



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**

Freedom

Daily Scripture Readings for
December 30 - February 9

Monday, December 30 - Galatians 1:1-5

To begin the new year, we will study the book of Galatians for six weeks. Our main focus for our six Sunday morning sermons will be on the theme of *Freedom*. Galatians explains very clearly that we have freedom in this life solely because of Jesus Christ. This letter is Paul's most explosive and angry because some have come to dispute this claim to churches he founded in Galatia. After he left this area of Galatia, other "missionaries" came to these churches. I would suggest to you that these people meant well, but did not understand the gospel of Jesus in the correct way. Their interpretation of Jesus was that he was the Messiah of *Israel alone*. As such, the Gentile followers of Jesus in Galatia needed to follow the law of Judaism in order to be full Christians. Paul finds out about these "missionaries" and his rebuttal to their teachings is the letter of Galatians.

It is clear as early as our verses today that Paul wants to remind these new converts in the churches of Galatia that Jesus died to set them "free from the present evil age" (v.4). I want us to truly appreciate who did what first. Jesus first died to set us free. It is in response to Jesus' actions that we trust in Him. It is in response that we devote our lives to Him. There are many freedoms that are given to us as Christians. Some of those freedoms come with responsibilities. Verse 4 is a good example. Being free from the present age means it is our responsibility to not succumb to the present age. It means we need to constantly challenge the present age, the status quo of society *and* church life. We must reject business as usual and instead relish in our freedom with Christ. If we devote our lives to basking in this freedom, we will not become subject nor manipulated by popular culture images or popular church culture. Let your freedom in Christ be the definition of your life and live your life "free from the present evil age."

Tuesday, December 31 - Galatians 1:6-10

Only seeking God's approval instead of human approval is difficult. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety Five Theses* to the door of the church in Wittenburg, Germany. This began the Protestant Reformation. Luther's main disagreement with the Catholic church at this time was the selling of indulgences. He believed this to be what Paul calls a perversion of the gospel in Gal. 1:7. Galatians happened to be one of Luther's favorite books of the Bible because it describes so clearly the good news of freedom in Christ.

Luther knew he was going to cause himself trouble by doing what he did. He knew the human authorities of the time would not approve of his decision. He knew that he would be ostracized, isolated, and eventually excommunicated from the church. However, he also knew what was right. Luther wasn't trying to please people. He was trying to please God.

Are you seeking God's approval or human approval? As a pastor, I continue to look for the 2020 equivalent to this 1517 dilemma. What are the issues of our day where the church has gone awry? Where do we need to speak out against injustice like Paul did, like Luther did, like Karl Barth did in 1930s Germany, like African churches did against apartheid in 1980s South Africa? Pray for God to show you these issues. Pray for God to lead you to seek His approval instead of human approval.

Wednesday, January 1 - 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

As Christians, we shouldn't put too much emphasis on New Year's Day. Our new creation began when we began our relationship with God through Christ. Have your actions shown you to forget that you are a new creation? Every person has flaws, imperfections, things they don't like about themselves. When we notice our own shortcomings or the shortcomings of others, we are focusing on the human point of

view, the flesh. God does not see us in that way. God sees us as perfect, as new. God doesn't see you as you were. God sees you as you are, with the Holy Spirit residing in you. Much like the churches in Galatia, we are free from the old way of life. Use that freedom for God's glory.

Do you need to use Jan. 1 as a new opportunity to live like a new creation? Go for it. Let me know if this is a goal of yours, so I can be praying for you. Happy New Year! Live like the old is gone (because it is), and you are a new creation in Christ!

Thursday, January 2 - Galatians 1:11-12

These two verses serve as Paul's overarching theme of the first two chapters of Galatians. They definitively declare that Paul did not make up these stories nor are these stories of human origin. The gospel that he preaches to these churches was the very gospel given to him by Christ. The claim being made by those Paul calls "some who are confusing you" (v. 7) is that Paul watered-down the gospel given to him by the apostles in Jerusalem. The claim is that the apostles in Jerusalem expect followers of Jesus to also follow Jewish law, and Paul has excluded that teaching to entice more people to follow Jesus. Paul is denying this claim by emphasizing he was not taught the gospel by any humans, but received it by the revelation of Jesus Christ himself.

