

Faith that liberates and teaching that enslaves

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 September 2005

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me please to Galatians chapter 5. And our title tonight is The Faith That Liberates and the Teaching That Enslaves.

From the very beginning, the Bible is quite clear that the story of redemption, God's great plan of salvation, is not something that will ever find its climax in this present world.

Christianity is not a religion about life in this world and about making it a better place. The Christian church is not an institution trying to improve the planet and its people, like the United Nations, for example, is trying to do, although given this week's evidence not very successfully.

Sadly, the Christian church has often deteriorated into thinking that that's what its job is. But no, the Christian gospel is a message of salvation out of this present evil age and for a new creation altogether.

It's a sure hope of a life of freedom and joy in a totally new creation, a new world. And yes, that and nothing else is the true Christian gospel. And from the very start, the Bible's clear.

[1 : 24] The story of redemption isn't just about saving individual lives from the guilt of sin. No. It's about a cosmic redemption. Saving the whole universe from the curse of sin, from its power and its consequences, from its slavery and corruption, from its decay and from its death.

And saving it for a regeneration, a recreation of the universe as it's meant to be, for the glory of God. And filled with people freed from the power and the slavery and the dominion of sin out of this evil age.

Freed to love God forever, freed to serve God forever in a whole new world. But that's the Christian gospel. And anything less than this vast and wonderful vision is simply a caricature.

It's no gospel at all. And the trouble is that as human beings, who are so bound up in this present world and the things of this world, our horizons so often are so low and so small that we constantly find ourselves forgetting this.

Forgetting that the truth of the gospel is about a new creation altogether. And instead, we like to think that actually we can be quite satisfied really with a veneer of the gospel.

[2 : 44] But the reality is that in fact, our faith is just becoming earthbound. That is the true goal, the real source of our satisfaction, of our assurance, of our identity, is something in this world, something in this present evil age.

And we can fool ourselves to thinking that we are trusting in the one true God, the God of the gospel, Jesus Christ, whereas in fact, we're actually living in bondage to the lies and the false promises of this age.

In reality, we're just slaves to the idols of this age, to false gods. It can be very subtle, it can be dressed up in all kinds of impressive religious and spiritual language, but that's what it is.

It's idolatry. It all comes back to that. And you can't worship the true God and serve idols. It's what we're teaching the children this morning in the Ten Commandments.

It's either or, it's one or the other. It can't be both because they're polar opposites. Either you're a subject of the present evil age and you're a slave to idols, or you're a citizen of the new creation.

[3 : 56] And you're bound to Christ alone, there can be no other. And the one is the way of freedom that leads to life eternal, but in the other is the way of bondage that only leads to judgment, only leads to corruption.

But both of these things can appear side by side in the professing Christian church. That's the shocking truth, but that's what Paul is dealing with here in the letter to the Galatians.

And there's a battle going on, a battle for the truth in the hearts and minds of God's people in the church on earth, and on the church in Galatia and in Glasgow.

There's a battle in Galatia going on between Paul, the apostle, with a message of freedom from the new creation. Remember the first verse of the epistle? Paul, an apostle not from men, but from God, by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised him from the dead, from the new creation world.

A battle between Paul, and those he calls false brothers in chapter 2 verse 4, who've slipped in, he says, to spy out the freedom we have, and to bring us back into slavery, the bondage of this evil age.

[5 : 08] And here in chapter 5 verses 1 to 12, we see again these two pitted completely against one another. Look at verse 2. Look, says Paul, it's I who's saying this to you. I, Paul, the apostle. Look at verse 10.

He talks about the one who's troubling you. It's very personalized here. Verse 12. Those who are unsettling you. They're head to head, you see. And we're getting very close to the heart of the matter now, in this clear standoff between Paul and the opposers.

It's a standoff between the faith that liberates, proclaimed by the apostle of the new creation, and the teaching that enslaves, that's proclaimed by those who preach circumcision, things of the flesh, the religion of this age.

Verses 1 to 6 explain the nature of that true faith, the gospel faith, the faith of freedom. And verses 7 to 12 expose the nature of the teaching, and the teachers who enslave.

So last week we looked at the big issue, the incredible lure of the things of this world, the things that would draw people back into slavery. Now that we've done that, let's look at some of the detail now in these verses.

