

Notes on Galatians

Commentary and Application

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DEDICATION

For the saints — wherever you are. Walk in grace.

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PREFACE

Loved one,

Inside this book are my own personal notes from months of preparation and teaching. What you will find is an approachable commentary and practical application on Paul's letter to the Galatians. In this letter the Apostle Paul pushes back against those who would imprison the church by legalism as he competes for their freedom that has been won by Christ. You will find that these writings are not more unique or exhaustive, or even particularly exceptional compared to other similar works. However, they are born out of prayer, searching the Scriptures, and attempting to communicate the centrality and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. These notes will not give all the answers to all the questions. In fact, there are many places where questions are left open, or standalone sentences glare on the page like signposts pointing to deeper study. It is my prayer that the serious disciple will search the Scriptures and hear from the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. He is ever faithful to teach us. Please, whatever you do, don't take my word for it! Ultimately, we are all responsible to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so, for it is by Scripture alone that we know truth (Acts 17:11).

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Anthony

CHAPTER 1 | GALATIANS 1:1-9

VERSES 1-2

Paul's Introductory Statement

The churches in Galatia were probably founded between AD 45-48.

Galatians was probably written ~AD 57-58 at the end of Paul's third missionary journey, although there is another theory that supposes that Paul wrote this letter much earlier and places it among his first epistles, around 10 years earlier.

Galatia is not a city but a region in the area of modern day Turkey. Cities of Galatia included Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

The recipients of this letter:

...seem to have been composed mainly of converts from heathenism...but partly also of Jewish converts, who probably, under the influence of Judaizing teachers, sought to incorporate the rites of Judaism with Christianity...This epistle was written for the purpose of counteracting this Judaizing tendency, and of recalling the Galatians to the simplicity of the gospel...The great question discussed is, Was the Jewish law binding on Christians?¹

With regard to the Galatian church, Halley's Bible Handbook reads, "There was a general epidemic of circumcision among these gentile Christians..."²

This area was controlled by the Roman Empire, in which one of the main forms of worship, along with paganism, would have been the imperial cult, or emperor worship.

This is the context into which Paul entered as he preached the gospel throughout this region, seeing the Holy Spirit move among the people and churches begin to form.

Paul finds himself in a position not unfamiliar to him as he is again compelled to write a letter correcting errors that began to grow within the Galatian churches.

¹ Easton, M. G. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893.

² Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook, Classic Edition: Completely Revised and Expanded Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014.

We find ourselves the beneficiaries of all of this in our day. We have such sound doctrine to reflect upon when we are faced with questions about conduct and what right doctrine is. We have the certain Word of God that was born out of much care and surely much contention, as we have seen in the Corinthian letters and will see in Galatians.

Paul introduces himself as an Apostle with a bold statement on who it is that makes Apostles, and by implication he makes known his own thoughts about the notion of man-made apostles.

Paul says that his apostleship is through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Note that the foundational truth of our faith establishes Paul's apostleship. His authority and role among the churches is divinely initiated and established by the Lord Jesus Christ, the redeemer of mankind and the Father who demonstrates His authority over all things by the resurrection!

Paul's commission is wrapped up in the truth of the resurrection. After all, it was that truth, seeing the risen Lord, that changed his entire life.

Again, we are reminded that no endorsing agency, ordaining body, congregation, or educational institution makes servants in the Kingdom of God. Only God does that, and He purposefully does so on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the resurrection.

Given that his entire apostleship is tied up in the resurrection, Paul has something to say about those false ministers

who do not believe the resurrection as a historical event, try to downplay its centrality, or paint it as allegory.

Paul also commends his “brothers” in the ministry to the churches as well. Teamwork makes the dream work.

God didn’t only call only Paul; there were and are other faithful workers in the Kingdom, names of men we may never know until eternity. They and their care for the churches are not unnoticed by God.

VERSES 3-5

With what does Paul open his letter? It is a common theme in Paul’s letters and one I pray is the heartbeat of our ministry: GRACE and PEACE — not legalism and drama; or, guilt and anxiety.

Grace is that unmerited, unearned, un-earnable favor of God. It is the fact that God cares for us and loves us completely without our having earned any bit of that favor.

That is how Paul opens this letter. That will be the heart of this letter and the heart of his ministry, really. It is grace alone by which we are saved.

This is something that the Galatians, as we will see, came to forget. They were attempting to improve upon God’s grace because of bad counsel from supposedly religious men who were ostensibly Christians but still preached that Jewish traditions and laws were mandatory to fulfill righteousness.

Juxtaposed against the law, this idea of grace is mind blowing! To explain to somebody, especially the pagans that

Paul was dealing with, that God WANTS us to be in His Kingdom, that He loves us no matter what terrible, heinous things or little white lies have stained our past.

And He loves us so much that He gave His son to die and suffer for all of those things in our place, that we might be reconciled to him — why?

That is the confounding question. It is because He loves us! Why? Because we are His creation, bearing His image, and He desires for us to bear His righteousness too!

The legalist might respond with, “You mean I don’t have to do anything!?” Correct. “What if I’ve already been doing all the things?!” That’s not necessary. Let that blow your mind. You have been saved by grace through faith, before you did anything at all!

Paul begins this letter with grace and peace and the good message of reconciliation with God, that Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins so He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of God. He is our rescuer and does not desire to see us languish or waste away in evil and darkness.

VERSES 6-7

The Reason for this Letter

These dearly loved Christians who found new life in Jesus Christ were turning away from, abandoning, what they knew in favor of something else, a so-called “different good message.”

It sounds like the gospel, but there's just something A LITTLE different about it.

This is where we begin to discuss the concept of heresies.

A heresy is considered an aberrant, unorthodox, unaccepted belief that is opposed to biblical truth and holds with it certain dangers.

Orthodox belief or teaching means right or accepted teaching, not to be confused with the Orthodox Church, which is short form for Eastern Orthodox. We must make the distinction between Orthodox as a proper noun and orthodox as an adjective.

Orthodox belief is right belief. Heretical or aberrant beliefs are skewed, twisted, or perverted truths that are biblically inaccurate and generally denounced by “orthodox” Christians.

By the way, we have had over 2000 years to work this stuff out.

According to the Lexham Bible Dictionary, “Heresy eventually came to mean a belief deviating from established doctrine in major areas like the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology. Those who embrace error in such cardinal doctrines are known as heretics.”³

³ Miller, J. E. (2016). Heresy and Orthodoxy in the New Testament. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The Greek term αἵρεσις//*hairesis* originally meant “choice,” or “opinion.”⁴

The tricky thing with heresies is that they sound almost right. Like, “Yeah, maybe that thing could be true.”

And here’s what it may have sounded like for the Galatian Christians:

Some well-read, intelligent-sounding teacher comes along, finds some Christians who believe in Jesus and are worshipping together. They have a couple of conversations about what it is that they believe, and before long this phrase pops up, “Well actually there’s a better way, there’s more to the story that you don’t know. As a matter of fact, I can teach you if you’d like.” And they begin to craft the way to God which is generally through them or through some form of ceremony or religious or legalistic obligation.

The gospel teaches us that Jesus Christ removed all barriers to God for us. These heretical teachers, called Judaizers, were bringing the Galatians into bondage by putting up barriers for God’s precious saints who were redeemed by Christ’s blood.

The Bible teaches us in 1 Timothy 2:5 that there is only one mediator between the believer and God (no earthly priests, no laundry list of tasks, no perfect haircut or outfit), that Jesus Christ mediates for us solely and directly.

Now, that doesn’t mean that there is no place for the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. As a matter

⁴ Ibid., *Heresy*.

of fact we find in Ephesians 4:11-12 that Christ set those types of workers among the Church in order to build us up, but not to get in the way!

And, those men are specifically instructed to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1)⁵

-AND-

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, [even] the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions. (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

Unfortunately, there were opportunists among the Galatians wrongly seeking to “improve” upon the faith of these Christians, and there are opportunists, hacks, and posers who go about doing the same today.

They may say, “Oh, you heard that all you had to do to be reconciled to God is believe because by grace you have been saved through faith and not of works? Yeah, yeah, yeah, that’s a quaint sentiment, but you want to know how to really please God...here I’ll show you for a fee.”

Beware; it’s easy to spot those frauds when the fee is monetary and hard to discern when the fee you pay is part of your freedom in Christ, part of your faith, when we trade

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are in the New King James Version.

truth for a lie. Those are the invisible things that mean so much more than money that people give up to a “different” or “better” gospel.

The trap is that when we start down that path to please God any other way than by being totally dependent on the righteousness of Christ that enrobes us, that was purchased by Him at the cross, we will never find the end.

We will always come up short, we will fail, and then we will enter into an endless cycle of guilt, shame, hypocrisy and falsehood because we will try our best to please God through our charade as if He doesn't see the reality of our hearts.

Then we will just keep living in that charade for others because we are afraid to show any realness or vulnerability or we are afraid of “what people will say.” Before we know it, we have abandoned the faith altogether in favor of a works-based righteousness that is doomed to failure.

The beauty of clinging to the righteousness of Christ is that it is the ultimate salve for guilt. When the whisper in your mind begins to repeat over and over again, “You're not good enough, look how weak you are,” we can respond in faith, “That is true, but Christ is holy and good and has redeemed me by His blood. I am His and He has promised to make me like Him.”

The miracles this does for our earthly relationships cannot be overstated. It brings a measure of authenticity and vulnerability that is quite foreign to most of us who live guarded lives. But when we let go of the mask and reflect Christ, there is freedom in that.

VERSES 8-9
No Other Gospel

Part of remaining vigilant is understanding that WE are susceptible to deception, to deceiving others, and deceiving ourselves.

Paul says, “If WE ever preach to you a different gospel — don’t listen!”

Paul doesn’t place himself above or outside of the realm of the legalist. He has lived his whole life as a Pharisee, the ultimate legalist! He knows his own heart!

He goes on to say that if anybody ever comes and says that an angel from heaven revealed this different, better way, they are accursed! We certainly wouldn’t take spiritual counsel from those who are accursed or condemned, who are not in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don’t think it’s surprising that men would attempt this thing either, saying that an angel had delivered to them special information.

This was certainly going on in the early church as it does today. People become infatuated with angels, the supernatural, and that sort of thing. Paul writes on this in Colossians 2: “Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in [false] humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Col. 2:18).

That is what happened with Joseph Smith and the Mormon church, and that is what happened with Muhammad and the religion of Islam.

In both cases, these men claimed to have received special information and revelation from an angelic being.

We see now that Paul's words are prophetic in nature! He wrote these words ~600 years before Islam and ~1800 years before Mormonism.

God has warned us that if any man or even an angel comes and preaches a different gospel, they are accursed. It is quite clear. It is so clear and so important that Paul writes this warning twice!

God must have been trying to tell us something. And I am thankful that He has preserved His Word for us, that we might be warned. Otherwise, we might swoon over the person who comes to us with tales of angels and special information. It is not so.

The gospel of Jesus Christ stands forever, and the truth of the gospel is plain and open for all. Jesus Christ “gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Gal. 1:3-5).

CHAPTER 2 | GALATIANS 1:10-24

Paul is writing this letter to address bad instruction that has found its way to the Galatian churches. This bad doctrine is a form of legalism that teaches adherence to the Jewish law and restricts freedom in Christ.

VERSE 10

Verse 10 is a bit of a reflection on Paul's bold correction to those who would trouble the churches with fantastic revelations from angels and other extra-biblical teachings that diverged from the true gospel.

Paul understands that in doing so there will be a certain number of people who hear these words that will be sorely offended.

Some of those people may in fact be responsible for perpetrating that fraudulent doctrine, and of course when they are unmasked, they will be offended but hopefully repent.

Some people, taken in by the flash of such teaching, may fight dearly to defend their position, because to admit when we are wrong or gullible is a humbling experience.

One source reads:

His adversaries accused him of being an interested flatterer of men, 'becoming all things to all men,' to make a party for himself, and so observing the law among the Jews (for instance, circumcising Timothy), yet persuading the Gentiles to renounce it (Ga 5:11) (in order to flatter those, really keeping them in a sub-

ordinate state, not admitted to the full privileges which the circumcised alone enjoyed).⁶

But part of this whole faith in Christ, discipleship, Christianity thing is being teachable, being humble — humbling ourselves, as it were. This involves listening and receiving sound, good doctrine and being discerning enough to shun bad doctrine.

Paul points out to the Galatians that if he were still in the people pleasing business he would not be a servant (δουλος//*doulos* = slave) of Christ.

What true words! These are words we each individually find to be true as we live out this life.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’” (Matt. 16:24-25).

The call to the cross was not a call to comfort. The cross was a brutally shameful and public means of execution. This is what Jesus calls us to.

To be sure, some people will be over the moon that we are Christ followers, and some will not. People want different things from each of us and may often try their best to guide or nudge us in the direction they wish us to take.

But we must ask ourselves in those times, “Is Christ our Lord in the fullest sense of the word? Does He rule over

⁶ Jamieson, Robert, Fausset, A. R., and Brown, David. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. New York, NY: Revell, 1920.

our lives and all realms of our lives? Is He the one who directs our steps in His Kingdom?”

The very act of declaring oneself a believer will upset some people. Walking out our faith will ruffle some feathers and draw pronouncements of “self-righteousness” and the critical eye seeking to catch us slipping in order to be the first one to cry “hypocrite.”

Even other Christians have a mapped-out plan for how our walk and discipleship should go!

But who is the Lord of your life? Who are you pleasing? People or God?

That doesn’t mean we SEEK to offend others, but if we keep adjusting our course each time another person desires to un-biblically direct our path, we will be lost adrift with no real direction at all, no anchor to hold us steady. Only Christ can keep us going straight, not turning to the left or to the right.

VERSES 11-12

Paul discusses some important points about the gospel relative to his own conduct and conversion.

The first thing is that the gospel is not according to man. It is not a contrivance of mankind as some suppose, but rather, God-wrought truth, observed and documented history that reconciles mankind to God.

The second thing is that Paul did not receive, nor was he taught, this gospel from man, meaning that he was not con-

verted on the mission field by some faithful messenger but by Jesus Christ Himself.

Consider the uniqueness of this position. This is, in fact, one of the key hallmarks of an Apostle in the proper sense (Apostle as a proper noun).

He received this message directly from Jesus! Paul, at that time Saul, saw with his own eyes, heard with his own ears. What he witnessed turned his world upside down, changed him completely and was the impetus for thirteen books of the New Testament, multiple journeys to preach this message, many churches established, and ultimately his own execution.

While Paul experienced a direct face-to-face meeting with the risen Lord Jesus, that is not true for us.

We have received the gospel from men; we have been taught and are taught this gospel by people. That is how we received this message.

That doesn't make us less than the eyewitnesses of Paul's day, just different. We have a particular place and purpose in God's Kingdom that we should diligently apply ourselves to.

In fact, Jesus taught his disciple Thomas, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed [are] those who have not seen and [yet] have believed" (John 20:29).

Later in 1 Peter, we read, "whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see [Him], yet believing, you re-

joy with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of [your] souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

But Paul points out here that what he has received is special, and that it is the foundation for his calling and his work in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ intentionally and specifically met with Paul for a divine purpose.

Those events are recorded for us in Acts, and Paul is going to shed some light on those events here as well.

In Acts 9, we read:

As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It [is] hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord [said] to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ ...Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My

name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.' (Acts 9:3-6, 13-16).

VERSES 13-14

Paul looks back in time; he recollects his past alienation from God.

Paul's past isn't a mystery or a big question mark. He has a past, and he uses the story of his past to attest to the miraculous working of Christ.

In Paul's life, formerly Saul, he was two different people. The dividing mark in those two people, where the old man ended and the new man began, was his encounter with the resurrected Lord.

He reflects on his former conduct in Judaism, his zeal, enthusiasm, love for the traditions, and his ambition to exceed beyond his peers in a works-based righteousness, just like many religions today.

Paul was RIGHT in his own eyes and in the eyes of his religion and in the eyes of his blood family. He was a GOOD man, defending the faith, tithing, and going to church. BUT Paul was miles apart from God's heart, separated by a vast gulf that self-righteousness could not bridge.

He followed all of the rules, he read his Bible, and all of the extra stuff too! As a defender of what he believed to be the true faith, Paul was determined to snuff out these heretical

weirdos that called themselves Christians and had broken away from the straight and narrow path.

VERSES 15-17

God would have Paul by His grace and at His pleasure. God's sovereignty entered the picture in Paul's life.

This is one of those areas that we cannot deny. We often squabble about sovereignty and free will, but the reality is that God conquered his enemy, Paul, by knocking him off of his high horse, confronting him with the truth of the resurrection, and confronting him with GRACE.

Why is it that God didn't fry him right there on the road to Damascus? Paul opposed Christ! He imprisoned and executed the saints!

Only because of MERCY, loved ones! While deserving of judgment, God did not carry it out in His patience.

