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SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: From Death to Life

What's the best trade-off you've ever made? In John C. Maxwell's book, *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth*, he talks about the Law of the Trade-off (Law 11). In that chapter, he says, *in order to go [grow] up, you have to give up*. It's the Law of the Trade-off. It's to give up one thing to gain another.

So again, I ask you, what's the best trade-off you've ever made? I remember turning 29 and realizing I was at a crossroads. I could keep living life the way I was living financially/vocationally, but I knew if I did that, I was selling myself short. I hadn't finished college. I was in a job I didn't particularly care for. Financially, we were struggling probably more than we had in the past. So I realized it was time to give up something for a greater future. So that's exactly what I did. I made some phone calls. I filled out some paperwork, and I went back to school. That was in 2010. I decided to go back to school to get my degree in Business Leadership and Biblical Studies. But in order for me to do that, I had to make the trade. I was going to have to say “no” to time with friends. I was going to have to say “no” to spending extra money on things that I probably didn't have any business spending money on anyway. But it was a trade-off. In order to go up, I had to give up something else. And I will tell you, though it was hard to say no to friends and to myself, it was one of the best decisions I ever made. I still practice this law of the trade-off today. But here's what I can tell you: Whenever I say “yes” to something, I have to say “no” to something else. Again, that's the law of the trade-off.

What I've observed as an executive coach and as a pastor is this: Many people never adopt the law of the trade-off. They do what they've always done, getting the same results they've always gotten. They remain unhappy. They remain frustrated. They feel like life is meaningless, and yet they don't change. They fail to say “no” in order to say “yes” to something far greater. We do this with our physical lives, but we also do it with our spiritual lives. We have to remind ourselves, that to experience our freedom in Christ, we must die to ourselves, and our old ways. And that's what we want to talk about today as we continue our series in Galatians.

The book of Galatians is written by the Apostle Paul, and this is a deeply personal and serious letter. False teachers have infiltrated the churches of Galatia, and were encouraging them to abandon the true Gospel. These false teachers were Judaizers, or legalists, who were saying Salvation by grace is true, but you must not abandon the works of the Law. In other words, Salvation by grace through faith is great, but it's not enough. In order to experience Salvation,

you have to pull your weight, in order to keep that Salvation. And the Apostle Paul has said, any gospel that is not the true Gospel is not just a false gospel - it is no gospel at all.

Paul's letter is to destroy that idea – to combat this false teaching - and to remind the churches of Galatia and us today, that we are free; therefore we must live as free people. That doesn't mean permission to sin. That doesn't mean we are to exploit grace. But we are not to add one thing to the Gospel, nor take anything away. In the previous few verses, Paul has just hammered this idea home. In fact, three times he has said Salvation comes freely by grace and not by works. Three times he says it, in three different ways, to make sure that we understand the true Gospel. And that's where we pick it up in Galatians Chapter 2, beginning in verse 19 (ESV):

¹⁹ For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live to God.

That right there is the trade-off. Paul died to the Law. 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 made the trade! 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.

This is the problem with religion. There are some in the world who say you need to do more good deeds than bad deeds, so when you get reincarnated, you'll end up in a better life - hopefully someday living that perfect life, and escaping the cycle of rebirth. How do you know? How do you ever know if you've done enough? I can barely get through one hour without sinning at least in my heart; how do you do that for a whole lifetime? I don't think you can.

Some say you have to just abandon all your desires. Let go of the desires of this world, even the desire to love your children. If you let go of all desire, then you can experience Nirvana. But here's the problem: there are some desires that are good, if not holy: To love God, to love your children, your spouse, and to desire to do good. I think that worldview fails as well.

You see, in order for them to experience life - that is, a spiritual life - they have to give up their spiritual death trap. But that's hard. I'm convinced when it comes to a person's worldview and their religious viewpoints, these are very hard to give up.

I remember talking with a couple at a leadership training in Kansas City, Missouri. My wife and I were preparing our family to actually go do overseas missions. We were selected to become a church planting team through Short-Cycle Church Planting. And during this training, I met this couple who are going to China. This young woman was from China, and her family were Chinese. But she was struggling, because she knew how difficult it would be to go back and share the Good News with them. She knew that by declaring a new worldview, it meant that she had traded her old way of living and beliefs for a new way. And for her family, she was prepared for rejection, because of the gravity of the claims of Christianity. Because if Christianity were

true, then the thousands of years of religious activity were meaningless. All of their loved ones were dead and gone, and now in Hell. She realized this might be too large of a trade-off for her family. This was a burden - it was a trade-off - but Paul wants us to understand the power of this trade-off. Let's pick it up in Galatians 2:20 (ESV):

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.