[6 : 22] And we'll begin with the second half, I think, with the false teaching that enslaves, in verses 7 to 12, as exposed by the true apostle of Jesus Christ, the apostle of the new age, the apostle Paul.

Now these are quite harsh verses, aren't they? And we live in an age of tolerance. And we tend to find this kind of sharp and heated disagreement and even the frank hostility in these verses.

We find it difficult. We find it perhaps offensive. We like to downplay all this sort of thing and say that, well, we can all surely coexist together in a tolerant fashion.

But that's not what Paul says. Paul doesn't say, well, we're a broad church, and so there's room for all kinds of views in our collective experience. He doesn't say, as I heard an evangelical minister saying just the other day, the fact that our rich diversity can exist side by side proves that God is with us in our broad denomination.

Well, that's not what Paul says either. Paul says, who has hindered you? The NIV says, who's cut in on you? The images of somebody cutting in on a runner in a race and tripping them up so they fall.

[7 : 42] Who's stopped you, he says in verse 7, from obeying the truth? Whoever it is, I wish they'd emasculate themselves. That's pretty tough talk, isn't it?

It wouldn't go down too well in many of our churches. That wouldn't go well at presbytery. It doesn't go down very well with the scholars either. One of them says this, it is downright rude and even objectionable.

But you see, that's to miss the point. What's Paul saying? When he says, I wish they'd go and castrate themselves.

That's what it means. Well, I don't think it is, as some of the scholars suggest, some reference to pagan practices in the temples and sensational rituals. I think it's much simpler.

He's referring back to Moses, to Deuteronomy and the law. In particular, to Deuteronomy 23, verse 1, which clearly says that no eunuch, nobody who's been castrated, can ever enter the assembly of the Lord.

[8 : 41] What he's saying, you see, with a heavy ironic reference to the Galatians' obsession with the law and their obsession with circumcision, what he's saying is, I wish that these people who are cutting in on you and perverting the truth, I wish that they would be cast out completely from the church of God.

I wish that they would be judged by God. I wish that they would be damned to hell. That's what he says very clearly in chapter 1, verse 9. Let them be cursed. They're very harsh words, aren't they? And we find ourselves recoiling from it. It seems fanatical to us. Why is that? Well, it must be because, mustn't it, we don't take God and his truth nearly as seriously as God does, or as the Apostle Paul does.

Truth matters because it's got eternal consequences. Truth is important. And if false teachers are preventing people from obeying the truth, the only truth that will set you free, the only truth that will save you, then they must be placing themselves under the severest judgment of God.

Just go back and read in Matthew's Gospel what we're studying in the mornings. Read Matthew 23 and see Jesus' verdict on those who hide the truth from people, who prevent people obeying the truth and entering life.

[10:04] Better to never have been born, says Jesus, than be guilty of that. Read Matthew 18 and see Jesus' verdict on those who cause his little ones to sin. Same word, cutting in, tripping up.

Better to have a millstone around your neck and be cast in the sea. Truth matters, you see. And obeying the truth, verse 7, leads to salvation.

Disobeying the truth leads only to judgment. Truth has eternal consequences. And that's why Paul's so deadly serious. And friends, that's why we've got to be serious about the truth too and about the Gospel and about understanding it.

And about this message in Galatians. This phrase in verse 7, obeying the truth, is very helpful, I think, in clarifying for us exactly what the issue is here in Galatia.

What is the difference in the message between Paul and these other teachers who want to enslave? Look at verse 11. It's preaching circumcision or it's preaching only the cross of Christ.

[11:08] Those are the two alternatives. It can't be both. Paul used to be zealous for circumcision. Yes, before he was a believer. But now, his message is the cross of Christ alone.

Nothing else for salvation. And it's because that's his message that his message is so offensive. Because, you see, the cross offends the world.

It offends the world and its values. It offends all its ways. Even its very best ways. It says to the world, you're finished. You're passé. A new world has begun with the death and rising of Jesus Christ.

That's all that matters now. It's the only thing that matters. That's why in chapter 6, verse 14, he says that boasting can only be in the cross by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

You see, you've no longer any hold over me, world. Your opinion doesn't count. Your prizes are worthless. Your currency has no value anymore.

[12:09] That's what we have to say to the world if we preach the cross of Jesus Christ. And, of course, nobody likes to be told that they're passé. The world outside hates that.