I understand Paul's concern and his need to defend himself. These teachers who came after Paul were putting more conditions on being a Christian. They can easily make the argument that Paul didn't tell them the whole story. There are Christians who continue to put conditions on following Christ. "You must dress like this, talk like that, do this at this time, etc." They come along and indicate that new Christians haven't heard the whole story. We must stop putting human conditions on God's gift of salvation. Let's recognize the God's gift of salvation for what it is: a gift! We must preach the gospel that was revealed by Christ and preach that gospel alone.

Friday, January 3 - Galatians 1:13-24

What have you been called to do? Call is very important in all of our lives. God has a plan for your life, and he has set you apart for that life before you were even born. Paul claims that his call is to proclaim Jesus to the Gentiles. Paul uses language reminiscent of the call of prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah from the Old Testament in verse 15. Again, Paul is defending himself against what others are saying about his authority and calling. Paul was doing as God commanded from him and it caused human turmoil in his life.

Which brings me back to the question above: what have you been called to do by God? Do not let human disapproval distract you from serving God. God has called you to do something special for the Kingdom of God. Are you living out your calling? Pray for God to give you guidance. Pray for God to give you clarity on what you are supposed to be doing right now. I'll be praying for you as well.

Saturday, January 4 - Genesis 39

To prepare for our study of Genesis tomorrow night, read the story of Joseph and Potiphar's Wife. Our time together tomorrow night will cover this story and the story of Judah and Tamar. These stories are back to back most likely because of dealing with the same issues of sexual temptation. How can these stories influence our lives today? What impact do these stories have on the future of Israel? Let's answer both questions tomorrow night.

Sunday, January 5 - Psalm 27:1

What fears do you have this morning? As you prepare to come to church, let me encourage you to give those fears to God. We can be confident in God's power and protection in our lives. Bask in that protection today!

Monday, January 6 - Galatians 2:1-10

Our topic for Sunday's sermon will be "Freedom From Yourself." The main verse will be Galatians 2:20, which we will read on Friday. As Galatians 2 begins, Paul recounts a trip to Jerusalem that he takes that is most likely the event also described in Acts 15. There are several important items in these ten verses that speak to the local church in 2020. First, I want you to notice verse 7. The leaders in Jerusalem recognized that Paul's gospel to the Gentiles glorified God just as Peter's gospel to the Jews. The issue in this meeting was circumcision. For us, a meeting like this might be "what is appropriate to wear to church?" or "what time is the right time to have a worship service" or "what music should be considered worship music?" Or maybe the questions are a little more difficult: "should a Christian drink alcohol?," "can a Christian watch a movie with violence, foul language, or nudity?," or "can you be a Christian and attracted to the same-sex?" Don't take lightly the issue at hand in these verses. It was as serious as the things I just mentioned (and no, just because I mentioned all of these things do I believe all of them should be answered the same way the question of circumcision was answered).

Secondly, notice who Paul brought with him. He brought a highly respected Jewish Christian (Barnabus) and a new convert (possibly led to Christ by Paul) Gentile Christian (Titus). It was very savvy of Paul to bring them both. They are the examples of multiple ethnicities or groups following Jesus. It's easy to stereotype and ridicule a group of people when they are not in front of you. When you see what is actually happening with your own eyes, it is much harder to discount. Seeing the need to bring the gospel to people opens our hearts to do what is right so all people have an opportunity to become a follower of Jesus. Having Titus in Jerusalem helped Paul prove his point of what God was doing through Paul's ministry.

Lastly, don't sleep on verse 10. This is an early example of the universal church, made up of multiple ethnicities, ways of life, and generations, working together to be the hands and feet of Christ on this earth. Don't forget the poor. This is still important. While we are spreading the message of Christ with our tongues, let us also share the love of Christ by giving necessary items to the poor. It doesn't matter what the church looks like, there is a command on all of us to remember the poor. Let us do that and let us work with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ across all ethnicities, genders, generations, income levels, and every other division we face in the world in order to rid the world of poverty. Are you doing your part to bring the gospel to all people and remember the poor? I pray that you are.

