**The Letter to the Soul Set Free**

**Freedom that Comes Through Faith
Galatians 3:1-14**

Well good morning. How is everyone this morning?

Grab your Bibles and turn to Galatians 3. If you don’t have a Bible, grab a hardback black on in a pew somewhere there around you, if you don’t own a Bible, that is our gift to you.

Well, Galatians is the letter to the soul set free. You can divide it into three parts: Part one is a testimony of freedom…and that covers the first two chapters. Part two is a theology of freedom, that is chapters 3-4. Part three is our transformation by freedom and that is the last two chapters.

We finished up part one last week…diving now into part two, the theology of freedom.

My guess is that if you grew up in church…you might have grown up singing this song (Play video)

Now I seriously considered having us all stand up and sing it and do the motions…just simply because it would be very funny…I mean, could you imagine some of us doing (act out…)

Now…singing that line over and over and over again might be a little weak, the theology of that song: That father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had father Abraham…and that I am one of those sons and if you are a believer you are as well…and we should praise God for that—that theology is spot on. It is in fact, taken directly from the text that we are going to study today. Let’s read about it:

(Read Galatians 3:1-14)

Pray—

Father, your word this morning has glorious truths that will lead to what 1 Peter says: a rejoicing with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. Spirit of God, I pray that you will prepare the hearer for these words. I pray that you will move my mouth so that glorious truths will be clear and bring overwhelming joy to the heart of your people and the opening of the eyes of the blind to see the crucified Christ.

This is a miraculous work that only you can do and I pray that you, Spirit of the Risen Christ, will fill this room and fill every heart for the glory of the name of the risen Christ. Father in Heaven, speak to us through your word. It’s in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Paul’s point in this text is that the freedom that we have in Christ is a freedom that comes through faith. He starts off by asking:

1. A Series of Questions (vs. 1-6)

The first question is in verse 1: (Read it)

I like the way that JB Phillips translates this…he gets to the heart of what Paul is saying, “O you dear idiots of Galatia…surely, you can’t be so idiotic…”

That really is what Paul is saying here…perhaps not quite that insulting…but close to it. When he says, “Who has bewitched you?” The idea there is “who hypnotized you?” Or as it is in your outline:

* 1. Who swindled you? (vs. 1)

They have been completely duped through their foolishness.

Then Paul says, “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.” Now, there’s a wordplay here: The Greek word for “bewitch” to the original reader would have meant that they have been tricked through evil eyes. OK…so that’s a problem…they’ve been bewitched…they have these evil eyes.

And Paul says, “Hey, hey, hey…to fix that evil eye, you have to get your eyes back on the cross where Christ was crucified.”

And that word “crucified” is in the perfect tense…which means that it was a past act that has significance in the present.

So…if you were to say that 56 men signed the declaration of Independence for the United States of America…you would say that in the perfect tense: A past act that has significance in the present. If you were to say that your wife bore a child…you would say that in the perfect tense…a past act that has present significance.

And that is why the word of Christ crucified is in the perfect tense…a past act that has present significance.

(Read vs. 2)

Woah wait…What does the Holy Spirit have to do with this?? Paul is going to talk about the Holy Spirit 16 times in the book of Galatians…but this is the first time he talks about him. We would expect to read, “Did you receive the gospel by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” We would expect to read, “Did you receive Christ by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” But we read, “Did you receive the Spirit…”

Now…I’m going to have to rabbit trail here for a minute so hang on with me…When does a person receive the Holy Spirit? There’s another term for this…called the baptism of the Holy Spirit (ok, we’re not talking water baptism)…when does receiving the Holy Spirit…when does baptism of the Holy Spirit happen?

Because Paul asks the question: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing of faith? Well…let’s back up and ask the question, “When do you receive the Spirit?”

The Catholic Church teaches that you receive the Holy Spirit when you are sprinkled as an infant and then when you are confirmed you get a “special strength of the Holy Spirit”. Lutherans also believe that you receive the Holy Spirit when you are sprinkled.

Some Pentecostals believe that you only know that you have received the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues. To quote one Pentecostal theologian: “Speaking in tongues is not the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but it is what happens when and as you are baptized in the Spirit…”

But Paul says here, you receive the spirit when you hear with faith. Look at verses 5-6…most newer translations have these two verses as one sentence…and rightfully so. This is all one thought together…(Read below…not Bible)

“Does he who supplies the Spirit to you (OK…so we know that Paul is still on this train of thought about receiving the Spirit) and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith (same exact phrase from verse 2)— just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?” (Galatians 3:5–6)

That is the exact idea that we were talking about last week when we talked about the word “justified”…you could read it like this:

“Does he who supplies the Spirit to you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—it’s the exact same thing now as it was back then when Abraham was justified?”

