



If you would, go to Galatians 6:11. We finish Galatians today. We're all done with Galatians. You guys like Galatians?

Response: Yeah.

It's been good, hasn't it. I've really enjoyed Galatians. Next week, we're gonna start Jonah, and then we're going to do Ephesians. We'll do four weeks of Jonah. If you're a parent, the Veggie Tales movie is coming out with Jonah. Maybe even if you're not a parent, you're just really immature –

(Laughter)

The Veggie Tales movie is coming out I think next month. And so, take the kids. We'll be studying. It'll be a big, nice, fun deal. Maybe we should rent a theater, I was thinking this morning, and just take all the kids and go see the Veggie Tales movie. They decided Jesus is not going to be made into a vegetable, which is good.

(Laughter)

Nobody wants a God who's a vegetable.

(Laughter)

So, we'll start Jonah next week. This week we finished Galatians. We'll start in Chapter 6, verse 11. Galatians 6:11, Paul says, "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!" The matter is urgent, and Paul is not writing through a scribe. He is, indeed, writing with his own hand.

"Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh."

Paul says, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world was crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."

We've been studying Galatians. What we have seen is that Paul was a man who was encountered by Jesus Christ, utterly transformed from an enemy of God's people and a

murderer to a man who loved Jesus and served him just without any thought for his own well-being or regard, to the point of his own martyrdom and death. Utterly transformed by Jesus' love for him.

And Paul was commissioned by God to go out and preach and tell the story of who Jesus was and what he had done. And people hearing this great message from the Scriptures fell in love with Jesus, had their lives transformed by His grace and His power. Churches got started. And we are here as part of the lineage of Paul's work and the Gospel's power.

And God had called Paul to go start a church in this region called Galatia. And as he pulled into town, he did as he always did, he proclaimed the Gospel. He told people about Jesus. He taught the Bible. People fell in love with Jesus. Their lives were transformed. They got together as we have gotten together this morning.

The church was off to a really good start. There was excitement. There was enthusiasm. There was love for Jesus. There was fruitfulness. It was contagious. And this work of God was spreading and changing people's lives.

Seeing that it had gotten off to a good start, Paul moved on to another city to start other churches. Paul was very catalytic in that way. He would start, move on, start something else, move on from there. And what had happened was, after he left that church and started to move on to plant another church, what he calls "false brothers" infiltrated the ranks to spy on their freedom in Christ and attempted, as Paul says, to make them slaves again.

They tried to take them from Jesus back to legalism; take them from freedom in Christ back to slavery; teach them instead of loving God and their neighbor to be bitter and angry and mean-spirited and divisive and to cause dissensions and factions and quarrels among God's people.

And Paul is absent from them, and his letter is trying to refute these false teachers. And it's amazing, because this is very, very, very common. One of my great passions is the starting of new churches – church planting. It is one of my deepest passions. Most people need a church that they can go to in their area that preaches Christ, because there's not one that's already there.

I'm not saying that there are not good churches in the country and not good churches in our area, but there are so many people that do not go to church, who have not heard about Jesus and who need a church that teaches them about Jesus. And they need it close so that they have a place to go and fall in love with Him and learn his Scriptures.

And that necessitates the beginning of new churches. As I said earlier, we started this church about five-and-a-half years ago. We've been privileged to help start other churches. This year we will be helping plant churches in eight nations – the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Haiti, India, Brazil, now into Cuba and into Chile. It is good to see God do his work. It is good to see the churches get planted and people to fall in love with Jesus.

Next month there will be 50 pastors here from across the United States of America, representing over 20 churches – young guys that are starting churches, that are here for training and encouragement. And we all deal with the same thing that Paul dealt with, and that is this, that starting a church is a lot of work. You gotta raise money. You gotta get people. You gotta get a building. You gotta know your Bible. You need God's grace and things get going.

And as soon as they get going and there's some people, some money, some enthusiasm, some opportunity, then all of a sudden, freaks and nut jobs and heretics and weirdos show up, because they're too lazy to go do their own thing. They want you to get it started, and then they want to come and steal it. That's how they work.