And then God placed Paul into the Kingdom by Christ and into the blessed ministry of reconciliation — preaching the gospel. That is GRACE, receiving treasures he did not deserve because it pleased God!

And that is a crash course in sovereignty! God's pleasure will be carried out; His Word will stand!

Is this the case for everybody? Certainly not, but it was the case for Paul. He was separated unto the Kingdom for God's glory by the same God that separated him from his mother's womb by grace alone. Paul recognizes that this is the same God that he has been seeking his entire life and

now has come face to face with, and it looked so much different than he expected.

So what is he to do now? NOW, his whole life pivots toward following the sound of Christ's command as he separated Paul to Kingdom work. Paul didn't go ask permission to get going! He simply obeyed Jesus - what else could he do?

He does not have a conference with 100 people about the viability, feasibility, acceptability of ministry or how he's going to pay his bills or how he's going to raise enough support. He doesn't look for an endorsement for the work! He is so certain of his calling, so sure of the face of Christ and the words he has received that he needs none of that to validate his call!

Paul is sure of his calling and his election. Nothing will dissuade him from following Jesus.

Why? Because that's his personality? No. Because of God's grace.

Paul does not go up to Jerusalem, not to purposefully offend the Apostles, but because his calling, and the gospel he received, are not dependent on man.

He stays in Damascus (that's where he was heading to persecute Christians, and now he is one!) and does some traveling in and around Arabia, which would have extended to Syria and Damascus.

As we see in Acts,

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes [something] like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, ‘Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this [Jesus] is the Christ. (Acts 9:17-22)

He lives as a Christian, learning, praying, studying no doubt, and fellowshiping for three years before going to Jerusalem.

This is important in our text because one of the main parties that Paul is pushing back against in the region of Galatia are Judaizers who would have had an overinflated respect for Jerusalem because that was the home of the Temple.

Paul notes that there is not a requirement to visit Jerusalem. The center of the gospel is Christ, not a place, not a specific local congregation, not a specific man other than Jesus.

VERSES 18-24

So after growing as a baby Christian for three years, he travels to Jerusalem, but not as a Pharisee, as a Christian.

Jerusalem would have had such a draw for Paul. Keep in mind Paul wasn't FROM Jerusalem, he was from Tarsus, a city of Cilicia in Asia Minor/modern day Turkey, much like the Galatians.

The Jews venerated Jerusalem and still do to this day along with many Christians.

Paul is different now, though. He's changed. He's new. He's seeing Jerusalem through a new lens, the lens of the cross.

He wasn't a rock star to the churches; he was relatively unknown outside of his conversion story.

But what was remarkable was his testimony. He who formerly persecuted the Church now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.

That word got around. For Christians of that era, they were hearing that Jesus still did miracles. He was still snatching people into His Kingdom by His grace. And listen, He still does that today.

Let us glorify God for whatever testimony we have, wherever we come from, whatever scar tissue we bear from our former lives. AND let the saints hear that Jesus is still

bringing people who were once enemies of God into His Kingdom.

CHAPTER 3 | GALATIANS 2:1-10

VERSES 1-3

Paul's Ministry Continues

In chapter 1, Paul recounted briefly his former conduct in Judaism, how he excelled beyond his peers and persecuted the church but was brought into the Kingdom and to belief by the resurrected Jesus Christ Himself.

He makes a point to note in chapter 1 how he did not receive the gospel from men, nor did he consult with men to confirm his apostleship or call to ministry or the validity of the gospel he received from Jesus.

He makes a special note that after he saw Jesus, he did not go up to Jerusalem for three years. Now in chapter 2, his second trip to Jerusalem takes place fourteen years later.

The point Paul is making is that the city of Jerusalem was not the epicenter of his faith. For all of those years he was busy with the Lord's business and seemingly unconcerned with the showiness of it all.

We see here that Paul mentions two of his partners in ministry - Barnabas and Titus.

Barnabas was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi.⁷

Titus' name occurs nowhere in the Acts of the Apostles. He appears to have been a Gentile and to have been chiefly engaged in ministering to Gentiles. He was the recipient of Pau's letter Titus, one of the pastoral epistles.⁸

Paul didn't do ministry alone. Men were with him. Did they agree all of the time? No, as we will see later. But they were joined together by the common bond of Christ and their labor for the Lord.

Paul also tells us that he was directed by revelation on this journey to Jerusalem. He wasn't commanded by some supreme council or religious leaders, but by God. God still does this. He still moves His people in a very real and practical sense.

Paul, Barnabas, and Titus travelled to Jerusalem from a place called Antioch. Antioch has a unique place in the formation of the first century church and has a unique bearing on Paul's letter to the Galatians:

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists,

⁷ Easton, M. G. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893.

⁸ Ibid.

preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26).

It was at Antioch too that sneaky legalists crept into the Body and began to subvert the gospel and impose their own form of religious requirements: fulfill the law, be circumcised, be a better believer. These men were called Judaizers.

Relative to the similar situation among the churches in Galatia we find, "The Galatians were Judaizing, not because the Jewish law was imposed by authority of the Church as *necessary to Christianity*, but because they

thought it necessary to be observed by those who aspired to *higher perfection*.”⁹

So in Paul’s case, this type of thing, men creeping into an assembly of believers to teach them a “better way,” which is really bondage and a one way trip to carrying the burden of guilt, is not new.

He had dealt with it before in Antioch. We can assume this must have made Paul quite upset to see that this kind of thing kept happening in different churches.

He would preach the gospel, that people are saved by grace, they have new life in Christ, there is abundant joy, and they are rid of the shame and guilt of their past life. And then other “religious” people heard of that good work and tried to improve upon God’s grace with a set of rules, regulations, and ceremonies that could never reconcile us to God in the first place.

So Paul goes to Jerusalem from Antioch to lay it out for the other Apostles, to get their thoughts to make sure that he did not run in vain. After all this time, Paul has a conversation to establish the facts.

Incidentally, it’s possible for us to do that. There are multitudes of sincere people in cults and false religions that are running in vain.

It is interesting that he brings up his trip to Jerusalem here with the Galatians. He may have done so to counteract the

⁹ Jamieson, Robert, Fausset, A. R., and Brown, David. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. New York, NY: Revell, 1920.

bad teaching from these Judaizers, who in their hyper-religious zeal may have overstated the importance of Jerusalem. This may have been Paul's way of demonstrating consensus on the part of the Apostles and letting the Galatian churches know that this had already been dealt with.

Sometimes people come along with some new thing, new doctrine, new idea, new interpretation, new way to worship, new best practices for being a christian, etc... But here's the deal — it's been done before!

These things have been talked about, argued over, and ultimately resolved by coming back to the certainty of Christ and God's Word.

In Paul's case, all of the men in Jerusalem he met with would have seen and heard the risen Lord, including Paul. There is no speculating or hypothesizing, but straight up truth, experience, and practical living that informs their debate — all supported by the Holy Spirit.

In the midst of all that was going on - Judaizers, the great debate, and the Apostles meeting — not even Titus was convinced or persuaded to undergo circumcision.

It would have been quite tempting for Titus, I imagine.

In Jerusalem of all places, where the Lord was crucified, home of the Temple, home of the first church, there the Apostles were gathered (all Jewish men). Do you think Titus ever considered he should do it just to be part of the team? Paul says no.

Titus was secure in Jesus Christ, the gospel of grace, and he relied on Jesus' righteousness. If Jesus' righteousness would allow him to stand before God on the day of judgment, then certainly it was enough for him to stand before these men, recipients of that same grace.

The same is true for us today.

VERSES 4-5

How This All Began

False brethren — false brothers! Men who appeared to be family, who spoke the language, looked the part, ostensibly knew the word and fit in, but were found to be false, contrived, not authentic.

Paul says that these men “came in by stealth to spy out our liberty...that they were brought in” (Gal. 2:4). There appears to have been some sort of conspiracy in the church in Antioch to make this happen.

That doesn't sound very up front. That doesn't sound very Christ-like, dealing in schemes, devising ways to bring people down. What wickedness lived in the hearts of these men.

But here's the thing! They thought they were doing right! They thought they were teaching a better way! The root of their sneaking, spying, and desire to bring men into bondage was a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel.

Paul, who lived his life as a Pharisee, who was a pro at the law, did not allow this to happen. This is the heart of a

shepherd — he defended the Body. Is it any wonder that he warned the Ephesian elders that wolves would creep into the Body, even from among themselves? Paul had seen it time and time again. And we must be on guard today, not in fear but in discernment.

The time for defending was at hand. When the faith of the Body is threatened, when bad doctrine creeps in, that is a time to defend, to set right, to teach sound doctrine in the clearest terms.

Paul points out to the Galatians that they received the benefits of his work in Antioch - opposing legalism and correcting bad doctrine.

VERSE 6

The men who crept into Antioch perhaps relied on their reputation or their credentials or their church-y pedigree. They “seemed” to be something, but they lacked the substance of the truth of the gospel.

This happens today too across denominations. Each tribe has their own group of highly respected Bible teachers and pastors. Wonderful servants of God who are humble and gracious and gentle. People who resemble Jesus, and we are blessed by them.

And then there are those who flit and float among the churches, never really staying in one place for too long, proclaiming their tenuous relationships with those blessed servants in an effort to appear to be something. “I came up under Pastor so and so...”

There's no need for that. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 1. Is Christ divided? No. If you are ever wondering how to tell if somebody is legit, you tell a tree by the fruit that it bears.

Unfortunately, this is all too common. Men want to be something, but rarely do they want to be servants.

This kind of self-promotion and delusional aggrandizement based on somebody else's ministry is never good for the Church. Let us cling to Jesus and not the reputation of others.

Paul says these men added nothing to him. Their self-promotion and need for a reputation didn't produce any fruit or edification or love; it added nothing.

He also points out that God shows personal favoritism to no man. Sometimes if we fall in love with ourselves, we may very well believe that we are God's favorite! How would the Kingdom go on without us? That is pride, plain and simple. And many people have fallen away from the faith that way — they start believing their own publicity.

We are God's treasured possession, but we don't deserve any bit of this glory that we get to be a part of. It all belongs to God, and inasmuch as we are allowed to walk behind the plough in God's Kingdom, we find ourselves blessed by the labor.

Only let us be servants. Let us put on the character and humility of Christ, shunning any form of celebrity that may come, because it is Jesus we want to see high and lifted up.

VERSES 7-9

The Apostles in Jerusalem (James, Peter, and John) confirm Paul's ministry and extend the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas.

I love what we find here in regard to Peter's ministry to the Jewish people and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles!

Think about it, Paul, a dyed-in-the-wool Pharisee with a reputable Jewish education, God sends to the Gentiles. Paul tried over and over again to preach to the Jews, but God sent him expressly to the Gentiles.

What good is all that education and brain worth when you're convincing a Gentile, a pagan with no baseline for the Levitical law, the covenant, etc?

Then we have Peter, a fisherman with an accent strong enough to peg him as a Galilean and no formal high-level education to speak of. That's the guy God uses to preach to the Jews!

Confounding! We might flip that if we were in charge. We would match them up based on their experience, background, education, etc.

But it is God who calls, equips, and sends people for His glory, and He often does so irrespective of our "best strengths." Don't we find ourselves beggars for His grace when that happens? Certainly!

Consider too, this man Paul is now in a position to defend these new Christians who are being tempted to forsake their

liberty in Christ in exchange for the law. Who better to defend them?

God's wisdom is perfect! His designs are perfect. These Gentiles have the ultimate defender, Paul through Christ, to make sure that the gospel doesn't get twisted, that it stays rooted in Scripture and grounded in the person and work of Jesus.

VERSE 10

One thing to remember — the poor. Why? Because it's nice? Because it makes for good social media posts, good social capital, good reputations? No, because it's Jesus' heart! Compassion. Remember the poor.

We need this exhortation today as well. Sometimes we can get so caught up in building our own brand that we forget we are called to live out Jesus' heart to those around us in a practical sense, not just a theoretical sense.

Lord, teach us your ways, show us your wisdom, help us remember the poor and to be open to the guiding of your Spirit.

Make servants of us all.

BUT...just in case we think ministry is all rainbows and butterflies, let us look at verse 11: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11, KJV).

Man, I thought the meeting in Jerusalem went so well. Perhaps Peter is still a work in progress, but that's for next week.

CHAPTER 4 | GALATIANS 2:11-14

VERSES 11-13

Paul opposes Peter publicly because he was to be blamed. Blamed for what? As we find out, Peter was complicit in creating an atmosphere in the church at Antioch where sectarianism, legalism, and hypocrisy ruled.

Remember that Paul, Barnabas, and Titus traveled to Jerusalem and met with James (the author of the letter bearing his name, not John's brother who had already been killed), Peter, and John.

It was there that those men recognized Paul's ministry among the Gentiles at Antioch and gave Paul and his companions "the right hand of fellowship." It seemed that all was well.

But here we see that Peter comes to Antioch, and while he affirmed Paul's teaching to the Antiochians, he lived out a double standard.

That double life he lived out in the eyes of the assembled body appears to be related to Peter desiring to present himself as a strict adherence to Judaism in front of "men from James."

We see here that very early in the Church, cliques were alive and well — in groups, out groups, Jews, Gentiles, le-

galists, wolves, the unsanctified, and those who used their newfound liberty in Christ to continue in sin.

Quite a group! And yet it is this group of people, in a universal sense, that comprise the Body and Bride of Christ. Each finds themselves in dire need of grace, not only from Christ, but also from one another.

Based on the composition of this motley group of believers, what happens next is entirely unexpected: conflict.

Paul takes this confrontation into his own hands. He said earlier (v. 5) that when false brethren snuck into the church trying to bring these Antiochians into bondage, he did not yield submission for even one hour. Paul would not yield now, even in the face of men like Peter and other men from Jerusalem who were associated with James, the brother of the Lord.

But he addresses this issue at its source - Peter.

We might ask ourselves, “How could you, Peter!?” And that is exactly Paul’s question to him as well.

Remember it was Peter that the Lord Jesus had given special revelation in Acts 10:

“The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, de-

scending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' And a voice [spoke] to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again" (Acts 10:9-16).

In this vision to Peter, the Lord Jesus specifically communicated to Peter that the Gentiles, those not of Jewish heritage, were being brought into the Kingdom and being made clean.

As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped [him]. But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man.' And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean'... Then Peter opened [his] mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him' (Acts 10:25-28, 34-36).

So, what happened in Peter's life since then? Why was he so influenced by these "men from James?" Was their devotion wrong?

First things first, Peter is not the villain here. We have to be careful not to paint him as such.

Reflect upon Peter's words to Cornelius in Acts 10:26: "I myself am also a man."

Peter was a man and was not exempt from failure — a fact that he knew deeply, having denied the Lord.

Peter was a work in progress, just like any of us. He was moldable, open to suggestion, open to man's wisdom. Peter was teachable, correctable, not too wrapped up in his own self to be deaf to sound doctrine, and we really see that through what he wrote in the New Testament.

Consider that Peter does not record this event for us in his own letters, and it is not recorded for us in Acts.

But what Peter does say about Paul in his letters demonstrates a heart of humility, unity, and knowing when God's hand is at work.

All of the Apostles mentioned here (Peter, James, and John) wrote letters that we have access to in our Bibles. They all could have blasted Paul and said, "How dare you!? Who do you think you are!? You aren't allowed to correct us. We are 'over' you in the Lord." They could have just said he was a heretic or illegitimate.

But they didn't.

Here's what Peter says about Paul in his own letters:

...and consider [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they do] also the rest of the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Peter understood that Paul was appointed by God to work in the Kingdom, that some people twisted his words, but that the core of Paul's teachings and writings was "that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation..."

Peter messed up in Antioch, but he also didn't allow his misstep to create a rift in the broader Church - there was already enough of that going on.

Peter's actions caused other people to do the same thing, play the hypocrite. Barnabas was one of those men, Paul's own traveling companion.

Barnabas had been at Antioch for quite some time by the time this event occurred.

Could you imagine!? This man Barnabas, who was part of the social fabric of the church there, who ate with their Gentile families, who played with their kids, who taught them the Word, shared in the Lord's supper and baptism with them, all of sudden he withdraws from them to be part of the "cool apostle" table — men from James, legalists.

How wounded would you feel?

Peter did this too; when he first visited he would eat with them, part of the family. When other men from Jerusalem came and “snubbed” that form of unity, he was moved to withdraw. Ouch.

How many times have we heard over the years that cliques have driven people out of the Church?

If you don’t know what a clique is, here is a simple definition: a small group of people with shared interests or other features in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them.

Peter was more afraid of “those of the circumcision,” of which he was also a part of by birth, than he was concerned with demonstrating the truth that God had shown him and confirmed to him.

We must realize that we are not beyond this temptation either.