We hate that when we are made to be redundant, aren't we? And somebody says, oh, I don't need you anymore. You're finished. Your work's done. Gone. There's nothing so has been as it has been. But that's what happens when the gospel of the new creation breaks into somebody's life in liberating power. That's what happens. It's like the man who's been living in poverty, sweating away in a sweatshop, depending for everything on his employer, needing his favor, needing his patronage for any hope of a future and a future life.

And then suddenly, well, he gets a letter from a lawyer to tell him that, well, he's got a long-lost uncle in America with no other relatives, no other progeny.

And he's his sole heir. And it turns out he's a millionaire. And one day when your uncle dies, well, you're going to inherit ten million dollars. And suddenly, you see, the man's free.

[13:14] A new world has broken into his present world. Oh, meantime, yes, of course. He'll go on working in his job. But his boss is no longer his master, not like he once was.

No. His future is all tied up with that letter from the lawyer with its promise of an inheritance and a future that's come from totally outside, from another world. And what matters now is following the instructions that the lawyer has given him so that he'll be able to take full possession of his inheritance in due course and meantime, surely, to get to know his uncle, to get to know his saviour. He'll obey the truth. That's the way to his salvation. That's the way to a liberating relationship that's going to change everything in his life. And you see, that's the crux of the issue in Galatians.

Who are you going to believe? Are you going to believe the truth, the true way of salvation? Or are you going to believe the lies that can never set you free? It's a mistake, I think, to see the issue here as one of faith versus works for salvation.

As though somehow faith was opposed to obedience and works in that sense. In fact, when you read chapter 5, you'll see that Paul is very keen on obedience. He's very taken up with works, actually.

[14 : 34] Chapter 6, verse 10, literally, where it says there, let us do good to everyone, he says literally, let us work the good to everyone. All through chapter 5 and 6, he's very concerned that people are indeed fulfilling the law of God.

So the issue isn't one about obedience, or rather it is about obedience, but the question is, obedience to whom? And to what? Is it obedience to the truth?

To Christ alone? To the gospel of a new creation? Or is it obedience to the lies of the idols of this age? That's the question. You see, it's very clear in verse 7, look at it again.

The truth isn't just something that you believe, it's something you obey, you obey the truth. It's a matter of the heart, you see, it's the very center of your being, it's your mind, it's your conscience, it's your will, it's your affections.

That's what you respond to the truth of the gospel with. It's really a question of to whom do you bow down, who do you really worship? Who is your real God and Savior?

[15 : 41] Where is your hope? Where is the source of your joy, your assurance, your expectation, your salvation, your identity? Where is it to be found? In Christ alone, in the new creation, begun with Christ's death and resurrection, possessed now by His Spirit in us, by faith alone, but as yet still, of course, in the future as far as our bodies is concerned, and therefore possible only by faith, only by trusting in Him, something we can't yet physically possess now, is that the source of our hope?

Or is it really Christ plus the things of this age? Circumcision, some kind of, some kind of present-day ministry, some kind of thing that's offered by the church, or some religious body, something that promises an experience now of all of these things.

Something that says, add this to your faith in Christ, your elementary belief, and then you will have the satisfaction, the assurance, the full sense of belonging, the things that will rid you of all your doubts.

You'll have that now. You can have that now if you add this to the gospel. That's the issue, you see. And Paul exposes these false teachers. Yes, their offer sounds so tempting, it sounds so attractive, doesn't it?

And Christians over the years have fallen for these things again and again and again. When the latest so-called blessing comes around the church, the latest thing that's offered for great new revival and renewal today, the great new experience of worship, whatever it is, a hundred thousand different kinds of things, offering us now the experience that Paul says is not yet fully for us until the new creation is here in its entirety.

[17 : 46] But these promises are very hollow. The reality is so very different because it is not the truth of the gospel. Our full salvation, says the gospel of Jesus Christ, says Jesus himself, says Paul, says every writer in the New Testament, our full salvation is not yet.

Our full bodily salvation will not be until we receive our resurrection bodies, not until Jesus comes to reign with power. And so ultimately that kind of false message can only lead to disaster.

And it's here in front of us. Look at verse 12. It hasn't brought them anything other than unsettlement. They haven't got the assurance. You're just unsettled. Verse 10, they're troubled. They're troubling you.

