

Introduction

Galatians chapter 4 is where we're at. We're going through the Book of Galatians together. Now, Paul has been, for the first 3-1/2 chapters... he has been building a case. The case that he is building is this. It is that the cross of Jesus Christ and the grace that it gives trumps any sort of manmade religious attempts. He has created this dichotomy, and he keeps comparing the two throughout the first 3-1/2 chapters. He keeps saying, "It's got to be grace. It's got to come from the hand of God. It cannot come from any effort of our own. It has to flow straight from Him." Now he is reaching the conclusion of that case. He gets to the middle of chapter 4, and he says, "Okay, I'm going to lay it down right here. This is it." He kind of demonstrates it. He compares the life of grace. He says, "This is what it looks like if you live in grace, and then this is what it looks like if you live by law." Now, he's not going to abandon these themes entirely, but when we get to chapter 5 next week, everything turns. He goes a completely different direction. This is sort of the conclusion of grace-law distinction, religion-grace distinction, that he is building here. So, have that in mind as we read this together. Let's start in Galatians 4:12.

"Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the Gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,

'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.'

"Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not inherit with the son of the free woman.' So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman."

1. A Life of Grace

That's kind of a confusing argument. What is it that Paul is attempting to communicate? Well, he's doing two things, basically. He starts off by saying, "Look; if you're living in grace, you're going to be able to do ministry in this particular way." Then he says, "Look... I want to conclude this by giving you an allegory that you're familiar with from Scripture." So, let's look at these things separately. First he says, "What does it look like to be someone who lives by grace?"

a. Contextualization. (v. 12)

What would it look like for Houston Northwest to be a church that would do ministry informed by grace rather than ministry informed by law? Well, Paul says in verse 12, *"Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are."* He's using a concept that we could probably best understand through a word that is thrown around in mission circles a lot. It's the word "contextualization." So what is "contextualization?" Contextualization means that you understand your context. When Paul showed up in Galatia to preach the Gospel, he didn't show up and say, "Hey, I'm not going to be anything like you. I'm not going to fit in with you." He didn't say, "I'm going to look totally different than you, so then that way you'll see how totally different I am in every aspect, and then you'll be drawn to me." No. In some ways, he fit in. Right? We don't know exactly what that was, but he said, "I became like you." If you go back and you read the New Testament, anytime that Paul goes to a new community and he starts a church, he would take and adopt certain local customs so that way he could begin to understand the way that they lived. In fact, if you go back and you read in the New Testament, Paul actually describes his mission strategy in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. This is what he says: *"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them."* So he then says this in verse 20: *"To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."*

Contextualization: You've got to make it to where the Gospel makes sense to the people you're preaching to.

Last summer I went to Africa. When you go to Africa, the way that they start their worship services at the churches I visited... I think I visited three or four different churches... in every single one, they would begin with a processional of dancing. They would have the men of the church proceed in and they would dance. I'm thinking about the church I grew up in. (Laughter) That would not translate real well into my culture that I grew up in. I was sitting there and I was like, "Man, this is incredible!" Everybody was dancing. Then the ladies would dance in, then the teenagers would dance in, and then the children would dance in. It was awesome. I was raised in a church where, sort of subtly... we didn't really come out and say it all the time... but basically, dancing was sin. Right? I mean, that was just kind of the way that a lot of people that I went to church with believed. Contextualization matters. If I show up in Africa and I start to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and then these people say, "That is incredible. We want to celebrate and demonstrate God's grace, and the way that we're going to do that is we're going to break out in dance right now." I would say, "Well... you can't dance. If you do that, that's sin." They'd say, "Well, 'phfft'... we don't want to hear your Gospel then," because that's such a huge part of their culture.

When I went to Montana a couple of weeks ago, I met a guy named Bruce. Bruce operates a ministry called "Montana Indian Ministries." Bruce himself is a Native American, and he has been sharing the Gospel with Native Americans for years. One of the things that he has noticed is that there are a lot of stories in Native American culture that call upon something that the Native Americans call "The Great Spirit." So he says, "You know what? I can tie the Creator God that is mentioned in Scripture, and I can show how the Great Spirit that they think exists through these stories is actually best known through the pages of Scripture, through Jesus Christ." He goes into his context and he understands it. Right? That's context. Jesus was God's mission strategy. What did He do? He went into the middle of human context.

