

Grace-Filled Shepherding and building community in our churches

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Galatians: Law-filled shepherding leading to division

- Galatians 1, Paul opens his argument with a thesis statement that the Gospel that the Galatians are now following is no gospel at all, but it's false. (1:6)
- Then he goes on to defend his own conversion from the false gospel of the law to the gospel of grace and the unity he had with the other apostles. He also defended his ministry and his position as a proponent of the true gospel.
- And in chapter 2, Paul describes this interaction he had with Peter. Take a look at 2:11-14... Law-based leadership contributes to disunity—separation in community.
- Continuing on with Paul's argument, ch 3, Paul talks about the history and the purpose of the Law and contrasts it with faith in Christ.
- Then Paul sheds light on the condition of the Galatian church itself. Ch 4:12-20, enmity with Paul. Paul no longer respected or esteemed in some circles in Galatia.
- And in 5:13-15, Paul suggests that the Galatian people were biting and devouring each other, and that their fleshly behavior in verses 19-21 was marked by things like envy, anger, rage, rivalry, dissension, division, etc. And in verse 26 Paul indicates that there was a real risk of conceit and envy and provocative behavior.
- In chapter 6, Paul is exhorting them to humility, to think rightly about themselves, and to both take care of themselves and take care of each other. So one can assume that there were some arrogance issues and lack of care and concern for each other.

Our version?: Principle-filled or formula-based shepherding

We need to teach adherence to the Word of God. We need to teach people how to order their lives around God's word – that's discipleship. But teaching our people to attend Bible studies and pray a bunch and share our faith and serve in the church and be in good fellowship and make better financial decisions and start homeschooling our kids etc. aren't necessarily indicators of spiritual growth or maturity. And they aren't necessarily indicators of healing or growth in our counselees or those we're shepherding.

And that's what can taint or fill our counseling or our shepherding. So that what we look for might be a series of external behaviors, a life that's oriented around the application of biblical principles but possibly devoid of actual Gospel truth and movement of the Holy Spirit. And we can find ourselves assuming that the heart is changing if the behavior is changing. Or even if the language is changing – different words. And that might be the case. But it can't be guaranteed.

Back to Galatians: "All that matters is faith expressed through love"

After Paul finishes his argument of self-defense in chapters 1 and 2, he begins to address the Galatians directly in chapter 3. He immediately goes after them for relying on works of the flesh rather than the Holy Spirit. And he reminds them that faith in Christ—not works of the law—is the way to live.

And Paul proceeds to go into a lengthy explanation of the gospel using Old Testament history as the lead-up for the work of Christ on the cross and the foundation of faith for those who are saved.

...Look for example at how Paul argues in 3:1-14

...And then in verse 23-26

...And then in chapter 4 there is this great proclamation of sonship (4:3-7)

...And the question in 4:8-9!

...And the reiteration those in Christ are children of promise, not children of slavery (4:28-31).

Paul contrasts a life of slavery according to law against a life of faith that makes us God's children. And in chapter 5 Paul begins to explain the fruit of a life of faith. Namely, the life of faith resulting in expressed love.

...See 5:2-6

...And 5:13-15

...The life of freedom through walking by the Spirit v22-24 – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – ALL of these are expressed in relationship with others. In other words, expression of love.

...And then into chapter 6, the call is to care for each other. VERSE 1,2,6, 9-10

So in Galatians, Paul contrasts a life according to the law (division, backbiting, devouring, flesh) with a life according to faith (love, Spiritual fruit).

So what is grace-filled shepherding?

Any kind of shepherding that emphasizes the grace of God through Christ and emphasizes a response of faith in Christ that results in greater Holy Spirit empowered love.

Christ's righteousness alone and His substitutionary propitiating work on the cross and the comforting and transforming work of the Holy Spirit in my inner being. Helping people land THERE is grace-filled shepherding.

How do we shepherd in this way?

- Starts by recognizing our own woundedness, brokenness and sin, need for grace
- Recognize our own tendency to live by an engineering formula, to live by good intentions rather than by trust
- Always be repentant of the tendency to save or sanctify self through systems, formulas, activities, performance
- Recognize and revel in and rest in the finished work of Christ. He did it ALL. ALL. Help our counselees see this – rest is our work
- Learn to be compassionate as fellow sinners on the journey
- Take pressure off our counselees to transform themselves – Let the Spirit do the heavy lifting
- Invite people to better comprehend their adoption as children of God
- Invite people to understand the freedom that they have
- Help people see that the truest expression of faith is not law or discipline or church attendance or ministry involvement or Bible study or any other external behavior but love (expressed love for God, for the brethren, for others)
- Shepherd toward this end in patience and in gentleness and in kindness and in self-control
- Recognize that our goal isn't to live in good intentions or employ spiritual systems, but our goal is to live in trust/faith in Christ and His work

How to summarize the idea of grace-filled shepherding?

The Spirit works in us, and we drop the laws and formulas and good intentions and focus on TRUSTING and RESTING IN the grace and mercy of Christ.

Shepherding in this way is an invitation to really, actually, personally, fully trust the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And thus as an expression of that trust, living in love in community.