

Faith, Hope and Love

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[0 : 00] Father, we ask that you would gently pour out your Holy Spirit upon us, gently and deeply pour out your Holy Spirit deep within us. And Father, we ask that you would write these words in our hearts, in the command center of who we are, so that we will be disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, learning to live for your glory.

And all this we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen. Please be seated. So, I noticed in the newspaper yesterday that there's been a poll done about what different Canadians think about religious pluralism and the presence of different religions in Canada.

And I suppose that it depends if you're an optimist or a pessimist. If you're an optimist, you can say that we're more popular than Muslims. If you're a pessimist, you could say that we're less unpopular than Muslims.

But that seems to be the result of a particular survey. In fact, we seem to beat them by a wide margin, but there's still a majority of Canadians who would find us suspicious.

And one of the things I think that many non-Christians would think about Christians is that we're obsessed with certain topics, that we're obsessed with sex, we're obsessed with money, we're obsessed with power, we're obsessed with rules, and we like to exclude people.

[1 : 29] And that would be, I think, how a lot of Canadians would just sort of think about Canadians, about Christians like us. So, the text of Scripture today talks about this very, very much, actually, and it's a very, very helpful text for us.

I mean, all of the Bible's helpful, but it's very helpful for us in terms of how we see ourselves in light of how Canadians see ourselves. So, if you turn with me in your Bibles to Galatians 5, Galatians 5, beginning at verse 1, we'll just see what the Bible has to say.

And those of you who remember, and we're here last week, last week we talked about Galatians 5, verse 1, but I'll read it again. It's sort of an unusual verse in Galatians. Galatians 5, verse 1, it sort of is just there.

And in some ways, it's the summary of the whole book, and in another, so it helps you sort of understand what goes before and what comes after. And so, here it is. It's a great, great verse, well worth memorizing.

Freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to yoke of slavery. And this describes to us the purpose that Jesus came to die on the cross.

[2 : 43] He came to die on the cross so that ordinary people like you and me would be free. That when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, that there would be a basic freedom bestowed to us. And that not only are we made free when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, but God's desire is that this freedom would only get deeper and deeper and stronger and stronger and a more real presence in our life.

And in the middle of it all, he uses this military analogy, which is stand firm. If you've seen some old war movies, it's the same type, it's an actual military term, and it would be as if, you know, the major says to the sergeant, you and your platoon, you've got to keep that hill.

You can't lose that hill. You've got to stand fast on that hill and not surrender it. And that's the exact same image which is used here in this text. For freedom, Christ has set us free.

Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. And we talked about this last week. I can't say more about it now other than to say this. So here's this ringing announcement of freedom and a warning about slavery.

So what is it that you think that Paul, the Bible, is now going to talk about next? Especially in light of this fact that there is this problem that even though Christ has made us free, that we could slip into slavery.

[4 : 03] So, you know, I think if you were to, for many people, you'd think, and maybe many Canadians would think, okay, well, here's where the Bible is going to warn us about being involved in sexual things.

Or maybe it's going to either be one of those contradictory things where it's going to talk about warn us against money as if it's evil, or talk about how we've got to give the church lots of money. Or maybe it's going to now talk about, I don't know, drinking too much. Or it's going to talk about anger. It's going to talk about violence. Or if you're more on the left, now it's going to talk more about injustice or something like that.

And so it's very, very, very striking that after this big declaration of freedom and this warning that you can slide into slavery, what's the very first thing that the Bible warns us against?

Religion. Like, just let that settle for a second. Not sex and drugs and rock and roll. Not oppression. It warns us about religion.

[5 : 02] Like, that's actually quite stunning. And regrettably, it's counterintuitive to most of us Christians. And it's definitely counterintuitive to Canadians.

That that's what the Bible is going to warn us about. But that's exactly what the Bible warns us about. Look at verses 2 to 4 again. Verses 2 to 4 of Galatians chapter 5. Look, I, Paul...

So look how it begins. Verse 2. Look. Just look. Right now, he's going to remind them of something that he established in chapters 3 and 4. But he said, look.