That's why if, for example, when Billy Graham pulls into a town and does a crusade, behind him come all the cults. They wait for Billy to go first and get everybody excited about Jesus, and then they go knock on their doors and steal them. It's sick, but that's the way heretics work. They're lazy. They wait for you to do the work, and then they try and steal the people that you've gotten excited.

This is exactly what's happening here. It happened to us early on in our church. I told you, I think, on a couple of occasions that we had this guy early on in Mars Hill. I was 25 years old, maybe 24, somewhere in there. I think it was right before my 25th birthday we started the church. And we had started with a small Bible study of people.

And a man came to me. He was older, more seasoned, experienced, been a pastor for a long time, had a good resume, said he wanted to help. I thought, "This'll be great. I'm young, dumb, stupid. I don't know what I'm doing. I could use some help. This'll be great."

He came in, and then after a while, he started shoving some agendas on me that I just didn't like. It was like the issues in Galatians, where it's not evil, or bad, but it really contorts the Gospel. And it becomes a priority over Jesus. And it doesn't fit what we're trying to do. And it wasn't right.

And so, I didn't know. Was this a bad guy who needs to just get shoved out, or is this a decent guy who just needs to get corrected? It's hard to know sometimes. And you gotta know people's hearts. And that's the hard part of it all. So, I started praying, saying, "God, help me figure out is this a good guy who needs encouragement? Is this a bad guy who's dangerous?"

And I remember before we started the church, a couple weeks before, I went to bed one night, and I had this really vivid dream God gave me, to where it was the opening night of the church, and I was in the back of the church in the foyer. It was a building up by the zoo, where we had started.

And there was no one around, and he walked in wearing a certain shirt and a handmade cross and shorts and sandals, carrying a Bible with a certain leather cover on it. He walked in and I was standing there. And he walked up to me and just laid out his whole agenda. He basically said, "I've been waiting for you to get the church started. Now that you've started it, I'm taking over. Thanks for everything, you're done."

And in my dream, God gave me two verses. He gave me Acts 20 and I Peter 5. Acts 20, Paul warns the Ephesian elders. He says, "Be on guard. Men will arise from your own number, distort the truth, and lead many astray. So, be careful." The problem in the Church is always in the Church. It's not the people outside of the Church that'll ruin the Church. It's the people in the Church that'll ruin the Church.

And so I took that as a warning from God, "Be careful, there's guys, or a guy in your church that's a wolf, not a shepherd, and he's gonna eat sheep, not love 'em. He's gonna hurt the people." And then God gave me 1 Peter 5, which basically says that Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd. What that means is, Jesus is the Senior Pastor. Mars Hill has a Senior Pastor. His name's Jesus. He's in charge.

The rest of us are just trying to study his Word, pray, listen to him, follow him, do whatever he says, because he knows what he's doing. The rest of us have no idea. So we're trying to figure out, "Jesus, what do you want? Just give us our marching orders, we'll go do that, whatever it is that you want."

And it says that He is the Senior Pastor, and it says, "Therefore, shepherd the flock that God has given you," which I took to mean, "This is the church that I have built. You go out, love and pastor and take care of these people. You don't need to follow some guy; you need to follow Jesus." And you all need to follow Jesus. He's the Senior Pastor.

So, I woke up and I told my wife, I said, "God just told me what's gonna happen." She said, "What's that?" I said, "The guy's a freak, a nut job, a heretic, a weirdo. He's a problem." She says, "Well, what are you gonna do?" I said, "Well, I'm gonna love the people, be their pastor. I'm gonna teach the Bible, and I'm gonna keep an eye on him."

I said, "But God'll deal with him, because this is Jesus' church. He's the Senior Pastor. He's gonna take care of this guy. He told me so." And I have a great, nice, sweet wife, and she's cool with that. She's like, "Well, if that's what the Lord said." Most women are like, "I'll call 911. You've lost your mind."

