



Week 4: Freedom from Legalism **Read Galatians 2:15-3:29**

This lesson is about three things:

- 1) The doctrine of justification through faith
- 2) The problem with “works of the law”
- 3) The promise as an inheritance from Abraham, received by faith

The police officer arrests me and takes me away in handcuffs. It is embarrassing, a felony arrest. I am accused of defrauding the people of my church of over \$1.2 million. But I am broke, now. I have spent the million dollars on wine, women, song, and on fancy electronics, front row Astros tickets and theology books. The church people are mad. They want their money back and their pound of flesh. My family has turned away in humiliation and disgust, disowning and disavowing me. I have nothing and nobody, but the debt has to be paid. The prosecutor wants to put me in jail to live until I can pay my debt, and to do my time, but I will never be able to pay it all back. I ask for a court appointed attorney, and one is given to me. The evidence is overwhelming, and the judge has no choice but to find me guilty. It doesn't really matter what I plead. She (in my dream, the judge is always a she for some reason) calls the prosecutor and defense attorney up to the bench for a private conversation – you've seen one of these on TV. The prosecutor becomes visibly upset. He waves his arms around. The defense attorney nods his head, and I can read the “yes, your honor” on his lips. He walks back to his seat, takes a checkbook from his briefcase, and without looking up, begins to fill in the lines on the document. When he finishes, he turns to me, and stretches out his hand to give me the check. It is a personal check, made out to the court for \$1.2 million.

“Take it.” he says.

“I can't,” I reply.

“Take it. I love you. It is for you.”

“I can't.”

He hugs me, and then he takes me by the hand, and we walk toward the bench together. The judge comes down, tears in her eyes. My attorney, with a trembling hand, passes the check to her. The judge puts her arms around me and holds me tight. She whispers in my ear that she loves me, and tells me I am free to go. As I walk away, I see the defense attorney, as they put the handcuffs on him, and lead him away...

OK, it is just a dream, thankfully. (Please tell me you didn't really think this was actually true.) I fully admit that I have massaged the details a bit for effect, and the analogy to God's grace described above is far from perfect. The model of "penal substitution" to save us from sin and death, to which this dream alludes, is but one approach to explain the grace of God. Still, the recurring dreams I have always have the same rhythm – fear, remorse, amazement, gratitude, followed by great sense of liberation and joy. One can speculate on the psychological causes of these dreams (maybe God is just giving me illustrations for teaching.) The images arising from my subconscious vary, but with the same overarching pattern. Sometimes I am before a judge. Sometimes it is a boss. Sometimes it is just a stranger to whom I somehow feel I owe something, and to whom I am accountable. I always have an acute sense that I just can't fix the situation. Then, gratefully, that sense of inadequacy and inability to measure up is relieved by some act beyond my control.

This is the essence of grace. This is why they call it "gospel," or "good news."

Sin is the broken relationship we have with both God and God's people. We are powerless to repair it through strength of will.

Grace is the free act of Jesus Christ to set us right with God and restore that relationship. We don't fix the broken relationship by somehow turning our lives around. *God* does the fixing in Jesus Christ. The sin cannot simply be forgotten. Just as in my dream, there is a debt. Even if the debt is "forgiven," someone has actually paid it. The one who forgives the debt absorbs the consequences of it.

Faith is our positive response to God's offer in grace. It is choosing to accept that forgiveness, *and* living in gratitude for it. (More later.)

Justification is being right with God. When it is translated literally, the word means "reckoned as righteous." In my mind's eye, I imagine being able to speak to God with familiarity: "We good now?" I ask. "We good!" God responds.

In verse 16, we find a straightforward statement of the doctrine of justification through faith: "*...we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ.*" (Galatians 2:16)

The inadequacy of works of the law

Galatians 2:15-21

Three times in verses 15 and 16, Paul speaks of "works of the law," and their inadequacy to restore our broken relationship with God. What does Paul mean by this?

First, by “works of the law,” Paul means the religious laws of Judaism. Verses 11-14 tell us that the context of this discussion is Peter’s decision not to eat with Gentiles, and his decision to give in to the “circumcision faction” and follow the Jewish laws about purity. These religious laws included keeping kosher by not eating certain kinds of foods, dressing in certain ways, prohibition of sex during certain times and seasons, and dozens of others. Issues around circumcision, sharing table with Gentiles, and eating certain foods seem to be the most divisive. Paul’s argument is that living by religious practices of purity will never succeed in making us right with God.