What Paul is saying is this: He says, "Hey brothers. Remember... you should become like me because I became like you are." He's reminding them that the Judaizers, the legalists, the people who said that you're saved by religion, you're saved by keeping all these rules... guess what they did? They never even came to Galatia in the first place. Why not? ...Because people that are legalists, they're always worried about becoming unclean because if they are among people that are different than them, then suddenly they're unclean. So people who are legalists... do you know what they spend most of their time doing? ...Staying away from people who are not believers. "I've got to stay far away from you because if I'm mixed up in your business, then your sin might somehow get on me and then I'm messed up." Now, sure... sometimes we can take the Gospel into certain cultural situations, and certainly the Gospel can be compromised. I understand that but what Paul was trying to say was this. It was that contextualization is essential for those who live the graced life. Because, he was arguing, "If you are someone who believes that you are saved by law or by rules, then guess what? You're going to always be a separatist. You are going to always try to build up walls and hide from the world, but if you're someone who is graced, you understand. You can step into any situation, into any culture, and Jesus will be relevant in that culture, and every culture is worthy of being contextualized. Every culture is worthy of studying, of knowing, and saying, "Look. You have a place where I can communicate to you how Jesus applies." Go look and see how Paul shared the Gospel everywhere that he went. Remember in Acts whenever he went to Mars' Hill, what did he do? He was talking to Greeks. So what did he do? He quoted Greek philosophy and Greek poetry. When he is talking to Jewish people, he quotes the Jewish Scriptures. When he is talking to Gentiles, he uses examples from their own culture. He is always looking for connection points. Where did he get such an idea? Maybe Jesus. When Jesus shared the kingdom, He told stories about farming. Why? He was in the middle of a farming community. Everybody in the Galilean and Palestine areas was always a farmer or they at least knew farmers, so he would share stories about God's character and God's nature by telling stories about farming. Sometimes people give me a hard time, "You're always making all these pop culture references." Yeah... you know why? ...Because you jokers watch TV all the time. And so if I can make some sort of an analogy to God through pop culture, then a lot of people go, "Oh... I get it. It makes sense to me." I didn't come up with this great strategy. The apostle Paul did. Jesus did. This is what you do. You take the Gospel and you put it into context. Right? Why are we sometimes afraid of that? Because we're afraid that if we take the Gospel into a particular context that the message will be changed. Please hear me on this. We can never be afraid to go into any context. God's evangelism strategy is incarnation: He gets in the middle of the mess. Right? What should the Church's evangelism strategy be? Incarnation: getting in the middle of the mess. That means the message never changes. It doesn't matter if you're here or on the other side of the world. We proclaim the same Gospel, the same Jesus, the same grace... no matter where we're at. But the methods are always up for grabs: For this church, dancing works... for that church, they're scared to death of dancing. We have to be smart about our contextualization. This church likes this particular type of music. This kind of people likes a different kind of music. These people speak this sort of language. These people speak a different kind of language. We have to know the people to whom we are attempting to reach. So Church... will we be a group of people that live by grace and move into any culture? You see, people who are graced understand, "I can go into any place at any time and faithfully live the Gospel." It might be more difficult in some places than in others, but I can always do so with a clean conscience because of the fact that God demands... God demands that we move into every place to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Think about it. What if Jesus had said, "You know, I don't really talk to women... People that are tax collectors and sinners.... not so much." But isn't it funny... don't we all know churches that say, "I'm kind of going to put a wall up and stay away from THAT group of people... whoever THAT group of people is." Guess what? Every time we do that, do you know what we're doing? We saying, "We'll be incarnational except over there." We refuse to context the Gospel in YOUR context. That's simply cultural elitism. We say, "It doesn't matter if you live on the other side of the world or around

the street, if you look different than me and I refuse to adapt my understanding and my way of thinking so that I can proclaim the one true Gospel to you, then I have decided that I'm going to play God in your life." Wrong. We don't get to do that. You see, legalists... like the people that Paul was describing... legalists are scared to death of contextualization. Why? Because legalists believe that if they adapt to the culture in order to proclaim the Gospel, they are scared to death that they will compromise the message of the Gospel. But, people who are living by grace feel compelled to adapt because they know that contextualization and incarnation is the only way to be faithful to proclaim the Gospel. So, we have to ask ourselves, "Are we legalists or are we people who live by grace?" Are we willing to bend the way that we think and the way that we do our ministry or particular methods so that we will carry out the Gospel? That is what Paul is arguing. He says, "The methods may change; the message stays the same."