(Laughter)

And so we waited, and I didn't say anything to this man. And it was opening night of the church. And I remember I was sitting next to my wife, totally spaced out, 'cause it's my first night. We're going public. I'd not been a pastor. I'd not preached. I'd not had a pulpit. It's like, "Can I just do this?"

And my wife says, "Honey, I forgot my Bible in the back in the foyer. Could you go get my Bible?" She left it on the information table. So I get up, and the band's playing, everybody's seated, and I walk back, and I pick up her Bible. And I turn around, and the guy walks in the door. There's nobody around. He's wearing the shirt, the cross, the sandals, the shorts, carrying the Bible, walks in, and just – my whole dream came true, just like I was watching a film.

And word for word he started saying exactly what he said in my dream – word for

word. And I finished his final sentence. I said, “Yeah, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Jesus told me you were comin’, and he told me to tell you that you need to leave, and you’re never welcome here again. So, you gotta go.” And the guy got all frustrated, and he left. I kicked him out, walked down the aisle, preached the sermon, we started the church.

(Laughter)

Good way to start. And a few weeks later, I get a call from a large denomination. And they said, “Do you have so-and-so in your church?” I said, “No, we kicked him out.” I said, “Why?” They said, “He’s dangerous. He keeps splitting churches. We kicked him out of our denomination because he would pull into a church with a young pastor. He would split the church, take the people, and every time he’s left a church, a lot of money’s disappeared. Don’t trust him.”

I was like, “I didn’t know all that. Jesus just said to get rid of him.”

(Laughter)

So, we got rid of him. And that’s exactly – I can remember times like this in the history of the church where someone or some people come in, and they’re really not about Jesus. They’re about something else. And they’re not here to love people. They’re here to take them to go after this thing that’s not Jesus, whatever it might be.

And Paul is dealing with this same issue in Galatians. He’s dealing with these same false teachers, these same kind of things. The only difference for Paul is, he’s not there. If you can even imagine that. It’s almost like you’re a dad, or a mom, and you have these kids that you love. And you’re out of the country, and you find out that someone else has moved into the house and is totally undermining you and telling your kids that they should never listen to you again and that they should be the parent. And they’re undermining the whole family and stealing the whole thing. It’s a frantic crisis situation.

Paul’s not even there to deal with it. He is now off starting another work. And so the letter to Galatia is his attempt to win this war and to bring these people back to their senses, and to say, “These are false teachers. They’re not leading you to Jesus. They have agendas other than Christ. They’re just in it for themselves. Don’t let them undermine my character or my doctrine. Keep with Jesus. You guys have gotten off track. What is going on here?”

That’s the heart of what’s going on in Galatians. And what he says is this, he says that you can tell a few indicators about whether or not someone is a true or false teacher. And the Bible is clear, that if you’re gonna teach the Scriptures and lead God’s people, you have to be careful. The Scriptures say that not many of us should presume to be teachers, because the teachers are judged more harshly. If you get up and say, “God says,” you better be right. You better be right, because God doesn’t take that lightly.

And so, he gives us a list of things to look for, for true and false teachers. And I would tell you this: Test me by this. Any church you go to, test the leaders by this. If

you move, or God sends you elsewhere, come back to Galatians and say, "Okay, if I'm gonna be part of this church, if I'm gonna trust this teacher, I wanna see these things. And I don't wanna see these other things."

Verse 12, he says, "Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised." They're working through force and not love. "The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh."

Here's some indicators of a false teacher. First thing they care about, they care about what everyone looks like. They care about making everyone look like a Christian, what Paul calls "outward appearances." What Paul says, circumcision/uncircumcision doesn't mean anything. The only thing that counts is this: Are you a new creation? Have you met the living God? Have you come into relationship with Jesus? Has he changed you and made you a new person? That's what counts.

God always works from the inside out. He changes our heart. He changes our nature. He changes our will and our mind. He renews us from the inside out, so that begins to show outside, but it's because of what He's done in us. He has changed who we are.

False teachers, all they care about is what we look like on the outside. Jesus said that man looks at the outward, but God looks at the heart. That it is easy to judge someone and say, "Well, you don't look like a Christian." The issue is, but where is their heart? Do they love Jesus? Have they encountered Him? If they have, then He will transform them. They will change.