I, Paul, see to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. Like, it won't profit you at all.

It's like... It's like... He's going to be completely worthless. What's an example? If I said to you, can I buy that car with the color blue?

[6 : 01] Ooh. You'd go, George, is this a type of absurdist humor? Like, you don't buy things with color. Like, you buy things with money.

And what Paul is saying here is that it's like if you go down the route of circumcision, which I'm going to explain in a moment, it's... That means you've made Christ completely and utterly, you know, worthless.

Like, you can't use Christ to buy whatever it is that religion thinks it's buying. You just can't do it. Read verse 2 again. Look, I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision... And just pause here. When we talked about this quite a few weeks ago, just remember the Bible would see female circumcision as completely abhorrent.

Female circumcision is always an attempt to enslave women. To make them not even second-class citizens, but lower than second-class citizens.

[7 : 10] And the Bible would condemn it if it was aware of it. It's just talking about male circumcision, which is a very, very different thing. Read verse 3 again. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law... Justified means be made right with God. By the law, you have fallen away from grace.

It's very, very strong language. So what is it that Paul is warning them about? Well, here, if you could put up the first point, that would be very helpful. What Paul established earlier is that for religion to work, in quotation marks, you need to keep 100% of the rules 100% of the time and get a score of 100%.

Now, Paul is just saying, listen, I'm Paul, I'm an apostle, I'm reminding you of this. But Paul isn't just saying this because it popped into his head.

He said, listen, if you read the Bible itself, if you read the Bible itself, that's what the Bible teaches. That that's the whole reason why God said, okay, I know that human beings have this great desire to justify themselves, become like God, make themselves right with me as if they're God.

[8 : 27] And they think they can do this in their own way, in their own strength, in their own power, in their own imagination. So in a sense, in 2 Corinthians talks about it, that means that we can boast relative to God.

And so I'm just going to, you know, I'm just going to give you an example. If you actually want to try to make yourself right with me, I'm going to sell the problem to you. I'm going to tell you what the laws are that you have to do to be holy and to approach a holy God.

And Paul earlier in chapter 3 and 4 just said, listen, if you listen to the Bible, what God says is you've got to keep all of them. And what does all of them mean? All means all of them. All of them means 100% of them.

And you've got to keep them 100% of the time. And you've got to get a score of 100%. And if you follow the Bible and you read that, then what your response should be is one of two things. What your response should be is, Lord, have mercy.

That's impossible. But what's the religious and human response? Presumption. And presumption is...

[9 : 34] Brian has to keep 100% of the laws, 100% of the time you get 100%. But, you know, I'm me. I get a pass on some of them. Like, I get a pass on the ones that I can't keep.

And I don't have to have... Because I'm me, I don't have to have 100%. Like, I just have to have a percent that basically I'm satisfied and happy with. And I have to have a percent on that percentage of times.

It sort of is fine with me, and it's a type of presumption. And, in fact, actually, if you want to get the next point, that would be great. One perennial counterfeit to saving faith in Jesus is presumption. It's just presumption. Because we want to try to make our way right with God, and, you know, there's Catholic versions of this, there's Evangelical Protestant versions of this, there's traditionalist Anglican versions of this, there's charismatic versions of this, there's Eastern...

Like, there's a lot... There's all sorts of different ways that we can start to add some types of rules or rituals that you really have to keep if you want to be a real Christian, a serious Christian.

[10 : 49] And if you don't keep those types of rules, you're not a real Christian, you're not a serious Christian. But what it is, is we don't actually keep those. Like, that's what the Bible constantly establishes.

It doesn't... We don't keep them. So what happens is that we just have basic presumption that there's just something about me which gives me a pass.

Or maybe, if I'm very generous, about us, the chosen, the elect, those of us in this congregation, those who braved the rude wind's wild lament to come to church today.

That's a quote from a hymn. And... But... That's the constant aspect of the religious spirit. You know, we true Christians who don't sing to guitars.

We true Christians who do sing to guitars. There's something that we start to add to the gospel of grace that we think is required.