You see, Paul got it. He was willing to give up the Law, which only condemned because no one could keep it perfectly. Instead, he died to the Law, so that he might live through Christ. You see, once Christ died, we too died to the Law. We died to ourselves. And we died to our sin. We traded off. We gave up, to go up, because Christ did it first, and He did it for us.

Remember what Jesus Christ said that he came to do with the Law. He told us in Matthew 5: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-20)

Because you and I could not fulfill the Law, Jesus Christ came to do it for us. As Ephesians says, we were dead in our trespasses, and dead people can do nothing. They are corpses. They cannot sing. They cannot dance. They cannot walk. They cannot roll over and even play dead, because they are dead. And they surely can't save themselves. This is why God became flesh - He came to fulfill the Law which we could never do. As Paul would say many times in different ways, we are a new creation in Christ. That's why Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." We trade off our old self for our new self. We trade off death for life. We trade off a slavery to sin, for a slavery to Christ. We trade off playing God, to finally just loving God.

As Paul said, Christ gave Himself up for us. I just want you to really think about that concept for a minute. The Son of God gave Himself up for me, for you. We who are enemies of God - we're saved or rescued from our sin, because God in the flesh died for you and me.

It's like spitting in someone's eye, kicking them when they're down, setting their house on fire, driving their car into a lake, and yet, they turn around and say, "I love you. I forgive you. Here are the keys to my Bentley and my mansion. Welcome home, son or daughter." That's what Christ has done for us. And as Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." We are changed forever. But in case we're confused about our Salvation, Paul tries to straighten us out one more time in verse 21:

²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Many people ask me, wasn't there another way to receive Salvation? Wasn't there a better way, other than having Christ die for our sins? Verses like Galatians 2:21 scream *No*. Paul says if righteousness were through the Law - in other words, if there was any other way to earn Salvation, to win Salvation, to earn back Salvation - then Christ died for no purpose. In other words, if there was any other way than Christ, His death was meaningless. It's a charade and a sham.

You see, when we play religion, and we turn to legalism, we are saying Christ's death was meaningless. We are attempting to nullify the grace of God. And this doesn't just hurt us - we bring other people down with us. There is no sin that only hurts you or me - there is always a ripple effect - and the sin of legalism attempts to nullify the grace of God, and pulls people away from God's love.

Today, wherever you are at, refocus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember, it is by grace, that is a gift, that you are saved. When we believe this, we will live like it. **We have made the trade. We are free, so let us live freely.**

N: Let me turn to Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney now, and talk about trade-offs. What trade-offs have each of you made as Christ followers?

C: I'm a big Bible thumper now, Nat, so I've lost some bodies. Well, you know, people have ideas about you, now that you're a Christ follower, or they assume you think a certain way. So I would say some of my relationships got weird, but I still talk to them, and we text, and hope that they'll come talk to me when the world problems are too much for them.

N: Yeah. It is interesting when we follow Christ that some people just can't handle it. And that's not a reason to not follow Christ. Well, for some, I suppose it is. And that's part of that evaluation process, you know: Is Christianity for you? Well, here's the cost. And what we talk about - and clearly, Paul is very clear - Salvation truly is free, and it's not like there are strings attached, but there are some strings attached - not in the legalistic sense - but we must know that when we declare our allegiance to Christ, some people aren't going to like it. Some people are going to reject the message; they're going to reject Him, and we are simply in the line of fire. Does that mean forever? Not necessarily, but that is hard, but we need to learn not to take it personally. And it seems like you've done that.

C: No, in fact, you know, I kind of know this isn't the end of it. So, you know, I hope my kids - you just hope you're raising them right. They have their own walks though, and God loves them more than I do. So I just hope nothing happens later on, where they reject it, and therefore reject me, you know? That's a possibility, but I know what's true, and I'm going to hold on to that. So we'll just keep on keeping on, all the way to the end of the race, right?

N: That's right. Arnie and I will hold you accountable in that, to make sure that you do hold fast, right? [Thank you.] Yeah. What about you, Arnie? I mean, life has been interesting for you. Do you feel like you've made trade-offs, as a follower of Christ?

A: No, I don't. To me, when you think of eternal life, and burning in Hell - really, you traded what? So I just, I don't - and maybe it's because I grew up in a very legalistic Christian school kind of background - where we had people come in, and in their testimony - they would tell us all about what they gave up for Jesus. But really, as I look at it now as a Christ follower, and an old guy, it's like death, burn in Hell, eternal life, but you didn't trade anything. I mean, you traded death for life. I mean, I have never felt I gave up anything for Jesus. It just, to me - it doesn't compute.

