

The Heart of Paul's Theology

LESSON
TWO

Paul and the Galatians
Discussion Forum



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The Heart of Paul's Theology

Lesson Two: Paul and the Galatians

Discussion Forum

With
Dr. Reggie M. Kidd

Students
Graham Buck
Dusty Hart

Question 1:

How is our interpretation of Galatians affected by its date and original audience?

Student: Now Reggie, in the lesson, you said that Galatians was probably written after Paul's 1st missionary journey but before the Council of Jerusalem. Now, I've heard some people have different takes on when the letter was actually written. How would our interpretations of the book differ if say it was written at a later time or perhaps even to a different audience?

Dr. Kidd: So in the first place if it was written not to the southern folks then we don't have as much information about what the background issues are. We have to kind of just do some guesswork from the letter itself but if we can locate it right after the 1st missionary journey to the folks that were involved in the 1st missionary journey then we can better piece together exactly what happened. In the second place, if it was written later and to the northern Galatian people, we have a challenge in just trying to figure out why, if the council in Jerusalem in chapter 15 dealt so straightforwardly with the whole question of should Gentiles get circumcised, why Paul didn't just end the conversation by citing that letter when he wrote this, why he didn't just talk about that decree when he wrote this letter. So if we date it later, the scholars who do that think it would have been written right around the time of the letter to the Romans so what interpreters then do is just read Galatians more like side by side with the letter to the Romans. And that is interesting in its own regard but still I think it makes more sense of the whole scenario between Acts and the letter to the Galatians to see this letter as coming after the 1st missionary journey before the Jerusalem council and several years before the letter to the Romans. And that's interesting because it means Paul's whole concern about works of the law as opposed to faith in Christ is an abiding one that carried through his ministry.

Question 2: **Why did Paul reject the unbelieving Jews in Acts 13?**

Student: In Acts 13 Paul turns from the unbelieving Jews and begins to direct his ministry toward the Gentiles. Isn't it a bit harsh that Paul rejects the unbelieving Jews in this way?

Dr. Kidd: Well Dusty, I think the tone that we should hear in Paul's voice when he says, "We turn to the Gentiles," is not really so much harshness as it is profound disappointment. Now we need to note that Paul never turns decisively away from his Jewish countrymen. His program continues to be throughout his ministry to go to whatever Jews he can find to talk with first. Whether it's Lydia and company alongside the river in Philippi or whether there is a synagogue, he will go. And what his hope is is that his fellow Jews will see what he has come to see, quite to his own surprise, that all their hopes and dreams for being the bearers of God's grace and mercy and justice and holiness to the world has been realized through the Messiah Jesus. And he is going to go to the Gentiles with or without them. He always hopes that he can take Jews with him on that mission. And he is somebody who has always understood God's promises to Israel are the matter of God's promise to Abraham, to bless the nations through Israel. He thought that that was some far off thing. He certainly wouldn't have thought it would happen through a crucified Messiah and his world just gets turned upside down, and he is just insistent on continuing to go to his people when he can to bring them the along, to fulfill...well, the terms that he uses in Acts 13 are those of Isaiah 49, to be a light to the Gentiles and he just hopes throughout that his people will get it about the Messiah and come with him.

Student: So is that kind of almost like over-speak in such a way, saying like "I'm shaking the dust off my clothes to the Jews and turning to the Gentiles" as a way of urging his Jewish brothers and sisters to see?

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, very much so. It's like, "Okay, if you don't get it now then I am going to go and I'm going to pursue this ministry as hard as I can." I hope that as he writes in Romans 11 later on that his people will be provoked to jealousy to say, "Wow. Look what we are missing out on. We need to get in on this." You know folks like myself who are from a Gentile background really need to take a hard look at Paul and recognize that the impatience that Westerners eventually developed about Jews not getting it about the gospel and the whole history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, pogroms and violence against Jews and shunning who has no basis in the New Testament at all. And especially in this one who said, "I would just as soon be cut off from my people" and never wrote them off and never wrote or spoke harshly even when he was writing and speaking with great profound disappointment. But it was always a disappointment that was tense with "Oh lord, have mercy on me and have mercy on my countrymen."

Question 3:

Why did Paul use such strong language in his letter to the Galatians?

Student: Now Reggie, Paul uses some pretty harsh language in the letter to the Galatians.

Dr. Kidd: Oh yeah. "Oh, you foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?"

Student: Yeah, I mean it's some pretty hard stuff. Is there anything particularly heinous about what the Galatians were doing? Is he just talking in a way to make it sound big or is there really something that's nasty going on here?

