

Galatians: The Charter of Christian Freedom 6:7-18**AEMMC**

I am stepping into this series right at the end.

For the last five weeks or so you have been in the book of Galatians,

And you have already walked through the key issues.

Galatians may be his most dramatic and passionate letter.

We see his heart for the church and for the Gospel,
and we hear both his love / and his frustration.

And in Galatians we get some of the most beautiful, memorable and dramatic summaries of the Gospel

– a summary of this truth
that has turned Paul's life upside down,
and is nothing short of history making.

The result of this good news is summarized by Paul in Second Corinthians 5
and then echoed in Galatians 6. Paul writes,

*Therefore,
if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:*

The old has gone, the new is here!

It is this truth that is echoed in the amazement
of so many of the classic hymns by Charles Wesley:

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in my Savior's blood?*

Died he for me who caused his pain?

And then later --

*No condemnation / now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine -- 3 mins*

And in this letter we hear some of the most dramatic appeals to Christian freedom:

Like Galatians 2:20

*I have been crucified with Christ
And it is no longer I who live, But Christ who lives in me.*

And Galatians 5:1

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free,
Stand firm therefore!
And do not let yourselves be burdened again
By a yoke of slavery!*

So let's walk briefly through the letter, and then we'll look at the issues Paul takes on in ch 6

Paul begins by defending his apostleship.

He received the authentic gospel message, and not through any man
but directly through the Lord Jesus.

He is therefore in a position to judge between the true and any false Gospel.

Paul then moves on to declare that salvation is *through faith and trust in Christ ALONE*.

It can't be obtained through the law or religious performance.

He references the experience of the Galatians at this point:

if they *received* the Spirit by simple faith,

if they *started* this journey in God by trusting Christ,
why would they then expect to *finish* the journey by human effort?

And he recalls the example of the Patriarch Abraham,
who "believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Furthermore, and this point is not lost on his readers,

Abraham was justified BEFORE the law was given.
To try to now connect the law with salvation is simply backwards.

Then in chapter five Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit
And Abe covered that very well for us last week.

Now in chapter six we are going to find a summary of the issues:

The carnal nature opposes the spirit..
What matters is inward transformation.. and outward fruit
and the Cross is the ONLY foundation for Christian life.

This issue of FLESH versus SPIRIT has often been confusing.

In English the word “flesh” can be taken to mean our physical body.

This is NOT what the Greek word means.

This is NOT an issue of body vs SPIRIT -

Rather the battle is between the fallen, carnal nature and the new life God creates in us.

In German the translation is usually “old man” versus “new man”

So then what’s the problem?

The problem is to what we sow – we sow to the carnal nature rather than the spirit.

And this issue of fallen nature vs the new creation is summarized by Paul by analogy with two types of people: Greek and Jew.

The Jew is Paul’s type for the religious man
The Greek is Paul’s type for the secular man.

And what is the root issue? Simply this:

The root of all sin –
We want to be our own Savior and Lord.

And we do this in one of two ways.

We reduce the Gospel to EITHER

Moral conformity OR self-discovery.

Moral conformity is religious performance -- usually a list of do’s and don’ts.

We stay right with God by our own efforts.

Self-discovery is the whole movement of self-improvement and self-knowledge.

And Paul’s response is that none of this counts --

You can be circumcised –
You can be uncircumcised –

You can even keep the outward requirements of the law.

And wisdom and knowledge are not enough.

So long as you rely on your own power for salvation, you missed it.

If you are trusting in something other than the Cross
you may be religious, but you aren't a follower of Jesus.

We'll talk about this more, but first let's back up and look at a really important word.

Because there is SO MUCH confusion around this problem of desire

Many believers make one of two errors, and these errors cause MAJOR life problems.

Many Christians think .. or suspect .. that the body itself is a problem.

Many Christians think.. or suspect.. that desire itself is a problem.

That is really a Buddhist or eastern teaching and not Christian at all.

The problem is NOT our desires themselves, and the problem is not the things we desire.

Let me say that again,

The problem is NOT our desires themselves

And the problem is NOT the things we desire.

Lust is a desire for a good thing – God created sex.

But lust is a desire that is out of control –

So there are two words we have to think about.

The first is a single Greek word in Gal. 5:17,

And the same word in the parallel text in Colossians 3:5,

that we translate with two words: "evil desires" or "sinful desires."

And the second word is "idolatry."

First, "sinful desires."

The Greek word is a single word - EPI-thu-MIA..

And this little prefix EPI means "above" or "over"
so not just ORDINARY desires / but OVER desires.

Excessive desires.

Magnified desires.

So this is a hard word to translate.

And what Paul is doing with this word is pointing to something really important.

And it occurs all over the New Testament whenever it talks about character change.

When we see the English phrase, “evil desires” or “sinful desires” we think of a desire for evil things, right?

But that is NOT what Paul is saying.

What we do in our heads is we create a forbidden list –

Things we are NOT supposed to do.

And an evil desire is to desire one of those evil things.

But that is completely wrong.