These Judaizers, men from Jerusalem, then Peter, then the rest of the Jews, then Barnabas, only gained more influence in the church at Antioch. It appeared that their behavior became commonplace, to the detriment of the Body at large, to the exclusion of vast swaths of people.

Their meetings only became more homogenous, more one-note. Where there was once diversity and mutual interdependence, a shared table, now there were cliques, factions, opposition, and social hierarchy.

Finally, Paul couldn't take it anymore and had to say something. An unlikely candidate for this work, being raised as a Pharisee. But when you think about it, the perfect defender, a man who knew the law but also understood grace, the unearned favor of Christ, down to his bones.

VERSE 14A

I believe that Paul was not acting impulsively when he decided to make this defense and preach against the exclusive Judaizing bubble of these "better than" saints.

This had been building for years. Paul saw it creep into the Church one little incident at a time. People began to add little ampersands next to Jesus' name in their small groups, cliques, and tribes.

For example: Jesus & the law, Jesus & circumcision, Jesus & birthright. Remember, Jesus + anything else = nothing. Jesus IS everything!

We see this in our churches today - Jesus & politics; Jesus & social justice; Jesus & health, wealth, and prosperity; Jesus & pet doctrines; Jesus & fashion; Jesus & whatever....

Have we not seen these modern day circles take the place of the Judaizers among the churches?

Not much has changed since then, and we praise God that we have Paul's words to instruct our views, to correct us when we play the Peter or the Barnabas, in these situations, when we get carried away by the current of Jesus + anything else.

Where this gets especially dangerous is not in the realm of personal conviction but the realm of excluding saints from fellowship. This is implying or outright proclaiming that one of Christ's dear saints who doesn't fit our expectations of "good enough" is excluded from the Kingdom.

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand... But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:4, 10).

Are we ready to stand at the judgment seat, dear Christian? So convinced of our pet projects and exclusions that Christ won't see through it and see that we have padded His gospel with ash and garbage!?

Harsh words, forgive me, but I have been on the other side of this issue. I have padded the gospel. May God forgive me.

Look to Jesus alone, loved one. It is His righteousness that saves us; none of our contrived special interests will do.

And don't you know Paul believed these lies in his former life! So we see the impetus for his vocal opposition in verse 14: "When I saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel." They began to obscure the gospel, to twist it, to make its way crooked rather than straight, to conceal it behind ritual.

That simply will not do. The truth of the gospel is straightforward!

This [is] a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

So Paul set himself against Peter's actions and publicly challenged his untoward behavior.

Here we have two great brothers in the Lord, Peter and Paul, on opposite ends of an issue that has monumental spiritual implications for the Church.

It's important to note that this issue is not a molehill made into a mountain. Some people want to be the corrector, the opposition leader, the guy who opposes everything, they just want to be right and be loud and be heard.

I don't think that you will find it surprising to know that churches have split and have experienced tremendous discord over things that shouldn't be issues at all, such as parking spaces or music type and volume or why the pastor looks so weird...

That is not the case here in Antioch with Peter and Paul. What we see here is not a couple of men squabbling over ancillary, peripheral, or bottom-tier convictions. This is the real deal, top-tier salvation essentials.

By what means are men saved? That is what is on the line.

Paul sees that the gospel is being polluted, and the danger is that it is endorsed by men like Peter, that the Body will see this as sound doctrine when it is not that at all!

By the way, if you are thinking to yourself, “I can’t imagine,” we have lovely families who are part of our church today who experienced nearly this exact thing in their lives, literally. They were put in a position where they were required by God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to oppose the aberrant teaching that in order to please God one has to follow the Jewish law and traditions.

This type of thing tears churches apart. It wounds people deeply. And I praise God that His Word is so clear about this. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. And I praise God for men like Paul, and men still today, who will not allow the gospel to be polluted, but who make it known that salvation is available to all by Christ alone.

Look to Jesus, loved ones. Whether we find ourselves as Peter or identify with Paul, look to Jesus. He will make us stand.

CHAPTER 5 | GALATIANS 2:14-21

Paul's Challenge to Peter and the Antiochians

VERSE 14

The impetus for Paul's opposition to Peter, Judaizers, and the rest of the people who are playing the hypocrite is that they were obscuring and twisting the truth of the gospel.

Remember that gospel means good news or a good message. The good message is consistently proclaimed in God's Word, both Old and New Testament.

I like how Paul writes it to Titus, one of his companions. He says:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself [His] own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

And what is the only requirement to share in this good message, this redemption? It is only faith, belief.

There is no other list of requirements added to the gospel.

The gospel is not: Jesus + giving your money; Jesus + a strict moral code; Jesus + ritual; Jesus + church; Jesus + ANYTHING!

Now there is a strong correlation between faith and holiness, being made holy and living a life of holiness wherein some of those things DO happen (i.e., being part of the Body, the Church; living a life of practical holiness daily rather than theoretically front-loading, etc.).

BUT the requirement is only Christ. Otherwise, we are found front-loading the gospel, adding heavy burdens on people who are broken anyway. That is not the gospel.

It is simply the cross of Christ reconciling mankind to God so that we might receive His righteousness, by no merit of our own, but simply because God loves us and cares for us. We are his cherished creation, and He longs to enjoy eternity with us as a Father and His children.

Paul opposes Peter publicly and addresses the assembled group of people who are there in the midst.

His first rhetorical question is, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?” (Gal. 2:14).

Incidentally, it is in this way that we pause to remember that the first century church, while often held up as the idol of perfection for the modern church, was also afflicted by human sin. We find encouragement in that, because Christ did not abandon her, and we will not abandon us.

This is the beginning of Paul's public correction on legalism or a regression to legalism.

Understand that legalism is regressing, not progressing. We have all heard the lie, "this is not necessary but if you want to be a better Christian..."

The fact is, if you want to be a better Christian, then hang the entirety of who you are on the merits and righteousness of Christ, knowing that all of your own are vanity. Then be clay in His hands as He shapes you to His glory!

Back to Paul's question — if Jews like Peter and others could momentarily set aside the law for convenience's sake, then they are implying by their actions that the law is not required for righteousness but merely formal ritual.

If that's the case, there is no requirement for the law to be righteous, then why would they compel non-Jewish Christians to observe their customs that may have been otherwise unknown to them?

Those non-Jewish believers, Gentiles, were brought into the Kingdom without any prior legal requirement; they were truly dependent on the grace of Christ.

Paul is demonstrating here their inconsistency and bad doctrine. Here we are reminded that good doctrine is structurally sound and consistent, because it is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

In doing this, Paul shines a spotlight on their hypocrisy, perhaps thinking, "I know you guys. You haven't always

been like this, but now when you want to put on a show to try to stratify the Kingdom you change your behavior.”

The behavior that Peter, Barnabas, men from James, and all of the other Jews fell into is a trap for even the most seasoned Christians, maybe especially so, as we continue to walk out our faith. At some point along the way, we feel like we have to DO MORE, DO BETTER.

VERSES 15-16

The emptiness of the law meant the Jewish people were dependent only on faith for justification, even though they observed the law.

“We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles...” (Gal. 2:15). This statement may ruffle our pride a bit. We may think wrongly, “Wait...I’m not a sinner.” Oh yes we are!

That’s not entirely Paul’s point, though. He isn’t being condescending.

About Paul’s heart for this confrontation, Matthew Henry writes: “Paul adhered resolutely to his principles, when others faltered in theirs; he was as good a Jew as any of them (for he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews), but he would magnify his office as the apostle of the Gentiles, and therefore would not see them discouraged and trampled upon.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry’s Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible*. 1706.

He's not looking down from on high, scorning the Gentiles and requiring them to be something else to receive fellowship with Christ or with other believers.

Paul's point, though, is that the Jews had a unique relationship with God.

While the Gentiles for the most part dabbled in pagan worship, idolatry, heathenism, etc., the Jews, God's covenant people, had been taught about holiness since their adoption by God"

For you [are] a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers (Deut. 7:6-8).

Yet the morally righteous Gentiles were found to have a law unto themselves. Paul writes much about this dichotomy in Romans 2:

For not the hearers of the law [are] just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also

bearing witness, and between themselves
[their] thoughts accusing or else excusing
[them] (Rom. 2:13-15).

Now the Jewish people, God's special people, had a special relationship with the God of creation: "What advantage then has the Jew, or what [is] the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1-2).

The "oracles of God" means God's Word, the Scriptures. It is by them that Christ was foretold, that redemption came near to mankind, that the law became our schoolmaster showing us holiness, love, and grace.

Paul says, though, that even in that favored state — chosen from among the people of the earth; receiving the covenants, the prophets, and the Word of God; and bearing the messianic line of Christ - they know that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Jewish people need Jesus too. The law will never make them perfect; it will only expose their imperfections, their need for atonement. A pious Hebrew might argue that the law makes provision for atonement by vicarious sacrifice of animals and the like. However, we say:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, [and] not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be of-

ferred? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those [sacrifices there is] a reminder of sins every year. For [it is] not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and [sacrifices] for sin You had no pleasure’ (Heb. 10:1-6).

So then, the point Paul is making is that both the Hebrew and the Gentile are dependent on the grace of Christ to be justified by faith.

VERSES 17-19

This can seem like a tricky portion, but if we keep it in context it is quite plain.

These Jewish men, the Apostles and a preponderance of believers in the church in Jerusalem, were beggars for the grace of Christ, and they were supposed to be looking intently at the person and work of Christ as their only means of salvation.

But in a parallel effort, they were found participating in ceremony and ritual that some said would absolve them of their sins.

If that’s the case, they are then found admitting a need for further remission of sins over and above what Christ accomplished on the cross. This is the worst of heresies! It is

denying the efficacy of the cross. It is in all practical ways denying that Christ made them holy.

Is Christ a minister of sin? Has he left us partially in our sins? Do we need Jesus + something else to make us holy? No! He makes us holy!

For one to return to the law was to admit that Christ's atonement had failed, that they were still in need of reconciliation! That is not sound doctrine. And yet it is that practical legalism that infests many Christian hearts even today.

Listen, if you believe in Christ, then you are saved, once and for all! No one and nothing can improve upon that.

These men, and many today, were rebuilding the law of requirement that was fulfilled and removed by Christ. They were building an altar to worship at that focused on something other than the cross.

VERSES 19-20

Being slain by the law to live unto God. Paul uses this language in Romans as well, and he will continue to build upon this idea that the purpose of the Law, the requirement of the Old Testament, is to bring men to Christ, to slay us, as it were, in our sin, to show our need for resuscitation through a living being - Jesus Christ.

What shall we say then? [Is] the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.' But

sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all [manner of evil] desire. For apart from the law sin [was] dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which [was] to [bring] life, I found to [bring] death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed [me]. Therefore the law [is] holy, and the commandment holy and just and good (Rom. 7:7-12).

The law kills us as we are crushed under its weight, but the law is good because it brings us to the end of ourselves, where we meet Christ at the cross.

We find ourselves, as Paul, crucified with Christ. The old person we were is condemned to death under the law and dies with Christ on Calvary in the first century.

Our new person is raised to life by his eternal resurrection, and by the Spirit, His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, we have life. It is Christ who possesses our mortal bodies.

We will reflect HIM AS HE LIVES IN US! This is when we begin to live out lives of holiness, because it is the HOLY spirit that lives in us; our old person is dead. So in what manner of behavior do we live? Holiness and the character of Christ.

Is Christ living in me, or am I living unto myself, with the thin veneer of faith, the stink of hypocrisy, much like the legalists in Antioch? Playing the game but altogether dead to the grace of Christ.

VERSE 21

Paul's dependence on grace is the whole point of the thing! If the law is enough, if good works are enough, then the cross is pointless.

If we require extra work to improve upon the cross, we are saying that the cross was not enough to save us.

This was the struggle for the Galatians, and it is the struggle for many anxious believers today who have either cast aside the grace of Christ, had it stolen from them, or have never been introduced.

BUT, it is grace alone by which we are saved. That much is certain. Everything else that proposes to be a way or the way to reconcile man to God is fraudulent and false.

Do not set aside God's grace, loved ones. Cling to it for dear life, for it is life.

CHAPTER 6 | GALATIANS 3:1-9

Paul continues to boldly declare the truth that those who believe in Christ are justified in God's eyes and that justification is not contingent on any human-based program or any work or effort of our own devising.

VERSE 1

Paul charges the plurality of churches in Galatia with being bewitched. He uses quite passionate language, beginning with the interjection 'Oh'.

Paul, having concluded the retelling of his defense to Peter and the Judaizers regarding their shared salvation with the Gentiles through faith, begins to address the Galatians' circumstances.

The last direct statement to the Galatians that Paul made was in chapter 1, verse 11. He then goes on to recount his own personal conversion history, early ministry, and ministry at Antioch where Paul had dealt with a similar situation: the church adopted the legalism of the Jewish tradition.

Everything leading up to chapter 3 laid the groundwork for his spirited defense of grace. He then turns his pen to address the Galatians directly about their own falling away.

From Paul's words, we see that they are in a dangerous situation indeed. They can follow their current course to destruction or they can return to faith. So Paul's words in

chapter 3 need to be strong, clear, and bold. They are! He does not beat around the bush at all.

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you...” (Gal. 3:1).

These words cut. I dare say one would be hard-pressed to begin any sermon in our era with these words and still remain in the pulpit any meaningful length of time afterward, regardless of how right or necessary the correction may be.

Paul here is outright declaring that the churches in Galatia are foolish for following a lie. He then uses the words, “who has bewitched you...” There’s a lot going on here.

First, it becomes apparent that some other party has been carefully weaving their lie in such a fashion that it has entranced the Galatian Christians.

About this term for “bewitched,” Thayer’s Lexicon reads, “*to bring evil on one by feigned praise or an evil eye, to charm, bewitch* one...hence, of those who lead away others into error by wicked arts.”¹¹

We can also determine from Paul’s word choice that this thing has happened! Somebody has bewitched you, they are not bewitching you now, nor waiting for a future opportunity — the thing has happened! You are bewitched!

You are under the spell! It has happened.

¹¹ Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (p. 336). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Please note that Paul is contending for them! He has not abandoned them nor retreated nor thrown up his hands and said, “everybody has an opinion.” He contends for them on the basis of God’s clear Word and, as we will see, by the Spirit.

The next thing Paul does after calling them foolish and bewitched is remind them of what they have seen and partaken in, what has been illustrated among them.

Before your eyes Christ was clearly portrayed or demonstrated as crucified (Gal. 3:1).

So it is Christ crucified at the center. Come back to that! Remember, foolish Galatians, what first moved your dead hearts to faith - Jesus Christ on the cross.

This is true for us as well; Christ crucified is the center of our faith. To stray from that is to fall under the spell of bad doctrine or the cult of self.

VERSE 2

Paul continues his campaign for them by way of reason. How did you receive the Holy Spirit, by the Law or by faith? This has profound theological significance.

Bear in mind that it was not until Pentecost in Acts 2 that the general dispensation of the Holy Spirit occurred, meaning that, as we understand from the Bible, the average everyday person walking around before Pentecost did not receive the Spirit of God within them, no matter how devout or pious they were.

In times past (OT), it was the prophets and certain select people who received the Holy Spirit for a particular God-given work.

Simply obeying or observing the works of the Law did not entitle one to communion with God by the Holy Spirit. There was a vast separation between God and man, as depicted in the Law, and the relationship between God and man was arbitrated by the high priest.

But then Jesus Christ came, our Great High Priest, and promised the Holy Spirit to all who believe.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 13:15-17).

Now, presently, God tabernacles within His people. His Spirit lives within us. The inner sanctuary that God occupies on planet earth is within our hearts, not any man-made temple. The temple that God occupies is the one that He built by His own will - YOU! And He dwells there on the basis of faith alone.

So the answer to Paul’s question is that the Spirit was received by faith, belief in the crucified Christ rather than works of the Law. No one could deny that.

VERSE 3

Just how foolish are you? Do you think that it's possible to improve upon Christ's work by your own flesh? Are you going to level up somehow by some cleanse? Some legalistic diet? Some rigid code of conduct? Some dress code?

The implied answer is NO!

We can never perfect God's work of the Spirit by our own devices. Never. It is God who does the work within us and moves us to work His salvation outwardly. Conversely, when we strive to focus on outward works in order to attain an inward result, that is a fool's errand.

I have met many people over the years who have gone down that path, myself included.

If I could just quit doing x, y, z or if I could just start doing x, y, z, then I will be ready to commit to this Jesus guy. That's completely backward.

We each come to the crucified Christ, the resurrected Christ, and beg to share in His death and resurrection. In that moment, we are required to count all of our works, good and bad, as dead before Him as we take hold of His work whereby we share in His life.

That's where the real meaningful work begins, not before, and there is no after.

Understand, there is only each moment with Christ. He is supporting us, not the other way around.

When I say there is no after, what I mean is that Jesus Christ is not a milestone on the road to sanctification. He is the road; He is the way.