[11 : 54] And we might always worship with it, with guitars, for instance. Since that's a simple one. But Paul is making a fundamental... You know, a far bigger thing is that once you start adding things to Jesus and what he's done for us on the cross, you're, in a sense, taking Jesus out of the equation altogether because God makes us right with himself by faith alone, by grace alone.

In other words, it's all because of God's grace because we can't keep the rules. And how do we receive that grace? We put our faith and only our faith in Jesus and only in Jesus.

And only in Jesus means Jesus with nothing added to it whatsoever. But some of you might say, George, I'm a little bit... You say that, but George, doesn't Paul... Doesn't the Bible contradict what you just said?

Doesn't it say that you can fall away from grace? Well, look again at what it says. Look at verse 3. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision. And by the way, what circumcision meant...

I meant... I said I was going to explain it. Paul is going to, in a moment, tell us that it doesn't really matter whether we're circumcised. He's using circumcision sort of as a word to capture those who feel that they have to keep the Old Testament law.

[13 : 09] They need Jesus plus Moses to be made right with God. They need Jesus plus religious rules to be made right with God.

And he's using circumcision as sort of a way to talk about all of that. Just as if we want to talk about big business, I've used this example before, we don't necessarily talk about, you know, post-industrial democratic capitalism and its different mechanisms in terms of unions and monetary policy and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

What we just say is we talk about Wall Street or big business or Bloor Street, right? And so that's what Paul's using here with this word circumcision. He's using it as not as the act itself but as sort of a way of encapsulating the desire to make ourselves right with God by following rules.

And in this case in particular, the different rules revealed in Leviticus, etc. in the Old Testament that God had revealed, Paul establishes earlier, to sell us the problem, to bring us to the point of saying one moment, if I want to go down this route of trying to make myself right with God, I've got to keep 100% of the rules, I've got to keep them 100% of the time and I've got to get a score of 100%. And once that sort of hits you, you realize that's impossible. That's completely and utterly impossible. And so the whole purpose is to get us to call out to God and say, Lord, have mercy. [14:39] Unless you have mercy and you do something I cannot do, I am doomed. And God, I can't believe that you want, you will just let me be doomed because I know that you are a God of steadfast love, that you are a God of mercy.

And in a sense, it's calling out for the Old Testament saints to say, I don't know how you're going to do it, God. I don't know what you're going to do. But God, I need mercy. I need you to do what only you can do to make someone like me right with you.

And Jesus and his death upon the cross and resurrection is God keeping his promise for all those Old Testament saints and everyone afterwards who comes to realize that keeping, if our goal is to make ourselves right with God by our actions, it'll never work.

It'll never work. The only reason we think it will work is because we have presumption. that we get a pass on all the things, we get a pass on enough of the things and get a good enough mark.

And why is it different for me than those nasty other people, those nasty Roman Catholics, if you're a Protestant or if you're a Catholic, those nasty Protestants, was because it's, well, there's something about us.

[15:56] I mean, why wouldn't God give me a pass? Look at me. You know? Now, we never consciously say that, but we can see that those who embark upon the path of religion and therefore are embarking upon presumption are always going to be insecure.

In fact, it's one of the reasons why for many people, when they cast off all religion, they find it liberating.

Why? No more pretending. I don't have to pretend I actually like to visit with some old lady when what I really want to do is sit down all afternoon, watch NFL football, eat potato chips, and drink beer.

I don't have to pretend I like these people. I can just go to the bar and if I don't fit in with the people in this bar, I just go to another bar. I just keep going to different bars until I'm either, you know, sufficiently blitzed or I find a group of people who just sort of fit with me, you know?

But, you know, in a bar, they just sort of live and let live. And so for many people, it's why they actually feel a sense of liberation when they leave religion. But the Bible here, remember, the Bible says that the gospel is not good religion.

[17:18] The Bible, the gospel is not good advice. The gospel is not good rules. The gospel is not good requirements. The gospel is good news.

And what is that good news? God has done with power and accomplished with power something that we human beings can never do ourselves.

