

Worship Series: “Real Talk—Paul’s Letter to the Galatians”

7th Sunday after Pentecost

“Jesus is Enough”—Sermon Text: Galatians 6:7-16

FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

3 July 2016

Hear the day’s lesson:

1 My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor’s work, will become a cause for pride. 5 For all must carry their own loads.

6 Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. 7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. 8 If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. 10 So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

11 See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. 14 May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! 16 As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (Galatians 6: [1-6] 7-16).

190 years ago as of tomorrow, back in 1826, former Presidents Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, once fellow Patriots and then adversaries, die on the same day within five hours of each other. Jefferson and Adams were the last surviving members of the revolutionaries standing up to the British. They forged a new political system in our colonies. Yet, while they believed in democracy and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, each had an opinion for achieving these ideals. Foes and friends in life, Adams and Jefferson’s death united them in the freedom that death affords. At a White House dinner John Kennedy once remarked about Jefferson: “I want to tell you how welcome you are to the White House. I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”

On the 4th of July I would remind us that Paul himself once wrote a noteworthy Declaration

of Independence—the epistle to the churches in the region of Galatia. This relatively short letter contradicted the Judaizers which was an early church party of Jewish Christians. These believers reckoned that circumcision was a tangible observance the Law of Moses and was essential for salvation. The Judaizing party tried to impose the Mosaic Law on Gentile converts. Thus to be a Christian a person had to follow all of the 613 ritual Jewish laws. Paul defiantly appealed to Christians not to submit to this kind of thinking and thus surrender their freedom in grace.

Grace liberates believers from living out of legalistic requirements. One reason Paul wrote Galatians is he believed persons could not earn God’s approval. Paul writes: “For freedom, Christ has set you free.” Yet Paul continues that this kind of gracious freedom does not give license to do as we please. We are not unrestricted simply to satisfy our immodest desires. Rather God frees us to be directed by Christ—allowing Jesus to be both Lord and Master. In a word, God frees us for self-restraint.

My friend, Rob Fuquay writes [about Galatians and freedom]:
What does that [freedom] look like today? What does it look like in your personal life where you are free to watch anything on the internet or television? What does it look like when you are free to eat or buy anything you want? What does it look like when you are free to turn a deaf ear to others’ needs? What does it look like when you are free to own things that are behind the deaths of other people?

Are we free or not? It is a question that is up to us. Maybe we can come to appreciate that freedom also offers ample responsibility which comes with it.

Paul’s last words to the anxious in Galatia connect several ideas. As I tried to point out a few moments ago, Paul castigates the circumcision party who suggest to the naive Galatians they only come to Jesus by compliance to Moses’ law.

Most of us face Galatian-type Catch-22 questions each day. “What do you believe” some ask. Depending on the answer they decide whether or not you are really a believer. I have a friend with cancer who does not think I am an authentic pastor because I cannot lay hands on

him and cure his multiple organ tumors.

There are many questions similar to this in which other persons decide the merit of our faith. Perhaps no one asks if we are circumcised or not today as they did in Paul's time, but there are other invasive questions:

What is your stance on female clergy? Baptism? Copywriting Christian music? Watching movies? Have you given away all that you possess? Which version of the Bible do you read and do you hold it inerrant? Does your faith permit dancing or playing cards? Do you drink alcohol? What is your stance on human sexuality? Do you think polygamy is sinful? How do you judge with respect to: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these (Galatians 5:19-21). And so on

There are a million questions like these too. As it was easy for Galatians to depart from the Gospel's gracious nature so too is it easy for us to also depart.

A preacher named Andrew Gamblin wrote about a 1996 George Barna study about young adults and teens on their image of and respect for Christianity's role in society. The report showed that 85% of were favorable towards Christians and the part they played in the American society. The Barna Group did the same poll ten years later and found a growing resentment towards Christians. Today nearly 2 out of every 5 young persons (35%) claim a "bad impression of present-day Christianity."

So why do these people have such negative feelings towards Christians and what makes them have these feelings? One young woman when asked of her image of Christians replied, "Christians are narrow-minded, antigay, anti-choice, angry, violent, illogical, empire-building, convert-focused people that cannot live peacefully with others." Random? Hardly. Another national survey found that the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are anti-homosexual, judgmental, and hypocritical. These "big 3" are followed by old-fashioned, out of touch with reality, insensitive to others, boring and not accepting of others beliefs.

I want to suggest that Thomas à Kempis' little book, *The Imitation of Christ*, can be

instructive for people to combat what most of us would see as a woeful misperception of the majority of people who are part of our worshipping community. Certainly we have our imperfections and warts, but most of us “aren’t really that bad.”

Thomas à Kempis writes, (in Latin about 1418–1427) that people are miserable because we are trying to find joy in other people and in other things. He suggests that the external will always fail us. What supplies true felicity, peace, and serenity is God. *The Imitation of Christ* navigates reader through exercises teaching how to detach ourselves from worldly things and how to focus on God. Once focused solely on God and have faith that God will provide everything we need, then we can find joy in the world around us. Once we receive authentic happiness from God, then we can see how beautiful the world is. We can relish it as the gift God created it to be.

I guess if we were to sum up Paul’s Galatians we could say: “Less law; more Jesus.” Thus with respect to God and a godly life—Jesus is enough!