For me to move on from Christ, forward or backward, demonstrates my own fickle nature and desire to build upon that which is already complete.

It is to spit in the face of Christ's perfect sacrifice and propose an alternative method of holiness rather than relying on the Spirit to work in us.

VERSE 4

To be a Christian cost something in a big way! It cost people their families, their livelihoods, sometimes their lives. Was it all for nothing? Unfortunately, sometimes yes.

There are those who come to faith in Jesus and do suffer much as we are each promised. Perhaps the strain was too much, perhaps they took their eyes off the cross, perhaps after counting the cost it just wasn't worth it. This is heart-breaking, and yet we know this will come to pass among the saints.

“Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away” (Mark 4:5-6).

VERSE 5

Another Test of their Soundness

Does God work among His saints by the works of the Law or by faith? It is only faith! Nothing else.

In our culture, we are not too wed to the OT Law, but we will happily substitute faith for many other things or, perhaps more commonly, augment our faith with those things that grasp our attention.

What things have crept into the Church, that bewitching song, to lure Christians away from the cross, away from faith in order to “be better, do better, mobilize, achieve, etc.?” Many things, sadly.

But how does Christ work among us? By faith alone. Bear in mind that the faith spoken of is our faith in Him, not our faith in anything else we have wrongly attached to the cross.

That is the whole “Jesus +” equation that we have been denouncing these past several weeks — there is no other gospel!

No special interest, no cause, no work of our hands, no church, no matter how religious or good they may seem, has saved us. Christ alone has saved us, by faith alone!

And if that proclamation rubs us the wrong way, then perhaps our eyes aren’t fully fixed on the cross. Perhaps we find ourselves desiring to add something to the cross.

VERSES 6-7

Paul drives the point home, answering his questions in full with a singular illustration: “Abraham BELIEVED God

and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6-7).

It is God, the Lord God, who will do the thing! He will bring us into our inheritance as we keep our eyes on Him!

Do not be charmed from the truth, Christian. If you think you are above it, reflect on Paul’s words to the Romans.

“When they knew God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:21-22, KJV).

It is faith that brings us into the family of God! Nothing else.

Perhaps that point seems a bit redundant by now. It is quite plain. Faith alone.

Nevertheless, time and time again in Scripture and throughout history we have seen and we do see now that we need to be reminded of this, not because we don’t care, but precisely because we do care!

We want to contribute! We want to be better, do better, help others. There is nothing wrong with that, but the lie is that if you do those things God will love you more. That is the lie.

The truth is that God loved us completely when we were at our darkest, worst moment. If you haven’t been there yet, God will love you perfectly in that moment, because you

are His child. Even while we make ourselves His enemy, He desires to have communion with us.

In our guilt and shame we say, “How can I approach such a One as God after all my darkness?” By faith, dear one.

By faith alone, trusting that it is He who makes you sufficient and righteous by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. That is why nothing else will do!

What can we add to the brilliance of Christ’s robes? Nothing. Anything we add shows up like a glaring mustard stain.

VERSES 8-9

Paul Stands on God’s Word, the Scriptures

In this portion, Paul actually anthropomorphizes the Scriptures, God’s Word. He writes as if they are a living being that foresaw the nature of God’s promise to the Gentiles and then preached to Abraham. Wow! Does God’s Word preach to you?

What did it preach? The gospel. Let that sink in. In the ages before Jesus came down to us, the gospel was preached to Abraham.

How? By God’s Word to Abraham: “In you all the nations shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). That was the sermon preached to Abraham.

Just so there’s no misunderstanding, Paul clarifies by saying that it is the people of faith who are blessed alongside Abraham who believed God, and God counted his belief as righteousness.

There are going to people like you, Abraham, people who believe the promise!

And here we are Believing, trusting upon Christ, receiving the gospel. Even as the Scriptures preached it to Abraham, so we have it preached to us and we believe. It is in that belief, that faith, that we are made citizens of God's country by faith in Christ alone.

About Abraham's faith and his offspring, the author of Hebrews writes:

Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born [as many] as the stars of the sky in multitude--innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced [them] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that [country] from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly [country]. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:12-16).

This is your heritage! God has prepared a city for you, dear one. Only believe in Christ. Let Him be your everything, your only thing.

CHAPTER 7 | GALATIANS 3:10-14

In verses 1-5 of Galatians 3, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions directly to the Galatian churches in order to provoke them to consider the error of the doctrines that they have given themselves over to.

The Galatian churches were probably comprised mostly of Gentiles, non-Jewish people. These new Christians (all Christians during this time were new Christians!) were struggling mightily with the thought that perhaps they were missing out on a deeper spiritual experience or were less holy in God's eyes because they did not initially adopt the customs of the Jewish people — a strict, pharisaical adherence to the Law, the Old Covenant.

This bad doctrine came about because, “certain Jewish teachers came along, insisting that Gentiles could not be Christians without also keeping the Law of Moses...Abraham looms large because the narrative they had received was based on the offspring of Abraham - which they were misinterpreting.”¹²

This really breaks Paul's heart. He had been a Pharisee, a strict adherent of the Law and a blood descendant of Abraham. As a matter of fact, Paul is recorded saying in Acts 23,

¹² Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook, Classic Edition: Completely Revised and Expanded Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014.

"Men [and] brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6).

He knew all too well about formal religion, customs, traditions, and dead works. That was how he grew up!

But Jesus had shown him something different regarding faith and this group of people who were formerly outside of God's covenant but were now brought near by the blood of Jesus.

Acts 13 describes a stirring occasion in Paul's early ministry in which he boldly proclaims God's grace extended to the Gentiles. At this time, they are in Antioch of Pisidia (rather than Antioch in Syria, where they were sent out from). Having declared the gospel to the Jewish people there in the synagogue and seeing mixed results, we find this:

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since

you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: “I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13:42-48).

This all informs our understanding of why Paul was contending so tenaciously for the freedom that is found in the gospel. It was made clear to him that no other burden was placed upon anybody other than faith.

A true, deep-seated faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ was and is the only thing that makes people righteous in God’s eyes.

That was the message Paul initially preached to the Galatians, and that was the message they initially grasped, or were grasped by — the good news.

But after some time, the Galatian churches grew discontent in their simple faith and were persuaded to “try something else.” That “something else” was seemingly related to their faith — the Law. They were being instructed by Judaizers (Jewish men who professed to believe in Jesus) that in order to attain righteousness one had to believe in Jesus AND follow the entirety of the Old Covenant Law.

This is the context for the plurality of churches in the region of Galatia.

VERSE 10

Paul begins to build upon the foundation he laid with his earlier line of rhetorical questioning by going straight to the Scriptures.

He begins with the plain fact that should be easy for all to understand: Whoever is subject to the works of the Law is also under the curse (Gal. 3:10).

Those who desire to serve under the Law are subject to the justly pronounced condemnation toward them for their failures, transgressions, and missteps.

That is the point Paul makes clear as he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26.

It's important to note that God's people, along with all creation, struggled under the weight of the Law and the curse until Jesus Christ.

As they entered the promised land, God commanded Israel to remember His Law and the covenant into which they were entering.

Mt. Gerizim to bless; Mt. Ebal to curse.

Paul quotes the final curse recorded in Deuteronomy 27: "Cursed [is] the one who does not confirm [all] the words of this law by observing them. And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deut. 27:26).

This is Paul's wake-up call to them: You want to be part of the Old Covenant? You want to partake in that ancient

faith? This is what it means; this is the weight that you have to carry!

VERSE 11

No one is justified by the Law in the sight of God.

This truth that Paul delivers plainly to the Galatians is also the conclusion we come to when we study God's Word systematically.

The fullness of God's Word all fits together, and what we learn by examining the Old Testament is that God's people could not and would not keep the Law in any collective manner.

No one was justified by the Law. All were guilty under the Law, and they received the curse. Even the heroes of the faith that we look to, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Judges, Samson, Gideon, David, Solomon, etc., all fell short of God's perfect holiness!

They all needed grace, and the only way they were able to keep their lives, let alone do anything good, was by God's grace alone!

Because of God's grace, they had hearts that beat for Jehovah, and they believed in the middle of their wretchedness in the promises of the Father. That is what pleases God.

“Without faith [it is] impossible to please [Him], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and [that] He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Paul shows them that this truth has been recorded not only anecdotally in the life of Abraham (“Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (v. 6)) but that the prophet Habakkuk wrote this to God’s people:

Then the LORD answered me and said:
‘Write the vision And make [it] plain on
tablets, That he may run who reads it. For the
vision [is] yet for an appointed time; But at
the end it will speak, and it will not lie.
Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will
surely come, It will not tarry. Behold the
proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the
just shall live by his faith’ (Hab. 2:2-4).

Sound familiar? Paul clung to this! It is also found in Romans 1:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,
for it is the power of God to salvation for
everyone who believes, for the Jew first and
also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness
of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is
written, ‘The just shall live by faith’ (Rom.
1:16-17).

Another rendering of that phrase could read, “Because of faith, the one who is regarded as or made righteous shall live.”

We cannot fabricate faith in order to buy more life as if we are entering some bargain with God. When our deepest, foundational condition is one of faith in Christ, God justifies us, regards us as righteous, and we share in His life.

So what we find in verses 10 and 11 of Galatians 3 is that Paul reconciles two seemingly opposing thoughts that are both found in God's Word, the necessity of the Law, though it brings a curse, and the necessity of faith, which brings righteousness.

VERSE 12

In verse 12, Paul points out to the churches that those who follow the Law must count themselves as all in! In this case, they are under the curse!

“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one [point], he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10-11).

Special note: Some people like to pit James and Paul against one another; this is a false dichotomy. John Spencer said a couple of years back at the Deep South Pastor's Conference that Paul was correcting obedience without belief, and James was correcting belief without obedience.

So then, if people are bound to the Law and are justly condemned and cursed for failure to abide by it, where is our hope?

We find this in verse 13.

VERSE 13

Christ has paid the price for us; He bore the affront to his holy person on our behalf.

The same treatment that Christ received, if applied to us, would not be an affront to our dignity but the reasonable punishment for our violations of God's Law.

Moreover, He, Jesus Christ, BECAME a curse for us in our place so we might be free from both the requirement of the Law and the penalty for our violations against the Law.

We must not let this slip through our minds. We must grasp the fullness of this thought, as it has profound bearing on our faith.

Jesus Christ did not just pay for our sins as a proxy who visits the library to pay our late fee, where the transaction is made at arm's length on behalf of some third party who is too embarrassed or too poor to pay the bill.

Jesus Christ BECAME SIN, BECAME THE CURSE, for our sakes so He might deal with it in totality, so that as He was crushed, our sin, our curse, was obliterated under God's wrath.

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put [Him] to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10).

The Holy One, robed in majesty and glory, traded His holiness for FILTH and SIN so that the Father might completely crush it underfoot and extend His matchless mercy toward us His creation, rather than His wrath!

“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, [So] great is His mercy toward those

who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, [So] far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:10-12).

“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

Who did He make this exchange with? Those who believe! And, more to the point, those who previously wore the garments of filth and had the curse spoken against them.

Parallel to the thought portrayed here in verse 13, Paul writes to the Corinthians, “For He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Paul girds this mind-bending theological foundation with the Scriptures of the Old Testament: “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deut. 21:23).

So it is, Christ, the Holy One, the Messiah, the one to bring God close, became a curse. He became sin for our sakes so that we might be robed in His righteousness, so that we might bear His image.

And He did all of that why? He imputed His righteousness to us beggars why?

Tying this back in with God’s Word and the fact that God the Father is a promise keeper, Paul gives the answer to ‘why?’ in verse 14: “that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles.”

That blessing is God's righteousness through faith, which is accompanied by the Spirit of God indwelling each of us.

Knowing all of the bad news, the curse, the Law, and sin, prepares our hearts for the good news — those who believe in Jesus Christ are robed in His righteousness and regarded as holy ones, saints, by the Most High God.

This promise is available to all and is not bound up in ceremony, works, or tradition but in the faith of Abraham found among the saints who profess, "We believe, Oh Lord."

CHAPTER 8 | GALATIANS 3:15-20

Paul has been contending earnestly for the liberty that is found in Jesus Christ by systematically challenging a false reliance on the Levitical Law. Gentile believers in the region of Galatia were being deceived into thinking that in order to achieve holiness or perfection, they had to adopt the customs and regulations of their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Their freedom in Christ mattered to Paul, who was himself Jewish, so he spends the greater part of this letter educating them on the reality of God's Word, its historic requirements, and its present and future implications.

VERSE 15

Paul continues his instruction on God's promises by using a human illustration — a human covenant, a testament, contract, or will.

Paul uses a commonly understood illustration — the drawing up of an agreement between two or more parties in a systematic, legal way. This agreement would be ratified by those parties and held within it certain expectations, promises, prohibitions, and so forth that were to be carried out.

If that contract or covenant was confirmed or put in force, then there was no longer room for changes or dismissal of it. The time for that had passed. It was considered a legally

binding document on each party. One could walk away, violate, or transgress from such contracts, but there was often a steep penalty associated with that.

The same is true for the covenant about which Paul speaks here - God's covenant. Specifically, Paul is talking about God's covenant with Abraham. Paul is leading us in a very systematic fashion to see that Jesus Christ was part of God's first covenant with Abraham.

The whole topic of covenants, contracts, testaments, etc., is quite broad and deep and is an interesting study in itself, biblically speaking. There were many covenants between God and His people. It is fruitful for the Bible student to study each of them in depth, because they each speak to the final covenant — the covenant of Christ.

Here is how one text succinctly gives us our bearings as we navigate Paul's words:

Covenant language is more prominent in the Old Testament, which reflects its futuristic character as 'a story in search of an ending.' The language of divine kinship (e.g., "father," "son") emerges in the New Testament, because Christ's fulfillment of the Old Covenant forges familial bonds of divine communion with all humanity...God's 'fatherly plan' for his family advances at every stage of salvation history through a series of divine covenants with chosen mediators: Adam,

Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and ultimately Jesus Christ.¹³

In verse 16, Paul develops his illustration regarding this covenant heart of God.

He focuses his efforts on the covenant of Abraham. This is important because the Galatian Christians were adopting the methodology of the Jewish people so that they might participate in the fullness of faith as sons and daughters of Abraham. They were being told true faith was found in being an heir to the covenants of the ancient fathers.

As we will see, that is not untrue. Jewish people were heirs to covenants of the ancient fathers, but their manner and means of approaching their inheritance was askew. They sought to make themselves children of the promise by works of the flesh.

This could never make them heirs. It was the promise itself that they longed for, which brought them into the family of God in the first place.

Paul does some very brief exegesis on God's promise to Abraham (Abram) found in Genesis: "Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your **descendants** I will give this land.' And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him" (Gen. 12:7).

¹³ Hahn, S. (2016). Covenant. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The original language is the singular (not plural) Hebrew word for “seed,” which the NKJV renders as descendants (plural).

Paul is pointing out that God’s promise was to Abraham’s seed, *singular*. While that promise was layered and did involve the multitude of Israelites, specific words are significant, and God communicated to Abraham about a singular Seed who Paul identifies as Christ.

So, even in the Old Covenants, we see the singularly unique person of Christ represented to God’s people.

VERSES 17-18

Returning to the idea that a ratified covenant cannot be changed or annulled, Paul declares that the Law, which came much later, did not and cannot void God’s promise to Abraham.

That’s not how God works! We need to understand that. God’s words are true. His promises and His judgments are everlasting. He does not revoke His promises or change His mind if He is feeling moody.

“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:11).

“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness [endures] to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides” (Ps. 119:89-90).

“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8).

“For the gifts and the calling of God [are] irrevocable”
(Rom. 11:29).

If God has declared it, then it shall be. Whether that is a covenant promise, the Law, grace, or the holy intersection of all of those things, they shall stand.

Just because Israel was given the Law after their deliverance from Egypt did not invalidate the original promise to Abraham.

These things go together. They are complementary rather than competitive. So many of our theological “conundrums” are cleared up by understanding that we have to hold more than one idea at the same time.

The covenant with Abraham AND the Law AND Christ existed together until they were FULFILLED in Christ according to the terms set forth by the One who instituted these covenants.

Paul is fighting back against the idea that the Law supersedes God’s promise to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham’s Seed, Christ. This might have been a natural assumption since the Law came later, kind of like Covenant 2.0. But that is not the case — the promise stands, and the Law stood beside it.

“For what purpose?”, one might ask. It seems like a logical question, and Paul addresses it in verse 19.

VERSE 19

Why did God give His people the Law through Moses as their mediator? Because of their righteousness? Their in-

trinsic goodness? Because all people are naturally good and kind and helpful?

Not at all! The Law was given to God's covenant people, the Israelites, because of transgressions — violations against His perfect holiness. Or, as written by one commentator, "...to make men more fully conscious of their 'sins.'"¹⁴

Transgressions were the norm and already happening apart from a written, codified law. Consider the state of the God's people even as they are delivered from slavery in Egypt. What do they do next?

“Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for [as for] this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him’” (Exod. 32:1).

So quick were they to abandon the God who had delivered them. So quick they were to turn to wickedness. This is the state of mankind apart from God's goodness. We are ugly, vain, hateful, and wretched to one another and ourselves. We are quick to forget God's goodness and quick to create our own gods.

¹⁴ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 331). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Yet God has endured with us even to the present day in His mercy. Even before the flood of Noah, mankind's heart was dark: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every intent of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Gen. 6:5-6)

Mankind needed a law. They needed a map and compass, some documentation, not to show them the way to redemption but to show them how lost they were so when they examined the Book, the map and compass of their faith, they might fully realize how far they were from their destination.

This is true for us as well.

VERSE 20

This has been called one of the most obscure verses in the New Testament. It seems to be a parenthetical comment, but it requires additional study to understand fully. Here is what we know relative to Paul's assertion in verse 20 and its bearing on our discussion.

We know that when God made a covenant with Abraham, there was no mediator at all, no go-between. God came to Abraham and initiated a one-way covenant on account of Abraham's faith.

We know that God gave the Law to Moses, and Paul indicates that God did so by the hands of angels. Moses served as a mediator between Israel and God, but the angels served as mediators between him and God.

Stephen speaks of those, “who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept [it]” (Acts 7:53). That author of Hebrews seems to confirm this view as well:

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard [Him] (Heb. 2:2-3).

Moreover, the Law itself required a mediatorial office in the person of the high priest, who mediated between God and man. This all illustrates man’s separation from God and the necessity for a mediator in order to come close to Him.

The purpose of a mediator is to bring two parties to common ground, meaning there are three parties in any contractual dispute. Those parties consist of: the wronged, the one who has done the wrong, and the mediator to stand between them and make reconciliation.

Job spoke prophetically about this office: “Nor is there any mediator between us, [Who] may lay his hand on us both” (Job 9:33). Paul ties all of this together, pointing to Jesus Christ when he says, “but God is one” (Gal. 3:20).

This is important for us to understand doctrinally, because some, having read this verse, are mightily challenged for many reasons. Some have been taught their entire lives that they need somebody to represent them to God. Entire religions are based on this notion that we still require a priest to represent God to us and to represent us to God. In this

line of thinking, the mediatorial office of the Law is still retained. People still require a priest to approach God for them.

We know from God's Word that this requirement no longer exists in any capacity. We are all priests (and priestesses) in God's Kingdom, serving under the one High Priest Jesus Christ: "But you [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

The Apostle John, while praising the Lord in Revelation, writes that Jesus "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father" (Rev. 1:5-6).

Another cause for confusion with verse 20 might be that the sharp Bible student thinks correctly, "There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

So true! So we swing back around to Paul's thought, "but God is ONE!" Jesus Christ is God, equal in authority, power, and glory. And He has laid hold of us to bring us to common ground with the Father.

This undeniable unity is so central to our faith that the idea of God as the mediator between Himself and his transgressing children has been communicated since Abraham, when God made the promise Himself. The Law then pointed to the need for a mediator. Finally, Jesus Christ stands in the gap as ONE with the Father, who has both fulfilled the promise to Abraham and has fulfilled the Law completely

in His body so that we might not be crushed under its weight.

“He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

CHAPTER 9 | GALATIANS 3:21-29

We continue reading through Paul's instruction to the Galatian churches on how they are to relate to the Law. Part of Paul's instruction also focuses on how the Jewish people related to the Law in times past, up until Christ fulfilled all of the requirements of the Law.

The churches in the region of Galatia were striving earnestly to perfect themselves by adding the requirement to observe the Law, the mountain of commandments contained in the Old Testament.

This was not designed for the Gentiles, nor was it part of their heritage. After Christ fulfilled the Law, there was and is no longer a requirement for believers to fulfill its requirements. We can never improve upon Christ's completed work.

It seems then that we come face to face with opposing ideologies: justification by works and fulfillment of the Law OR justification by faith in Christ and the promise of God.

So the logical question one might ask is, "What purpose does the Law then serve?" Paul poses this rhetorical question in verse 19. It is an important one to ask, and it's important that we who follow Christ and cling to the Book know the answer. This is especially true for us who are committed to verse-by-verse exposition of all of the Scriptures, which includes the Law.

We believe in faithfully teaching through the Law just as we do the rest of the Bible, as challenging as it may be, because we believe that, “**ALL** scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that God’s people can be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

By understanding God’s Law, we are brought to a clearer understanding of our own need, and we are given a broader context and understanding of God’s holiness and the human condition throughout time.

VERSES 21-22

Paul asks and addresses the next logical question in verse 21: “Is the law then against the promises of God?”

We can see that Paul is diligently trying to clear up any misunderstanding of the “either/or” mindset in the churches’ doctrine.

We are a people of extremes. Well-meaning Christians over the ages have adopted theological positions relating to the Law at two extremes and all along the spectrum between.

Some have declared God’s Law as meaningless and the Old Testament as void and unworthy of consideration for the practical Christian life. That is dangerous ground to stand on, especially since so much of the Law and the Old Testament point to our redeemer Christ.

On the other extreme, there have been Christians who have ostensibly come to faith in Christ, but not practically, be-

cause they demand that true followers of Christ keep the Law that God gave to the nation of Israel.

Neither one of those positions faithfully represents God's Word as delivered to the Church by the Holy Spirit. That is what Paul goes on to explain in the remainder of this book and in chapter 3.

The law is not against the promises of God. They are not opposed to one another. That is a false dichotomy. It is not either/or.

The Law is the mechanism by which people, having failed to live righteously, come to cling to God's promise that He will make them righteous by His own hand.

Paul even explains that IF one COULD gain righteousness from following requirements for righteousness, then God's Law would have been the way to do it.

BUT (v.22) rather than making that happen, God's Word confined or imprisoned everybody under sin.

About this Matthew Henry writes, "The law discovered their wounds, but could not afford them a remedy: it showed that they were guilty, because it appointed sacrifices and purifications, which were manifestly insufficient to take away sin."¹⁵

So then, imprisoned by sin, all of creation longs for a way to be made whole. People attempt and seek many things to

¹⁵ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (p. 2298). Peabody: Hendrickson.

fix themselves or achieve perceived wholeness. The Old Testament saints looked to the horizon for the fulfillment of the promise that was made to them in the Scriptures, the promise that God would bring them close.

This notion is confirmed in the New Testament as well: “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead [Abraham], were born [as many] as the stars of the sky in multitude--innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced [them] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:12-13).

Those OT believers looked forward to Christ. We benefit from their writings, the Scriptures or the Law, and we too look forward to Christ. We are bound together with them in one shared hope, one shared faith, and one shared promise.

While they lived under the weight of the Old Covenant, the Law, longing for their redeemer, we live under the new covenant of that redeemer, longing for a blessed reunion with Him. Incidentally, it is this reflection that gives us some perspective on endurance and patience over time.

VERSES 23-26

Paul continues to instruct on the purpose of the Law, those 613 requirements meant to inform God’s people on holiness, obedience, and faithfulness.

He chooses to illustrate the relationship between God’s people and the Law as a child or student relating to a tutor or schoolmaster. Please note that this is not an imperative

for ignorance or blind faith but rather an education in God's ways.

In this illustration, these two parties are not related by blood. Their relationship is academic. The schoolmaster is responsible for teaching the student all they should know in order to function properly.

The ultimate goal of this student/teacher relationship is to demonstrate academically and intellectually that the spiritual algebraic equation we all face is solved by the person and work of Christ.

Once all of the lessons are complete, the student, examining the materials and educated on the subject matter, comes to the reasonable conclusion that the Messiah who is found within all of these texts must be the one to reconcile mankind to God.

But there's more! Paul says that the role of the Law is to bring us to Christ so that we might be justified **by faith!** That is far more than an exercise in intellectual dexterity. That knowledge of Christ, while it might begin in the brain, **MUST** travel to the core of our being. It must turn from knowledge to FAITH, for it is by faith that we are justified in God's sight by Him.

It was the tutor's responsibility to educate the child and keep them safe and secure, as it is with children in schools today. Teachers are only relieved of this role once Mom and Dad come to claim their child and take them home.

Faith is the thing that brings us to our heavenly Father, to our home.

Paul continues to build on this notion (v.26). No longer are we bound up in an academic relationship; we are sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus Christ. That is a blood relationship. This is our true family, our true home, where we belong.

VERSE 27

Paul calls to mind their former choice to follow Jesus Christ, not the Law. They were baptized **into** Christ. They were moved in a very real sense from where they once were in space and time **INTO** the person of Jesus Christ, so that now they existed geographically, spatially, and spiritually **IN HIM**.

What this means practically is that God views those who are justified by faith as one with Christ, of the same substance. Thereby we are viewed as robed in His righteousness.

“Because I live, you will live also. ‘At that day you will know that I [am] in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you’” (John 14:19-20).

VERSES 28-29

So then all of those who have undergone this immersion into the personhood of Christ by faith are no longer distinguished from one another on the basis of race, ethnicity (εθνος//*ethnos* = gentiles), slavery, freedom, or even gender.

We can make some reasonable inferences as to who made up the body in the Galatian churches from Paul’s writings: Jewish people, Greeks (non-Jewish people who worshipped

the Pantheon of gods/goddesses), slaves, free people, men, women, and their families, no doubt.

What a diverse crew on multiple levels — diversity of background, upbringing, relative societal advantage, and socioeconomic level. There was a lot going on!

Paul says that those identities, those labels, no longer distinguish the believer. Notice the repeated usage of “neither/nor” in Paul’s instruction.

When God views the Body, he doesn’t see Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, or female. He sees the substantive work of Christ conforming believers into His own image by the working of the Holy Spirit.

We are all something new now; we are all IN CHRIST. The practical application for us is that we should view each other as such. How differently we would treat our brothers and sisters if we committed to seeing the Lord Jesus in their mortal bodies.

God the Father sees us as His own son Jesus Christ. Why then should we find our identity in anything else? Why are we so intent on magnifying our uniqueness and personal identity when there is neither Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, or female if we are all one? Our unity is in Christ, wherein we magnify Him like a million shining candles burning together for one purpose.

YOU ARE ALL ONE! Why? Because we have all entered into Christ. It is timely to reflect back on Paul’s words: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

This is where the discussion of identity is had. What am I clinging to in order to validate my worth as a human?

The Galatians deeply wanted to be part of the team and had bought the lie that in order to do that they had to become Jews. They could never do this completely, because they weren't born into the tribes of Israel. They could be proselytes, but even then they carried the stigma of "second class" believers from true Israelites.

The reality, though perhaps less ceremonial, was far more profound. Non-Jewish believers were brought close to God by the blood of the cross. They were reconciled and righteous in God's eyes because Jesus Christ brought them into the Kingdom by His sacrifice.

For us today, there are many who deeply want to be part of the team, any team, and will conform their identity to whatever will grant them access to community. Churches have taken up this strategy as well.

We have the hipster church, the reformed church, the surfer church, the flip-flops church, white church, black church, and the list goes on. While these places make people feel comfortable, they can sometimes turn into just another form of pharisaical legalism.

If we base our spiritual home on personal identity rather than Christ's identity, we find ourselves selling another set of rules meant to squeeze somebody into conformity. Sometimes the unspoken law is that if you can't or don't look like me, you can't be here. Rubbish!

The truth is that we are all supposed to look like Christ! We were baptized INTO HIM, nobody and nothing else.

We are all one Church, the Bride of Christ, each of us separately joined to His bone and His body for His glory. We are found in Him, and He is to be found in us unpolluted.

[There is] one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

If we are Christ's, if we are truly found in Him and He in us, then we are children of the promise. We are together heirs to an eternal Kingdom that shall never perish, nor shall the gates of hell prevail against it.

And that should give us great comfort even as it challenges our identities.

This was Paul's reminder for the Galatians, and it is so timely for us today.

In some ways, Paul's teaching was a call to bring everybody back together from their pet doctrines and legalism in these Galatian churches, reminding them of their shared faith regardless of where they came from.

This is the heart and attitude that we are to adopt as Christ lives in us and calls us to unity with one another.

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father,

[are] in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20-23).

CHAPTER 10 | GALATIANS 4:1-7

Having brought the Galatians to the reasonable conclusion that the purpose of the Law was to serve as a type of schoolmaster or tutor over God's children, Paul continues to build on this illustration.

He will continue to do so throughout chapter 4 as he returns to Abraham. Paul's letter to the Galatians is quite remarkable as he corrects the errant doctrine that righteousness comes through the Law by using that very Law as his proof!

In Galatians 4:1-7, Paul depicts the relationship between God and humanity as a Father-child relationship and the relationship between people and the Law as one of slavery.

This is important because there are many who misunderstand and mischaracterize the nature of God. There are some who depict God as a cold, distant, unconcerned being who may or may not exist; if He does exist, He doesn't involve himself in the affairs of humans anymore.

There are others who view God as a cosmic bookkeeper whose sole purpose is to keep account of our debits and credits and give us a balance report at the end of our lives. Those who espouse this view hope dearly that they strike a positive balance.

There are also those who believe God is a brutal dictator who conforms men into deluded or ignorant slaves through punishment and catastrophe.

Others believe God is a capable broker they can bargain with. They may say, “God, I promise to read my Bible, say my prayers, and give to the poor as long as you promise to take care of me financially and keep me from hardship.”

Some describe God as THE moral authority who concerns Himself strictly with the moral conduct of men so that we can know the difference between right and wrong. If we choose to live morally, we will go to heaven.

There are countless additional variations here we could mention, including deists, theists, agnostics, moralists, legalists, and on and on and on — a flavor for every persuasion, all incomplete, all quite distant from God.

God’s Word describes God’s ways as unsearchable: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable [are] His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

Though we could dedicate our entire lives to unraveling the fullness of who God is, we would still not understand Him completely at the end of our days.

It is by His Word along with the instruction of the Holy Spirit that we can grow to know Him more. We can draw near to Him, and He promises to draw near to us. Why? Because God is overwhelmingly described by the Bible as a Father. The relationship between the creation and the sovereign, almighty author of creation is as a child to a Father.

Once we view God the way the Bible depicts Him, as a Father, then we can begin to better understand the complexities of who He is. We can do this not because we are so great at being dads, but because any good thing we know about being a dad is from Him, our Heavenly Father.

Now, I say all of that because this morning we continue to build upon Paul's exhortation to the Galatian churches, namely that they are "heirs according to the promise," and "children of Abraham," because of their faith in Jesus Christ (3:29).

The Galatians longed to be part of the eternal family, but they had become distracted by ritual and Law, and they believed wrongly that they had to follow a load of extra rules to be part of the family.

Paul continues in chapter four to explain the nature of being a child in God's house. We must approach this portion with the understanding that as believers, we are exhorted and encouraged to pursue maturity — to grow up: "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ" (Eph. 4:14-15).

Additionally, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary [principles] of Christ, let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1).

We must also recognize that we WILL ALWAYS BE our Father's kids, just like our own children are to us: "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the king-

dom of God as a little child will by no means enter it” (Mark 10:15).

For this paradox, consider this question as we study our text: What if we could grow in maturity, wisdom, and knowledge to look more like our DAD (spiritually speaking), all while maintaining our child-like faith, innocence, gentleness, and goodness?

VERSES 1-2

Paul revisits the notion of what it meant to live in God’s family as the Jewish people did with the Law as a guardian or steward.

The idea is that those who were born Jews, born into the blood family of God’s chosen people, were being raised in God’s ways by this Law that was over them.

You’ll notice that they are described as children, but Paul says even heirs have to obey slaves and guardians in the home when they are children; they have no rights to speak of yet. That relationship exists until such a time as the father, the master of the house, determines that his children are prepared to responsibly keep their inheritance.

Irresponsible children lose their inheritances all the time, so it’s up to the head of the house to make sure the children are trained to care for what they inherit!

One source writes, “Between \$1 trillion and \$3 trillion will be transferred to heirs every year through 2050...experts estimate that 33% of benefactors have negative savings within two years of inheriting wealth...a shocking 70% of

high net worth families lose their fortune by the second generation.”¹⁶

VERSE 3

The condition of Paul and the Jewish people under the Law is here described as slavery, and Paul uses remarkable language. A more illustrative reading based on the Greek text might sound like: ... “when we were **infants** (νήπιοι//*nepi-oi*) under the **first principles** (the a,b,c’s) of the world we were **enslaved** (δεδουλωμένοι//*dedoulomenoi*).”

Paul is firmly placing himself among those subject to enslavement. He also states this matter-of-factly. This thing happened; enslavement happened and continued in the past for quite some time, all while those enslaved were babies, infants, and vulnerable to almost anything.

