

“Freed by the Spirit” // Gal 3:1–6 //

Freedom in the In-Between #4

Baptism Weekend

Today is a special day at TSC @ all our campuses—this is one of the days throughout the year in which we offer you an immediate chance to get baptized.

The **NT command to follow Jesus is quite simply**, “Believe and be baptized,” (Mark 16:15). Some of you listening to me have believed but never yet been baptized.

Baptism is not the same thing as salvation—salvation happens when you simply trust in Christ as Lord and Savior—but baptism is an important sign that you have been saved.

- We often compare it to the ring you put on after your say your wedding vows to show that you are married.
 - For some of you, it’s like you’ve said your wedding vows to Jesus, but never put on the ring.
- Maybe you say, “Well, the vows are what is important.” I agree. But try telling your new spouse that you don’t feel like wearing the ring.
 - **(My tattoo)**. When mama tells me it’s important for her for me to publicly display the sign, I do it.
 - What **if she leaves you** or she dies?
 - If she leaves me I’ve told her...

Works Consulted:

“It Is Finished: The Present Power of These Three Words,” Ray Cortese

“Galatians 4:21-31,” Tim Keller, *Galatians for You*

“You Never Leave It Behind (Galatians 3:1-14),” Tim Keller

“The Law in the Gospel Life (Galatians 3:15-25),” Tim Keller

“Commentary Summary - Galatians 3,” Tom Schreiner, Richard Longenecker.

“Faith to Live by the Spirit,” Chip Henderson

“Faith that Honors God’s Word,” Chip Henderson

- And if she dies I’ll just flip it over from... to...

Some of you have yet to take the sign.

You say, “**Well, I didn’t come prepared today.**” That’s ok, **we are prepared** for you. We have everything you’ll need—we have modest, stylish shorts and **black t-shirts** that say “**Jesus in My Place**” which is yours to keep if you want it, btw.

And, we’ll offer some time before you get baptized where we can talk with you and answer whatever questions you have.

This will be an **extremely important moment** for many of you: In my observation, **the decision to get baptized often makes the difference between a passing religious phase** and a defining moment that transforms your life.

That’s coming at the end, but I just wanted to **give you a heads up** to get mentally prepared for it.

Introduction

Galatians 3, if you have your Bible... I’m really excited about the message today. This is one of my favorite short passages. **Paul gets a little salty** here with the Galatians, and that’s when Paul is at his best, IMO.

As you are turning to Galatians 3, **imagine with me for a minute** that you are a **consultant contracted by companies** that are about to go under, brought in to turn them around.

You take on the case of a company that has just declared bankruptcy. But **as you begin to review their assets**, you discover they actually have a great product; they are going bankrupt because the CEO is corrupt and incompetent.

Their **ledger is a litany** of bad decisions, fiscal mismanagement, corruption, nepotism, discrimination, embezzlement, and just about any other bad business practice you can come up with. **All the CEO wants, however**, is for you to find a way to get the company back in the black so that he can carry on business as usual.¹

In your report to the Board of Directors, you would probably say something like: “Listen, your debt is the least of your problems right now. You need to fire the CEO and bring in a new one. Throwing money at the problem won’t fix it if you don’t change the corruption underneath.”

The company needs not only to have its debt removed; it needs to have a whole new operating procedure.

That’s similar to the point Paul makes in Galatians 3.

- Our salvation had to be more than simply having our sin debt removed.
- And that’s because our sin had done more than leave us guilty before God. It had also left us utterly unable to live the Christian life.
 - That’s why we often struggle to make relationships work, even after we’re Christians.

¹ This helpful illustration adapted from Chip Henderson, “Faith to Live by the Spirit,” sermon on Galatians 3, preached at Pinelake Church on Jul 14, 2013

- It’s why many of us can’t find that elusive peace or satisfaction or happiness we’ve always yearned for.
- **We need not only to be given a clean record; we need also to be released from sin’s power.**

Paul says that this also is a gift of God accessed only by faith in Christ.

- **And this is what many of you have yet to grasp.** You’ve grasped “Christ alone” as your forgiveness-provider, but not “Christ alone” as your righteousness-producer.²
- **You believe salvation is by faith alone**, but sanctification (or growth in Christ) is all up to you!

The essence of salvation, Paul says, is you in Christ and Christ in you:

- **You in Christ**, where you stand in Christ’s righteousness, applied to your account;
- and **Christ in you**, where his resurrection power becomes the source of your spiritual life.

