

Before we get going in Galatians, we have a couple of things we need to do. In case you're not quite sure how a church runs, or how, in particular, The Village runs, it's our understanding from the Scriptures that Christ is the head of the church, so as a staff and as an elder board, we are in glad submission to Christ. Simply what that means is that we're going to sit under the weight of the Word of God, and when it comes to cultural issues, or when it comes to really the commands he has on the church, we're going to just simply submit to what the Bible says. We're going to read it as it's written and then go from there.

The Word says that under the headship of Christ you're to have a plurality of leaders, or an elder board, who then governs the congregation, so we have had an elder board for years now. We meet every Tuesday morning from 6:00 to 8:00 a.m., and then once a month we get the men and their wives together for a dinner. We are good friends. We argue well, we study well together, we pray well together. It's a very strong team. I feel very safe, and very protected.

I am not king here. I have a very loud personality. I am a very aggressive young man, and I pretty often lose votes. Now, in the decades to come, they'll apologize and land where I think they should land, but for now it's my understanding that plurality of leadership is best, so I have often lost votes in that room. They are a tremendous group of men, and over the last year we have been seeking to actually expand the number of men in that room.

We are a very large church spread out across a very large metroplex, so we need more voices and more men in that room in order to teach, shepherd, and discern like we've been commanded by Christ to teach, shepherd, and discern. Less than half of the elder board is actually paid staff, and then the majority of our elder board are laymen, men who do not work for the church, are not paid by the church, but who are faithful elders of the church. As we have set out to expand that room, for the last year we've been vetting Wes Searcy and his family.

So Wes, if you'll come on up, I'm going to introduce Wes to you. Wes felt called into ministry at the age of 21. He has worked in churches in Florida, in Colorado, and in Texas. He is currently the vice president of NEXT Worldwide, which is ultimately a church-planting organization that partners with indigenous church planters in foreign countries, and then utilizes students to help those church planters do whatever it is they're doing.

They're all over the world. I know we've taken a trip with him into Romania. There's basically a group of pastors in Romania who then our students will go in and partner with those pastors in whatever they need. Sometimes that's evangelism, sometimes that's just doing surveys, but this is what Wes does full time as his job. We love him. We love his wife. His wife, Colleen, has taught at our women's Bible study. She is a gifted, tremendous woman. They have two young sons. The presence and power of the Lord's grace in the Searcy home is really quite spectacular to look at.

I want to talk to you about process here. You have now until February 24 to give us a reason, if you're a covenant member, that Wes does not biblically qualify for the office. You can read what's expected of Wes in 1 Timothy and in the book of Titus. If you want to see what it takes to be an elder, that's where those lists are. We've vetted him pretty well, but maybe you know something we don't know. Maybe you were at a soccer game with Wes' kids and your kids and he freaked out and punched somebody, pepper-maced a lady, and ran off. We don't know that, so we need to know it. If you've gone into business with him and it hasn't gone well and he has been shady, we don't know that, so you need to let us know if he doesn't qualify biblically.

But if he *does* qualify biblically, then come February 25 or 26 we're going to let you know that Wes is now officially an elder, and he will begin to shepherd and walk with the elders who are currently here for the good of the bride, and for the ongoing maturation of The Village Church into the headship of Christ. So will you join me in praying with Wes? I'm going to let Wes just head on out. He has been here at all of our services. I'm going to pray for Wes and his family, and then I have one more thing I want us to look at, and then we'll dive into Galatians. Let's pray for Wes.

Father, the task of overseer carries with it a stricter judgment, so I pray for Wes, and I pray for Colleen and their boys and their family. I thank you for the grace you've shown Wes. I thank you for his love for you and for your Word, that he doesn't just love the Bible; he loves the *you* of the Bible. Thank you for how he has led so well in his home. He's not disqualified. His wife loves you. His children love you. You've done a real work there. Thank you for his love for seeing your name and your renown known across the whole world. I thank you for his love for students. You've done well there.

So now, Father, I just ask that if there are pieces we're missing, if there are things we're unaware of, God, that will ultimately bring reproach upon your name or upon your bride, I pray you would let it come to light, but if Wes is your man to be added to the team, God, so that we might grow in health and we might grow in vibrancy and we might grow in submission to your Word, God, I pray that you would bless these next two or three weeks, God, that we might celebrate yet another brother who has been given watch care over your flock here at The Village. We love you, and it's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Okay, I want to do one more thing before we dive in. Bryan and Robyn Adams are long-time members of The Village Church. In fact, they've been here since we were a really tiny place. In fact, you have probably been sat before in your seat by Bryan and Robyn. They've led groups. They've been on the greeting team. They've worked in Kids' Village. They've been just as wired in as you can get wired in. They have struggled with infertility for years and several months ago found out they were pregnant with twins. So there was much celebration for those of us who know them and love them and walk with them.