This was their reality — child slavery in a spiritual sense. Nothing about this has the tone of “everything is awesome, let’s get more people to join us.”

I must impart the gravity of this condition. Far too often in Christian circles, we use the language of “bondage” to depict the human condition (i.e., smoking, addiction, alcohol abuse, anger, depression, etc.). This can desensitize us to such important language.

The enslavement Paul is talking about was divorced from human volition; it was the state they were born into. Their

¹⁶ “The ‘Greater’ Wealth Transfer.” Last modified 2012.
https://www.accenture.com/t20160505t020205z_w_/us-en/_acn-media/pdf-16/accenture-cm-awams-wealth-transfer-final-june2012-web-version.pdf.

lives were not their own from the cradle to the grave unless they were released or had their freedom purchased.

Paul continues to drive home that it is the infant, the child, most impacted by this state, with no recourse or defense.

So here the Galatians are at a crossroads. Do you want to be a baby, or do you want to grow up? The Galatians wanted to see themselves and depict themselves as mature because of their adherence to the Law. Paul says that those who do such things are immature, babies, and enslaved, not yet ready to keep their inheritance without the oversight of a guardian.

And this isn't Paul taking shots at people, defaming people for being immature. He lived that life! He knew the weight of that bondage, the struggle and the lack of freedom. Paul and his countrymen were both blood children in the family AND slaves (verse one illustrates no difference between a child and a slave). They did not know freedom from the Law.

About the spiritual enslavement of Israel, who God delivered from slavery out of Egypt, Irenaeus (2nd century) wrote,

“...when they turned themselves to make a calf, and went back in their minds to Egypt, desiring to be slaves instead of free people, they were consequently placed into a state of servitude suited to their wishes — a slavery that did not in fact cut them off from God, but subjected them to the yoke of bondage...”

People will obey rules until the day they die, enslaved in dead religion, not because they love God, but for a multitude of other reasons that do not bring freedom or life. They may even cling to the Scriptures in a way that brings bondage. This was what happened to Israel, and this happens today too.

As we see in Isaiah:

But the word of the LORD was to them, ‘Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little,’ That they might go and fall backward, and be broken And snared and caught (Isa. 28:13).

Another common condition for those in spiritual slavery is rebellion. Having felt the heavy hand of religion devoid of freedom, they forsake the heavenly family altogether.

VERSES 4-5

BUT, God our Father purchased all of those children out of slavery and into freedom.

He did not do so in order to bear down on us, to beat us, or to hurt us. He did it so we could sit at His table, heirs to His kingdom, no longer under a tutor, no longer enslaved, no longer serving dead religion, but alive and well and in His kingdom.

God the Father adopted all of us as His children. This is the good news for all who have struggled under the oppression of religion and “be better” doctrine. We have a home that is

characterized by freedom and liberty: “For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17, NLT).

In our church, we have step-parents, adoptive parents, and foster parents. That’s such an awesome picture of God’s heart toward humanity. Some of these kids in our church were born into a legal system with a stack of paper mounted against them that they didn’t even know about in their infant state.

But a mom and dad came along and said, “I am willing to move that mountain of legal requirements. I am willing to wait until the fullness of time has come. I am willing to put up my own resources so that you might become my child.”

That’s what God did for us by Jesus Christ - he purchased our adoption. It took everything He had, His very life, but He did not count that as too dear a price to remove the chains of the Law so that we might have an eternal Father-child relationship with Him.

VERSE 6

The result of our adoption is our relationship with the Father. In our adoption we are given a great gift, a unique gift to those who are Christ’s - the Holy Spirit. It is this Holy Spirit, the very substance of the Father who is Spirit, that dwells in us and works on us as we grow up in Him.

The Spirit causes us to look like our Father, to talk like our Father, to behave like our Father, and to display His mannerisms, His personality. As our earthly fathers imprint us with their image, so our Heavenly Father imprints His im-

age on us AND continues to shape us, because we are forever children in His Kingdom, constantly learning and growing.

It is that Spirit that brings an insatiable desire to be with our Father, that cries out Abba, Father just as Jesus cried (Mark 14:36).

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with [Him], that we may also be glorified together (Rom. 8:14-17).

VERSE 7

Because of Christ, we are free and have a vast eternal inheritance set aside for us in our Father's Kingdom.

We can look back at our times in slavery and know how much we despised the weight and requirements, and we can rejoice in our freedom as children of God through Christ.

Paul's words have a gravity to them that is hard for us to understand. When Paul wrote these letters, slavery was a common condition.

People would understand clearly the illustration that Paul was making on a spiritual level.

People yearned and longed for freedom. One thing hasn't changed — the human heart still yearns and longs for freedom. Through Christ you have “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:4-5).

You are free, loved one. Nobody can take that from you. I beg you, let nobody put you back in chains. Christ has purchased you, having become a slave on our behalf, and brought you into the eternal family once and for all.

CHAPTER 11 | GALATIANS 4:7-18

The Galatian Condition, the Human Condition

Paul has driven home the point of what it means to be a child of God, an heir to God's Kingdom by faith in Christ, rather than a slave to the law or to the basic principles of the world.

He has made the point that people are not brought into a right relationship with God because of a rigid system of religious rules but by faith in Christ alone. This is commonly referred to as the doctrine of justification by faith.

In plain language, the doctrine of justification by faith is that a person, recognizing their sin, turns from their sin and believes completely that God has provided a way to be made righteous by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Because of that belief, God applies the righteousness of Christ to them. They are seen in God's eyes as holy, clean — just as if they had never sinned.

That is the process by which we are brought into God's Kingdom, adopted into His eternal family.

In verse 7 Paul writes, "Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:7).

VERSES 8-9

We see the competing conditions of the human experience — either being separated from God or known by God.

Paul calls to mind the former state of the believer: "when you did not know God."

This is a condition experienced by all humanity. We are not born into a right relationship with God. Any assertion otherwise is contrary to God's Word, the Holy Scriptures. We are all born into a fallen creation. And we each find very quickly that we fall short of holiness far more often than we draw near to it.

David writes about this briefly in Psalm 51 as he is considering his own sin: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). He recognized that he was birthed into a world marked by iniquity and sin. And so it is for all of us.

Paul writes about this in Romans: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

We are all born of flesh, brought forth into a world of sin and iniquity and in need of God's grace.

It was in that previous condition that the Galatians were enslaved to everything else but God.

In verse 8 "served" is translated from the Greek term δουλεύω//*douleuo*. This means, "*to be a slave, serve, do service...*" or "in a bad sense, of those who become slaves to some base power, *to yield to, give one's self up to...*"¹⁷

This was quite literal for the Galatian churches. They had worshipped other deities before coming to Christ.

¹⁷ Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (p. 124). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Paul's description applies to us as well. Many people serve many different things. Whether that is a religious law, moral code, or, on the other hand, immorality (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life), it makes no difference.

None of those things are God. But they rule over us as such, bringing us into submission, bringing us into spiritual slavery.

Some people even worship the religion itself or worship at the altar of patriotism rather than God the Father.

The Bible says, "For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage" (2 Pet. 2:19).

Additionally, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin [leading] to death, or of obedience [leading] to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

It is sad to think that after this glorious adoption, after we come to know God and we are known by God, there are those who would rather regress, who would rather walk backwards, than find freedom in Christ. Why return to things that never made us whole or holy in the first place?

Contextually for the Galatians, they exchanged a set of well-rehearsed religious ordinances and ceremonies that were performed to idols for freedom in Christ. Then they traded their freedom for another set of well-rehearsed religious ordinances found in the legalistic system of the Judaizers.

By doing this, Paul indicates that they held a deep-seated desire to be enslaved again, a condition that is common among people as long as we call it something that sounds good, something other than bondage or slavery.

We'll call it a system or a growth track. People feel comfortable operating under systems. Systems guide us through the process so we don't have to exercise willpower or discernment or dependence on the Holy Spirit; we just do what the manual says, and we are good.

This is the Pharisaical model of religion. Unfortunately, many who bear the name "Christian" have adopted this same model for today. They see Christianity as a moral responsibility or the best lifestyle choice out of a slew of other choices, rather than the result of God's unmatched love and redemption of His creation.

Yes, there are instructions that are imperative to our faith. However, the all-too-familiar danger in our culture is that it is possible, and quite common, to see the Bible as ONLY a set of moral regulations for living a "good life." That is a shallow and incomplete view of God and His Word.

Moreover, it is possible to follow the instructions to the letter and still not know God or be known by Him - style rather than substance.

Recall Christ's words: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt. 7:22-23).

Again, recall Christ's words to the overtly religious:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you are like whitewashed tombs which
indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside
are full of dead [men's] bones and all un-
cleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear
righteous to men, but inside you are full of
hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matt. 23:27-28).

What does a practical return to slavery look like?

VERSES 10-11

So, well-meaning, religious people, having been adopted
into God's family by the blood of Christ, traded in their
freedom for a rule book and a multitude of religious obser-
vations, exactly what they were delivered from!

Accustomed as the Galatians had been, when
heathen, to the mystic worship...prevalent in
the neighboring region of Phrygia, and
the...doctrines connected with that worship,
they were more readily led to believe that the
full privileges of Christianity could only be
attained through an elaborate system of cere-
monial symbolism.¹⁸

Beware, loved one!

¹⁸ Jamieson, Robert, Fausset, A. R., and Brown, David.
Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible. New York,
NY: Revell, 1920.

This is not a rant against Christmas and Easter. Some fringe Christian denominations have denounced all holidays, but that is just another form of legalism, just another set of unbiblical rules.

In all of this Paul's emotions are on display. With all of this confusion and the seeming tendency for the Galatian churches to prefer being bound to law, religion, codes of conduct, ceremony, etc., Paul is rightfully worried about them.

He loves them and wants to see them in a right relationship with the Lord. Having labored among them in teaching, preaching, and discipleship, he is concerned that the churches are throwing away sound doctrine for the weak and beggarly elements that comprise every other religion under the sun.

Every religion has holidays, feasts, observances, rules, codes of conduct, etc., but THE FAITH brings freedom from those things and closeness to God the Father by FAITH in Christ.

VERSE 12

Paul's Exhortation to be Free

This faith is relational. In Christ we are one Body, diverse yet mutually dependent upon one another.

This is what we see in Paul's case. He tells believers to become like him — free, new, bound to Christ.

Paul had been a Pharisee, “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of

the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5-6).

But he threw all of that away for the sake of knowing Jesus, being known by Him, and demonstrating to others that they could be reconciled to God by Him. He became all things to all men, even becoming like one of the Galatians:

For though I am free from all [men], I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those [who are] under the law, as under the law, that I might win those [who are] under the law; to those [who are] without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those [who are] without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all [men], that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

How many are willing to become like Paul? Not very many.

We are more willing to persuade others to become like us. That’s the nature of debate, right? To prove to somebody that they should adopt our hang-ups and our convictions rather than us becoming like them and showing them freedom in Christ?

When Paul said, “become like me,” he was introducing them to Jesus, not his own peculiarities: “Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

And it was Jesus Christ who came to bring freedom and holiness.

VERSES 13-16

Paul’s Personal History Among Them

It appears that because of Paul’s infirmity he was able to declare the good news to the churches in Galatia, a constant trait of Paul’s ministry.

People spend ages trying to make sure the conditions are perfect or as near to perfect as they can get before sharing the gospel with others.

Paul’s God-directed experience was that it was his weakness and the imperfection of his circumstances which allowed him to share the goodness of God with others.

Paul could not be credited with setting the perfect conditions for a successful evangelistic experience. Rather, he found himself as a broken instrument in the hands of almighty God to bring this message of redemption to a people who were completely divorced from Jesus, literally worshipping other gods and goddesses.

They were so kind to him! Paul says they would have given him their own eyes if they could. (This is where we infer that Paul had a consistent medical condition affecting his vision, potentially since he had encountered Jesus and lost his sight (Acts 9)).

Nice people believe crazy stuff! Just because they worshipped other gods didn't make them unkind — they received Paul so warmly and cared for him.

It was to these people that he gave what he had - Jesus. At first, that was glorious. They received this message as if from a heavenly messenger or even Jesus himself. This was so powerful.

So Paul calls on them to remember their relationship with one another. It's almost as if he is saying, "You guys know me, I know you, and I'm not your enemy!"

VERSE 17

While they had at first received the simple gospel of Jesus Christ by faith, they had since been deceived by an organized group of people — the Judaizers. The intent of this group was to establish a religious hierarchy with themselves at the top and the Galatian baby Christians at the bottom.

As stated by one commentator, "The zeal cultivated by legalism is often more a zeal for the group itself than for Jesus Christ. Though they name the name of Jesus, in practice *the group itself* is exalted as the main focus, and usually exalted as the last refuge of the true 'super-Christians.'"¹⁹

Essentially, the Judaizers were feeding their own egos. The baby Christians among the Galatians would say, "I want to be like them; they're so holy and respected. How can I do that?" At which point they would be instructed in the com-

¹⁹ Guzik, D. (2013). *Galatians* (Ga 4:28–31). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

plex code of Jewish Law, and then they were caught, chained up by religious legalism. Such a sad state and one that occurs today as well.

Otherwise, the zealous new believers, unable to follow the strict code of religiosity, found themselves excluded altogether, deemed a second-class believer or a “bad” Christian, somebody who didn’t “live up” to the fabricated standard. So many people have been burned by this same legalism today.

I pray it’s comforting to see that God prepared His Word to teach our hearts about this very thing 2000 years ago. About such legalists Matthew Henry writes:

There may appear to be a great deal of zeal where yet there is but little truth and sincerity...It is the usual way of seducers to insinuate themselves into people’s affections, and by that means to draw them into their opinions... Whatever pretences such may make, they have usually more regard to their own interest than that of others, and will not [stop] at ruining the reputation of others, if by that means they can raise their own.²⁰

VERSE 18

Who/what are we to be zealous for? Jesus or other people? Jesus or a celebrity pastor? Jesus or our favorite author? Jesus or our favorite Christian tradition?

²⁰ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (p. 2304). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Ultimately, the answer is Jesus Christ alone.

It is good to have teachers and pastors and mentors. It is good to desire good things, of course! It is good to pursue God zealously. It is good to follow Christ zealously and enthusiastically — please do! Don't be the Eeyore of the bunch!

It is good to do so even when, especially when, nobody is watching.

We must remember that zeal for God's Kingdom in the purest sense is brought to us by faith in Christ - not works, people, or rules. Christ alone.

CHAPTER 12 | GALATIANS 4:19-5:1

VERSES 19-20

Paul feels obvious pain and distress addressing this issue of a turn toward a rules-based religion, which Paul has characterized as equating to slavery or bondage. He describes his state of being as a mother, laboring during childbirth. As a father, I can describe what this may have been like from my point of view, but I can't truly identify with that anxiety,

distress, mixed feelings of pain and joy, and everything else that occurs during childbirth.

But Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says he can. He says he feels this way in dealing with the Galatians.

They were so new, his little children, so impressionable and vulnerable, and he feels this immense sense of re-birthing them into truth — desiring that Christ be formed in them.

This is the heart of all who are set apart to preach the gospel. Our hearts yearn to see Christ forming in those we care for. It is the Holy Spirit that does the work, and yet our hearts labor and travail for that new life to come into being. We love seeing newborns in Christ and Christ in them.

Paul saw himself as a spiritual parent to them. This was characteristic of Paul's relationship with the churches and with people.

We are warned not to call any man father or teacher by Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:8-10). That teaching is about an infatuation with presumptuous titles and wrongly standing between people and God. It is an imperative that has been largely ignored.

Paul is talking about something else far greater than titles and undue respect for an office. He is talking about relationships, about fulfilling the ministry that God placed him into.

He similarly referred to the Corinthians, as his heart was breaking over their conduct and division: "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I

warn [you]. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet [you do] not [have] many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:14-15).

Paul writes about individuals too. He refers to both Titus and Timothy as true sons in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2, Titus 1:4). Later, he says, “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten [while] in my chains” (Philem. 1:10).

For Paul, this faith community was built on family! It has been said that blood is thicker than water. That is a pithy attempt to remind us that our families are more important and deserve more consideration than non-family.

But in Paul’s mind, this was the great family of Jesus Christ where we are all bound together eternally in the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the blood that matters, Christ’s blood, and by it we who believe have been brought into this great universal family of God.

Along the way, God places father figures and brothers and sisters and mothers in our lives as He sees fit for our instruction and raising up so that we might be equipped for serving in His Kingdom (Eph. 4:11-13).

This idea of discipleship, growing in maturity and liberty in Christ, was more than incidental to Paul. It was more than one or two days a week. It was everlasting.

Now, it’s not all roses! See here that in this relationship, Paul feels a significant amount of doubt. He is perplexed by the Galatians. He has had to employ a tone in his writing

that he wishes he could have avoided, but he loved them enough to shoot them straight.