Tuesday, January 7 - Galatians 2:11-14

Remember all of those tough questions I asked yesterday? Is it ok to do this or do that as a Christian? Is it ok to worship this way or that way? The decision made in Jerusalem was easier than what was transpiring in Antioch. It's one thing to make a decision to allow others to do something; it's completely different to do it yourself when you've been taught your whole life something different. This was the problem in Antioch. Jewish Christians who wanted to keep living as Jews, but this meant being separate from the Gentile Christians. Is there supposed to be one church or two? Peter seemed to be eating with the Gentiles for a time until he retreated from interacting with them for fear of what other Jews might think. Paul takes him to task for this in front of everybody.

We are to be one church. There isn't a Jewish church and a Gentile church. There isn't a modern church and a traditional church. There isn't a Republican church and Democrat church. There isn't a white church, hispanic church, or a black church. There is the church. And while we are going to have disagreements concerning several

issues, let us remember what we have in common: we are all saved by grace through faith, so that no man may boast.

Wednesday, January 8 - Daniel 3:1-30

While we are talking about spiritual freedom we have in Christ on Sunday mornings, we will begin a study tonight on Religious Freedom and the way Baptists have fought for this freedom over the last 400 years. Many people throughout history and today do not have religious freedom. We should count ourselves very lucky to live in a country that allows us full religious freedom. Baptists were instrumental in including freedom of religion in the First Amendment. Come tonight as we begin this study.

Our passage today discusses the lack of religious freedom for the Jews in Babylon. Despite the sentence for worshipping God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego still chose to worship. They were punished, but God protected them. I love what they say in verse 18. Even if God does not save them from the furnace, they'd rather worship God and die than worship an idol and live. If we ever are faced with a similar choice, may we live out our faith in God with boldness like these three men.

Thursday, January 9 - Galatians 2:15-18

"I've never not known Jesus." Nate Pyle in his book *Man Enough* shared his testimony in this way. It is a testimony that reminds me of my own testimony. My parents tell it this way: "you've been in church since before you were born." Paul says it a different way in Galatians 2:15: "we ourselves are Jews by birth."

Those of us who have grown up in church have never known any other way. The rules, procedures, and organization have been ingrained in us before we could talk. But those of us born in church or "born as Jews," even we have to come to believe in Christ Jesus. That's the point of this whole argument Paul is making! Being raised in church leads you to the same place as those who weren't born into a Christian family.

Our salvation is not dependent on following the Law or acting a certain way. Our salvation is dependent on faith in Christ. So if the rules, procedures, and organization of church have had no eternal effect on us, why are we forcing new Christians to be exactly like us? If it's about Jesus, why are we worried about the other stuff? I'm happy that my testimony can be "I've never not known Jesus." I'm not going to think I'm better than others just because they cannot say the same thing.

Friday, January 10 - Galatians 2:19-21

Who is living inside your body: You or Jesus? Pray that you can repeat Gal. 2:20 in your own life.

Saturday, January 11 - Matthew 28:18-20

At College Heights, we have two main Scriptures that inform our ACT acronym. Along with Micah 6:8, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 tells us that not only is our duty as Christians to live a life of following Christ, but it is to lead others to that same life.

Tomorrow night, we are going to have a Discipleship Preview Dinner at 6:00 p.m. This will kick off the Discipleship Program for 2020. I hope you make plans to come and see how discipleship groups are going to work and what options are available to study. Also start praying now. Pray for God to use this time for his glorify and that we are able to "go and make disciples."

Sunday, January 12 - Psalm 28:6-9

Our God is a God who hears us. Come praise Him who hears us and is our strength!

