

Galatians: A Gospel of Grace
Part 5: The Fruit of Grace
October 18th & 19th, 2014

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

For the last four weeks, we've been looking at the letter of Galatians, which was written by the Apostle Paul during a time when religious leaders within the church were beginning to distort the gospel...

They were essentially teaching, *"It's fine to believe in Jesus, but if you want to be right with God, you also need to follow the Mosaic Law with all of its customs and traditions including circumcision! If you do these things, then God will accept you!"*

Paul responds over and over by saying, *"No! You'll never be made right with God by obeying the law! No amount of good works or sacraments you walk through, or church attendance or spiritual discipline makes God look at you and say, "Good job...now we can talk."*

Christianity has never been about what we do to get to God, but about what God has done through His Son, Jesus, to get to us!

This is called the gospel of grace! Grace...meaning we don't deserve it! We can't earn it! We didn't ask for it! And yet, when we place the trust of our heart in the finished work of Jesus, we can stand forgiven and free with joy, peace, and confidence in God's presence!

Now...this raises a question that Christians and skeptics have been asking for centuries, and no doubt, many of us have asked it too. The question goes like this!

If we believe the gospel...that we are made right with God because of the finished work of Jesus Christ! Then does it matter how we live? Doesn't the gospel give us license to do whatever we want to do?

Wedding: This summer, some very good friends of ours were married, and Beth and I were able to take our kids to the wedding, which was their very first to attend. We wanted their first wedding to be an experience to remember, so they were dressed to the nines, and we prepped with dance moves so that when the music started bumping, the Mullenix family could hit the floor! The day before I pulled my kids aside, and said, *"Now, there is going to be an open bar at the wedding...meaning, there will be an unlimited fountain of kid's drinks! And tomorrow night, you can have as many sodas as you want!"* You should have seen their eyes light up, because they know that I am the soda warrior who almost never lets that stuff into our home! And they were like, *"really Dad?"* I said something like, *"Yes kids...drink and be merry."* I even gave them dollar bills to tip the bartender!

The following day, we were celebrating the evening and I asked them, "So...how many sodas did you have?" One of my boys replied... "I had nine!" Nine sodas! That is freedom... ***We're still eating kale chips and hummus to make up for that...***

In the same way, many will ask... "Doesn't the freedom that Christ brings give us license to treat life like an open bar (figuratively speaking)?"

To answer this...you have to look at the whole message of Galatians together. In chapter 5, verse 1...

"So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law." 5:1

"For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature." 5:13

Paul is saying that if we fall back into rule keeping as a way of being made right with God, **we will lose our freedom.** However, if we say, "Now that I'm walking in Christ, I can live however I want," **we will abuse our freedom.**

Marriage – When Beth and I looked at each other 14 years ago and said, "I do...no matter what...until death separates us," I didn't pull her aside later that night, "Now that we're married (legally bound)...I just want you to know that I can treat you however I want to." No...that would be an abuse of married freedom and love, and a fast track to disintegration!

In the same way, if we ever say, "now that I'm walking in Christ I can do whatever I want, it shows that we don't know Jesus or what He's done for us! We've never grasped the gospel!"

You see...the text goes on to say...

"...Use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 5:14

The gospel frees us from fear, but at the same time it frees us to love Jesus, each other, and our neighbors

When the good news of what Jesus has done for you gets down deep into your heart, you will ask, "How can I live for Him?"

This is the very question that Paul addresses at the end of chapter five!

Look at 5:16...

“So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.”
Galatians 5:16-17

How do we grow up in Christ? First...notice that the text doesn’t give us an image of a picnic, but of a battle, which is why if we’re being honest, at some point all of us have said, “*The Christian life is hard.*” Maybe that’s what you’re saying today. Let me encourage you in these next few moments!

On one hand...the Holy Spirit of God is present and active in our lives (and we’ll come back to this in a moment).

At the same time, there is another nature at work in us that Scripture refers to as the “sinful nature” or “flesh.”

When the New Testament describes the “*Flesh*” and “*Spirit*”, it is not describing our physical nature as opposed to our spiritual nature, but the sin-desiring aspect of our lives as opposed to the God-desiring aspect!

Now...to understand this, it helps to look at another place where Paul describes in greater detail this battle being waged within us...

“I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.” Romans 7:15, 18-19, 22-23

Paul says, “*I want to do what is right, but I don’t...*”

We can understand that...can’t we!