And if you just focus on the outward, legalisms, morality, rules, traditions, piety, and the like, you can get people to be good. You can get women to wear appropriate clothes. You could get men to watch their mouths, so they never curse. You can get people not to get drunk, or not to listen to certain music, or not to watch movies, or not to do certain things. But if they don't love Jesus, they die and go to hell as very moral people.

And Paul says the only thing that counts is: Have you met Jesus? Not just what do you look like, but do you love Jesus. 'Cause that's the only thing that counts. The rest will take care of itself. Jesus says, "If you love me, you'll –" what? "– you'll obey my commands."

If someone loves Jesus, their life will get cleaned up. But if the goal is to clean up their life without pressing them toward loving Jesus, Paul says that's false teaching. That's false teaching.

Another indicator of false teaching, he tells us, is that these people avoid persecution. They're very excited. They're very combative. They're very bold. But as soon as times get hard, they give up. These are the kind of people who – oh, they're getting a little opposition – they disappear. The work at the church gets hard – they quit. The money's not there, they're not gonna get their paycheck – they're done. They give up. As soon as it gets hard, as soon as somebody opposes them, as soon as the

money dries up, as soon as the work gets difficult, they leave.

Paul says a true teacher doesn't. He sticks there to the bitter end. He says, "This is my church. I love these people. We're here. Jesus is in charge. I'm not going anywhere. As long as the people are here and Jesus is here, I'm here." False teachers, they give up. They quit. They give in. They walk away. Why? Because they're in it for power. They're in it for money. They're in it for fame.

As soon as they're not as famous as they thought they would be, as soon as they're not getting paid as much as they were hoping for, as soon as they don't have as much power as they were wanting, they say, "Well, that's not what I was looking for. I was looking for something greater, grander, more glory. It's getting difficult now. People are opposing me. Persecution's coming. The days are hard. The hours are long. I give up." And they quit. They give in.

It's easy to be a teacher, and it's easy to be a leader when things are going great. When they're not, Paul says you'll see whether or not somebody is in it for love of God, or for selfish gain. In addition, he says false teachers are hypocrites. They'll make rules and legalisms and they'll burden people with heavy loads. And they're hypocrites. They don't even obey them themselves.

These are the kind of people that will say, "Don't do this, don't do this, don't do this." And you walk around and follow them, and they do that. I had one pastor scream and yell at me. He said, "Do you drink?" I said, "Yes, I do drink. I have never been drunk in my whole life. I never had a drink until last year. And I was reading the Bible and got convicted that I should have a drink." 'Cause it's in there.

And he said, "You shouldn't drink. That's a sin." I said, "Where does the Scripture say that?" He says, "Well, it doesn't say that." I said, "Well, then, who are you?" I said, "Do you drink?" He said, "Yeah, but that's not the issue."

(Laughter)

Well, yeah, it is. It is the issue. You know, don't do this situation where you tell everyone what to do, but you don't do it. If you're gonna tell people to read their Bible, read your Bible. If you're gonna tell people to love their neighbor, love your neighbor. If you're gonna tell people not to do something, then don't do it. If you're gonna – if you are gonna tell them to be faithful to their spouse, then be faithful to your spouse, 'cause the worst is a hypocrite. That's the worst, especially with a teacher.

And Paul says they're hypocrites. They tell you to do things and they're not doing them. They tell you not to do things, and they're doing them. So, who are these guys? Who are these guys to run around, making rules, being legalistic, telling people what to do that they're not even doing? And this is the mark of a true leader in Scripture. A mark of a true leader in Scripture, really, guys, comes down to this – it's character. It's character.

Paul says, and whomever the author of Hebrews is says in Hebrews 13:7, that a leader is someone you can look at their life and the outcome of their faith, and you

can admire that. And you want to imitate them. What that means is, if you're a mom, you look at a mom, and you look at her kids, and you look at her work, and you say, "She's got wisdom. I need to follow her. I need to talk to her."

