

My two older children are learning their addition tables in school right now, and it's become a daily habit to try and help them with their learning at the dinner table. They will quiz each other, and then I'll try to throw harder equations at them to see if they remember the rules. After asking them what $5+5$ is or $9+3$, I'll ask them a question like what $292+0$ equals. The rule for adding zero is that no matter what, it equals the number that it's being added to. No matter how big or small the number is, that's the rule.

It's hard for kids to wrap their heads around this rule because they get so intimidated by the other large number. Our minds will hear the how large the first number is, and we start to panic. But then we hear "plus zero" and our minds relax and our anxiety subsides.

As silly as this might sound, we can do the same thing when it comes to our salvation. We all inherently know there's a problem. There is a holy and righteous God, and we know that we are not. Therefore, we have no way to be in his presence again. This is an overwhelming math problem because our sin, our mess, and our state before God is equal to the biggest number you can think of. How am I ever going to solve this problem?

We come to the end of Paul's digression in his letter to the Galatian churches. Paul will often have an argument in his letters and then go off for a chapter or two to really make his previous point clear. Paul spent all of Chapter 3 arguing that the righteous shall live by faith, not by fulfilling the Law. Then he explained what the law was for and what it wasn't for. Then, last week, Daniel preached on the beginning of Paul's digression and our adoption in Christ. Paul is essentially saying, if you didn't understand my argument, I'm going to now hit you over the head with it and make sure you understand what I'm saying.

He's not doing this to be repetitive for repetition's sake. He's doing this because it's that important. Paul is taking everything down to the studs and the foundation. He's ripping everything out and making sure that we understand what is behind all our Christian faith.

You see, we think we have to add something to the freedom that's been given to us in Christ. This is what was happening to the churches in Galatia, and this is what happens to us today. We know we have a problem, and instead of trusting that Jesus has truly paid it all, we want to play our part in solving our problem.

But Paul has one message today, which is our main point and title this morning. Jesus + nothing=freedom. From the beginning of his letter, until now, Paul has been driving home this point. This is what led him to say in the beginning of the letter: Jesus is the one "who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age."

It's what led him to be astonished "that [they] are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ," and "Who has bewitched you?" The Galatians have fallen back into the yoke of slavery by believing that Jesus + something=salvation.

Paul is going to help show us that freedom is found in him alone, and that if we try to add anything else to him, we are not walking according to the Scriptures.

He's going to do this by first showing us that Jesus alone gives us freedom. Next, we will see the warnings of adding anything to Jesus. Finally, we will see the hope that Jesus brings to his people.

Let's read verses 21-27 and see Paul's illustration to make his 1st point that Jesus alone gives us freedom.

Ok there's a lot going on in this illustration, and Paul is assuming you know your Old Testament, especially the book of Genesis. Tyler, in his first sermon in Galatians talked about how the book of Galatians is essentially Paul's exposition of Genesis 12-21, which we will pick back up in January.

But if you've forgotten, or you're new to the Bible, in Genesis, there's an old man named Abraham, who has an old barren wife, named Sarah, and a slave woman named Hagar. God promises Abraham that he will have children, even in his old age. Abraham believes him and it is counted to him as righteousness. Yet, no children come. But Abraham and his wife believe the promise. So Sarah, his wife, knowing that she's barren offers up her slave, Hagar, for Abraham to have children with.

Hagar conceives, and then she gives birth to a son named Ishmael, but strife and sin ensue. God then promises Abraham again that he will have a son, not through the slave woman, but through Sarah, his old barren wife. Sarah conceives and a son is born, Isaac.

Ok so now that we have the stage set, let's look at Paul's illustration again. Paul says that Abraham had two sons, one born of a slave woman and one by a free woman. One born through the flesh, which just refers to how normal conception works, and one born through promise. It's a son through promise because she's barren.

He then tells us that this is to be interpreted allegorically, or in a deeper or representative way, and he tells us that the two mothers are to be seen as two different covenants. So you have Hagar, she represents the Law and slavery and the present-day Jerusalem at the time, the Jewish faith. Then on the other side, you have Sarah, she represents the covenant of freedom and of promise and the heavenly Jerusalem.

Now at this point, it doesn't sound too scandalous, at least on the surface. But Paul is about to do invert everything. Let's read verses 28-31.