About a month ago at 19 weeks, she started to go into labor with the twins. They rushed her to the hospital. Her water broke. They were able to stop the progression of the labor, and really when they got in there and did the ultrasound, Baby A, who's Titus Bauer, had literally positioned himself blocking the birth canal so Baby B couldn't get out. So despite the fact that her water broke and there was no water in there, little Titus Bauer (named after Jack Bauer because he just decided it wasn't happening) had blocked the canal, and for a month, despite the fact that her water had been broken, for a month labor was stopped.

Then on Thursday the contractions picked back up. You're allowed to have, I think, three shots a day that will stop your contractions from progressing. By noon on Thursday they had already given her all three shots, so they started her on a drip, but nothing slowed down the progression of the contractions and the labor. So Thursday evening, Robyn gave birth to the two boys. Titus Bauer was born at one pound, six ounces and lived maybe 20 minutes. Asher was born right after that at one pound, two ounces, and is still with us. He's in the NICU and he's fighting for his life.

They've already almost lost him on multiple occasions. They woke them up on Friday and had them come into the NICU to say goodbye to Asher. His left lung had ruptured and they thought he was gone, but he fought through it. The kid has just been a beast since the second he came out of the womb, refusing to go the way this should go, and that's God's grace upon grace for them.

So I wanted to just start out our time together today introducing Wes and then praying for this family, just to kind of continually push before you our need to humble ourselves before God, and to ask God to do what only God can do. I just want us to ask for the life of Asher. His skin is translucent. It's not fully developed yet, so they're real worried about infection on his skin. His left lung has ruptured. He's not breathing on his own. Outside of those two things, all his vitals are sharp and he's fighting.

But I want us to spend some time praying for, not only Asher's life and that we might get to watch him run up and down these hallways here in Flower Mound, and we might get to watch what God would have for him in long life, but also for Robyn and for Bryan as they mourn the loss of Titus and plead for the life of Asher after what has been years of pleading with God for mercy in this area of their lives. They've been so faithful up at the hospital. They had verses plastered all over. They're ministering to other people.

In fact, a guy they'd been sharing the gospel with ran in and was all geeked out that he found a Bible app on his phone. He was like, "Do you know you can get the Bible on your phone?" He just really had freaked out about that. It's funny what we're so in tune with that other people aren't in tune with at all. So they've just been faithful with this trial. They've been faithful to encourage others who are in similar positions as they are, so I just wanted to start today by praying for them.

They know I'm sharing this. I haven't divulged anything they haven't given me permission to divulge. For those of you who know them and love them, please make contact and encourage them. They're doing well, but man, this is hard stuff. So I want us to pray for them. Will you join me in praying for them this morning? Which means don't just listen to me pray, but let's pray together.

Holy Spirit, you gave Paul good words when you gave him that we are perplexed but not crushed. So when I consider Bryan and Robyn's great faith in you, their great love for you, their steadfastness in the face of adversity and difficulty and sorrow, I confess I am perplexed but not crushed. Father, we come to you as a body of men and women who by your blood are tied deeply to Bryan and Robyn Adams, who are tied deeply to our tiny brother Asher. God, that you would save his life, that you would confound again the wisdom of the wise, and that you would do here what feels impossible to so many.

We thank you for the grace you've afforded Bryan and Robyn to walk in a type of joy. Not a type of happiness but a type of joy through this, and that you would, God, exponentially grow their faith in the days and weeks to come. I pray there would be a day we get to watch little Asher get in the water and proclaim a love for you and be baptized. I pray you would just bless his little life, and from just the earliest possible days of life, there would be a steadfastness about you, a love for you, and a ferocity of spirit when it comes to you. We love you, Jesus. We're asking because we know you can. We're believing and hopeful that you will, and it's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Okay, if you have your Bibles, let's go to Galatians, chapter 1. Whenever the gospel is preached, powerful things happen. Sometimes those powerful things are measurable in that you'll see a growing numeric, or you'll see community transformation. If you were here last week, we covered the church at Ephesus, and we saw how the whole socioeconomic system in Ephesus shifted as the gospel was proclaimed, as the Word of God was proclaimed. So sometimes it's measurable and sometimes it's a lot slower than that, but where the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, powerful things happen. Transformation occurs.

