

Galatians Devotionals

Read Galatians 1

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Gal 1:10

I tried diligently not to be hired by First Baptist Church. Not that I didn't want the job as pastor, but I didn't want to be influenced away from my real convictions or beliefs in order to win the job. I was always very intentional to answer every question as honestly and openly as I could, even if I sensed my answer might be off from what the committee was looking for. While I certainly wanted the job, I didn't want to bend myself more to the will of people than to the will of God.

Paul had tried people-pleasing in his past and it got him nowhere. As a member of the religious ruling class of Pharisees, he tried to always be the most zealous in his study of the scriptures and attendance in the synagogue. When a rogue sect of “Christians” popped up, Paul did everything he could to stomp out the threat. But one day Paul himself met Jesus and decided to no longer be a servant to people without first being a servant to Jesus. If you are diligent to serve Jesus first, it will change your marriage. Your parenting will be different as you consider spiritual correction in all your disciple efforts. We are not called to ignore the voices and requests of others, but we are warned against allowing them to be the loudest voices in our lives. **People are wrong more than they're right, and to seek the approval of people is one of the most fickle and frustrating pursuits you could ever undertake. God challenges us to seek His approval first and foremost that we may truly be a servant of Christ. Which people are distracting you from God's voice being in first place for your life? Where are you seeking the approval of people more than the approval of God? Where do you regret seeking that approval in the past (friends, co-workers, etc.)? Be a Jesus-first servant today, and you will be the best possible servant to people than you can be!**

Read Galatians 2

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ...Galatians 2:16

When have you felt unsaved? Most often it's a result of some disobedience to the Lord. Perhaps it's a fall back into the habitual sins of your past, or that your time in scripture and prayer has been lacking. While we certainly can lose blessings of obedience, we CANNOT lose our salvation. We haven't been saved by anything we've done, and we don't remain saved by anything we do. Yes you should read your bible to be closer to God, but you cannot be dismissed from the family of God once you have recognized and repented of sin and received the grace of God.

We see Paul's pushback against legalism begin in this book. Some Jewish Christians felt that Gentile Christians should still submit to certain parts of the law. These Jews were treating Christianity more as an extension of Judaism and ultimately the law, instead seeing it as a new covenant through Jesus' blood. Peter, Barnabas, and others were influenced by these

arguments and Paul is challenging them to stop. In pushing Gentiles to keep certain aspects of the Law, like circumcision, the gospel wasn't being properly preserved and communicated (Gal 2:5). Yes we should encourage believers to follow the commands of scripture to be diligent in the word, prayer, proper speech, etc. But let us not confuse people by indicating their salvation is tied to these acts. A person who prays 10 minutes is not more saved than the person who prays for 5. We have many opportunities to grow in our faith, but that's only made possible by the eternal hold Jesus has on those who have been saved. **Is there anything you're requiring of people in order to allow them to claim the salvation of Jesus? Could it be that instead of degrading them, God's calling you to disciple them? In your own life, remember that Jesus says the eternal life he gives us can never be taken away. So live in that peace and allow it to motivate you to honor him in your daily life as a growing Christian.**

Read Galatians 3

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made...Galatians 3:19

When I first started playing tennis, the boundaries caused me a lot of confusion. Years of playing on a basketball court had taught me that stepping on the boundary lines put you out of bounds and turned the ball over to the other team. Tennis works differently, with any part of the boundary line considered in play. Tennis replays are highly technical and if even the smallest part of the ball hit the edge of the boundary, the ball is considered playable. Knowing the boundary rules for every game is vital.

Yesterday we read how the law was difficult to live under and caused lots of problems for those who tried. So why did God give the law instead of immediately going to a covenant of grace in Jesus? Paul explains the law was given (added) to define sin and convince us we are sinners. It served to convince OT saints of the need for a coming Savior, whom we now know to be Jesus. But how can we know a Savior is needed unless we know how bad our sin is? The law was the boundary, revealing what actions match the character of God (forgiveness, love, etc) and what actions do not (lying, greed, etc). Without the law, we wouldn't know how bad we were, and how much we need the Savior (offspring) of God. **Do you try to perfect yourself by personal effort? While we certainly have the responsibility to choose differently, we are never called to change ourselves. Instead, we're called to submit to the choices Christ has for us. We do not begin with the Spirit and then trust in our human efforts. Even when we try to do well, there may still be sinful motivations behind our actions. Today remember that the righteous live by faith. Pray in thankfulness for salvation. Don't seek the places you can change today, but pray and ask Jesus where He's calling you to submit yourself fresh to him today in thought, word, or action.**

Read Galatians 4

So brothers we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. Galatians 4:31

Freed slaves didn't always feel very free after the Civil War. Booker T. Washington's incredible autobiography, "Up From Slavery", recounts how he and many other freedmen pursued new

opportunities through education to live out their freedom. However, there were many who didn't know how to live in freedom. After a brief time of uncertainty, many slaves returned or remained on the same farms and submitted to the same masters that slavery had placed them under. Washington eventually began a school to educate these freedmen and was always disheartened by those who failed to pursue and enjoy their hard-won freedom.

