



March 30, 2014
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Ergo... Be Free
Galatians 5:1-13

For those of us who heard Josh McDowell last week, I think we would all agree: it was a somewhat shocking experience. However you felt about that, I guarantee you—Josh intended to shock. He feels that the scourge of pornography is so dangerous, so pervasive and so destructive, that he wants to shock us with stories and statistics.

Hmmm... someone uses shocking language to awaken his audience to a risk he doesn't think they understand or take seriously enough. Does that sound familiar? How about Paul? We have been journeying through the first four chapters of Galatians and have heard pretty shocking language from Paul. Language intended to shock because he wants to make sure his readers understand the seriousness of the topic. As a matter of fact, this morning, we are going to hear his most shocking language yet... probably a PG rating. So a word to the wise!

Tuesday I flew down to Boulder, Colorado to meet with a church session to talk about joining our denomination. On the Southwest flight back, I was seated in the front seat and an older woman was across the aisle from me. She was very feeble and obviously in rough shape. As we sat at the gate, her nose started bleeding...and it bled for the entire almost 3 hour flight. Nothing she did could stop it. At one point, she stumbled into the bathroom to try and get the problem under control... and made such a mess that it had to be closed until the flight attendant could clean it up. He put on surgical gloves, a mask, used a bio-hazard bag... it was quite an involved process cleaning up this poor woman's terrible mess. All she could do was sit there, helplessly, towel to her nose, and watch as he worked.

Shortly before we landed, he finished cleaning and sat down on the jump seat near the old woman. She was so embarrassed and so appreciative. She reached out and handed him something. It was a twenty dollar bill... a tip for cleaning up her mess. But he handed the bill back across the aisle and said, "I cannot take this. You cannot pay me to do my job. I am trained to do it and I was happy to help you." All she could do was say, "Thank you," and receive the gift of his kindness.

This is a wonderful summary of the gospel as Paul has painted it so far in Galatians. Jesus came to clean up our mess. To do what we could not do on our own. Only he could do it. Our life was stained with sin and brokenness. We were

helpless to undo the mess we had made. But out of his sheer grace through his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus paid our price; he cleaned up our mess. He made us righteous before the Father who adopted us as his children. We could not assist him; we could not reimburse him... we could not tip him. All we could do was say, "Thank you," and receive the gracious gift of His kindness.

That is the good and utterly unique news of the gospel of Jesus. But false teachers had come into Galatia and thrown them into confusion. They said that Paul was wrong. They said Paul's message was wrong. They told these Gentile believers that, unless they became Jews—unless they obeyed all of the Jewish rules—not even Jesus could save them. Yes, Jesus died on the cross and rose again. That's fine, but it's not enough. You must eat kosher and keep the Sabbath and observe the cleanliness rules and, most importantly, every Gentile man must be circumcised. Otherwise, you aren't saved. Jesus is not enough. You have to pay to clean up your mess. You have to do your part! You have to help God out!

Paul is furious, and he's not done saying shocking things to the Galatians.

A few weeks ago, our session presented a resolution to Chuck Hunter, the retiring mayor. It was written like most resolutions. It started off with a bunch of "whereases"... "Whereas Chuck is a great guy, whereas he built all three of our buildings, whereas he served the city as mayor for eight years, whereas the city experienced unprecedented growth under his leadership... whereas, whereas, whereas..."

Galatians 1-4 contains the "whereases" of the gospel. "Whereas I, Paul, am an apostle called by God to proclaim the good news of Jesus; whereas you were trapped in sin and could do nothing about it; whereas God sent Jesus to die in your place and rise from the grave in victory; whereas, when God looks at you, He sees only the righteousness of his sinless Son; whereas in that moment he declares you justified; whereas He has adopted you as his sons and daughters; and whereas his Holy Spirit now lives inside of you, sanctifying you, moment by moment for the rest of your life..." Whereas!