So now, Paul then says, "Let me tell you why I am able to do contextualization wherever I go." Look at verse 13. He says, "*You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the Gospel to you at first...*" If you go and you read your New Testament, you're going to find out that Paul had some kind of an issue. We don't know what it was. There have been all kinds of theories and all kinds of debates about it. Listen to this in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Paul describes this. He says, "*A thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.'*" What was wrong with Paul? We don't know. If you look at verse 15, he says, "Some of you were willing to gouge out your eyes and give them to me." There are other places at the end of letters where he says, "Look at how I write in my own hand with such large letters." I think that maybe he had some eye trouble, and maybe the eye trouble was so grotesque that it was almost a disfigurement, so people didn't want to be around him. I don't know that for sure. We don't really know. But whatever it was, it was such a physical and bodily ailment that whatever was bothering him made other people initially recoil at his sight. Okay... whatever it was. So what does Paul say? "It's because of that bodily ailment..." In other words, "...because of my brokenness, that is the reason that you were able to hear the Gospel in the first place." Why? For whatever reason, they saw him preaching or teaching and they brought him in, and it was through his brokenness that an avenue was opened up for him to tell others about Jesus Christ. And then it was because of his brokenness, because of the fact that he was in need, that he was able to say, "Look at me... look at how messed up I am... Look how in need I am... God has fulfilled every need that I have in the midst of this brokenness." What does he say? He says this... that God says His power is made perfect in Paul's weakness.

b. Brokenness. (v. 13)

Contextualization matters but next, brokenness matters. Do you want to know the life of grace? I'm going to tell you. The life of grace is ministry like this: "We tell people how we're broken; we just share it." The rest of the world is scared to death of this. Right? The rest of the world is busy creating outside images and all sorts of devices to cover up the flaws that they have because they are embarrassed by the issues. If you have some kind of physical problem right now, some sort of health problem... Is your first reaction to try and hide it? Yeah, it might be. Maybe you have some sort of social issue or some kind of other financial problem, and your tendency is to hide it. Maybe you have a sin issue or rebellion issue, and your tendency is to kind of keep that hidden because you want people to think that you are a good person. What does Paul say? "It is in our weakness that God's power is perfected." Why? Because whenever I say, "Look how messed up and look how broken I am..." then it creates a space where I can say, "But... but, in the middle of my brokenness, look how great my redeeming God is; look how great my saving God is." (Clapping) So hear me on this... I want you to hear this. Do you know why churches sometimes lose their effectiveness?

Because we become churches that attempt to hide our brokenness, and when we try to hide it, do you know what we're doing? If God's power is made perfect in our weakness, what we're trying to do is limit God's power. We're trying to say, "God, we don't want Your power here. We got this." Man... you've got nothing. If you're trying to hide your brokenness, you don't get what you need. You need grace and grace is only effective when you declare openly how broken you really are. Right? So that's the way that it starts. The life of grace... the ministry of grace begins when we start to stand up and proclaim just how broken we truly are in the first place. God's power is perfected in weakness. "Look how weak I am." You say, "Well that seems really like a bad plan." Well, do you know what? God is in the business of using crazy, messed up plans to display His glory all the time. Every time I conceal my weakness I attempt to limit God's power. May I never do so but instead declare the power of Jesus and the wholeness of the Gospel by putting my brokenness on display, just as Paul does.

c. Family. (v. 17)

