

## **The Precepts in the New Covenant**

*Galatians 5:1-26*

Pastor Dale Evans

November 30, 2014

### **Introduction:**

Walt Disney and his cast of artists, songwriters and scriptwriters were masterful storytellers. They created an empire and legacy that continues to this day. It is an empire that thrives on creating good characters and works under the premise that those good characters exist because of good stories. Now Walt and his company were by no means a collection of good evangelical Christians, yet their stories are laced with Biblical and Christian themes. One story in particular is important for our series. In their adaptation of an earlier children's book, the Disney movie team starts out by presenting the shambles of what should be a typical household. The children are ill-mannered and nearly disrespectful, the mother/wife is involved in activist actions that the husband is likely to be opposed to but yet clueless to its meaning. Their current child-care provider leaves in a huff, and the writing of an ad for a replacement highlights the desire of the father to have a home of decorum and dignity. A soliloquy of song pining for a "proper English home" brings this scene to an end. The father, Mr. Banks, is desirous of a home that he can only see built upon rules, order and structure. The story unfolds with the arrival of a new "nanny." One, who with careful scrutiny, does not bring a lawless, unstructured plan, but intends to demonstrate that kindness, mutual respect (whether someone is a banker or a chimney sweep), genuine interest in others' well being and even the care of "nature" will lead to a meaningful existence. Songs with lines like "a spoonful of sugar", "feed the birds", "love to laugh" all unfold to expose the father's lack of a true understanding of what constitutes a "proper English home." The film ends with Mr. Banks gaining great insight to meaning, purpose and practice of fatherhood and brings a sense of order to his household, not based on rules and regiment but on love.

This morning we are bringing to bear another implication that arises from a consistent unfolding of the New Covenant in our thinking. The New Covenant is the concept allows us to read the Bible as the unfolding of this story of the work of God from creation to new creation. We then can see and understand that the Gospel, the work and revelation of the Son, Jesus Christ, has inaugurated a new, better and perfect way. God had spoken through events, speeches, rituals and law that now find their true and complete meaning in the power of the Gospel. Their symbolic and temporary purpose is now more clearly seen in light of the coming of the Gospel where hearts are cleansed and lives empowered in a way only pictured before. The Old Covenant pointed to Jesus, the person of the New Covenant, whose incarnation and violent, sacrificial death on the cross fulfills all the pictures and shadows of the Old Covenant and ratifies the New. Seeing the centrality of the Gospel and the implications that the new covenantal relationship brings with it will cause us to read our Bibles comprehensively and cohesively,

will affect our view of the church and its practices, and will cause us to live daily in light of the power of the gospel.

## **Galatians' Gospel Context**

Today's Scriptural text, found in Paul's epistle to the churches of Galatia, brings to the foreground the daily implications of life in the New Covenant. In this letter, Paul positions the Gospel as the keystone to God's working in history. He vigorously challenges anyone who would somehow present a different gospel, confronting them with the ultimate nature of the identity and power of the work of the Christ and the Spirit.

### **The Gospel is central to God's purposes...**

I want to set the context for the passage this morning by walking through several sections from earlier in the letter. First, let's turn to verse 6 of chapter 1. After the typical letter opening seen in correspondence from the first century with the identification of the author, the indication of the addressees, and as greeting (all of which he will adjust or elaborate for his particular setting), Paul would usually then state a "thanksgiving/prayer/blessing" that he would use with significant rhetorical effect to introduce his major themes. In the letter to the Galatians, we are confronted with an emotionally charged challenge that is more a curse than a blessing. This should cause us to wake up, take this letter with extreme seriousness and pay close attention to its argument. Let's read in verse 6:

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia (and by extension, our word from God to Clearcreek Chapel today) involves a challenge...no, a demand, to a commitment, a clarification and a continuance in the power of the gospel of Christ. He uses strong, emotionally laden terms like "astonished", "quickly deserting", "distort", and "accursed" to call out this concern. For Paul, to misrepresent, misinterpret or misapply the gospel is tantamount to holding an entirely different gospel, a gospel that is ineffective and worthless. Because of the counterfeit nature of this potential deception Paul calls out a curse upon those who would promote and proclaim such a travesty!