I desperately want to be patient...yet the city of Lowell is doing repairs on the bridge that happens to be my fastest route between work and home. So, for the last few

weeks, I have found myself cursing the fact that the city has it out for me! I believe patience is good, yet impatience wells up within me!

Let's get a little closer to home...

Forgiving: Why is it that we believe that forgiveness is good, and we want people to forgive us...yet, when it comes to forgiving someone for what they said or did, we resist and justify our resentment and bitterness?

Parents...why is it that we want to love our children by being kind, regardless of whether, at any given moment, they deserve kindness! And yet, if you're anything like me, you find that you're not always kind in thought or word! **Why is this?**

Giving: Why is it that we want to be self-giving with our time and resources, and yet there's a drift in our lives toward stinginess?

We could come up with a thousand examples to describe this internal battle between our desire to be the person God created us to be and the desires we have that so often lead us to walk in a completely different direction! **Why is this?**

It helps to understand what Paul means by "the desires of the sinful nature."

Desire: Greek word *epithumia*, which means "over-desire," or "inordinate desire."

Many of us think that the big problem in our lives is our desire for bad things! But the New Testament teaches over and over that our main problem is that we have an inordinate desire for good things. So that instead of enjoying and being grateful for the good things God gives us, we fall in love with them! They become gods...and begin to control us!

Self – You are a gift from God (Psalm 139). It is biblical to love and care for yourself! *Love your neighbor as yourself (If you don't love yourself, you won't love your neighbor very well!)* What happens when someone falls in love with themselves? We call that self-centeredness? (Selfies) Do you enjoy hanging out with self-centered people?

Children – Children are a gift from God! As parents, we delight in them, and do everything in our power to help them grow up in to healthy, joy-filled, Jesus-loving young adults. And yet, children make terrible gods, don't they! And if we say to our children, *"you are my life, and there is nothing more important than your happiness,"* when they grow un-happy, we despair? We compare our children with other children, how many activities they're involved in compared to others, how successful they are compared to others, and out of this are born envy and jealousy?

Beauty – Beauty and sex are wonderful gifts! Song of Songs is an Old Testament love poem about a young bride and groom. It's filled with unashamed, unfiltered beauty, passion, love and lovemaking. And God celebrates that! But please hear me young men and women. The moment you look at beauty or sex and say, *"I must have this if I'm going to be worth anything, or I must have this be happy."* You've turned a very good thing into a god-thing that will become an all-consuming thing. And this will lead you to look for affection and acceptance in the arms of one person after another, when God said, *"I designed you to give your whole self (including your body) to one man or one woman for life."* You can be stunningly beautiful or have jaw-dropping sex...but if you're looking to beauty or sex to fill you, they will ultimately fail you.

You see...at the root of our sinful desires are usually not bad things, but good things that we begin to love more than we love Jesus!

And when this happens, it creates sinful desires in us that have distorting and destructive effect on our lives! **Look at vs. 19!**

"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures (describing sex between unmarried people and unnatural or uncontrolled sexual practices), idolatry, sorcery (worshiping other idols or occult and pagan religious practices), hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension and division (relational brokenness), envy, drunkenness, wild parties (addiction to pleasure-creating substances and behavior), and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, than anyone living that sort of life (unrepentant, habitual, ongoing way) will not inherit the Kingdom of God."
Galatians 5:19-21

Paul is not looking to undermine our confidence in Christ and everything we've said thus far, but to banish any complacency in us that says... *"I can walk in Christ and flirt with sin at the same time."*

Later in chapter six, Paul will say...

"Don't be misled – you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant." 6:7

Remember...all of Scripture is for our joy and freedom, which is why God will press against places in our lives that are bringing death rather than life!

Keep reading...

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things.” Galatians 5:22-23

Let’s look at these for a moment (I’ll mention a few)!

Love – *To serve others for their good and intrinsic value, not for what they do for you!*

Joy – *Is to delight in the sheer beauty and worth of who God is. (Star-filled sky; Passage of Scripture that moves you to worship)*

Peace – *The confidence that regardless of whether life is good or bad, God sees and He cares and is in control...you can rest!*

Kindness – *The willingness to serve others practically in such a way that makes me vulnerable! (Generosity)*

Goodness – *(Integrity) – I’m the same person in every situation. Who you are on Friday is who you are on Monday. You’re the same here and at home as you are at work.*

Gentleness – *(Humility, self-forgetfulness) – **Is not to think less of yourself, but to think of yourself less.** You can stand in a crowd without being consumed of what people think of you.*

On one hand, this list is beautiful and breathtaking. But if we’re being honest, it’s overwhelming because we know we’re not living like this every day, all of the time in word, thought, and deed?