Verse 17: Then he says, *"They..."* He's talking about the Judaizers, the legalists... *"They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children..."* My little children... All through his writings, Paul does something interesting. He uses the language of family. Family. That is just a crazy thing to do, to say, "I don't even know you, but if you have received the grace of God, guess what? We're related." Where I come from, people do crazy things to defend their family. Right? They'll say things; they'll do things. They will back up their family because blood is deep... it's thick. And that's what Paul declares the relationship is through Christ... to become brothers and sisters. We're in the family together. This is the picture that he gives. Paul says, "Hey, look at those Judaizers. They make much of you. Why? So that you will make much of them." What's his point? You see, Christianity is different. The Gospel is different because what he's saying is, "At the cross, we're all bound together... we're all equal. What these guys want is for you to say, 'Hey, we're just these poor old Gentiles. We don't keep all the rules, we don't do all the feasts, and we didn't get circumcised...' all this kind of stuff, so we're kind of low down here. But you guys... you all are super religious. You all are super spiritual. You're up here so we're just going to kind of look up at you and say, 'Wow! Look how great they are.'" Paul says, "Hey, guess what? That's the age-old trap of religion. Religion does that all the time... take human leaders and build them up and put them in the place of Jesus Christ."

I am honored to be here as the pastor of Houston Northwest but I ain't Jesus. It's good that people are kind to me and they like me, but guess what? We're just brothers and sisters. We're fellow travelers. Sure... I've been placed in a position of leadership. I'm happy to do that, but listen... I am not something super or beyond you. I have the same Spirit of God that lives in you and lives in me. Right? We are together, family. Right? This isn't some sort of thing where it's, "Man, this is a super spiritual person and then just kind of an okay person." Nope. We're ALL redeemed and ALL righteous. That's why Paul says, "You're my little children; you're my brothers, you're my sisters..." You see, religion is always about attempting to create layers and levels of spirituality.

This week I heard a really sad story. It made me so sad... about a church that is a huge church, and at the conclusion of their services, they have spontaneous baptisms. They say, "Hey, if you want to get baptized, you just come forward and we'll baptize you right now." It was revealed this week that this church was planting 15 volunteers in every service and having them stand at different times and come forward to make it appear that people were coming to Christ. They said, "Oh well, I see people coming forward, so now I will come forward too." He kind of defended that by saying, "Well, you know, we want to do whatever it takes to get people to take down those barriers to come to Christ." Yeah... No. That's just manipulation.

Why did he do that? Do you want to know why he did it? Because he felt slave to perform at a certain level so that people would respect him for what he did. That's religion. That's attempting to create some sort of superman-type ego within the church. May it never be. Look, if I do that kind of stuff, you all take me out back and beat me up. Okay? That's just not cool. This is the thing. What we need is not some sort of superman kind of thing... We need people who are willing to, again, say, "We're family here; we work together. We embrace one another. We serve together. We're all in need of the cross. We're all in need of grace." And that is what Paul does. He exhorts them as "his little children." I don't want to be part of a church that's wrapped up in the slavery of performance but instead a slave to the grace of the Gospel.

d. Jesus. (v. 19)

So then Paul gets to the end of this section and he says, "...I am again in the anguish of childbirth..." Why? Verse 19: "...until Christ is formed in you!" This is where it kind of all builds. Look, he's saying, "Contextualization... brokenness... family... all of it builds to a place of Jesus. The more that you understand grace, the more you should look like Jesus. Let me say that again: "The more you understand grace, the more you should look like Jesus." Are you going to have bad days? Sure. Are you going to mess up? Sure. But, the more that grace takes its root in your heart, then you're going to begin to look more and more like Jesus Christ. That is Paul's prayer. "I want Christ to be formed in you." In Colossians: "Christ in you... the hope of glory." Christ is IN you. He just wants it to look more and more... the more that I understand the grace of God, then the more I begin to look like Jesus. We've got plenty of churches and plenty of programs, even, that aren't part of churches but just other great social services that talk about all sorts of other things: behavior modification, performance ability... all this kind of stuff... But look; this is the thing. At the end of the day, all of those things will eventually fall short if they are not about Jesus. So, everything has to be about making disciples of Jesus Christ. So what does that mean? That means I have to let the grace of God invade me so that in every aspect of my life I apply grace to it so that way I look more like Jesus. Then guess what? I start to treat other people like Jesus would treat them as well. God begins to well that up within me.

