

Galatians: A Gospel of Grace
Part 3: Growing in Grace
October 4th & 5th, 2014

Welcome: Let's go to Galatians, chapter 3! We've set aside our entire fall to look at Harbor of Hope's mission, which from the day we opened our doors 15 years ago has been to *Help People Find Their Way Back to God!*

My prayer is that we come to see firsthand what God has done in history to bring us back to Himself, and then...we come to realize that God calls ordinary people like you and me to partner with him in *Helping People Find Their Way Back to God!*

So...before into chapter three, let me take a moment to look back at where we've been thus far!

The Apostle Paul wrote Galatians during a time when groups of religious leaders had made their way into the church and were confusing and frustrating the believers by teaching what Paul referred to as a pretend-gospel.

They were essentially saying, *"It's good to believe in Jesus, but if you really want to be right with God, you need to follow the Mosaic Law. You need to adopt our cultural customs! Greek men, you need to be circumcised! Then God will accept you!"*

Now, our tendency is to think that the issues facing the ancient church were very different than those facing Christ-followers today, but that isn't true at all! We've seen each week that the real threat facing these churches was legalism!

Legalism – Legalism is simply looking to something besides Jesus to make yourself clean and acceptable.

And last week, we saw that **every one of us has looked to or is looking to something other than Jesus Christ to make ourselves clean and acceptable!**

Adam and Eve – God gave Adam and Eve everything including himself, and they responded by saying, *'That's not enough...we want to rule the world!'* When they walked away from God, the text says that they realized their nakedness and were ashamed! So, what did they do? **Sewed grass skirts.** This has nothing to do with fashion. The text is describing a spiritual reality. Adam and Eve felt unclean so they covered their nakedness!

Since that moment...every person born into the world has known the nagging feeling of being unclean and naked! We either deny it or try to find something to cover us!

Do you remember the emperor in Hans Andersen's short story who loved to flaunt his wardrobe before the people. Eventually two scoundrels came along who decided to play a trick on the emperor by offering to make him a set of clothes **so**

fine and beautiful and invisible looking that anyone unable to see his clothes would be found incompetent and dumb.

If you know the story...when the emperor tried on his clothes (which weren't really clothes at all), he felt naked (because he was), but he wouldn't dare tell anyone lest the people think of him as stupid!

Finally, the day came when the emperor was to be paraded through the streets in his extraordinary new set of clothes.

As he rode along in the buff, the crowd played along, and all seemed well until a young child who, not knowing any better, screamed '*the emperor is naked.*' The crowd soon followed. (Awful...we've had this dream!)

The story concludes...*"The Emperor realized that the people were right but could not admit to that. He thought it better to continue the procession under the illusion that anyone who couldn't see his clothes was either stupid or incompetent. And he stood stiffly on his carriage, while behind him a page held his imaginary mantle."*

Do you know why this story is so painful? We do the same thing (figuratively speaking). We feel naked, like something is missing in our lives (unlovable, undesirable, unworthy)...so we either deny it, or try to hide!

Some of us hide by trying to keep all the rules and watching our behavior so that God and people will see us in a certain way! Some of us try to hide our nakedness through beauty, money, career, lifestyle, or romance!

But if you've walked that road for very long...deep in your heart you know those things will never work!

Galatians tells us that only Jesus Christ can cover our nakedness and give us the acceptance and cleanness our hearts are longing for!

Now, we'll come back to this by the time we're through, but first I want to move to chapter three, and begin a conversation, which is going to take us through the rest of the series. In chapters 3-6, Paul addresses the question that every Christian asks...and that is, how do we grow up in Christ? How do we grow in our affection for Jesus? How do we grow in joy? Patience? Love for our neighbor? Endurance? Generosity?

Paul will answer this question by telling us first how we don't grow...and then how we do!

Galatians 3:1-2

“Oh foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ’s death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.”

Galatians 3:1-2

Paul calls the believers, “foolish,” which basically means, “You dear idiots.” Why?
Look at verse 3...