Dr. Kidd: Well, hello! Jesus hung on the cross, shed his blood to cover our sins and these guys want to have believers shed their blood to express their solidarity with Jesus. And Paul's going, "Don't you get it? Your blood would never suffice and that's why he had to shed his blood because your blood would never be enough." And to think that it would call upon anybody else to shed their blood after Christ has shed his blood is just, well, it gets the big anathema. It gets the big, "Don't go there." So in this respect he thinks a lot like the writer to the Hebrews who goes, "All the other priests have to keep doing their job over and over and over again. And what marks our priest is that his work has been done once. He underwent the whole curse." For him that means whatever is going to undo that work really needs to be done away with.

Question 4:

Are any modern errors comparable to the errors in Galatia?

Student: So Reggie, is there any similar false teachings today that compare to the magnitude of those teachings that Paul was addressing in Galatia?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I think the rule of thumb, Dusty, is if I am being told that what Christ did on the cross was good but not quite enough and that I need to add to it then, you know, you are in this Paul danger zone. And that means, how do I confess my sin? Because I continue to sin but how do I express my sorrow over my sin? Do I simply acknowledge it? Well, Paul I think would say "Okay." But do I go punish myself? Do I take a knife and cut myself? Do I take some sort of whip and beat myself on the back? And unfortunately, I have known people that they kind of feel like they mess up so bad, how could God love them anymore? And what can they do to get themselves back into God's favor? That kind of thinking is a fundamental misunderstanding of the situation that exists because now we are sons and daughters. We are accepted in the beloved and we are loved not because we shed our blood but because he shed his blood for us. And another thing is these people want to go back under the law and what they are going to wind up doing is adding to God's commandments. And whenever you add to God's commandments and make our

relationship with him a matter of following a code instead of pursuing a relationship, then I think you are going to have Paul coming down on you. When it becomes not a matter of his work in us through the Holy Spirit because we are now clean and he indwells in us then I think you are going to have Paul getting all upset.

Question 5:

Why did Paul oppose Peter so strongly in Galatians 2?

Student: So what Paul is talking about is that it's not about us shedding our blood in addition to Jesus shedding his blood for our sins and it's not about us adding rules to God's law, that those things are separate from his gospel. But there is a section when he is talking about his interaction with Peter that Peter was eating with the Gentiles and having a great time and then these guys from Jerusalem come up and then he separates from the Gentiles. And Paul seems to lay into them pretty good. Is there something else going on there as well?

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, I think that's very perceptive because that really does become the occasion for Paul to get all over the Galatians. Because he connects some dots, the implication is if you haven't gone all the way and shed your own blood and come under the law in this respect you are not a true citizen of Israel. And God had already dealt with Peter about who his true Israel is, who his true people are. They are all those who belong by faith to Israel through Israel's Messiah, Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike. That was straightened out for Peter back in Acts 10 and 11 when the angel appeared to him and showed him that God declared all foods to be clean. And he went to Cornelius' house, the Gentile Roman centurion, preached the gospel. God baptized those people in the Spirit, gave them faith and didn't require them to become circumcised. And as far as Peter was concerned, they are just as much Jews as I am and Peter understood that.

And then he comes up to Antioch where Paul has been ministering and he has full table fellowship with Gentile Christians. And thereby fully accepts them into the people of God just like him under the same terms, the shedding of Jesus' blood. But then when certain people come from Jerusalem out of concern, or concern for their consciences, out of fear of them, or whatever, he withdraws from table fellowship with these Gentiles. And Paul realizes the implications of that are Christ's blood was not enough for them. Somehow they would have to add to that work and become like full ethnic Jews. And what has happened in Paul's whole theology is his whole view of God has had to be reconfigured to realize that Jesus Christ is just as much Lord as the Father. So he has re-juggled his conception of God himself to include Jesus in the deity. He has had to adjust his sense of how Israel fulfills her destiny to reach the nations. It's through Jesus. And he realizes now that Israel has always been a spiritual concept, a root, a tree that includes natural branches and now grafted in branches. So it's very, very important for him that there be this picture of one people of God, the true Israel made up of all who trust in Christ Israel's Messiah.

Question 6:**Did Paul believe that God had different plans for Israel and the church?**

Student: So there's not like you've got Israel on the one hand and then the church on the other, sort of two roads kind of headed the same direction that someday will meet up again?

Dr. Kidd: No, for Paul he sees it completely differently than that. He sees the whole narrative of Old Testament history being the bringing together of all of God's promises for his people through Jesus the Messiah. And now everybody who belongs to Jesus the Messiah belongs to the Father because Jesus the Messiah is the one true obedient, faithful Israelite who receives God's favor for his obedient life, for his keeping the moral law keep the Mosaic law, living in obedience to his heavenly Father. All of those who belong to him are covered by him and are just as much citizens of the kingdom of God, just as much citizens of Israel as those who are ethnically so.