That means, if you're a man, you look at a man and you say, "What's his life like? How does he handle his money, his relationships? If he has a wife or children, how does he treat them?" I want to see it. I want to see – I want to see the way he lives. I want to see the way she lives. And I want to see that they're practicing what they preach, that what they're teaching is corresponding with what they're living. And if they are, we call 'em a leader.

But just because they say things doesn't make them a teacher or a leader. It has to be what they say and what they do. Paul tells a young man in the New Testament to watch your life and your doctrine closely. What that is, is be careful with what you teach and be careful with what you do. Because both what you say and what you do are sermons that you're preaching, and people are listening to.

Paul says hypocrites are the worst. They make rules. They don't keep 'em. They tell people to do things. They don't do 'em. That's a false teacher. You should be able to take any Christian leader or teacher, follow them around, and you should see no disconnect between what they say and what they do. Not that they are perfect, but that there's uniformity, harmony, and consistency.

The last thing Paul says is that false teachers are arrogant. They boast. And they're proud. They'll tell you, "Here's what I've done. Here's where I've succeeded. Here is what's happening. Isn't it great? And it's because we're gifted. We're wealthy. We're smart. We're educated. We're trained. We're talented. We're wise."

Does Paul boast? He boasts all the time, but what he says is, "May I never boast in anything but this. May I boast in the cross of Jesus Christ." It's good to brag. It's good to boast, as long as when you're all done, you say, "And isn't Jesus great? Look what he did." If you gotta good job, you gotta good marriage, you got good health, you got good kids, you make good money, you get good grades – whatever it is, you could say, "This is my life. This is how great it's going. I'm so excited. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus."

As James says, "Every good and perfect gift – that comes from God." It's all God. Paul says, you know, people that are false teachers, they boast and brag as if everything that goes well is because they were on the job. Real good Bible teachers, good Christian leaders, they're gonna boast. They're gonna tell ya – they'll tell you good stuff. Here's – God's changing lives. God's saving people. God's doing the work. God's giving buildings. God's planting churches. God is good, but it's God. It's God. And it's not just God working through us because we're so great. It's God in spite of us, because God is so good. It's grace.

And so Paul says – Paul says, "Here's the deal. Don't commit yourself to false teachers. All they want is appearances, not changed hearts. What they want is they want to avoid suffering persecution and hardship. Take the long, hard way to the cross. If that means your life is going to be difficult, then so be it. Just keep loving Jesus. Don't give in to hypocrites who say one thing and do another. Be consistent.

And don't be arrogant and boastful and proud, and a person who, every time something goes well, takes credit for what God has done. Boast and brag, but boast in Christ."

And Paul lays out this in Galatians, and what he's told us to this place is that it's not about false teachers. It's about Jesus, who's our real teacher. And what it's not about – "Christianity is not about works, about you being a good person," he's told us. It's about God being a good God. It's not about what you and I do. It's about what God has done in Jesus. It's not about us cleaning ourselves up so we're presentable to God. It's about God cleaning us up so that we're reflections of him. It is about God, and how good God is.

And it is not about culture, about these social customs, or morays, or norms, and one culture imposing itself on another culture, because God loves all cultures and races and peoples and nations and tribes and tongues of the earth. So, it's not about circumcision and feasts and festivals. It's about Jesus and Jesus loving people, and those people loving him back, and those people being new creations in Christ.

And Paul has told us that it is not about morality, about being good. It is about worship and loving God. And Paul has been adamant with us as well, that it's not about a human movement or human teachers. It's about God – God teaching us, God leading us, God guiding us, and God definitely working through his people. But it's still God, nonetheless.

And we've reached this point where then Paul culminates the book in Chapter 5, and he tells us it's about freedom. It is for freedom that Christ has made us free, that this life in God is freedom – freedom from sin and death and slavery and folly, and freedom to belong to God, and to be adopted as His child, and to be able to call Him dad. And for Him to love us and to bring us into His family, the Church.

It's about us being filled with His Spirit and living by His power and bearing forth the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul says, "Against such things there is no law."

