

Intro and Galatians Overview

What do you look for in someone you date?

Has someone ever loved you unconditionally? How did/would that affect you?

Let's look at God's love for us-- this sets Christianity apart from every other religion (not what we DO for God but the gospel is about what God has DONE for us)!

- Psalm 139:1-16
- What do you think of the intimacy we see in this Psalm? How does this inform or change your view of God?

Galatians Overview: Read 1:1-5

1. Who is Paul? Read Acts 9:1-15
2. What do you think the word "gospel" means?

"To a shameful degree, we Christians are morally indistinct from the world. Why? One reason is that we think piecemeal... we do not perceive reality from God's perspective... What we really need is to be reeducated in reality, as it is interpreted for us by the gospel. **We need to know who God really is. We need to find out who we really are. We need to understand what our root problem really is and what God's merciful answer really is.** And we need that new perception of reality to percolate deep down into our affections and desires, reorienting us radically and joyfully to a whole new way of life." (taken from *A Passion for God*, Afterword by Raymond C Ortlund, Jr)

3. Themes in Galatians:

-Faith vs Law
-Intimacy with Christ (sons and daughters through the gospel)
-Freedom in Christ

Next week:

Read Galatians 1:1-2:10

Observe (What is it saying- why, when, how?), **Interpret** (What does it mean? What do we learn about God? Context, history), **Apply** (What does this mean in my life?)

Galatians 1, The Uniqueness of the Gospel

Who are some of the people you seek approval from for various things you do?

1. What do we learn about the gospel message just from what Paul says in passing about it in 1:3-6? In light of 1:6 and 2:3-5, what can we guess the opposing teaching (“different gospel”) to be?
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Reflect and React:

“Paul says: ‘A different gospel... in reality is no gospel at all’ (Gal 1:6-7). Martin Luther says: ‘There is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. If we say, as the circumcision party did: “you need Christ plus something else,” then you have not just diminished the gospel but eliminated it. For to add anything to Christ is to make him only an Example or a Helper but to make yourself Savior.’”

~What do you think, how do you react to this quote?

2. What does Paul teach in vs 1:6-10 about how we should think about:

~All truth-claims by teachers/philosophers

~Our own feelings and experiences

Why is he so uncompromising? How does he apply this standard even to himself?

3. What kinds of false teachings about God and the gospel are floating around today in our culture and even in churches?
4. What is Paul’s past like (v 11-24)? How does that affect his understanding of the gospel and his life?
5. What about you? How does your past affect where you are on your spiritual journey now?
6. When have you worked hard on something, only to have it turn out to be in vain?
Why do you think Paul is concerned that his preaching to the Gentiles was “in vain” (v 2:2)?
7. What do you think Paul is talking about in v 2:4 when he mentions freedom versus slavery?

Next week: Read Galatians 2:11-21 (We’ll discuss hypocrisy in the church and the centrality of the gospel)

Observe (What is it saying- why, when, how?), **Interpret** (What does it mean? What is it saying about God? Context, history), **Apply** (What does this mean in my life?)

Galatians 2, The Centrality of the Gospel

Summary: The gospel is not just the way to enter the Kingdom, but the new way to do everything, to face every problem, and to grow in every step.

What do many non-Christians (and even Christians) say they dislike most about the church/Christianity?

1. What do you think was the significance of Peter's "eating with the Gentiles" (v.12)? Why was it hypocritical (v.13) when he stopped eating with them?
2. What does Paul mean when he says that Peter was not "acting in line with the truth of the gospel" (v. 14-16)?
3. What does the concept of justification mean (vs 16-17)? How do you think a person is "Justified in Christ"?
4. How can we avoid adding our own rules to follow (for our justification) and at the same time avoid sin?
5. There are "two thieves" of the gospel:
"The "Two thieves!" of the gospel Tertullian said, 'Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors.' Tertullian meant that there were two basic false ways of thinking, each of which 'steals' the power and the distinctiveness of the gospel from us by pulling us 'off the gospel line' to one side or the other. These two errors are very powerful, because they represent the natural tendency of the human heart and mind. These 'thieves' can be called moralism or legalism on the one hand, and hedonism or relativism on the other hand. Religion vs. irreligion." (Read p.18-20 in Tim Keller's article)

~What do these two thieves look like in our culture and churches today?

~All of us tend to struggle with one or both of these errors. Which do you struggle with more? Why?

Focus: The character of Christ (Lion and Lamb)

~Why did Christ have to die on the cross? Galatians 2:21

The Gospel: The Key to Everything (by Tim Keller)

The Key to the Kingdom

Already-Not Yet. Fundamental to the New Testament is the understanding that we live in the overlap of the ages. The new kingdom of Christ has begun, but the old kingdom of darkness continues. We live in both the “now already” and the “not yet” Jesus taught that the power of the kingdom has arrived (Mark 1:14; Matt. 13:16-17), that it exists in the midst of gathered Christians (Lk. 17:20-21), who are entering it (Matt. 11:12; Luke 16:16). Yet he also taught that it had not arrived fully and in completeness, for his followers were to pray for it (Matt. 6:10) and it would not arrive until the end of time (Matt. 25:34). Paul teaches that when we become Christians we are transferred now into Christ’s kingdom (Col. 1:13) though the evil age is still present to us (Gal. 1:14). We feel ourselves caught in the tension of living in the midst of both (Rom. 12:2; 13:11-14; I Thess. 5:4-8). We are already saved yet shall be saved (Rom. 8:24 and 5:9-11), we are already redeemed yet we will be redeemed (Col. 1:14 and Eph. 4:30), we are already adopted yet we will be adopted (Rom. 8:15,23), we are already reigning in heaven as kings (Eph. 2:6; Rev. 1:8), yet some day we shall be kings.