Question 7:**Why did Paul reject circumcision in Galatians but later allow Timothy to be circumcised?**

Student: Reggie, in Galatians 5, Paul says that if you receive circumcision then Christ will have no value or benefit. But yet later in his ministry he allows Timothy to be circumcised, can you help me understand that?

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, well when we were talking about how if you add the shedding of your blood to what Christ did, well, that just doesn't work. For Paul, once we are clear about not needing to shed our own blood and we got that straight, then he is perfectly happy to talk with Jews about continuing the practice of circumcision. In fact, Paul is accused time and again of going around telling Jews to stop being Jews but Paul never does that. It's important to understand that Timothy is a Jew on his mother's side. So I guess the real question is why he was never circumcised in the first place and what Paul does is have him regularized in the eyes of the Jewish community. Now it's not like Timothy has to get circumcised to be saved but in order for Paul to gain any sort of access to a Jewish community that's already hearing him wrongly saying that Jews should not practice Judaism. It's really important for him to have a half-Jew who is part of his ministry team to show that he is a pious Jew even at the same time that he is a follower of Christ.

Student: So is that kind of like later on in his ministry towards the end when he is in Jerusalem and he takes the Nazirite vow, that he is not doing away with Judaism per se more that Christ is that fulfillment of the Jewish faith?

Dr. Kidd: Yes, he would have Jews understand that the fulfillment of the story that they have been birthed in, that they have been immersed in, and that has shaped them is Jesus the Messiah. And they don't have to step out of that story to have a relationship with Jesus the Messiah.

Question 8:

Should the modern church blend and reconcile its various cultures?

Student: So Reggie, this letter then seems to be written to a church that's having a hard time mixing cultures. You've got the Jews in the church and you've got the Gentiles, and trying to really figure out what does it mean to be the church? It's not just something that the early church dealt with is it? I mean, we have a lot of different cultures in the church today. How should we go about blending?

Dr. Kidd: Well Graham, it is important I think to realize that for Paul the blending of cultures wasn't secondary. It was at the heart of his gospel. And that is why he says so strongly here in Galatians 3, "All those who have put on Christ, all those who have been baptized in him have put him on and are heirs." And that means there is no Jew/Gentile, male/female, slave/free. And he really did expect that to get worked out in the hard stuff of life, of Jews and Gentiles learning how to love each other, of slave and free learning how to love each other, slave and free, rich and poor, and people from all kinds of ethnic backgrounds, and certainly that does mean different tastes and different preferences. Because part of what he was seeing was this great vision that goes back...like at the end of Psalm 22. All of the ends of the earth, all the families of the earth as well as the faithful sons of Jacob and Israel, those who are rich, those who are poor, those who have already died, those who have not been born being this great assembly that the Messiah would bring together. And yes, it's no different today. People are called in the skin that God gave them, with the color hair, the color eyes, the same ethnic background that they have. But they are also called to relate to people who look, think, feel, speak a lot differently than they do around the person of Jesus Christ and to have a higher loyalty than just those backgrounds.

Student: So it's kind of like we are who God has made us to be and each one of us being different can see a little bit different perspective of God and when we interact together we get a more full picture of who he is.

Dr. Kidd: Well, as long as Jesus is at the center of it. I mean I have been in fellowships throughout the course of my years as a Christian where there have been really deep differences. You know, some of us are tongue speakers and some are not tongue speakers. Some of us feel like we should only sing Psalms and we shouldn't have instruments to them and others feel like we need to sing the hippest music around. Some of us really feel called to a ministry of evangelism and others feel that we are called to ministry of social justice. Some people seem to have the gift of no matter what they do they make money, and other people can't, you know? They

would know how to spend it if they had it but they don't know how to make it. And it's so easy for us to develop our spiritual relationships around lines of affinity and common likes and common stations in life. But the whole call of the gospel is to orient our lives around something else. It's not just gathering people around me that are different just for the sake of difference. It's a matter of finding that which really binds and that's the cross of Jesus Christ.

And so it means being committed to relationships of heroic forbearance and saying, "You know, I really don't, you know. I suspect I know how you are going to vote for in this coming election and that person stands for things that I think are totally wrong. But because you and I are brothers in Christ I want to understand what it is about that person that attracts you. I might have something to learn from you." And across the board, if we define our relationship primarily around the blood that we share that Jesus shed for us, and the Spirit who taught us, as Paul says, "to love one another and in that love finding the law being fulfilled," well, then I think we sense his pleasure and we know the kind of community that he has called us to be. And you know what? And then we become a city on a hill the light of which can't be hidden.

Question 9:

What is the relationship between law and grace?

Student: Reggie, I have heard people say, "I am under grace so I don't have to obey the law." Can you help me understand the relationship between law and grace? What the expectation is and how Paul helps us understand that in Galatians?