It's about us being in the Church, Galatians 6, and loving each other and encouraging each other. And when we sin, bringing one another to repentance. And where we have heavy loads and burdens, that we encourage one another to be mature and strong and take care of our responsibilities. And also support and help each other when times are hard and things are difficult and we need each other.

And all of his happens, he says in Galatians 6:6, through the study of the Scriptures, through the right teaching of God's Word. And through being under good teachers, who open the Bible and encourage us and lead us and knit us together and keep us focused on one thing, and that's not our movement, or our church, or our ministry, or our tradition, or our piety, or our hopes, or our nationalism. It's about Jesus. And just sort of clearing out all the debris and saying, "You know, it's about Him and about his work in us and about us loving each other as a reflection of His love for us. That's what it's about."

And Paul brings us down to this place where he then tells us how this is all possible.

And I'll tell you guys what, I love where he says, "Circumcision or uncircumcision doesn't matter." What happens oftentimes in the Church is we get hung up on things that really don't matter. All of a sudden, it's about this ministry, or about this particular style, or about these particular issues, or about this particular thing.

Paul says, "Here's what counts. Have you met Jesus? Have you encountered the living God? Has he done His work of transforming you and making you a new creation? That's what counts." That's what counts.

I don't care your denomination. I don't care your tradition. I don't care. Here's what I care about. Do you love Jesus? If you love Jesus, we're family. And that our unity is in Christ. That's what holds us together is that the same God who changed you changed me, and He's at work in both of us. That's what counts.

And I – it just concerns me because we can have this temptation as God's people to get so sidetracked by other things. Oh, we're about this political issues, or this moral agenda, or this spiritual movement, or this religious tradition, or this social cause, or this ministry. He says, "No, the only thing that counts is God finds His people and changes them." That's what counts. Everything else is just details. Everything else is a means to the ends. Everything else is secondary, tertiary.

What counts is this: Have you met Jesus? And I love what he says, "I'll never boast in anything except for Jesus and what He's done." And Paul knows full well we have sinned and we have fallen short, and that God has loved us and He has come for us. And that Jesus comes as God in human flesh, ultimate unparalleled humility. He's tempted. He lives without sin. He is mocked. He is beaten. He is shamed. He is scorned. He is betrayed. He is hated. He is despised. He suffers. He is crucified. And He dies. And his final words are, "Father, forgive them."

Unbelievable. Paul says, "Everything happens there at the cross." My sin is placed on Jesus. The sins of all of God's people are placed on Jesus. He is punished in our place. He dies, death being the wage for sin. And three days later, he resurrects, and He conquers sin, and He conquers death, and He sends out this great, glorious news of His work.

He returns to the Father, where today he is our High Priest, our Intercessor, our Advocate, our great King and God. His love reigns down on us every day. That He is good at His work, and He has sent out His Spirit into the hearts of His people, to bring love and wisdom and life into that new heart that He's given us. And every good thing that we are, and every good thing that we do is because of Him.

And Paul says, "If I brag, I'll brag about him and what he has done and how deeply he has loved me." And it's glorious, because we have a culture that knows nothing of love. It only knows of lust and of greed and of selfishness and of narcissism. Love in our world is a sentimental, fleeting feeling. "I love you. Oh, I fell out of love." It sort of comes and goes whimsically. It's not rooted anywhere.

The Scriptures tell us that God is love, I John 4 and Romans 5, that God has poured out His love in our hearts through the Spirit that He has given us. And Paul tell us in Galatians that we now can love one another and we can love God because of the love

that God has imparted to us. And God's love is not just a sentimental, romantic feeling that is fleeting, coming and going. God's love is an efficacious, transforming love.

When God's love encounters someone, it explodes in their life, and it changes them. They are never the same. It's a glorious thing. Paul says, "That's what counts. God's efficacious love, poured out through Jesus, changing His people. That's what counts." Paul says, "The rest is all details."

And the issue is, "Well, how do we get to this place where we're transformed people, where we're changed, where we're loved, where we encounter God, where we are made new from the inside out?" He closes with these great words, verse 18, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen." If you have to summarize the Christian faith in one small sentence, that might be the best, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's it.