“How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?” Galatians 3:3

Perfect = Completion

Paul is saying... *“You came to God by trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ, crucified for your sins...but now you are trying to grow up or complete yourself on your own strength.”*

In this one verse, we find a 2,000 year-old lie that many Christians tend to believe! It goes like this...

God saved me from my sin when I was really bad. Now it’s my job to show God that I’m really good!

Paul will say again and again... *“No...we never outgrow the gospel.”* Instead, we grow up in the faith in the same way we began! By having our hearts melted and molded as we trust in the beauty of Christ crucified for our sins!”

And to the degree that we move away from or lose hold of this Good News and exchange it for rules and regulations, we will lose our growth, joy, and vitality in Christ!

Ken’s Ranch: A very good friend of mine owns a large ranch in South Dakota. Several years ago, he hired a company to plant 20,000 trees throughout the ranch (which I guess makes your ranch large, by definition). The trees quickly established and grew, but over time, he realized that the weed matting around the trees was restricting their growth, and if not removed, all of the trees would eventually die.

TREES NEED FREEDOM TO GROW! (Restriction = death)

The same is true of you and me...

Now, freedom is a recurring theme throughout Galatians...and especially chapter 5...which begins like this...

"So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law."

Galatians 5:1

Yet, many of us, even after coming to Christ by faith, believe that our responsibility is to keep God happy by following the rules. Through begrudging submission... *"Just do what he says!"* **500 years ago, Martin Luther, the great Reformer said...**

"Works-based righteousness is the default position of the human heart."
Martin Luther

Luther means that on Monday mornings, as we prepare for work, the operating mode of our hearts is to believe that God's pleasure rests on how well we lived over the weekend! *So, if you gathered for worship...God smiles. But if you went to the beach instead, there's a divine frown! If you're giving above and beyond financially (happy God)...but if you spent all your money with friends, and you only have a \$20 spot to give...divine Displeasure! If you had an argument with your wife or snapped at one of your kids...and you're not having an extended quiet time Monday morning, be prepared for a rough week!*

Now...please hear me! I'm not suggesting that how you live doesn't matter! We'll see later in chapter 5 & 6 that when Christ gets into our lives, there will be an undeniable substance to our lives and choices that oftentimes looks very different from those around us!

But don't you see...if you believe that growth in Christ hinges on how well you follow the rules (restriction), even your obedience will be done for selfish reasons...to keep God happy! And this will steal your joy and exhaust you.

We grow in Christ only when we're given freedom, which only the gospel can provide us with!

So...how do we grow?

Plants: Consider what is necessary for a plant to grow. I planted a garden this spring, which basically makes me an expert, so I'll tell you. You need the right soil conditions, sun, and water, but what you really need is a **miracle!**

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Photosynthesis – Did you know that there is a ridiculous process that takes place under our noses every minute of the day by which plants convert light energy from the sun into chemical energy and store it in the bonds of sugar, which then fuel the plant for growth! **It's called photosynthesis.**

Now, if you don't give your plants the conditions they need, they'll suffer and eventually die! Many of us are very good at that! But place that thing in the ground, water it, tend it, and let the miracle of photosynthesis take place, and you'll have a healthy, vibrant plant!

In the same way, if we're to grow as Christians, certain elements will enable us to thrive (feast on God's Word, have conversation with God (prayer), spend time with people who love Jesus). These things are very important and we'll be talking about them more in the weeks ahead. But what you really need (to grow) is a miracle!

All throughout Scripture, the writers use the image of a plant to describe someone who is growing in their affection for God...and in resemblance of His character!

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4

"And now, just as you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness." Colossians 2:6-7

Notice what Jesus says in John 15... *"Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit."*

And in Colossians 2... *"Let your roots grow down into Christ, and let your lives be built on him."*

The miracle that is essential to our growth as Christians, which sets Christianity apart from every other religion is the very presence of the risen Christ in our lives!

Christianity is not about a series of rules that we follow, but about a relationship that we enter!

Look at verse 5...

"I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ."