God has done something in the person of his son in his death upon the cross that we receive purely and utterly because he is gracious and merciful and all we do is put our hands out in faith and trust and he gives us what we cannot accomplish when we put our faith and trust in Jesus.

And why has God done this? God has done this. God has done this. So that you and I can be free. And so you and I can grow in freedom.

So one of the things that has to die in us is our presumption. Like it's very hard because presumption is very addictive.

[18:30] presumption is very, very addictive. But you know, as the gospel grips me, it's not, I mean, it still can be very, very hard when maybe one of my kids reminds me of something that I did to hurt them many years ago.

And that can be very hard and it can upset my view of myself and my view of what I was like as a dad. You know, but at the end of the day, what do I have to say?

That in light of the cross, I know that I'm a sinner. And in light of the cross, I know that I've not been perfect, can't be perfect, will never be perfect.

And in light of the cross, I can think about the fact that I'm only made right with God by what Jesus has done and my sins have been forgiven.

And my identity and my security do not come from trying to get people to think I've succeeded 100% of the time and 100% of the laws with 100% mark.

[19 : 42] And so as we are gripped by the gospel, there's the possibility that our security and our identity is now in what God has, a destiny that God has given me. And I can say to my kids, hopefully, without having to spend 10 years in therapy and remorse and beating myself up, I'm really sorry that I hurt you.

I am really, really sorry that I hurt you. Or to our friends, or to our parents, or to our spouse, or to our employers.

You see, presumption, the more we are dictated and ruled by presumption, the harder it will be to both accept responsibility and ask for forgiveness.

But the more we are gripped by the gospel, then whether we realize it or not, there is something within us which is grounding us and shaping us and propelling us and drawing us to a type of security and identity based on God accomplishing something for us that begins to free me up to acknowledge lack and sin and ask for forgiveness as I apologize.

If you could put up the next point. Once I am gripped by God's grace, he will never let me go. This text in verse 5 about falling away from grace, it's to be sort of understood in two ways.

[21 : 22] The one way is to understand that, you know, what I've just described by being sort of gripped by the gospel and that once we're gripped by the gospel, but there is this older Christian terminology called backsliding.

It's old-fashioned terminology, but it's been lost by the church, but we should get it. I mean, this is what the Bible teaches us, that it is possible for me to slip back into presumption, slip back into rules, slip back into legalism.

That's called backsliding. You're falling away, but once God's grace has me, I can't lose it. Why? Because it's God's, not mine. That's why.

It's God's grace, not my presumption. And the second thing is, and this is what Paul is talking about here, he's writing to a church, and it's not always clear in any local congregation all who are in fact Christ's.

And for those who have yet, not yet come to Christ in a saving way and are feeling that this new thing is better because it's religion, then Paul is warning them that if you go down that route, you're walking away from Christ, you're cutting yourself away from grace, and what are you walking to?

[22 : 38] Presumption. And let me tell you, in a marriage or relationship, presumption really helps a marriage. Not, okay, I'm saying the opposite.

Presumption ruins relationships and ruins life. So, Paul doesn't just sort of warn them about these counterfeits, but he also then reminds them in a very, very powerful, densely packed text.

He reminds them powerfully of faith, hope, and love. And by talking about faith, hope, and love, he helps them to understand if the counterfeit of Christian faith is presumption.

What does true faith look like? Verses 5 and 6 of chapter 5. For through the Spirit, that's the Holy Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

[23 : 54] It's a very dense text. For through the Holy Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. Now, here, there's a, one of the things that was really powerful for me this summer when I spent time in Angola, is it, and some of you who speak multiple languages, you already know this, but it was very powerful put to me because I had to speak and I would be regularly translated into Portuguese and sometimes into one of other, the other tribal languages.

And, and one of the things that constantly came to me, especially afterwards, is that people would debrief, is how sometimes even simple words in English had no equivalent, no simple equivalent in the other language.

And then sometimes, I would just say, like my 10 words in a row, and the other person would speak for a couple of minutes and it was always very funny because sometimes they'd be interrupted by somebody in the congregation and they'd have a little bit of a conversation about how to try to translate some simple word.