Dr. Kidd: Yeah Dusty, people who say that have kind of a distant memory or faint echo of what Paul is doing in Galatians but it's really off. In the first place for Paul, the law itself was a gift of God's grace. It was the law that helped people see their need for a redeemer. It was also the law that gave the charter for, well, here's what a people looks like when they are formed into the image of God and when they together are living as his people, as his kingdom, as his society, as his city, as his family. For Paul the concern is the way that the law's gracious function of being the incubator for the birth and the career and the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's done its job. It's brought us to Christ. And to the extent that it convicts us personally of our sin by showing us that we can't keep the commandments, it's done a very gracious job for us.

On the far side of that, for Paul, the law still stands because he can sum up the whole law in "Love your neighbor as yourself." And he's got this sense of the direction that our lives are going to go as they are transformed by God's Spirit who has made us alive and is making Christ's life active in us is that it is going to be in the direction of doing what the law calls for. But with the Galatians in particular, it's important for them to understand that the dynamic of that transformation, the transformation of the person into one who bears the image of God, is not through this, "I must keep these

commandments.” It’s through responding to the person who has embodied God’s love for us, receiving his work of redemption on the cross and the grace of forgiveness that we get because of his sacrifice. And then walking in the Holy Spirit who comes to live in us and to make Christ’s life effective in us. And so that’s why he talks in Galatians 5 about the fruit of the Spirit being love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control. Then he says, “Against these things there is no law.” He wants these folks to lean into the person and work of Jesus Christ, and his presence among them in the Holy Spirit and to learn to live in love. It’s like, you know when you first learn to drive you read the driver’s handbook but the point is to learn how to drive. And at some point you need to get behind the wheel and drive. And these folks have all that they need in order to drive and they are going like, “Okay, I am going to read the driver’s manual while I drive.” And he goes, “You guys are going to crash if you do that.” All that the law needs to teach you is in you. The text is there and now it’s been embodied in Jesus. So live in him. And you know what? You will fulfill the law and you will find that you are being made over into the image of Christ.

Question 10:

Is it possible to place too much emphasis on grace and not enough on law?

Student: So in that sense law isn’t like this bad thing. It is good but the Galatians are having a problem with following it when they should be living by faith. Is there any place where Paul kind of does the other thing, where people are living too much without the law and so he tells them go back and look at that and do that?

Dr. Kidd: What we will see two lessons from now when we get to the Corinthians is people who are doing exactly the opposite. They think that they have so much arrived at the great *eschaton* that they don’t need...In fact, in 1 Corinthians 4 he says, “You need to be careful to not go beyond what is written.” And throughout 1 Corinthians, he is drawing them back to lessons that they need to glean from Israel’s experience in the wilderness and particular commandments that God had given them. And by contrast in Galatians 5:6, he says, “Look folks, the only thing that matters is faith working through love.” With the Corinthians, in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians he is going to say, “Look, the only thing that matters is keeping the commandments of God.”

And here is where we kind of get back to Paul’s whole eschatology thing. What makes him so profoundly good as a pastor is that he reads people’s hearts and he reads their hearts in light of his sense of God’s timeline. And the Galatians are trying to turn the clock back and go back under the law as though Christ had not come, as though it was necessary for some other shedding of blood. And he’s going, “You guys don’t get it.” And to come at them with a lot of ordinance keeping would just be to confirm them in their sickness. With the Corinthians, they think that they are so far beyond the constraint of the Scriptures that he has to remind them of how much

wisdom there is for us in Scripture. And so he calls them out of a, sort of a pretend future that they are in and he says, “No you need to get back into the sloppy already not yet” where because we are still sinners, God’s law still tells us what we need to know about who God is. And if we think we need to live apart from his rules we are kidding ourselves.

Question 11:

Did Paul inappropriately interpret the Old Testament in light of Jesus?

Student: Now Reggie, I’ve heard people say that Paul does some kind of funky stuff with Old Testament in Galatians. Like in chapter 3, he is talking about Abraham’s seed saying that he wasn’t talking about plural seeds but only one and obviously that can only mean Christ. But then they say but the original meaning was plural and Paul is just reading Jesus into the Old Testament. Is that what he is doing here?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I think he has learned to read the Old Testament in light of its fulfillment in Jesus. But when you go back to Genesis, I think you find on a closer read that he is reading the text for what happens in Genesis. In Genesis 12 and 15, God gives the promise of seed. And you know, it’s a singular noun but it’s got a multiple meaning. It’s got a plural meaning. He tells Abraham, “Your seed is going to be like the stars in the sky, the sand on the seashore,” you know, innumerable. But Abraham understands immediately that that promise of multiple seed is going to have to be done through a singular seed. Thus the little scenario that plays out where he has Ishmael through Hagar because he won’t wait for the son through whom it’s going to get done. And then by Genesis 17 and 22 it’s very clear that we are talking about a singular seed. It’s Isaac and that is why the scene on Mount Horeb in chapter 22 is so dramatic because the means by which God would fulfill the promise “plural seed” looks like it’s just going to be aborted because God has told them to kill the one seed through whom it can be done. Now, you know, fast forward and Paul finally sees that the singular seed through whom God is going to bless the nations has been Jesus. And so he takes that dense complex idea and packs it all together in Galatians 3. But it’s not because he’s not reading the original context. He does see that that original context was a tremendously fertile one itself.

