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SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Tearing Down the Walls

Have you ever watched one of those home remodeling shows? My wife just loves these shows. I, on the other hand, am more of a “Beachfront Bargain Hunt” kind of guy, as I have a heart for the ocean. But my wife just loves these remodeling shows. Well, I've noticed that over time the styles of homes have changed. That's why people remodel them. Our first home was a home that was built - I think in the early '70s - and it had many rooms, many walls that separated one room from the other. One feature that was fairly common was a separation between the kitchen and the living room. Now today, if you watch the remodeling shows, or even these vacation home shows, what do most people look for? Open concepts: they're looking for these homes that have the walls torn down. So with these remodeling shows, they always come in and take down the walls between the living room and the kitchen. They are looking for an open concept.

What would you think - if you were watching one of these shows where they're planning to do an open concept – they tear down the walls, but at the end of the show, they put the walls right back up? What do you think about that? I'd probably be pretty confused. I would want to know why they would tear down the walls, only to put them right back up, when they were desiring this open concept. Do you realize this is what we do with our spiritual lives? **Jesus Christ came to tear down the wall that separated us from God.** He came to tear down the walls of our prison cells of sin. He came to set us free from our bondage to sin. He came to tear down the walls of religion. He came to free us from the trap of performance. **But if we're not careful, we begin to rebuild the walls that Christ tore down.**

And that's what we want to talk about today, in the book of Galatians. So, let's pick it up in Chapter 2, beginning in verse 17 (ESV):

¹⁷ But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!

So this passage is a little bit confusing, and it seems like there's a lot of debate into exactly what Paul was saying. I think the New Living Translation helps us as we read this. The New Living Translation puts it this way, “**But suppose we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ, and then we are found guilty because we have abandoned the law. Would that mean Christ has led us into sin? Absolutely not!**”

I think what Paul is saying in context is this: We are made justified, (in other words, declared righteous by God purely by grace, which is what Paul has been teaching all along) but in reality, we are abandoning the law, and then, we are actually sinning. Would that mean that Christ is the cause of that sin? Paul essentially says “no way”.

I think though we get really confused when we talk about works, grace, and salvation. So let me clear that up. As we said early on at the beginning of this study, there tends to be two different extremes, when people err in the practice of Christianity. On one extreme, people can go to legalism, which is what Paul has been writing about. It's what we've been talking about now for a couple of weeks. This is drifting back to the works of the flesh to save us. The problem is, whenever we add anything to the Gospel of Salvation by grace through faith, Paul says *it is no gospel at all*. You are putting on the shackles again to religion. You are rebuilding the walls. Religion can't save you. It will only disappoint you and leave you frustrated. So that's one extreme that people drift to in Christianity, but that's a mistake.

But on the other side, people err with another action of the flesh – that being *license* to sin. There are some today, who echo what people were saying 2000 years ago - that when we experience Salvation freely by grace, we have permission - or a license - to sin. After all, God is gracious, and he pours out grace upon grace to His children. So therefore, when we are truly free, we are free to run wild all over God's green Earth.

Here's the problem: **God did not take off our shackles - God did not tear down the walls of religion - just to make us slaves to sin.**

God did not free us from our slavery to sin, only to make us a slave to sin again. That makes no sense. It's like tearing down the walls in your house, only to rebuild them the exact same way. So we cannot use our freedom in Christ as an excuse to sin.

Think about what Paul said in Romans 6. I'm going to read this to you, because it destroys this false belief of license. Romans 6 says, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (Vs. 1-14)

You see Paul makes it incredibly clear in Romans 6, that Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, is not just a one-way ticket to Heaven. There is this heretical teaching of easy believe-ISM that says, “Just say a prayer and you'll get in. Just say yes, or raise your hand, and you'll be saved.” Is Salvation truly a gift of grace? Absolutely. And you better believe when you read a passage like Romans 6 that a soul saved is a life changed.

This is why in Ephesians 2 it says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, not of yourselves... ..so that no one may boast,” and then Paul would go on to say, “You are a masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, so that you might walk in them.” (Paraphrased) We are truly saved freely by grace, and thanks be to God, we're set apart for a whole new purpose in life. Salvation does not make us a slave to the flesh to works, or to license. We truly are free.

But we know Paul has more to say, so let's pick it up again in Galatians 2, verse 18:

¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

Paul here seems to take the focus off of Peter and put it on himself hypothetically. He says, “OK, so what about me? Let's just say I go back to the way of legalism.” That's why he said, that “if I rebuild what I tore down, it's not Christ who is the transgressor. He's not the one who is prompting me to sin; it's me.”

As I said earlier today, it would make no sense to begin a remodel, and tear down the walls for an open plan, only to rebuild the walls exactly like they were before. That makes no sense. But what's funny is, we see this all the time in these reality TV shows. They need a new restaurant, so they bring in Gordon Ramsay or Robert Irvine. They have two days, or four days, or a week, to get a new restaurant, get a makeover - but the problem is, even with a new coat of paint, a new floor, and a new menu, their heart has not changed. The real issue has not been dealt with, and so they just go back to their old ways, and the restaurants fail. This happens in shows like “Hoarders”, where these people live these really confusing lifestyles. They can have people come in and clear out their house, only to go right back in and start hoarding again. That makes no sense, but people do it all the time.