If you think about it on an individual basis, here's what happens: The gospel is heralded. It is spoken. Few people come to know and love Jesus Christ without the gospel being spoken. I would contend that you didn't see someone not drink beer and that's how you got saved. You didn't see someone not act this way

and that's how you got saved. That might have drawn you to curiosity, but it was the proclamation of the Word, either in a conversation with someone or from a stage, that by the Holy Spirit's power opened up your heart to the things of God.

What's occurring in that moment is spectacular. You and I by our nature, from the second we're born, have set up shop on the throne of our hearts. We are god, and what we want rules, and what we want reigns, and we become in that position a slave to our desires and our longings. Despite the fact that those desires and longings simply bring reproach, shame, guilt, and loss into our lives, we continue to sit on that throne and pursue the god of our own comfort and the stuff of future garage sales. Yet the gospel goes out, it's received by the mercy of God, and we gladly step off that throne and let the rightful Ruler of our hearts reign as he was meant to reign, as Lord over our lives.

There's this really beautiful thing that happens in that moment, and I'll try to explain it very quickly. The law (which up until that point has been condemning and up until that point has felt impossible), the commands of God, God's expectations of us, feel crushing and condemning as though they're impossible. I don't fit in with this God who requires these things of me. But when the gospel takes root in our hearts, there's a gladness around the law, where we've now been set free to pursue the holiness of God, because we know if we stumble in our pursuit of the holiness of God it has been paid for in Christ.

So all of a sudden the law no longer feels like a weight to us, but becomes like David said, "honey on our lips." I don't know a lot of people who lay in bed at night and meditate on the law of the Lord and go, *Man he's so good that he would command these things*. Most people I know lay in bed at night and go, "God, I just can not do all these things you expect of me. Please forgive me today and I'll try harder tomorrow." That's what most people do.

But isn't it crazy that David is laying in bed going, "Oh, all your commands are awesome"? David was horrible at following the commands, and he's laying in bed going, "Man, your commands are like honey on my lips." How does that happen? It happens because faith in Christ has been given to us. You might say, *Well, David didn't know who Christ was*. Oh no, David knew the promise of Christ, and the New Testament is clear that David was saved by his faith in the coming Christ before the Christ came, which is what that word *propitiation* is in Romans. When Jesus died, he died not only for our future sins, but for the sins of those in the past who put their faith in the promise of him. So the gospel goes out, and it transforms the hearer who receives it.

One of the reasons I want to consistently push you out of your cultural comforts, the reason I want you to get on planes with us, the reason we have dozens and dozens of trips all over the world into the Middle East, into Africa, into Asia, into India, the reason I'm trying to encourage you to get on a plane and go to

Guatemala and go to these other places is so that you might see that this same gospel message has been heralded in other places and it has transformed lives, and it has made people love the Jesus whom you love, and it has created a worship in them that I hope is in you.

Wherever the Word is preached, wherever the gospel is proclaimed, powerful things happen. But here's a thing we learn in Scripture: The gospel, as powerful as it is to transform, is frail in our flesh. Here's what I mean by that: Although the gospel is powerful in its transforming works in our hearts, we have a tendency to drift away from the gospel and drift into one of two great perversions that have gospel loosely attached to them, but in the end are not the gospel at all. Pay close attention today, because between now and June, I'm going to pull us back to this paradigm repeatedly as the book of Galatians bears its weight on us concerning what is the one and only gospel. Let me try to explain and unpack the two great perversions of the gospel.

Although I think you're going to see both of these, the one most common in our midst and the one most common in the book of Galatians is that the gospel is heard and it just seems too easy to be true. That Christ would love us, save us, and rescue us from our sins, not because of anything we do, not because of anything we have, but simply the free, unmerited grace of God bestowed upon us, seems way too easy, so we move to helping a brother out. Surely Christ can't save me, so here's what I'll do: I'll add these things to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by doing that I'll help God save me. In the end this is exhausting. It simply doesn't work. I'm going to try very quickly to explain to you why it doesn't work.