Question 12:

Why did Paul allegorize the stories of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4?

Student: Now that kind of makes me think about another question because Paul then goes to talk about the seed through the children. He talks about Hagar and Ishmael, and Sarah and Isaac and you’ve got the bondwoman and then the free woman. Is what seems to be kind of a funky thing that he does talking about allegory and that driven by his reading of the singular and the plural seed?

Dr. Kidd: Again, what Paul is seeing is that in the history of redemption, the actual story as it unfolded in its original context is pointing to truths that are being realized right in Paul's own lifetime. And the irony is, he sees in those who are championing physical Israel, earthly Jerusalem in his day, as being the culmination of the spirit that was at play in the attempt to bring about God's promises through the flesh in the Hagar-Ishmael relationship. And what you have back in Genesis is the attempt to force God's hand to fulfill his promises through the flesh and not through God's own time and God's own way, through God's own Spirit. So you know, Ishmael goes out and winds up recipients of his own line of promise. He was promised that he would be head of a great nation, in fact where Paul had spent time in Arabia during his three year school in the discipleship of Christ, so to speak. There are a number of levels of irony here. It so happens that Mount Sinai, where the law was delivered, is down in Arabia. So Paul was able to set up this contrast between these two Jerusalem's, an earthly Jerusalem and a heavenly Jerusalem. And the people of promise who are in the line of Isaac are now the church. And the people of the flesh, the people who think that God's plan for redemption has to be forced by us and not done by God that we respond to in faith, originally that was Ishmael. And now it's those who are paying a lot of attention to the earthly Jerusalem.

Student: So the people that once were truly of the faith who looked to physical Jerusalem having not lifted their eyes now to Jesus almost become slave children like Ishmael?

Dr. Kidd: Yes, and that's part of Paul's heartache for his fellow countrymen.

Question 13:

Are there any problems with under-realized eschatology in the modern church?

Student: Reggie, are there examples in the modern church today where churches under-realize the kingdom of God? And just thinking through that, are there problems? What kind of problems would that bring up?

Dr. Kidd: Well, you guys may have some thoughts on this as well. I mean, in the US church scene, I think there is a lot of legalism. I think there are a lot of churches that are happy for people not to learn Scripture deeply enough for themselves to make a lot of informed decisions. And it almost seems like I try to keep people in spiritually infancy. "Don't worry about that. We'll make all those decisions for you."

Student: Yeah, I've been to churches where you kind of get this feeling like if you start digging into the Scriptures and start using all these theological terms like it's almost elitist. And so don't use any words except the words that are in the Bible. Even if we try and like explain what those mean we are going beyond what the Scriptures say and we need to stick to that.

Dr. Kidd: And do you feel like you have ever seen stuff that is under-realized? I know that is kind of a different way of thinking about things for a lot of people?

Student: I'm blank. I mean, I'm trying to think of... The only thing I can say to connect with that is a lack of discipleship but I don't know how that connects, so...

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, well for a long time believers were not really challenged to learn Scripture for themselves and to be able to read it. The Scripture was thought to be a closed book with too many possible interpretations. And so you needed a magisterial church to tell you what it means. And for instance, as lovely as stained glass is in big cathedrals, if stained glass is there to tell the story but doesn't invite me... but I'm kept illiterate and I am not brought into a place where I can read Scripture for myself and experience what Paul values in the letter to the Galatians about the spirit of God working in you, and not just in the aggregate but in the individuals personally, people are just stunted in their growth and he says "It's for freedom that you have been set free." And so a lot of people's experience of Christianity around the world and over history has been just locked into permanent infancy because the church has not assumed the task and the responsibility of teaching and training people so that they can make wise informed judgments, so that they can take on the work of the ministry for themselves.

Student: I think another way that I have seen it work out too is that when you have this belief that the kingdom of God is something that's going to come primarily in the future, there is almost like this sense that we are just going to sit around in our huddles and wait for that to come. And there's really not that much interaction in the world because if the kingdom is something that is coming later we just need to be prepared for it, rather than kind of having this thought that the kingdom is in a very real sense here and now, and going out and working is part of God's call in our lives.

