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Welcome to the New Life Podcast and Ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

00:44

A reading from the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Galatians, chapter 1, verses 1 through 5. Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins.

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to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. This is the word of the Lord.

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This past Thursday was Juneteenth. Juneteenth is a day where we commemorate and celebrate the freedom of African-American slaves in our country. This celebration began in about 1890.

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People in Texas celebrating their freedom. It's spread all over the country. In the year 2020, President Biden signed a law making it a national holiday. So now it's one of the 11 national holidays. It's also called Black Independence Day, celebrating the freedom of enslaved peoples from slavery during the Civil War. Now.

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What you probably know about Juneteenth, but maybe not, so I'll tell you, is that Juneteenth does not celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation was given about two and a half years before June 19th, 1865. The Emancipation Proclamation was in January of 1863. President Lincoln signed an executive order saying that all the enslaved peoples in the Confederate States of America were free and if they could

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if they could escape their captors and move to Union territory or to where Union armies were situated, they would be free. But the news of this proclamation took time to get out. People that were in contact with Union armies began to receive the news quickly and a lot of people were freed. But it took two and a half years before the news reached Galveston, Texas, to East Texas, and it happened with General Granger landed in Galveston and he went to the town square and he proclaimed,

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to the enslaved peoples there, you are free. So that became a moment of celebration for the African Americans in Texas. That celebration spread all over the country and is now known as Juneteenth. Now, think with me for a second. What if someone said to one of those people who had just had their freedom announced to them that they were free from their enslavement, that they were now free American citizens, what if someone just said,

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came back later after Granger made his announcement and said, actually, you're better off being enslaved. And then some of them actually agreed and went back and willingly submitted to slavery. Now, that would be absurd. In fact, that would be offensive even to think about. That anyone would first of all come and say, you're better off being enslaved. There are sadly white supremacists to this day who would say that, but they are extremists.

04:05

But then anyone say that and that any of them would actually willingly submit themselves back to slavery. It's absurd to think about. is even offensive even to mention that anyone would willingly submit themselves back to being enslaved, to being a enslaved person. As we look at the text today, Galatians, this is exactly what's going on. We think about the celebration of freedom that we just experienced this week.

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We think about the celebration of freedom that's coming up in a week, a couple of weeks with July 4th. And what Paul is saying is you have been freed, you are free from your slavery, and there are people coming saying actually it's better for you to be enslaved, you should become a slave again. This is the summary of the message of Galatians. That as Paul says in Galatians 4, for freedom you have been set free. Now that may sound like a redundant statement.

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But it is not. He is saying, Jesus Christ set you free. And he sets you free so you would be free. Not so that you would submit yourself again to a yoke of slavery. It is absurd to think that anyone would willingly submit themselves to slavery when they've been freed. But that's exactly what Paul says is going on in the churches of Galatia. This is the first sermon in our series. We're going to be going through Paul's letter to the Galatians.

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As I said, it's going to continue on until just before Advent. I do what I never do, and I've actually outlined and planned all those sermons. I never do that. I usually fly by the...

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by the moment a little bit more. But we're going to be walking through this letter and this letter is, Martin Luther called it, along with 1st John and 1st Peter, the epistle to the Romans and the Gospel of John, he said that the letter of the Galatians purely distills the Gospel. Purely distills the Gospel. And I think the reason why he thought that is if you know a little bit about Martin Luther. Martin Luther was

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I mean, he's a bit eccentric, I think that's safe to say. But he was sort of bound, enslaved, if you will, to sin in a way that he felt the guilt of his sin. And he felt the pressure of it. He felt the shame of it. He understood the reality, which is we have so many sins, it's impossible to enumerate them all.

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And one of the things, one of the stories of Martin Luther's life is that before he started reforming the church in Germany and leading the Reformation across Europe, he was an Augustinian monk. Same order actually as our current Pope. He was an Augustinian monk and he would attend confession. And when he would attend confession, he would try to literally think of everything that he did.

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And he would wear his confessors out for hours, confessing every little thing, every little... because he understood the gravity of sin. He understood, as a good Augustinian, that we are all sinners and we are deeply sinful and every action we do is tainted by sin. He understood this. And so when he, in his study of Scripture, he was a seminary or college professor, in his study of Scripture, in teaching the gospel of grace from Paul, from Galatians and Romans,

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When he discovered this notion that we're going to talk about for five months, that we are saved, we are justified by faith alone, it set him free. It completely set him free. And it became one of the most important messages of his life and indeed of the Reformation and of Protestant churches of which we are one. So this book of Galatians is one of the key texts for us to grasp, to understand, and to dig in.