Galatians 3:5

Let me ask you! Is God waiting to work out his goodness in your life until you get the right Bible reading plan? Is God like, *"man...that cat tried to read through the Bible in a year, but fell behind in November...maybe next year?"* Is God waiting to shape his character in you until you have a more consistent prayer life? Are there a certain number of small groups you must attend to see God's hand at work in your life?

No...God gives you His Spirit and works miracles among you because you BELIEVE the message you heard about Christ!

Believe = "Trust." It is in the present tense. It's saying that when we became a Christian, we trusted the gospel...*that Jesus loved you so much that He was willing to die to bring you into the Father's arms.* Now, that we're walking in Christ, we don't exchange that Good News for begrudging obedience. We grow by drawing near to Christ...letting Him nourish and strengthen us! And by the wisdom and power of His Spirit in us, we apply the gospel to every area of our lives.

What is the Gospel (Good News)?

Galatians 3:10...

"But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law.' So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life...' (13) But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith."

Galatians 3:10-11, 13-14

Gospel: We deserve to be cursed (condemned) for our wrongdoing. But Jesus was condemned in our place to purchase our freedom!

We don't deserve to stand in the presence of our Maker today or ever. But Jesus walked into hell to bring us into our Heavenly Father's arms. And then...He gave us His Spirit to live in us...giving us the desire and power to obey!

This is the heart of the gospel! Christ has set us free! If you belong to Jesus...you're free! Yet, some of us are still living under condemnation!

Some of you are living under condemnation because of your past! You're convinced that Jesus could never forget or forgive you for what you did! Let me ask you...how many of your sins were future sins when Jesus died? Jesus took the curse for your wrongdoing...past, present, and future!

*Some of you are afraid that God will smite you because you sinned on Friday night? But don't you see...Jesus already took your penalty. **God is just...will not punish sin twice!** So rather than hiding in shame, go to Jesus, confess your sin, and receive the forgiveness he died to give you...*

Some of you believe that God is waiting to crush you if you slip up, and the moment circumstances go bad (health, \$, job), it's God! Don't you see that Jesus was already crushed to set you free!

Do you believe this promise? Are you trusting Jesus and walking in the freedom He died to give you?

If not, set your eyes on Jesus' death again and again until the gospel becomes real to your heart. Ask God to make it so real to your heart that Christ crucified becomes like a portrait to you. Gaze on it! And then come to Jesus in faith and say, "**Father please accept me on the basis of what Jesus did for me...**"

Application

As you go into the week ahead...practice applying the gospel to your life again and again...

Work – When you wake up Monday morning, and you've got an exhausting week in front of you (meetings, deadlines)...and the weight of the world is on me...take a moment to rest in the truth that your value is not dependent on what you produce or don't produce. Whether you're praised or criticized. You're a Son/Daughter of the King. (Chapter 4 – Abba...)

Marriage – If you want God to move in your marriage (healthy or not)...apply the gospel to it! **Ephesians 5**...husbands love your wives like Jesus loved the church (he died). And husbands, if you're willing to die for your wives...she'll respect and honor you!

Generosity – If you're going to become a generous person, you must see the gospel! **2 Corinthians 8:9**. *Christ, who was rich, became poor to make you*

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rich. When you see that Christ gave you everything for you, your heart will be set free from stinginess and you'll give.

Friendship – (Philippians 2) – Don't be selfish...don't only consider your interests...look out for the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus.

Bitterness/Resentment – Forgive as the Lord forgave you! (Colossians 3:13)

Temptation – Hebrews 4:15-16 says that *"Jesus understands our weaknesses, for he faced the same temptation that we do, yet he did not sin. Because of Christ, we can come to the throne of our gracious God where we find mercy and grace to help us when we need it most."*

Go to the throne of your gracious God...

As you apply the gospel to your life...you will grow! And God's grace will begin to shine through you, and Jesus will be glorified (magnified) in you. And people will be drawn to Him.

**God's grace is at work in you...but it doesn't stop with you!
Which is why we're asking you this fall to take time every day to pray for one person! To ask God to work out His grace in their life...and then to look for creative ways to care for them, to encourage, to listen, to give...**

Together...by God's grace, we'll continue helping people find their way back to God!

Pray