Paul uses the word 'brothers' in verse 28 to indicate who he's talking to. He is not talking to those under the law, who are still accepting parts of the law as a part of salvation. He's speaking to his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

He says that 'you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.' Paul's words here, though few are vitally important. He is saying, Christian brothers and sisters, you are like Isaac, you are the children of promise. You are not the children of the slave woman. You are the children of promise because you have been supernaturally born, or as Jesus says in John 3, you have been born again.

Now why is this scandalous? Well remember that Sarah is barren. Yet God promises to give her a child, and he does, through Isaac. Isaac would lead to Jacob, to the 12 tribes of Israel, and then to the nation of Israel itself, God's set apart people. God's people were the children of promise because they were built on a promise.

But that's not who Paul calls the children of promise. He says the born again believers, his fellow Christians are the children of promise and that those under the law, the Judaizers and the Jews are actually the children of the slave woman! He's inverted the Judaizers' argument completely.

Paul is not trying to just name call or invert for the sake of inverting. He's calling the church in Galatia, and us now to do something. So what is he telling us to do? Look at verses 30-31 again. He is telling us to cast out the slave woman, for we are sons and daughters of the promise, of the free woman. These verses in Genesis described what their patriarchal parents were to do with the slave woman. But Paul is now saying that is what they are to do to those that preach Jesus + something.

But how can Paul say this? How can he be so bold?

Chapter 5 verse 1: For freedom Christ has set us free! Jesus did not come to put us under a new kind of bondage. This is why Jesus says on the Sermon on the Mount, "do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

In other words, we could never obey the whole Law perfectly. As Paul wrote previously in Galatians, "we were held captive under the law." But how and when would we be set free?

We would be set free from the Law when Jesus came and perfectly obeyed for us. Adam failed, therefore, in Adam we all have failed. But for all those who have placed their trust in Christ, who perfectly obeyed, we now have a representative head that has done it for us.

This is why we have been set free! This is why Paul can say, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!" This is why Paul can speak so boldly. Because Christ did not come to exchange one set of shackles for another. He came to set us free from the Law so that we could love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Brothers and sisters, you have been set free in Christ, so live in it!

Now I want to address a ditch very quickly that I think some of us can fall into, or can be tempted to think. This ditch says, "but if we're free in Christ, if he's set us free from the Law, won't that mean we'll just go on freely sinning? For if I've been set free from my sins and from obeying the Law perfectly, I guess I can just live life however I want to because Jesus covers my sins." Some might call this licentiousness.

There's a story from the Civil War days, before the Emancipation of the slaves in which a northerner went to a slave auction to purchase a slave. This northerner bought a young slave girl and as they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, "You're free."

With amazement she responded, "You mean, I'm free to do whatever I want?"

"Yes," he said.

"And to say whatever I want to say?"

"Yes, anything."

"And to be whatever I want to be?"

"Yes."

"And even go wherever I want to go?"

"Yes," he answered with a smile. "You're free to go wherever you'd like."

She looked at him intently and said, "Then I will go with you."

I understand how some could think that complete freedom in Christ gives you a license to sin. But what this story communicates, is exactly what Paul is communicating to us in Galatians. We were dead in our sins, we were slaves to the Law that we could never keep, we followed our every desire and thought. Yet Christ purchased us with his blood, and he set us free.

Our freedom in Christ doesn't give us a license to sin. Our freedom in Christ gives us a license to obey our Savior out of love, not slavery. And as we begin to live in and through this freedom, we begin to see that sin is no longer sweet, but bitter. We begin to be renewed, day by day, from the inside out.

Brothers and sisters, may we not see our freedom in Christ as a license to sin, but as a declaration from Christ that you are his and he is making you, through sanctification, more like him day by day.

Now why does Paul have to remind us that we've been set free in Christ? Because he knows that we often fall back into slavery unintentionally. This will lead us to our second point, the warnings of adding anything to Jesus.

Paul writes in verse 1, "Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

These Galatian Christians are being influenced by these Judaizers, who are most likely genuine men, who truly believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Yet they also truly believe they must follow the old Law as well, in order to be saved, and Paul is saying, stand firm! Don't fall back into slavery.

We often feel like our salvation comes with strings attached. I remember, after being newly saved, I was like, 'Ok now what? I guess I need to figure out what I can and can't do?'

I began asking questions like, What's sinful, what's not? Do I read my Bible every day? If I do, what do I read? If I don't, am I in trouble? Do I pray every day? If I don't, what happens if I don't? I needed to be disciplined. I needed to be shown what it looks like to now live in this freedom that Christ purchased for me.

