

Freedom Fighting

Acts 13-15 - NCBC, February 26, 2017

Main Point: **God's Gospel of Freedom in Christ will always be opposed.**

- Opposition from Demonic Powers
Paphos (Acts 13:4-12)
- Opposition from Internal Disunity
Perga (Acts 13:13)
- Opposition from Racial Discrimination
Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-50)
- Opposition from Disobedient Unbelief
Iconium (Acts 14:1-7)
- Opposition from Cultic Devotion to Idols
Lystra (Acts 14:8-20)
- Opposition from Dangerous Persecution
Derbe (Acts 14:21)
- Opposition from Deadly Tradition
Antioch of Syria (Acts 14:26-15:3)
- Opposition from Law-Keeping Duty
Jerusalem (Acts 15:4-20)

Application: **Pursue the freedom of true righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ alone.** (Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 5:1)

Opening Announcements:

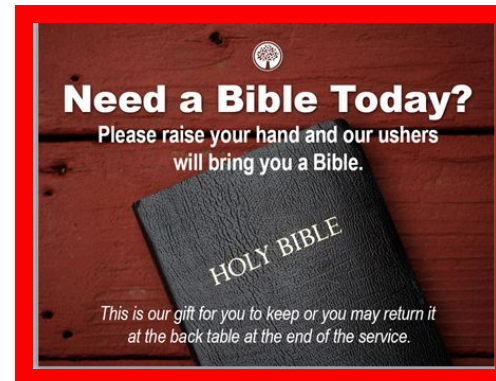
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<<Blessed Assurance>>



What's your story? What's your song? I pray that it is praising our Jesus all the day long. For only Jesus Christ can free us from slavery to sin!

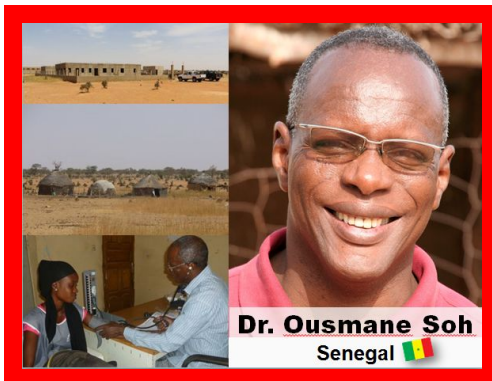
We continue our worship now by opening God's Word to **the Acts of the Apostles – chapter 13.**



If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, you're going to want one to follow along in the message this morning. So just raise your hand so we can get you a Bible. We're covering 3 chapters this morning – so you'll definitely benefit by having your Bible open in front you throughout today's message.

We were so blessed by Jerry McCorkle's ministry last week, and the Gospel partnership we enjoy with Spread Truth Ministries. We are eager to see the Story of God's grace and forgiveness taken to everyone, everywhere!

And that's why we are so excited to introduce you to Dr. Ousmane Soh from Senegal next Sunday!



Dr. Soh will be preaching from Nehemiah and sharing a ministry update with us. He is a born-again Christ follower who is also a medical physician. He uses his medical clinic as a Gospel-outpost in a country that is 95% Muslim. Our own Kyle and Diane Krall have worked

with him the past 6 years through *The Luke Society*, and highly recommend his ministry to us.

So for the sake of the Gospel, we are planning a little surprise for Dr. Soh.

As he comes to encourage us with the word of God, our Missions Committee is encouraging all of us to prayerfully seek to bless and encourage this faithful Gospel partner.

Dr. Soh has been working for years to build a medical clinic that would further God's Gospel purposes in the middle of this region. After several years he is now just \$20,000 away from finally completing the project!

So after both services next week, we will be taking a special exit offering to help fund the remainder of this clinic. We believe this is a very worthy and right investment for the glory of God among the Muslim people in Senegal. So prayerfully consider how God may have you share in this effort, and then come prepared to give generously next week. Your gift will not only greatly encourage the faith of Dr. Soh, but also give glory to God!



Today we turn our attention to Paul's first missionary journey. Because before we study Galatians, it's helpful to learn a bit of the background behind Paul's letter.