But what is missing? All of these whereases are great, but what does every resolution need to be complete? Therefore! Whereas, whereas, whereas, whereas... therefore! Chapter 5 introduces us to the "therefores" of the gospel. What is the Latin word for "therefore?" Ergo! Our new sermon series is called "Ergo;" "Therefore" because in these last two chapters, Paul deals with the "therefores" of Christian life. Whereas God has done everything to save us and we can do nothing to save ourselves... whereas the work of Jesus is entirely sufficient to save us... therefore—ergo—what? What difference should it make in our lives? How will we live differently because these things are true?

Paul introduces the first "therefore" in verse 1. We'll get to it in a moment, but first, Paul wants to repeat himself! We have already listened as Paul's scolds the

Galatians and the false teachers who misled them; who taught them that Jesus was not enough; that they had to be Jewish to be saved. We've heard that message... clearly. Well, Paul is about to repeat himself. We might be tempted to say, "Hey, I got it the first two or three times you said it! I'm not dense!" But repetition in the Bible means something: "This is important! This matters! Pay attention!" So pay attention!

What is the topic of Paul's repetition? Circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of the Jewish covenant. It was the mark of belonging to God. And if—as the false teachers claimed—you had to be a Jew in order for Jesus to save you... well, circumcision was the ultimate expression of Jewishness. Remember, these are all Gentiles! Not only are they not circumcised, it was considered in Roman culture to be a barbaric act of mutilation. In fact, there was actually a surgical procedure to reverse circumcision for those who changed their mind; who didn't want the embarrassment of being seen naked in the Roman baths and gymnasia.

But the message of the false teachers was: if you Gentiles don't get circumcised, you aren't saved. And Paul's repeated response could not be stated more clearly than in verse 2: "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all." In other words, "Not only does circumcision not make you more "worthy" of salvation, if you choose to be circumcised—just to hedge your bets—Christ can't save you. That is your choice. Either you receive the blood and scars of your circumcision—which declares that you are going to pursue your holiness before God by your own effort—or you receive the blood and scars of Christ's crucifixion—which declares that you trust him to save you. Those are your only two choices: one or the other, all or nothing." Listen to verse 3. "Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."

This is the drumbeat message of Galatians. Paul repeats it, because we don't want to get it! As often as we have read Paul's words, there are still hundreds of us here today who prefer to be a member of the Circumcision Party—who prefer to believe that we can help Jesus out, that his work on the cross is not enough—that we also have to do stuff in order to be saved. We have to keep the rules to help Jesus out. Why? Because we want to be in control. We like thinking that our salvation depends, at least in part, upon what we do. And we don't like the feeling that our eternal fate is entirely in the hands of someone else. But those are our only two choices. Either we trust that Christ can save us, or we trust in ourselves and our ability to be good enough to please God.

The Galatians were being seduced by the message that they could obey the rules and earn God's favor. And Paul is furious at the falsehood of this teaching... furious at the rule-keepers who are trying to steal this gift of grace. How furious? So furious that we read his crudest comments yet, and that's saying something in

this book! Verse 12: "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves." "These false teachers who are trying to steal God's grace from you—these "Snippies" who claim that circumcision is essential—I wish they'd perform the procedure on themselves and slip with the scalpel. Instead of just the foreskin, I wish they'd cut everything off!" I know, but that's what the Bible says!

Ouch! Could Paul be any clearer about how high the stakes are? Once more, he repeats himself: it is by God's grace alone that we have been saved. We can do nothing to save ourselves. Rule-keeping will not do it. Christ has done it on his cross, and because Christ has done it all "Whereas" Christ has done it all... therefore, what? Ergo what? 5.1: Therefore: "Be free!" "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." He repeats it in verse 13: "You, my brothers, were called to be free."

The great "therefore" of Galatians is "freedom!" Eleven times in this short book, Paul uses some form of the word "free." And the most majestic proclamation comes here in verse 1: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." Do you see the last four words? The original Greek means an action that took place once in the past and lasts forever. That's justification! The work of Christ on the cross—his covering us with his righteousness—that happened once, and it lasts forever! What does this mean for the person who surrenders to Jesus, then? What is the "therefore?" Therefore, you are free! Spiritual freedom is not something you have to work for not something you must gain or claim. You have it. "You are free," Paul says. So be free! Live free."