Paul is teaching here that receiving the Spirit happens at the same time as justifification, or being saved. If you have heard with faith…if you have believed God and it been counted to you as righteousness…if you have been saved…that was the exact moment that you received the Spirit.

OK…so off of the rabbit trail and back to the question that Paul is asking:

* 1. Who saved you? (vs. 2, 5-6)

He keeps coming back to this point time and time and time and time again. Constantly preaching the cross? Why does he do this? I mean really…it is kinda starting to feel like I’m preaching the same sermon over and over and over again…and if it feel like that to me…

But the reason is very simple: when you get your eyes off of Jesus crucified for you, and put them on the hypnotizing golden medallions of pleasure, prosperity, ease, self-worth…and as that medallion swings back and forth and our eyes lock onto it…we will be bewitched just like these foolish Galatians.

The only way to prosper in your Spiritual life, is to continually, with steadfastness and perseverance keep your eyes on Christ crucified.

So…the question in my mind is, why does Paul bring the Spirit into it? He’s used the word “gospel” in the past to describe this event. He’s used the word “justified” to describe this event. He’s used the words, “grace of Christ”, “called by grace”, “faith in Christ Jesus”…to describe our salvation. Why add yet another term for us being saved?

Well…its to set up the very next verse:

(Read vs. 3)

Paul’s next question is:

* 1. Who sanctifies you? (vs. 3-4)

OK, I need to spend time here…and it’s probably going to end up being more time than I should spend…but this is so very important.

A lot of people think that we get saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but the way we grow in our Christian lives is through our own effort: Reading the Bible, praying, doing good things, being more loving, trying harder, getting less angry…pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps is what makes us get more like Christ.

But Paul calls that foolishness. He says: Dude, you started this whole thing through the Spirit, but now is it through your flesh…through you own works that you are perfected?

No, no, no: You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and you are sanctified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

That word, “sanctified” is another one of those “churchy” words that are really important. Sanctification refers to three different things: (explain these)

* Positional Sanctification: I am holy
* Progressive Sanctification: I am becoming holy
* Perfected Sanctification: I will be holy

Now, we all absolutely affirm that positional sanctification is only through Christ. Through faith alone, not through my works. Only Christ can make me holy.

And most people would affirm that our perfected sanctification will also be through Christ. Only he determines the day of our death or the day that he comes and it will be totally by his grace that he takes away our sinful flesh and makes us perfectly holy.

BUT MOST PEOPLE think that our progressive sanctification is through our own effort. By having devotions, by praying, by going to church, by working harder…that is what will make me more holy.

And Paul says, “No stinking way”. There is no possible way that could be reality. Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? You’ve got to be kidding me. No, it is also through Christ!

Tim Keller says this: “…our failure to obey and conform to Christ’s character is not a matter of simple lack of willpower, and so we cannot treat our failures simply by “trying harder”. After all, resolving to “try harder” is resolving to rely on our own efforts to keep a law. We need instead to realize that the root of all our disobedience is particular ways in which we continue to seek control of our lives through systems of works-righteousness.”

Let me illustrate it like this: A lot of people pray, “Lord, I get angry a lot…help me not to get so angry.” And I don’t know that that’s the best prayer:

We normally try to start our bedtime routine at 8. Read the kids a couple books, make sure the kids all go potty, give them drinks, turn on their music, tuck them in, give them a kiss…walk out of the room by 8:30 (at least that’s the goal). And so there’s this internal timer that goes off at about 9 PM…you see, at 9 O’clock, the parenting desk is closed. Office hours have ended and will resume at 7 AM (and not a moment before).

* 9:05-drink
* 3:00-up 4 times
* 6:55-having devotions

Why do I get angry? Because I’ve set up this idol in my heart with a clock on it. And at 9 PM I take my eyes off of Christ crucified and look at the clock and say “my way, my comfort, my desires, I’m supreme”, and then at 7 AM, I start looking back at Jesus. And listen to me: there is no amount of effort…there is no amount of saying, “be patient, be patient, be patient”, there is no amount of self-talk and motivation that will remove that idol.

I can’t be perfected by the flesh. The only way to get rid of this “small-g” god, is the same way that Jesus Christ took control of my heart in the first place: Through the Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ crucified for me.

OK…another example here: No amount of effort is going to make you waste less time in front of the TV everyday. In 2016, the New York Times reported that the average American adult watches 5 hours of TV a day. Scientific America reported a year and a half ago that the average parent spends over 9 hours in front of some kind of screen: smartphone, tablet, computer, TV…and that over 80% of that time was not work-related.

