

Introduction:

- A. [“Dueling Preachers” – A Judaizer and the Apostle Paul each come to Galatia.]
- B. This was the greatest conflict in the early church. Take the time that Paul called out Peter—the early church’s two most significant leaders, a situation which Paul recounts in Gal. 2. Listen to **Gal 2:11-12...** In other words, Peter—*Rock*—was afraid that he’d be seen as a second class Christian if kept eating with the Gentile believers, who were uncircumcised. In other words, they were Christians but they most certainly were *not* converts to Judaism. Jews—including many of the Jewish believers—looked down their noses at the Gentiles, even if they came to Christ, as sort of spiritual half-breeds.

V.13... Even Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, the most gracious guy you’d ever meet. So suddenly we have a deep rift in the church based on the assumption that there was a kind of inherent righteous advantage to those who kept the Jewish identity laws from the Old Testament—circumcision, Sabbaths and the other special days, certain foods and other customs. Imagine the effect on those Gentiles? It was becoming pretty obvious that if they were to be with the mature believers they would have to obey these Jewish identity laws.

But then Paul puts the matzo on the bottom shelf in v.14: *“When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet [up to now] you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. [That was good.] How is it, then, that [now, since these men have come from Jerusalem] you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?’”*

Basically, the Jewish believers saw the law of Moses having two distinct parts. They knew they had not been able to keep the moral and spiritual laws—that they had sinned against God—and that Jesus had died on the cross to forgive their sins. Paul reminds them of that in **Gal 2:15-16**, *“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”* I’m sure they believed that and were grateful. But they saw the other part of the law—the parts that defined their distinct Jewish identity (and which were much easier to obey)—as still in force. What they didn’t see was that they were adding duties to the free gift of the gospel.

- C. Paul had heard that the church in Galatia was starting to swing to the arguments of these Judaizers so he wrote this fierce letter to set them straight. I want to take you on an overview of his argument in this letter. Then I encourage you to go home and read it more closely.

I. EVERYONE WHO IS SAVED BY GOD’S GRACE THROUGH CHRIST IS EQUALLY HIGHBORN AND WELCOME AT THE SAME TABLE. (Gal 2:19-4:8)

- A. First, Paul argues that believers in Jesus Christ can no longer be condemned by the Law of Moses because we were crucified with Christ. **Gal 2:19-20:** *“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

Illus.: There's a knock at your door and there stands a sheriff with a copy of the Ten Commandments. "I'm here to arrest you on the charges of lying and Sabbath-breaking."

You nod. "True enough," you say. "I did those things. I have no excuse. I'm dead to rights. But you need to check your records because I already died for those offenses. Well, actually I didn't die. I trusted Jesus to die for me. But that old lawbreaker-me is now as dead as a doornail. Not coming back. Once dead, always dead."

The sheriff says, "If you're dead, how can you be standing here talking to me?"

"Oh, this is Jesus living in me. I didn't just turn over a new leaf. I am a new creation. I was born again. I am deeply committed to being a righteous person now but even when I sin that old law cannot condemn me."

- B. So Paul's point here is if "every debt that you ever had has been paid up in full by the grace of the Lord," and then you decide that there are still *some* laws we must keep or we will be condemned, you undermine all of God's grace. It's like you cross back over a state line and are now condemned by all those laws again.

So **v.21** says, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" What those Judaizers were doing was setting aside the grace of God when they suggested that it was necessary to obey the laws about Jewish identity. *We can handle this part of the law ourselves. We don't need God's grace here. Just do it!* But Paul says, if you're going to depend on *some* of the law then "Christ died for nothing," because you're assuming you can, at least to some degree, stand before God on your own merits.