They haven't got perfect peace now. And look at verse 9. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. It's spreading throughout the whole church, you see. It's ruining their Christian life.

Setting them against one another in deceitfulness, in conceit, in provoking one another. And its end is very fearful. Look at verse 4.

[18 : 55] Total severance from Christ and the truth. Lost in a world where there is no grace. curse. And Paul says that for those who peddle and teach that kind of falsehood, the end is very stark.

Verse 12, that will be realized, that curse. Verse 10, he will bear the penalty. Whoever he is, God will judge him and them. And that's always the result when totally false and erroneous expectations of the Christian life are peddled in the guise of the gospel.

when people are promised full healing now if you have enough faith. Or wealth now if you have enough faith. Or sinless perfection now if you follow these steps to true holiness.

Or whatever it is. And friends, we can delude ourselves for a time. And people very often do delude themselves for quite some time. But in the end, it just leads to disillusion, to despair, to cynicism.

And very often to rejecting Christ and the gospel altogether. I've seen it so often. I just think of somebody I knew who chased all over the world, all over the world for special meetings to cure the

mental illness of a family member.

[20 : 17] Spent thousands, traveled thousands of miles all in hope of what was being on offer. But was never realized. And no, Paul says, all of that is phony.

It's phony. And when you look underneath it all, you see the real motive behind it all. Do you see verse 11? To preach circumcision, you see, to preach this world's idols is to remove the offense of the cross, the scandal of the cross.

It makes you much more acceptable to everyone. Chapter 6, verse 12 tells us that they do it to avoid persecutions. Just the same. You see, the true message of Christ crucified and Christ alone, by faith alone, is offensive because it says to the world and it says to the worldly church, you don't matter anymore.

Your evaluation doesn't count for anything. So you've got no hold over me. I'm free. The only thing that counts is faith. The only thing that counts is the new creation.

No one can take that from me. And no one can add anything to that. So I'm free. Don't you see, when you totally belong to Jesus Christ, you cannot be owned by anyone else or anything else.

[21 : 35] So you see, the world's valuation of my career doesn't matter. What matters is that I have Christ. And so I'm free from my professional masters.

I'm free. The world's valuation of my looks doesn't matter. So I'm free from the advertisers, from the fashion gurus, from those who want to enslave me and say I need them for fulfillment.

I'm free. I'm free from those who want to tell me what my body image must be, from the supermodels and all the rest of it. Their opinion doesn't matter.

The only thing that counts is Christ and the new creation. Church leaders, valuations of my spirituality doesn't matter.

And so I'm free of the burden of thinking that I must impress the leaders in my church by conformity to the tradition, by adhering to this sacred cow or to that particular thing.

[22 : 37] Whatever it is in your church or your fellowship or your way of teaching, you see, I'm free from all of that so they can have no hold on me. And that's why the world finds that so offensive.

But that's real freedom, you see. Don't you see the chains of this evil age, whatever they are, in every form, fallen off in Christ. Even the best chains of the religion of the old world, even the faith of Israel.

In Christ, it's all superseded, says Paul. That's all a thing of the past. The only thing that counts is the freedom that we have through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the man of the new creation, the man who is now in us, making our future life real in our earthly bodies now by His Spirit.

And that can only be by faith, can't it? Because only Jesus can give us that and it can only come to us from the new creation into the present world by His Spirit.

It brings the love of Jesus Christ and His faith into our lives now in this world by the Spirit. And that's why the only thing that counts is faith. The only thing that counts is the new creation.

[23 : 53] And that's why real believers and real faith must not and cannot ever give that up.

because you give up the only thing that matters and try to add things that are of no value, things that are passé, things that are dead, things that are worthless of a bygone age, well then you've lost everything, says Paul.

Because by doing so you're not adding to faith in Christ, you're actually saying the cross of Christ didn't do enough. You're saying, as Paul says in chapter 2, verse 21, Christ died for nothing.

And that means, if you're saying that, that you're heaping scorn upon Christ and His cross. That means you're rejecting Christ and His death for you and that is the heart of unbelief, not of faith.

You see, faith plus something else to give us full satisfaction is actually the antithesis of faith. It becomes unbelief. Because what you're really doing is putting your trust in the plus.

That becomes your savior. That becomes your idol. It's that that really becomes important and you talk about. And churches which add to the gospel of Jesus Christ, whatever it may be, of their own practice, their own way, their own special thing, you'll find that that's the thing they're always talking about.