So then you think about this. Contextualization: Hey, that kind of sounds a lot like Jesus. Go get in the middle of people who are broken and I'll be with them. Then you talk about brokenness. Hey... displaying brokenness and using it for redemptive purposes... that sounds a lot like the cross of Jesus, doesn't it? Wow. Treating people with respect and equality, no matter who they are, no matter what their troubles are, that no matter where they're from... that sounds like a method that someone would have used... Oh, I guess Jesus, right? It's this idea that the more that the grace of God comes over me, the more I reflect Jesus. That then is spiritual maturity. Jesus Christ welled up within me showing Himself. Whenever the Church of God, whenever every person in this room and in the first service begins to say, "Spiritual maturity isn't me doing cool stuff, but it's Jesus taking up residence within me and then changing the way that I live." Guess what? Then it's powerful. (Clapping)

2. The Choice of Life.

So then Paul finishes this way. This is where it gets crazy. Then he says, "I want you to look like Jesus Christ, but you've got to decide if you're going to do that or not."

a. Spiritual DNA (v. 23)

He tells a story about a man named Abraham in the Book of Genesis who had two sons. For those of you who don't know the story, let me recap it very quickly. This is what happened: God made a promise to Abraham and He told him, "You're going to have a son, and you will have decedents that will be more

numerous that the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore." Okay? He makes this promise to Abraham, and Abraham waits and waits and waits and waits... and no child. So finally he takes matters into his own hand. He takes his slave Hagar and has a child by her, and God says, "No. That was not what I told you to do. I want you to wait." So He waits until he's an old man. When he is an old man and his wife Sarah is an old woman, a miracle happens and she conceives and gives birth to another son... Isaac. Hagar... she has a son. His name is Ishmael. What Paul says in this seemingly weird passage that he concludes with is this: Ishmael represents the Old Covenant... the old way of living: living by your own effort... taking care of your own problems... doing things that you've got to do. That's Ishmael. Then he says, "Then there is Isaac, and Isaac represents living by the New Covenant... by grace, by trusting that God will keep His promise." He uses this sort of interesting idea of a child. You know, Paul has been using this sort of adoption picture throughout the Book of Galatians, and it sort of reaches its climax here by saying, "Look, you're in a family or not." You see, Abraham is the common denominator here, but he has two kids and they have two different sets of DNA... spiritual DNA, if you will. Ishmael has the DNA of "This was done by effort... I did this. I went out and tried to seek that on my own." Some of us in our room, we would identify with Ishmael. "I take care of my own spiritual destiny." One of my friends who is not a believer... He says, "No fate except that which you make." That's what he believes. It's his life. Then there is Isaac: the child of promise, born of Spirit not of flesh, not of effort, because they were beyond any ability to have a child, and God gave them a child through Isaac; that's the other child. Spiritual DNA. Why does DNA matter? Because you know DNA determines eye color, skin color, personality traits... all sorts of things that you have no control over. That's why Paul uses the example of kids. There's two people that have two different sets of spiritual DNA within them: one effort-one grace, one law-one cross. Which one do you think that we need to be part of? He lays it before them.

b. Antagonism. (v. 29)

Then he gives us an interesting example, at the end of the chapter almost; he gets to Galatians chapter 4 and he says this in verse 29: *"But just as, at that time, he who was born according to the flesh..."* (Ishmael) *"...persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit..."* (Isaac) *"...so also it is now."* What's his point? Abraham threw a party whenever Isaac was weaned. Whenever he threw that party... I think it's Genesis 21 where this party is... At that party, Isaac is being celebrated; Ishmael mocks and makes fun of Isaac. Paul says, "Look, from an allegory standpoint it still holds true. People that are under the law cannot abide by or live with people that are under grace." They just can't stay together. It doesn't work. They're enemies. They're oil and water. They don't mix. This is the crazy thing. They are enemies. They are against one another. They will never work.

c. Choose (v. 30)

So what does Paul say? He gets to verse 30. What does the Scripture say? *"Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."* This is what Paul says, "Look... You have heard this over and over, and I'm done telling you." Here, we've now reached a point. Just like Abraham had to choose... was he under law or under grace? Would he choose Ishmael or would he choose Isaac? You now too have to pick. Are you going to live a life under grace and promise, or do you want religion and law? Either cast out the slave woman and her son, or you cling tight to religion. But you've got to pick right here and right now. Just like Moses put a choice before the people, "Choose life not death..." Just like Joshua put a choice before the people, "Choose this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my house, we will choose the Lord." Now he puts a choice before the church and he says, "Pick. What do you want?"