The gospel of the kingdom. It is difficult but crucial to maintain the balance of both confidence but humility that comes from realizing the kingdom is present, yet not fully. When a Christian or a church emphasizes one over the other, there is a resulting imbalance in all areas of ministry or life. The key to maintaining this balance is the gospel, which is called “the gospel of the kingdom.” The gospel (as Luther wrote) means we are *Somali justice et peccator*--both sinful yet righteous. When we realize we are, in ourselves, still sinners, it humbles us and makes us recognize our limitations. When we realize we are, really sinners (peccator) but nevertheless, holy in his sight, (justice), it exalts us and gives us confidence. Without the gospel, we are doomed to live either too optimistically or too pessimistically. Without the gospel we are either legalists or liberals--taking into consideration one aspect of reality but ignoring the other.

Only the gospel allows us to understand the “overlap of the ages” (our current place in redemptive history) and gives us the resources to live in this place as well.

The Key to Uniqueness

The gospel makes Christianity unique among all religions. As a matter of fact, it sets Christianity apart both from moralism on the one hand and relativism on the other.

The “two thieves!” of the gospel.

Tertullian said, “Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors.” Tertullian meant that there were two basic false ways of thinking, each of which “steals” the power and the distinctiveness of the gospel from us by pulling us “off the gospel line” to one side or the other. These two errors are very powerful, because they represent the natural tendency of the human heart and mind. (The gospel is “revealed” by God (Rom. 1:17)--the unaided human mind cannot conceive it.) These “thieves” can be called moralism or legalism on the one hand, and hedonism or relativism on the other hand. Religion vs. irreligion.

The moralism-religion thief. How does moralism/religion steal joy and power? Moralism is the view that you are acceptable (to God, the world, others, yourself) through your attainments. (Moralists do not have to be religious, but often are.) When they are, their religion is pretty conservative and filled with rules. Sometimes moralists have views of God as very holy and just. This view will lead either to a) self-hatred (because you can’t live up to the standards), or b) self-inflation (because you think you have lived up to the standards). It is ironic to realize that inferiority and superiority complexes have the very same root. Whether the moralist ends up smug and superior or crushed and guilty just depends on how high the standards are and on a person’s natural advantages (such as family, intelligence, looks, willpower). Moralistic people can be deeply religious--but there is no transforming joy or power.

The relativism-irreligion thief. How does relativism steal joy and power?

Relativists are usually irreligious, or else prefer what is called “liberal” religion. On the surface, they are more happy and tolerant than moralist/religious people. Though they may be highly idealistic in some areas (such as politics), they believe that everyone needs to determine what is right and wrong for them. They are not convinced that God is just and must punish sinners. Their beliefs in God will tend to see Him as loving or as an impersonal force. They may talk a great deal about God’s love, but since they do not think of

themselves as sinners, God's love for us costs him nothing. If God accepts us, it is because he is so welcoming, or because we are not so bad. The concept of God's love in the gospel is far more rich and deep and electrifying.

Where they differ. Each of the two thieves partially grasps one "side" of the gospel while rejecting the rest of it. Moralism (though it does not have to be explicitly religious) usually sees God as very holy and as a Judge. It understands that there is an eternal and absolute law of justice which cannot be discarded. Relativism (though it does not have to be optimistic) usually sees God, if he exists, as a spirit of love. It stresses that everyone is imperfect yet valuable and that we should forgive and accept one another as we are.

On the one hand, "moralism/religion" stresses truth without grace, for it says that we must obey the truth in order to be saved. On the other hand, "relativists/irreligion" stresses grace without truth, for they say that we are all accepted by God (if there is a God) and we have to decide what is true for us. But "truth" without grace is not really truth, and "grace" without truth is not really grace. Jesus was "full of grace and truth". For the gospel is:

"I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe" (vs. relativism)

Yet "I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope" (vs. legalism)

How they are the same. On the surface, moralism and relativism seem to be two opposite views. Indeed, people who are strongly influenced by one usually disdain members of the other side. But ironically, both are really identical.

They are both forms of works-righteousness. Moralists, despite all the emphasis on traditional standards, are in the end self-centered and individualistic, because they have set themselves up as their own Savior. Relativists, despite all their emphasis on freedom and acceptance, are in the end moralistic because they still have to attain and live up to (their own) standards or become desperate. And often, they take great pride in their own open-mindedness and judge others who are not. So ultimately, both the religious person and the irreligious person are seeking to avoid Jesus as Savior, and make him (if anything) just an example and a helper, a means by which we save ourselves.

They both lose the sight of the real God. So, while one side loses sight of the law and holiness of God and the other side of the love and grace of God, in the end they both lose the gospel entirely. For the gospel is that on the cross Jesus filled the law of God out of love for us. Without a full understanding of the work of Christ, the reality of God's holiness will make his grace unreal, or the reality of his love will make his holiness unreal. Only the gospel--that we are so sinful that we need to be saved utterly by grace--allows a person to see God as he really is.

They both deny our sin--so lose the joy and power of grace. Moralism flatters us that we are not so sinful that we can't win God's favor. That steals all the power and joy of the gospel, because we think that God's love is with us because we earned it. So there is no wonder and amazement, no humbled joy and awe, before the fact that God hears us, helps us, knows us. On the other hand, hedonism very obviously flatters us that we are basically good and able to choose our own moral standards. That steals all power and joy, because it says that God's love is with us because it just goes to everyone. So it cost God nothing to love us (since we are not so sinful that we deserved the cross). Again, there is no wonder, humble joy. God's love is not electrifying. There is no "release" and transformation of motive.

Note: There are really two ways moralism robs us of joy. It will either lead to a) self-hatred (because you can't live up to the standards), or b) self-inflation (because you think you have lived up to the standards). Inferiority and superiority complexes have the very same root. Whether the moralist ends up smug and superior or crushed and guilty just depends on how high the standards are and on a person's natural advantages (such as family, intelligence, looks, willpower).