Ultimately, Christ has come so that you might have a mediator between God and yourself, which means that we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us to God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. I went a little Trinitarian there on you, but follow me. That means that ultimately I have a relationship with Jesus. Now, let me tell you where we get a little bit off, where the drift occurs. We hear the gospel, we receive the gospel, and then we start going, *Wait, this is a little too easy*. We love Jesus, and then all of a sudden we go, *Well man, that's a little too scary to just trust in that, so let me help him*, and we begin to add some religious activities in order to help save us.

Now, let me tell you why that simply doesn't work and why our culture doesn't help us. I study my Bible, I pray, I fast, I'm involved in a lot of spiritual disciplines, but I do those things because they increase my intimacy with Jesus Christ. They push me further into my relationship with Christ. I don't do those things to be saved. I *am* saved, so I do those things. Do you understand the difference? My great fear and the perversion of this lane is that they quit trusting in their relationship with Christ as salvation, and begin to trust in their religious activity.

That's madness, because it's akin to how we feel about celebrities. What I mean by that is the most popular magazines out there, like *People*, *Us Weekly*, gossip columns... We love information about people we don't know, and if you'll listen to people talk, we talk like we know them. Don't we? "Oh, I love Khloe." We talk as though we know people we do not know. I've felt it happen to me.

Years ago I was eating at a steak house here in Dallas. I didn't even live in Dallas at the time. It was the early 90s. I hadn't been a believer long. I'm in a restaurant, I lean back in my chair, and I bump into somebody. I turn around and it's Troy Aikman. Just to be clear, I grew up in and around the Bay Area. I was not a big 90s Cowboy fan. My 49ers were taking a beating back then, all except for that one year where Deion Sanders intercepted the pass, but that's neither here nor there. I didn't even need to bring that up.

And although I'm not a 'boys fan, and I didn't get all geeked up, and *Oh, it's the Cowboys' quarterback*, it *is* Troy Aikman. So here's what happened to me. I don't know Troy, but I can tell you a lot about him. I can tell you that he played high school ball in Oklahoma. I can tell you that he signed his letter of intent to play college football for the Oklahoma Sooners. I can tell you he got injured, didn't get his starting job back, so he transferred to UCLA where he became the "golden boy."

Troy Aikman is drafted by the Dallas Cowboys, and takes an epic beat down his first year, 1 in 15. Just destroyed. Then all of a sudden Jerry puts together the team, made them a big enough offensive line that I could have run behind it. He just builds out this lights-out team, and then here come the titles, here come the Pro Bowls, right?

But here's what I felt as I left the room that night, that steak house. I feel like I know him, like Troy and I had some dinner, man. But if you stumbled across Troy at some point today, and you said, "Hey, Matt Chandler said hi..."

"Who?"

"You know, Chandler. You guys had a steak together in '93, '94, somewhere in there."

"No, I don't think that's right." He would probably do what most of us do. "Oh yeah. Tell him I said hi."

Here's my great fear for those of you who are stuck in A. You know Jesus like I know Troy. You can give me some stats, you can give me some facts, you can talk the game, but you don't have a relationship with Christ. You just know *about* him. So here's the thing I think few of us ever stop long enough to really ponder on and think on in regard to our religious activities: Are the activities of your life in regard to group

Bible study, those disciplines we've been commanded into, is that leading you more into Jesus, or has that become an end in itself to you?

Jesus is going to be very aggressive towards the Pharisees in John, chapter 5 when he says, "You study the Scriptures in vain because you think that in them you have life, and yet you refuse to come to me to whom those Scriptures testify." This goes back to what we were talking about last week, that affections matter. In the reading of the Word, are you getting to Jesus? In the study of the Word, are you getting to Jesus? In your prayer life, are you getting to Jesus? In your group life, are you getting to Jesus? Is it getting you to Jesus?

Because ultimately, if it's not getting us to that, then it's as Jesus said, "in vain." Now don't hear me wrongly. Be a man and woman of the Word, yes. But like we covered last week, if you're just getting truth for truth's sake, and that truth isn't leading you to *the* Truth, we've kind of missed the mark. You'll come to contend and defend doctrine, which is right and good, without loving the One who gave those doctrines. It's an insane trade, and that's error number one.

I think error number two is just as commonplace. If the gospel is here and error one is simply trying to help God save you, error number two is to hear the good news of God reconciling you to himself in Christ, and go, *Hey man, that's the greatest message ever. I'll do whatever I want now and he'll have to forgive me.* So here's how that kind of looks here.