But if you can't gain your freedom, there is something you can do. What? Lose your freedom. Isn't that what he is saying in the last half of verse 1? "Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Paul is saying, "You already have your freedom in Christ. It has been given you. You can't gain it; you can only lose it. So stand firm—don't waver, don't waffle—don't you dare allow the yoke of rule-keeping slavery to be put back on your neck.

How many of you have seen the Oscar award-winning film *Twelve Years a Slave*? It is the disturbing, true story—set in 1841—of Solomon Northrup, a free black man living in Saratoga, New York with his wife and two kids. Northrup was kidnapped and transported to New Orleans where he was sold into slavery. He had never been a slave. He was an educated man who could read and write. But suddenly he found himself cutting cane and picking cotton under the whip of a master. Because he could not pick 200 pounds of cotton a day, he was lashed to a post each day and whipped. Because he defended himself against one of the overseers, he was hung by his neck and left for hours in the heat of the day, barely able to touch the ground with his toes. He was forced to whip another slave because if he didn't, the master would kill her.

For twelve years, Northrup is in bondage, fighting to escape. Finally, a sympathetic man writes to his family in New York and a friend arrives with the sheriff and takes him home. I admit, I was bawling in the last scene where Northrup first lays eyes on his family after twelve years' absence. His first words, tears streaming down his face: "I apologize for my appearance, but I've had a difficult time these past several years."

But the more powerful scene was when he awoke after having been drugged and kidnapped to find himself in chains. For the first time, this free man was shackled. The terror in his eyes, as he tried frantically to free himself, was haunting.

The whole powerful point of the movie was this: here was a free man who had his freedom taken away. He had never been a slave. He did not know the chafing of shackles or the bite of the bullwhip. Because he knew the joy of freedom, it made his twelve years of slavery even more horrific than the poor soul who had been born into captivity. Solomon Northrup did everything he could to regain his freedom.

Paul says, "You already have your freedom. Why would you give it up? Why would you return to a life of rule-keeping? Why would you try to add your meager efforts to the sufficient work that Christ has already done for you?"

How do we let freedom slip away? How do we lay a yoke back upon our own necks? I'll share one way... the most destructive of all. It is the bondage of guilt. When we receive Christ and say, "Jesus, please forgive me of my sins..." in that moment, we experience the most wonderful deliverance. The feeling of freedom; of chains removed; of scars healed. Even for the most awful sins for which we need forgiveness. But as time passes, the Devil begins to lie to us. He calls back to our awareness those things of which we are most ashamed.

I know it has been true for me... sins that go back decades. From time to time, I find the Enemy of My Soul bringing them back to my consciousness... causing me to mull them, to stew on them, stirring my sense of guilt and failure and shame, making me doubt what Christ has done for me. I find myself re-praying about it... re-confessing it, feeling awful about it again. And my freedom is stolen. I remember one time, many years ago, sharing this with Pastor Jim Mead. He said, "You need to receive the work of Christ once and for all! You need to renounce the enemy who would steal your forgiveness, and you need to claim the forgiveness of Jesus, once and for all."

When those guilt moments come, we don't stand firm. We doubt. We question. We see the yoke of slavery lying there on the ground, and we begin to eye it and finger it and heft it and consider replacing it upon our necks. If we pray more, if we confess more, if we feel bad more, if we do more penance, then maybe we will deserve to be forgiven. And when we do that, we have traded freedom for slavery. Someone once told me, when we re-confess a sin that we've already confessed to

God, He is up in heaven saying, "What are you talking about? I don't remember that," because when we confessed it in the first place, Christ took it upon himself, wiped it clean and made it disappear.

Jesus once said in John 8, "If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed!" How many here this day need to believe in the freedom they possess? How many here this day need to be free... to live into the reality that is ours in Christ. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!" You don't need to seek it. You don't need to work for it. You've got it! You need to keep it! Thank Jesus for the freedom that is yours, and begin to live what you are! "Free at last, free at last—thank God almighty—you are free at last!"

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. What does "ergo" mean? Why is that the name of this sermon series? How would you sum up the first half of what Galatians has to say about the gospel that leads us to this "therefore" section?

2. How do you define freedom? How do you think Paul understands that word? Can you think of a time when you felt like you were in bondage? How were you delivered?