Paul’s summation of all this is **Galatians 2:20** (a verse you should definitely have memorized (and that is reflected in the bookmark I gave to you with the ‘Gospel Prayer’ you can pray each day) – ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body (the way I grow in Christ), I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (NKJV)

Galatians 3:1–6

And so now we pick back up in chapter 3: **1 You foolish Galatians!** (J.B. Phillips’s translation translates this opening salvo as simply “You idiots.” I like that better. As I mentioned, Paul is feeling quite salty

² Ray Cortese, “It is Finished: The Present Power of These Three Words,” Liberate 2015, accessed September 18, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqhhROM4D5g&feature=youtu.be>

here). Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

- Paul is saying, “You understood the gospel so clearly! It was **like Jesus had died right** in front of you. Like you were there and saw his wounds and heard him say, “It is finished.”
- *But now, you’ve **gone away** from that!*

²I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard?

- **This is important:** this is the **1st time Paul mentions the Holy Spirit in Galatians**, and it is going to become his primary focus for the next 4 chapters.
- **And here is his question:** *How did you **1st receive the Spirit?*** Did it happen because you **did something?** Or because you **ate the right things?** Or went through some ritual?
- No, it happened b/c you put faith in the finished work of Christ. (On the cross Jesus cried "It is Finished" and then gave up his Spirit; we now cry "I believe it" and then receive that Spirit.)

Well then, ³After beginning by the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh? ⁵...Does God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law? Or is it by believing what you heard— ⁶just like Abraham who believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness?

Here is the game-changing question: If you **initially received the Spirit by believing**, why would you think **growth in the Spirit** would be achieved in any other way?

Why would **God start our salvation by faith** in his provision, but then **expect us to grow** by us grabbing ahold of our boot straps and pulling ourselves up through obedience to the law?

No, he says, the way we grow in the Christian life is the same way we began in the Christian life: through faith in Christ’s finished work.

- **The words “it is finished,” you see,** are not just words that we believe one time to find forgiveness; they are words we believe again and again to experience spiritual power.
- **The first time we believed these words,** we were released from the penalty of sin
- **As we continue to believe them,** we are released from its power.

Now, **let’s pause here for a moment,** because **I’ve told you before** that most Christians are not quite sure what to do with the Holy Spirit.

- On the one hand, you have **a group that is obsessed** with him:
 - He’s this mystical force always revealing himself through warm, fuzzy feelings and strange coincidences: “*Pastor, I was praying about whether to ask this girl out... and I was driving down the highway...*”
 - Or, you receive him through strange encounters (stiffnecked)
- The other group, maybe in reaction to that group, **ignores him altogether.**
 - They **believe in him**, but believe in him like I believe in pituitary gland. (not even sure where to point). Same with H/S. He’s rattling around in there somewhere but not sure what he does.
 - For most Christians, **if they believe in a Trinity it is** God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible

Paul shows us in Galatians that **neither of those viewpoints is correct: The Holy Spirit is real**—the 3rd person of the Godhead, and his power is absolutely essential to the Christian’s life.

But he’s **not accessed through weird,** mystical ceremonies or experienced primarily through random confluences of circumstances.

His **ongoing power in us is released through renewed faith** in the gospel.

- **As we continue to put faith in the finished work of Christ,** the power of the Spirit is released in us.

Or think of this way:

- By believing it is finished we gain the power to continue.
- The fire “to do” in the Christian life comes from being soaked in the fuel of what has been done.
- That’s why we say...
 - The deeper you go in the gospel, the wider, higher, and farther you go in obedience.
 - LUTHER: To progress is always to begin again.
- Fav pictures of salvation: Serpent on the pole.
 - As they looked, they lived!
 - As you continue to look, you continue to be healed.
- Think of it like one of those new cell phone batteries, where the phone charges when you place it on the charger. Christians receive spiritual, life-changing power when they are resting on the cross.
- So, when you want to grow spiritually, when you’re frustrated at the lack of spiritual fruit in your life, come back to the cross—to the message that it is finished, and rest there.
 - And thank God that his acceptance of you is not based on how much spiritual fruit you show, but on Christ’s finished work. And then you’ll start to bear spiritual fruit.
 - The irony of the Christian life is that the only ones who get better are those who recognize that their acceptance before God is not conditioned on their getting better.
- You believed “it is finished” once to escape the penalty of sin. Now believe it again and again to escape the power of sin.
 - In the words of those modern-day musical prophets, Journey: Don’t stop believing. Hold on to that “it is finished” feeling. Or something like that.

