

LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST**Galatians 2:15-21****(Read Galatians 2:15-21)**

Intro: I love this picture! I've entitled this photo in my collection as "Crazy Happy Tysons". The occasion was my mom's 89th birthday and seven of her eight children were there – which was an increasingly rare occurrence. Because of that, we wanted a family photo, which we attempted to do using the timer feature on Sherry's camera. And it WOULD NOT work. Something always happened. It would snap too soon or it would not snap at all, and with each failed take we laughed harder and harder. We finally got a good photo, but this is our favorite. It is a picture that represents the joy we have, and have always had, as a family. We love each other. We love being together. And we love laughter. Being with my siblings is part of living life to the fullest. I love this picture too. This is a picture of joyful abandon. This is a clear illustration of parents spending their children's inheritance and loving every minute of it. Whether it's posed (as I suspect it is) or a genuine, candid snapshot of an elderly couple who love each other, love life, and are living it to its fullest, it is just a hint of the joy that comes from knowing Jesus and having him living in our hearts.

It's been a several weeks since we've been in our study of Galatians so let me give you a brief refresher: Paul is astonished at how quickly the people in the church he had planted in the region of Galatia had fallen away from their initial, joyful acceptance of Jesus. And what really frosted his cookies was the fact that they had fallen away into the old way of thinking that Jesus had, long ago, liberated the Jews from. The Galatians were Gentiles, they didn't have the baggage of the old Jewish law to escape. Yet they had listened to the wrong people and picked that baggage up. Paul was incensed and intent upon restoring them to their first joy. The joy that, once upon a time, had them living life to the fullest. He said the Gospel message is that salvation comes from faith and not from works. In James Denney's words, "*The miracle of the Gospel is that God comes to the ungodly, with a mercy which is righteous altogether, and enables them through faith, in spite of what they are, to enter into a new relation to himself, in which goodness becomes possible for them.*"

In the old way of thinking, one struggled for goodness by doing and thereby attaining salvation, and that is impossible. You cannot gain salvation by working for it. Jesus did the work at the Cross, we need to accept that he did just that, and then live accordingly in that belief. For Paul, the message was salvation by faith and by faith alone. And that is where we pick it up today. To live life to the fullest is to . . .

Identify completely with Christ

- In another place Paul points out that . . . *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* Romans 3:23. But the people who were putting the old Jewish thinking into the minds of the gullible Galatians were making it sound like observing the legal requirements of the Jewish Law was the way out of sin. And while you can observe the law, and you can strive to do everything right and to be perfect, you will STILL fall short of the glory of God. You see, the problem with the Law is that it does nothing to help you with your sin other than helping you realize how impossible it is to overcome it. Paul tells us in verse 16 that *by the works of the law, no one will be justified.*
- For that reason we need to realize that we must identify with Christ. We need Christ in you and Christ in me to be overcomers. That's why Andraé Crouch's simple lyrics, *Jesus is the answer for the world today, above him there's no other, Jesus is the way*, are so incredibly true and powerful. The Galatians were falling for what many others, right up to the present, have fallen for. The lie that you have look a certain way, you have dress a certain way, and you have to go the right meetings, you have to say the right things. These are all human requirements and what we need to do is please Christ and not anyone else. And what pleases Christ is having faith that his death on the Cross, and his resurrection from the grave was the sacrifice needed for our salvation. Once you believe that, you will live for him and please him.
- So, to live life to the fullest we need to do what Eugene Peterson says in his paraphrase of verse 20. . .

Quit being a law-man and be God's man. (v. 20 The Message)

- Let's listen to that verse again *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (v. 20 NIV). That's good enough. We don't have to do the work. It's already been done. And here is another powerful truth: It's not a once and done thing that we have to keep repeating – it's a life.

- Living life to the fullest means living in Christ. Archibald Hunter writes, *“Faith, as this verse makes plain, is not the act of a moment only, it is the attitude of a whole life. It is not to say one time, ‘I believe in Christ.’; it is to go on, day after day, month after month, year after year, believing with all one’s heart in Christ as God’s Son, who so loved us as to give his life for us.”*
- That’s it! When I was a kid in Vacation Bible School we learned a song that meant exactly that: we sang, *Happiness is to know the Savior, living a life, within his favor.* And later it says, *Real joy is mine, no matter if the teardrops start, I’ve found a secret, it’s Jesus in my heart. Happiness is to be forgiven, living a life, that’s worth the liv’n, Taking a trip that leads to heaven. Happiness is the Lord!*
- They seem like simple words, but simple or not, they are TRUE! Paul is pointing out what we still need to see, we are making it impossible when Jesus has made it possible. That is why he is saying, in so many words, “Don’t become like me, with all my human requirements, become like Christ.”. Jesus is the model to follow. And so Paul gives us some assurance, telling us, in so many words, “Relax people, guess what?

...

We’re not perfect yet

- He does this by asking, “If I’m not perfect then is Christ failing in me?” And he responds in the strongest language he knows. We translate it “Absolutely not!”. The literal translation from the Greek is “MAY IT NEVER BE!!!” But, truth be told, if I used the language Paul used to express his true thinking on it, I really have to ask you to “pardon my French.” It’s like this, when we diminish what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, in fact if we diminish God in any way at all, we are insulting and rejecting the work he has already done for us. Think about that. (PAUSE)
- That is why the answer is . . .

In Christ Alone

- Paul is hurt more than angry that the Galatians had gone after the works religion of the old Jewish way of thinking. That thinking held that the Gentiles (which the Galatians were) not only did not have the law but could never possess it and therefore would never achieve righteousness. This was not only unnecessary, but a lie. Paul’s point is YOU CANNOT ACHIEVE RIGHTEOUSNESS!!!!!! EVER!!! And for that reason legalism is the enemy of the Gospel. Sin is coming short of God’s standards not man’s standards.
- Archibald Hunter says it best, *“When, knowing ourselves to be sinners who cannot perfectly keep God’s law, we put our trust in Christ who died to redeem us, God accepts us for Christ’s sake, grants us forgiveness, and sets our feet on the way of salvation.”* The answer is in Christ alone. This is why we have hope. So it’s like this, the only way to get right with God is to trust Christ and by not working for it.

Conclusion: Let me wrap this up with a couple thoughts. For Paul, to go back to the Law is to refuse the incomparable grace of God in the Cross. Going back to the Law is to imply that it could really save and there was no need for the Cross and that Jesus didn’t need to die. We don’t struggle with that same law. We struggle with our own law. The one that says we aren’t good enough for Jesus. That we’re too bad for God to save. Or we keep letting him down with our human failures. This is what keeps us from living life to the fullest in Christ.

Well, look at it this way: One commentator I read this week used the word picture of the Cross being the wall of separation between me and my past. It was an awesome and incredibly freeing realization for me. Do you struggle with the sin you have in your past or even the present? Most of us do. Some more than others. Like me you need to get over it. Jesus took care of it at the Cross.

It’s like being out in blinding blizzard with snow blowing across horizontally and 20 degree temperatures and they’re dropping. You’ve been struggling unsuccessfully to shovel the driveway clean, you’re exhausted and you finally just give up. So you struggle your way up to the door of the house and you burst through it into the warmth of the kitchen, and into the fragrance of your favorite meal (like a great chili or minestrone – whatever is the best meal you can think of on a bitter winter night) and it’s being prepared on the stove by your mom or your wife, and she looks up and says, I made your favorite, just because I love you.

That door is the Cross. The blizzard raging on the other side of it is your past and the challenges you face. That fragrance is your new life in its fullness. And that loving face is Jesus who says “I love you this much.” Amen.