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# First Word

A CHURCH FAMILY PUBLICATION OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 2019

## Jesus Plus? BY JOEL SUTTON

Mahatma Gandhi was the leader of India's independence movement. He was a pacifist. Before the movement, he trained to become a lawyer. He went to South Africa to get his education. He was there during the time of apartheid and came across a bunch of legalistic, racist, bigoted Christians. Upon returning to India, Gandhi said, "I like their Christ, but I do not like their Christians."

That is the kind of reaction our world has to us believers many times, based on negative experiences they have with legalistic Christians. Legalism destroys the church's witness in the world. It also destroys the life of the Christian.

If you question that, take a serious look at the letter to the Galatians. The apostle Paul's pen flowed with heated ink as he rebuked them for "deserting" Christ (1:6), "nullifying the grace of God" (2:21), becoming "bewitched" by legalism (3:1), and desiring "to be enslaved" by this crippling disease (4:9).

Paul is specifically addressing the issue of circumcision. Judaizers were going around from church to church, explaining that worshiping Jesus was not enough in order to have a relationship with God. They said you also needed to be circumcised.

Paul says "Beware of the 'Jesus plus' mentality." In Paul's day, it was Jesus plus circumcision. But in our day, it is Jesus plus health and wealth, or Jesus plus being good enough or Jesus plus religious activity. Beware of "Jesus plus".

*"But compared to knowing Christ, rules are weightless. It's the Redeemer who matters. True joy can only be found in following Christ."*

If you see Christianity as a religion without conceiving of it as a relationship, then you're in big trouble. If you're religious without knowing God and following God, you're in danger. In fact, being religious is just as dangerous and sometimes more dangerous than being irreligious. Religion - the legalistic, rule-following, prideful kind of religion - will destroy.

Pastor Tim Keller said in his book *The Reason for God*: "If you center your life and identity on religion and morality, you will, if you are living up to your moral standards, be proud, self-righteous, and cruel. If you don't live up to your own moral standards, your guilt will be utterly devastating."

Paul says in Galatians 5:1, "It is for

freedom that Christ has set us free." True freedom is not found in following rules; it's found in following our Redeemer.

To be clear, rules matter in some cases. There are limits to our freedom. Parents know that household rules are good. Grace does not condone license. But compared to knowing Christ, rules are weightless. It's the Redeemer who matters. True joy can only be found in following Christ.

Since Christ is perfect, we don't have to be perfect. Because Christ is righteous, our righteousness doesn't need to measure up to God. The gospel isn't about our finding a way to God; it's about God coming to us. Our righteousness is a gift from God. It comes through Christ by faith. With no added "plus".

This fall, I want to invite you join us on Sunday mornings, as we explore the Galatian letter and what it means to "lose your religion" and find true freedom in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the meantime, if a modern day "Judaizer" tries to tell you that you must add something to your faith in order to be a good Christian, stop him. Stop her. Don't let them "cut in on you" (Gal. 5:7) and keep you from the joy and freedom that is yours!



### OUR FALL SEASON BEGINS ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8TH!

ALL CLASSES AND ADULT COMMUNITY  
GROUPS WILL START UP THE  
FOLLOWING SUNDAY, SEPT. 15TH.

- The return to TWO SERVICES, 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. (Nursery and preschool classes will be provided both hours).
- Bibles given out to our Kindergarteners at 9:00 a.m.
- Open house for all ages (10:00-11:00 a.m.)
- Children and parents meet their teachers
- Parents and students talk with Pastor Jason and their small group leader
- Adults to discover how they can get connected
- Hear about the new Middle School ministry

FALL SERIES: LOSING MY RELIGION

OUR MISSION:  
TO HELP  
INDIVIDUALS  
BECOME  
CHRIST-CENTERED  
& CHRIST-SENT  
TOGETHER

WANT MORE INFO?