A whole new way of seeing.

Paul shows us, then, that we must not just simply ask in every area of life: "what is the moral way to act?" but "what is the way that is in-line with the gospel?" The gospel must be continually "thought out" to keep us from moving into our habitual moralistic or individualistic directions. We must bring everything into line with the gospel.

The example of racism

Since Paul used the gospel on racism, let's use it as an example to think in a gospel-based way.

The moralistic approach to race. Moralists/legalists would tend to be very proud of their culture. They would fall into cultural imperialism. They would try to attach spiritual significance to their cultural styles, to make themselves feel morally superior to other peoples. This happens because moralistic people are very insecure, since they look a lot at the eternal law, and they know deep down that they cannot keep it. So they use cultural differences to buttress their sense of righteousness.

But the opposite error from cultural imperialism would be cultural relativism. This approach would say, “yes, traditional people were racists because they believed in absolute truth. But truth is relative. Every culture is beautiful in itself. Every culture must be accepted on its own terms.”

The gospel approach to race. Christians know that racism does not stem so much from a belief in truth, but from a lack of belief in grace. The gospel leads us to be: a) on the one hand, somewhat critical of all cultures, including our own (since there is truth), but b) on the other hand, we can feel morally superior to no one. After all, we are saved by grace alone, and therefore a non-Christian neighbor may be more moral and wise than you. This gives the Christian a radically different posture than either moralists or relativists.

Note: Relativists (as we said above) are ultimately moralistic. And therefore they can be respectful only of other people who believe everything is relative! But Christians cannot feel morally superior to relativists.

In the same way, Christians must think through every subject and all behavior, to bring all things into line with the gospel.

Some examples:

1. **Approach to discouragement:** a person is depressed, the moralist says, “you are breaking the rules. The Bible says ‘rejoice always’. So you need to repent of your discouragement. On other hand, the relativist says, “you just need to love and accept yourself.” But (assuming there is no physiological basis for depression) the gospel leads us to examine ourselves and say: “something in my life has become more important than God, a pseudo-savior, a form of works-righteousness. We need to find this ‘idol’ and root it out”. The gospel leads us to repentance, but not merely setting our will against superficialities. It is without the gospel that superficialities will be addressed instead of the heart. The moralist will work on behavior and the relativist will work on the emotions themselves.

2. **Approach to pleasure.** Some moralists are indifferent to the physical world--they see it as “unimportant”--while many others are downright afraid of physical pleasure. Since moralists, are seeking to earn approval with God, they prefer to focus on sins of the physical like sex and the other appetites. These are easier to avoid than sins of spirit like pride and covetousness. Therefore, they prefer to see sins of the body as worse than other kinds. As a result, legalism usually leads to a distaste of pleasure. On the other hand, the relativist is often a hedonist, someone who is controlled by pleasure, and who makes it an idol. The gospel leads us to see that God has invented both body and soul and so will redeem both body and soul, though under sin both body and soul are broken. Thus the gospel leads us to enjoy the physical (and to fight against physical brokenness, such as sickness and poverty), yet to be moderate in our use of material things.

3. **Approach to sex:** The secularist/pragmatist sees sex as merely biological and physical appetite. The moralist tends to see sex as dirty or at least a dangerous impulse that leads constantly to sin. But the gospel shows us that sexuality is to reflect the self-giving love of Christ. He gave himself completely without conditions. So we are not to seek sexual intimacy with someone but hold back control of our lives. If we give ourselves sexually we are to commit ourselves legally, socially, personally--utterly. Sex only is to happen in a totally committed, permanent relationship of marriage.

Summary: All problems, personal or social come from a failure to use the gospel in a radical way, to get “in line with the truth of gospel” (Gal.2:14).

All pathologies in the personal life come from self-salvation strategies. Sin in the heart leads us to naturally hate the gospel of grace. As ways to maintain control over our lives, we find ways of earning our own salvation which enslave us to idols. The gospel alone frees us from those and gives us a delight of heart to do right and know God.

All pathologies in the church and all its ineffectiveness come from a failure to use the gospel in a radical way. We believe that if the gospel is expounded and applied in its fullness in any church, that church will look very unique. People will find both moral conviction, yet compassion and flexibility. For example, homosexuals are used to being bashed and hated or completely accepted. They never see anything else. The cultural elites of either liberal or conservative sides are alike in their unwillingness to befriend or live with or respect or worship with the poor. They are alike in separating themselves increasingly from the rest of society.

Galatians 3:1-14, The Message of the Gospel

Summary: Believing the gospel is to repent, not just of failing the law, but of relying on the law--- not just for sins, but for achievements done as self-salvation.

In your family history, what are some generational patterns, traditions, or inherited traits which you see yourself repeating that could hinder your growth in Christ?

Tim Keller asks, “Do we grow spiritually by “being good” or by repenting of “being good”? What do you think this means?

“We all live by and rely on something (besides the grace of God and the work of Christ) as a way to justify ourselves to God, ourselves, and the world.... We are not Christians until we repent not just of our individual sins, but even of our best deeds done as a way to avoid Jesus as Savior. It is when we repent of self-righteousness that we move into the Christian faith, into a whole new way of approaching God. Paul says it: ‘All who rely on the law are under a curse’ (Gal 3:10). Luther says it: ‘We think: How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done!’ ...But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see what Christ has done for us.”