What that looks like in a place like DFW is that we go to church once a week. Maybe we're in a group, maybe we're not, but the extent of our love for Christ and our understanding of the gospel is completely caged in to *this*. We're going to listen to Matt yell at us, we're going to sing some songs, and then we're going to go. Our lives have been so compartmentalized that the glory of Jesus Christ and the weight of the gospel has made no difference in any other aspect of our lives. You have, for whatever reason, believed you have fire insurance.

"No, I was baptized when I was a kid. No, I go to church on the weekends. I mean, there's no guilt and shame over sin. I don't feel any remorse for the wickedness I do, but Christ has me. He's going to save me." That's a perversion of the gospel. That's not the gospel. The gospel is not *I can do whatever I want because he's forgiven me*. How cruel would he be if that were the gospel? Try to tie that into your parenting. "I want to love you well, so just do whatever you want, no repercussions, no shaping, no discipline, no desire to mature. You just do whatever you want and we're cool." How wicked of a parent is that? It's a perversion of the gospel.

The good news is that there are those of you here today who have no idea what the good news of Jesus Christ is. You, like me growing up, knew there was a Jesus, knew he kind of died on the cross, had no idea what that had to do with me, or what that did for me, or what that even meant for me, and that's some of you today. The book of Galatians and God's draw to you into this place is going to answer some of those questions.

Some of you are over here in A. You are busy with hundreds of religious activities, but if you were honest, there's no real love for the Lord. You're trying to get love for the Lord with a bunch of busyness. It's not working and you're exhausted. I come across 20-year-olds all the time who have bailed on Jesus when they actually never tried him. I've sat across many a cup of coffee and heard, "Man, I tried with all my might to do this. I gave it everything I had. I did this. I did this. I did this. It doesn't work for me."

I always want to point out, "No, that's like saying, 'I tried to love this girl. I tried to. I looked at her Facebook page, and I looked at all the music she liked, and I listened to it, and then I looked at all the books she liked to read, and I read all the books, and I watched the movies she liked, but man I just... It's not going to work.'" Well actually, you never knew her. You never met her. You never walked with her. You cyber-stalked her. It's not the same thing. But that's what you're doing. *I'm going to get all the information I can.* Instead of intimacy you're compiling information. I want to contend that many of you who think you have tried Christ, simply have not tried Christ.

Then I know there are a ton of us over here. For a ton of us the gospel has no bearing on our everyday lives. This is it. This is our religious experience...Sundays. The second we leave here it's back to the next compartment of our lives, whether that's home, where the gospel has brought no weight onto the home, or whether that's work, where the gospel has brought no weight onto the work, or whatever domain you head to next. You compartmentalize your life so that Jesus is *a* thing, but doesn't sit over *everything*.

Galatians is going to attack these two ideas and try to anchor us in the center. There's good news for all of us in that the Lord wants to save, draw attention to, and protect us from the tendency to drift into one of these two errors, and to ultimately believe things that might sound like the gospel but are not the gospel at all. So let's get to work. Galatians, chapter 1. We're going to start in verse 1. **"Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers who are with me..."**

So if we just stop, Paul is just, kind of right out of the gate, going, "Hey, this isn't my musing about Jesus. I haven't been called by men. I haven't been trained by a man. I was called by God through Christ. So what I'm talking to you about isn't what I think or what my bent is. I come to you as an apostle, as a messenger." A better way in our culture to think about this is, "I come with the power of attorney. I come as a

representative of Christ with the power and the authority to speak on his behalf so you might clearly understand his desire for you and what God has purchased in him for each of you. An apostle, not *by* man, not *through* man, by God in Christ."

Then what you have next is a simple gospel primer. "**...To the churches of Galatia...**" Just to point out a couple of interesting things about the book: Almost all of the Pauline Epistles are written to a singular church. This is not written to a singular church. It is written to multiple churches in an area, Galatia, which is modern-day Turkey. Then another interesting note on this letter is that in almost all of the Pauline Epistles, he starts with this standard greeting, has a prayer, and then goes into the bulk of his letter. He does not go into the prayer in this letter. He makes a statement, a gospel primer, and then you'll see where we go from there. Let's look at this.

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins..." So what we have happening right out of the gate, if we're going to understand the gospel clearly, if we're going to get to this center, transformative work of God in Christ, here are some things you have to know: You're a sinner, and I'm a sinner. This is fundamental to our understanding of what God has done for us in Christ. You and I fall short of what God has asked us to be. Surely no one wants to argue that.

