



Sermon Growth Guide

September 11, 2022

Tempted by Good



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Freedom - Tempted by Good

Galatians 2:11-21

Key Verse: Galatians 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Big Idea: Freedom involves putting an end to any temptation of good works and putting on Christ fully and completely.

Foundations

This week we are continuing in our study of Galatians, looking at Galatians 2:11-21.

It is so hard in our world to not do good. In every form, society tells us to work harder, look better, and to be more successful. Striving for these things often leaves us feeling trapped instead of liberated. Well, there is a “better” out there that is actually worth striving for, and that better freedom, might I add the best freedom, is in knowing we can find in Christ Jesus today.

In this passage, we see a debacle between two spiritual leaders that arose out of an idolatry of nation and culture over the love for a neighbor. Paul shares that it is not by works that we are saved but by faith alone and that the greatest threat to the gospel comes when we allow these traditions or customs to stand in the way of love.

Freedom is on the other end of the cross. Freedom in Christ is not simply adding Christ into your already constricting efforts to do good, it is a matter of laying every effort and thought down at the cross to walk in the true freedom Christ intended for you to have.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Galatians 2:11-21.

I am amazed that Peter’s line of thinking even led Barnabas astray. Why do you think that is?

Applying God’s Word

What area(s) of your heart still tell you that you need to earn Christ’s salvation?

Contrast life with a work-based salvation and life with a faith-based salvation. What are some real life examples of ways we are tempted by good works?

Tim talked about a “white funeral” where we put to death all our striving and laid everything at the feet of Jesus. If you are comfortable, share that moment with your group.

Witnessing God’s Word

Think of ways that you can set a reminder of your white funeral in your busy schedule this week.

Think of someone who need to hear the good news of the gospel this week and send a word of encouragement to them.

The hardest thing in the world is to watch a friend make a mistake. Bijou is a one-way street running east to west. Every day from my office window I watch five or six cars pull out of the parking deck and turn left, against one-way traffic. I cringe watching them sit there at the intersection in ignorance, just waiting for some truck or city bus to come screaming directly at them. Seriously, a half-dozen a day that I witness! There is nothing I can do. I just watch and wait and pray. Then I celebrate when the penny drops, the driver realizes they are headed the wrong direction. The only thing to do when you are headed the wrong direction is back up and turn around. The Bible calls it repentance; turning around, changing your mind. We need that with Jesus. But even that is only the beginning. The real change we need is passing through the cross into new life in Jesus.

We are looking for a greater freedom as we study Galatians. Jesus has won a better freedom. This verse is one of the most succinct and clear pictures of the gospel and the freedom it offers that we will ever find. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) Can you imagine? Freedom is actually on the other side of going to the cross. Freedom is on the other side of giving your life away to Jesus. Freedom is found after you die to self and live to Christ. Jesus once said, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it." (Luke 9:24) What does that mean? Paul experienced it. He called it being crucified with Christ. But to die with Christ is also to rise with Christ and find new life, resurrection life, free life. Jesus. To know Him is to love Him. To trust Him is to grow in confidence. To bend the knee and give your life to Him is to finally be free.

Peter made a terrible mistake. Peter was not perfect. Neither was Paul. Neither am I; neither are you. Only Jesus is perfect. Paul watches his friend Peter

make a horrible mistake here. The gospel is not something to be spoken only but lived out. Your actions must display the gospel truth. Peter failed at that one day, and Paul tells the story. "When Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group." (Galatians 2:11-12) Paul doesn't stand up and condemn Peter. See that? He shows him where he is standing. You are headed the wrong way on a one-way! But Peter did it because he was afraid. It's amazing what fear and defensiveness of your personal reputation can make you do. Do you fear people, or do you fear God? If you fear God, you never have to fear another person again. But that's easier said than done. Peter pulled out of Christian fellowship when the Jewish-Christian legalizers appeared. He might have thought it was not a big deal, but Paul saw an absolute abrogation of the truth of the gospel and the freedom Christ has won! And others followed. "The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray." (Galatians 2:13) Always measure your actions asking yourself if you would want others to do the same.

The issue here, if we have not yet covered it clearly, is that some were coming to the Galatian churches and saying that if you want to be a Christian you must first become a Jew. You need to subscribe to the Jewish ways and customs to be folded into the community. Dress the way we dress. Talk the way we talk. Eat the way we eat. Vote the way we vote. Thank God we don't do any of that type of thing around here. (Sheepish snicker). "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'" (Galatians 2:14) If it is a sin, what sin would you call it? What is the name for



the spirit that has taken over Peter's mind and caused him to act not in line with the truth of the gospel? Out of line. It's nationalism. It's favoritism. It's racism at worst. But the sin, the sin is idolatry. You put your idolatry of race, nation, or culture in front of your love for neighbor. Out of line. The *only*, only requirement to join in Christian fellowship with the church is that you have thrown your lot in with the grace of Jesus and long to participate in the salvation He has won by His life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead. That's it.

Paul makes the argument, here and for the rest of the letter, that to take one step toward earning your place with God, earning your place in the church, earning your salvation through your actions and works, to take one step in that direction, in word or in deed, is to step out of the stream of justification by grace through faith and back into the stream of works righteousness, attempting to prove that you are worthy of salvation by doing all that is prescribed in the law. Peter was tempted by good, by doing good, by good works. Choose. Law or grace. Pick one. Pick your savior—yourself (good luck) or Jesus (good Lord).