Read: Gal 3:1-14 together

1. **If you had been in the room when this letter was read for the first time, how would you have felt?**
2. **How are the Galatians to grow? What does Paul say are (supposed to be) the elements in their continual spiritual progress? (vs 3-5)**
3. **What can we learn from Abraham’s example about the way to believe the gospel and the wonderful results of believing the gospel?**
~Abraham as a man of faith: Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19
~How would you define faith? Hebrews 11:1-2, 6
~How can we apply faith? Hebrews 12:1-2, 11:13-16
4. **Why (if verse 10 is true) can God credit us as righteous and not be unjust? (v 13-14)**
5. **How can you walk more fully in the “blessing of Abraham” by “the promise of the Spirit through faith” (v 14)?**
~Look at John 14:16-17, 1 Corinthians 2:12-16, Galatians 5:16&25, Ephesians 3:16-17

Galatians 3:15-29, The History of the Gospel

Summary: Every part of the Bible and all its history is really about the rejection or the unfolding of the gospel!

What was your favorite Bible story or fairytale as a child? Why?

Tim Keller: "The Bible is not a collection of "Aesop's Fables," it is not a book of virtues. Paul shows us in this passage that there is a complete unity in the Bible. There is a story within all the Bible stories. God is redeeming a people for Himself by grace in the face of human rebellion and human desire for a religion of good works. Martin Luther shows that he understands this when he says that Satan's original temptation was to get us to not trust the love/grace of God, but to seek salvation through our won efforts. So all the Bible is about the unfolding of the gospel in stages through history."

If the Old Testament isn't about "moralism" but rather points to the gospel (Christ) in every event and person, discuss the common use of Bible stories for our children. What did you learn in Sunday school as a child? Are we creating little moralists in our families? How would we go about making this mistake right?

Read Galatians 3:15-29

1. Why does Paul in verse 16 make a point about the promises to Abraham (Gen 12: 2,3,7) applying to a singular noun (seed), not a plural one? How does that help him make his statement in verse 18 that the law does not save?
2. If, as verse 18 says, the law is not the way we inherit the Spirit or a right relationship with God, then what is the law for? (v 19-22)
3. Make a list of the benefits and blessings that come to us through faith.
4. What does it mean that we "clothe ourselves with Christ (v 27)?" How does the gospel of grace lead to the unity of verse 28?
5. How can you be passionate (zealous) for Christ and add spiritual disciplines to your life (reading and memorizing the Bible, prayer, fasting, etc) without being legalistic?

The Story in the Stories

“There are great stories in the Bible ... but it is possible to know Bible stories, yet miss the Bible story ... The Bible has a story line. It traces an unfolding drama. The story follows the history of Israel, but it does not begin there, nor does it contain what you would expect in a national history If we forget the story line ... we cut the heart out of the Bible. Sunday school stories are then told as tamer versions of the Sunday comics, where Samson substitutes for Superman. David ... becomes a Hebrew version of Jack the Giant Killer. No, David is not a brave little boy who isn't afraid of the big bad giant. He is the Lord's anointed ... God chose David as a king after his own heart in order to prepare the way for David's great Son, our Deliverer and Champion...

- E. Clowney, The Unfolding Mystery

The one supreme doctrine

“The one doctrine which I have supremely at heart, is that of in Christ, from whom, through whom, and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night. This rock ... which we call the doctrine of justification ... was shaken by Satan in paradise, when he persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God Thereafter the whole world acted like a madman against this faith, inventing innumerable idols and religions with which everyone went his own way, hoping to placate a god or goddess, by his own works; that is, hoping without the aid of Christ and by his own works to redeem himself from evils and sins. All this is sufficiently seen in the practices and records of every culture and nation....

b. The devil, our adversary, who continually rages about seeking to devour us is not dead. Likewise our flesh and old man is yet alive. Besides this, all kinds of temptations vex and oppress us on every side, so that this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough. If this doctrine is lost, then is also the whole knowledge of truth, life and salvation lost; if this doctrine flourish, then all good things flourish...”

–Martin Luther

(See how Luther uses the doctrine of salvation through Christ to interpret the story of the fall in Genesis 3?)

A Survey of the Old Testament through Jesus

Jesus fulfills the writings of the prophets (I Peter 1:11)

The Redeemer will be human (Gen..3:15-the seed of the woman)

The Redeemer will be God (Isaiah 9:6- the Mighty God)

The Redeemer will suffer and be killed (Isaiah 53:6--our iniquity on him)

The Redeemer will rise again (Psalm 16: 10; Acts 2:3 1)

The Redeemer will be a Jew (Gen..49:10) yet bring in the Gentiles (Gen..12)

Jesus fulfills all the ceremonial law and writings

Jesus is the sacrifice all the sacrifices point to (Hebrews 10).

Jesus is the bread on the altar in the temple (John 6), the light stand in the Holy Place (John 8), and the temple itself (John 2), for he is the presence of God with us.

Jesus fulfills all the ceremonial clean laws about foods and ritual purification (Acts 10 and 11).

Jesus fulfills circumcision--it represents how he was cut off from God. Now we are clean in him. (Col..2:10-11)

Jesus is the Passover lamb (I Cor..5:7)

Jesus Fulfills all the moral law

Jesus is the one who “fulfilled all righteousness” (Matt..3:15).

Jesus is the one who embodies the law. The law shows us who Jesus is.

Jesus fulfills all the characters of history

Jesus is the better Adam, the one whose obedience is imputed to us (I Cor..15)

Jesus is the better Moses, who mediates a new covenant (Heb..3)

Jesus is a better David, who delivers his people. (II Sam.7)

Jesus is a better Job, who truly suffers in innocence and then intercedes for us (Job 42)

Jesus is the better hero than Samson, whose death accomplishes so much good (Judges 16:31)

Jesus is the judge all the judges points to (since he really administers justice), the prophet all the prophets point to (since he really shows us the truth), the priests all the priests point to (since he really brings us to God), and the King of kings.

Galatians 4:1-7 The Experience of the Gospel!

Summary: God loves and accepts believing sinners as if they had done all His only Son had done—He accepts us as sons/daughters.

What is your relationship with your father like? How do you think that affects your view of God?

