

Last week, we were reminded of the wonderful Gospel message, but we also saw, that the Gospel can be something that's quite offensive – The message was about 'the total sufficiency of Christ' – "Christ is enough". Nothing else is needed – but only faith working through love..

To be a 'proper' Christian; or a 'better' Christian, we don't need to:

- add religious works;
- add any specific religious ceremonies;

We don't need to:

- have any particular Spiritual Gift;
- speak in tongues;
- vote for a particular political party;

And any:

- unbiblical teachings; or
- side issues; or
- distractions

that get presented as if to be a better/proper Christian, you'd better:

- embrace this;
- do this;
- think this;
- pass this on,,,

otherwise you're not a good Christian...

Any of that, is not a teaching of God. Even if the person telling you these things, is very persuasive, , , if I'm being told that to be a better Christian, I have to add this or that – it's a lie of the devil – it's a form of enslavement...

The issue in Galatia (that Paul was writing about), was they were being enslaved, because a number of them had been convinced, “We need to embrace the Old Covenant religious Law”...

But in Christ, we’ve been called to freedom...

Now, the strange thing with us humans, is on a lot of issues, we tend to swing like pendulums (from one extreme to the other, when the truth is actually somewhere in-between)...

And when we’ve been enslaved by something:::: When we shake the shackles of that enslavement off, we might swing so far the other way, that we go to another extreme, which is just as destructive, and just as enslaving...

Let me give you a couple of examples, and I’ve chosen **these** examples because they’re the ones that seem to crop up most often within the church:

Let’s talk about Spiritual Gifts:

In my experience, some of the biggest swings of the pendulum, that we find in churches, is to do with spiritual gifts (and **particular** spiritual gifts).

A Spiritual gift, is an ability that God gives us, to be able to do things that (in our own strength) we could **not** do. It’s not something we’re naturally talented/good at – it’s God doing something through us. And we all have different Spiritual gifts.

So, for instance:

*Naturally, I'm a **terrible** public speaker. But when God called me to preach, I discovered that His Holy Spirit, enables me to do it...*

And so if you get anything good out of these messages, all glory goes straight to God, because I know, that it's only through Him, that I do this...

Now, when it comes to Gifts of the Holy Spirit, I don't think many would argue that the gifts of:

- teaching & preaching;
- intercession (praying);
- mercy;
- serving;
- giving;
- helping...

I don't think many people would say that those gifts don't exist anymore...

But some **do** say that about gifts like:

- healing;
- miracles;
- speaking in tongues;
- prophecy....

“Cessationism” is the belief that gifts (known as ‘sign gifts’) ended, after the apostolic age – that after all the original apostles died, these ‘sign gifts’ cease to exist...

Now, I'm going to call that “one extreme”, because I cannot find any evidence for that in the Scriptures.

So, some people (and maybe even some of **us**) may have ingrained into us, that these gifts just don't happen anymore. And so, if we **do** see these things happening in a church, well "it must be the work of the Devil..."

That's one extreme – that's one side of the pendulum.

So, let's imagine that that's been your experience in the church:

- you've never **seen** the Spiritual Gifts;
- you've never experienced the Spiritual gifts;
- You may have never even **heard** of them...

But then you hear some teaching about the Spiritual Gifts, and how God gives these gifts for **His** purposes, and for the building up of the church... , and your eyes are opened:

- "Why have I never been told this before?";
- "This is a whole new experience of God that I've been missing."; and
- "Wow!!! The Spirit of God is at work, and it's exciting..."

And WooHoo,,, and we swing the pendulum right over to the other side... Now, let me describe what the other extreme looks like.

Some of the most instructive teaching (that we find in the Bible), on spiritual Gifts, we find in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In Corinth, we get a picture of a church, who were so **focused** on the gifts of the Spirit, that it had become a

very selfish thing, and they'd become a church who didn't love.

- “My gifts are better than your gifts”; and
- “If you don't have the gift that I have, then you're not as ‘Spiritual’ as I am”; or
- “If you don't have **this** particular gift, then you don't have the Holy Spirit.”

But Paul came down hard on them:

- “You're calling yourselves spiritual...”
- “Don't you understand that the gifts are given for the building up of the church – not for the individual”...; and
- “No gift is more spiritual than another”;
- “We don't all have the same gifts”....

And his harshest criticism, is they were so self-focused, they were not loving their brothers and sisters in Christ, in the way they used their spiritual gifts... Corinth had become a church of divisions and spiritual elitism....

And we see some churches, just like Corinth, in our world today...

Alright, so the pendulum swings:

- No spiritual gifts anymore;
- Wow, they do exist;
- Look at what we've been missing out on;
- You have to have these particular gifts, and if you don't, you're missing out – you're unspiritual;

- But then, the misuse of the Gifts of the Spirit cause a heap of heartache in the church, and brokenness...
- Oh, must be of the devil;
- The cessationists are right – the sign gifts are the work of the Devil....

The pendulum swings from one extreme to another, when the truth is exactly how the Scripture tells us the gifts are supposed to function:

- For the building up of the church;
- No gift greater than the other;
- Used, with the motivation of love for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ;
- Never to exclude (Tongues & interpretation);
- To be used in an orderly way
(nobody speaking over the top of anybody else.)
(nobody taking centre-stage – to step back & let others participate);
- Every member, valuing the other...