In vs. 6 Paul compares the salvation process to the experience of Abraham. (“...just like Abraham who believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness?”) He quotes Genesis 15:6, where

Scripture says that “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.”

In Genesis 15, God made a promise to Abraham that from him would come a great nation that would provide forgiveness and salvation for the world.

The problem was that Abraham was old and childless when God made the promise.

When Abraham believed God’s promise, however, two things happened:

1. He was declared righteous

Credit is the word “logizomai” in Greek, and it means counted.

When you write a check... (*You millennials know what that is?* It’s this piece of paper that you’d give to someone else when you wanted to give them money.)

The check is not money; but it counted as money. They could go to the bank and say, “I have this piece of paper, give me this amount of money.”

Faith that Jesus paid our sin debt in full on the cross—is like the check that is counted as Christ’s righteousness, whereby the riches of Christ’s righteousness are applied to our account.

Second, when Abraham believed...

2. His “dead,” sterile body was given the ability to reproduce.

When God made this promise to Abraham, he was an octogenarian married to another octogenarian with no kids. By

that point—mercifully—most people have given up on trying to have kids.

But even though God's promise defied everything Abraham felt to be true, he believed God.

And **when he did, God gave his old, dead, sterile body** the ability to reproduce.

In the same way, when we believe Jesus's statement from the cross that "it is finished," even though we **feel** condemned and spiritually lifeless, God imparts resurrection life into our old, dead, wretched, sin-sick spiritual hearts.

~~A couple of amazing things~~ happened in the story of Abraham that Paul alludes to in Gal 3.

~~First, God took upon himself the responsibility him to accomplish this.~~

- ~~Right after making this promise to Abram, Genesis 15~~ tells us that God instructed Abraham to get a cow, a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon and cut them in two and arrange the halves opposite of each other (v.10). In Abraham's time, this was how a covenant was signed. Each covenant-maker would pass between the two halves, letting the blood of the animals splash up on their robes, saying "let this be done to me if I fail to uphold my end of the covenant." Genesis 15 tells us, however, that when it was time to pass through the divided animals, God caused a deep sleep to fall on Abram, and God passed through alone. He was saying, "I'll be responsible to uphold your side, and my side. If you break your part, I'll pay with my blood." **He was showing that this covenant**

~~did not rely on Abraham in any way, but entirely on God. God would accomplish it all.~~³

Second,

Interesting little thing God did here to symbolize this. **Shortly after Abraham believed the promise, God changed his name from Abram to Abra-ha-m.** I heard one Bible teacher explain that "ha" is the sound you make for breath—and breath is the same word for Spirit in Hebrew. So, this name change was symbolic of God putting his Spirit into Abraham to give him life. **I'm not sure that's exactly what God had in mind** when he did this, but it's a cool thought, so I have officially changed my name to J-ha-D.

A few years later, **at the ages of 99 and 90**, Abraham and his wife Sarah had a son who would father the nation who would bring Jesus into the world, who would provide forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who believed through his death and resurrection.

Paul then asks,

- What part of this exactly did Abraham accomplish by his own strength?
- Was it some technique or new way of positive thinking that infused fertility to Abraham's sterile body?
- No, it was all God. All Abraham did was believe what God promised, and keep believing it!

If that's so, **then why would we think we could achieve *spiritual life*** by our own strength, through obedience to the law? **If we started in the Spirit**, through faith in the gospel, do we really think we will finish in the flesh, through obedience to the law?

³ Tim Keller, "Chapter 6: The law in the Gospel Life," *Galatians for You*.

In fact, **Paul points out that when God made the promise to Abraham, he hadn't even given Israel the law yet**, or even initiated the covenant of circumcision! ¹⁷ My point is this: The law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously established by God and thus cancel the promise.

- **Obedience to the law** can't be a condition for obtaining the promise—it wasn't even around yet!
- **Rather, righteousness and spiritual life are given to all** who simply believe the promise of Jesus that **"it is finished"** just like he said.

Summit family—this is the kind spiritual power many of you are missing.