I think something some of us should consider is how we present our faith to others. Do we unintentionally advertise Christianity as a new set of moral rules for people to follow? I don't think any of us mean to do this, but if a new believer's first thoughts are, "ok what can I do or not do?," then I think we've missed the point.

This isn't about a set of moral rules. All the other religions have that on lock. Our faith is centered on a person, and his name is Jesus. And as you grow in your love for Jesus, he will begin to reorient your heart and begin renewing you from the inside out. Let us not present more rules, but instead present Jesus, the savior of the world.

While none of us try to fall back into slavery, we do it when we believe that our salvation hinges on us trusting in Jesus + our perfect obedience. I believe this is what leads many of us to question our assurance of salvation.

Every time we miss a day or week of Bible reading, or every time we slip up and fall right back into the sin that we've been fighting so hard against, we feel awful. We feel guilt. We feel like we have to make it up. Brothers and sisters, you are not saved because you read your Bible every day. You are not saved because you pray every day. You are not saved because you white knuckled yourself into not sinning.

If our salvation is based on anything other than Jesus' blood and righteousness, then we have fallen away from the freedom in Christ, and have submitted to a yoke of slavery.

Paul spells this out for us in verses 2-4.

Paul does not pull any punches in this section. He makes some very clear and strong statements. Let me first clarify what Paul means when he says, "if you accept circumcision." He is not saying, 'if you are circumcised.' This has less to do with the act as it does with the heart behind the act.

He is saying that if believe in Jesus + circumcision= salvation, then you are wrong.

He tells us that if we believe this then Christ will be of no advantage to you. He says that if you do this, then you will be obligated to keep the whole law. He tells us if you believe this, then you are severed from Christ and have fallen away from grace.

In other words, if you believe that Jesus' free gift of grace is not sufficient to justify you before God, then Christ does nothing for you. If you believe this, then you have just submitted yourself to not just the command to be circumcised, but you have now submitted yourself to the perfect obedience to the whole Law. If you believe this, then you do not have grace, you have law and slavery.

It's no mistake that Paul uses Abraham and Sarah earlier in this passage to help us understand our hearts. Remember that Abraham and Sarah believed God's promise to give them a child, a child of promise. Yet after remaining childless, they took that promise into their own hands. It became the Promise + their plan to achieve that child through Hagar. They would take it into their own hands.

Now I think it would be easy to read this and think, "well good thing I don't believe circumcision saves me," or "I'm not taking a slave woman to help me have a child." But Paul is not after just an act of cutting off skin, he's after your heart. The Lord, speaking through Jeremiah, the prophet, writes, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem." (4:4)

In other words, God has always been about the heart, not the flesh. Therefore, as we read this passage, as we examine our lives, what are we looking to to atone for our sins. Is it Jesus and his righteousness alone? Or is it Jesus + something?

Every single other religion or belief system adheres to the + something model. I guarantee that I know two groups of people who have done more good works than you. For instance, do you know who prays more than you? Muslims. They must pray 5 times a day. Do you know who goes on more missions trips than you do? Mormons. Most of them go on a 1.5 to 2-year mission trip.

So if this is about a good works contest, then we have lost. But this is exactly Paul's point.

Paul knows the church in Galatia is struggling with this, and he knows that the church will struggle with this until Christ returns. Paul's words are for us now. So what are you trusting in to save you? Is it your good works? Your adherence to the Scriptures? Is it your church membership? Is it your baptism? Is it your giving to the church? Is it short term missions trips you took when you were younger? Is it raising successful children? Is it raising all your children to become believers?

Paul writes in verse 6, that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” In other words, there is nothing you can do to save yourself, it is the free gift of God, through faith. And it is through faith that love is then on display.

Therefore, we read our Bible because we love our God and want to know and enjoy him forever. We pray because we want to commune with the God that we love. We give to the church and to missionaries, not out of a works-based theology, but out of the overflow of love that has been given to us, through the freedom won for us in Jesus. And it’s out of this love that Paul is writing this letter to the Galatian church.

Let’s read verses 7-12 and see Paul’s final warnings and love for the church on display.

Most people know the adage, that “it’s not how you start, but how you finish!”