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, the whole mentality that says, "The ship is going down and there is no point in polishing the metal on a sinking ship," says that the kingdom has not come in enough of the fullness that Paul is talking about in the letter to the Galatians. And it's interesting that in this letter he talks about doing good to all people, especially the household of faith. But it does include doing good to all people and Paul's sense of fulfillment of God's promises in this day would, I think, create more of a climate of going into the public square, exercising civic virtue and responsibilities as citizens and people who are called to different kinds of vocations and seeking to impact the world in the name of the king whose kingdom has in large measure come.

So yeah, there is a place where that's an area in which eschatology is under-realized in our church. Often in churches there is this assumption that here is what a Christian culture would look like and we sort of freeze Jesus into this mold. The second commandment about not making graven images is not just a literal thing. It's a call for us to consider everything about what we do in church as a creating, as a construct

of a certain image of what God looks like, and what the Christian life looks like. And many churches will take on sort of their own little folk culture, where it's setting boundaries that keep different people kind of out. There may be churches that are very republican in their feel and make people who like are more democratically oriented feel very much on the outside. And there are also churches that feel such passion for kind of more justice and mercy issues that make like business people feel really weird and not welcome. I think one of the marks of the church that has this...and that is an under-realized eschatology that is afraid to let the Spirit bring together people of vastly different kinds of persuasions on particular kinds of social and life issues. And what Paul wants for us is to make Christ the center of our relationships and then go together to the Scriptures to keep examining what his wisdom would be for us today. And that's part of what is it like to live in this "already not yet" overlap.

Question 14:

What problems are associated with over-realized eschatology?

Student: So we have been talking about under-realized eschatology just makes me curious, you know like what sort of problems that would arise of an over-realized eschatology in the church today. How would you address that?

Dr. Kidd: Well, we will see a lot of that when we talk about the Corinthians. But whenever the church feels like, "Oh, we're beyond Scripture and we can make up...not in "you're too ignorant so just let us tell you" but when we don't feel compelled and constrained by this particular story and we can kind of make up our theology for ourselves and recast God in our own image and then go live as though there are no rules and therefore, you know, lots of misbehavior, then you are in that over-realized sort of setting.

Student: So it's a real tension that we are called to, that we shouldn't be too much over on this under-realized side nor should we think more highly of ourselves than we ought but that we live in this really fine line tension that some of the promises have come true and some are yet to come. And so it just takes faith.

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, it takes a lot of faith. It takes boldness and humility. It takes graciousness and audaciousness at one and the same time, and it's a life that has to be lived out on our knees.

Question 15:

How do we live in light of the new creation?

Student: Reggie, Paul in Galatians 6 talks about the new creation that that's really what matters. Practically speaking, could you speak about what does that look like

in our everyday life, at our work, at home, with our friends? What does this living in light of new creation really mean?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I think Dusty, Paul has a couple things going on in Galatians that are really pretty spectacular. One is the sense that we individually have been personally made alive. We were dead. Now we are alive. So he can say back in Galatians 5:6, "Circumcision is nothing; un-circumcision is nothing. What counts is faith working through love." He really believes that we are different people. We have this whole new capacity to be loving, to be patient, to be kind, to be good that this was not true of us before. And then the second thing that he wants the Galatians to see is that beyond just themselves in the world things are different. And that's where he says like what you just quoted, Galatians 6:15, "There is neither circumcision nor un-circumcision but a new creation." And just before that he's talked about how to me the world has been crucified and I have been crucified to the world. So, I'm dead and I'm alive. But also there is an old world that is dead and what has happened is that the Holy Spirit has been set loose on planet earth in a way that just wasn't the case in the old covenant. So I think for Paul new creation is his shorthand for the coming of the kingdom to the extent that it has come as opposed to being not yet here in its fullness.

It's a shorthand for the invasion of the Holy Spirit showing up on the earth that once was, well, C.S. Lewis would call, "the silent planet." Now the earth is the place where the Holy Spirit has been put in play to bring redemption through the preaching of the gospel as we go and we do evangelism and we consider the incredible history of missions since the 1st century church from Jerusalem in Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. That process is just going on and on and on. And Christ is taking people captives and nations captive and people groups captive. We are still seeing new creation being played out and it also means not only do I as an individual live a life, faith working through love in every aspect of my life, but I live out that love out in the world, in the marketplace, in my calling, in the law courts, on Wall Street. And I can expect the Holy Spirit to be with me effecting in some measure as I seek to live out what it is to bear God's image, his new creation.

So my call... I mean, I'm not going to save the world. The church isn't going to just save the world by political means and by taking control but in ways that are really subtle and often really hard to see. And sometimes in ways that are profound like when William Wilberforce felt called not to be minister of the gospel in church but to minister the gospel in parliament and year after year after year would put forth legislation calling for the end of slavery in England and finally got to see this measure of justice being brought into effect. That's part of new creation, is believers believing that we can expect to see God taking ground in our day.