It seems obvious to modern Christians that these rituals don’t restore our relationship to God. Nonetheless, many Christians have simply replaced the Jewish religious practices with our own modern Christian versions. For example, some believe that being baptized with water is necessary if one is to be right with God. Others will say that one must have received the Sacrament of Holy Communion to be right with God. We find ourselves drawn into believing that ...

...if we go to church every Sunday, we’ll be right with God.

...if we say grace before every meal, we’ll be right with God.

...if we tithe ten percent of our income, we’ll be right with God.

...if we do a morning devotional, we’ll be right with God.

The list goes on and on. At St. Luke’s, we practice five “inside-out habits.” *We pray. We study the Bible. We make friends. We tell our stories. We give ourselves away in generosity and service.* Is there something wrong with these practices? Are they modern day rituals that have simply replaced the Jewish religious practices Paul so vehemently rejects? Note that Paul’s claim is not that these things are bad in and of themselves. Rather, he is aware that our temptation is to see them as essential to our relationship with God. No! Paul says. There is nothing we can do that will make us right with God. Instead, God has already done it in Jesus Christ, and all we do is accept that through faith.

Instead, we understand our religious practices as important in three ways:

- 1) They help us to strengthen our connection to God, and build our faith. It is the faith that matters, not the practices themselves.
- 2) They are a response in gratitude to a restored relationship with God, rather than a predecessor to that restored relationship.
 - We don’t go to church to get right with God. We go to church to say thank you for God already making us right with God.
 - We don’t pray to make us right with God. We pray to say thank you for God already making us right with him.
 - We don’t tithe in order to pay off our debt and make us right with God. We tithe in gratitude, because Jesus paid off that debt, and made us right with God.

- 3) These practices are means of God's grace, and God uses them as doors by which the Holy Spirit can come into our lives and change us. We will discuss this "sanctification" in later lessons.

But Paul's argument is compelling, and the temptation to count on the wrong thing is strong. Jesus is pretty clear about one thing: the largest impediment to a restored relationship with God is self-righteousness, and the lure is strong, that siren's song inviting us to lean more into our religious practices and walk away feeling self-righteous.

This rejection of religious law would have been revolutionary and difficult for the Jewish Christians to abide. Even more revolutionary and difficult, even to our ears today, is Paul's most revolutionary claim. In his repudiation of being set right with God by "works of the law," Paul is recognizing the inadequacy of even the moral law of Judaism. Surely Paul is not saying that we should not follow the Ten Commandments! Surely Paul isn't saying that we should jump into killing and that stealing and adultery are not a big deal. Indeed, that is not Paul's argument. Instead, Paul's is making the case that striving to follow the Ten Commandments, as well as the rest of the moral law, can't put you in right relationship to God, no matter how hard you try. Why? Because you will never get there! You will never be good enough! The real essence of the law is a matter of the heart, and all of your striving and all of your working will still fall so short. The standard is just so high.

Jesus made that clear:

"Anyone who lusts has already committed adultery in his heart."

"Anyone who is angry with his brother or sister is liable for the judgment."

We grew up trying our best to be "good boys and girls." But how good does one should be? Is it a "more good than bad" standard? Most of us sort of imagine a continuum, with Adolph Hitler and Osama bin Laden down at the bottom of the heap, and Jesus himself at the very top. Where is the line on that continuum that makes us "right with God?" Maybe half way? And if we "try hard" to be good, isn't that what matters? Paul's proclamation is that the line for God is at the very top, right at Jesus, and you and I will always fall short.

J. Vernon McGee was a famous radio preacher in Los Angeles. He preached a famous sermon called "Jumping to Catalina Island." He told of two people standing on the pier in Santa Monica, looking out at Catalina Island some 25 miles away. They would have a contest to see who could jump to Catalina. They would run down the pier and jump out as far as they could. When each of them had jumped, they would compare, to see which one got farther. The one who jumped farther would gloat. "I got closer to Catalina than you did." But the truth was really simple... neither of them would even get close. Neither will we get close to God with all of our striving to be good boys and girls. Because of that, and because of God's love for us, Jesus came from Catalina Island to us. Jesus chose to restore that relationship, because nothing we could do would reach far enough. And when Jesus comes to the mainland, all we have to do is take his hand.