You might be better than a buddy of yours, you might be farther along than somebody else you know, but you are most definitely a sinner. You have most definitely pursued other things as god besides God himself. You have most definitely lied. You have most definitely been indifferent. You have most definitely harbored in your heart anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, jealousy, rage. You might not have *acted* on those things, but those things are in you, and I want to continually bring you back to this reality. You are not a sinner because you sin; you sin because you are a sinner. Are you with me?

The reason those external, moral actions are there is because of the internal state of your heart. This is what needs to be repaired, because you can repair your external actions and still have a broken, busted-up heart. Those of you over here in Perversion A know exactly what I'm talking about. You can have a pristine, external, moral way of doing life, with a wretched heart. You're a sinner, and I'm a sinner. This is undebatable without sounding foolish. "I'm not a liar; I just lie occasionally." That's the kind of game you have to play.

Ultimately, he says that Christ gave himself for our sins, *all* of our sins. No matter how dark they are, no matter how light they are... He gave himself for our sins. So what does that mean? There are two things that need to be taken care of in you and in me that we cannot do ourselves that Christ has taken care of for us in the giving of himself. One, we're going to need a righteousness that far supersedes our own righteousness. It doesn't matter how good you try to be.

Your motive in that goodness is usually wrong, and you fall short of even your own ideal, much less God's ideal, so you're going to need an alien righteousness. You're going to need a righteousness that's better than your righteousness. So Christ is going to come, and he's going to perfectly live out the law, and in his perfection he will impute to us *his* perfection, so that when God looks upon you and me in Christ, he doesn't see our shortcomings and failures but Christ's perfection; so that God delights in you and I through the Son because he sees the Son's perfection in our lives.

What about all those screw-ups and mess-ups in your life? Well, that takes us to the second movement of Jesus. Not only was his life perfect, but on the cross he absorbed all God's wrath towards you and me completely, so when God looks upon you and me, he sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ and no former offense, which is why the Bible uses words like *blameless* and *pure* to describe us from God's perspective.

Anyone want to argue they actually hold that position? Schedule coffee with me this week. I need to know you, dawg. I have to sit down with you. If you're telling me that you don't need either one of those, that you have no former offense that you need to be held accountable to, and you have, right now, no need for a greater righteousness than your own, I need to know you, man. You are an anomaly. You are Neo in *The Matrix*, bro. You are not of this world.

But since I know no one is going to email and take me up on that coffee, you need the righteousness of Jesus, and you need his wrath-absorbing death, and they've been made available to you. He has given himself for our sins. Look at one of the results of this. It's just one of the results. Again, this isn't... I just need to stay on the text lest we be here well past June and into 2015. **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age..."**

Now, my fear when we read a sentence like that, because of our tendency to compartmentalize, is when we hear "present evil age" we have a tendency in our minds to roll up on movies that come out on Halloween. We start thinking paranormal activity. We start thinking that kind of thing. "Present evil age" for us is like *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (I dated myself there), or whatever that Denzel Washington movie was, and some kind of apocalyptic, world-has-gone-to-trash, demonic activity kind of place.

But I want to contend earnestly with you. If paranormal activity kind of stuff was going on in your house and you were aware of it, you'd be far more serious about the things of God than you are right now. If Bloody Mary is showing herself in your bathroom, you're going to be in my office memorizing the book of Ezekiel,

praying like a beast, speaking in tongues. I mean you would be a monster if demons were showing up in your house, like most of us think when we start...

Surely our Enemy is going to be more slick than that. Surely our Enemy is more slick than that. He has been fighting a lot longer than you and I have. This "present evil age" doesn't mean that kind of darkness isn't there; it means it disguises itself in a way that lulls us to sleep, that there's actually a battle going on at all. Christ has come and he has given himself for our sins that he might save us from this present evil age.

Let me try to explain how I think that works itself out most commonly. It works itself out in hundreds of ways, but how I think it works itself out most commonly. Most of us have been lulled to sleep about this conflict that we're in by loving creation more than we love the Creator. When you love creation more than you love the Creator, you have given birth to a thousand addictions and to a gangrene that will attach itself to your relationships and erode out the joy meant to be had in life even in a fallen world.

When you love creation rather than the Creator, you're trying to get *from* creation what creation cannot give you. You're going to hit a ceiling and grow frustrated in that ceiling and be forced then to medicate. Some of us are going to medicate with drugs and alcohol. Some of us are going to medicate with sex. Some of us are going to medicate with lust. Most of us are going to medicate with trinkets and toys.

