

Series: Legalism. License. Liberty!
Message Title: ***The Fearless Life of a Free Man***
Date: Sunday, September 10, 2017
Scripture: Galatians 1:1-5
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

We are a few short weeks away from the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was a spiritual revolution that transformed the church and shaped the culture of the world.

Though several centuries in the making, a flame ignited and spread from that moment on a key date (October 31, 1517) when Martin Luther nailed words of protest to the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany. And the world has never been the same.

So much of who we are and what we do in our churches today are a result of this act of defiance and recovery of truth that not only reformed the ritualistic practices of the church, but changed the history of the world. Protestant reformers: Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox and more. Part of our spiritual growth and maturity has to do with understanding

the conflicts and context by which we have received and understood our faith.

“Those who do not know history are destined to repeat it.” —Edmund Burke

“History is not a burden on the memory, but an illumination of the soul.” —Lord Acton

What was the source, secret and cause of this ecclesiastical revolution and spiritual reformation? —The rediscovery of the truth of the Gospel embedded in the pages of Holy Scripture. Dogma had replaced doctrine. Ritual had obstructed relational faith. Legalism had destroyed liberty.

It was a day when religion created guilt-ridden obligations that restricted freedom and fun. So many see the church like this today— obstructionist to peace and the good life. Sadly, the joy of our faith and the freedom of our salvation appears to others as to be limited by the obligatory restrictions of religious intolerance.

Luther was resolute and courageous—called “God’s Volcano” (eruption of arguments for

freedom through discovery of the wonder of grace, and ultimately liberty).

“Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, ‘As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!’ Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience... And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon

I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.” —Martin Luther

Martin Luther, though a religious man, was a miserable man. He was a man who was conscientiously committed to improvement, but discovered the absolute inability to change apart from the stirring and transforming work of God’s Holy Spirit. He struggled to ever learn and discern God’s “grace and peace”—what Paul addressed in the opening of every letter.

Once grace invaded Luther’s life, he was a free man and he would not, could not allow others to live in the bondage of guilt and grief in which he had known and lived.

What provoked Luther? On All Saints’ Eve (10-31-1517), Luther went public with his objections to the way preacher Johann Tetzel was selling indulgences. These were documents prepared by the Roman Catholic Church and bought by individuals,

either for themselves or on behalf of the dead. Indulgences were purchased with the belief that they would release people from punishment due to their sins.

Based on the treasury of merits of the saints, Tetzel preached, "Once the coin into the coffer clings, a soul from purgatory heavenward springs!"

Luther disputed the church's trafficking in indulgences and called for a public debate of 95 statements of apology. His *95 Theses* spread across Germany as a call to reform, and the issue quickly became not indulgences, but the authority of the church. Did the pope have the right to issue indulgences?

Having privately been stirred by grace and publicly called this practice into question, Luther became the focal point of a movement of "Freedom Fighters" to allow believers to know the two great blessings and joys of life in Christ: grace and peace!

Why such a big deal about Luther today?
History lesson? Much more!

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (John 8:31-32 ESV).

It is Truth that delivers us from fear, anxiety, superstition and bondage.

We are living in a world that is relentless in its effort to suppress and deny truth. Martin Luther became a fearless man because he was a free man. Likewise, is only truth that can make us free and fearless.

(Illustration of Jonas Salk). After successfully inoculating thousands of monkeys with the polio vaccine, Salk began the risky step of testing the vaccine on humans in 1952. In addition to administering the vaccine to children at two Pittsburgh-area institutions, Salk injected himself, his wife and his three sons in his kitchen after boiling the needles and syringes on his stove top. Salk announced the success of the initial human tests to a national radio audience on March 26, 1953.

Luther, being convinced that he could risk his life and future on truth, stood in the face of error without fear of consequence. But Luther was not the first. The Apostle Paul confronted and addressed this same matter in his letter to the churches of Galatia.

“Martin Luther really began the Reformation with the writing of a commentary on Galatians. And it was out of the writing of that commentary that he was moved to the concept of grace and faith as opposed to works, and that really resulted in him blasting out... of the Roman Catholic Church and establishing the protest that became Protestantism.” —John MacArthur

The Book of Galatians is called *The Magna Carta of Spiritual Liberty—The Battle Cry of the Reformation—The Emancipation Proclamation for Every Believer*.

“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, to the churches of Galatia: 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, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. 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—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 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” (Galatians 1:1-8 ESV).

Galatia was a region Paul had visited and established churches during his first and second missionary journeys. But where Paul had planted seeds of gospel truth, others brought complication and confusion. It wasn't long until the gospel was distorted (and a distorted gospel quickly becomes a deserted gospel).

Note the tone of Paul's address. It is a highly charged-like atmosphere—lightening storm. Paul asserts his apostolic authority—the essence of the gospel and then gets down to business. There are no pleasantries, but

rather provocation of the issue at hand—the acceptance of a different gospel. We feel the turbulence as a reader. Paul gets to the point: religion restricts, but Jesus frees.

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Galatians 3:1 ESV).

I can go no further without looking back again to Martin Luther. It was this letter, this epistle of Paul, that became the foundation of Luther’s teaching. Martin Luther really began the Protestant Reformation with the writing of a commentary on Galatians. And it was out of the writing of this commentary that Luther was moved to the concept of grace and faith as opposed to rituals and works.