Again, does this mean we do whatever we want whenever we want to? Well, we could do so, and it would not make God love us or accept us any less. But in faith, we won't do whatever we want. Instead, we will

discover that God works within us to change us. Christ takes over our hearts and lives. Galatians 2:19-21 is a little hard to understand, but Eugene Peterson's translation in *The Message* helps me make sense of it.

What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a "law man" so that I could be God's man. Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.

Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God's grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily. (Galatians 2:19-21)

A bit more about faith

Perhaps the most difficult part to understand is not so much that works of the law won't make us right with God; we have learned that the hard way. Nor is it really that God reached out in love to restore that relationship – most of us have been taught about a loving God since we were children. Rather, we want to know what it is that IS required of us. What does it mean to "live by faith in the Son of God?" (Gal 2:21) We've already said it isn't all about going to church and Sunday School each week. Is it simply a matter of praying "the believer's prayer: "Lord, I accept you as Lord and Savior of my life. Come and live in me and control my life." There is nothing wrong with that prayer, and I pray it on a regular basis with those who want to become followers of Christ. But surely, there is more to it than that. What does "faith" really mean? The Sunday School words at the end of today's lesson say a bit more about it, but let me suggest there are four components to faith:

- 1) It is saying "yes" to God's offer of forgiveness.
- 2) It is believing it and trusting that in Christ, you are right with God. ("We good? Yep. We're good.")
- 3) It is living in gratitude for that gift, doing everything to express your love to Jesus for it.
- 4) It is seeking to continue to live in that relationship with God in Christ. Faith is primarily a relationship.

One really important recognition. Faith is *not* an accomplishment. It is not a work in and of itself, a hoop for us to jump through, a box for us to check. Dr. Charles Cousar was a Presbyterian minister, and professor of New Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia. He died in 2014, but was among the foremost American scholars on Paul's letters. He points out that the preposition Paul uses when he says "justified through faith" means "through," as opposed to "on account of." He writes:

*The line is thin but terribly important which separates faith as a necessary response to God's grace from faith as a precondition to grace. Faith is not the ultimate form of self-justification which finally succeeds. [We] run the risk of making faith, like circumcision, something persons perform in order to activate God's otherwise latent justification. But grace with strings is no grace at all."*¹

Here is another imperfect analogy for faith. Pretend your grandmother sends you an envelope. You open the envelope, and inside there is a cashier's check for \$1 million, along with a note from your grandmother telling you how much she loves you. You wouldn't view that as an accomplishment, and say, "look what I did; I opened an envelope from my grandma." No, you would say, "oh my God, look what grandma did for me. My grandma is awesome!" That windfall was a gift. You didn't deserve it. And you would respond not with self-satisfaction, but with humility and gratitude.

But still, you do have to open the envelope, right? You might just let it sit on the counter, because you find it uninteresting. Or you might send it back, because you are mad at Grandma. Or you might think Grandma is just going to say the same thing she always does, yada yada yada. Or maybe nobody ever told you there even was an envelope. But Grandma sent that envelope, and one way or another, if you want to receive the gift, you have to open it. Faith is opening the envelope, and then living your life in gratitude for Grandma's love and generosity.

The argument from experience (reprise)

Galatians 3:1-5

In an earlier lesson, we learned about the power of the story. It is our experience of God that forms the foundation of our values, our beliefs, and our sense of calling. Paul begins chapter three by appealing to the Galatians to remember their own experience, their own story. "*Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ... Did you experience so much for nothing?... Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?*" (Galatians 3:2,4,5)

The Psalmist says, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*" (Psalm 34:8) If you are old, like I am, you remember the 1972 television commercial for LIFE cereal with Mikey. Mikey tries it, and likes it. "He likes it!!!" Paul reminds the Galatians that they have tasted and seen the goodness of God, and that they have tried authentic faith and liked it. He reminds them of the experience of transformation which the Holy Spirit brought into their lives, and the miracles that were accomplished. He reminds them of their collective story.