Paul had been tempted by good too. He had tried to justify himself by acts of the law. It killed him. "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God." (Galatians 2:19) The law isn't evil. The law is all the teachings of the Ten Commandments and the laws and prophets, and all these inspired Scriptures that show us righteousness and virtue and holiness in God's sight. The law reveals the heart of God and the healthiest, purest way of life. At the same time, it is impossible to completely satisfy. No one can do it. Only Jesus. As is said, you don't break the law; the law breaks you. You realize you are far from holy when you approach the law. You realize you are far from perfect, far from righteous, even far from your own standards of goodness and kindness. The law pushes you to despair. Paul says, the law itself proved to me that I can't keep the law. It broke me. So I gave up, gave in, gave over my life to my loving Savior, Jesus. The law condemns,

but the gospel sets free. Martin Luther wrote, "The law therefore does not justify but condemns; but the gospel is a preaching of Christ who forgives sins, gives grace, and justifies and saves sinners." The law is not a method to earn your salvation; it is a revelation that you need a Savior.

Paul confronted Peter. One step in that direction, brother, and you have lost the gospel won by Jesus Christ. "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:21) The greatest threat to the gospel does not come from the world or the culture. The greatest threat to the gospel comes from inside, within our halls, within our hearts, when we either accept some notion of Christianity that evacuates the cross of meaning (Why did Jesus die on the cross then?) or, as we see today, we rise up in exclusionary confidence and spiritual pride and allow custom or tradition or anything else to stand in the way of love.

But let's return to verse 20. You see, for Paul, for all of us, it isn't a matter of simply adding grace to our religious efforts. It isn't a matter of adding a little of the love of Jesus to your life. It is a matter of death. An end. A full stop and a last breath of your old life, your old man, your old woman. Death. A distinct and sharp giving over of your life, in its entirety, to Jesus Christ. That's what this verse means. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) Paul doesn't say, "and so I sprinkled a little grace on my spiritual efforts and religious striving, and I felt so much better; I added a little Jesus to my pursuit of the perfect life, and I felt so much better." No. I died, he says. I went to the cross, he says. I stopped living to the law. I stopped living to myself. Jesus calls it being born again, born anew, born from above. The life you need, the better freedom won by Jesus, it comes only from a full and total surrender of your life. You must pass through the cross into the free country.



Let me read you this passage from Oswald Chambers' famous devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*. Chambers calls this a "white funeral." "There must be a 'white funeral,' a death with only one resurrection—a resurrection into the life of Jesus Christ. Have you really come to your last days? You have often come to them in your mind, but have you really experienced them? You cannot die or go to your funeral in a mood of excitement. Death means you stop being. You must agree with God and stop being the intensely striving kind of Christian you have been. We avoid the cemetery and continually refuse our own death. It will not happen by striving, but by yielding to death. It is dying— being "baptized into His death" (Romans 6:3). Have you had your 'white funeral,' or are you piously deceiving your own soul? Has there been a point in your life which you now mark as your last day? Is there a place in your life to which you go back in memory with humility and overwhelming gratitude, so that you can honestly proclaim, 'Yes, it was then, at my 'white funeral,' that I made an agreement with God.' Are you willing to experience that 'white funeral' now? Will you agree with Him that this is your last day on earth? The moment of agreement depends on you."

Have you gone to the cross with Jesus? Have you passed through the death of the cross into new life in Jesus? I knew a man who was striving and succeeding in business. When Christ confronted him, he began crying so hard he had to pull his car over on the side of the highway. Jesus hit him square between the eyes through a song on the radio. He wept and wept until his shirt was drenched in tears, and he said, "Yes, Lord. I am yours. I stop my striving and my desperate attempts to justify my own life. I'm yours. I give you my life." He is one of the most joyful men you will meet today. I plan to see him in a few weeks in Atlanta. I know a man who had Jesus appear to him in a vision while he was wasting away in a prison cell in Ethiopia. Locked up behind bars, he found freedom giving his life to Christ. His wife, miles away, had an appearance

of Jesus in a dream that same night. The Lord can set you free when you give Him your life. For me, it was a Young Life camp when I was twelve years old. "Yes, Jesus, if you want this life, it is yours." Never have I felt such a flood of joy. Have you had your white funeral? Your death to self and living to Christ? Your passing through the cross; your rising into new life?

I offer it to you today. I will lead you in your own white funeral. Maybe you can name a time when your confidence in Jesus grew, and another time when it waned. Have you fully given your life into His hands? Do it today. "Jesus paid it all; all to him I owe." He who loved me and gave Himself for me. I am tempted to save myself. I am tempted by good works for my own justification, but why would I rob the glory of the victories of Jesus? He has done it. I receive it. Do you want the better freedom Christ has won? It is here. Where fears are stilled. Where strivings cease. At the cross. Pray with me now, "Jesus, I have tried to save myself, I have slipped deeper into sin. You are my Savior. You are the one who died for me. Today is the day I give you my life. I cling to the cross. I hide in your grace. I love you Jesus. Thank you for loving me. In Jesus name, amen."

This is an important moment. There is only one way to stop the striving and live in the Savior. Die to self and live to Christ.