Monday, January 13 - Galatians 3:1-5

One of the most powerful tools we have when sharing Christ with other people is our own experience. Nobody can contradict what you experienced. The heretical missionaries who had come to Galatia after Paul left were trying to do that. Paul reminds them of their experience with the Holy Spirit. The questions are simple to answer. Following the Law is not what brought the Spirit upon them. Believing the message that brings about faith (v. 2) is why the Spirit resides now in you. Don't think of ourselves as second class Christians, Paul would say. All are equal in Christ Jesus. It's not about the rules, it's about the relationship with God. Do you focus too much on the rules? Are you trying to earn God's blessing in your life by "being a good person?" Or do you allow yourself to bask in God's presence embracing his gift of salvation?

Tuesday, January 14 - Galatians 3:6-18

Paul uses Abraham as an example to further his point regarding circumcision. These teachers who came after Paul suggested the Gentiles needed to be circumcised to be sons of Abraham. Paul reminds everyone that Abraham wasn't even circumcised when God chose him! This one fact would seem to tear apart these other teachers' argument like a house of cards.

One of the points Paul is trying to make is that Abraham first had faith and believed. Abraham heard God's Word and trusted it much like the people in Galatia had previously heard Paul preach about Christ and believed it. This passage, coupled with the rest of Galatians 3 on Thursday makes it clear: God's grace is given to all people regardless of their status with the Law. It is completely dependent on gracefully receiving the gift God wants to give you. It doesn't matter how "deserving" you are. Do you know someone who needs to hear that message of grace today? Give them a call right now to tell them how much God loves them.

Wednesday, January 15 - Luke 4:16-21

I hope we understand how fortunate we are. For the vast majority of Christians over the past 2000 years, religious freedom protected by a government has not existed, nor does it exist today. Jesus tells us in Luke 4:18 that he came to “proclaim release (free) the captives.” Jesus wanted us to be free people. Free to choose or not choose to worship Him. Pray for those Christians around the world today who worship God under threat of persecution. Pray for revival in those places where only God can “let the oppressed go free.”

Thursday, January 16 - Galatians 3:19-29

For our devotion today, I want us to focus on the end of this passage. More specifically, let us look at Gal. 3:27-28. These two verses might be an early statement of faith that was pronounced over people who were baptized. If so, then Paul is repeated something every hearer of this letter heard at their baptism and the numerous baptisms celebrated in the churches in Galatia. Let these words wash over you. Paul is reminding these Christians that as Christians, the divisions that once governed their lives were obsolete. There are no ethnic distinctions, social class distinctions, or gender distinctions.

What the church is supposed to be is an alternative community to the social divisions in the world. It should be a glimpse of the fullness of the Kingdom of God when Christ returns. How are we doing?

In two and a half weeks, on Monday, Feb. 3, the Iowa Caucuses will be held. This will be the first time votes will be cast in the race to be the Democratic nominee for president. It will kick the 2020 Presidential Election into high gear and the 2020 Election will be in full focus until November. There is a sharp political divide in the United States today. I think if we were to create a statement of faith similar to Gal. 3:28 today, we would include politics. Instead of identifying as a republican, democrat,

libertarian, independent, etc., identify as a Christian. Consider yourself clothed with Christ. Christ abolished the dividing lines and made our social distinctions obsolete. Let's be an alternative community to the world around us. A community where all people can come together and only identify as ones who follow Christ.

Friday, January 17 - Galatians 4:1-7

“Abba! Father!” is the exclamation in Gal. 4:6. These words are the climax of this passage showing us we are children of God. Not children who are still minors and have no rights to God's inheritance. But because Christ was born and then lived, died, and rose again, we are adopted children of God with full rights, no longer under the guardianship of the Law. This gives us the right to exclaim “Abba! Father!” “Abba” is the Aramaic word for father. It's the word Jesus uses for God when he is hanging on the cross (Mark 14:36). Paul uses it one more time in Romans 8:15, but other than that it is not used in the Bible. It is a word that is rarely used to refer to God (as seen by only three instances mentioned here). The reason for this is that “Abba” is a very very informal term of endearment for a father. The best translation we could give in English is how a toddler would call their father “dada” or “daddy.” That translation can cause consternation for many Christians as it seems much too informal for God. “Abba” was possibly used in the early church as a cry of excitement after baptism, a word of jubilation toward the Father in heaven who saved them echoing Jesus' words for his heavenly Father. It is in that spirit where we can call God our “Abba” as well. One who saves us when we can't save ourselves, much like a dad would do for his toddler. Praise be to God for a Father in heaven who we can claim as our “Abba!” Praise be to God that we are not slaves, but children of God, and as children, heirs with Christ.