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It is a key text for everyone to sit in as we seek to understand what the gospel is and the freedom that it proclaims. And so today we're going to do a little bit of this introductory work introducing you to the letter. Whenever we come to a text of scripture, we need to try

to understand its context. The reason for this is yes, we believe that the scripture is inspired. I was actually

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I was actually reading a first century text by a first century bishop named Clement of Rome. And he was writing a letter. He actually wrote two letters to Corinth. It's called First Clement and Second Clement, writing to the same people that Paul wrote to, the Corinthians. And in the letter, he says that Paul wrote inspired scripture, that the writings of Paul were inspired by the Spirit. This is what the Church has believed for a very long time.

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that the writings of the Bible are inspired by the Holy Spirit. That same Paul says in 2 Timothy that all scripture is breathed out by God. It is expired, if you will, breathed out by God, inspired into the text. Peter himself says that what Paul wrote, along with all the other scriptures, is the Word of God. And so we do believe that scripture is inspired, but believing that it is inspired doesn't mean that we treat it

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like a verse by verse, mystical text of sayings. Some people treat the Bible that way, this verse said this to me and this verse said that to me. The Bible is a collection of texts. They are sacred texts, but they are texts written by people in a certain time, in a certain situation, to a certain group of people. And if we want to understand these texts and apply them to our lives today, we have to situate in the context. So it is important work to do to understand

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What is the purpose of this letter? When was it written? To whom was it written? Who wrote it? Why did he write it? So we're going to talk about that a little bit today. Now, I could definitely go into the weeds of all of this, but those of you who have been around New Life for a little bit know I like to do this on a midweek podcast. So I'm going to explore more of the history of Paul and lot of the things that are surrounding it that would not be appropriate

to do in a sermon because it would become more like a lecture and you guys would be bored to tears.

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But I'm going to do that in a midweek podcast, not this week because I'll be gone, but the next week, just laying out lot of this contextual stuff beyond what I'll say. But today, I do want to cover some of it. And the first thing is to cover Paul and these churches. These churches are in the Roman province of Galatia. That is south central modern day Turkey. The Roman province of Galatia was in the center of what is now Turkey and was then called Asia Minor before that, Anatolia.

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There were specifically two cities that are mentioned in the book of Acts and Acts 14 that are in the Roman province of Galatia. That is Lystra and Iconia. Those two cities we find Paul going to and evangelizing and establishing churches there in his first missionary journey. There are two other cities that are close by that aren't technically in the Roman province of Galatia, but were very close. We see that Paul moving between the four of them.

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with ease and if there was a message, a false gospel being circulated, it stands to reason that it would be circulating between these four cities. One was called Pasidian Antioch and the other Derby. So this letter was certainly written to the two churches, Lister and Iconia, but probably to the four of them. Paul had visited them. We read about this in Acts 14. He had evangelized there. There are different adventures that he got into in each of these cities, including being stoned to almost death in one of them.

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and one of them healed a person and they came out and they thought that Paul was Zeus and Barnabas with Hermes, maybe I've got it opposite way around, but at any rate they wanted to sacrifice to them. So they got into a lot of adventures there, but the end result is they established churches and they came back around and appointed elders. So these are

established churches. Paul went to them and he preached the gospel, he shared with them the good news. And now we have a situation where after he has gone back to Antioch, he has received news.

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that people are coming up from Jerusalem and they are spreading a false message. The essence of this false message is that they have to become like Jewish people in order to be saved. These are called Judaizers and there was a party of them, we read about them in the New Testament. Most of the New Testament is about this. People that are saying you have to keep certain rites and ceremonies of Judaism in order to be saved, in order to be a part of the people of God.

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Paul did not teach this. Paul taught explicitly that this was not the case, that salvation was in Christ alone through faith alone. But these people were coming up from Jerusalem and they were essentially saying, Paul has pulled a baited switch on you. He gave you a message that was palatable to you as Gentiles and to make it easy for you, but he did not tell you the full truth. In other words, we're coming up from

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Jerusalem, we're bringing you the old time religion, we're bringing you the full gospel. Paul was bringing you a truncated gospel, a cheap grace, an easy believism, and we're telling you the truth which comes from the leaders of the church, Peter and James and John. Now, that was a lie, because Peter and James and John did not believe this. We see this clearly in Acts 15. And we know that Peter had already received the vision that all foods were clean. So these people were coming up and spreading false truths.