Web: [www.firstfreechurch.org](http://www.firstfreechurch.org)  
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# COMING SOON: NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL MINISTRY

We are excited about a change coming up this fall in our Velocity Student Ministries. We will be launching a new middle school program this September for our 6th-8th grade students on Wednesday evenings from 6:30-8:30pm. We feel this new program will help us better meet the wide-range of various developmental needs of all our students.



Our student ministries are structured to be small-group-centric because we strongly believe every teenager needs the opportunity to process out loud their spiritual faith journey. This happens with a consistent small group leader who cares about them and wants to propel them toward Jesus.

On Wednesday nights, our Middle School (6th-8th Grade) and Senior High (9th-12th) ministries will run separately but simultaneously. To help lead this new Middle School program on Wednesdays, Doug Nelson has volunteered to help work with these great middle school students. We are excited to have him among many other new volunteers joining our team!

We appreciate the tremendous love, support and partnership our Church family has shown for both our children and student ministries. Would you please join us in praying for this new season of our student ministries? We are looking forward to serving alongside our incredible youth leaders as we seek to propel students toward Jesus.

*Velocity Kick-Off is September 18th and Creekside Clubs begin September 25th!*

## This Month @FIRST FREE

- **September 11th Women's Neighborhood Bible Study.** Our first Bible study is Wednesday, September 11th from 9:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. This fall, we are studying 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. We also provide a great (free) program for children ages infant to 5yrs. Study books will be available in the lobby on Sunday, Sept. 1st and 8th for a cost of \$8.
- **Men United starts Friday, September 13th.** Men, join us for teaching, accountability, and community on Friday mornings, 6:30-7:30 a.m., Room 103.
- **Our MOPS/Momsnext groups** meet twice a month, on Friday mornings from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. **beginning September 13th.** Sign up for our fall semester of Mops and Momsnext at on our website: <http://www.mops.firstfreechurch.org/> Questions? Contact Renea Reichenbach-Carr ([Reneamarie@hotmail.com](mailto:Reneamarie@hotmail.com)), or Jeanine Bruen ([jeanine@bruen.org](mailto:jeanine@bruen.org)).

# STUDENT MINISTRY SUMMER TRIPS

## LEAD THE CAUSE | CHICAGO, IL

Right as summer kicked off 16 of our students and 4 adult leaders took part in Lead the Cause in Chicago, IL. This trip was designed to create Gospel movement within our student ministry by using intense prayer, training and street evangelism to give us opportunities to practice sharing Jesus with others. There is no other trip or training that has the impact on teens that Lead the Cause does. Students had the unique opportunity to see how Jesus can use them on mission to reach their friends for Him.



## CZECH REPUBLIC

In July for over two weeks, 7 of our students and 3 adult leaders went to the Czech Republic to partner alongside a local Church doing relational English camp as a form of outreach in the Czech. The Czech Republic is less than 1% Christian, so it was a privilege to build relationships with both students in the local Church to encourage them and with students who have not yet decided whether they want to follow Jesus.



## JR. HIGH ADVENTURE TRIP | ROCK RIDGE, MN

Near the end of this summer 6 adult leaders, 2 ministry team students and 22 of our Middle School students went on our Jr. High Adventure Trip to Rock Ridge in Ely, MN. The purpose of this trip was to encourage relationships and connect our students in our Middle School age group. They took part of adventures like canoeing and rock climbing and enjoyed time in the outdoors, disconnected from devices and screens as they spent time with God and each other.



## FALL SERIES | GALATIANS: LOSING MY RELIGION

SEPT. 8 A Poisoned Gospel

SEPT. 15 The Best Day Ever

SEPT. 22 Endorsed and Approved

SEPT. 29 The Answer to Religion

OCT. 6 Jesus Plus??

OCT. 13 Heirs to a Promise

OCT. 20 Religion Relapse

OCT. 27 Outreach Sunday

NOV. 3 Legalism Bully

NOV. 10 Who Tripped you Up?

NOV. 17 Step with the Spirit

NOV. 24 Reaping What We Sow