There is an emotive response to new trinkets, new toys, new clothes, and my guess is new lovers. There's an excitement, there's an energy, there's a joy, but if we could be straight (and again, I've said this, I don't know that we can), if we can be honest, that emotive response fades and leaves us right where we were before the new trinket, before the new toy, before the new job, before the new clothes, before the new lover, and we're now forced to go find another one. Maybe it even needs to be bigger, maybe it needs to be more perverse in order to get that same high. So then we end up living extremely foolish lives.

I'll tell you why I'm constantly worried about you. Because technology is moving at such a pace that you can almost stay numb forever. I mean, I didn't even figure out how to use my first iPhone before there was another one. I hadn't even figured out how to use it and then all of a sudden it upgraded. I'm still trying to catch up. I don't need Siri; I need to figure out how to unlock the thing. Maybe if I had her... "How do you unlock the phone?"

Ultimately, what we do is just keep purchasing, keep buying... I'm not going on a consumeristic rant here. I don't think there's anything wrong with new stuff. I don't think there's anything wrong with a nice car or a nice house, unless you're not dialed into your heart enough to know that you're using those things to medicate a restlessness in you that's robbing you from all that Christ has come to grant you in the gospel.

So how Jesus delivers you by giving himself for your sin, how he delivers you from that, is he takes the roof off that you keep slamming into in the pursuit of ever-increasing joy.

What happens is, when trinkets, toys, cars, and houses are no longer enough, you will begin to look for people to blame for your restlessness. You'd be happier if your spouse wasn't such a moron, and you'd be happier if people at work would show you the respect that you deserve. Do you see how the gangrene begins to work itself out in your relationships? Because your heart is restless and it can't be solved by stuff anymore, so now it has to be people who are blamed, and you begin to erode out the joy that would be found even in relationships.

What Jesus comes and does is he reconciles you to God the Father who deserves ultimately all the praise and glory of all that's been created. So now your joy doesn't terminate on created stuff, but it rolls up to its Creator, where it should be, and that's ever increasing. From money to sex to toys to houses, everything rolls up to, *Isn't he good? Isn't he gracious? Since I'm a sinner, this is what I deserve. Since I'm rebellious, this is what I should have been given by God, but instead this is how he blesses. This is what he does.* And my joy begins to be ever increasing.

Now you have to hear me say this, because you might be new. When I use the word *joy*, I am not using the word *happy*. Those are not the same thing, and it's unbelievably important that you understand that. Thursday night we hop in the car, and we head up to the hospital to see the Adamses. Their home group was already there. They were praying and crying, and Titus' little body was in the room with everybody and was bundled. We were waiting for Robyn to come out so she could hold him before they took him away.

I walked in, and let me tell you something; there wasn't a lot of "happy" in the room. There wasn't a lot of high fives and jovial laughter. That wasn't happening in that room. There were tears and confusion and perplexity and loss and angst. We're praying, we're asking the Holy Spirit to minister to us, to minister to the group, to minister to Bryan, to save Asher, and we're crying out on behalf of this family, and Bryan comes in. He puts his arms around us, and he just starts to pray with us, and despite the fact there was no happiness in that room, there was an unshakable joy in that room. There was a confidence in God that was not removed from this precious family by horrific circumstances.

So you can chase whatever you want to chase. I'm a young man, but I'm telling you, I'm chasing joy. I'm not chasing happiness. It's too easy to be removed. But man, I've been able, in the face of death and beyond, to hold on to my joy. Christ in the giving of his life, sets you free from the bondage of this world by taking off the ceiling and letting joy be ever increasing in him. He frees you from worshiping creation and rolls you up to understanding that the Creator of that creation is whom the praise is due to.

Now, look at where he goes next here. Verse 4: **"...Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."** Don't you dare doubt God's salvation for you, when it was God's will for you to be saved. Did you see that? Why does Jesus give himself for your sins to deliver you? It's by the will of God. It's not because you're awesome; it's because God is able to save, so he saves, so that he might be glorified, which frees you up from having to be greatness. *He's* greatness. Now, look at where Paul goes next.

