

Death By Religion
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Key Scripture: Galatians 1:1-4

Introduction:

We are going to do a study on the book of Galatians. We are taking this season as a church to give ourselves to the Word of God in a greater way.

- We are seeing lives transformed through the reading of the Bible in the 90 Days class.
- We are seeing lives become energized as college students and others are giving themselves to memorizing passages of scriptures.
- We have set out a schedule for us as a church to read through the Bible in a year.
- We want to use this series on Galatians to not only teach us the Bible, but also how we can read it, believing that we can actually know what it is.

We will go through Galatians verse by verse asking, “What is this saying? Why is he saying it? Who is the audience? What is the main point and the particular point?”

We are calling the study on Galatians Death By Religion because letting our goodness be the measure by which we relate to God will kill us. Paul was writing to the Galatians because a group of Judaizers came along behind Paul and said that what Paul had to teach was o.k. but insufficient; that in order to be saved you had to follow Christ and you also had to follow the law; that you had to be circumcised and all the rest. We don't teach on circumcision, the laws of Moses, or the ceremonial laws. As I read it I realized that Paul is being forced to address the biggest problem in our relationship with God; not our problem of how bad we are, or how much of a 'sinner' we are, but of how 'good' we are, and of how this subtle and not so subtle thing of our goodness is more of a problem than our being bad.

Who did Jesus have the bigger problem with during His ministry? Was it with the 'sinners' or was it with the people who thought they were good? It was those who thought they were good that took issue with Jesus about how He related to others, who He ate with, how He understood religion, and how He related to God. Let me ask you this:

- When was the last time that you had a meal with a prostitute?
- When was the last time you befriended someone who was nothing like you?
- When was the last time you affirmed someone who disagrees with your view?
- When was the last time you criticized your brother or sister in Christ about their rightness or wrongness?

We say, “Well, that was Jesus. He could get away with that.” But did Paul do the same thing to reach the Gentiles? Yes, he did. Who does Paul have to confront in this book because that person separated himself not just from 'sinners' but from other believers who didn't conform to his style? The apostle Peter and Barnabas, who didn't want to get tainted, who didn't want to miss out on being 'good'.

Paul is dealing with something even worse than Jesus' dealings. Paul is dealing with a group who say, “Yes, Jesus is our Savior, but it is essential that you also keep the Law of Moses. They weren't denying who Jesus was, or that He was the Savior, but they were adding to what Jesus did and taught; saying, “This is how we maintain our justification before God.” They wanted to add to grace.

Mike Acock is doing a course called The Prodigal God by Tim Keller. In it Keller teaches about the nature of the elder brother, and how the elder brother misses the heart of the Father even worse than the younger 'prodigal' brother. He teaches how we can know if we have the heart of the elder brother inside of us. The heart of the prodigal story and Galatians is not the 'wayward sinner', but the 'religious' people who try to do everything the Bible says. Jesus and Paul are not pleading with 'immoral outsiders', but with 'moral insiders'. In the prodigal story both sons rebelled, one by being very bad, the other by being very good. When you think:

- "I never did this, this or this, so why is God doing this to me?"
- "I've always tried to be good, so I deserve better treatment from God than I'm getting."
- "Why isn't God answering my prayers the way I want?"
- "I've sought to obey the scriptures, I've worshipped faithfully, I've served others, I've given my tithe, now God owes me in some way."
- All of these are 'elder brother' thinking.

I. Being Clear On Who I Am.

A. Galatians 1:1- "Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." Here Paul is giving his whole perspective, his orientation, on life and preaching and everything. (See Rom 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, 1 Tim. 1:1)

B. The Judaizers were saying that men appointed Paul., that he wasn't a true apostle because he wasn't one of the 12, and that his teaching was different than the rest. Paul was saying, "I know who I am, and I know why I am. I am an apostle of Jesus Christ and God the Father. I am a servant of Jesus Christ and God the Father, I am under the command and will of Jesus Christ and God the Father." In a number of his letters, Paul brilliantly orients his whole existence for being. I think Paul rehearsed that continually, not because he was unsure, but because he was in awe of what Jesus had called him to. He was humbled in that call. I think it continually brought to mind the grace and mercy that had been shown to him by Jesus and the Father at his conversion. In Paul, we see that Jesus saves the "elder brother", and once the "elder brother" gets it, he really gets it.