So, that's one example of how the pendulum swings to extremes...

The second example, is the one that's at play here in Galatia...

One side of the pendulum is Legalism – **you must keep the Law**. The other side of the pendulum is licentiousness – **We're free**, we can do whatever we like...

And both of these are enslavement.

On one side of the pendulum, we're enslaved to the Old Covenantal Law. On the other side of the pendulum, we're enslaved to the cravings of the flesh (which is our human inclination to satisfy our worldly desires)...

Whereas the 'sweet-spot', is to be **“Saved by Grace”** (Christ is sufficient) and **“living by the Spirit”**. That's the 'sweet-spot'.

So what Paul says now, is to guard against the pendulum swinging **too** far the other way. He's been telling us, “Don't be enslaved by the Old Covenantal Law. In Christ, you are free.” But now he's saying, **“Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh”**

.....

Right through to V10 of the next chapter, Paul describes what 'living in the Spirit' looks like. And we're going to study most of that next week. Today, we're going to concentrate on how we relate to one another.

Often it seems, that enslavement to one extreme or the other, is accompanied with a wrong relationship with our brother.

e.g. In what we've been studying, it's been pretty obvious that the ones who have been embracing the Old Covenantal Law, have been looking down on those who have **not** embraced the Old Covenantal Law. And this was no little matter. Remember, those who were living by The Law, would refuse

to even eat with a Gentile, because they considered them unclean.

Imagine what fellowship would be like in a church where half our church thought the other half were ‘unclean’ and wouldn’t even eat with them...

But when ‘legalism’ is called out for what it is, and a church take a decided stand against it, that too, can create a few problems – particularly if the pendulum swings the other way,,,

On one side, you might have people who have swung so far from the Law, that they’re living by the flesh. And they’ve probably got the attitude:

- “Look how free we are.
- We’re free in Christ.
- We can do what we like;

- We don’t need to try and be good, because Jesus has already forgiven us.

And we see some of that around today. It’s called “hyper-grace”, where they believe, “You don’t even need to ask for forgiveness if you’ve done something wrong”...

- And if you’re not living like we live, then you don’t understand the grace of the Gospel – you’re caught up in ‘legalism’...

On the other side, there are those who are still tempted to embrace the Old Covenantal Law, saying “If you don’t keep the Law, you’re not a good Christian”. And look, if you don’t keep the Law, look at where it leads...

And even in the middle, there can be bitterness...

It’s a traumatic thing, for a church to go through theological division and upheaval... Sometimes it ends up in a church split. Other times, when it’s all said and done, they’re still together, but the ‘blame-game’ begins...

Do you know what I mean by that???

- “It’s your fault.”
- “All of that hurt and trauma we went through – it’s your fault”...
- Because you didn’t believe what I believe, it’s your fault...

Paul makes a statement here, that I find ‘absolutely fascinating’...

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, **but through love serve one another.**

This is a picture of what ‘freedom in Christ’ and ‘fellowship in Christ’ really looks like... **through love serve one another** ... Now, using the word “serve”, sorta misses the point that Paul is making.

The word for “slavery” that he wants us to be free from, is δουλείας (douleias). The word for “serve” that he urges us to do, is δουλεύετε (douleuete). It’s the same route word

And this is what I find fascinating...

- We’re being called to freedom
- **Stop being a slave to The Law...**
- And living by the Spirit, is to love our Brothers and Sisters in Christ; and
- to practically demonstrate this, **by serving them as a slave...**

That’s a pretty big love, isn’t it... That’s a pretty big commitment...

You see, “love between Christians”, isn’t some kind of airy-fairy concept, where “I’ll do something nice for you, provided it doesn’t impact on **me** too much” – it’s very practical...

When we truly love each other, we serve each other, **at great personal cost...** To be a servant – to be a slave of the other, means they come first...

through love serve one another – The prominence of love – self-giving love – that’s freedom...

And we shouldn’t be surprised by this. Paul quotes from the same Old Testament passage that Jesus quoted, ¹⁴ **For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”ⁱ**

You see, in the church, it's not The Law that creates a great fellowship... As if we could ever legislate, "You be nice to one-another"... It's not 'The Law' or 'rules' that create a great fellowship – it's the love that we have in Christ...

It's the common love we have for one another, that drives us to love one another, and to serve one another...

When there's no love in the church, V15 gives us a picture of that: ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

It's pretty ugly, isn't it...

What does **real** freedom in Christ look like? What's the **evidence** of true freedom???

- It's where we're not enslaved by the Law, so we're living by grace;
- It's where we're not enslaved by the flesh, so we're living by the Spirit; and
- It's where we're not enslaved to ourselves, and so in love, we willingly serve each other, freely serving our brothers and sisters in Christ, as a slave. Not thinking of ourselves, but only for the good of the other.

"Doing the Law" – we avoid that...

But “fulfilling The Law” (with Christian love) – that’s the sweet spot...

Questions????

ⁱ Leviticus 19:18 , Matthew 19:19 , Matthew 22:39