Student: So there is a real sense in which — cause we were talking about under-realized eschatology and over-realized eschatology earlier — that we as the church through our actions and our words and just our everyday life, we are in a sense trying to push that coming of the kingdom, if you will, kind of push that forward.

And that God is actually using us to make his kingdom more real in the world than it was before.

Dr. Kidd: We pray it and then we live it knowing that it's for him to decide what he is going to do and you know we can see an ebb and flow in history. Sometimes the kingdom seems to be on the rise and sometimes the kingdom seems to be in the retreat. And we just don't have God's vision. All we have is his heart and his spirit in us. And sometimes we are privileged to live in a time of great suffering, which is building the foundation for what God may do in the future. And sometimes we live in these scary moments when we look around and we go, "My goodness, we are like in charge." And we have to be stewards of this responsibility and use the power that's ours for good instead of for evil, to serve others instead of to serve ourselves.

So new creation I think along with the idea of faith working through love are a really nice short-hand in Paul for the way that he wants the Galatians to understand that despite their obsession with the commandments that they are misunderstanding in the first place that God wants to work on this personal level and then out there in the world. The Corinthians that we are going to get to in a couple of lessons down the road, they have a very different problem. They are sure they've been remade. They are sure that Christ rules and Christ reigns. So they have these perspectives down here, the personal then what's going out there in the world. They think they got that but they are doing it totally detached from the specifics of what God says about what life is supposed to look like. So interestingly, when Paul does his "not circumcision, not not circumcision" thing he doesn't talk about faith working through love. He doesn't talk about new creation. He talks about he talks about new creation but it's in another...it's in its own way. What he talks to the Corinthians about is the need to keep the commandments of God, to read the Word and to live it out. But again, back to the Galatians, they need to understand that a whole new force is in play, that Jesus' death and resurrection means life and history and everything is different. And we can live with a much more vibrant robust ethic about what it is to be his people in the world around us.

Question 16:

What is the connection between the Holy Spirit and living by faith?

Student: It sounds like, and correct and me if I'm wrong, that the Galatians were legalistic and they were stuck in the law. Is it in a mechanical kind of way?

Dr. Kidd: Yes, I think so.

Student: Okay, so it makes sense...

Dr. Kidd: And, I think they were wrestling with — and I alluded to this in the lesson — I think they were really wrestling with, how do I tame the beast? How do I gain

control over my life? And they had been turning to the law and to circumcision as a means by which to get assurance of their salvation, to feel okay. And they were trying to do it by rules and the law instead of leaning more radically and more boldly into the finished work of Christ on the cross for them and the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit in their lives to enable them to live boldly, freely and as forgiven sons and daughters. But I interrupted.

Student: No, what I was thinking is in order to do that, to live in light of this new creation that Paul is calling the Galatians to, that it would take great faith. I am just curious how the Holy Spirit plays into that. Like can you help me make the connection between this faith that Paul is essentially asking them to get away from, this legalistic bent to begin to live in boldness, and how does the Holy Spirit...?

Dr. Kidd: That is a great question. Paul is going to articulate this more straightforwardly in 1 Corinthians 15 and there he talks about how the second man or the last Adam, Christ has become life-giving Spirit. And that's a condensed way of talking about a transition in Jesus' own ministry to his church. On the earth, he ministered in bodily form and was confined to one place at a time. And he talks about this in his final discourse in John's gospel and he tells them, "Don't be sad cause I'm going away. I am going away so that you can do greater things than you have been able to do because I'm not going to leave you alone. I'm going to send a *paraclete*. I'm going to send an advocate so that I can be not just beside you but I can be in you." And then Peter talks about the way — Peter in his sermon in Jerusalem at Pentecost, talks about how at his ascension Jesus goes to the right hand of the Father and receives the Holy Spirit and then pours the Spirit out on the church. Well, for Paul that is the Spirit of Christ that is on the earth. When the Holy Spirit gets poured out on the church then the Holy Spirit starts to dwell in us and make us new. The Holy Spirit isn't some entity apart from Christ. What the Holy Spirit has done is to come and to bring the things of Christ to us to use John's language.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to make us new and to make Christ alive in us and so, back to Galatians, Paul, his anxiety, his prayer, his desire for the Galatians is that — remember what it says in Galatians 4 — that Christ be more perfectly formed in you. Well, what he is talking about is the Holy Spirit at work in us, making us new and, it's like he says, it's faith working through love and that's the work of the Holy Spirit and then we are called to live out the new creation. And that is as those were indwelt by the Holy Spirit and we are called to live in a world where the Holy Spirit is at work bringing a measure of justice, bringing people to himself, folding them into the church and then ruling and governing the church. That is Christ dwelling in the church. So the Holy Spirit has everything to do with it because the Holy Spirit is the means by which and the way in which Christ himself is present to the church and working in the world.