1. So, who are you? What's your orientation? How often do you rehearse who you are? How often do you rehearse that Jesus Christ called you, chose you, appointed you? That He did it because it was His will and it pleased Him to pick you?
2. Example: I (your name) am saved, called by the command and will of God to know Him and be a follower of Jesus Christ, not by my will but by the will of Jesus Christ and God the Father. When I'm confused, frustrated, want to quit, have made a mess of my life, I've said to the Lord, as Peter said to Him, "Lord, you have the words of eternal life. Where else would I go?" I believe this about Jesus, and so I follow Him. And to this day, I can declare that He has always done me good.
3. Death by religion is when we measure ourselves, whether we are good or bad. I don't measure myself by whether I am a good follower or a bad follower. That's the whole point Paul is going to make. I am a follower by faith in Jesus Christ and I add nothing else to that. It's up to Him, not me.

II. Being Clear Who I am With.

A. Gal. 1:2- "...and all the *brothers* who are with me. To the *churches* in Galatia."

1. Not just with him physically, but with him in agreement, standing with him in what he is saying. (The Gospel) They were a band of brothers, with a deep bond.
2. It is always in relationship to the church. Paul stands with the church.
 - He stands with them through their confusion.
 - He stands with them through their misdeeds.
 - He stands with them through their hypocrisy.
 - He stands with them through their infighting.
 - He stands with them through their immaturity.
 - He is with them. He is for them. His heart is always to see them through what it is that God wants to do through them.
3. Who are you with? Are you standing with the church as Paul did?
 - This is my band of brothers or sisters.
 - This is where I get my resources from.
 - This is where I give my gifting to.
 - This is where I work through my relationships.
4. The elders in leadership: We love and enjoy each other. It has not always been easy, but we are knitted together, regardless of all the things we have been through. We work through our problems together. God has done this. Most of us quit way to soon on our relationships within the church. We need to stand together and stick it our together.

III. How I See You.

A. Gal. 1:3- "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1. This is how Paul sees all the followers of Jesus. He sees them as having favor and peace with God. That is how he orients everything he does and says. He, in essence, confers a blessing of favor with God and peace with God.
2. Can you speak grace and peace to people who are in bondage to hypocrisy and to deception? Can you bless them with grace and peace? How healing and strengthening it is when our 1st line of thought towards each other is to confer grace and peace, and to build one another up by saying how God sees them.

IV. Christianity is a Rescue Religion

A. Gal. 1:4- "...who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father."

1. Christianity is not a fix-it religion. It is not, and this may shock our current mode of teaching Christianity, a "Seven Habits of Successful" Christ followers. It is not like a Consumers Report list of what to do and what not to do. This kind of teaching smacks of the "elder brother" mentality, and the mentality of the Judaizers. This kind of teaching will kill you.
2. Christianity is a rescue religion.
 - Jesus rescues me from my sin.
 - Jesus rescues me from my guilt.
 - Jesus rescues me from my shame.

3. “He delivers me from this present evil age.” That doesn’t mean He takes us out of the evil of this world. No, He calls us to be light and salt into the world. But He delivers us from the bondage and the deception of this world. We are called to begin living for the age to come right now.

V. The Purpose of Everything

A. Gal. 1:5- “...to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

1. The purpose of everything is doxology. It is praise. It is praise to God for how He will work all things out. All of creation is unfolding for doxology. Every event of your life is designed for doxology.
 - The purpose of your life is doxology.
 - The purpose of your suffering is doxology.
 - The purpose of your salvation is doxology.
 - The purpose of your poverty is doxology.
 - The purpose of your wealth is doxology.
 - The purpose of your giving is doxology.
 - The purpose of your Bible Study is doxology.
 - The purpose of your obedience is doxology.
 - The purpose of your trials is doxology.
 - The purpose of your being a man or woman is doxology.
 - The purpose of your marriage or being single is doxology.
2. “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” Westminster Confession
3. Death By Religion is:
 - If you’ve lost your joy, you may be experiencing “death by religion.”
 - If you live in guilt, you may be experiencing “death by religion.”
 - If you are consumed with yourself, you may be experiencing death by religion.”
 - If you are upset with others because they aren’t doing what you want, you may be experiencing “death by religion.”

Discussion Questions:

What has been the main source of your identity in life? Do you rehearse your identity in Christ frequently?

Who are you standing in relationship with in the church? Can you name your band of brothers or sisters in Christ?

Why do you think that people gravitate more to a “fix-it” kind of religion than a “rescue religion” with Jesus?

Do you see your life more as a list of duty and responsibility or as one designed to glorify God and enjoy Him forever? Why might this be so?