This is usually the part where he says a little prayer, but he's just not having that. Look at 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..."** Did you see what happened? I don't know if you noticed what happened there, but here's what he just said: In the gospel we are attached to Jesus, we are in Christ, and Paul says, "I am astonished that you have so quickly deserted him." Not *it...him*. It's important that you get that. It's not that you deserted a *message*; you deserted a *person*. You deserted *him*. "I am astonished. I am baffled. I am bewildered that you would desert him and move on to another gospel."

Then look at what he says about that. **"...not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."** So the history behind this text is that there's a group of men from Jerusalem called the Judaizers who have come down into the churches of Galatia, and they're teaching the Christians in Galatia, who were Gentile pagans, that in order for them to be fully Christian, they must first become Jews. They need to be circumcised and be obedient to the dietary laws and the festivals. So they're adding to Christ. They're over here in Error A. Jesus, plus these things, equals salvation.

Paul is saying, "I am astonished that you would leave this and go over here, because this isn't the gospel. This doesn't set you free. This cannot work." Paul is going to tell us in the weeks to come, "Trust me, I've tried. That doesn't work." Then look at what he says next, because this is important. **"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. 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."**

This is bold. Crazy bold. He's going, "Listen, if I come back and tweak this message, if somebody comes from Jerusalem, if some other guy comes in here claiming to be an apostle and teaches something other than this, let him be damned. If, say, you're out in the woods and an angel appears and gives you golden tablets and rolls out another gospel, let him be accursed. There is no other gospel." This is the gospel. This is what saves. This is what delivers.

If you come over here, you rob yourself from this. The ceiling being taken off, ever increasing joy, freedom from the slavery to creation is yours here. Not here and not here. And Paul is astonished that we would make such a foolish trade. You have him who created all things, you have an invitation into relationship with the God of the universe, and instead, you want to study his Facebook page but not know him? You want to just give him lip service but not follow him? You don't want joy in obedience but rather you want some truths you can regurgitate? Why in the world would you make that trade?

Then look at verse 10 just as we close, because there seems to be an accusation being made against Paul, and he's not having it. Look at verse 10. **"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."** I love this. Apparently there's an accusation being made against Paul that the reason Paul didn't tell them about circumcision (because that can't go over well to grown men), the reason he didn't tell them about the dietary laws, the reason he didn't do those things is he wanted to win friends and influence people.

The accusation is that Paul soft-pedaled the gospel in order to gain converts. So Paul goes, "If anybody preaches other than this, let him be damned. Who's trying to win friends now? Because if I'm trying to win friends then I'm not a servant of Christ. If I'm trying to tickle your ears, then I do not love Jesus." So the place I want to pull you back to repeatedly between now and the end of June is this is what has been made available to you: Life to the full by Jesus Christ.

And that if you would confess your sins, repent, and ask the Holy Spirit to dwell richly in you, God grant you the faith to believe in that grace, you're set free from the bondage and the wickedness of this evil age. It's the only gospel there is, guys. So if you've come over here and you're frantically trying to earn what has been freely given, that is no gospel at all. And if you think you're a Christian because when you were 9 your parents had you baptized but you haven't followed him, you haven't pursued him, that's not the gospel.

What's at stake here is not only joy here and now, but ever-increasing joy throughout eternity. Please don't make the astonishing trade of exchanging the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ for some false gospel that is not now, and never will, bring you the fullness of life that God has promised to us in Jesus Christ. I'm going to pray for us, and we're going to move into a bit of time extolling the name of Jesus Christ through song.

Maybe you're confused. Maybe the Spirit has done a work, and you kind of see clearly for the first time. When we're at the end of that, there will be men and women up front, and in some campuses in the back, who are willing to pray with you, talk with you, and help you wade through this a little bit. I want to encourage you, if you have some unresolved tension in your heart, or maybe the Holy Spirit is freeing you up to see for the first time, maybe you've been sitting in here for months and the Holy Spirit today has

opened up your understanding, come and talk with one of us and let us pray with you and encourage you and maybe help you understand more fully this great gospel of Jesus. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, help us. If sermons transform, they only transform because you breathe life into them. So I pray that Galatians 1:1-10 would fall on good soil, fall on good ground; that you would open up our hearts and minds to hear, that you would give us ears. I pray that you would grant salvation to those without it. I pray for freedom for those who are walking in an external religion that is not transformed. I pray for those who an hour, an hour and a half, a week in church is the extent of their understanding and knowledge of you. I pray that you would increase their joy by allowing them to submit and surrender all the more fully to you. Help us, Holy Spirit. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Love you guys.

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