It's about grace, and grace comes from Jesus. That's it. That's it. And the false teachers are saying, "It's about you." Paul's saying, "It's about Jesus." Paul's saying, "It's about what you – no, what Jesus does." There is this continual temptation for you and I to believe that we are flying solo; that we are alone; that God has abandoned us; that we are isolated; that we must fix ourselves, cleanse ourselves, heal ourselves; that we must do something to please the holy and righteous God.

And Paul declares, "Jesus." When Jesus cried out on the cross, "It's finished," it was all done. Now, all that is left is for you and I to love Him and to trust Him. That's what we must do. And even that is done by grace. It's by grace. And I love – I love – I love the concept of grace. It is the most freeing and liberating thing in the world. There is no other religion, philosophy, tradition, movement, or ism that has any concept of grace. Everything else is you through karma, working off your sin; or that there is no sin; or that there is no consequence for sin.

The Bible is clear that it is about sin and grace. The problem is always sin, the answer is always, always, always just Jesus. And it's grace. And we come before God and we say, "But I'm not good." God says, "But Jesus is." "But I'm not perfect." "But Jesus is." "But I haven't paid you back." "But Jesus has." "But I don't deserve to be in your presence." "Jesus has made you worthy." "But I'm not lovely." "It's not that you're lovely; it's that Jesus has loved you." It's about Him, and this is grace.

We don't deserve love, but we've been loved. We're not clean, but we've been cleansed. We've not merited or earned anything, and we're not good, but God is. And even those of us who know God have betrayed him. And it is not even that we are faithful people, because the Bible promises that even when we're faithless, he's – what? He's faithful. He is faithful to us. That's grace.

And God's grace in the Scriptures does things. It is God's loving power, unmerited, undeserved, in action, doing things to transform people. That's why when people become Christians in the Scriptures, they often get new names. Saul becomes Paul. Cephas becomes Peter. Abram becomes Abraham. Because when you encounter the living God, you are a different person. You are a new creation. You start over. You begin your life with God, with this new heart and his Spirit and Jesus Christ and the grace of God just flowing down to you.

And this grace is magnificent. "It is by grace we have been saved," Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, "It is by grace we have been saved." It is by grace our sins are forgiven. It is by grace that we are gifted by God to serve him in ministry. It is not enough that God is kind enough to save us and forgive us and love us and heal us and transform us. Then he chooses to use us in His purposes so that we can have this measure of joy by being co-workers with Him. It is by grace that we get a gift to serve with.

Paul says in Romans 12 that we should administer God's grace as it has been given to us, that we become, then, conduits for God's work on the earth, because this God who rules and reigns over everything isn't just doing His work. He is doing it through His people. And God not only decrees the ends, which is loving and changing people, He also decrees the means, which is working through you and me.

"And at times we will grow weary and we will lose heart," Paul has warned us. There are days when we will be fatigued, when we will be tired, and we will wonder, "Is this working? Am I running in vain?" And it is in those moments that God's grace that has saved us and healed us and forgiven us and transformed us and changed us and gifted us and called us and sent us and bought us – it shows up at that very moment through the Holy Spirit in us to empower us. That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15.

It sounds like he's boasting. He says, basically, "I worked harder than anyone, and I got more done." He says, "But not I –" what? "– the grace of God that was with me." The grace of God. Paul knows everything that was ever done, every word that was spoken, every word that was written, every sermon that was preached, every life that was transformed, every church that was planted was God's grace.

Did he work hard? Yes, by God's grace. You and I breathe by God's grace. We were born by God's grace. We live by God's grace. Everything we do is by God's grace. The skills, talents, abilities we have is by God's grace. The fruit that we bear is by God's grace. The new heart that we have, the life that we live, the joy that we taste, the eternity that we long for is all of God's grace.

