

The Weekly Word

Aug 3-9, 2015

Galatians is a book of faith and liberty. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, August 3: Galatians 1- No other gospel...

Paul is adamant that there is no other gospel other than what he preached and anyone who preachers/teaches another gospel, another way to God, should be eternally condemned. Those are strong words. Paul has not yet explained the Gospel he preached compared to those perverting the gospel but it occurred to me that Paul gave a strong hint with his grace and peace statement in verses 3-5. He writes, *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Paul's Gospel, the Gospel he received via revelation directly from God, centers on Jesus *who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

Jesus is God's way of salvation. Jesus rescued those who believed in Him from the present evil age. This was God, the Father's will, way and plan. And this is the heart of the Gospel. We cannot earn our way to God. We cannot atone for our sins by ourselves. We cannot be rescued by any human plan, ingenuity, dedication or hard work. NO sacrifice or ritual performed by human beings can rescue a single person. Only Jesus *who gave himself for our sins* can rescue us.

This is the Gospel... this is grace... this is God's way. Period. There is no other way.

I marveled at the Gospel and at all Jesus did for me... for us... for all who believe. My heart warmed and prayers began to well up in me... Prayers of thanks and wonder.

O, God, I praise You and I bless You and I thank You. Jesus did for me what I never could have done for myself. Jesus rescued me by giving His life a ransom for mine. Jesus paid the penalty my sins deserved. He forgave and took my penalty. I am blessed and redeemed because of Jesus. Praise You Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen and Amen.

Tuesday, August 4: Galatians 2- Christ alone...

Now the true colors of Galatians comes out. Must a person who is a non-Jew become a Jew in order to follow Jesus and be saved? Must a Jew who wants to follow Jesus continue to keep the Jewish Law? Answer to both. NO

Faith in Jesus –the Gospel message we saw in summary in Chapter 1 verse 3-5 –is all that is needed to be a Christ-follower and be rescued and redeemed. Paul was so adamant about this that he opposed Peter in public when he observed Peter showing the slightest deviance from this truth.

My thoughts and conversations with the Lord traveled in 2 directions as I pondered this truth.

First, I wondered and considered if there were areas in my life where I am trusting in something I had done or do rather than trust in Christ alone. Is my faith in the fact that I worship weekly, I take communion regularly, I was baptized, etc.? I thought about my daily times with the Lord. Do I trust in “my consistent devotions” or in Jesus?

I examined and probed my life... God's way is Christ alone. Although there are activities I do that strengthen my faith (worship, giving, daily times of prayer and scripture, sacraments, etc.) these do not earn me brownie points or 'salvation' points. My rescue is solely dependent on Jesus' love and gift. Nothing else.

After some time I found myself examining to see if I put certain people at arms length because of things they believe or how they were raised or their nationality or culture. Isn't that what Peter began to do when he would no longer eat with Gentiles? If Paul or God were to look at my life would I need to be called out like Peter was called out?

This was harder for me to do. Everywhere I look I see a polarized world. The likelihood is that I polarize, too, but I do not even see it. I sat quietly bringing myself into the light of Christ. It is the best I could do this morning...

O, Jesus, Spirit, Father show me where I have polarizing lenses on and do not see people as You see them. Show me where I treat people differently and inappropriately because of my prejudices and judgments.

Lord, that I might reflect You more clearly and accurately, I pray. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, August 5: Galatians 3- Good News...

Galatians is a strong and powerful letter. Faith in God comes through faith in Jesus Christ. It cannot be earned or merited. It comes as fulfillment of a promise, the promise given to Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

This chapter concludes with a stirring declaration: *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. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (26-29).*

After inserting these verses, I found myself staring at them. The centrality of Jesus Christ radiated out. Five references to Christ or Christ Jesus in three sentences. And they are not passing references; they are core to the understanding of the sentences.

- Paul begins, *So in Christ...* and continues
- Baptized into Christ
- Clothed ... with Christ
- All are one in Christ Jesus
- Belong to Christ

Each one of these phrases describes a person connected to Jesus Christ. Being 'in Christ' and 'belonging to Christ,' is the defining connection that makes a person a child of God and heir of the promise given to Abraham. These are astounding words spoken by a Jew who before his encounter with Jesus would have claimed that his bloodline as a Jew made him an heir of Abraham and therefore a child of God.

When Jesus came, a new way to be connected with God was established... the way of belonging to Christ, being baptized into Christ. And this way is established through a promise God made rather than a set of laws we must keep! GOSPEL... GOOD NEWS!

I sit this morning, early light creating a vast array of dancing colors outside in the yard. Crisp wisps of morning air tickle my cheeks as thoughts of my Lord Jesus settle upon me. God has lifted the burden of earning my status as His child and granted it to me and to anyone and everyone who would belong to Christ Jesus. This thought, this truth, is so freeing and so life

giving. My heart is set free to love God –the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit- to love with my whole heart as a response to God’s love and promise.