You see, there was no singular "Galatian" church. Galatia was a *region* in the middle of modern day Turkey. So Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to *several* different churches – all whom he ministered to during his first missionary journey.

So our Bibles are open to **Acts 13**, where we jump into the middle of one of Paul's first sermons at one of these Galatian churches.

You can find this text on page _____ of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read from **Acts chapter 13, verse 36**:

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, 37 but he whom God raised up did

not see corruption. 38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. 40 Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: 41 "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you."

So reads God's Holy Word. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

If you've ever been on a mission's trip – you know how difficult it is to report on everything you've experienced upon your return. You get home from your travels, and people ask, "How was the trip?" "What did God teach you?" And when you try to explain all the different experiences that God gave you, and all the ways you saw God at work, it all sounds very 1-dimensional and weak compared to what you actually experienced.

So as I've had the privilege of serving Christ as a short-timer in Haiti and Jamaica, I've learned it's helpful to organize my reports by a particular theme.

For example, if someone wants to know about the culture of Jamaica – I share what happens in a society after the family institution has been purposefully removed.

Or if they ask about the country's economy, I can tell them stories about Bauxite mining and show them pictures of red lakes with putrid mining scum thick enough to support the weight of a small animal.

Or if someone asks about the people, I can talk and talk about the many different friendships I made with children living in orphanages tucked into the side of mountains, or faithful believers who were living out their last days in the filthy squalor of infirmaries, or believers with great faith, even though the entire sum of their belongings, including their home, would have all fit on this platform with room to spare.

In other words, mission trips have a way of taking us outside our comfort zones and exposing us to God's grace in fresh and strengthening ways. That's why I highly recommend that every New Castle member go on a mission's trip! It's good for your soul!

As I studied Paul's mission I observed a repeating pattern.

Missionary Patterns:

- Gospel **Announced**
- Gospel **Attacked**
- Gospel **Advanced**

Paul and his teammates would announce the Gospel, the Gospel and its messengers would be attacked, and then the Gospel would advance by the supernatural power of God!

So this morning I wish to take you on a helicopter tour of Pauls' first missionary journey to the Galatian churches, and we will trace the thread of Gospel opposition through the entire trip.

And we'll see that opposition doesn't ultimately overcome the advance of the Gospel. Grace always wins in the end!

But we should also expect attacks on the message of salvation by faith alone in Jesus. Human nature hates undeserved grace. Proud hearts want to earn their own salvation some way. So don't be surprised to suffer for faithfully proclaiming the love and grace of Jesus Christ!

Make sure and note this, this morning

GALATIANS:
Freedom from Legalism

Main Point

God's gospel of freedom in Christ will always be opposed.

God's Gospel of freedom in Christ will always be opposed.

And since this is true... we need to take heed for our own hearts – to make sure that we are truly trusting in Christ's finished work for our righteousness. As we trace the thread of the Gospel's opposition on Paul's first missionary journey to the Galatian churches... please ask yourself,

Am I still fighting this kind of opposition to my spiritual freedom in Christ? Or have I succumbed in some way to a Gospel attack...and allowed myself to be enslaved again to the very thing that Christ died to free me from?

We must pursue the freedom of true righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ alone.



The year is 46-48 A.D. **Chapter 13 of Acts** starts by telling us how the Syrian church at Antioch served as the sending church for Paul and his teammates as they fasted and prayed, and sent them off.¹

Their first stop was the island of Cyprus, where their message of freedom in Christ quickly encountered,

Opposition from
Demonic Powers
Paphos (Acts 13:4-12)

Opposition from Demonic Powers

¹ Acts 13:3

In **verse 5**, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark start to proclaim the word of God to the Jews. And at Paphos, they meet opposition from a certain man whose Jewish name ironically means “Son of Salvation” and his Greek name means “Magician.” Bar-Jesus or Elymas was a deceiver. Putting his knowledge to evil use – trying to gain power through his influence with the town’s governor.

This is nothing short of Satanic opposition to God’s gospel.