Paul says, "It's about grace from Jesus. That's it." That's it. And no matter what the question, the answer is, "I need grace from Jesus. That's what I need." And God is a gracious, loving God, who takes good care of his children. He is faithful and trustworthy, and the whole message of Galatians is, "Have you met Jesus?" Don't you love Him? Isn't it easy to trust Him? Isn't it amazing what he does? That's the living God." That's the living God. Amen?

Response: Amen.

Amen. That's Paul's final word. It means, "May it always be so." May it always be like this. May we never deviate from this. May this never change. It's about you and I being brothers and sisters together in Christ. It's about grace falling on us through Jesus, and it's about Him. That's why it is such good, glorious news.

God loves you. God has come for you. God has come to seek and save those of you

whom are lost. God is here to dispel any false notions we may have of morality or piety or spirituality. He is come to just clear the ground so that we could see Him and realize that He is pursuing us, arms wide open. And He has extended a hand to us. And He has grabbed His children. And He has loved them. He has loved them until they are lovely. And He has changed them by His grace.

And He will never leave them. And He will never forsake them. And they will be His people. And He will be their God for ever and ever and ever. Amen. It's all good news. It's all true.

At this point, we have to respond. That's the whole point. God reveals Himself; we have to respond. If you're not a Christian, you respond with recognizing that you are not going to make yourself acceptable to God, but that you need Jesus, and He has done that for you. That means that you will recognize your sin. And you confess it as sin. And you trust in Him and love Him for what He has done.

He will give you a new heart. He will make you a new creation. His promises will be applied to you. He will do his work of grace in you. For those of us that have tasted this, we can assure you that the Lord is good.

For those of you who are Christians that are weary and downtrodden, you need to come to God for empowering grace. Those of you who want to serve the Lord, you need to request of Him today gifting grace. Those of you whom are struggling, you need to come to Him for forgiving grace and confession of sin. Those of you that are bearing fruit, you need to come to Him with gladness of heart, thankfulness and celebration, that like Paul you're being used as part of His plan.

We'll respond by taking of communion, which is remembering Jesus' body and blood, shed for our sin. And Him coming, body and blood, again, to take us home into His presence. If you're a Christian, confess your sin. Remember, Jesus took communion. I don't care what church you go to, if you're a Christian and love Jesus, you're welcome to take communion with us. There's one Lord, one faith, one baptism. As long as you love Jesus, you're part of this family, too.

We'll collect our offering. If you're a visitor, or not a Christian, don't give. You're our guest. It's good to have you. For the rest, it's part of your act of worship. And I'll get the total from James, see where we are at. And then I shall pray and we shall sing.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our God. We thank you for the work you've done on our behalf. We thank you for coming to die for our sins and raise in victory. To seek us. To save us. To heal us. To change us. To live within us. To gift us for service. To empower us for fruitfulness.

Lord Jesus, may we always cling to Paul's final words to the Galatians, that it is about being a new creation. It is about you. And it is about the grace that you extend to us that enables us and causes us to become new creations.

Lord Jesus, we do love you, and we thank you that you are so easy to love. And we trust you, and we thank you that you are so easy to trust. And we thank you for all that you have done. I thank you for the people that you have brought in this church.

Lord God, we have seen people become Christians. We have seen Christians who had strayed return to you and bear fruit. We have seen people who are steeped in deep folly experience wisdom and life. We have seen those that were tasting death partake of your goodness and be transformed.

Lord God, it is a beautiful, beautiful thing to see you do your work. We thank you that we get to see it, that we get to experience it, that we get to participate in it. Lord God, please keep us encouraged. Please keep our eyes on you. Please keep our hearts devoted to you and our faith abiding in you.

I thank you, Lord God, for those that have helped us with this building and this ministry. Thank you for those that have taken their talents and invested them wisely and brought back a return to help with this project.

Lord God, we thank you for the building. We know that the building is not the issue. It's just the place where the people who love Jesus get together to thank Him and to love Him and to grow in Him and to encourage others to come and taste and see that He's good.

So, Lord God, may the issue for us never be ministry, programs, movements, buildings, morality, politics, or anything else. May it always be the cross that we boast in, the grace that we've tasted, and the change that has come. Amen.