Tim Keller: There is often a great chasm between what we believe and what we experience practically and emotionally. Paul teaches us that we are justified in Christ—God sees us as perfect in His sight just as wise, righteous, and beautiful as His own Son. Martin Luther says this “is easy to utter in words, but in use and experience is very hard.” This echoes Paul in Gal 4:6-7 who says we must cherish and rejoice and see ourselves as adopted sons/daughters of God!

Read Galatians 3:26-4:7

1. Paul imagines a child-heir of a very rich family (who is still taken care of by guardians). How does this illustrate the condition of a person who is under the law/doesn't have a relationship with God?
2. Imagine back in the history of our country or currently in some countries of the world. What are some of the differences between living as a slave or living as a child?
3. How do you think you would feel if you had been a slave and someone came and not only set you free, but also **adopted** you and made you an heir?
4. What has God done in order to make us His children? (vs 4-6) What was Jesus' part? The Holy Spirit's part?
5. What is the significance of being adopted into God's family? What difference does that make in your life?
~Read Romans 8:15-16 What does “Abba” mean, why is calling God “Abba” significant?
6. Which of the characteristics of a slave mentality (a person still living as if they are “under the law”) are strongest in you? How can you overcome that mentality? How can we daily rejoice in the change God has made in our station of life (from slaves to freedom and adoption)?

A. The importance of adoption

“The notion that we are children of God, His own sons and daughters ... is the mainspring of Christian living ... Our sonship to God is the apex of Creation and the goal of redemption.”

–Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

“If you want to judge how well a person understand Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. [Adoption] is the highest privilege the gospel offers ... not justification—by which we mean God’s forgiveness of the past together with his acceptance of the future—is the primary and fundamental blessing is not in question ... But ... adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves.”

–J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

“According to the Scriptures, pardon, acceptance, and adoption are distinct privileges, the one rising above the other in the order in which they have been stated...while the first two properly belong to (the sinner’s) justification, as being both founded on the same relation [with God] as a Ruler-and-Subject, the third is radically distinct from them, as being founded on a nearer, more tender, more endearing relation [with God] as Father-and-child ... the privilege of adoption presupposes pardon and acceptance, but is higher than either...”

–James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*

B. Objections to and distortions of adoption

“I have heard it seriously argued that the thought of divine fatherhood can mean nothing to those whose human father was inadequate, lacking wisdom, affection or both, nor to those many more whose misfortune it was to have a fatherless upbringing ... But this is silly. For it is just not true to suggest that in the realm of personal relations, positive concepts cannot be formed by contrast... The truth is that all of us have a positive ideal of fatherhood by which we judge our own and others’ fathers [How else could we be unhappy with our bad fathers?] and it can safely be said that the person for whom the thought of God’s perfect fatherhood is meaningless or repellent does not exist.”

–J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

“In the sense that God is the Creator of all things, it is true that the Bible sometimes speaks of His Fatherhood. He is the ‘Father of the heavenly lights’ (James 1:17) and the One who brought the universe to birth. But that is not the most common usage... We are not, by nature, children of God. We need to become his children ... In fact, by nature, we are children of wrath, not children of God (Ephesians 2–3).”

–Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

“The idea that all are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere ... The gift of sonship to God becomes ours not through being born, but through being born again. ‘To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband’s will, but born of God.’ (Jn. 1:12-13) Sonship to God, then, is a gift of grace. It is not natural but an adoptive sonship, and so the New Testament explicitly pictures it.”

–J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

C. Adoption defined

“Adoption is not a change in nature, but a change in status. If we fail to see this truth, we will reject the power of our adoption ... Adoption is a declaration God makes about us. It is irreversible, dependent entirely upon His gracious choice, in which He says: ‘You are my son, today I have brought you into my family.’”

–Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

“The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and “placed in a new relationship of son to his new father... All his old debts are canceled, and in effect the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family ... [On the one hand, the new father] owned all the [new offspring’s] property, controlled his personal relationships, and had the rights of discipline. On the other hand, the father was liable for the actions of the adoptee, and each owed the other reciprocal duties of support and maintenance.”

–Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, and Sons*

“The Roman law, it was a recognized practice for an adult who wanted an heir, and someone to carry on the family name, to adopt a male as his son ... The apostles proclaim that God has so loved those whom he redeemed on the cross that he has adopted them all as his heirs, to see and share the glory into which his only begotten Son has already come. “God sent his Son ... to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights as sons.” (Gal.4.4-5). We, that is, who were “foreordained to adoption as sons...(Eph. 1:5). “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are ... When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 Jn.3.1-2).”

–J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap. 19

D. Biblical theology of adoption

“God and religion are not less than they were; the Old Testament revelation of the holiness of God, and its demand for humility in man, is presupposed throughout, but something has been added. A new factor has come in New Testament believers deal with God as their Father.

–J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

“According to our Lord’s own testimony in John’s Gospel, God’s fatherly relation to him implied four things. [1] First, fatherhood implied authority. The Father commands and disposes; the initiative which he calls his Son to exercise is the initiative of resolute obedience to his Father’s will ... (6.38, 17.4; 5:19; 4:34). [2] Fatherhood implies affection. The Father loves the Son. “The Father hath loved me...”(5.20, 15.9-10). [3] Third, fatherhood implied fellowship. “I am not alone, for my Father is with me.” “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone...”(16:32, 8.29). [4] Fourth, fatherhood implied honor. God wills to exalt his Son. “Father ... Glorify your Son”. “The Father .. has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son...” (17:1; 5:22-23). All this extends to his adopted children. In, through, and under Jesus Christ their Lord, they are ruled, loved, accompanied, and honored by their heavenly Father... [“Father ... let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...” (17:23-24)

–J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

E. The Spirit of Sonship

“[We all have a native] inability to believe that salvation is entirely of God’s grace and love.... We are slow to realize the implications of that. We are sons, but we are in danger of having the mindset of hired servants. Furthermore, if there is nothing else the Devil can do to smear our joy in Christ, he will try to produce in us what our forefathers used to call a ‘bondage frame of spirit’.... That is why he sends us the Spirit of adoption. Paul says:

“You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’ (Rom. 8:15-16).