So, let me encourage you for a moment...vs.22.

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives.”

Can you say that with me?

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives.”

Who produces this fruit? The Holy Spirit of God! This is the Spirit that Jesus promised in John 16, when He said...

“...It is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.” John 16:7

“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.”

Romans 5:5

The Bible says that when we come to Christ in faith and say, “Jesus, my life is yours,” God pours out his Spirit into our lives, and from that moment, begins in us a process of renewal and restoration! This is GOOD NEWS!!

Many Christians believe that it’s our responsibility to change; to grow in affection for Jesus, eradicate sin, and develop Christ-like character! So...you’ve got a lot of Christians saying, “I’ve got to be better...do better...try harder.” This way of thinking only leads to discouragement...

To say things such as...

“I’ll always be this way (impatient, unkind).”

“I’ll never have the capacity to forgive that person.”

“I came from an angry family, and I’ll always be angry.”

“I could never speak of my love for Jesus publicly. I’m not a courageous person.”

“Our marriage will always be this way...”

“I’m destined for a Junior Varsity Christian life.”

There is frustration in many of our lives because we don’t understand or believe this promise that the Holy Spirit, who raised the beaten, bloodied body of Jesus Christ from the dead is alive in us and is committed to our beauty and joy!

So on one hand...if you belong to Jesus, you are a child of God, covered in the righteousness of Christ, and when God sees you, he sees the perfect, flawless character of Jesus!

But even more so...He is committed, with all of his energy and power to transform you inside and out, so that...

By his grace, you are not the same person today as you were yesterday! You will be a different person tomorrow!

“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”
Philippians 1:6

Do you believe it? Are you resting and rejoicing in this truth? Where do we go from here?

Application

How do we put this into action when we go from here?

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.”

Galatians 5:24-25

Notice, Paul doesn’t say... “Just stop sinning...” He points us to the cross...

1. Come to the Cross – When you came to Christ in faith, you were crucified with Christ! Your sins were nailed to the cross with Jesus, paid for in full!

Too many of us spend our lives under a cloud of condemnation because we don’t rest in the shadow of the cross! We believe God would never accept us because we don’t believe in our hearts what God has done to embrace us!

First thing you must do is to set your heart on the reality of Christ crucified for your sins! Jesus was crushed to make you whole! He was beaten beyond recognition to make you beautiful! He died to give you life...

When you see Jesus dying for you, you’ll ask, *“If I have a Savior who loves me like this, why do I need these other thing in my life?”*

Be honest with Jesus about the good areas of your life that have become too important! The inordinate desires!

Confession Sin: Confession is like taking out the trash...if you don’t do it, your house will stink! To deny that you have sin is to give it the upper hand, but when we confess our sin, he forgives us and frees...

2. Follow the Spirit’s Leading

Children: Elise, my seven-year old daughter is still at the age where, if we’re in a parking lot or a crowded room, I will simply reach out my hand, and she

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instinctively places hers in mine and allows me to guide her through the crowded room!

To follow the Spirit's leading is to joyfully place your hand in the hand of the God and say, lead me! You saved me from sin, spared me from destruction, and gave me a future! My life is yours...

What does this mean practically to follow the Spirit?

Scripture: John 16 – *The Holy Spirit reveals truth to our hearts by reminding us of what Jesus said. Today, God does this through Scripture. We need to not only read God's Word, but to let God's Word read us...press in...convict us of sin, yes...but to also to motivate us towards obedience!*

**Obedience – When we respond to Scripture in faith, it's called obedience!
Obedience lines the path of transformation!**

Community – You can't do this alone. The truth is that it's hard to see what God is doing in our lives! Ask someone... what are you seeing in me? Is Jesus changing me? You need people to affirm...and you need people to confront gently.

We're going to take these next few moments to worship! As we do, to ask the Holy Spirit to make Christ more beautiful to our hearts! Communion – making real the cross of Jesus Christ! Confessing sin...celebrating freedom!

Pray!