Paul is saying, if you go back to your old lifestyle, that's not on Christ. That's on you. If you are free by Christ, you are truly free. But should you walk into the trap of legalism or license - that's not on Him - that is on you. Christ frees us from the chains of legalism, and He frees us from the chains of sin. He tore down those walls, and that's why Paul continues in verse 19:

¹⁹ For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Vs. 19-21)

Paul, in verse 19, says that [through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God](#). In other words, he gave up. He could no longer play the game of legalism. He could no longer try to earn his Salvation, by trying to fulfill the law, because it was useless. He couldn't do it. No matter how many rituals and ceremonies and religious activities he did, it would never make up for his sin. Instead, he accepted God's grace, and he died to the law. The law was not his Salvation. The law could not be his God. God is God. And Salvation is from God alone.

Friend, today, if you are truly God's child, you are free. You are no longer a slave to sin. And you are no longer a slave to legalism. If this is you, when you've wandered either to license or legalism, Christ says, *Come home*. Quit trying to rebuild those walls. Instead, live in this remodeled house. It's a new life. It's a free life. Live in it. Enjoy it. Enjoy life to the fullest, which can only be experienced through Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us: **we are free. Let us live freely.**

N: All right, let me turn to my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Arnie, what does it mean to you to live "freely in Christ"? And what doesn't it mean?

A: You know, I really have no idea anymore. When I look at what's going on in Christian leadership and in the world - you know, living freely in Christ - what does that mean? When you look at some of these people - and I'm not saying judgmentally or anything like that - but when you see these guys making some really crazy decisions from investing, and you get this scandal with Liberty. Now you've got another scandal, where this great Christian leader, theologian - you find out, he owns a couple massage parlors. You know, living freely in Christ - I know what it means for me. And I guess I just have to only focus on myself, not make judgments of others, but it's grace - and license carried by some of the best minds - so crazy. Doesn't it get confusing to you Nat, when you look outside of yourself?

N: Oh, absolutely. It's a constant struggle, and so much of it comes down to the heart, which is, I think what you're really talking to. We can't read the other person's motives, right? We don't know what's going on inside of them. So I wrestle with, you know, this notion of legalism, to license. Is it a matter of the flesh; is it a matter of the Spirit? Because in my mind, where I've probably erred, is on the side of caution - which some people would say is legalism - but it's like, well, it probably depends on the heart. If I'm doing it from the outflow of my heart, then that's got to be right. But am I carrying myself in a way that it looks like I'm trying to be a Pharisee, and better - you know, holier than thou? It's a real struggle. But I think what you're saying is, that we need to really focus on ourselves. How are we living? How are we doing? Are we living freely in Christ, in a way that brings Him glory? That removes the obstacles to the Gospel? Or are we doing it in a way that compromises the mission of Christ? Are we doing it in a way that compromises the Gospel message? And that's something that we can ask ourselves, and we

should. I think that's what you're challenging us to do. Cara, we've been talking about legalism and license. From your perspective, what are the signs that you're being influenced towards legalism, and maybe even towards license?

C: Well, sometimes I get the feeling I'm not doing enough, that I might've - you know, I'm not being obedient. Maybe I'm not holy enough. I think that's one thing that gets in our brains, especially if we care, you know, we care. We want to do our best for God, but it can turn into legalism in that way. Because we start comparing our walks to other people's. The second would be when we put the gloves on, and want to argue over disputable matters, over things that are at non-essential doctrines. So whether or not to use tobacco, to drink alcohol. We should not accept heresy when it's clear. We can have different opinions. That's not wrong. But when the opinion is in actual defiance of clear Biblical teaching, we shouldn't tolerate that. But I think we get real legalistic over really stupid things, especially on social media.

N: That's very true. You know, I really appreciate what you said about that drifting towards legalism - that worry of - are we doing enough? And maybe a question we need to ask is - enough for who? We know that we don't perform *for* God's love - we perform *from* it. And so again, it's the heart, it's the motive. Are we doing enough for whom, and for what? And can we do more? Yeah, always, but also I think God wants us to live a life of good stewardship - and that's in our time, our talents and our treasures. And I think there's one area of life that we can get real in trouble with this, and that's ministry. People in ministry - it is true - we never turn it off - like we are always a Christian. And so, we're always on. However, I've seen a great many people in ministry who sacrificed their family, their lives, their livelihood, for their ministries, but they end up broken, and alone, and honestly miserable. And I don't know if that's what God has called us to do. I remember seeing a panel of real well-known authors and pastors. And they asked them, "If you could go back to yourself at the beginning of your ministry career, what would you tell yourself?" And every one of them - and these are like the people we would say they are the best of the best - and they all said, "Don't sacrifice your families. Don't sacrifice your life. Give it all you've got, but know when to say no - at the end of the day, at the end of the evening, at the end of the weekend - whatever it was - know when to say no." And I think that, again goes back to that drifting towards the legalism. Are we doing enough? That depends for whom, and to what end.

A: So Pastor Nat, didn't David do exactly that same thing?

N: You mean David from the Old Testament - sacrificed his family? Well, yeah, sure he did. But I think the situation was considerably different. I mean, King David - he sacrifices family for all the wrong - I mean - for all the wrong reasons. But I guess - back to my original point - I guess whether you do it for the right reasons or the wrong reasons - for sin or for your own glory - you're still compromising and you're drifting towards legalism. So I think we, again, all need to be really careful, even for the good things, and especially the bad things. Are we sacrificing the many pieces of grace that God's given us? If so, I think it's time for us to pause, reevaluate and ask ourselves, am I drifting towards legalism? If so, ask God to guide you and to drive you to

where you need to be.