The argument from Scripture: Abraham and the covenant

Galatians 3:6-16

Remember that Paul's audience, in this case, are Jews, men and women who are steeped in the law, and have been practicing Jews all of their lives. He has appealed to them by way of their own experience and

¹ Charles Cousar. *Galatians: A Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) pp. 54-55

the Holy Spirit, but now he is appealing to them through the Bible itself, the home of the very law that they are asking that everyone seek to follow. Paul points to a key verse in Genesis: “*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*” (Genesis 15:6) One could just as easily have translated this, “Abraham believed God, and it justified him” or “Abraham believed God, and it made him right with God.”

Let’s do a little Old Testament basic history: (Yes, you should do it if you are going to understand Paul’s argument here.) The Old Testament narrative includes a number of periods of Biblical history.

- It begins with what is often called the **pre-history**, usually with no dates assigned. This takes us from Creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, through Noah and the flood and the Tower of Babel.
- Then we hear the story of the Patriarchs, in which God’s special people are really just an extended *family*. This is Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Rebekah and Ishmael, Jacob and Leah and Rachael, and Joseph and his brothers. This is called the period of the **Patriarchs**. One can only guesstimate, but let’s say this period is perhaps 2000-1800 BC. It ends with Joseph helping to rule Egypt.
- The next period is called the period of the **Exodus**, and begins with the Biblical book of the same name: “*And there arose a Pharaoh in Egypt who did not know Joseph.*” (Exodus 1:8) This period is in the 1400’s BC. It is during this time that Moses leads the children out of Egypt into the promised land, and receives the law from God at Mount Sinai.
- The Exodus is followed by the period of the **conquest**, in which Israel takes control of Canaan, followed by the period of the united **monarchy** (Saul, David, Solomon), followed by the divided kingdom of Israel and the period of the **Assyrian conquest**, followed by the period of the **exile** into Babylon, followed by the period of the **restoration** of Jerusalem. Then, the Bible goes silent for 300-400 years, until we get to the New Testament, which is called the **second temple** period.

Here is Paul’s argument:

- God made a promise to Abraham that by him and his family, ALL the nations of the world would be blessed. And that promise specifically included the Gentiles.
- Even for Abraham, it was his willingness to believe God’s promise that made him right with God.
- The promise to Abraham was inherited by his offspring (singular), meaning Jesus (whose lineage is traced to Abraham.)
- Ergo, it is through faith in Jesus that everyone, even Gentiles, receive God’s blessing as his special people.
- The law, which came 430 years later says Paul, can’t change an inheritance... once a will is written, it cannot be changed. So God did not intend for the law to change that promise to the Gentiles.

- The purpose of the law was to “hold us over” until Jesus came. It formed a sort of guiderails the ups and downs of the people of God through these remaining periods of history. Until the Holy Spirit came to transform all of us, the law served as our disciplinarian to keep us between the lines, but it was powerless to make us right with God.
- Now, since Jesus has come and the Spirit is at work within us, the law’s primary purpose is to help us see that indeed we cannot meet its standard, and to show us our deep need for God’s grace.

The real bee in Paul’s bonnet

Galatians 3:26-29

We have discussed the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in terms of how it justifies each one of us individually. My dream described at the beginning of this lesson reveals a sense of personal guilt, of conviction, and celebrates the amazing grace of God that lifts that burden off of my shoulders.

Interestingly, helping the Galatians to understand they are made right with God through faith does not seem to be the main cause of this letter, especially in this particular segment of the letter. What punches Paul’s button is the segregation of Gentiles into second class citizens, somehow folks who are unclean and have to be “cleaned up” by circumcision and dietary laws.

Turn back with me to Galatians 2:11-14. While this letter is written TO the Galatians, it is written FROM Antioch of Syria, and clearly Paul is not liking what is happening in his home church. It seems that Peter has flip flopped after they had it worked out at the Jerusalem conference, and now Gentiles are kept separate from the Jews, because they are not ritually clean and pure, by not following Jewish law. This segregation and exclusion infuriates Paul. He brings this point home in a passionate way in the last four verses of Galatians 3:

...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

There are no second-class citizens. All of us are made right with God the very same way. You don’t have to get yourself cleaned up to be a part of this family, because faith is the access point. God will do the cleaning up. Attach yourself to Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Again, from Charles Cousar:

Acceptance of God’s “not guilty” verdict means accepting people with a different history, a different story to tell.... His justifying grace may then appear offensive not only in that it totally disregards human merit, but also in that it breaks down otherwise acceptable barriers and brings together radically disparate folks. Such solidarity is not always easy to take... God’s way is to unite as he justifies and justify as he unites.”²

² Cousar, p 58.