“...Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit ... [which] brings us into a deep-seated persuasion that we really are the sons of God. If it is a fact that ... God has adopted us into his family, then the Spirit assures us this is true, and enables us to live in the enjoyment of such a rich spiritual blessing... He sends his Spirit into our hearts, bringing us the deep spiritual and psychological security that rests on the objective fact that our sins are forgiven and we belong to the Lord.”

–Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

“Let me remind you of how Thomas Goodwin ... states the matter... He pictures a man walking along a road with his little boy, holding hands—father and son, son and father. The little boy knows that the man is his father, and that his father loves him. But

suddenly the father stops, picks up the boy, lifts him up into his arms, embraces him and kisses him ... The boy is no more a son when he is being embraced than he was before. The father's action ... has not changed the status of the boy, but oh! the difference in the enjoyment! That is what is described in Romans 8:5..."

–D.M. Lloyd-Jones, Romans 8.5-17, p.280

“It is a manifestation of God unto the soul...It is a thing better felt than spoken of. It is no audible voice, but a ray of glory filling the soul ...corresponding to that audible voice, “O man, greatly beloved,” (Dan.9:23)... “The Spirit does not always witness to our condition by force of argument from sanctification, but sometimes immediately by way of presence as the sight of a friend consorts without help of discourse...” (Richard Sibbes)

–D.M. Lloyd-Jones, Romans 8.5-17

The problem:

“Because I did not believe God loved me on the basis of Christ's life, death, and resurrection...”

The result:

...therefore I could not face the risk of seeing my sins as my own responsibility. So (1) having tried to clear my conscience by blaming others, I (2) turned on the afterburners and made myself busy with work and duty. Or to use Luther's analogy, I was full of active righteousness. I looked to my outward activity to feel good about myself and judged others by my own active standards...

The turning:

But now I understood what Luther was talking about: “in the righteousness of faith we work nothing, we render nothing to God, but we only receive and allow another to work in us.” This is what he calls a “passive righteousness that is credited to our account through faith. This was Christ's righteousness, bought with the price of his blood on the cross. This I received by faith. The reason it had been so difficult for me to have a personal faith in Christ was that I had not experienced total forgiveness. But I had now brought real sins...including my attitudes of self-dependence and blame-shifting—to a real Savior and they had been forgiven...How awesome it is to be loved unconditionally by a holy, righteous God.

–Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom*

Galatians 5:1-15, Life of the Gospel: New Freedom!

Summary: The gospel is not a form of “divine manipulation” in order to get us to do things for God, but an expression of genuine love and acceptance...through the gospel we delight in God and others for themselves.

What does freedom mean to you (free to do or not to do what)? Think about your freshman year...

Tim Keller: A new quality of life results as a Christian loses the old motivation of selfish fear (“slave” mentality) and becomes empowered by the new dynamic of grateful love (“child of God” mentality). Without an experience of grace, all our good deeds are essentially self-interested, impersonal, and conditional. We do “the right thing” in order to get into heaven, or in order to better our self-esteem (etc.). But people who know they are totally accepted already, do “the right thing” out of grateful love. “Neither circumcision (religion) or uncircumcision (irreligion) has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6). Only in the gospel do you obey God for God’s sake and not for what God may give. Therefore, only in the gospel can a person love others for their sake and do good for its own sake, and obey God for His sake. Only the gospel makes “doing the right thing” a joy and delight, not a burden or a means to an end.

Read Galatians 5:1-15

1. Observations? What does Paul say about love? (vs 6, 13, 14)
2. What do you think it means that Christ has liberated us into freedom (vs 1)?
3. Why does Paul make such a big deal about circumcision? What do you think of Paul’s denunciation of those who preach circumcision (vs 12)? What rituals or traditions in the church today might be similar to circumcision back then?
4. When or in what ways have you gotten off the track in the “good race” of the Christian life? What are you relying on besides Christ (John Eldridge calls them “lesser lovers”)?
5. In verses 13-15 Paul is clarifying what gospel freedom does NOT mean. What misconception is he addressing? In what way are Christians free from the law and in what way are they not?
6. The gospel says that we are accepted totally by God through the work of Jesus. It has nothing to do with our own performance! When acceptance/love is so complete that it makes our performance invisible, how is that an incentive to you for holy living?

Galatians 5:16,-25 Life of the Gospel: New Power!

Summary: Joyful repentance for the residual self-righteousness under both our sins and our good deeds is the secret of change... a continual “walking in the power of God’s Spirit.”

If you described yourself as a fruit, what kind would you be?

Or, WHO or WHAT in your life has influenced you the most so far?

Tim Keller: Without the gospel, superficialities will be addressed instead of the heart. Some (ie, the religious) will focus and work simply on changing behavior, while others (ie, the irreligious) will focus and work simply on changing or accommodating emotions. But repentance for self-righteousness gets at what is under both behavior and feelings.

Read Galatians 5:16-25: Dr Jekyll vs Mr Hyde

1. Observations? What does Paul say about the battle within us? (Romans 7)
2. What do you think it means to be “led by the Spirit...not under the law” (v 18)? How can you explain the difference between living under the Law and walking by the Spirit?
3. Look at the list of “the flesh” compared to the list of the fruit of the Spirit. After listing the fruit of the Spirit, in verse 23, Paul says, “Against such things there is no law.” What does this mean?

Making it Personal...

4. How has God been at work in your life this week?
5. In what areas of your life are you having the most trouble “following the Spirit?” How can we pray for you?

Read together and discuss the article on the next page.