Paul is asking the church the same question. He says, “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” In other words, you started so well! What happened? Paul is confused because, as he says in verse 8, they’ve been persuaded by someone that’s not Jesus. Jesus is the one that called them out of darkness and into the light. This Jesus is not the one now calling them back into slavery.

No one expects to fail. We start new things all the time thinking that we’ll finish well. That’s what New Years resolutions are all about, right?

But we’re right back to Abraham and Sarah again. They believed the promise, results weren’t happening as fast they wanted or expected, so they took matters into their own hands and had a child their way, not God’s way.

The church in Galatia is doing the same thing. Maybe they just couldn’t accept the freedom that Jesus gives in salvation. Maybe they felt they had to do something, to play their part in their salvation. No one ever intends to undercut Jesus and his sufficient work, but when we try to add anything to Jesus, we’ve fallen back into slavery, and unfortunately, we can bring others with us.

Paul writes in verse 9, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” While this seems like it comes out of nowhere, Paul is trying to give a corporate application to us in the church. Jesus uses the same parable in the gospels. A little bit of leaven, in time, would spread to the entire lump of dough.

In other words, this dangerous theology, even when done accidentally and unintentionally, can have corporate ramifications. For example, let’s say you read an awesome book on meditating on Scripture. It’s life-changing for you. You begin to see how it not only helps you keep Scripture on your mind, but you’re able to more easily share what you’re reading with others in conversations.

Now you start talking to other brothers and sisters about it in the church. Let’s say you find out that another church member only reads his Bible once or twice a week, and it’s only 1 or two verses when he does. This blows your mind because you’re inhaling Scripture, rolling it around in your mind and your heart all day. How could they not have the same kind of affections towards the Word that you have?

Are they even a Christian? Because a Christian would be on my same level, or at least half of my level.

I know this might sound silly or exaggerated to some of you, but if we’re truly honest with ourselves, we attach things to Jesus all the time and make judgments. You can be saved by Jesus and his grace alone, but

if you don't dress a certain way, eat a certain way, look a certain way, talk a certain way, study the word a certain way, then you're not really a Christian, because this is how I think it should look.

If we're not careful, we can add things to Jesus and the free gift of grace given to us through his life death and resurrection, and place dangerous stipulations on brothers and sisters around you, just like the Judaizers did.

Paul then asks a rhetorical question in verse 11, he asks, "But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" In other words, if Paul was still preaching circumcision, that you had to be circumcised in addition to faith in Jesus for salvation, then the Judaizers would have no reason to persecute Paul.

In one of my recent seminary classes, my professor read some very surprising survey results that a couple trusted ministries conducted. These ministries call it the "State of Theology Survey." That's a really fancy title for a survey that is taking a poll on what people think about God because theologians don't just live in seminaries, we're all theologians. We all think and believe things about God.

The most recent survey in 2025 polled 3001 evangelical Christians. They were asked around 30 or so questions and I'd like to share the results of 2 of the questions.

The survey asked a question and then they could answer: agree/disagree/unsure

- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation. 43% disagree
- God counts a person as righteous not because of one's works but only because of one's faith in Jesus Christ. 44% unsure or disagree

I hope those results are shocking to you. For this poll was given not to a mixed crowd of people walking the streets of downtown Missoula. These were verified evangelical Christians.

So why am I sharing this with you? I'm sharing this because if you think Ellyn and I will be the only ones that will face persecution for their faith, or the only ones that will have to swim upstream, this poll shows you that the offense of the cross is here, in our country, now, among evangelical Christians.

Tyler mentioned at some point during this series in Galatians how interesting it is that the religion most hated and rejected is the one that offers the free gift of grace. But Tyler is just pointing out what Paul is saying. Paul says, "in that case the offense of the cross has been removed." These poll results show that the offense of the cross has been removed for many evangelical Christians today.

So why is the cross offensive? The crucifixion was awful and horrid, but that's not why the cross is offensive. The cross is offensive because there's nothing you can do to add to it. In the closed country that our family will be, Lord willing, moving to, Protestant Christianity receives a heavy amount of persecution. Yet, in this country where it is almost illegal to be a Christian, there are many Catholic churches that face very little persecution.

Why is this? Paul answers this question! He says that if you add to the cross, if you add to the sufficient work of Jesus' life and death, then you've removed the offense because now YOU can do something about your own salvation. And this looks exactly like all the other religions in the country.