“To be convinced in our hearts that we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God by grace alone is the hardest thing.”
— Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*

Let’s get back to the opening verses of Galatians. They are so vital for us in both

recognition of this enduring conflict and our own desire for God to work a liberating reformation in our souls today.

There are three principles everyone of us need in life to know/encounter truth and freedom.



1. Revelation—See Life Differently

A new authority. Most people live with a horizontal orientation—from men and through men—but Paul was changed by a radical vertical orientation.

Truth must be revealed in us. God must work in our lives.

“Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead” (Galatians 1:1 ESV).

We need to know and see something we have not seen before. We need enlightenment to the truth!

Who is Jesus? He is the one-of-a-kind, unique Son of God whose defining work in this world was validated and vindicated by resurrection.

Who was Paul?

“For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13 ESV).

God did a miracle in Paul and wants to do a miracle in us today. Why does Paul’s apostleship matter? Authoritative.

“Paul’s first drop of ink is a decisive, challenging contradiction: ‘Paul, an apostle not from men nor by means of man.’ Men did not send and commission him. He is not the ambassador or representative of men. What he utters is not the word and the wisdom of men. The authority back of him and his message is not human.” —R.C. H. Lenski

Apostles were special messengers.

“And when day came, He called His disciples and chose from them twelve, whom He named apostles” (Luke 6:13 ESV).

Paul was added later to this group—not of man, but of God.

We cannot take an “elective posture” toward Paul. We cannot say, “I agree with the gospels, but not Paul.” Why? The appearance of the living Christ was the key to apostleship. Apostles were unique. There was a specific criteria, and Paul met it.

The only viable form of “Apostolic Succession” is a loyalty to the teaching of the Apostles (Acts 2)—not personality, but authority of God’s Word. Reason this matters = gospel at stake. If Paul is not an Apostle, people were free to reject what he said. But Paul defended this because of the message it brought.

This happened in the Roman Catholic Church—substituted the church as authority over the Scripture rather than Scripture over the church and of its offices. But Apostles are unique in relationship to the history and ministry of Christ—visible witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, in their commissioning and in their inspiration—but God’s Spirit to speak and write according to the Word of God.

People often don't like what Paul says about marriage, roles of husbands and wives, binary gender, sexual practices, etc. But the apostles were unique. The opinions, convictions and communications are those of Christ Himself. Therefore if we would bow beneath the authority of Jesus Christ, we must bow beneath the authority of apostolic doctrine. To set aside our submission is an indication of the fact that whatever we say with our lips, we are bucking the authority of Jesus Christ Himself. Apostolic authority is divine authority. Therefore we must submit to it.

Scripture is not a book of verses and options; it is the Word of God! There is no "WikiWord".

This is true of all who know Jesus Christ.

"And all the brothers who are with me"
(Galatians 1:2a ESV).

2. Rescue—Experience a New Reality

We live in a new reality, knowing Christ and His authority. We now live in the realm of grace and peace. This is realized through the

decisive event in history—the intervention of Christ who delivers us from evil in the present and in the future. Jesus rescues us. He took our sickness upon Himself—from sinful enslavement to righteous freedom.

Jesus rescues us while we are His enemies (Zacchaeus). We don't fix ourselves.

“Unless His [Jesus'] grace comes to us while we are still His enemies, we will never become His friends.” —Alistar Begg

We have to come to terms with the fact that our sins are such that there is no religious action, performance or experience that could deliver us from the evil of this age.

Jesus leaves us here to live distinctively. We don't affirm the philosophies and values of this world, but rather, we look to God's Word to establish both standard and wisdom for life. Christ rescued us to live differently.

It was planned by the Father, procured by Son and secured by the Holy Spirit.

Confidence in God's rescue allows us to risk our lives for Him. It's not just enough to see and know, there must be...

3. Reform—Focus Life on God's Glory

Paul went from being a self-righteous, self-serving religious exhibitionist to a man whose entire being was consumed with the glory of God. No part of his life would remain untouched.

This is not just for Paul, but for all who know and experience Jesus' revelation and rescue.

On Wednesday, April 16, 1521, Luther entered the city of Worms, knowing the cheers of the common people would quickly be exchanged for the scrutiny of papal representatives who would create an inquisition.

The gathering was known as the "Diet [Assembly] of Worms" to address the matter of Martin Luther's writings and influence within the church.

Luther was confronted with charges that he had been teaching that a sinner, merely by trusting Christ, could, despite his or her sins, have confidence of salvation before God. This teaching undermined the control and the corrupt profiting of the Roman Catholic Church, and it brought the fury of the church on Luther's head.

The next day, Martin Luther (a miner's son from Saxony) with a simple monk's habit, stood before Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Charles V pointed to a pile of books on the table published in Luther's name and asked him to recant. Luther admitted they were his books, but asked for time to discuss what parts of the book he needed to recant. If Luther was wrong and refuted by Scripture, he would be the first to burn his own writings.

"I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience, I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. May God help me, Amen."

—Martin Luther

For Luther, it was God's Word that freed and saved him. Luther's freedom made him fearless. So it must be in every generation as we see and seize the full truth of the gospel and our freedom in Christ—not to do what we want, but to live for the glory of God.

"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, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Galatians 1:3-5 ESV).