I gave the example how in the tribal language group, they have, I can't remember the exact number, but it's something like 27 different words for spirits, but they don't have a generic word for it.

And every spirit is basically what we would call a demon. So when I just said something about the Holy Spirit, it caused this long conversation. So why am I saying this?

[25 : 19] Because of the word hope here in the text. The word hope in the text. If you look again at verse 5, it says this, For through the spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

Now, in Canadian English, what does hope mean? Hope means something weak. I hope the senators win the Stanley Cup before Matt Duchesne goes somewhere else.

Now, what do you folks think about that? Do you think I'd bet all of my RRSPs on Matt? No, you'd want to have me going for therapy or something if I did something like that.

You'd say, George, that's a foolish thing because, I mean, what are the odds? You can hope for it but it's just like a, just sort of hope. In the Bible, hope doesn't mean that.

Hope basically means assurance. A type of humble or blessed assurance. difference. And there's no way to translate that even easily into English without having a couple of sentences.

[26 : 38] By the way, it's one of the reasons why it's part of God's original intention that there be local churches because we're all called to read the Bible as individuals but we can't just read the Bible as individuals.

We need people to help us read the Bible, to help us to understand it and explain it. One of the things that you should pray for me is that when I preach and teach that at the end of it you are more able to read the Bible for yourself in an accurate way.

So just, could you put up the next point? Here's the first thing. It's very, very interesting. Remember, the way the world sees us is that we're obsessed with money, we're obsessed with sex, we're obsessed with power but here Paul is saying the gospel calls us to freedom, the gospel makes us free and then it warns us and what does it warn us?

It warns us first about religion and now it's going to start to try to explain once again what the gospel is. One of the things it does is it talks about hope and the fact of the matter is is that we hunger for hope, for true hope.

We warn our friends that this is a false hope, that it's a vain hope, that it's a foolish hope, that it's a, you know, you know, I don't know, you know, my Toronto friends in Toronto would say it's a vain hope to hope that the Senators will ever win the Stanley Cup, George, because the Leafs are going to win the Stanley Cup many times before Ottawa ever wins.

[28 : 05] So that's, you know, that's a joke, right? But we warn each other about false hopes, vain hopes, counterfeit hopes, but we all know that human beings need hope, we crave hope, we starve, and when we start to come to a point in time when we feel that there is no hope, that all we have is despair, and in the middle of it, if you could put up the next point, what Paul says here is that the Holy Spirit grows in Christians a humble assurance that we are not doomed, but that in Jesus Christ crucified, we will one day walk in the garden with God naked and unashamed.

This is not presumption because, you see, the Holy Spirit works. When it says by faith, it doesn't just mean, well, I have faith in this or faith in that.

No, it means every time you see the word faith here in this context, it's always for saying about faith in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Faith in God's powerful, effective grace that we receive when we, by faith, believe what God, receive what God has done for us in the person of His Son.

And so the Holy Spirit both draws us to a saving faith in Jesus, but the Holy Spirit doesn't just draw us to a faith in the saving work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, one of the things the Holy Spirit quietly does in our lives is continually draw us back to Jesus and Him crucified.

And part of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives isn't just to have us have certain emotions, you know, we all want to have great emotions, right, or emotions that we find pleasant. But the work of the Holy Spirit isn't a work of emotions primarily, it's work in this text to constantly bring us back to this faith in Jesus Christ and Him crucified and what it is that God has accomplished in the person of His Son.

[30 : 01] And what He's accomplished in us is that it is now not my ability to follow rules that makes me right with God, but Jesus' perfect obedience, His perfect rule-keeping, His death upon the cross that deals with my shame, that deals with my failures, that deals with my outright evil and my outright lack, and that it's His wholeness and His completeness and His perfect sacrifice made actual here on earth.

And God, through this, does something which I can never do, but He does, and He does it completely without reservation. He does it fully, and that when I put my hands out because He said, George, if you just put your hand out, I will give you a promise that will make you mine forever, and mine forever means mine forever, and when I put my hand out and He gives me Jesus and He takes my hand, He will never let me go.