### **The Gospel is appropriated only by faith...**

So we should continue in our reading of the letter aware of the intensity and scandal that this gospel challenge brings. As we move along in the letter to verse 15 of chapter 2 we read this statement:

*We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

This text indicates that the challenge to the gospel that Paul particularly has in mind involves some connection to the role of the “works of the law” with respect to the position of God’s people and the forgiveness of the sin and rebellion. The message of the gospel of peace is appropriated through faith and belief in the work of Christ and in this alone. But for Paul, the gospel impacts us in a much more comprehensive way than mere forgiveness. For he goes on to indicate that the Gospel of the grace of God’s forgiveness in the power of the death of Christ extends to the ground and nature of full living.

### **The Gospel involves a new way of life...**

We see this begin to develop and we move down to verse 20 of chapter 2:

*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. <sup>3</sup> O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? <sup>5</sup> Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?*

Notice, Paul states that the life he “lives” is by faith in the Son of God. In verse 2 of chapter 3 he asks this important question in the unfolding of the full argument of the letter, “Did you receive the Spirit (the enablement of faith, the empowerment for living, the evidence of grace) by works of the law or by hearing with faith? This calls for the obvious answer, “hearing with faith.” And then asks, “Having begun by the Spirit (insert the parallel “hearing with faith”, are you now being perfected by the flesh (insert “works of the law”)? The Spirit continues its work in the lives of those crucified with Christ to live by “hearing (a metaphor that includes doing) with faith.”

### **The Gospel’s new life is as a child (son)...**

On along to verse 4 of chapter 4 we find:

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

In this small section, he introduces a unit that will demonstrate the unity of God's intension in the working of salvation through redemptive history. He assures the Galatians and us that this is happening at the appointed time. This is not a correction or mistake. The sending of the Son and the outpouring of the Spirit are happening to complete and fulfill the divine purposes and intentions. Which brings us to our text this morning.

## **Galatians' Gospel Expression**

Now we arrive to chapter 5. Here we read:

*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

After presenting a lesson from the figures of Sarah and Hagar as picturing the contrast of slave and free, he asserts that Christ's work was intended to bring that freedom. "For" freedom, Christ has set us free. There is something intentional about being set free, it is not just an effect of Christ's work, it is a goal or purpose for this work. Last week from II Corinthians we were challenged that the New Covenant brings a freedom. Paul had already presented that theme here in Galatians (likely written a few years prior than the Corinthian correspondence). In II Corinthians he connected the New Covenant, the work of the Spirit and our live as being free from slavery to sin and the law. Continuing on in our reading we see:

## **Gospel faith works through love...**

*<sup>2</sup> Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. <sup>3</sup> I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

Because of the intention of the Gospel work of Jesus, we should not (indeed cannot) go back to a position of slavery. Going back to live under law is in actuality cutting yourself off from the gospel. Note this is somewhat a play on

words with the particular part of the law, that of circumcision as the focal point. What matters in living in light of the gospel is “faith working through love.” The faith that he championed in verse 16 of chapter 2 that brings us forgiveness and a new relationship and status before God because of the work of Christ is the same faith that expresses itself in character and action. It “works”, that is makes itself known, is seen, visible and real in the love it has for the Christ who bought us and with those whom he has brought us into fellowship. He goes on to say:

### **Gospel faith brings freedom to serve...**

*<sup>7</sup> You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> This persuasion is not from him who calls you. <sup>9</sup> A little leaven leavens the whole lump. <sup>10</sup> I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. <sup>11</sup> But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. <sup>12</sup> I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! <sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

Here Paul paints one of the great conundrums of the Scripture. He has made it very clear that the embracing of the Gospel is an absolute. There is no middle ground, no going back part way, no distortion or sharing of gospel realities with other “ways to God.” And yet, here we see his plea that some were now “hindered”. We are told there are times when we are incomplete, confused, stumble and need correction and rebuke. We need challenge and warning. These are the means God uses to keep us and continue our experience of his grace. Challenges point to our failure and utter neediness, his warnings give us insight and he points us to His power, work and grace to reorient and restructure where we have strayed and failed. And in so doing he points out that our freedom is not to “lawlessness”. Our liberty does not loosen us from exhibiting righteousness that is the mirror of the glory of Christ in our hearts. Instead, it demonstrates a love for one another because it trusts the power to love. Our work is the Spirit’s work in us. We are not gaining merit, keeping rules or building some benefit package. We love, because He loved us. So what does this look like?

