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ*, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because *by works of the law no one will be justified*.

Trying to hold Christ together with keeping the law of Moses is like trying to hold together balloons and porcupines.

It is all or nothing with Jesus.

Chapter 3

Different Gospel

Galatians 3:2-5 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith

They were saying the Spirit was received by works of the law rather than by hearing with faith. They were perfected by the flesh (human effort) rather than by the Spirit.

They distorted the Gospel saying justification (being made right with God) and sanctification (living a life of growing holiness) came from human effort rather than faith and the Spirit.

Galatians 3:10-11 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “*The righteous shall live by faith.*”

Chapter 5-6

One of the Judaizers arguments was that this newfound freedom in Christ, would lead to a sinful, lawless lifestyle. If it is all grace, then we can do as we please.

Paul addresses this. In the final two chapters applying the doctrine of grace alone to practical Christian living.

Galatians 5:13, 16, 22-23 You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Paul argues as we are set free by grace and faith, this is not a freedom to sin, but a freedom to pursue holiness in the power of the Spirit.

Salvation is the work of the Spirit. External religious rites such as circumcision are of no value in the realm of the Spirit.

Finally, Paul concludes.

Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Because of the cross, everything else is secondary. The world is crucified to us when we no longer look to the world or anything in the world for salvation, value, worth or identity. The cross is the death of any significance in any material thing in this life. The cross demolishes human effort and pride.

Don't make your identity or worth dependent on anything that can be taken from you. Not your job, your family, your friends, your health, your cell phone.

We took the cell phones away from the students for the whole of serve week. No phones.

One person made an observation that those phones were those students' identity. They have only known a life with a cell phone, it is their lifeline, their dependence.

But the kids did fine, what a great break to find out their phone was not their identity. Crucify the world and all its attachments.

Boast—or glory—only in the cross, we'll discover that Jesus gives us a sense of value and a depth of joy that's unshakably secure and unlike anything else in this world.

Jesus

Jesus at incredible cost to Himself, purchased our freedom from the bondage of slavery to sin. This freedom becomes ours by faith in Jesus.

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Implications and application.

It is easy to think this issue of Judaizers and a false Gospel is a first century problem, irrelevant to us. But nothing is further from the truth. This false view of the Gospel is deeply ingrained in all of us and in all churches. It is hard to root out.

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

How do we submit to the yoke of slavery? How do we fall back into the bondage of slavery to what is contrary to the Gospel?

When we add anything to Christ in order to gain acceptance or favor with God.

The Galatians added circumcision.

We add God loves me more or accepts me because:

I do my devotions every day.

I don't drink or swear or shop on Sunday or do what pagans do.
I send my kids to the right schools.
I support the right political party.
I attend the evening service.

It is not that these things in themselves are wrong or bad, but when they become the measure of our standing before God or our righteousness, they become "circumcision."

When our relationship with God is driven by performance rather than grace and faith.

We deny the Gospel when we say or imply Christ is not enough.

Believing God loves me more because I am good and loves me less when I fail.

Slavery says: I obey so that I might be accepted.

The gospel says: I obey because I am accepted.

When we live as though Christ has not already done enough.

We do this when we carry around guilt or shame that Jesus' blood has already covered.

We do this when we carry condemnation that Christ has taken away.

We do this when we remain covered up in our sin or sinful past.

"For freedom Christ has set us free."

So "Why are you living as though Christ has not already done enough?"

When we rely on the flesh instead of the Spirit.

The Spirit produces Christ-likeness as seen in the fruit of the Spirit.

You might be in bondage to a false Gospel if you compare yourself and your worth to others, like the comparisons between the Gentiles and the Jews.

We become like Peter whenever fear of people becomes stronger than fear of God

Modern Peters include us when:

- when we stay silent because coworkers might laugh.
- when we avoid identifying with unpopular believers.
- when we soften biblical truth to gain acceptance.

- when we compromise convictions to fit into our social circle.

The bottom line is whatever degree you look to yourself to justify yourself, is the degree to which you are undervaluing Christ and diminishing His sacrifice and robbing Him of His glory. And to that degree you rob yourself of your freedom and put yourself in bondage.

Ask yourself these questions that will expose your view of Gospel and which Gospel you live by.

- ***What makes you feel good about yourself?***
- What makes me feel that God accepts me today?
- What makes me think God is disappointed with me?
- Do I measure my standing before God by Christ's obedience or my own?
- Whose approval most influences my behavior—God's or people's?
- Where am I trusting my own effort instead of the Spirit's power?
- Is my obedience flowing from gratitude for grace or an attempt to earn God's favor?

Galatians 2:20 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 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

In Christ be free and live free.

Prayer: Father, help us to respond to your glorious grace poured out to us in Christ's salvation with gratitude expressed in desiring to live a life of holiness, not in our own strength but in the power of the Holy Spirit, given to us as yet more grace from you.