Certainly we could imagine that this letter would have caused a great spectrum of reactions among the Galatian churches as well. This is part of growing in Christ with one another, to say the hard things in love when they are needed. It takes maturity to remember that the whole point of correction is reconciliation AND to hear the hard things spoken or written in love, being humble enough to listen without being overly defensive or just bailing out altogether because we are offended.

Have we considered that perhaps we need the correction? The Galatians certainly did! The Corinthians certainly did! Are we better, smarter, or more spiritual than they? Let each one answer in his own heart.

Paul's correction of the Galatians was based on their desire to be enslaved by the Law, that body of regulations meant to show us our depravity, rather than living out their freedom purchased by Christ.

VERSES 21-26

While the Galatians were developing an affinity for the Law, it was an unhealthy and uninformed love.

They were being told that in order to please God they had to do all of these external things. This is dangerous, because this type of thought or practice denies the efficacy of the cross. It attempts to improve upon Christ's death via external actions, rather than believing by faith and receiving God's grace.

Paul challenges them, “Don’t you hear the Law?” This question is more of an indictment regarding their understanding of the Law. The Law does not bring freedom or righteousness, as Paul has demonstrated over and over again.

Applicable to us is the understanding of Scriptural literacy. Many people claim a robust understanding of Scripture and are quite convinced of their expertise, even though they have never examined the Scriptures critically, or even at all! Short form: know God’s Word!

Paul demonstrates from the Law that their perception of righteousness by the Law is flawed. He uses the book of Genesis, the first book of the Law, as his text to instruct the Galatians in their misunderstanding.

He references Abraham’s sons — which is quite a compelling history. Remember that the Jewish people revered the person of Abraham. They were descendants of the one man that God called out from among the nations to be the progenitor of His special people, the nation of Israel. As we see in John, “Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (John 8:53, 58).

So the Galatians were being deceived into thinking that they could make themselves true children of Abraham by circumcision, by following the Law, and that God would be pleased with that.

Paul takes them on a history lesson about what it means to operate in the flesh and what it means to be a child of promise, born out of God’s directive by faith. He speaks of

two sons. One the child of a slave, Hagar, and one the child of the free woman through promise, Sarah.

Let's examine a brief survey of the context that surrounds Paul's message:

Genesis 15: God makes a covenant with Abraham that He Himself will be responsible for:

Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:5-6).

There's only one problem: Abram's wife Sarai is unable to conceive. Perhaps they can speed up the process of God's promise?

Genesis 16: The flesh takes over and begets a child born into division and sin, and people are wounded. This was not God's promise, but this is the result of what happens when people try to improve upon or try to captain God's promise.

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no [children]. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, 'See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing [children]. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her hus-

band Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. Then Sarai said to Abram, ‘My wrong [be] upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me. So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid [is] in your hand; do to her as you please.’ And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence (Gen. 16:1-6).

Genesis 17: God continues to speak to Abraham about the promise, even in his sin, and institutes the covenant of circumcision. But, TWIST, Ishmael the child of slavery shares in the covenant of circumcision. What then does circumcision avail the nation of in regard to their uniqueness?

This [is] My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you... Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah [shall be] her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be [a mother of] nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.’

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall [a child] be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear [a child]?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, [and] with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.’ Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him (Gen. 17:10-23).

Genesis 21: The son of bondage is cast out.

So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to

Abraham, ‘Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, [namely] with Isaac.’ And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son. But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.’ (Gen. 21:8-12).

This is a heartbreaking story of the difference between God’s promise and man’s sinful effort wrought in impatience, distrust, and desire.

In a grand indictment against the legalists, Paul is saying here that although they claim to be sons of Abraham, Paul says those who are under the Law in bondage are more like Ishmael than Isaac. There is more law to them than liberty.

AND, the implication is that they will be cast out!

The religious system represented in earthly Jerusalem equated with slavery, was born out of human effort, and ends in being cast out. The heavenly Kingdom, established by God’s promise, came forth by Jesus Christ and offers a family to those who believe.

VERSES 27-31

Nothing about Sarah and Abraham in their old age hinted that they might begin to have children. But God’s promise was fulfilled in their lives. The barren woman brought forth Isaac.

We who believe are children of promise, born into God's family with an inheritance and a family. We are not born of our own efforts or the efforts of our parents but born of God's promise to establish a family unto His glory.

Part of being in that family is enmity between the Law and freedom. The one born in slavery persecutes and pursues the children of promise. We should expect this. The aim? To be brought into bondage like them. Misery loves company.

“The persecution Christians face ‘will not always be by the world but also and indeed more often by their half-brothers—the unbelieving but religious people in the nominal church. This is the lesson of history ... Today the greatest enemies of the believing church are found among the members of the unbelieving church, the greatest opposition emanating from pulpits and church hierarchies.’”²¹

But take heart! This is such great news! We are children of promise!

How freeing would this news be to many of our loved ones? You don't have to labor under the confines of “doing,” but you are made free by Jesus Christ, the one true child of promise who brought us into His family.

God made another promise: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14).

²¹ Guzik, D. (2013). *Galatians* (Ga 4:28–31). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

How crazy does that sound? To those who heard it, perhaps like Sarah, it seemed implausible, impossible. To many today, that fact still presents a mighty hurdle. Can God do this?

God the Father has done this. He has established His eternal family by THE SON OF PROMISE - CHRIST. And we share in His likeness as children of promise, because that is how God builds His family — by His certain Word.

We see in John: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

CHAPTER 5 VERSE 1

So we come to the final imperative born out of our reliance on the promise. Because of everything we just examined, we can only come to one conclusion — the Galatians and we ourselves are to stand firm, to remain, in the liberty delivered to us by Christ and not subject ourselves to slavery again.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1, NIV).

CHAPTER 13 | GALATIANS 5:1-6

Estrangement vs. Expectation

VERSE 1

Since you are children of promise, stand firm, or remain steadfast, in the freedom for which Christ has made you free.

Christ has freed us from the yoke of bondage. A yoke is a wooden beam designed to harness two animals together, normally oxen, so that they can pull together in their shared labor. We are no longer, as farm animals, tethered to the Law. Rather, we are tethered to Jesus, and the yoke of Jesus Christ isn't characterized by soul-crushing weight and rigid complications.

“Come to Me, all [you] who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke [is] easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

By way of application, we are not to return to the Law in any of the forms it has taken over the generations! We cannot claim to be free from the Old Levitical Law while attempting to build again a new unnamed Law that also enslaves people. That is all too common in society and in the Church today.

We must beware the slow drift toward legalism. This can happen by those with an orthodox faith — those with right doctrine.

What happens is that we acknowledge that Christ has fulfilled the Law for us completely, having become a curse for us. But then we systematically emplace an unwritten/unspoken law that states, “If you are a good Christian then you will not touch, will not taste, will not wear, etc.”

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as [though] living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ‘Do not touch, do

not taste, do not handle,' which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, [false] humility, and neglect of the body, [but are] of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (Col. 2:20-23).

We need to beware creating our own yoke that we are placing onto people whom Christ brings into His Kingdom and has placed under His yoke. We walk on dangerous ground when we remove the light, easy yoke of Christ and replace it with our own, when we tether people to our systems rather than to our Lord.

VERSES 2-4

Estrangement from Christ

VERSE 2

The first fact that Paul delivers to us here is this: if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

Circumcision was that covenant instituted by God with Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. It was an extreme covenant that required the actual physical cutting away of flesh from the body, symbolically representing the removal of the flesh nature from God's covenant people.

But remember, Ishmael, the child of the slave, Hagar, also participated in this covenant. Paul writes to the Galatians in 4:21-31 that Christians are not children of slavery but are children of promise.

That promise is represented through Isaac, the child of the free woman who was unable to conceive. Therein we see that the children of promise are not born out of the clever devisings of the flesh but by the promise of God.

Nevertheless, the rite of circumcision, carried out on all men of Israel at the age of 8 days old, was a point of pride for the Israelites. This affected the early church severely! The church in Antioch struggled with this: “And certain [men] came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1).

The temptation for the men in the Galatian church was to do this extreme thing to prove their sincerity and their dedication. This would have been an attractive option, because by this ceremony men could signal their righteousness. This appealed to their pride, as legalism appeals to our pride. They could claim to have been so singularly devoted to God that they would go under the knife.

Paul tells them that if they do that, they are throwing away any benefit they have found in Jesus Christ. Why does participating in circumcision eliminate the benefit and riches of knowing Christ? Because now these men are trusting in their own works, not the work of Christ.

If we start a work in our flesh, we are responsible for completing it, and so they, and many others today, find themselves working, working, working with no rest in sight, no peace of spirit, and no unity with Christ.

Interestingly, the implication, then, is that for those who appear to be hyper-religious (externally speaking), they are

the furthest away, actually separated from Christ by their own works, no matter how well-intentioned or sincere they may be.

The righteousness they are building in their own strength is the thing that stands in the way of knowing Christ.

VERSE 3

Paul continues to repeat himself (“I testify again...”), at least it seems that way to us. But he does so because this is SO important and so common. We are not unfamiliar with the idea that people need to hear things more than once based on retention, attention, and comprehension.

The message that bears repeating is this: If they wanted to participate in one point of the Law, namely circumcision, then they were required to keep the whole thing, incurring for themselves a debt.

One of the things plaguing our generation, though not new at all to mankind, is crushing debt. Debt weighs on people mightily. In 2019, the total combined amount of consumer debt in the US was around \$14 trillion, a number that is nearly incomprehensible.

Forbes.com reported last month that a 20-year-old college student committed suicide after misunderstanding some features of an online securities trading platform. The young man reportedly believed (wrongly!) he had incurred nearly

\$730K of unintended debt, which led to his untimely suicide.²²

Debt hurts people. It's not fun. Incidentally, that's why so many prosperity preachers are so popular. They are exploiting people's longing to be relieved of their debts.

Relative to our text, we learn that once we take up one point of the Law, we are responsible for the whole bill. That is a debt that we simply cannot pay. Our spiritual assets will never be enough to cover the expense.

As Paul wrote in chapter 3, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed [is] everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them'" (Gal. 3:10).

This is confirmed by James as well: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one [point], he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

For a man to keep the whole Law would be to fulfill all 613 written requirements contained in the Old Testament continually and forever. This is an impossible task for the average human, hence God's allowance for sacrifice/atonement in the Law to cover transgressions.

²² Klebnikov, Sergei, and Antoine Gara. "20-Year-Old Robinhood Customer Dies by Suicide after Seeing a \$730,000 Negative Balance," Last modified December 16, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sergeiklebnikov/2020/06/17/20-year-old-robinhood-customer-dies-by-suicide-after-seeing-a-730000-negative-balance/?sh=3486a5bd1638>.

That is why humanity needs a Savior who was tempted in all points as we are tempted, yet without sin. That's why we need the perfect High Priest who became our perfect sacrifice — because without it we would be obliterated by our indebtedness to God's Law and our constant failings.

This is the state of those who seek to bind themselves under the yoke of the Law: they are now responsible for the payment required. Almost as if, forgive the imperfect analogy, Jesus is paying our bill and we say, "No, No, Jesus, I got this."

Even though Paul explains the danger, people were and are still deceived into adopting this legalistic position, because by doing so they can adopt the appearance of drawing closer to God.

VERSE 4

By adopting this legalistic position, the Galatians have **ACTUALLY** lost touch with Jesus in the severest sense, rather than drawing close to Him.

Paul's language could also indicate that for those who went under the knife in order to share in the covenant of circumcision, more than their flesh was cut off. In the realest terms, they themselves are severed or cut off from Christ altogether.

The word "estranged: here is translated from a term that means, "to be severed from, separated from, discharged

from, loosed from, any one; to terminate all intercourse with...”²³

You will notice that this estrangement, this severance of relationship, applies to those who merely attempt to be justified by the Law, for there can be no justification by the Law itself as executed by human hands. The original language used by Paul here indicates that an action is being attempted unsuccessfully.

One scholar writes, “Paul is not declaring that they *are* being justified by the Law, but that they *think* they are (or they are trying to be), though their attempt can only end in failure.”²⁴

By this attempt you have fallen from grace. Is that possible? Yes. How? Attempting justification via any other means than faith.

This is interesting, because we generally think of “falling from grace,” or “apostasy” as somebody who is ultra-worldly, which is not necessarily untrue. But Paul describes the notion of falling from grace via self-righteousness. So it’s possible for somebody to be super self-righteous, wearing the label “Christian,” but to be totally divorced from Christ.

²³ Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (p. 336). New York: Harper & Brothers.

²⁴ Wallace, D. B. (1996). *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (p. 535). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

To claim that we are relying on God's grace while really relying on our own righteousness is certainly retreating or falling away from that unearned, un-earnable favor and relying on our own merits instead.

The end result of our fabricated righteousness is alienation from Christ, neither knowing Him nor being known by Him.

We may feel justified, even smug, by our deeds and contrived self-righteousness, but in reality we have fallen from His favor, because to attempt to be justified apart from the cross is shunning the grace of God, denying the cross, and declaring that we can do better than God.

VERSE 5

Those who are continually reliant on grace live in a state of EXPECTATION through the Spirit that dwells within. There is an expectation for those who cling to justification by faith — the hope, the expectation of righteousness.

This is not hoping in an uncertain, fifty-fifty sense, but faithfully knowing that this shall come to be (that is where our hope is derived), that we are seen as righteous, and we shall be seen as righteous by the Father because of Jesus Christ.

By the Spirit we are empowered to patiently endure with hope, not trusting in our own inadequacies, but trusting in the sufficiency of Christ.

VERSE 6

It's not about doing; it's not about the works of the flesh. We who believe do not find our identity in those external markers of holiness, nor do we boast in our flesh nature.

Rather, we find our identity, our personhood, immersed in and engulfed by the person and work of Jesus Christ. This relationship with Christ is what changes us, moves us, and works both in us and outwardly.

For the Galatians to potentially adopt a hard line against circumcision based on Paul's correction would be equally as wrong as glorying in circumcision. Doing so would mean dividing into camps, picking an issue to champion, and focusing on the wrong thing. Anything other than Jesus Christ is the wrong thing.

Counter to the legalists who adopted and pushed adherence to the Law, others may say, "I will see just how far I can go in the opposite direction!" That is equally contrived and equally separated from Christ.

We who believe are to find ourselves IN Christ, positionally speaking. What we find in that position, in Christ, is that those attributes that profit us as are faith working through love. Not faith working through fear, faith working through compulsion, faith working through guilt, faith working through commitment, or faith working through work. It is faith working, being made real, and exercised fully through LOVE that is gain.

"Whose love?" is the next question, and it finds its answer reciprocally. We may be tempted to say it is our love! The

love we have for God is the thing that draws us close to Him, that awards us our position in Christ. But the Bible teaches us the opposite.

It is His love for us that won us to Him while we were His enemies (Romans 5:8-10) and His love for us which births our faith and our love toward Him:

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 5:17-19).

He, Jesus Christ, loved us first, before we adopted any of our religiousness or tradition, before we were smart enough to rebel against religion and tradition. Jesus loved us first, in our wretchedness, when we cursed His name. He loved us first.

Let that be our meditation.

CHAPTER 14 | GALATIANS 5:7-15

Fulfilling the Law in Love

Continuing in Galatians, we see that this letter remains focused on correcting the errant belief that people could improve upon their righteousness by observing the Old Testament Law. What this meant practically for these new Christians was that they were adopting the religious customs of the Jewish people. The men were even committing to the rite of circumcision as a way to demonstrate their devotion.

This is all quite disturbing to Paul, because he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to them: that they are justified in God's eyes by faith alone and that they are made righteous by Christ's righteousness alone.

This is what we call alien righteousness or imputed righteousness. These terms describe how it is that we are viewed as holy or righteous in God's eyes as we are robed in a righteousness that is not intrinsic to our own nature — it is something that is outside of us, foreign to us, alien to us.

Paul sums this up in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he writes that Jesus Christ, the righteous one who knew no sin, was made sin for our sake that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This applies to all who believe. Our righteousness is not found by works or from within ourselves. Our righteousness is awarded to us by God. We cannot improve upon it, and we cannot earn it.

The problem in the Galatian churches was that they were being deceived into believing that they could earn their

own righteousness, that they could take what they started with, the gospel, and mature away from it.

This is still a very real and pervasive temptation today. But, the more we wrongly attempt to improve upon the gospel, the further apart we move from Jesus.

VERSES 7-9

Paul addresses the unseen hand that has been disrupting the Galatians' race of faith. He also addresses the Galatians themselves, indicating that when they started out, things were going well! They had received the gospel of salvation by faith; they were running rather than crawling or walking.

What a joyful declaration! What a joyful thought to know that the people that Paul preached the gospel to were actually running beautifully! They were going for it! They were vibrant and active.

But something happened. They were hindered by another party on the track, so to speak. Somebody, or a group of people, was slowing down progress. These deceivers, in their minds and potentially sincerely in their hearts, were teaching that in order to go faster, go further, be stronger, these runners (the Galatians) had to adopt their methodology.