- **You need it in your marriages.** You need it in your singleness. You need it to overcome temptations. You need it to draw closer to God. And the **only way you get it is by believing** the promise!
- **"It is finished"** is not just the way we obtain forgiveness in the past; it is how we gain power in the present.
- **The first time you believed "it is finished"** it released you from the **penalty** of sin; as you continue to believe it, it releases you from the **power** of sin.
 - This is what the **hymn writer** was talking about when he said, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin..."
 - Our sin has been **cancelled by the death of Christ**; have you experienced deliverance from its power?
 - That also is accessed by faith in the death of Christ. *"The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God."*

The Galatian "error" was that after they started through faith in the gospel, they thought they would be perfected—or come to maturity—by the **power of the flesh**, through obedience to certain law, or circumcision, adherence to dietary restrictions, or whatever.

For most of us, those are not the same things we turn to. But, the 1st week of this series I alluded to a number of laws we turn to, to try to perfect ourselves.

Different denominations have different approaches:

- **Liturgical/Catholic:** ceremonies and sacraments. Baptism. Salvation is faith in Christ plus these things.
- **Baptists:** rules: what you look like, act like...
 - **And in these traditions**, the definition of Christian is always really narrow... only if you conform exactly to our narrow definition of what a Christian believes and does, are you considered a real Christ. **That's because the emphasis** is all on external conformity.
 - **But it's not the law that can change us...**
- **More liberal churches** put emphasis on certain social justice rules. The **way you become a real Christian** is by adopting certain societal agendas.
 - **Some of the agendas they put forward are good**—but the emphasis is all on what you are to do rather than the **power of the Spirit released** through faith in gospel.
 - **This is just a new progressive version of the law.** Do this, and you will live. **The focus is on a list of things we** are to do rather than as power released through faith in what Christ has done.
- **We megachurches tend to emphasize** our own set of laws: **We're big on life principles**, practical applications of faith: So, we're always talking about **3 ways to change** your life; **5 Ways to be** a better person. **4 Ways to be an Amazing Dog Owner** or whatever the list for the week is. **And I love practicality.**

But we cannot, we will not, grow through the law

- We grow only as the **Spirit's power is released in us through continued faith** in Christ's finished work
- (BTW, next week I'll explain to you the purpose of the law—that is what the last ½ of Galatians 3 is about)!

- But for now, **Paul is pointing us to a power** that cannot be accessed through the law!
- ~~Luther: the law says “do” but it’s never done! The gospel says “believe” for it’s already done and that’s where the power to change comes from.~~

Also, please note that I’m **not talking about finding freedom from the law by simply dumbing down the law...**

- **Joyce Meyer** (I listen to her on the radio sometimes.) She said, “I finally realized that the gospel is not about rules; it’s about loving God and each other. So, what have you done this week to help out someone you know?”
 - **“Oh, I’ve gotten freedom from the rules and now I just have to love God and love people?” As if that were any easier?** *Love God and love each other is what Jesus said was the summary of the law!*
 - **With all due respect, “just love God and people”** is not the gospel; it is the very essence of the law that we have grievously failed to keep.⁴
 - **The gospel is not love God and do your best.** The gospel is that you did your best and it wasn’t enough, so God in his love sent his best who did for you what you could not do for yourself and all you can do now is receive it by faith.

DMLJ talked about a controversy in his day between “seeker sensitive churches” and “doctrine-based churches”

- **Neither of those is the focus** of a gospel church.
- There must be a time when the pen goes down and the eyes go up... and you stop saying, “Oh my God! Look at what I have to do for you!” And start saying, “Oh my God! Look at what you have done for me.”
- **From that look, the Spirit’s power is released.**

- **And when that happens, you change.** You don’t make a plan to change, you change on the spot! Because your **desires change**. Which is what God is after!
- **God is not just after obedience**, he’s after a whole new kind of obedience, an obedience that grows from desire.
 - **Like Adon with reading. I used to be like that...** Now, not enough hours in the day to read!
 - **That’s what God wants.** He’s not just after obedience, but a whole new kind of obedience, the obedience that grows out of desire.
- **The law is powerless to produce that.** Here’s what I’ll show you next week: The law is like **railroad tracks**: they lay out the direction you need to go, but are powerless to move the freight along the tracks.
- **Only the Spirit, released through faith in the gospel**, has power to do that.
- **DMLJ**: I spend ½ my time telling my congregation to study doctrine and the other ½ telling them doctrine isn’t enough; faith in the gospel, not doctrinal knowledge, changes!