The Pharisees were great at avoiding all the stuff on the forbidden list but they`re lost.

What did Jesus say about them? He said they were condemned.

And more than that, they were part of what was wrong with the world.

So we know that creating a list of DO NOT DO’s is not the answer.

Se we can’t say that the real problem is desiring something that`s evil.

And that is not what EPI-thu-MIA is.

EPI-thu-MIA is not talking about an ordinary desire for something that`s bad.

It`s an excessive, over-desire for something that`s good.

Tim Keller helps us out. He puts it like this:

“When a good thing / becomes our god or salvation, it creates *overdesires*.

Thus Paul says that sinful desires become deep things that drive and control us.

Sin creates within us / the feeling / that we must have this or that.”

“Unless he loves me I will just die.”

“If I can’t have that then life is not worth living” etc.

“But the good news is that the Spirit has desires too!
What does the Spirit yearn for?

Jesus tells us in John 16:14 that the Spirit longs to glorify Jesus.

“This means that the Spirit / is battling with your overdesires
that flow out of your commitment to being your own savior

by stirring up your desire for Jesus and His glory.

“To live by the Spirit is to fan into flame this desire through worship and repentance.

“We must deliberately work on the root of our sin –
by gratefully remembering who God is and what’s He’s done for us.

*“What you think you need from your false gods and idols (security or peace or whatever)
you already have in Christ and His love!*

“We use this truth to kill the lies that hold us in the grip of these over-desires
by gazing upon Jesus in the Word and in prayer.”

So if you are hearing “addiction” that is pretty close.

And why is that a problem— because as Paul tells us in Eph 5, the root issue is idolatry.

“You shall have no other gods before me. ”

We are to love God above all else.

And when we don` t love God, there is an empty space in our hearts.

We try to fill it with stuff – with money, sex, or power.

But it doesn` t satisfy because we are created to love God.

There is this *thing* that happens when we love and worship God –

We become what we are worship.

We become what we fix our gaze on.

We have missed this great truth about transformation
because our generation is more mechanical than spiritual.

We like work. We are always ready to try harder.

But we are not good students of spiritual life.

So Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3 about the root of freedom:

*Now the Lord is the Spirit,
And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate
the Lord's glory, are being transformed*

*into his image with ever-increasing glory,
which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

So here is how we should pray:

"Lord I *think* I need this for life,
but you tell me that your love is better than life.

"Help me to believe that and desire that
more than the pseudo-life that this idol is offering me.

"Help me to soak in the reality of what you did for me – dying in my place –
something no idol could or would ever do."

(AND need to practice our new life. – working it out daily in our choices)

Now let's go back to the basic issue.

This issue of the fallen nature vs the Spirit is summarized by Paul

With two ways we seek our own salvation

Moral conformity. The Jew is the type for this.

Self-discovery or wisdom. The Greek is the type for this.

Either way, we are in control of our own salvation.

And then - what happens?

Have you been around someone who has worked really, really hard to get where they are?

Often these people are very proud. Because they think they did it on their own.

And this is esp true for religious success.

We work hard to stay in the lines, and

then we judge all those around us who are struggling.

And this is what we see in verses 1 to 6.

Paul says, “Carry each other’s burdens – but watch yourselves!”

“Watch yourselves, lest you too be tempted.”

The temptation here is not to the same sin, but to something much more subtle:

The temptation is to pride!

“Thank God I don’t have this struggle”

“Thank God that I am better than old Joe who struggles with x, y, and z”

And the result of this thinking? Verse 3

You “think you are something when you are nothing”

When we see others fall / the temptation is to judge OURSELVES as better

When we do that we prove that we are NOT rooted in Christ / *but in our own righteousness*

I achieve my goals by my own power and make myself an idol.

Both of these methods, the moral path / or the self-discovery path,

Leave ME as the center of my little world.

Both of these paths sow to the carnal nature rather than to the new nature.

And I hear a strong echo here from 1 Cor 1:26-31

*Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.
Not many of you were wise by human standards;
not many were influential;
not many were of noble birth.*

*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;
God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—
and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,*

so that NO ONE – NO ONE may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.

And then listen to this – remember there are two ways of seeking salvation:

By wisdom – and by moral conformity—

*It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus,
Who has become for us wisdom from God—*

that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written: “Let those who boast, boast in the Lord.”

The Cross is the great leveller – a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Greeks

The religious man has control of his own salvation -
It is his personal performance that keeps him right with God.

Paul says, *that is an affront to the Cross! Your pride separates you from God.*

The secular man is no different.

In his wisdom he becomes a fool – I can do it myself.

So it is NOT circumcision – it is NOT about outward conformity. The Jew has it wrong.

And it is NOT uncircumcision – not about making it on our own.

The Greek has it wrong. The new agers have it wrong.

And the false teachers are saying, “Didn’t you know – the Cross is not enough.”

God expects you to be circumcised.

And Paul’s response is this : “Never!”

If God gave you the Spirit by faith, why are you now pursuing religion?

At least try and be logical!