Look at **verse 8**. Satan and his demons are always opposing the Gospel of God. Seeking to turn people away from the faith. In **verse 10** Paul calls him the “son of the devil.”

And yet, greater is He who is in us – the Holy Spirit – than he who is in the world, right?² Amen!

And so God’s Spirit works through Paul to literally blind the sorcerer in **verse 11**, and thereby testify that true spiritual freedom can only come by faith in Jesus Christ alone!

Now learn this lesson church.

Leading someone to faith in Jesus Christ is not a mere intellectual exercise. It’s not about just sharing a story, or

² 1 John 4:4

making an emotional connection. It’s all-out war against the forces of hell!

Satan and his minions do not want us to experience the freedom of true righteousness – the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone!

But that’s not all that opposes God’s gospel of grace. Look at **verse 13** with me,

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem.



God was at work on the island of Cyprus! The team must have been encouraged. So they continued their journey, landing at Perga...only to have their own team fractured from within, as John Mark deserts the team and heads back to Jerusalem.

Can you image the heart-breaking pain of,



Internal Disunity

The Scriptures don't tell us why John Mark separated from the group. But we know from **Acts 15:38** that Paul did not find his reasons valid.

Maybe John was afraid of traveling in the dangerous robber-infested mountains?³ Maybe John was jealous of Paul's leadership over his cousin Barnabas? Or maybe he didn't actually approve of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles?

We really don't know why John Mark deserted his teammates in the middle of this first missionary journey. But this we do know – the true Gospel of freedom in Christ will always be attacked – and often by “friendly fire.”

³ 2 Corinthians 11:26

Christians often undermine the progress of the Gospel with their own fears, selfishness, and unforgiveness. Pride and competition disrupt Gospel progress.

So ask yourself this morning,

Is there any way that your freedom in Christ is being constrained by fear, pride, or bitterness? Have you taken personal credit or responsibility for your spiritual freedom in Christ in a way that makes it more about you than about the Jesus whom you claim to trust?

Is there any broken relationship between you and another person which is hindering the progress of God's gospel in your life and ministry? If so – humble yourself, and repent. Consider Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 7:3-5** – take the beam out of your own eye before you concern yourself with the speck in your neighbor's eye. And pursue humble reconciliation in the Gospel of God! Satan would love nothing more than to divide God's people and undermine their testimony of the very Gospel freedom that they proclaim in Christ!

So after John Mark deserts, **verse 14** finds the missionaries up at **Antioch in Pisidia**.



They are now in the Galatia region, and here their message of freedom by faith in Christ alone meets the,



Opposition of Racial Discrimination

Let me briefly summarize Luke's historical account of this visit for us in **Acts 13**:

In **verse 16** Paul begins a sermon to the Jews as part of their Sabbath worship in the synagogue. Through this sermon, Paul recounts the history of God's work through

the Jewish people – from Abraham to Moses to the Prophets to King David to John the Baptist to Jesus.

Starting in **verse 28**, Paul recounts the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And in **verse 32** – Paul argues that Jesus is the good news. Jesus is the gospel fulfillment of the promises of God to His people! And then notice this amazing punch line in **verses 38-39**,

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

This is bold Gospel preaching! And the initial response was very positive. Look at **verse 44**,

The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

Revival was about to break out in Antioch of Pisidia! But this only aroused the jealousy of the Jews, and dividing lines were drawn by one's race.

The Jews despised this message of freedom in Christ by faith alone. You can see their strong opposition in **verses 45 and 50**. They were contradicting, or continually speaking against Paul's message. They were reviling or blaspheming – speaking evil against God and Christ.

Theirs was the sin of Jonah. The sin of prejudice.

Have you ever succumbed to such spiritual elitism?

Have you started to believe that the Gospel is somehow tied to your own culture? Your own preferences? Your own history? Your own race?

Because our local church is so mono-ethnic, we are very prone to this Gospel attack.