N: Well, I think what you've identified, is you actually did, but it just didn't compare. It was barely a real trade-off, because the return on your investment, so to speak, far outweighs what you gave up. And I think that's the reality, and I wish more Christians believed that, and adopted it, because it is so worth it - to follow Christ frees us to live in a way that is quite enjoyable. It's life to the fullest. And so, to trade off Hell for Heaven - that's a no brainer - but a lot of people are stuck in that struggle. And we hope that they won't be.

C: Well, we're in - we're Americans Nat. It's hard to say - we have it - we're so comfortable. I mean, we lose some buddies - that may or may not be great. You know? So in America, we haven't had to see family members get their literal heads chopped off, because they want to follow Jesus. You know, there's people who have their kids butchered in front of them, because they want to follow Christ. So it's just - I hear what Arnie's saying. Like, I haven't felt - other than you know - some people say some rude things every once in a while, because I'm in the public eye just through my husband, and with the books - but I don't really feel like I've given too much up, to be honest. I think in the future - that's what I think about - I think there's more to come.

N: Well, I think there is. And speaking of the future, I want to go off road to talk about something that we didn't even talk about in the message today, but I'm getting more and more questions about this online, and through our digital platforms: People are starting to wrestle and struggle with the upcoming election. The election is just under two weeks away, and the questions really revolve around politics. And when I think about it, I guess this does have to do with the trade-off, because our politics are subject to the Word of God. In other words, we may feel like we're a Republican first, or a Democrat first, or a Libertarian, or an Independent. But the reality is, if we are a follower of Christ, that trumps any political party. And so...

A: That "trumps" any political - Come on, Pastor Nat.

N: Hey, Hey, that just happened. It just flowed naturally. What can I say? That - I can't think of a better word than "trumps" - I'm in trouble now.

A: Yes you are, yes you are.

C: Well, I don't know - our government cannot save us - okay - only God can.

N: Right. So, but people are wondering, people are asking questions. How do I approach politics? What should I believe as a Christian? And how does that translate into politics? So I just want to open it up to you guys for a couple of minutes. What would you say to those people who are asking those question?

C: Well, just look at what we're called to do. The Apostles were never called as believers to demonstrate civil disobedience, to protest Rome for their unjust laws or brutal schemes. You know, as believers - we are to proclaim the Gospel – okay - so to live lives that reflect a changed life. With that being said, though, I want a strong economy. I like roads free of potholes. So I'm going to vote, but politics is merely a method God uses to accomplish His will. [Well said.] So you're going to vote, okay. And God's going to do what He wants to do. And whether that candidate is in the office to slow things up, or to speed things up, or slow it down - we do our part by voting for the candidate that we want. You know, I have my opinions. And if you were to ask me, I'll tell you what they are. But most of the time, Nat, I stick to the Gospel message. I remind them that God's will is going to be done. I think it's our responsibility to vote, and the Gospel is where we're going to find real change, right? Candidates promise change. The real change comes in the Gospel.

N: And that's exactly it. It is the real change that matters. And that's what the Gospel promises. And one thing we have to remember, is when we read the Bible, there is a bridge that we have to cross from their time to our time - the situation that they were in to the situation we're in now. And that's what we're taught in seminary - is the principlizing bridge - just a fancy way of saying there's a gap between them and us. And so how do we apply the principles in Scripture to us today? Because the society that they were living in - let's say at the time of Peter's writings - they were different than they are today. We live here in the United States in a democratic society. So we have the opportunity to vote and effect change that they never could. And so we have to wrestle, but what we would encourage - what I would encourage you to do, is to go back to the Bible. Turn back to the Bible, and see what it says, and evaluate candidates based on that - evaluate your political persuasions based on that. But I would say every area of life needs to go back to the Bible. What does the Bible have to say? Not what I think; not what I want it to say; not piecemeal of faith – no. What does the Bible say as a whole? And allow that to drive how we view and think about everything else. Arnie, what do you think?

A: I think politics is politics is politics is politics, and my focus is elsewhere. And yes, it's important. It's always been important. I can remember back in the day, when people thought it was the end of the world, when I was a kid - when a Catholic of some kind was running for President, and people were hysterical, because it was going to be the end of everything. So I don't get all worked up. I think we're here for a purpose. If you want to be a part of social action, and God's called you to do that, that's great. Support that a hundred percent. My calling is different, and you know, it is what it is - me and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

N: That's right. Well, we would all say, and we would all agree: Keep the main thing, the main thing. And that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Okay. Leaders come - leaders go - God is

sovereign. That is always true. What we are responsible for is how we react to the situation. And the best way we can react is by sharing the Gospel, because that is what's going to change the world.