So here we are Houston Northwest. We have to choose. Do we want to choose grace and mercy and love? Do we want to be a people who refuse to be afraid of the culture? Look. You go turn on a news channel. You're going to listen to any kind of person that's out there... they're going to tell you how messed up the world is, and you might say, "I'm afraid of that; I don't want to go into that." Thank God that Jesus didn't take that perspective with you and me. Do we want to be a group of people who will jump into the mess or hide from the mess? Will we contextualize and be incarnate or will we not? We have to decide. Will we be a people that will openly display brokenness? Do you want to know why "Freedom Story" has been so effective? ...Because people are taking their brokenness and putting it on display. This testimony today... a lot of people would be scared to give it because they'd say, "I'd be embarrassed." Why is it not embarrassing? Because it's not about the sin... it's about the deliverance and the God who gives it. So... (Clapping) you have to say, "Whoa; I'm going to put my brokenness out there." Right? Will we be afraid to put our brokenness on display? Will we be a church that's willing to say, "Hey. We will declare one another as family." I don't care how messed up you are. I don't care where you've been. We will call one another brothers and sisters. We'll treat one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord, and children will embrace one another. We'll do these sorts of things. Will we do that and will the mark of maturity become Jesus, or will the mark of maturity become how many rules can you keep? That's what Paul says. You've got to pick... Are we in it for grace, or are we in it for religion? Are we in it for the blood and the empty tomb, or are we in it for how many rules that we can keep and how many people we can impress?

So today, Houston Northwest, we come to the conclusion of this section of Galatians and guess what? Before we move on, we've got to choose. What do we pick as a church? Do we want to be known as a church that involves grace and mercy and isn't scared to get their hands dirty to get out there in the world? Or... are we the church that will just kind of hang back and hide and hope that everything works out out there? And Paul says, "I have laid it out for you; you've heard it over and over again. I'm done saying it. You pick right now which one you want." (Clapping) So now, we've got to choose. That's the bottom line today: Pick. The life and the ministry of grace is contextualization... getting in the middle of it. The life and the ministry of grace is displaying brokenness, not trying to hide it. The life and the ministry of grace is treating one another as family, no matter how messed up we are. OR... will we choose to hide and pretend that we have everything together and to try and create layers and strata of different sorts of spiritual qualifications so we can separate ourselves out from other people and try to pretend that we are better than other people? Which one will we pick? I know which one I want, and I know which one I know that God wants for us. But guess what? He still lets us choose anyway. But just as the slave and the free can't live together, if you're a slave to religion or law, you're going to miserable whenever grace is proclaimed. I'll just be honest with you. As a preacher, I get scared talking about grace a lot. Do you want to know why? Because when you start receiving people that look messed up to the world, Christians start throwing that "L-word" around... "Liberal." Right? Well, that church has gone liberal. They let anybody come. Yeah. You know what? If liberal means we love with the liberality of Jesus Christ, then call me "liberal" all you want because we're not going to turn people away but instead we're going to extend the grace. (Clapping) Right? Here's the thing: Are we going to choose grace or are we going to choose law? We have to pick... Right now... and I hope we make the right choice. Let's pray.

"God, I pray that we would let our hearts be broken by what breaks Your heart; God, that we would see people that are in need and we would refuse to stand aside but instead would get our hands dirty; God, that we would put our brokenness on display; that we would confess our sin so that way people would know that we're not perfect, and they would see that, God, Your grace is working in us and God that we would be willing to treat one another as family... not as someone who has layers and levels but instead is someone that just puts it out there and treats each other as equals because that's what You have called us

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By Dr. Steven Bezner. Part 6 in the series "Freedom Story"

to do. Father, now I pray that we would choose as a church... what are we going to be? God, I pray that You would lead us to be people of grace, people of mercy. God, I pray this in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."