[25 : 15] That's the thing that really becomes important. That's what you need if you're going to be in. But no, says Paul, that's a false teaching.

It only enslaves, puts you back under the masters that Christ's death and resurrection has freed you from. So what then is the mark of the true faith that liberates?

Well, it's there in verses one to six in three things. Do you see them? Three things about true faith. First of all, verse one, true faith stands firm. It will not submit to a yoke of bondage. That is, it stands firm on the no longer that is a relic of the past age because Christ has come. Christ has fulfilled the law. He's been raised to the glory. He begins the new creation. And it stands firm, motivated by that freedom. The freedom of deliverance from the present evil age. Knowing that something far better has begun even than the very best of that old age.

[26 : 19] The glories of the experience of God's people prior to the coming of Christ, even that is superseded. The glory of Moses and Sinai and the law and the prophets, even that is now as nothing.

You see, real faith understands the gospel story. It understands that the coming of Jesus divides the whole world, the whole of time and eternity, if you like, into two realms and only two. You're therefore in one or the other. You can't be in both. Once there was merely the realm of flesh, the realm of the natural, of the earthly.

Paul talks about it in Romans as being in Adam. But now in Christ, there's the sphere of the spiritual, the heavenly, the new creation. And before all of that was only promise for the pagan Gentiles, they were enslaved under the spirits of this world. But even Israel, even God's chosen people, were like slaves too. They were privileged slaves, but they were slaves. They lived in a sphere of law, of circumcision, of guardians.

[27 : 25] Even they were subject to the age of preparation before Christ. And not even for them was there ever real and ultimate justification, real and ultimate righteousness before God.

It was all, even for them, a promise of the future. Look back to chapter 3, verse 11. Remember, Paul says, no one is justified by God in the law. It probably says by the law in your Bible, but really it says in the law. For the righteous shall live by faith. He's quoting the prophet Habakkuk, who was saying you must live by faith in the future. God is going to come and intervene and ultimately justify his people, ultimately vindicate them. But it's in the future, you must wait for it. But you see, now that's come, Christ has come. And in Christ, the era of real salvation in history has come. It came when Jesus rose from the dead. That's why Paul says in 1 Timothy 3, verse 16, that Jesus was justified, vindicated, same word, by the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 31] But you remember in Romans 4, 23, he says, he was raised for our justification. In fact, Paul sees Jesus' resurrection as his justification, his being declared righteous to the universe, and his adoption, and his glorification, his sanctification, justification, all of that in one, in his resurrection.

You say, well, what's that got to do with us? How is Jesus' justification, how is his public declaration to the world as being God's perfectly righteous, triumphant son, how is that of benefit to me? Well, the answer is by his Holy Spirit, the Spirit that unites us to Christ in his victory. Chapter 4, verses 4 and 6 that we've looked at so many times, because of Christ's work on the cross in history for our sins, his Spirit is at work in our hearts for our salvation, for our adoption, for our justification. That's what it means to be in Christ. It just means to share in what Christ has accomplished by his rising from the dead. We share in the life that he has in the new creation. And that can only be shared in, as verse 5 says, through the Holy Spirit by faith. That's the only thing that can connect us still bodily in this evil age to the new creation.

[30 : 04] The Holy Spirit that connects us to Jesus Christ. It makes us in him. Either you're in Christ or you're in Adam. Either you're in the flesh or you're free as new people.

Either you're slaves or you're free. Either you're beyond grace in the realm of law and circumcision or you're in the place of grace by the Spirit. And that's why real faith stands firm. You can't mix it with the old age. Not even a tiny bit, Paul says. Look at verse 3. You can't just have circumcision alone. You can't just have a few little idols of the old age. No, if you accept that, you've got to consign yourself to that whole world. That whole world view. A world of bondage. Including the whole law. But verse 4 is plain, you see. That severs you from Christ. To try to be justified in the law, in that world, in that era, is impossible.

[31 : 09] Because only in Christ is there justification. Only in Christ is there righteousness. Only in Christ is there vindication before God.

That's something that belongs to the age to come. It's something that only came into existence in history with the resurrection of Jesus. It couldn't be before the cross.

Ever. Ever. Because true justification, true declaration of us being righteous before God means resurrection. It means the end of death.