So, tall or short,
rich or poor,
old or young,
whatever the skin color or hue of hair,
successful or unsuccessful,
gay or straight,
happy or sad,
children or no children,
married or single,
churched or unchurched,
sick or well,
oppressed or oppressor,
white supremacist or civil rights activist,
sober or drunk or high or on and off the wagon so many times you've lost count,
republican or democrat or libertarian or communist or fascist...

there are no second-class citizens. None of us can jump all the way to Catalina Island. We all are made right with God the same way: by the amazing act of love and grace in Jesus Christ, receiving that gift through faith.

Sunday School Words³

Spend enough time in church or with Christians and you will run across some words that we don't use frequently in our normal day-to-day conversation. However, these concepts are important for understanding Paul's letter and the Christian faith. Each week, we will examine a few of these "Sunday school words" so that they may shed light on the context of the lesson.

Sinners:

The biblical Greek word for "**sin**" is failure, being in error, missing the mark. We most often think of sin as wrongdoing or transgression of God's law. Sin includes a failure to do what is right, but sin also offends

³ : <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary>

people; it is violence and lovelessness toward other people, and ultimately, rebellion against God. The Bible teaches that sin involves a condition in which the heart is corrupted and inclined toward evil. The principal effects of sin are alienation from God, from others, from oneself, and from creation. For example, alienation from God lead Adam and Eve to fear and flee from him. Alienation from each other and themselves shows in their shame (awareness of nakedness) and blame shifting. Genesis and Romans teach that Adam and Eve did not sin for themselves alone, but, from their privileged position as the first, originally sinless couple, act as representatives for the human race. Since then sin, sinfulness, and the consequences of sin have marred all. Jesus continued the prophets' work of deepening the concept of sin in two ways. First, he said God requires more than obedience to external norms. People sin by hating, despising, and lusting even if they never act on their desires. Second, Jesus' harsh denunciations of sin show that sin cannot be overlooked. It must be confronted, unpleasant as that may be (Matt 18:15-20; Luke 17:3-4). But Christ came not just to explain but to forgive or remove sin. His name is Jesus because he will deliver his people from their sins (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:77). Thus he was a friend of sinners (Matt 9:9-13; Luke 15:1-2), bestowed forgiveness of sins, and freed those suffering from its consequences (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:36-50). Paul in Galatians claims that we have all been found to be sinners, but in Jesus Christ we have been justified. (Gal. 2:17).

Law:

The usual Hebrew term translated as "law" is tora. Tora, used 220 times in the Old Testament, more specifically means "instruction." Many biblical precepts are expressed as broad principles without legalistic detail. For example, "work" is prohibited on the Sabbath yet is never defined legally. This ambiguity, which allowed for some flexibility, was considered a liability by Pharisaic Judaism. In an attempt to make sure the command proper was never violated, the rabbis created secondary, rigid rules which, if followed, would theoretically prevent a person from ever violating the biblical command itself. This was known as "putting a fence around the law." Such nonbiblical rules are prescribed exhaustively in the Talmud, but this burdensome "tradition" is contrary to the spirit of biblical law (Matt 15:3; 23:4). The role of law is to administrate the covenant. Laws prohibit things destructive to a relationship with God (e.g., worshiping other gods). The law gives direction to what a loving response to God should be, and tells how to reap the full benefits of the relationship. The Law Prepares Sinners for the Gospel. No one can receive eternal salvation by works of the law (Ga 2:16) because none perfectly keeps the law (Rom 3:23), and violation of any part of it makes one guilty of the whole (James 2:10 ; cf. Rom 2:25; Gal 3:10 . Instead, salvation is a gift obtained by faith, not works (Rom 4:4-5; Eph 2:8-10; Php 3:9). Paul is reminding the Galatians that they will be justified by faith in Jesus rather than their ability to prevent themselves from ever violating the law.