Saturday, January 18 - Genesis 41:1-8

We all wish that God would answer our prayers on our timetable. I imagine Joseph felt the same way. He's in prison for a crime he didn't commit, he interprets a dream for the cupbearer to the king, thinks he'll be pardoned soon, and then...nothing. Our passage today clearly states it was two years before Joseph was remembered, two years before God's plan for Joseph continued.

It's very hard to wait on God's timing, but let me assure you: God is at work. It may not be as quick as you think it should be, but God is at work. God was at work in Joseph's life even though he was sold into slavery and thrown into prison. God is at work in your life. Put your trust in him.

Sunday, January 19 - Psalm 29

The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice. God spoke the world into existence. God wants to speak to your life. Are you listening? Come worship today and hear the Voice of the Lord!

Monday, January 20 - Galatians 4:8-11

I'm worried about you. This about sums up these four verses. Paul has used logic, reason, and references to the Old Testament to explain why the Galatians should say no to the new missionary teachers. When we reach this last section, he concludes with statements of concern. Why would you go back to living like you did before you knew Christ. Submitting to the Jewish Law is akin to going back to their previous Pagan ways. Verse 11 captures Paul's sentiment: "I fear for you."

We must be concerned for our fellow Christians who feel the draw to be under severe restraints for the gospel. Those who are legalistic about church attendance, tithing, and checking off the boxes of faith for the sake of checking off boxes. And while we usually mention these issues when it comes to judging others, our passage today

puts the focus on judging yourself. Is your Christianity built on your relationship with God or on how many times you've been to church this month? Is your Christianity built on "being known by God" or whether you are caught up on your Bible reading plan. Please don't mishear me. I think the best way for a relationship with God to grow is by coming to worship regularly, having Bible study with fellow Christians, and things of that nature. But I want you to do those activities for the goal of growing spiritually and not just doing them "because that's how I can be a 'good Christian.'" If you are just trying to do the things "good Christians" do; if you think that's what God wants, I'm worried about you.

Tuesday, January 21 - Galatians 4:12-20

During the summer between 8th and 9th grade, my family changed churches. Our old church was in the process of splitting/closing (it's a very long, weird story), and it was time for us to find a new church. I didn't want to join the church we did. I wanted to join a church started by our previous pastor where many of my friends were going. My parents disagreed, so we joined a different church. I didn't want to be there, but it turned out to be the best possible decision. The decision God wanted for my life all along. Not more than a year later we went to church camp, and God called me to be in ministry. I am now convinced it would have been harder to hear God's voice in the church where I wanted to join. It's funny how our life goes on paths we don't expect, yet it is exactly where God needs us to be.

I think a similar sentiment is what Paul says in Gal. 4:13-14. To be honest, we aren't really sure what he is saying, but it seems that he originally went to area of Galatia because of an illness or to recover from wounds of persecution. It was only because of this infirmity that Paul found himself preaching to the Galatians. I don't think Paul would have chosen to be beaten or get sick if he had a choice. However, for the

Galatians, the best thing that happened was Paul had to come to them. It wasn't the path Paul would have chosen, yet it was exactly where God needed him to be.

In the days and weeks ahead, try to remember this when you find yourself in a place that isn't your plan. Think of it as an opportunity to do God's work. Ask yourself: why does God have me here today? Wait for an answer and then do what God says. May God bless you today.

Wednesday, January 22 - Acts 5:29

When human authority and God's Law contradict who should you follow? Does that contradiction happen in our community today? We will talk a little about this as well as continue to look at the role of Baptists in Religious Liberty tonight..

Thursday, January 23 - Galatians 4:21-5:1

It is in this passage we reach a verse that summarizes the entire letter to the Galatians. Galatians 5:1 is the concluding argument to which Paul has been leading for the first four chapters. It is the sentence that the final two chapters will continue to support. Christ has set us free, not just from sin, but from the Law. And because we are free, we must hold our ground and protect that freedom.