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and false teaching. And Paul heard of this and thought it was urgent enough that he write this letter. Now, this letter was written before the council that we read about in Acts 15. In Acts 15 we find that Paul and Barnabas go down and they share with the people because

this controversy continued to grow. And they shared with the apostles about their ministry and their mission and how God had sent His Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles.

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and ask the council, the very first church council that met, and you can read about it in Acts 15 as I said, to deliberate and decide the issue. Do Gentiles need to be circumcised and to keep the Jewish rituals and ceremonies in order to be saved? Now, caveat emptor, we're going to be talking about circumcision a lot in this letter. So parents, you probably will need to...

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in a way that is appropriate according to your own wisdom, explain what it is. And I'll leave that up to you. But you probably will need to do it because it's just going to keep coming up and up and up again. So this is the message that they were bringing and the Council met in Acts 15 and deliberated and decided that they would put nothing more on the Gentile believers, nothing other than that they be baptized and have faith in Jesus and that they abstain from sexual immorality.

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that they do not eat food that's been sacrificed to idols, and Paul says that they give to the poor, which Paul says we were eager to do. Nothing else was said that they had to do. None of the circumcision or food laws or holy days, they were completely free from those things. They had freedom. Now, this letter of Galatians was written before that. The reason why we know this is that all Paul would have to do when these people were coming up and saying, Paul's not a real apostle,

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he's giving you a false message is to waive that letter. That's all you have to do. Here's a letter. It comes from Jerusalem. It comes stamped with James and Peter and Paul. So this is in the in-between time. And Paul felt it was so urgent that he wrote this letter. So that's enough of the context to get us started. I'll go into more detail about Paul's life and some of

other things, as I said, in a supplementary podcast. But there's three things I want to cover today in our remaining time. Three things that we see in these first

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five verses, introductory verses to the letter. And that is apostolicity, catholicity, and gospolicity.

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if you will permit. First, apostolicity. Paul begins right away. He doesn't do this in all his letters. fact, he doesn't always identify himself right away in his letters. But he needs to identify himself immediately and claim his apostleship immediately. Why? Because the people that were presenting this false gospel, his opponents, will call them.

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They were saying that he was not a real apostle. They were challenging his apostolicity. And they were challenging his message. And so Paul right away comes and he says, look, I am an apostle. I am an apostle. And then he says, and this is important, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ. We learn from this that his opponents were saying that his apostleship was derived from Peter and James and John.

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And if it was derived from them, we're telling you what these guys teach and believe. We're bringing you the actual message. Paul has delivered to you a cheap message, a truncated gospel. And so he has to begin by asserting his apostolic authority. I like what Matthew Henry said about

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about this. is the top quote on page 3 in your bulletin. Paul asserts his apostleship. He doesn't always do this. Paul usually presents himself as a very humble person, but he asserts it right away, and Matthew sums it up well. He says, thus does the apostle, being constrained to it, we might say forced to do it, by his adversaries, magnify his office, which

shows that though men should by no means be proud of any authority they are possessed of,

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Yet at certain times and upon certain occasions, it may become needful to assert it. It is needful for Paul to be asserting this now. Because by implication, the message that he is presenting, the anti-gospel that is being proclaimed, is dangerous. They are in danger. Their souls are in danger. Paul...

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writes this letter urgently, he begins to assert his apostolic authority because this is an urgent situation. That implies that the truth of the gospel has life or death consequences. Like the very existence of this letter, it shows us that these are not just religious disagreements, religious tenets, things that help us, you know, have a good, you know...

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meditative state or whatever. It does all those things. It helps us with our, you know, well-being and I'll talk about that a little bit later. It is, but it's more than that. The reason why we have faith in Christ, the reason why Christ came is because there are eternal consequences, life and death. And Paul is writing into that urgency that he is an apostle not by men or through him. Now, he's gonna spend most of the time in rest of chapter one and chapter two going through his biography.

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showing how he is an apostle directly from Jesus and not from Peter and Paul, demonstrating his independence from Peter, James, and John. Galatians has more biographical material of Paul than any other place except for Acts, and it also has things that aren't included in Acts. And the reason why is because his apostleship was being challenged. So the principle here is that apostolicity is important.

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This should not surprise us because we've been saying the Nicene Creed ever since Easter and every Sunday we've been saying I believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. Apostolicity is important. Why is it important? Because we don't have a New Testament without apostolicity. We don't have the Gospels without the Apostles and their followers writing them down.