And so maybe you evaluate your life, you get an app on your smartphone to see if you spend too much time on your smartphone. And find out that you spend way more time in front of a screen than you thought you did…so you say, “Well, I’m going to do better. This is wasting my life. I’m being lazy.” And you decide to try harder…for the glory of God of course.

And it will last for a day or a week…maybe. Or perhaps a month if you’re really stubborn…I mean determined. But it won’t last. Why? Because you’ve never addressed the idol. You’ve just replaced it…more like, you just gave it a new coat of paint.

So you had the idol of personal ease and comfort and selfishness and you replaced it with the idol of personal success and determination and self-betterment. But when you find out that the new idol isn’t any more satisfying than the old idol…you’ll just go back to it because it is easier.

Sanctification by effort will never work because from beginning to end, there is not one thing in your spiritual life that you are able to do through your own effort. It is only ever through the work of the Spirit of God in your life.

So now do you see why Galatians is the letter to the soul set free. Doesn’t that free you up in amazing ways? Think about it now…this is a massive burden that is off of your back.

So many people when they come to Christ, they don’t experience “my yoke is easy and my burden is light”…they experience—Ok, you’re saved here you go: Devotions every day: 15 minutes in the Bible, 10 minutes praying, and you better spend 5 minutes memorizing verses…and if you don’t do all that every single day, then you don’t love Jesus. Pray before every single meal, if you miss one, God will poison the food. Church every time the doors are open—SS, AM, PM, small group…you can only skip if you’re dying. Literally. I mean, seriously, if you don’t go to church on Sunday night when you’re on vacation, you are probably not saved. Oh yeah…money. You better give 10%, not a penny less…and we’re talking gross, not net. If you take that 10% out after taxes, God will break every single thing you own and bankrupt you faster than you can say chapter 11.

And when we depend on fulfilling the checklist to be holy…we (as verse 4 says) have suffered so many things in vain. When instead, you can now take a moment and breathe. Yeah…you were at the hospital with your spouse till midnight and you didn’t get up early to have devos…seriously, breathe…it’ll be OK.

So, your work called you in and you had to work last Sunday, breathe…God isn’t going to kill you for it.

So…your kids were up in the middle of the night. Like, every single child was up multiple times and the next day you were biting everyone’s head off. You made Dracula look like Sleeping Beauty…ok, relax (Read vs. 5-6).

Let me put it like this: Early in my senior year in High School, I found out that my pastor (who I was really close to) was moving…and I was really mad. I got in the car after having breakfast with him, slammed my hand on the steering wheel…my hand then slipped off from the side of the steering wheel and slammed into the windshield washer controls…and I busted the thing clear off.

I knew dad was not going to be happy with me…especially when it was because of my anger. And I knew there would be consequences…but I could breathe…because I knew that it wasn’t like dad was going to take the car away from me forever, or was going to make me quit the soccer team…I knew he wouldn’t be harsh—I knew I’d probably have to pay to get a new one and fix it. I could breathe because I knew my dad was for me.

OK…so listen to me, that’s what God is like. He’s not harsh. He is for us. And yes, when we sin, there will be natural consequences that result from that. But he isn’t harsh. He is good.

Let’s keep going and we’ll see how good he is:

(Read vs. 7-9)

So now we have:

1. A Single Reminder (vs. 7-9)

OK, so we saw back in verse 6 that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

And then in verse 7, God says the same thing about us: Those of faith…if you have faith—you are a son of Abraham. And this is what God told Abraham would happen way back in Genesis 12: “Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”” (Genesis 12:1–3)

Blessing all the families of the earth through Abraham was fulfilled by the death of Abraham’s descendent on the cross so that all who believe would become sons of God by faith, and since we exhibit the same faith that Abraham displayed, we are likewise sons of Abraham…and verse 9 tells us that we are blessed along with Abraham.

And how does all of this happen? What made it possible for all of these things to be true? We see next:

1. A Sufficient Savior (vs. 10-14)

(Read vs. 10)

* 1. The Condemnation Through Law (vs. 10)

If you do not do everything written in the Book of the Law…you are condemned. OK…so if you’ve ever told a lie, turn to your neighbor and say, “I have”. If you ever disobeyed your parents when you were a kid, turn to your other neighbor and say “I did that too”. OK, if you’ve ever looked at a car that someone else had, a house that someone else had, a job that someone else had, or a paycheck that someone else had…say “Yup”.

OK, so I just did 3 of the 10 commandments, and I’m pretty sure that all of you just said that you broke them…you sinful bunch of people.

All I had to do though, was list one. Because verse 10 says that if you do not do all things written in the book of the law, you’re under a curse. So if you have only ever told one teeny-weeny, itsy-bisey white lie and that’s the only sin you’ve ever committed…you’re still under a curse.