In Gal 4:29, Paul reminds us that it is Ishmael who persecutes (plays with, makes fun of) Isaac in Genesis 21:9. This is what the Law does in response to those who are free. The Law reminds us of our past failures. The Law forces grief while the gift of Jesus gives joy. We do not live in a state of grief over our failures. We live in a state of freedom because Christ has set us free.

Today, I want you to remember that you are free indeed. I want you to tell others not what they are doing wrong, but remind them they can have freedom in Christ. It is a freedom that can boldly say "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Live out that free life today!

Friday, January 24 - Galatians 5:2-12

Don't read this passage out of context. Outside of the context of the entire letter, these verses today have a completely different meaning. Specifically, verse 4, on its own, sounds like a text that proves that one can lose their salvation. I do not believe that Paul is saying "if you are circumcised, then you are no longer a Christian." I think he is saying "if you are circumcised, then you think that God's grace is not enough. You are trying to leave grace for the Law." This is similar to what the letter says in Galatians 2:21. Thinking that being under the Law is necessary means that Christ died for nothing.

There are no other steps or requirements to be a Christian other than accepting the grace God wants to give you. Those churches or groups who think they will be the only ones in heaven are sorely mistaken. They are akin to those causing division in the Galatian churches. It's not about certain rules and regulations. It's about all sufficient grace. Grace that has been given to you, and grace that will never leave you. Who do you know that needs to hear about God's grace? I pray you have the opportunity to share that message today.

Saturday, January 25 - Genesis 50:15-21

Tomorrow night we will conclude our study of Genesis. We have moved from the creation of the universe and origins of the world population to the calling and blessing of Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and his sons, not to mention the other numerous descendants of Abraham, such as Ishmael, Esau, etc.

This passage serves as a great conclusion to Joseph's story. Joseph's attitude should be an attitude we can copy. With Jacob dead, Joseph's brothers worried about retribution. Joseph reassured them saying that even though they intended evil, God used it for good. God can use all of our difficult times in life for his glory. Let us not hold

grudges against those who have caused harm in our lives. Let us look forward and remember how God has used those tragic events to strengthen us for the future.

Sunday, January 26 - Psalm 30:10-12

In what areas of life do you need God to be your helper today? Call on him and he will be gracious to you!

Monday, January 27 - Galatians 5:13-15

If you've been reading along with these devotions over the last four weeks, you've probably been saying a lot of "yeah...but" in reference to what Paul writes and what I (Josh) have been commenting. You've probably been thinking "yeah, I agree we are saved by grace, but the Law is still important, right?" These three verses answer that question.

You are free from the Law. Do not resubmit yourself to the Law. But do not use your freedom for selfish reasons. Use your freedom to serve one another. Do not sin willingly against God and one another because your salvation is not on the line. Live your life according to what Jesus says is most important. Love God and love other people. This is a summary of the entire Law.

So yes, the law is important. In our freedom found in Christ, we submit not to the Law but to the will of Christ. Like Paul, let us preach the message of freedom and then preach the message of how we use our freedom. If the Spirit is truly residing in the person, then they will realize the importance of using their freedom in this way and not for "desires of the flesh."

Pray for one another today. Pray that each of us can live out the command to "love our neighbor as ourselves."

Tuesday, January 28 - Galatians 5:16-21

Instead of focusing on the list found in 5:19-21, I want to remind you of something Paul says in Galatians 4. When he uses the story of Hagar and Sarah as an allegory he compares Hagar to Mt. Sinai. This is significant because he is not only saying that Hagar's child was born of the flesh and is enslaved, but that it is the Law, given to Moses on Mt. Sinai that is similar to the flesh and slavery.

Sinful desires and the Law equally enslave the world because they both help us indulge in self-gratification and pleasure. It not only "feels good" to give into our human nature (the flesh), but it also "feels good" to withhold from worldly pleasures (the Law). Another way to say it "feels good" is being prideful. For the pleasure seeker, the stories they can tell after the events of a given night or weekend are points of pride. Similarly for the Law follower, the stories they can tell after resisting the temptation of a given night or weekend can be points of pride.