Romans 7: 14-25: The battle we cannot loose

The second battle is totally different than the first. In the Galatian letter, in a sense an expansion of Romans 7, you have a summary verse of the battle that touches every Christian.. “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want” (Galatians 5:17) .

Only one true self

How is this battle different? Let me tell you what I think this difference is. This hit me back in 1983 in Brazil while I was teaching on some of this. All of a sudden I began to see the difference. In the old battle Jekyll and Hyde are equally you. Your good self is you, of course. And your coveting inner self is you, too. Both of these are equally you.

Modern psychology doesn't want to accept this. In fact, a lot of pop psychologists in the Christian tradition, who write those self-help books, have accepted the idea that you are basically good. Freud talked about the ego and the super-ego. The ego was the evil self and the super-ego the good self. And even Freud never said which one was truly the self. Let's face it both are equally you.

So how are you going to win this battle? It is hopeless. Both your selves have an equal claim on you. So New Year's Day comes along and as an unsaved person you say, “I am going to make some resolutions; I am going to be kind; I am going to be good. I am going to love my mother-in-law.” And that is you talking. That's Mr. Jekyll. And you go over to visit your mother-in-law two days later and find an awful lot of resentment in your heart. Where did all that resentment come from? That's you, too. They are both you. You find that you love being kind – that's you; and you hate it when you are not – and that's you.

Now the difference between the unsaved person and the Christian is this (and this is a radical difference). The battle rages just the same when you become a Christian, but now the real you is only one. This is phenomenal! The real you is one--not two. In verses 17 and 20, and throughout this whole section Paul says: “But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

Paul says something quite remarkable here. It's not me that does this, but sin that dwells in me. And he repeats this as if to emphasize the point. These old habits, this old programming that I have is not the real me. The real me has been redeemed. So we conclude that of these two selves which once were on equal terms, now one self has been reduced to a husk. One is no longer a part of the real me. Paul talks about the war in our members, that is in our body. It is still part of our habit system, but it's not the real self. It no longer has power over me. It's a vestigial remain. Therefore we cannot say that we have two natures warring on the same basis. Paul doesn't teach that. It is not two warring natures, but a new nature with the husk of the old.

In the old warfare there are two selves that are equally you, two equally combating powers: a conscious want-good self and a covetous, selfish, evil self. In the second warfare, the born again Christian, has only one self which is holy, which is born of the Spirit, where the Holy Spirit resides and that self is the real you, warring against the evil remains of your past programming.

Galatians 6:1-10 Life of the Gospel: New Relationships!

Summary: How does the gospel change our image of ourselves and our relationships to others? Outside the gospel we are either confident (if achieving) or humble (if failing). But in the gospel our new self-image produces a bold humility that changes all our relationships.

Do you find it easy or difficult to ask for help from others? Why?

Tim Keller: Without the gospel, your self-image is based upon living up to some standards--whether yours or someone's imposed upon you. If you live up to those standards, you will be confident but not humble. If you don't live up to them, you will be humble but not confident. Only in the gospel can you be both enormously bold and utterly sensitive and humble, for you are both perfect and a sinner! Paul shows us that this new, unique self-image changes all relationships. "Don't be conceited --- provoking or envying each other" (Gal. 5:26). Because we are humbled by the gospel, we don't "provoke" or approach anyone with a sense of superiority. Because we are powerfully loved in the gospel, we don't "envy" or approach anyone with a sense of inferiority. The gospel keeps us from being either co-dependent on or independent of people. Both approaches are essentially selfish--ways to earn our value through relationships. Now we do not need to have people serve our needs nor to serve theirs. So we are free to sacrifice and commit, but also to love the person enough to confront.

Read Galatians 5:25-6:10

1. In what areas do you tend to compare yourself to others (looks, money, clothes, sports, family heritage, success, leadership, spirituality, talents, etc)? Do you feel you compare favorably or unfavorably?
2. Do you have more of a tendency to "provoke" or to "envy" others? How can the gospel help you to overcome your tendency, whatever it is?
3. In what ways could a person be tempted when trying to restore another?
4. At first glance, verses 2 and 5 seem to be a contradiction. What do you think Paul means (carrying burdens and loads)? What is the "law of Christ" (vs 2)?
5. What does this passage say to you about humility and responsibility?
6. In the previous chapters, Paul has very strongly taught that we are not justified by our actions but by faith in Christ. Now in verses 7-10, he clearly links eternal destiny to what we do- "you reap what you sow." How can these seemingly opposite ideas be reconciled?

Making it Personal...

7. Do you have a specific "burden" in your life right now that this group could help you with? How can we pray for you?

The Gospel and Relationships

Tim Keller

The gospel creates a whole new self-image (Galatians 5:26, 6:3-5) which is not based on comparisons with others. Only the gospel makes us neither self-confident nor self-disdaining, but both bold and humble that works itself out in relationships with everyone. The gospel alone addresses the problems of “conceit” or “vain-glory”. To the degree I am still functionally earning my worth through performance (i.e. to the degree I am still functioning in works-righteousness), to that degree I will be either operating out of superiority or inferiority. If I am saved by my works, then I can either be confident but not humble (if I am living up to what I profess) or humble but not confident (if I am not living up to what I profess). In other words, apart from the gospel, I will be forced to be superior or inferior or to swing back and forth between the two or to be one way with some people and another way with others. So I am continually caught between these two attitudes because of the nature of my self-image.

But the gospel creates a new self-image. It humbles me before anyone, telling me I am a sinner saved only by grace. But it emboldens me before anyone, telling me I am loved and honored by the only eyes in the universe that really count. So the gospel gives a boldness and a humility that do not “eat each other up”, but can increase together.

The “two thieves” and relationships

In lesson 3 we studied the two extremes that oppose the gospel: “moralism” and “relativism”:

Moralism Salvation through self-denial, Emphasis on doing duties, You are a sinner thus not acceptable, Truth is more important than love, do what is right.