The cross is offensive, the Bible is offensive, not just in our family's future country, but here, in America, because it tells us that we are dead in our sins and trespasses (Eph 2), that we are conceived in iniquity (Ps 51), and unless we are born again, unless we are given a new birth, we will not enter the kingdom of God, and instead, we will inherit eternal conscious torment in hell. That is the truth that the Scriptures lay out.

But if you repent of your sins against our holy and righteous God, and believe on the Lord Jesus, believe that Jesus truly is the eternal Son of God, who has come to live the life we could never live, and die the death we deserved, that there is nothing you could ever do to atone for your sins; unless that is what you put your whole trust and faith in, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God. That's the good news of the gospel, and that is offensive.

If you're here this morning, and the freedom found in Christ is offensive, I invite you to examine yourself this morning. That pit in your stomach feeling that you can never shake when you think about deep and eternal things, that unsettling feeling like your floating in deep space and you'll never be able to stop, that feeling is your soul telling you that you need to truly consider your life, and the short amount of time you have left. Turn and be saved. Repent and believe. Don't let another Christmas go by with you wondering if you'll believe at the next one.

This what leads Papa Paul to say, "I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves" in verse 12. Paul's words are strong because hell is real, and he knows that the message that these false teachers are proclaiming is false and is completely opposite of the freedom given to us by Jesus. Therefore, if you would believe that if something like the cutting of skin would save you, you might as well chop the whole thing off and really guarantee you're getting to heaven.

As silly or grotesque as that might sound, let us not rush by Paul's care for the church. Because if you have anything to do with your salvation, like these false teachers are saying, then there is no end to the work you will have to do to claim your eternal salvation.

As we approach Christmas this week, some of you might be wondering, this is the oddest Christmas sermon I have ever heard...What does this have to do with Christmas?

This is a great question that the Scriptures are going to answer for us. The whole Bible points to Jesus. The OT points to him, and the NT points back to him and points forward to when Jesus will make all things right, and this will be our final point this morning, the Hope of Jesus

This whole passage started with Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. We saw how the child of promise was supposed to come through the barren womb of Sarah. Though Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands, through Hagar, the Lord was faithful to give that promise through their son Isaac.

Paul then began his whole argument by comparing Hagar and her offspring to the children of slavery and to the present-day Jerusalem, and Sarah and her children with freedom and the Jerusalem above, or the heavenly Jerusalem. Paul ties all of this up with his quote from Isaiah 54, when he writes, "rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!"

Now to put this into its original context, Isaiah is writing this during the exile, a long time after Abraham and Sarah. But Isaiah is clearly referring back to Sarah. So Sarah is supposed to rejoice, though she is childless. Why? God says that the "children of the desolate one (Sarah), will be more than those of the one who has a husband (referring to Hagar)."

Sarah is to rejoice, because God will give her children, though she is barren and childless now. So what is Isaiah's point and why is Paul using it here? Isaiah 54 comes right after Isaiah 53, the famous Suffering Servant Song.

He was "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows...surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgression; he was crushed for our iniquities...He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

We get this sweeping description of Jesus and what he will do for his people. Then the very next verse is our verse from Galatians, "Sing, O barren one!" Then in verses 2 and 3 God says to his people, ²"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. ³For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

Remember Isaiah is prophesying when God's people are in exile. But he is promising that their tents will be enlarged, and that his people will spread over all the earth! This seems unfathomable considering their current situation. But is this not the same situation that Abraham and Sarah were in? God promising something unfathomable? Yet he promised it would be so.

God's people are given the same promise, that their people will possess the nations. How does God do it? He does it through the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, and his people are no longer just the ethnic Jews that were set apart through circumcision. They are set apart because their hearts have been circumcised. They have been born again by the Spirit. They are no longer an ethnic people, they are a multiethnic people, and every time the church gathers, it is a foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem to come.

This is what Paul is pointing his people, the church, to in Galatians. Look to the heavenly Jerusalem. This is why he writes in verse 5, "for through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness." And this is why he can have confidence, in verse 10, that they will "take no other view."

For though we have been made righteous when we repent and believe, we wait with eager confidence that we will stand in Christ's righteousness on that last day.

So as we eagerly wait to celebrate Christmas, the first Advent, this week, let us live in light of the first promise given to us in the person and work of Christ. For he has set us free from the Law. And may we eagerly wait in confidence until he brings us into the heavenly Jerusalem, where we will dwell and enjoy him in freedom, forever.