We are to be led by the Spirit, not the desires of the flesh nor the law. Pray that you live by the Spirit today. Confess your attitudes of pride and go as the Spirit leads today.

Wednesday, January 29 - 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Earthly leaders have much power to bring peace or disorder in our lives. Let us pray for our local, national, and world leaders to realize that there is One who is even more powerful than they and He is the only true God. We will pray tonight and continue our discussion of Religious Liberty, so I hope you make plans to join us!

Thursday, January 30 - Galatians 5:22-26

It is the Spirit which governs us as Christians not the Law. And how should the Spirit's work be seen in our community of Christ followers? In the fruit of the Spirit seen in these verses. Notice that it is the fruit of the Spirit, not fruits. We are not discussing

qualities to check off in the good Christian handbook, but qualities that the Spirit exhibits through us. These nine characteristics paint a picture of the ideal Christian. I do not believe this list to be comprehensive, but as an example for how to live and work with each other. Notice that the list begins with love. Love is the attribute that allows all of the other characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit to be at work. After all, how many of these characteristics are equated to love in 1 Corinthians 13?

The list ends with self-control. We can think of it more as God-control. The new teachers who had come to contradict Paul's teachings of grace wanted the Gentiles to be Law-controlled. Paul is saying they don't need the law, but the Spirit will guide them to be self-controlled (i.e. God-controlled). And while the new teachers may tell the Galatians all of the laws they are breaking, Paul slyly reminds the Galatians there is no law against doing these things. Not even the false teachers can say they are doing wrong by following the fruit of the Spirit!

How are you doing exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in your life? In what areas of your life do you need to allow the Spirit to do its work? Call or talk to a trusted friend today. Ask them to pray for you about this part of your life where you are holding back from the Spirit. Pray together and seek how God can break those strongholds in your life.

Friday, January 31 - Galatians 6:1-2

One of the lesser known major world events over the last 30 years is the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The dominating Hutu tribe tried to carry out mass murder and genocide against its rival Rwandan tribe, the Tutsis. Remarkable stories of courage have come from this horrible atrocity of people trying to save each other's lives. In the town of Ruhanga, a group of 13,500 Christians had gathered to hide and seek safety from the war. Many denominations of Christians were present. When the Hutu militia reached the people, they ordered them to separate between the two tribes,

Hutu and Tutsi. The people refused to separate since they were one in Jesus. For this, they were all killed, Hutu and Tutsi alike.

This is a horrific but pointed example of what it means to bear one another's burdens. To fulfill the law of Christ, Gal. 6:2 says, we must bear one another's burdens. If another Christ follower is struggling with a transgression, then we help that person. If another follower of Jesus is suffering in any way, we work together to bear the load.

At the end of last week, we read that we are to use freedom to become slaves to one another. This action follows the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Bearing the burdens' of each other is also obeying this commandment. We must bear the burdens of all Christians as our own burdens. We stand together. We are, after all, part of one body.

Saturday, February 1 - Psalm 2, Psalm 110

We will begin a new study on Sunday nights looking at the Book of Psalms. While we have read a significant amount of Psalms to prepare us for Sunday morning worship, we have not studied it in detail. I hope you plan to join us to look at these two psalms tomorrow night. There's not a big football game or anything right?

Sunday, February 2 - Psalm 31:23-24

Let verse 24 be a prayer of commitment to God for you. Be strong! Take courage! Wait on the Lord!

Monday, February 3 - Galatians 6:3-5

The Bible is not written for somebody else. It is written to you. Let me explain what I mean. You know how you read a passage or hear a sermon and think "oh, I know exactly who needs to see this?" That's thinking the Bible is written for somebody else. Yes, the Bible is written to that person as well, but don't forget about you too!