We’re condemned.

(Read vs. 11-12)

* 1. The Justification Through Faith (vs. 11-12)

Listen to me, the law was not given to save anyone. The 10 Commandments are not in existence so that you can see how well you measure up and hopefully make it to heaven. NO WAY! The law is there so that the one who does them (perfectly) shall live by them.

The 10 Commandments aren’t there to show you how successful you’ve been. They are there to show you how much of a failue you are.

Which in our egotistical, self-centered, self-inflated, self-esteem, “I’m so awesome” society…well, that doesn’t go over very well. So there’s a reason why everyone wants the 10 Commandments out of sight and out of mind. Which…listen, I’m not saying that our government should have paid to put Bible verses up on government land…or that there even should be Bible verses on government land, that’s not the role of government.

That being said, people don’t want to get rid of the 10 commandments because they want a government that doesn’t give preferential treatment to one religious group over another…people don’t want them up because people don’t want to know how much they have failed. And the ten commandments are a list of ways that we have failed.

As Ryken says, “The problem with the law, then, is not the law; the problem with the law is our sin. Since we cannot keep the law, the law cannot bless us. All it can do is curse us, placing us under the condemnation of divine wrath.”

“It is evident” Paul says, “you can’t be justified by the law”…rather, the righteous shall live by faith.

So here then is the question: We are under a curse. We have sinned, and God is rightfully angry with us. How do we get rid of the stench and smell of the curse?

(Read vs. 13-14)

* 1. The Redemption Through Christ (vs. 13-14)

J. Denny says this, “Death is the experience in which the final repulsion of evil by God is decisively expressed; and Christ died. In His death everything was made His that sin had made ours…”

And then we see in verse 14, that everything that was His by righteousness, has been made ours through faith.

This is the ultimate reversal. We were slaves, slaves to sin and slaves to death. And in order to be rescued from slavery, a ransom must be paid. And in the case of our ransom…the highest price of all was paid: The life of the Son of God. That is what it means that he redeemed us: He purchased us from the slave market of sin and set us free.

So Martin Luther summarizes it like this:

“So long as sin, death, and the curse remain in us, sin damns us, death kills us, and the curse curses us; but when these things are transferred to Christ, what is ours becomes His and what is His becomes ours. Let us learn, therefore, in every temptation to transfer sin, death, the curse, and all the evils that oppress us from ourselves to Christ, and, on the other hand, to transfer righteousness, life, and blessing from Him to us.”

This is what it means to be saved. That all of my self-effort, is gone. All of my self-righteousness is gone. All of my attempts to pull myself up by my bootstraps and earn the favor of God, is gone.

The righteousness of Christ has been freely granted to us. Now go and live in that freedom. This is the freedom to allow the Spirit of God to smash the idols in your life. This is the freedom from self-condemnation when you fail to allow the Spirit of God to speak blessing into your broken heart. This is the freedom, that when death comes…to you, or to a close family member who is saved…to not fear but rejoice because the curse was taken and all that remains is life. This is the freedom to run to the arms of grace when temptation is near.

This is the freedom to delight in the means of grace. To delight in God’s Word as honey from the honeycomb. To delight in prayer as conversation between you papa. To delight in gathering with the church as reunion and rejoicing with close family. To not view these freedoms as the duties of a soul that is bound and chained by the laws of legalism that demand for you to do your duty as a slave of the king. Rather these are the freedoms that come from the delight as a son of the king.

This is the gospel of freedom. It comes through faith. It is the gospel for your soul to be set free.

Let’s pray:

God, I pray for these, my brothers and sisters. Many of them have chained themselves with the laws of legalism. Laws that demand self-effort to earn your good grace. Free them, oh God from this oppression. May they know that they are free through the gospel to delight in you as a father, a good father, who loves his children.

Keep us, oh Father, from the kind of self-effort that causes us to rely on our works instead of your finished work. May we realize that our greatest need is not better behavior, but better eyesight. Our need is not to do more, but to look more often to the crucified Christ who took our curse so that we could receive the blessings of God. Give us these eyes. God, I plead with you, give these eyes to your people.

I pray for those who are here and are still under a curse. Whether they are trusting in their own works or are simply not looking to you at all, would you redeem them from the curse of the Law. Give them the spiritual eyesight to see that Christ was crucified for them, that if they would only believe, they would have eternal life. Grant faith to their hearts.

And now, as we rise to sing of wondrous mystery, the perfect Son of Man, in his living in his suffering never trace nor stain of sin…help us to see the true and better Adam who came to save the hell-bound man…cause us to sing with renewed life and joy of the grace unmeasured and love untold found at the wondrous mystery of the cursed messiah. It’s in his name we pray, Amen.