### **Gospel faith is actively obedient...**

*<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality,*

*impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

Walking, at common metaphor for the activities of living, all that we do from day to day, the actions and attitudes that constitute the realities of this world, is accomplished by the Spirit. The notion that this “life in the Spirit” is active is found in the imperative, “walk by the Spirit”. But it also is produced by the activity of the Spirit because we are “led” and exhibit “fruit” of the Spirit. The character and righteous produced by this gospel-oriented life is not dependent upon the proper application of law. Law takes us away from gospel, the shadows and pictures. We are living in the reality. And so life in the Spirit, life in the New Covenant, life governed by the Gospel expresses itself in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The works of the flesh have been crucified, decidedly and definitively dealt with in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. A new “codified” law is not positioned to govern our thinking. We live by the Spirit and the love that is expressed in this new relationship. Obedience is not a matter of rules and regulations but because we love. The author of Hebrews tells us in chapter 3 verses 16-18 that the Israelites failure was not merely failure to keep the rules, but rather unbelief.

*For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all of those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

## **Reflect and Respond**

The law of Christ, which we now serve in this Gospel era of redemptive history, is not so much a list of the imperative sayings of Jesus with or without the additions from his apostles. It is the governing principle of the power of the Spirit that pursues the image of Christ in love and obedience.

Those of you who have struggled with understanding some recent books, go back and reread Elyse Fitzpatrick’s *Give Them Grace* or Barbara Duguid’s *Extravagant Grace* or Jerry Bridges’ *The Gospel for Real Life*, or even Tullian Tchividjian’s *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* and even though they may not be

expressing their thoughts through this “new covenant” lens, this is the theological engine that is pulling their boxcars.

### 1. Trust only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We daily must recognize our sin and failure and trust the work of Jesus to be sufficient to answer for it. We often have seasons where we think our sins and troubles are too big, too bad, too hard, too many. Our Christ is faithful to stand at the right hand of the Father and is the perfect advocate for all of our failures. The Father always hears His Son and because we are now in Christ and have been given the Spirit, there is nothing else to trust. Indeed our “hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness.”

### 2. Discard all remnants of “law keeping.”

Since the garden we have been trying to keep a law. We want rules. What is good, what is bad. In essence we want to know how much of our good is acceptable and how much bad we can get away with. Many of you have had work environments where the list of “rules” for dress, vacation, behavior, use of time is so delineated you always wonder if you’re breaking something. We are not going to gain God’s favor by doing it right. We are not living under some shadow of a God who is sitting over us, patting us on the head for good things, spanking our bottoms for failure and we need to avoid the spankings and get more pats on the head. No our chastening whether in blessing or pain, leads us to see our failure and our idols to force us to his grace.

### 3. Walk in the Spirit by faith through love

Often in literature there are allusions to other common themes or characters as image or figures to carry the story or “meaning.” One common theme is the redemption or salvation of a character, the one who is the rescuer is referred to as the “messiah” or “Christ” figure. Even Disney made a movie that tells the story of the acquisition of the rights and production of Mary Poppins and entitled it as “The Saving of Mr. Banks”. But in the original movie, Mary Poppins is really not so much a messiah figure. She does not provide the motive or basis for Mr. Banks’ re-creation. She does however provide the connection, the change, or the enablement for his new life. She is more appropriately figuring the Holy Spirit. Walking with Mary Poppins is how the Banks’ children and even Mr. Banks himself learn to live. We however “walk in the Spirit”.

Trust God, Love God, Love one another. And in so doing you fulfill the Law of Christ!