How the gospel provides a “third way” in relationships

Moralism often makes relationships into a “blame-game”. The moralist is very consciously trying to earn salvation through performance and that includes relationships. Moralists must maintain a self-image of being “a good person”. Some moralists do so by laying the blame on others, by being very judgmental and by always insisting that they are in the right. There is a lack of teachability, of humble admission of error or listening.

But moralists can also play the “blame-game” by laying the blame on themselves. Moralists can “earn their salvation” and convince ourselves they are worthy persons through being very willing to help others. This kind of self-salvation superficially makes the moralist look very open to listen, very humble, very teachable. But this can be a “co-dependency” – a form of self-salvation through needing people’s approval or through needing people to need you (i.e. saving yourself by saving others). So moralism works through either blaming others or blaming yourself. Either way, it makes relationships torturous.

On the other hand, relativism reduces relationships to a negotiated partnership for mutual benefit. Relativism says: “A relationship is fine as long as both people are helping each other reach their goals.” But as soon as a relationship entails major sacrifice, the hedonist (relativist) labels it “dysfunctional” and bails out. (There are dysfunctional relationships, but only when the sacrifice is being done out of needy selfishness and not out of fullness of love.) For the relativist, you only relate to another as long as it is not costing you anything. So the choice (without the gospel) is to selfishly use others or to selfishly let yourself be used by others. But the gospel leads us to do neither. We do sacrifice and commit, but not out of a need to convince ourselves or others that we are acceptable. We can love the person enough to confront, yet stay with the person when it does not benefit us.

The gospel and family relationships

Moralism can make you a slave to parental expectations. The two ways you become a slave under moralism is that either a) you are so bound to please your parents that you can’t live without continually thinking of them, or b) you are so mad at them for their control or neglect of your life that you cannot live without thinking of them. To be living either in action or reaction to them all the time means that you are still a slave to their view of you. You are haunted by it either way. On the

other hand, **relativism** sees no need for family loyalty or the keeping of promises and covenants if they do not “meet my needs”.

The **gospel** frees you from making parental approval an absolute or psychological salvation, pointing how God becomes the ultimate father. Then you will neither be too dependent or too hostile to your parents.

The gospel and sexual relationships

The **moralist** tends to see sex as dirty or at least a dangerous impulse that leads constantly to sin. There will be an approach-avoidance relationship with sex. The uneasy conscience of the moralist will lead to either complete avoidance or to a very driven, breathless need for sexual experience. Both come from a “glory-vacuum” within which makes sex into a way to fill the emptiness. On the other hand, the **relativist** sees sex as merely biological and physical appetite. Thus the relativist may be less convoluted and troubled about sex, yet may have also given up on the deep longing of his/her heart to have union with someone sexually who is completely, unconditionally, and permanently true to them.

The **gospel** shows us that sexuality is to reflect the self-giving of Christ. He gave himself completely without conditions. So we are not to seek intimacy sexually, but then hold back control of our lives. If we give ourselves sexually we are to give ourselves legally, socially, personally, utterly. Sex only is to happen in a totally committed, permanent relationship of marriage. Through Christ’s transformation of us that ideal is somewhat realizable even between two sinners.

The Gospel and Forgiveness

The most basic capacity for building a strong and intimate relationship is the ability to forgive. If we are going to have a marriage relationship, a good friendship or effective team relationships, we will need to know how to forgive both the small, daily “rubs” as well as the more significant and major let-downs.

Resentment and the Gospel

Resentment requires a person to sit in the position of judge (Rom..12:19-20). Now when we sit in judgment and condemnation of others, we forget our own sinfulness and weakness. “Let the one without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7). Bitterness is the opposite of humility (cf James 3:13-14 “...show it by ... deeds done in humility ... but if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition...”). If we stay in a position of moral superiority, we cannot see our own lostness apart from the grace of Christ, and therefore Jesus ties our ability to forgive to our ability to repent. (“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors ” (Mat.. 6:12). This doesn’t mean that God forgives our sins because we forgive others. It means that the degree of our awareness of ourselves as forgiven sinners determines the degree of our ability to forgive. Both forgiveness and repentance stem from an awareness of our sinfulness and deserved condemnation apart from the free mercy of God.

What is forgiveness? When someone has wronged you, it means they owe you, they have a debt with you. Forgiveness is to absorb the cost of the debt yourself. You pay the price yourself and you refuse to exact the price out of the person in any way. Forgiveness is a) to free the person from penalty for a sin by b) paying the price yourself.

We are told that our forgiveness must imitate God’s forgiveness in Christ. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you (Eph..4:32). a) How did God forgive? We are told that he does not “remember” our sins any more. . That cannot mean that God literally forgets what has happened. It means he “sends away” the penalty for them. He does not bring the incidents to mind and does not let them affect the way he deals with us. b) How did God forgive “in Christ”? We are told that Jesus pays the price for the sins. “It is finished” means, “It has been paid in full” (John 19:30).

How can we forgive?

- 1 . Distinguish between granting and feeling.** Forgiveness is granted first and felt later (Luke 17:3-10).
- 2. Separate the evil-doer from the evil and will his or her redemption.** Notice that on the cross Jesus says, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).
- 3. Determine never to exact the price, but to pay the price ourselves.** Forgiveness is a promise not to “bring the matter up” to the person, others, or even ourselves. At each point when we are tempted to exact payment, we refuse, and though it hurts, that is a payment:
- 4. Fill the mind with the gospel motives for forgiveness.**
 - a) Think of Jesus as Savior.** The Bible is explicit in telling us to forgive as God in Christ forgave you (Eph 4:32). And it is impossible to forgive without continually melting the heart with a knowledge of the gospel.
 - b) Think of God as judge.** “Leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: ‘vengeance is mine ... says the Lord’” (Rom. 12:9).