~~Spurgeon said that at the end of every message he plowed a trough back to the cross...~~

- ~~I used to think he meant that at the end of each message he explained how to get saved.~~
- ~~But think of the imagery: A trough is what water flows through. He knew that the water of life — the ability to do whatever he had just preached about, came only from the cross.~~
- ~~The power to do in the Christian life comes only from being soaked in the fuel of what has been done.~~
- ~~Spurgeon said, “The gospel produces the best morality in all the world!”~~

Which means...

⁴ <https://markbocanegra.wordpress.com/2011/09/10/all-you-need-is-love/>

- **When you are struggling in your marriage**, you don't just need to learn new techniques in marriage. The power to really change in marriage comes from the gospel.
 - Learning 5 new steps to being a more thoughtful husband is not nearly as important as embracing the 10 billion steps Jesus took to you when he died on the cross.
- Or, **when you are struggling as a parent**, or your kid is struggling with sin, and you can't make them love the right things no matter what you say, **where do you turn?**
 - Do you force them to conform to the laws?
 - But you **can't produce righteousness in their hearts** through the law!
 - (Again, **next week I'll explain how to use the law**) Heart change only comes from the gospel!
 - **You need to turn your hope toward the gospel, and pray in faith** for that power to be released in your life and their lives.
- **When you struggle with sin**, and you've fallen *again*, you've got to **look at the finished work of Christ**, and thank God that his acceptance of you is no longer based on how well you live the Christian life, but on Christ's finished work and receive the power to get up.
 - **You look up and realize that in Christ the Father** has already started running toward you even before you, the prodigal, started home.
 - **One of the best descriptions of this is Prov 24:16**, the righteous man falls 7 times...
 - Belief in the gospel in the verse is not demonstrated by never falling, but by what you do when you fall.
 - You declare,
 - "My acceptance is not based on how well I have run, but on your finished work.
 - **When I fall, he is still standing. When I feel weak, Christ in me is still strong. When I feel unrighteous, Christ in me is still holy.**

- I am as accepted in your sight as if I'd never sinned a single time, because the finished work of Christ has become my righteousness. *My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness...On Christ the solid rock I stand"*
- And when you believe that, you get the power to get up.

Conclusion (MUSIC)

"It is finished" is not just a statement we believe once to escape the penalty of sin. It's a statement we believe repeatedly to gain power over sin.

Baptism

As I alluded to at the beginning, the **first and most important sign that declares** you believe "it is finished" is baptism.

- (Explain baptism...)
- It's an **important declaration of faith** that releases spiritual power in your life.
 - Again: The decision to get baptized often **makes the difference between a passing religious phase** and a defining moment that transforms your life.
- You say, **"Not that important."**
 - **Well, first**, who are you to tell God what is important? Is that how you want to begin your walk with Jesus?
 - **Second**, you don't realize the power of declaring publicly, "I believe it is finished."
 - **My dad**: walk forward like I'm going to ask you to do. He stood there, holding on to the pew. He thought, I'm getting closer. **Embarrassing**. But then he let go and stepped out and all of our lives changed.
- **Practically:**
 - **"I rode with people."** They'll wait. I promise. This is why they brought you.
 - Big one: **"I was baptized as a baby**. Do I need to do it again?"

- I understand. You respect your parents and don't want them to feel like you are rejecting your heritage.
- Don't see it as a repudiation of your parent's faith; see it as a fulfillment of it!
- Every time in Scripture, it happens after conversion, as an expression of your faith.
 - **Acts 2** "3000 believed and were baptized,"
 - **Acts 4**, "5000 believed and were baptized"
 - **Acts 8**, "the Ethiopian eunuch believed and said, "What hinders me..." Philip answered, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."
 - **Not a single time** in Scripture do we see baptism done to a baby, as an expression of one person's faith on behalf of another. It's always an expression of your faith.
- **"But it will mess-up my hair... or my make-up."** It doesn't look that good anyway. **And last week I talked about finding your identity** in Christ and not in how you look anyway, so you need get over that
- We have everything you need.
- **Stop putting it off. =**
- **You say, "I'm not saying 'no,' just 'not yet.'" It is **disobedience to put off until tomorrow** something that God has told you to do today.**

Ready? **Stand and step.**