Faith:

Means belief, trust, and loyalty to a person or thing. Christians find their security and hope in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and say "amen" to that unique relationship to God in the Holy Spirit through love

and obedience as expressed in lives of discipleship and service. As for the ancient Israelites so for the new people of God, faith means primarily confident trust based on God's promise as understood through his Word (Luke 1:20; 24:25). In Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, and the gospel, the true message of God, people are called to say "yes" to God and to recognize the messenger and the message as true (Mark 1:15). The message of the gospel declares that we are counted as righteous because of our faith in Jesus and not by our works of the law. Paul has cited faith in Christ as the determining factor in God's eyes making reference to when Abram believed God's promises and was credited as righteous.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What does "penal substitution" mean in the context in which it is used in this lesson?
2. What is a recurring stressful dream that you have? What about those dreams do you find interesting?
3. What does Paul mean when he speaks of "works of the law?"
4. What are some Christian religious rituals that churches today try to make necessary?
5. Is there a ritual in your own faith that, if done differently, would make you feel uncomfortable?
6. In what ways are religious practices important to our faith journey?
7. What does the reading say "faith in Jesus" means? What does it mean to you?
8. What is an unexpected gift that you have received in your life? How did that gift impact you?



Week 4: Freedom from Legalism

Daily Readings

Week 4: Day 1 - Romans 8:5-6

Commentary: The new life created and given by the spirit is to be expressed in concrete living. The covenant given in Christ Jesus does not nullify the call of God to live a moral life. Freedom in the spirit means freedom from sin, and freedom from sin means we are free from not only death but the things in life that destroy us daily. Living in the Spirit gives us new life in Jesus and affects the way that we live out that life. Paul is not suggesting that all physical things are inherently evil and only spiritual things are good, here things of the flesh refer to those things that steal away our freedom to live in peace with God.

Reflection Question: What is different about your life before and after your baptism? If you don't remember your baptism, what do you think your life would be like had your parents not made that decision?

Week 4: Day 2 - Romans 6:6-10

Commentary: Our old selves were enslaved to sin and headed for death, because we have died to Jesus, our freedom is found in His new life. When Jesus died he paid the price for all our sin and now the penalty of sin has been destroyed once and for all. Because we have new life we live our new lives for God, putting aside the older things that we have been freed of. It is easy for us to frame our identity around our past failures, but Jesus gives us a new identity in his righteousness and calls us to live into that redemption.

Reflection Question: What is something you used to do that the Spirit living within you will no longer allow?

Week 4: Day 3 - Genesis 15: 1-6

Commentary: God makes a promise to Abram to make him a great nation and reassures Abram, that despite their age, his descendants will become “as numerous as the stars” and through his people the whole world will be blessed. After saying these things Abram believes God even though what God says is seeming impossible. Because of his belief God labels Abram as righteous, Paul later uses this text as an example of faith based righteousness. Asserting that from the very beginning of the covenant between God and Abraham, it was faith and not works that justifies us.

Reflection Question: What is something about Christianity that you struggle to believe? Ask God to give you more faith in this area or to reveal to you if it is essential to your faith.

Week 4: Day 4 - 1 Corinthians 12:25-31

Commentary: From the very beginning church was done in community, and anytime you do something together it never fails that there will be arguments or division about whose role is most important. Even the disciples argued over who was to be closest to Jesus in the coming kingdom. Here Paul is reminding his readers that the community of believers has a unified mission of bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. If we are all in this together than we all share in the successes and failures of fellow believers. God has given us the same purpose but not the same callings in life. My gifts and talents are different from yours and are God given, therefore it makes more sense to celebrate our diverse gift sets rather than to compete over them.

Reflection Question: When was the last time you were jealous of someone else? Ask God to show you how to celebrate with those who are honored and to suffer with those who suffer.

Week 4: Day 5 - Ephesians 3: 1-6

Commentary: Paul’s mission to share the good news of the gospel to the gentiles was a unique one. Prior to Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus, followers of the resurrected Jesus remained confined to the Jewish faith. But now we have become fellow heirs to God’s chosen people and as such receive the same promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul argues that this inheritance has always been (and will always be) by the grace of Jesus Christ. We are members of the body of Christ not because of what we have done but because of salvific work of God through Jesus Christ.

Reflection Question: How would you feel if you got a letter saying that you had just inherited a great fortune from a long lost relative? Which part of the good news of the gospel will you claim for yourself today?