- C. In the next verses, beginning in **ch.3**, Paul says, “*Did someone cast a spell on you that you are so oblivious!? When you put your faith in Christ do you remember your experiences with the Holy Spirit? Do you remember the powerful sense of freedom and forgiveness, of life? Do you remember the miracles? Do you get any of that by reverting back to law-keeping? That’s a trip back to the graveyard.*”
- D. Then he takes them all the way back to the great promise God made to Abraham in Gen 12: “*All nations will be blessed through you.*” That means the Gentiles. And what in Abraham would bring that blessing to the Gentiles. The Bible says, “*Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.*” Abraham was often a righteous man but the righteousness God gave him credit for was God’s free gift to him in response to Abraham’s faith. Which led to the principle and promise: “*the righteous will live by faith.*” What was the blessing promised to the Gentiles? The Son of Abraham, Jesus the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit whom Jesus has sent to dwell in us. That is how we can live the God-blessed life. So **Gal 3:14** concludes, “*He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*”
- E. Paul comes to his first major conclusion in **3:26-27**, “*So in Christ Jesus you are **all children of God** through faith, for **all of you** who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*” It is as if we are in a room full of siblings, all bearing a striking family resemblance, all equal heirs of the Father’s treasure, all dressed in the same Christ-like robes and all having the same Holy Spirit—God’s living breath. You can almost picture Paul looking over his bifocals at the lifelong Jews in their prayer shawls

and then over at the nervous Gentile newbies. Then he says, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Now let’s take Communion... *together.*

There are no second-class citizens in God’s kingdom. There is no high table and low table. **We are all equally highborn by the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

The other major theme in this book is freedom. The Judaizers wanted the Gentiles to be bound by the Jewish identity laws, especially circumcision, but Paul says *if you do that you must keep the whole law and forfeit the grace of God.* So the principle is in **Gal 5:1**, *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”*

II. OUR FREEDOM IN THE SPIRIT ENTITLES US “TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER HUMBLY IN LOVE” (Gal 4:9-6:10)

This part of Paul’s argument isn’t so complex but it is certainly counterintuitive.

A. There’s an old hymn that says,

*“Free from the law, O happy condition.
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.”*

While that’s certainly true it doesn’t mean our lives are ungoverned. We’re not spiritual libertarians with everyone doing what is right in our own eyes. **Gal 5:6**, *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**”* Faith in Christ always leaves the fingerprints of love. That’s the only identity marker you need to look for or value.

- B. Well, isn't that just another law I can't keep, a law sure to condemn me in the end? Loving other people is hard! **Gal 5:13-16:** *"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, **serve one another humbly in love**. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. [That was what this spiritual caste system was causing in Galatia.] So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." So God's law to love your neighbor hasn't changed but we now have God the Spirit to walk us through it—to empower us, to actually generate the love for others within our hearts, and to teach us how to love well.*
- C. When we "walk by the Spirit" to "serve one another humbly in love," there are virtues that will grow in our lives, "the fruit of the Spirit": *"love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."* [5:22-26] Again, those are the sour, worm-infested fruit of spiritual one-upmanship.
- D. In a wonderful paradox, when we are set free from the law we can finally keep the law—we can love our neighbor as ourselves. Our faith is at its best and most natural when it is loving others, and there's nothing God wants to help us with more than that. So, we can have a church that is *"conceited, provoking and envying each other,"* or we can get in step with God's Spirit and *"serve one another humbly in love."*

E. Let me wrap up with an example. Last Sunday Amit and Nels told you about a new outreach idea we read about called the **1-degree rule**. A few months ago the Elders began trying this. In that first meeting we each shared our assessment of how we doing personally in being agents of God’s grace to people who don’t know him. Frankly, we were all pretty humbled by our responses.

Then Amit asked us what would be one thing we could do better in the next month to move up the scale one degree. Some talked about being more bold with friends, or to pray specifically for someone, or just to step into relationships more readily. Then the next month we reported in. Again, not all that impressive but we made some progress.

Now here’s the thing. You could take this 1-degree rule as a kind of guilt-inducing requirement. You wouldn’t like it. You might protest it. Or try to do it out of a sense of obligation. And you will resent it or be shamed by it.

Or you could say to the Lord, *“I see how this would help me to be more like Jesus and I would love to be a brighter light for him. I’m going to pray that the Holy Spirit will walk me into this—giving me the opportunities, or the hand in my back, or the words to say. I can’t wait to see how he will work!”* Do you see the difference?

Conclusion

Here, rising out of that tense conflict in the early church, are two great privileges of grace:

- Everyone who is saved by God’s grace through Christ is equally highborn and welcome at the same table.
- Our freedom in the Spirit entitles us “to serve one another humbly in love”.