That's what justification is. Righteous before God means the end of death. And that brings us to the second thing that real faith does there in verse 5.

Do you see? Not only does real faith stand firm, real faith waits. That's what the Spirit does in us by faith. That's His work in us.

[32 : 06] We wait for the hope of the verdict of the last day. That is, we wait for our resurrection which is our justification for our glorious vindication publicly to the universe. That's what we wait for.

And that perfection is still not yet. Because it's something that belongs to the new creation. So real faith, you see, doesn't have any fantasies. It doesn't expect now what simply cannot be in the body until the end of this present evil age.

It doesn't get taken in by seductive offers of special blessings or amazing powers or wonderful heavenly experiences of perfect health and healing or whatever. No, real faith eagerly awaits all that.

But it knows that it's all part of a consummation that's still waited for. That's what being Spirit-filled means. to be an eager waiter waiting for that day.

Just read the famous Holy Spirit chapter in Romans chapter 8. What are we told? In the Spirit we say the present sufferings are not to be compared to the glory that is yet to be revealed.

[33 : 20] By the Holy Spirit we groan inwardly. We wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. That's our resurrection. That's what the Spirit does in us. He makes us waiters. We wait eagerly.

You see, the only way that we can have justification, righteous standing before God and all those blessings now in this present age is through the Spirit by faith. Because through the Spirit we share in Jesus' resurrection life, not yet ours in the body.

Not yet ours. There's a future aspect to our justification for which we wait in hope. We cannot have that full glory now. It belongs to the new creation.

Listen to the Westminster Catechism answer to question 38. At the resurrection believers being raised up in glory shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment.

That's justification on that day. But you may ask, well, if our full and ultimate acceptance before God is really the verdict of the last day, how can we have any assurance now that we're saved?

[34 : 30] How can we have any peace? How can we be free from worry that maybe we won't stand on the last day? How can we be free from that crippling uncertainty?

Will I really be acquitted? Maybe I won't. And the answer, friends, is that you can't find that assurance anywhere in this evil age or in the things of this evil age.

You can't find it. You can't find it in the assurances of formal religion, whether it's from the absolution of priests or from doing penance or from having just impeccable Protestant reform doctrine.

No, that can't give you assurance. You can't get that assurance from the experience of religion in this age, from trances, from visions, from sensations of worship.

No. You can't find that assurance in the works of religion, whether it's conformity to this tradition or that or whatever it is, in circumcision, in being fastidiously honest, in being chased by going to prayer meetings, even by joining St. George's Tron.

[35 : 41] No. None of these things will give you that assurance. Real assurance of salvation, of standing acquitted at the last at the throne of God, can only be found in one place.

Only in one place. And that is trust in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Christ. And in the promise of God that what is His and what is ours now by faith in Him, by the Holy Spirit, will be ours then in the body when He comes again.

In other words, the only way to have assurance in this world now is to trust the gospel of Jesus Christ and keep trusting it. Because it's something that can only come from the new creation.

Can't be found in this evil age. And you must have it through trust and faith in the promise of God.

You see, faith, real faith, always obeys the truth of God and waits eagerly for the fulfillment of the promise.

Faith in the Bible is always forward-looking. Faith, says Hebrews 11, is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things we don't yet see. Just read Hebrews 11 and see what faith means.

[37 : 03] Faith, it says, acknowledges that we're strangers on this earth, that we look for a better city, a heavenly one in the future. Faith doesn't look for assurances in this world, it fixes its eyes on the reward and it trusts the word of God, the promise of God.

Real faith waits eagerly for the hope of righteousness. And lastly, verse 6, you see it, real faith works.

Real faith stands firm, it knows that there's no longer about the present condition of the Christian, we're no longer slaves. And real faith waits knowing that there's a not yet, that we're heirs, that we're saved in hope, that we trust the promise of God to be true.

But real faith at the same time doesn't forget that there is a now, that we are now already sons of God by adoption through the Spirit, that we are now in Christ by faith.

And already the life of the new creation is within us, it lives in us, and it lives through us. In fact, that life in us, Paul says, is the only thing that counts now.

[38 : 13] Not circumcision, not seeking satisfaction and assurance through religion, not uncircumcision, not seeking fulfillment through irreligion, as the pagan Gentiles had previously done, no, but only faith working through love.