Question 17:**What is the role of the Holy Spirit at the present time?**

Student: So when the Paraclete typically is translated as “counselor”, does that do it justice in terms of what that really means?

Dr. Kidd: Well, it says part of it as it's a legal term. It's one who will come and be our advocate and for Paul — that's John's language — for Paul we are ones who were unrighteous and now we have been made righteous. And so it's the Holy Spirit. For John the Holy Spirit is going to come and convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. And that's part of the Holy Spirit's work and that's an Old Testament concept of God coming to press his case against the...his covenant lawsuit against a wicked and sinful world. For Paul, the presence of the Holy Spirit is there because we are no longer convicts as far as God is concerned. Jesus has taken the wrath for us. He has been cursed as he laid out his arms on the cross. And because we are now seen by God as being righteous, the Holy Spirit can dwell in us. Now we are holy as far as he is concerned. He is, if you will, taking back ground in our hearts and making us new, sanctifying us and then working out in our lives.

Question 18:**Why did Paul emphasize his authority so greatly in Galatians?**

Student: Reggie, in the first part of Galatians, Paul spends a fairly large portion defending his own authority and you can kind of get the feeling like he is almost being a little macho and saying, you know, “It's my way or the highway.” But earlier on in his ministry, he submitted to the authority of the church, whether it's at Antioch or Jerusalem. Where does the final authority lie in when it comes to the church?

Dr. Kidd: Okay Graham, in the case of the Galatians, if we have the timeline right, it's important to realize that God is dealing with some brand spanking new Christians who are really confused about where they should go. Paul had ministered to them. They had heard his message, believed it, received Christ, received the Holy Spirit and then he is gone. And now they are hearing people saying, “Yeah, Jesus is good, really good. But Paul didn't really tell you everything you need to know. He was kind of playing favorites with you and he wanted you to like him too much so he didn't really tell you what bold obedience required. And Paul knew that he should have told you there was some fine print and that the boys in the congregation need to get circumcised.”

And a lot of what Paul is doing is reestablishing their confidence in listening to him and, like you say, Paul is not a lone ranger. Even as he writes this letter he has agreed to go down to Jerusalem to have the church talk it out and I think that he has every confidence that they are going to decide the right thing about circumcision. And yet at

the same time, he knows that he has been called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He knows that Gentiles do not have to get circumcised and he is just out of his mind concerned that some of the folks back in Galatians are going to pull the snippers out before this council takes place. And so he wants to remind them of who it is who has preached the gospel to them. He wants to remind them of what they have experienced of the goodness of the Lord and he wants to remind them of the slavery that they would be going back under if they would let themselves do this.

Question 19:

How do we resolve tensions between the gospel and the teachings of the church?

Student: So if you are talking about the timeline that he is going down to the council at Jerusalem, which ultimately does side with him, right?

Dr. Kidd: Yes.

Student: So he is not trying to be a maverick but he is really trying to be faithful to the gospel. So if we think about it for ourselves today when we find ourselves in tension between what's going on and what the church is saying and what the gospel says. How do we work those tensions out?

Dr. Kidd: Well, you make a good point. Paul had, himself, indicated to the Galatians, "Look, I told you what the gospel is, and if anybody comes and tells you something beyond, besides what I have told you already, an angel or even I myself, let them be cut off. Let them be an anathema." And what Paul is doing is saying, "Look, in Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah, the whole biblical storyline, which is really the final court of appeal even for these people that want you to get circumcised. They are doing it because they have a wrong read of the story. But that story, the story of Creation, Fall, redemption, is the normative story. And I have come to tell you that that story has come to a culmination point and a renewal point and a new creation point. And once that is set, and it is established, and it is fixed, and it means you don't need to shed your blood because he shed his blood for you. And now that you have been baptized, you have received all the benefits that are being promised to you. They are already yours. And we together are being called to be this new people of God, I can tell you that I have told you the truth and whenever you hear countervailing voices, even if that voice would be mine, you can take it to the bank that voice is wrong."

So Graham, I think there's the lesson for us. Once the gospel has been put out there, the story of God's redeeming his planet through his Son who is the one that God had been ordaining all along to undo Adam's mess through the line of Abraham as anticipated in the covenant community under Moses' governance in revelation and then through the first united and then divided monarchy of Israel, all that culminating

in the person and work of Jesus. Once that's out there then that becomes the standard against which everybody, Paul himself, measures everything. So for us today too, we have to listen to the voices around us in our culture and in the churches and keep coming back to the Word of God as it tells us that story and it explains it to us. And is the means by which Christ becomes personal to us in the Holy Spirit.

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