And in a sense, when I put my faith in Jesus, the final word about me from the only person who matters, who is God Himself, has now been spoken, and I know it, that there might be times I backslide, there will be times I backslide.

There are definitely aspects of sin within me that I have to deal with, but I am not doomed. In Christ, my destiny is that one day I, with others who are Christ's, will walk in the garden once again with God in the cool of the day, and I will be naked and unashamed.

That is a blessed assurance. That is the Christian hope. And it's the opposite of presumption, because it's based, in a sense, on giving up any hope in my own power and abilities, and my own specialness.

[32 : 12] And saying, only God, only you. And look what else it does. He also describes what faith is again in the very next verse. So verse 5 again, for through the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait.

In other words, we eagerly have an assurance for the hope of righteousness. The righteousness here once again means being right with God in a way that's right. verse 6, for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything.

It doesn't matter if you're circumcised or uncircumcised. Go ahead. If you're a guy, get circumcised. Circumcise your boys if you want. Don't circumcise them. It doesn't matter. It's just a personal preference.

But what matters? Verse 6, only faith working through love. Only faith working through love.

Now there's a Latin phrase which I'm not going to try to say because I don't know how to pronounce Latin. This actually, one of the things just recently we celebrated or many people celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and one of the things which slipped into the medieval church, the medieval church was in fact the complete opposite of what this verse says.

[33 : 32] And there's a Roman, there's a Latin phrase for it. But basically in the medieval church they began to say that what works is that love, my love forms faith.

So that love comes first. So what does that mean? Well I have to love the sacrament. I have to love the blessed virgin. I have to love the poor. I have to love the institution.

I have to do these types of acts of love. And as I do these types of love, then faith in Christ will be formed by which I'm saved.

But this text says no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Faith working through love. If you could put up the next point that would be great.

Saving faith in Jesus Christ crucified expresses itself in self-giving love. See, how is one of the ways that we understand that we've come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ?

[34 : 34] Not that automatically we become like a Mother Teresa. but that as this gospel of grace grips us and we put our faith and trust in him, that as God's grace, as Jesus and his self-giving death upon the cross, as that starts to ground us and shape us and nudge us and draw us, one of the things that we find being expressed in our being gripped by this gospel truth is that we start to express and do things that are self-giving love.

We do. But some of you might say I have to wrap this up. Isn't God mean? Didn't Paul say something in this text that John read just a few minutes ago?

Isn't he very mean? Doesn't Paul say that men who want to go down this route should castrate themselves, cut off their male sexual member? Well, he does actually.

I don't know if you caught that. Look at verses 7 through 12. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion and the word in the original language here, persuasion here, persuasion in English is a neutral word.

It's a good word. But in the original language it has a bit of a sense of like what the con man does to persuade you. There's a sense there in the original language.

[36 : 14] This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. In other words, once false teaching comes into your church, it's going to go throughout the entire church. It's going to touch everything.

And then he says, I have confidence in the Lord that you, that he's a plural, you, the congregation will take no other view and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty whoever he is. In other words, he's just saying, listen, at the end of the day, God is going to deal with this.

God's going to deal with this. We have to deal with it in terms of maybe excluding them from teaching, but God will deal with them. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, because maybe the false teachers were saying that Paul used to be very zealous for it, which is true.

Maybe he's referring to the fact that he had Timothy circumcised for ministry amongst the Gentiles, but whatever it is, they're twisting things. He says, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed.

I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves. As long as he doesn't do anything, it's a very, very, you know, if you ever read, I don't think this is a spoiler, but if you ever read the really excellent novel World War Z, don't see the movie, read the book.

[37 : 29] In fact, the book has virtually nothing to do with the movie. And one of the things in the book is that there's a guy who becomes very rich by selling an antidote.

He says that if you take this, it will mean that you won't become a zombie if you're bit by a zombie. And it's a lie. And it's part of the dynamic of the book.