But the clear reality of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is that grace is no discriminator of persons. Look at **verse 48**,

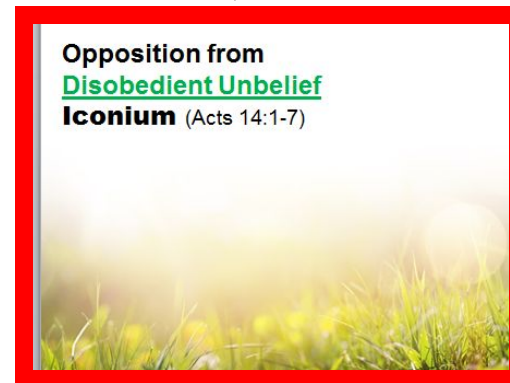
When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

True righteousness comes by grace. To the weak, the poor, strangers, foreigners, and the rejected. Do you need to repent of any spiritual elitism that perceives any others as “untouchables?” Paul writes Galatians to unite God’s people as one multi-ethnic family that is transformed by the Spirit of God!

From Antioch of Pisidia our missionaries travel to Iconium.



As their habit was, **chapter 14 verse 1** tells how they began preaching the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue. But **verses 2, 4 and 5** describe the opposition they encountered as,



Opposition from Disobedient Unbelief

The Jews are characterized as “unbelieving” in **verse 2**. This same word can be translated as disobedient. For to disbelieve the goodness of the Gospel is to disobey God.

The verse goes on to describe how the Jews try to poison the minds of the Gentiles. They were trying to embitter hearts against the sufficiency of Christ alone.

The effect of Gospel preaching in this city was division – **verse 4**. And you see the mob mentality of the opposition, as **verse 5** says that “an attempt” was made to mistreat and stone the missionaries. In today’s vernacular we’d call this a riot.

Now maybe you have never participated in a riot or tried to murder a preacher of the true Gospel. But let me ask you,

Have you ever justified your self-trust by comparing yourself with others? Have you ever found assurance in what is popular, more than what is preached?

Let me illustrate.

Where do you look for answers when you are convicted by God’s Spirit to change in some way? Do you look to God’s Word? Or do you look to other people?

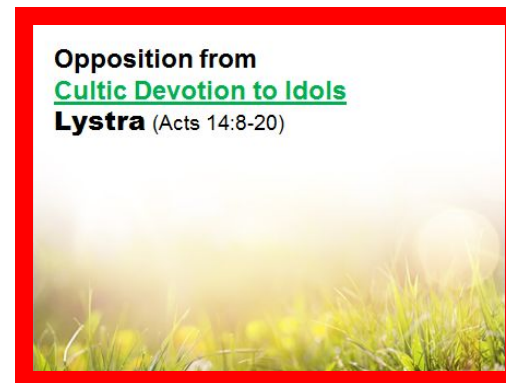
Now biblical community in the church is a gift from God – and it has its place – but if our faith is more a function of our parents, or our friends, or our pastors – than it is between us and the Lord ...then we are not truly trusting in Christ alone for our spiritual freedom are we?

Christ alone is the source of true freedom. The unbelief of the crowd will always oppose true grace.

Disobedient unbelief drove the missionaries out of Iconium towards Lystra about 18 miles away.



And as they continued to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the “Listerines,” they encountered...



Opposition from Cultic Devotion to Idols

Iconium was the home of Lois, Eunice, and Timothy.⁴ In fact it's likely that Timothy was converted during this first missionary journey of Paul.

There is no synagogue mentioned; this is a Gentile region. And starting in **verse 8** we see God's Spirit transform and heal a hopeless situation. The text repeats the man's condition three times, emphasizing how hopeless his situation really was:

Man who could not use his feet, he was crippled from birth, and he had never walked.

But there's no hopeless situation for Jesus! God's Spirit heals this man. But that's when the people's devotion to idolatry gets exposed.

For the Lysterines say in **verse 11**, "*the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*"

They believe Barnabas to be Zeus, and Paul to be Hermes, and prepare to offer sacrifices in worship to their false gods.

Now there's probably two ways we can learn from their opposition to the true gospel here. First, our materialistic flesh often wants to make the supernatural, natural. We want images of God that we can actually touch or see with our eyes. We want specific rules and regulations to follow that are measurable, observable, and scientific –

rather than a relationship of knowing Christ and walking in the Spirit for true spirituality.