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We don't have the rest of the New Testament which teaches us the doctrine of Christianity, which gives us authoritative teachings without apostles. And Paul asserts these apostles were not made by men. The commentators that are reading point this out. Paul's ordination didn't come from men. It's not necessarily a problem that it would come, my ordination comes through men. That's not necessarily a problem. But if you're going to be an apostle, if you're going to speak with the mouth of God,

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Your apostleship needs to come from God Himself, from Jesus Christ. And this is Paul's assertion. Indeed, this is the assertion of Peter when he talks about it in the same topic in 2 Peter, when Paul talks about it in 2 Timothy chapter 3. When Jesus says in John 13 and 14 that I'm going to send the Spirit and the Spirit is going to enable you to remember all the things that I've said, people always wonder, how do they remember all that stuff and write it down word for word? The answer is that Jesus said,

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the Spirit was going to come and give you a miraculous memory. He was going to bring to your remembrance what I said and the things that occurred. And the other thing that he says is the Spirit will also lead you into all truth. So two things are at play here. One, the ability to write down the Gospels and second, the ability to teach the doctrine that Jesus is bringing forth in the New Covenant. Without that we don't have Christianity. Apostolicity is one of the most important

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principles and for the sake of this text and what Paul is saying Apostolicity is following the Apostles teaching the teaching that we find in the New Testament where these men Inspired by God say thus saith the Lord and we don't have a religion without that Apostolicity is that important now? There's another aspect to apostolicity that we won't get into today, but it is the authorization of the Apostles as they found churches

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It's not the topic of discussion for today, but it is important. But the most important aspect of apostolicity is that we adhere and we follow the teaching of the apostles. So, let's move on to the second point, catholicity. He says next, and all the brothers who are with me to the churches in Galatia. Now these are the parts of letters that we can easily skip over. Oh, it's just the to and the from and all that.

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But another principle that we've been talking about is that all scripture, all scripture is breathed out by God. We affirm the verbal plenary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There aren't any passages or parts of scripture we just gloss over. They all bear some truth. And what's the truth that we have here? The truth is that the reason why Paul would even imagine writing a letter to another church is because none of our churches are just isolated.

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Assemblies we are connected. We are connected and what happens to another one it affects us. This is what we call Catholicity. Catholicity comes from the word Catholic which for some of us could be a trigger word. It could be a word that we don't think we should use as Protestants. Let me disabuse you of that. Catholic is a very fine word to use. In fact, it's been used for centuries and what it has referred to as the Orthodox Church that is connected throughout the world.

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The word Catholic comes from two Greek words, kata, which means according to, and holos, which means whole, that's easy. So it means according to the whole. So what is Catholic is properly is St. Vincent of Loran, a fourth century church father. It is everything

that is believed everywhere, always, and by all. A three-fold test, ubiquity, antiquity, and unanimity. So Catholicity are the teachings of the church that have been adhered to

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in all times by every one. And it implies the connectivity of the church to each other. So Paul is emphasizing, look, I'm not speaking alone. I have an authority that comes straight from Jesus, but the brothers who are with me are joining in my message. It's not just me. It is the brothers who are with me. And he was writing from Antioch, one of the church where people were first called Christians, it says in the book of Acts. And he's writing to the churches in Galatia.

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Because we're connected. We're connected. Again, in the Nicene Creed, we confess that we believe in one holy and Catholic apostolic church. The church is one. Paul says it in Ephesians 4. We have one church, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Jesus, on the night before he suffered, when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane, we're going to sing in a minute with bloody sweat. We're going sing that during the communion song. He prayed a prayer, part of the prayer that he prayed...

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was that the church be one even as he and the Father are one. Now he and the Father are perfectly one. So we are united. The church is one and the church ought to emulate that unity, that connection. We are not isolated. We are together. We have this catholicity where we share a unity of teachings and we have that connection to one another. So all the brothers with me and to the churches of Galatia. Thirdly,

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Gospolicity. If you'll permit me to coin a word so I can have alliteration through my three points. My wife is shaking her head no, but I'm gonna do it.

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The central message of this passage and of this book is the gospel. The gospel. And what is the gospel? He begins in verse 3. Grace to you and peace. What is grace? Grace is unmerited favor. Unmerited favor. It is favor, it is mercy that we do not deserve. Grace is what we need. He is asserting grace to you and

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Peace. Peace is a concept I think we can more fully engage with intellectually and maybe with our hearts because in many ways we are not at peace. Not at peace. We are the most anxious people, one of the most anxious peoples in recent memory at least. We have a very anxious society. We're suffering with all sorts of anxiety, with pressure, with shame. And Paul says, look, God has bought you peace.