No need to earn or work for God’s love... God granted it through His promise and now I can live into it and love Him and others because my life is filled with His presence.

I belong to Christ Jesus. Do you? Oh my, it is so freeing and life giving...

Thanks and praise to God for His incredible promise of life and invitation into His family through belonging to Jesus. Lord God, words escape me... my spirit sings but my lips are still, as joy fills me, as I bask in being Your child... Thank You, Lord God for this gift... Amen.

Thursday, August 6: Galatians 4- Rules or faith?...

Paul’s elaborate argument is becoming clear. Some Galatians are returning to the ‘law.’ In other words, one must become a Jew and practice the entire law in order to follow Jesus. Paul’s word... you cannot have it both ways. If you are under the Law then you are not under faith in Jesus. The Law never could save. The Law never gave the Holy Spirit and the Law won’t do that now. But faith in Jesus can save, will save, and did give the Holy Spirit.

I am not tempted to ‘return’ to Judaism. I never was a Jew. But sometimes the subtle temptation to earn my way into God’s good graces or perform particular religious rituals to help ensure my salvation, does creep into my thinking and living. This letter of Galatians reminds me it is faith in Jesus... and only faith in Jesus that opens the floodgates of God’s blessings of being part of God’s faith family.

The simplicity of the Gospel is sometimes a bit scary, because it is so simple. I am reminded of Naaman in the Old Testament. He traveled to Israel to be healed of leprosy but when Elijah told him all he had to do was bathe in the Jordan he was angry. “I could have bathed in the river back home. Had he asked me to do some thing great I would have done it...(2Kings 5)” And he left angrily. Fortunately he came to his senses and returned to the prophet and did the simple thing he was told and was healed. What I see in this story is that sometimes we are willing to do that which is great or hard to receive our reward. However, when we are asked only to do something simple we think, It can’t be, I didn’t do enough’.

We are odd sometimes....

All God asks of us is to believe in Jesus and live from that posture of belief. God’s reward for faith in Jesus... we are heirs, children of God.

Lord, I am praising You for Your gift of grace!!! What a gift. What love. Praise be to You. Amen!!!

Friday, August 7: Galatians 5- Faith expressed in love...

God’s Word in Galatians 5 is wonderfully rich in meaning and meditation points. Although I paused to praise God at a number of places in my reading, it was verse 6 which drew me to ponder God, my Savior.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Circumcision, the sign of the first covenant, is of no value. In fact non-circumcision is of no value as well. Paul is speaking of spiritual value. Neither action nor the birthright/nationality generally associated with circumcision is of any spiritual value. Paul puts it plainly. *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.* The only act of spiritual value is faith (in Jesus, that is) expressed in love... love for God and others.

I stared at the word **only**. No mixing of various religious acts... no circumcision, no lighting of this or that incense, no special prayers or meditation 'oms' is of spiritual value. None of this can earn a person a closer more connected relationship with the God of creation. *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

Only faith in Christ... the 'in Christ' is not in the sentence above but is clearly present from the context of the paragraph. It has been from the beginning and will be to the end all about Jesus. Jesus is the source and supply of our faith, nothing else is required and nothing more is to be added.

Only faith in Christ expressed in love... want to do something to strengthen your faith? Put your faith in Jesus to work in acts of love for God –Father, Son and Spirit– or put your faith in Jesus to work in acts of love for others. Love is the natural response to God who rescued us through Jesus' death on the cross. God put love into action and so should we...

And so my thoughts went to how can I love today... love God and others.

I can talk with God, I can speak of God as my conversations allow. I can look for ways to let the Fruit of the Spirit mentioned in verses 22-23 become realities in my life. Any and all of these will put my faith into action in love.

What a delightful day in God's lap this morning... ☺

Lord, thank You for the delight of my time with You in world and meditation. You are so good. Your love for me never ceases to astound me. I am blessed to be Your child. Walk with me today, Lord. Be in my conversations and my thoughts. Help me to open my life to others and in so doing, express the love You have placed in me to the others I meet today. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, August 8: Galatians 6- Keep on doing good...

Paul ends his letter with a knock out punch. Verse 12-15 sums up his letter's main point. What counts is not circumcision and following the Law but being a new creation... through faith in the cross of Christ. This is a great truth to hold onto!

And yet, it was verses 9-10 where my heart was drawn by the Spirit to meditate and ponder. *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Being a new creation in Christ impacts and affects how I am to live and verse 9 gives me a plumb line for living... do good for others. Don't give up, do good! Think about others, look out for others, whether believers or non-believers... look to build them up.

As I walk around today, I want my thoughts to be "God, how might I do good to and for the people around me?..."

Lord, Jesus, help me to reflect You as I live today... in the deeds that I do and words that I say. In Your name Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Sunday, August 9 2015, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.