We must guard ourselves from such idolatry.

But by extension, we should also note the danger of worshipping men more than God Himself. It is easy today for Christians to cluster together in camps that are more devoted to a particular leader than Christ Himself.

Idolatry is a wicked evil. In **verse 19** the Lysterines are persuaded by Jews from Antioch and Iconium to stone Paul – drag him out of the city, and leave him for dead.

The false religion of idolatry seeks to murder true freedom in Christ!

But note well **verse 20 of chapter 14**,

But when the disciples gathered around [Paul's body], he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas [the 40 miles] to Derbe!

⁴ Acts 16:1, 2 Timothy 1:5



According to **verse 21**, they preached the Gospel in Derbe, then circled back through all the Galatian churches,

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

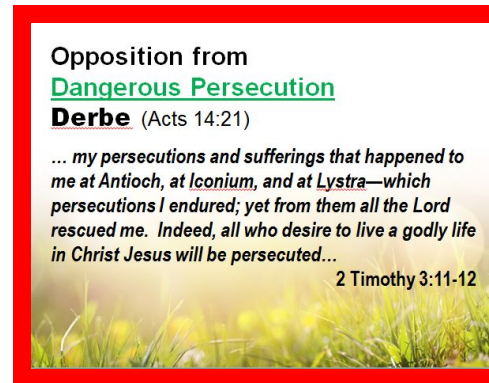
In other words, true believers must expect



Opposition from Dangerous Persecution

Do you expect that your freedom in Christ will be costly to your personal comfort, ease, and esteem in this world?

Listen to Paul's words from **2 Timothy 3:11-12**,



He tells Timothy, you have followed...

... my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...

Freedom in Christ may result in physical imprisonment and slavery in this world. That's an interesting paradox isn't it? But nothing can truly separate the soul from the freedom of Christ's righteousness.

And so after appointing elders in every one of the Galatian churches (**verse 23**),



...the missionaries prayerfully commit the new believers to the Lord and return to their sending church, Antioch of Syria.

The first missionary journey is complete – and so you would think that the opposition to the Gospel would end, right?

But no. Here at their sending church we encounter,



Opposition from Deadly Tradition

Chapter 15 starts by introducing us to Judiazers from Jerusalem had brought the deadly plague of righteousness by human achievement – salvation by works. Salvation by circumcision of the flesh, rather than circumcision of the heart.

The appeal of this opposition was to custom. Tradition. Tradition. And O how prone we are to falling into the trap of making our culture and tradition our primary authority for what is necessary for salvation, rather than the very words of God Himself.

Tradition of course is not wrong. In fact it can be a very helpful servant to our faith. But when the teaching of man functionally adds or subtracts from the living word of God, then tradition becomes our master.

In fact, this is the very slave master that Jesus died to set us free from. We cannot mix human works with faith without nullifying the saving grace of God.⁵

The missionaries knew this was of utmost importance. So after much disagreement and debate, the elders of the Antioch church sent a group with Paul to go to Jerusalem to help settle this matter:

What must a person do to be saved?

⁵ Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:21



And in Jerusalem, the Pharisees argue again in **verse 5 of chapter 15** that “it is necessary for Christians to be circumcised to keep the law of Moses.”

But Paul argues forcefully that this is opposed to the true Gospel. This is the,



Opposition from Law-Keeping Duty

You see the Pharisees in Jerusalem were proposing a different argument than the Judiazers in Antioch. The

Judiazers were saying you had to be circumcised to be saved. The Pharisees were arguing you were saved by grace, but still under obligation to keep the law after being saved.

But here’s the reality church – whatever you are trusting to keep you saved is what you are trusting for your salvation.

Please don’t miss this. If you are trusting your obedience to keep you saved – then you are trusting your obedience for your salvation, and you have fallen prey to a false gospel of law-keeping.

Christ died for you. Christ rose for you. So that everyone who believes in Him is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by your law-keeping duty.