This idea is what allows Gal. 6:2 and 6:5 to exist within four verses of each other. Verse 2 tells us to bear one another's burdens. Verse 5 says to carry your own load. Both verses speak to you. You carry one another's burdens and carry your own. Don't let this be a scolding for asking for help. We all need help in some parts of our lives. This is an admonition for not doing anything and expecting others to do the work for you. Carry your own load and when it becomes too much, the church will bear your burden just like you will bear others' burdens.

Tuesday, February 4 - Galatians 6:6

On the surface, this verse seems out of place. Why is Paul talking about paying ministers in this context? In Paul's mind, this corresponds to following the guidance of the Spirit as it leads the church. The Spirit gives us freedom which we use to serve one another. The Spirit guides us to living by the fruit of the Spirit and bearing one another's burdens. The Spirit leads us to recognizing that our earthly spiritual leaders should be compensated for their actions. Paul echoes these thoughts in 1 Corinthians 9:14. It is similar to when Jesus sends his disciples out and commands them to not take anything with them, but that those to whom they minister should take care of them.

It feels weird writing about the necessity of paying me, but I appreciate the sacrifice of tithes and offerings that you give that allow me to provide for my family while being your pastor. Could you continue to do something else for your ministry staff? Pray for us. Pray that we can lead College Heights in accordance with what God wants. Pray that we can lead our families. Pray that we are able to take the time to grow our own spiritual lives. I thank you in advance.

Wednesday, February 5 - Romans 13:1-7

Often seen as the most concise statement of how a Christian should live under an earthly government, let us remind ourselves the time period Paul was writing. Paul is writing to Christians living in the Roman Empire who are being persecuted for their faith. He is writing to those whom had much less freedom than we enjoy. How can Romans 13 speak to our society today? Let's discuss Romans 13:1-7 along with the surrounding passages tonight.

Thursday, February 6 - Galatians 6:7-10

These four verses gives us an excellent glimpse into the individual and group work necessary as a Christ follower. Notice the singular pronouns in verses 7 and 8, but then Paul expands that thought to plural pronouns in verses 9 and 10. We each have an individual responsibility to do good and grow in our faith. Likewise, the universal church works as one body and as the body of Christ we must "work for the good for all."

So I have two tasks for you today. Your first task is to recognize the truth of verses 7-8. You will reap what you sow. If you are looking to grow in your spiritual life, you will grow as deep as you work. Get to work by studying your Bible, praying, and talking with other Christians. Your second task is to come together with fellow Christians whenever you can and do good together. Can you do that? Pray for each other that we can share the love of Christ with the world with our actions.

Friday, February 7 - Galatians 6:11-18

A realization that has been lost in our time is the embarrassment of the execution tool that was the cross. Today, we decorate our homes and churches with it, make it into something pretty and ornate, and wear it on jewelry without recognition of the horror of the crude torture device that the cross really was. So when Paul mentions

boasting in the cross in verse 14, it would be oxymoronic to be proud of this way of death for the first century reader. And that's the point.

Paul concludes his letter reemphasizing that circumcision nor uncircumcision is not the point. There is no pride in following the Law or not. And when you feel the urge to boast in what *you* are doing, instead boast in what Christ did on the cross, an event about which is not normally boasted.

For us, this is the point. When we feel the desire to boast in our faith about what we have done or how great we are living as Christians, let's remember that the only reason we are Christians is Christ's death on the cross. When we want to separate ourselves between the "circumcised" and "uncircumcised" groups of today (who do you think these might be?), let us remember that we are new creations and the old dividing lines of culture, race, society, age, etc. are gone.

Pray that you can do your part in this endeavor. Do not boast in your life, but boast only in Christ. He has made all of us new creations and all are equal in his eyes. In Christ alone, we have freedom and that freedom is available to all.

Saturday, February 8 - Psalm 8

This is the first psalm of praise in Psalms. It glorifies God for the way He created the world and then allows humans to take care of the world. Let us explore how this relationship of creation care works tomorrow night as we continue to study in Psalms.

Sunday, February 9 - Psalm 32

How happy we can be when somebody forgives our improper actions against them. When you ask for forgiveness for sin from God, He is a just God ready to forgive. Let us rejoice and worship him for his faithfulness to forgive!