And Paul says,

“For myself – may I NEVER boast -- unless I boast in the Cross of Jesus Christ”

He counted even his Jewish identity as loss.

But let’s look at one more issue that comes out of this battle between flesh and spirit –

Between the carnal nature and the new creation.

Because this is not only an issue within our churches,
It’s an issue as we seek to share our faith.

Paul has made it very clear for us, that in Christ there is no male or female,

No Jew or Greek

No rich or poor

No slave or free (3:26-29)

Paul has rejected even his ethnic identity to find himself IN CHRIST ALONE.

How can he do this?

Because he has been grafted into a new spiritual family.

Remember in chapter 3:7 Paul writes,

“Understand, then, that those who have faith / are children of Abraham”

Wait a minute.

I thought my grandfather was Guester Hjalmarson.

But my NEW grandfather is Abraham, the desert wanderer.

All those who have faith are his children.

And Galatians 3:16

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people,

but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.

The Promise of salvation is sure not because it is made / to me and to you,

But because / *it is made to Jesus* –

the son of Adam, son of Abraham, son of David, son of God.

The Promise is sure because it is made to Jesus.

The issue at the end of the day is not imitation - but *participation*

We are children of the free woman, not of the slave.

God has grafted us into a new family -

We are no longer Mennonites and non-Mennonites –

In 1 Peter 2:9-10 we discover that we are a holy nation (*ethnos*).

We are a new kind of family, created in Christ by His death and resurrection.

In the world we have determined familial ties by human blood lines,
but now in God's family we determine them by covenant and the blood of Christ.

WE who trust in Christ are IN CHRIST -- Hallelujah!

*Therefore,
if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:*

The old has gone, the new is here!

Galatians 2:20

*I have been crucified with Christ
And it is no longer I who live,*

But Christ who lives in me.

This isn't THEORY.

It isn't a new perspective on psychology.

This is the glorious truth of salvation
It is the work of God from beginning to end.

Jesus has done it all!

But what difference does it make in our day to day relationships?

If God's point was to create a new race of perfect people
who could then go around pointing out the weaknesses of others –

If that is Christianity – who needs it?

When we see others fall the temptation is to judge ourselves as better

And prove once more that we are NOT rooted in Christ / *but in our own righteousness*

Karl Barth, the great German theologian, put it like this:

*When we confess our virtues we are competitors,
when we confess our sins -- we are brothers .*

Betty and I have loved the "faith story" sharing that is going on every Sunday.

It reminds us of the "open mike" time we have had at METRO every Sunday for the past 3 years.

It is easy to judge someone when you don't know their story.

But when you enter the pain of another, you have compassion.

*When we confess our virtues we are competitors,
when we confess our sins -- we are brothers .*

Many of us know John 3:16, but what about John 3:17?

*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but to save the world through him.*

Mercy triumphs over judgement – HALLELUJAH!

The Cross is the hinge point of our faith.

It is the place where the deep character of God is revealed.

But more than that, it is where we learn our deep need.

Tim Keller writes,

“You are worse off than you ever dared imagine,
But God loves you more than you ever dared to hope.”

**NOTHING in my hands I bring
SOLELY to thy cross I cling**

(Block – we have focused on individual transformation and AGAIN
Made the gospel all about US <http://nextreformation.com/?p=4750>)

Now, what I Have NOT done is talk about how we sow to the spirit
rather than sowing to the flesh.

But that has been done in earlier weeks.

I want to close by remembering an old story.

There was a man who had two sons –

And we all know the story of the waiting father..

Sometimes called the story of the prodigal son..

And in that story we see a man who has always done the right thing –

But who does not understand the heart of the father.

And we see another man who was so focused on self-discovery

That he was prepared to treat his father like dirt.

And the shocking reality of the story is that the father bears all this --
He bears what most of us would not bear.

He is patient, gentle, vulnerable and loving through it all.

And he is completely unlike the way we think about God.

Every year my daughters ask me what I want for Christmas.

I never know what to say.

Because there is nothing I want from them..

Except that they be around at Christmas time.

I want to see their faces, their smiles,
I want to love them and hold them again.

That is the simple heart of a father.

And we hear that simple heart in Jesus:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary
and burdened,
and I will give you rest.*

*Take my yoke upon you -- and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.*

*For my yoke -- is easy
and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30*

The law was a great burden to the Jews,
And it was a burden that religious teachers wanted the new Christians to carry.

This is why Paul cries out,

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free,
Stand firm therefore!
And do not let yourselves be burdened again
By a yoke of slavery!*

Here is how Eugene Peterson translates Jesus words from Matthew 11.

Are you tired? Worn out?
Burned out on religion?

Come to me.
Get away with me and you'll recover your life.
I'll show you how to take a real rest.
Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.
Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

Pilgrims progress -- the picture of carrying the burden..

What are you burdened with?

What prevents you from living in the freedom of the Spirit?

What kind of help do you need to break through to peace and freedom?

God gives us the body so that we can `bear one another`s burdens`

The pastors and elders would love to help you and pray for you.