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God has bought you peace. Now that ought to be a message that we might perk our ears. How can I find that peace? How can I find peace in my heart? Peace in my soul? Peace in my mind? And the answer is when we depend on nothing but Jesus. And we solely rest in Christ and we let everything else take care of itself. Now of course, that doesn't mean we don't work hard. Of course we do. That doesn't mean we don't obey. We do. But the central part of peace is resting.

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Resting in Christ. So he says grace and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ And this is this is the message of the gospel where how does this? Grace and peace come it doesn't come from you. It comes from God. It doesn't come from the church It doesn't come from other people doesn't come from your parents and their approval it comes from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ and How did he how did he get this peace for us? It says he gave himself

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for our sins. So the ultimate proposition here is that we all have a problem. And that problem is ultimately sin. I already gave you the example of Martin Luther, his struggle with sin, and his fastidiousness with confessing that. But the teaching of Scripture, and I think

it fits with our human experience, is that we live in a broken world. I don't think I need to prove that. We have a lot of brokenness around us.

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A lot of fallenness, a lot of hurt. The question though is that, well is everyone broken? Is everyone as bad? And I think if we really take stock and looking into our hearts we know the truth. We know the truth that every single person is tainted by selfishness and desires and thoughts that we aren't proud of. The Bible teaches that every single person, every single person has fallen short of the glory of God. Every single person is sinful. Every single one.

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This is also something that the church has taught from its beginning. That we have a sin problem. What is sin? Our catechism teaches that sin is lack of conformity with God's Word and His will, God's law. So we rebel against God, we don't do what God says that is sin. But in particular, a particular teaching of our tradition is that everything that we do is in some way tainted by it, is tainted by sin. This is what Martin Luther was really wrestling with. He knew that fact. He knew that even his best work was

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was stained by sin. We have a sin problem. And the only way that we can get rid of that sin problem and come into the deliverance which is about to proclaim is if we have it taken away. How is it taken away? It says that He gave Himself for our sins. We're going to find later in this letter the wonderful truth that He exchanged His righteousness for our sinfulness. He gave His righteousness to us. He took our sinfulness on Himself on the tree. And we are righteous in His sight.

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because He traded us. He traded us His righteousness for our sinfulness. He gave Himself for our sins. And this is the second part of the gospel. It's not just disembodied souls being delivered from sin. It says He delivered us from this present evil age. This is where I'm going to sound a little bit Pentecostal. Because He says that we are delivered. And what are we delivered from? This present evil age.

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This world around us with its suffering, with its harm and all of the pressures that come upon it, all of the things that oppress us, and this is where I think it gets very particular in applying this to ourselves. Each and every one of us has a certain thing that I think oppresses us, know, that a concept or something that we wrestle with, whatever anxiety it is that keeps you up at night.

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It may be varied for us, it may be different things at different times, but we're all worried about something that we are consumed with at one time or another in our lives that makes us anxious, that makes us worry, that we are ashamed of. Many of us are shamed by certain things. We think that we need to prove ourselves. All of this stuff, Paul says the gospel delivers you from that. The gospel delivers you from it. You are delivered. And that's where...

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I begin to sound a little charismatic because I think the truth of the gospel is that you're delivered. Now we have to live into that deliverance. But listen, you're free. You've already been set free. You're free from the shame. You're free from the need to perform, the need to measure up. You are delivered. You don't need to get delivered. You are. All we need to do is live into the fact that we have been set free and rest in the fact that Christ has paid it all.

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That's the gospel. And that is gospel-icious, if you also permit a term.

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This is a dad, I live to make you groan. It makes me happy. So this is the gospel and we conclude with this. This ought to move us to praise. Paul concludes in verse 5, to him be the glory forever and ever amen. This should cause us to praise. I read this quote earlier from John Calvin and I'll read it again.

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He says the manner in which we are redeemed by him ought to excite our highest admiration as I said before this is a very Calvinistic way of putting it a very subtle and muted way of putting it it ought to Excite our highest admiration we ought to be excited for sure But to put it in another way we ought to make us shout it ought to make us clap our hands that we are Delivered that we are redeemed from our sins that Christ is providing peace for us

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and grace. This is why we worship. This is why we praise Him. This is why Martin Luther was moved to do what he was moved to do because he was set free. And the truth that I want to proclaim to you and that should set our hearts on fire is you are free to. You're free. You are free in Christ. And may the peace of God be with you. May the peace of God be with your soul. Let's pray.