

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Chapter 4

The Holy But

The boss walks through his factory ... spots a 20-something in cut-offs leaning on a shipping crate. "How much you get for doin' that, son?" "\$500 a week, sir." The boss peels a *thou* from his money clip. "Here's *two* weeks. Get your butt outta here! You're fired!" The kid disappears. Turning to his foreman, the boss growls, "Who hired him?" "Beats me. He's the Fed Ex guy."

"But" with one "t" is one of the most welcome words in the Bible. Let's read Romans 3:20-24 (p. 838 NIV) and 6:20-23 (p. 330, MSG).

Ever muttered something like -- "Sure, *God* loves me, *but* my life sucks right now." Or - "I know *God* loves me, *but* I feel so alone."

The problem? Your but's in the wrong place. Try this.....

"Life stinks right now, *but* I know God will never desert me." Or -- "I'm so confused, *but* God has a great plan for my life."

It's not what you *feel*; it's what you *know* that counts. Put what God says is true on the right side of your *but* ...so you can rest on it.

"Don't gimme that ole time religion."

"I need to clean up some junk in my life first before God can forgive me." If you've thought this, religion comes through with things for you to do and not do. *Legalism* = striving to earn God's approval.

God's prophets told the Jewish people many centuries ago that their Messiah would come take all their sin to the cross (Isaiah 53:4-6). They said Messiah would set up His kingdom on earth with Jerusalem as His throne. This news was conditioned on their observing rules re cooking, eating, bathing, worshiping, sex, et al.

Christ's fellow Jews meticulously lived by Moses' law; yet they hung the sinless Messiah (2 Corinthians 5:16). So the answer's not religion; it's trusting God who has done, is doing and will do ALL we need to be secure in Him. When we accept His forgiveness, He'll do good works through us, out of "want to" not "have to."

After the Lord was crucified, raised to life again and returned to His Father, Peter, James and John pastored those in Jerusalem who welcomed Jesus as their promised Messiah.

Let's read Peter's pitch in Acts 3:17-21 (p. 812 NIV). And Stephen's last words to the Jewish experts in Moses' Law in Acts 7:51-8:1 (p. 816 NIV).

DISCUSS: What are Peter's and Stephen's version of the Gospel?

Saul, who endorsed Stephen's stoning, becomes a holy terror, torturing Jesus' people. Then the risen Christ does an extreme makeover on Saul, repurposing him as "Paul, God's first voice to Gentiles." Note the uniqueness of Paul's Gospel in Galatians 2:15-16, 20-21 (p. 866 NIV); and Ephesians 2:1-10, 3:2-12 (p. 869 NIV).

DISCUSS: This is God's Grand Invitation for today, from Jesus' lips in heaven to Paul's ears in the Arabian desert. What is it, in one sentence?

Paul calls it "my gospel," "the mystery" and "the secret." Let's read Galatians 4:1-31 (p. 414 MSG)

"But God," not "God But" ***Galatians 4:1-7***

When Paul took the Gospel to today's Turkey, many Galatians embraced it. Some believers in Jerusalem heard that these new, mostly Gentile converts were following Christ without keeping the Mosaic law, circumcision or countless religious rules. So they convinced many new Gentile converts that faith was not enough.

Another "holy but:" "I was doomed to fail by trying to keep the law, but now God has forgiven and forgotten all my sin" (Romans 8:1-2).

DISCUSS: Why is it tempting to believe that Jesus' death, burial and resurrection require more than our faith to save and keep us saved?

Rites and Righteousness ***Galatians 4:8-11***

Once slaves to pagan idols, then free in Christ, now some Galatian faithful were fooled into thinking that religious exercises will *save* them or earn them extra grace from God (Romans 14:4-22).

Here's one more holy but: "Once I deserved God's death sentence, but He put all His justifiable wrath toward sin on Jesus at the cross. Now He's no longer angry with me since I've accepted His permanent pardon. Moses' laws are still God's standard of behavior, but since I can't keep them perfectly, Christ kept them for me."

DISCUSS: What's an appropriate response to news like this?

A Methadone In Their Madness

Galatians 4:12-20

The Galatian believers hadn't lost their salvation; they had exchanged the *joy* of being free in Christ for the placebo that God saves and keeps us based on our faith plus our human efforts.

DISCUSS: Name other misconceptions people have about God.

Artificial Incrimination

Galatians 4:21-31

The 4,000-year-old war of weapons and words between Jews and Arabs goes back to Isaac and Ishmael. About 2,000 B.C. Abraham and Sarah want kids, but her baby-maker is even too old for the "Antique Road Show" (Genesis 16). God promises them a son, despite Sarah's expired warranty (Romans 4:16–25).

Tired of waiting for God to act, Sarah pushes her man into the sack with her maid Hagar. This was socially okay, 'tho' not with God. But being an agreeable guy, Abe weds and beds Hagar.

Along comes son Ishmael. Imagine the hoots 86-year-old Abe gets down at the lodge from da boyz in the Order of the Arabian Stud!

Twenty-five years after God promised a son to Sarah, she delivers Isaac. Abe loved both of his sons. From Isaac, the child of God's promise, came the Jewish race. From Ishmael, the son of compromise, came the Arabs. And this family feud rages on today.

Before the cross Jews had their sins of the previous year forgiven by sacrificing a blemish-free animal on the Day of Atonement. When Jesus, God's sinless, sacrificial Lamb, died for the sins of the world, keeping the Law was superseded by faith in Christ as the way to get square with God once and for all (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus told the religious moguls of His day, "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your man-made tradition" (Matthew 15:6).

DISCUSS: Why does it seem so traitorous to knock "religion?"

Christ's death **paid in full** your sin debt which condemned you to eternity without God (John 1:12; Romans 4:4-5; Hebrews 4:10). When we take Jesus as our Savior, this happens:

- You're as right with God as Jesus is (1 Corinthians 1:30).

- Your sin no longer separates you from God (Romans 8:35-39). The real you – in which God’s Spirit lives -- is forever secure, “hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). One day Jesus will take you to be with Him always (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Jude 24-25).

- God’s Spirit helps you live, think and do right. Your old sin nature (powerless to please God) died with Christ, replaced by a new spirit (with God’s power to decline to sin, and power for “good works” that God does through you (Galatians 5:16-26).

Tired of trying to win God’s favor? Then just tell Him “Father, I’m unable to meet the Law’s standard of perfection. I believe Jesus paid my sin debt in full. Father, I now trade my old life in for the new life You have for me. Thank You. Because of Jesus, I’m Yours.”

His Deal

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God’s Grand Invitation to all in this “age of grace”
which He introduced through Paul
and which will end when
Jesus comes for the believers who will meet Him in the clouds
And live with Him for ever and ever, without end:

Since Jesus took your place on the cross, God permanently forgave you for all your sin. Receive that gift in faith; then God’s Spirit lives in you, and you are eternally secure in Christ.