

May 25th, 2025
“Living by Faith”
Galatians 1:13-17; 2:11-21

Monday: “Previous Way” - Gal 1: 13-14

Paul had come to the region of Galatia, which is around modern day Turkey, to witness to the Gentiles. While he was there he suffered some of the most intense persecution, beatings, and sufferings that he ever encountered along his missionary journey. But despite all that happened to him, he deeply love the churches in this region. He taught them about finding freedom through the salvation offered in Jesus Christ. A spiritual freedom they had never experienced before.

But then he left the region, moving on to the next area, and it seemed like everything started to fall apart. Yes, the churches in Galatia wanted freedom, but they didn't seem to grasp what it meant to be truly free in Christ. In the midst of the confusion entered a group known as the Judiziers, people who grew up Jewish and told them that their faith in Christ wasn't complete if they didn't act like a Jew. News got back to Paul and he was noticeably upset.

He is upset because the churches took the grace of Jesus Christ and imparted on top of it a list of rules - making it legalistic instead of loving. They put so many rules on it that they are in danger of losing what the heart of the gospel is all about - Jesus Christ. He saw what the Judiziers were doing as a hinderance to the faith that these gentile pagans who had come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The teachings of the Judaizers were becoming a hinderance.

How does Pauls 'previous life allow him to both understand and refute the Judaizers?

Prayer: Lord, free us from our need to be in control that makes us add to your grace with laws. Let us live into your freedom alone, we pray. Amen.

Tuesday: “Grace” - Gal 1: 15-17

I have to believe that the Judiazers did not set out to make the Gospel message more complicated. I want to believe that they had the best interest of the Galatians in mind. I want to believe that because too many Christians are like the Judiazers today, adding rules to grace. Trying to put forth the message that Jesus is not enough alone, even if we don't mean to. We say that you need to believe in Jesus *and* in order to be a good Christian. You need to believe in Jesus *and* like a certain style of worship. You need to believe in Jesus *and* vote a certain way. You need to believe in Jesus *and* following the rules not of Christ, but of this specific church. All of the rules were weighting the Galatians down, just like they weigh us down today.

Think of some of the “ands” that we add to our faith today. Some are preferences - we want you to dress a certain way. Others are cultural misunderstandings about the Bible - such as not having tattoos, which had more to do with ownership, being branded, then the expression of love or devotion that most tattoos show today. The truth is that we all have “ands” that we've added to faith in Jesus Christ that are weighing us down and distracting us from the gospel truth, making faith and grace far more complicated then it should be.

What are some of the “ands” we to to grace today?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you that you came to teach a new way to live. A way marked by your truth and grace. Let us live into your life, boldly and fully, being freed from the extra “ands” we hear all around us. Amen.

Wednesday: “Oppose” - Gal 2: 11-14

There is a distinction to be made between structure that helps us live out our faith by being acceptable and the Church representing Christ to the world and imposing rules on top of our faith that distract us from our mission. A wonderful example of this came from my spiritual director, who served with her husband as a missionary around the world for decades. The places where Christianity often faltered were those areas where North Americans and Europeans went into tribal cultures, introduced Christ to folks, but didn't stop there. Instead of allowing people to live into their faith in the context of their culture and society, they took their evangelism one step forward, and one step too far, by explicitly telling people they weren't quite Christian until they accepted the way of being and culture from the missionaries. For example, going into an African tribal society and trying to make them democratic in the name of being Christian. Democracy isn't in the Bible and by trying to impose this way of living, they just confused what it meant to be a follower of Jesus Christ with their particular way of living.

Have you ever noticed when someone doesn't have all of the facts right they just skip logic altogether and start attacking people? Paul wants the Galatians to know that he has preached the full and true Gospel to them. Jesus's teachings, death, and resurrection. He didn't water down the Gospel, as he was accused on by the Judaizers, in order to convert them. He gave them the whole gospel and let the Holy Spirit convict and lead them into faith. Now others were coming to make their faith about the law instead of Jesus, and that is not part of the Gospel message of Christ. Its almost as if they have been saved from a burning ship, are on the lifeboat, and are now trying to steer the boat back towards the flames. And when they can't, they start jumping overboard and swimming towards the now sinking ship.

How would you explain the argument between Peter and Paul?

Prayer: God, forgive us for the times we have used faith as a weapon when we disagree with someone. Instead, unite us in your love, we pray. Amen.

Thursday: “Faith in Christ” - Gal 2: 16-16

Paul proclaimed that the Gospel message tells us that we are saved by Jesus Christ alone. Not by our own actions of following the law to a 't' or worshipping a certain way, or anything else that is done by our own merit. Paul isn't giving them this message in a diluted form, or to make them like him. He is telling them the whole gospel because he is compelled to by Christ. Humorously, what the Judizers are proclaiming about needing to follow the law, is what he believed before encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Knowing how painful that road is, he is trying to steer the Galatians away from it, towards the Gospel. He doesn't want them to follow a law just to please others, he wants them to please God.

Our deepest human desire is for companionship and we think we can achieve that by making people like us, or by making people *like* us, in our image. Paul speaks firmly against this, saying that we are not to proclaim the Gospel, the very word of God, to please others, but because we are compelled by God. We are merely vessels to help others glorify God!

How much of what we do and who we are, both as individual believers and this Church, is because we are seeking to glorify God and how much of it is to make other people like us? How much of what we do is to fulfill other people's expectations and how much of it is living into the mission God has created us for?

How does your faith in Christ center and guide you?

Prayer: Lord, sometimes we want others to like us, other times we want other people to be like us, and both ways of living can steer us away from living by faith alone. Speak to us again what it means to have faith in you. Lead us to follow you, we pray. Amen.

Friday: “Grace of God” - Gal 2: 17-21

The truth is that the Word of God is powerful. It’s the message of the Gospel that leads people to love Christ. It’s the message of Christ still converts hearts today - if we get out of the way and stop complicating it with our own agendas and laws. We need to get out of our own way in order to get back to the root of the church - the Word of God. We need to get out of our own way in order for the church to be re-born anew, like that first Pentecost. S

I am commissioning you today, may the love of Jesus Christ and the grace that passes all understanding, shine through you, as it did the apostle Paul, so that those who do not yet know Christ come to that knowledge through you. And leave it at that. Don’t give into the temptation to make someone like you, so that others may be made in the image, not of us, but of God.

How has the grace of God changed your life?

Prayer: Lord, we rejoice in your grace and how it has transformed us. Let us listen to the call of your grace upon our lives and respond with eager hearts every day. Amen.