What is that love that is the expression, the working out of real faith? Well, why, it's the currency of the new creation, isn't it? And it showed itself most clearly, most wonderfully in this world of ours in one place.

Where? Chapter 2, verse 20, in the cross of Christ, where the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. Chapter 1, verse 4, the Son of God who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, that's the love of the new creation.

It was Christ's self-giving love that rescued us into the new creation, the realm of love, so that we also can live by love, through the Spirit of Jesus, living out that love from within us as we walk in step with the Spirit, now here in these bodies, still on this earth, even as we wait for our resurrection bodies, in the life to come.

It was a self-giving love of Jesus that won our redemption. It was his love that fulfilled the law and perfect righteousness for us, and it's that same love at work in us by faith that enables us to fulfill the whole law, our destiny, as we love one another by faith.

[39 : 54] We'll have plenty more to say about love that fulfills the law and the studies to come, the rest of chapter 5 and chapter 6, but for now it's a good place for us to stop tonight with love, because it's a great challenge, isn't it?

In Christ now, while we await the hope of glory, only one thing counts, the love of Jesus Christ lived out from us by faith.

That's the mark of the Holy Spirit's presence. love, that's the mark of true saving faith, love, the self-giving love of Jesus at work in us and among us, at work in us and at work through us and above all in the Galatian context, among us, as we'll see when we read on from verse 13, a Christian fellowship, not bouting and devouring one another, not conceited, not pushing ourselves and our own agendas in the church, but rather through Christ, through love, serving one another. That's the evidence of the new creation at work. That's the evidence of Christ's Spirit bearing fruit in us. That's the evidence of the fullness of the Spirit in a fellowship, serving one another through love. How can we have such love? The answer in verse 5 is clear, only through the Spirit and by faith. How do we receive the Spirit and go on receiving Him?

[41 : 20] Remember back to chapter 3, Paul's whole argument, not by works, not by works of any kind, however spiritual they may sound, blessings, experiences, whatever it might be.

No, not by that. How? By hearing with faith, says Paul. By hearing with faith, by listening to and receiving God's words, and by obeying the truth of the gospel, and going on obeying.

that's why in another place, Paul says something very similar to say the same thing. 1 Corinthians 7, verse 18, he says, circumcision counts for nothing and uncircumcision.

The only thing that counts is keeping the commands of God. That's the only thing that counts is the hearing with faith, the word of God, and in faith obeying it.

That is faith working through love. So you see, love for Jesus, the Savior and his kingdom, his new creation, and love for one another, and love for God's word and his commands, and obedience to

his word, that's real faith.

[42 : 32] Love to the Lord, expressed in love to his people, and fueled by love for his word, that's life in the spirit, that's faith.

And Paul says that's the only thing that counts. It's the only thing that counts. So as we think of our life together here in this fellowship, in the body, we need to ask ourselves that question.

Is our faith, our understanding earthbound? Are the things that take up our minds and our hearts and our attention, the things we strive for, the things we fight for, are they earthbound, things of this evil age that are passing?

Or is it solely the new creation? Is it the truth of the gospel that's rescued us out of this evil age for a life to come? Well, if we've understood the history of the gospel, then that will be true.

And it will be evidenced now in our bodily lives by a realism about the present that waits eagerly for the future when all will be as it must be and ought to be and all will be as we want it to be, perfect and righteous.

[43 : 52] We won't be searching for that now in all kinds of false ways, but we will be serving one another in love. We will be obeying and cherishing the truth of the gospel with the hearing of faith so that the Spirit of God may be at work in our hearts and our lives.

faith is expressing itself through love. So is that you and is that me? Is that our fellowship here?

That's what Paul's asking us and that's what we must ask ourselves.

Let's pray together. We thank you, our Lord, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

the love that went to the cross at Calvary, the love that gave itself for me and for every one of us.

And we pray that we would be hearers with faith to your word of truth and so receivers by faith of the life of your Spirit within us that we might be a fellowship expressing the love of the new creation even now and that that love may be contagious and spread and speak of the glory of Jesus Christ and the freedom that is to be found in him.

[45 : 20] So guard us and help us, we pray, never to be deflected from obeying the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and seeking our assurance, our satisfaction, our joy, our hope in one place alone in the life of the risen Jesus, our Savior.

Amen.