As Peter argues in **verse 11**,

We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the Jerusalem council of 49 A.D. concluded definitively that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone. Man is not justified by works of the law, but faith in Jesus Christ alone.⁶

And so after the conclusion of this Jerusalem council, Paul writes Galatians. For he wants these new churches

⁶ Galatians 2:16

to have great clarity on their freedom in Christ. He knows that,

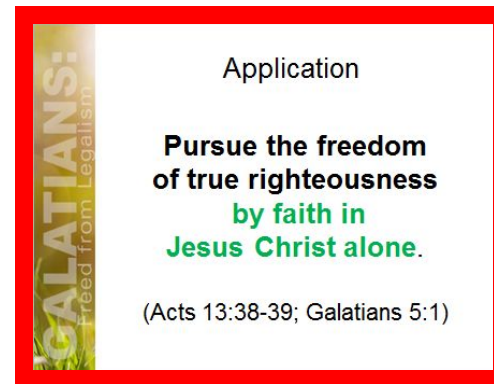


God's gospel of freedom by faith alone in Jesus Christ will always be opposed. And he knows there's strong opposition trying to convince the new believers to add human works to their Christianity.

And so he writes Galatians. And we are eager to study it... because it's true in our lives just as much as for the Galatian churches.

Paul's First Missionary Journey warns us that Gospel preaching will either set you free from the law, or harden your devotion to law-keeping.

So let's learn along with the Galatian churches to



Pursue the freedom of true righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ alone. (Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 5:1)

Paul says in **Galatians 5:1**,

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Christ alone sets you free from sin. Christ alone can do what the law could never do – in transforming your very nature so that your desires are even pleasing to God.

Christ has given us of His Spirit – and now we are free to walk by the Spirit and live by the Spirit – all for the greater glory and praise of God our Savior!

Let's fight together for this kind of freedom. For faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to find true freedom from sin.

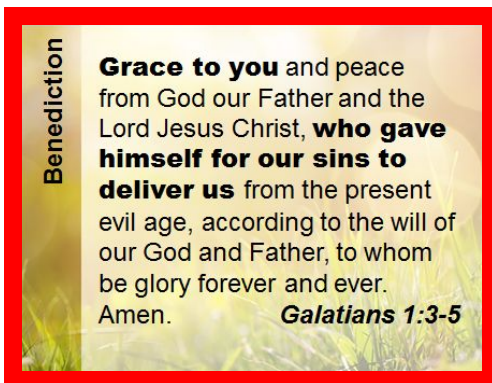
Let's pray.

Amen.



Closing Song – <<Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)>>

Benediction



³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Recommended Resources on Freedom Fighting:

- Acts 13:38-39
- Romans 2: 29; 3:20-25, 28; 8:2-4; 9:30-32; 10:2-4
- Galatians 1:7; 2:4-5, 15-16, 20-21; 3:11, 25-26; 4:4-7; 5:1, 4-6; 6:14-15
- Galatians Overview: The Bible Project – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmx4UjRFp0M>
- Steve Lawson “Justification By Faith Alone” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2Mf3SrRs2Y>
- “Justification” A Gospel Coalition Booklet, Philip Graham Ryken <http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/booklets/Justification.pdf>
- *The Whole Christ*, Sinclair Ferguson
- *The Discipline of Grace*, Jerry Bridges

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:11. Review the various forms of opposition that the Gospel faced on Paul's first missionary journey. What opposition to freedom in Christ is currently most relevant in your own life?
2. Read Romans 9:31-10:4. Legalism is pursuing true righteousness with some other "engine" than faith. How are you most tempted to establish your own righteousness apart from faith in Christ?
3. Galatians has been considered a "mini-Romans." What is your favorite verse in Galatians, and why?
4. Read Acts 13:38-39. How do you define freedom in Christ? Cf. Romans 8:21 and Galatians 5:1, 13ff
5. Read Matthew 10:34-39. Discuss why God's Gospel is so divisive.
6. We shift our hope from the gospel when we either minimize our own sin (pretending/license) or minimize God's holiness (performing/legalism). Discuss which error is most tempting for you, and then pray for each other to grow in the "obedience of faith" as taught in Romans 1:5 and 16:26.