Paul continues to destroy legalism by revealing it as slavery over free people. His example of Hagar and Sarah is an apt one. Two sons with the same father, but under the instruction of different mothers. In the same way as believers, we have the same Father, but our churches and spiritual mentors don't always paint a consistent and scriptural picture of what we have truly been offered. We find ourselves reading devotionals out of guilt instead of an excitement to know God just a bit better today. We pray while watching the clock and hoping we've spent enough time to please God. That's the attitude of a slave, not a son or daughter. God's grace is there to keep me free when I am tempted to chain myself up through spiritual self-effort. God's grace is also there to cheer me when I realize the days of great devotion and Christ-likeness in my thoughts, words, and actions DO NOT cause God to love me any more than He already does. **Where do you find slavery in your Christianity? Are you doing because you feel you have to? There are spiritual disciplines to grow in, but they are intended as blessings on our lives, not chains. Be honest about places today you are trying to impress God through spiritual self-effort. In Christ, you are loved and accepted and invited to enjoy the freedom of salvation and grace through Christ!**

Read Galatians 5

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? Galatians 5:7

My small, rural Jr. High school was starting a cross country team, which was pretty easy because we had plenty of country "track" all around our school. I showed up to the first few practices, excited to try out, but without knowing what it would take. After the first half-mile, I soon discovered what would become a great source of hindrance to being a successful runner...quitters. Several students only wanted somewhere to be, and once out of sight of our coaches, they began walking and chatting. This caused me to lose all motivation as I realized we weren't all there for the same reason.

Paul says that Galatian church had been doing really well, knowing the truth and living it out, but something changed. He asks a very pointed question: who stopped you from living in obedience to God? There are actually two answers. First were those who weren't there for the right reasons, attempting to make people live out their version of faith, i.e. living under rules. The second answer is...you. Over my years of running, I've learned that quitters are my opportunity for encouragement. Encouragement that I'm still going, and my change to encourage them as I run past. We know that living in our own flesh brings sin (v.19). Even fleshly attempts to live our faith will end in sins of disobedience, pride, and worse. **Run with the Holy Spirit as your coach. Some days you'll feel tired and exhausted, but you'll notice a little more love, joy, peace, etc (v.22-23) showing up in your life. Look at that list and identify which spiritual fruit seems to be growing most in you. Also identify which spiritual fruit you'd**

like to work on with the Holy Spirit in the coming weeks. Spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12) are selected and given by the Holy Spirit. But all the spiritual fruits of this chapter can be ours. Don't let fruitless people hinder you.

Read Galatians 6

For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Galatians 6:3

I've finally come to a place where I can receive a compliment on my preaching. As a young man, I wanted to hear the praise that I interpreted made me better than the pastor I shared the pulpit with. Later in my 30's, I became uncomfortable with the encouragement, recognizing my previous pride and fearful of falling to it again. Now in my 40's, I've learned the words of encouragement from others was never the problem. The issue was what I thought of myself...often way too much.

Paul's wrapup in Chapter 6 encourages us to restore or correct Christians who are in error. He had done this for Peter and Barnabas who had both judged the faith of others on personal effort instead of on the grace of God. We are called to challenge error, but we must focus on the proper person. It's easy to see the mistakes of the other person, but we must first ensure we do not deceive ourselves by thinking we are something. While I may not deal with the same exact sin as the unrepentant person, I still have plenty of areas God is speaking into my life for change and Christ-likeness. You do not have to remain silent on the sin of others because you are a sinner too. Instead, you can share your own imperfections and struggles as you challenge them to struggle as well. Salvation calls us to struggle, not to secure our eternity, but to honor the sacrifice of Jesus that was made for it. **We aren't required to call out every sin of every person every time. But those repetitive sins that people get "caught up in" can often damage individuals, families, and even churches. Is there anyone God has been calling you to correct and challenge? You don't have to do it from a place of perfection, but recognition of imperfection. This could be with a friend or even a child. Don't pretend to be something you're not...know exactly who you are and who Jesus has made you to be!**