And, I mean, wouldn't you hate somebody? Like, wouldn't you just want some unbelievable punishment to happen to somebody who willingly becomes rich selling false confidences to people? You see, part of the reason that we have trouble with Paul's language is that we, at the end of the day, we start to slide into the Canadian belief that the gospel and religion is just like talking about ice cream flavors.

It doesn't really matter in terms of our eternal destiny. But if we're gripped with this idea that there really is our eternal destiny hangs on this, then this is not extreme language.

[38 : 30] But here's the thing. If you could put up the next point, I'm going to have to run through my points quickly. Embrace the offense of the cross of Christ. Embrace the gospel. That's what Paul is saying here, right?

He's saying the gospel is an offense. Why is it an offense? Because the gospel tells us our rules won't work. The gospel warns us about presumption.

The gospel warns us about these things. It undercuts our pride. It undercuts our boasting. It undercuts our thinking that we're superior because we're Anglicans or because we're white or because we're black or because we're Canadians or because we're Africans or because we're Chinese.

That the gospel keeps relativizing this and undercutting this and offering a completely and utterly different way of being made right with God. It relativizes things that we want to make absolutes out of.

It is constantly an offense and Paul is saying I've embraced the offense of the cross. That's the gospel. Could you do it too? Just in closing, look at verses 13 and 14 because Paul once again goes back to the theme of the letter.

[39 : 35] For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

for the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

You see, if you understand the whole law is assumed in one word, one phrase, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, whoever believes that they had done that 100% of the time and gotten 100%. Who other than someone with proud presumption? Just if you could put up the next point. So what Paul is saying here is another perennial counterfeit to saving faith in Jesus is self-serving faith.

Why? Because the self-serving faith is a religious faith that means that we can just serve our appetites. It's wanting to give ourselves, hearing about the gospel and then thinking that if we just sort of mentally assent to a certain thing or do a few rules, that it means we can do whatever we want in our life, but at the end of the day we're going to go to heaven.

[40 : 47] It's not getting this whole being cut and our whole need for God's mercy and dependence. It's not understanding that giving ourselves to Christ and the gospel means that we will now have this pressure that comes from within for self-denying, self-effacing love that is good for the other person.

And when Paul says this one whole verse summarizes the whole law, if you could put up the next point, the law that he's saying that true love is a form of goodness and holiness which energizes me to give myself for the good and holiness of the other to the glory of God.

Why? Because what does the law do? The law talks about the holiness of God. It talks about goodness. It talks about truth. If you read the Old Testament for the first books of Moses, it talks about beauty as well.

And so he's not saying that love is just somehow something like give me, give me, give me or having a particular feeling that love is at one with goodness and love is at one with holiness and love is at one with goodness and holiness and is at one with desiring to be with the God who loves, who is good and who is holy.

And it means that if I'm going to do true love, if I'm acting in a loving way to another person, it's not going to be something that hurts them, that wounds them, that leads them far from God. That my act of self-giving love is going to be something that is good, that serves them in a way that's good for them and in a way that is holy, that in a sense fits them for God or draws them close to God and that that is what happens when we put our faith in Christ is that this energy comes to move us in this direction.

[42 : 41] And why does the world need the gospel then if you could put up the final point? We hunger for love. Every single person that we will meet hungers for hope and hungers for love.

they might not realize it but they hunger for God and they might not realize it but they hunger for what only God can do and has done in the person of his son.

Please stand. Father, your word warns us about presumption.

Father, may your Holy Spirit move and work in our lives to help presumption die in us and create within us, Father, rather than presumption to be more gripped by true faith in the gospel.

And Father, your word warns us of the possibility that our faith is just a matter of serving ourselves and that we can be deceived. And Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit and your word would work in our lives to lead us away from self-deception and lead us, Father, towards having a true faith which expresses itself in such a love.

[44 : 03] And Father, we do hunger and we do thirst ourselves for love and for hope. And we thank you, Father, that you both meet our thirst in the person of your son and that as you meet our thirst, you create an even deeper thirst, a thirst which is filled with joy as you draw us to yourself.

Father, may your Holy Spirit make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, learning to live for your glory. And we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.