They were teaching that religious observance would make one a better runner, while in fact the opposite was true — they were just being weighed down with heavy burdens.

Jesus addresses this type of bad discipleship and instruction in Matt 23: "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and

lay [them] on men's shoulders; but they [themselves] will not move them with one of their fingers. 'But all their works they do to be seen by men'" (Matt. 23:4-5).

This is all too common. Many Christians begin the race well, fired up, motivated, just blown away by God's grace toward them and relieved that all of their guilt and shame can be laid down because Jesus Christ has borne their burden.

But then, after a short time, some other Christian comes along (perhaps deeply sincere) and loads another burden right on to their back, full of things to do in order to "please Jesus."

As we see in Matthew, "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are" (Matt. 23:15, NLT). That is not how it is supposed to be. When people find Christ and freedom, far be it from us to load them down with extra requirements!

Furthermore, Paul tells them in no uncertain terms that this persuasion, this doctrine of extra works to improve upon righteousness, does not come from Jesus at all! It is contrived, man-made.

Then he uses a phrase he has used before to describe the situation, a phrase that would be abundantly clear to the Judaizers among them: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon remarks on this adage: "a slight inclination to error (respecting the necessity of circumcision) easily perverts the whole conception of faith, Gal. 5:9; but many interpreters explain the passage 'even a few false teachers lead the whole church into error.'"²⁵

Symbolically, leaven (yeast) represented sin in Jewish religious life. It was for this reason that during the Passover week, Jewish families were required to remove from their homes any and all leaven. By doing so, they were to observe and learn this symbol of the removal of sin: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel" (Exod. 12:15).

This was very clearly and consistently related to the corruption of the spiritual condition, so much so that Jesus instructed on this topic, saying, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1).

This teaching is captured in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as well. The warning for us is that small, insidious deviations from sound doctrine can corrupt the entirety of the Body.

Paul warns the Corinthian church of this same thing: "Your glorying [is] not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6).

²⁵ Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (p. 273). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Paul categorizes this tiny amount of pharisaical behavior found in the Galatian churches as the leavening agent that if unchecked would spread to the whole Body.

Incidentally, it is leaven/yeast that puffs up! We could draw a defensible connection between the leaven of hypocrisy, pharisaical behavior, and arrogance, pretense, ostentation and pride, which are not marks of Christ.

VERSE 10

There's hope! The Galatians can rebound; they can come back from this. They are not completely lost or abandoned by Christ.

In Paul's writings to the churches, he teaches some difficult things. He corrects bad doctrine, bad relationships, and outright vile sin within the churches. These things are difficult for anybody, but Paul did so with the wisdom of Christ as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And while we are challenged by his writings at times, what we see is that Paul is never dismissive of these churches. He never writes them off or abandons them.

He contends earnestly for them in the face of unsound doctrine, false teachers, and their intrinsic sin nature. Why? Because of his confidence in Jesus Christ. He knows that Jesus Christ is able to bring the proper correction and spirit to the churches, because after all, the local expression of the churches comprise the universal Bride of Christ.

That's why Paul could write that he is confident that the Galatians would have no other mind relative to doctrine

and faith, because it is in the hands of Jesus. He also makes allowance for those who would distort good doctrine and deceive God's people, that they shall bear the fullness of the judgment that they earn.

The reality is that those people who are peddling lies, poison, and hypocrisy to God's people will have to answer for it regardless of their level of sincerity. It's also important to note that although these were uncomfortable letters that resulted in uncomfortable conversations, that did not make Paul their enemy. They were still part of the family!

Even though the Galatians had given up so much ground to the legalists, Paul could still truthfully say that he was confident in their ability to reason and persevere in Christ. And that is an incredibly hopeful message.

VERSES 11-12

Paul had been a strict Pharisee in his former life before Christ: "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:5-6).

Now, years later, he was being accused by some in the Galatian churches of being an advocate for circumcision, of being one of the very people that he is writing to correct!

That is not an entirely unfounded challenge, but it is a mischaracterization of who Paul was and his commitment to the gospel. Here's where these accusations potentially came from. First, Paul was circumcised himself. Second, Paul

had one of his young disciples, Timothy, circumcised in Acts 16:

Paul went first to Derbe and then to Lystra, where there was a young disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek. Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium, so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek. (Acts 16:1-3, NLT).

So some could take that information, twist it, and make it seem like Paul was trying to exclude the Galatians and that he was inconsistent in his preaching and treatment of other new believers since he had Timothy circumcised.

On the other hand, a very different situation happened with another of Paul's traveling companions, a Greek by the name of Titus: "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with [me]... Yet not even Titus who [was] with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised" (Gal. 2:1, 3).

In order to fully understand how this applies to Paul's ministry, we have to know the full story and what is going on here culturally. Timothy had Jewish heritage, so it was appropriate for him to participate in his own heritage if he felt the need to do so. Titus was a Greek, a Gentile with no requirement to conform to the Jewish Law, but rather to be conformed into the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Paul dealt with both of these men according to their own conviction and heritage under the common thread of the cross. He did ministry with both of these men. He preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles and understood that the New Covenant of Jesus Christ abolished the requirement of the Law.

He succinctly presents this idea of deferring to the personal convictions of others for the sake of the gospel while keeping the cross the main focus, saying, “I have become all things to all [men], that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

He goes on to say in our text that if he had continued to preach circumcision as part of salvation, then the offense of the cross has ceased, meaning that if he were to soften this message towards the Jewish people, whom he had longed for to know Jesus, then he wouldn't have any more problems.

But the cross **was** offensive to those who adhered to the Law. It offended them to believe that one was made righteous in God's eyes apart from any religious rite or ceremony but strictly through faith in Christ.

Again, to the Corinthians Paul writes, “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:22-23).

Not much has changed over the millennia. Men, especially religious men, still trip over the cross as a point of stumbling, because the cross ignores our contrived righteousness and works. AND, those who are considered wise by the

world's standards believe that the cross is foolishness, fables or myths to make men behave.

The point Paul is driving at here is that if he were to adopt the accepted method of righteousness and stop preaching the cross, then life would be a lot easier for him. Unfortunately, this is a method that has been adopted by people in pulpits today.

Then, in some clever word play relative to circumcision, Paul says that he could wish that they would cut themselves off! Paul gets quite passionate about the gospel and liberty in Jesus. His heart is on fire for God's truth.

VERSES 13-15

He reminds the Galatians that God called them to freedom in Christ, not bondage. But he also warns them not to use that liberty to cater to their own sin nature, which some will do.

That is equally as dangerous as adhering to the Law - to have such a disregard for God's holiness and love for us that we would willfully disrespect Him by continuing to operate in our sin because it scratches our sinful itch. We should be sensitive to the cost of our liberty and be sure that we do not trample it underfoot.

Paul instructs the Galatians that in their liberty, grasping God's great love that has grasped them, they should take the opportunity to love and serve each other, rather than loading one another down with rules and needless burdens. Serve the other rather than serving the flesh, the self.

This is how the love of God, His grace, and freedom in Christ, manifests — love and service to others. So simple, yet so profound in our world where self-care is of the highest priority.

And the thing about this is you can't fake it for long. Eventually we burn out, get grumpy, etc., if we are faking love and service. But, when we are grasped by Christ, living in His grace, freely moving as directed by the Spirit, then the fruit of our liberty is found to be loving and serving others. Paul skillfully ties this into the Law by reminding them in verse 14 that fulfilling the Law is summed up in loving your neighbor as yourself.

So much of his teaching has been in response to a bad representation of the Law, but Paul reminds them of our Lord's words and teaching on what it means to fulfill the Law - loving others fully and loving God completely, with every fiber of our being (Matt. 22:36-40). That is how we fulfill God's Law truthfully.

Finally, we end with a warning fit for the Galatians who were at a crossroads in their churches — the Law v. liberty. Paul illustrates the division they were experiencing as biting one another, which would end in them being consumed or devoured, wounding one another deeply until there was nothing left.

This word for biting is translated from a term that means as, “...*to bite...with the teeth...to wound the soul, cut, lacerate, rend with reproaches*: Gal. 5:15. ...”²⁶

Hasn’t this happened to so many of us, and haven’t we been the attacker, and haven’t we seen churches torn apart, families torn apart, friendships torn apart by this? Certainly.

But to love and serve one another in liberty, that is where the saints are found doing the work of Jesus, because that is what He has done for us.

CHAPTER 15 | GALATIANS 5:16-21

²⁶ Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (p. 124). New York: Harper & Brothers.

The Spirit v. The Flesh

Paul has labored persistently in his writing to correct the faulty doctrine that the Galatian churches were required to adopt the Old Testament Law in order to be justified by Christ. He has demonstrated in chapters two, three, four, and five that justification comes by faith in Christ alone and that the Law is unable to justify us in God's eyes since we are unable to keep it. Rather, we put our faith in Jesus Christ, the perfect Law keeper, the perfect High Priest, and are thereby made righteous.

Having laid this doctrinal groundwork, Paul arrives at the application portion of his letter. This famous portion of the Scriptures is where we are instructed in the fruits of the Spirit. Before we get to the fruits of the Spirit, we have to examine what Paul calls the works of the flesh.

Paul lays out for the Galatian churches the culmination of what it is that he has been driving home — the juxtaposition between the Law and faith. Now we see in our text the juxtaposition of the flesh and the Spirit.

VERSE 16

Having written extensively on the burden of the Law, we come to the resulting logical conclusion. The instruction we receive is that by walking in the Spirit, we will “not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16, NIV).

Take a minute to consider the theological implications of what is going on in this statement. The instruction is quite clear, but it is weighty, substantial, and meaningful: we are to walk in the Spirit. This is coupled with Paul's assertion of what happens when we walk in the Spirit.

In the strongest terms, Paul writes here that the result will be that we will not feed the weakness of our flesh with all of its subsequent guilt and shame. As a matter of fact, the language Paul uses is emphatic in its characterization that when we walk in the Spirit, the lusts of the flesh are found to be impossible. Think about that!

The original language that Paul employs here has been called, "the strongest way to negate something in Greek." Paul's choice of language, it is said, "rules out even the idea as being a possibility: 'οὐ μή (ou me) is the most decisive way of negating something in the future."²⁷

We have enough here to theologize for hours. We could discuss what it means to walk "IN" the Spirit. What does it mean to walk? What is the Spirit? What does it mean to gratify the desires of the flesh? How is Paul so certain that by walking in the Spirit we won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh?

I certainly feel like my flesh nature takes over sometimes even when I strongly desire to walk in the Spirit!

²⁷ Wallace, D. B. (1996). *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (p. 468). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

VERSES 17-18

Paul makes allowance for this common human condition and points out that those who are led by the Spirit are free from the Law. The Law was given by the Father and fulfilled by the Son. The Holy Spirit, being equal in power, authority, and glory with the Father and the Son, reigns over the Law just as the other two persons of the Trinity.

Now, Paul is somebody who knows how real this fight is. He knows firsthand that the desires of the Holy Spirit and the lusts of the flesh are opposed to one another. The flesh, our human body, seeks gratification in the earthly plane. The Holy Spirit seeks to glorify God for eternity, including here in our earthly bodies.

How can the two exist together in harmony? They don't. This is the truth that each of us discovers everyday.

Do not despair. If it all depended on us, we would surely be lost. But Jesus Christ, who walked in the Spirit, has paved the way for us. He has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to walk as He walks, in holiness, free from the Law.

Paul experienced this same struggle personally and adds detail to the back and forth that plays out within our own bodies and minds as believers in Romans 7:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that [it is] good. But now, [it is] no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in

me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but [how] to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will [to do], I do not do; but the evil I will not [to do], that I practice. Now if I do what I will not [to do], it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Rom. 7:15-25).

Additionally, Paul reminds us, “[There is] therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2).

VERSES 19-21

The works of the flesh — what are they? Notice that they are characterized as “works” rather than fruit. Works are fabricated, wrought by our hands. Also, in Paul’s mind, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, the works of the flesh are plain to see, clearly known.

He then constructs a list of those things that are seen as exemplary of the desires of the flesh, the human condition. Be careful not to blow through these lists when Paul gives them, but take time to consider each term. In that exercise, we are able to find that while some of the sins may not apply to us, most certainly some do apply to us more fully than we would care to admit.

Keep in mind that this isn't meant to be a personal report card or a new written law but a means by which to discern the evidence of walking in the Spirit as opposed to the flesh. In this, we clearly find our need for a Savior, our need for repentance, and comfort for our own shared condition with the rest of humanity. As we consider these marks of corruption, bear in mind that our Lord Jesus was devoid of any of these, though He was tempted by all of them and died for all of them.

As we begin our examination, I pray you will forgive the uncomfortable nature of this list. However uncomfortable, we know that God's Word is true, holy, good, and useful for instruction, so let us forge on.

- Adultery - the violation of the marriage covenant. Some translations do not include this in Paul's list, rather confining this and the next term, "fornication," under the broader term of "sexual immorality."

Relative to adultery, Jesus taught us that it is more than the physical act that is viewed by God as adultery, but the desire of the heart is equally condemning: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you

that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28).

- Fornication - πορνεία//*porneia* - sex outside of the marriage covenant, strictly for self gratification. This is not uncommon in our society. It’s not really taboo at all, but is a clear demonstration of what Paul is talking about concerning the body warring against the Spirit in pursuit of its desires.
- Uncleaness - “...the state of moral impurity, especially in relationship to sexual sin.”²⁸
- Lewdness - “...behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness—‘licitious behavior, extreme immorality.’...In some languages the equivalent of ‘licitious behavior’ would be ‘to live like a dog’ or ‘to act like a goat’ or ‘to be a rooster,’ in each instance pertaining to promiscuous sexual behavior.”²⁹

So these first few appear to be grouped together. They give us a very clear picture of what it means to live after the flesh and how that manifests itself in reality. Please note

²⁸ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1). New York: United Bible Societies.

Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

²⁹ Ibid.

that this didn't make Paul blush. He was willing to tackle the issue (sometimes going on within the church) in order to bring correction.

We find that the next two go together as well: Idolatry and Sorcery

- Idolatry - the worship of idols, or deities other than God, constructed by human hands.
- Sorcery - one text remarks that this may have been connected with the ancient pagan cults. We also know that this is the lifestyle that some early Christians came out of, as it is today. Also, note the use of the Greek term: *φαρμακεία*//*pharmakeia* — drug use was potentially related to the pagan cults.³⁰

While we have relegated this behavior to fiction in our hyper-intellectualized society, this was very real and continues to be very real for people — especially in the New Age cults. The early church understood this was a reality, even on Paul's journeys we find this account:

And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned [them] in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and [it] totaled fifty thousand [pieces] of silver. So the word of the

³⁰ Ibid.

Lord grew mightily and prevailed
(Acts 19:18-20).

After these, the next several revolve around division, discord, and contention.

- Hatred - another of the works of the flesh. Not many are exempt from it, even if we pay lip service to it. We may say, “I don’t hate anybody,” but our hearts know better.
- Contentions - “...conflict resulting from rivalry and discord—‘strife, discord.’”³¹ This is the act of people contending with one another. Paul warned about biting and devouring one another in verse 15. The end is destruction.
- Jealousies - born out of rivalry with others. Often-times, jealousy is characterized not only by covetousness, wanting what somebody else has, but also feeling like we deserve what they have more than they do.
- Outbursts of wrath - unable to control ourselves, we are likely to spew hate and curses at others.
- Selfish ambition - This is all too common in our society. It is looking out for number one, ourselves, and stepping on somebody else’s neck to get ahead either overtly or covertly.
- Dissensions - disagreement that leads to division. Again, these are born out of rivalry — feeling like

³¹ Ibid.

we need to faction off into our dissenting camps. This is the person who is always the dissenter or dissenting voice.

- Heresies - we might think we know what this term means, “bad doctrine.” That is the ecclesiastical or church meaning it has picked up over the generations. Originally, this term meant, “a division of people into different and opposing sets.” Literally it meant a “choosing” with the added weight of dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.³²
- Envy - What’s the difference between envy and jealousy? Is Paul repeating himself? Perhaps; the two words are certainly similar. Although this term indicates “a state of ill will toward someone because of some perceived advantage,” a simple reading also includes the notion of a “grudge.”³³

So many of those we could lump together in the realm of divisiveness. The works of the flesh manifest themselves in divisiveness many ways.

- Murders - speaks for itself. But keep in mind that murder is often the culmination of one or many of the other manifestations of the works of the flesh.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

- Drunkenness - the Bible does not explicitly prohibit drinking alcohol, but it lists drunkenness as one of the clearly evident works of the flesh:

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord [is]. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:17-19).

- Revelries - goes with drunkenness. Big parties formed around the goal of achieving maximum drunkenness. These are quite pervasive and even acceptable in the human condition.
- And the like - this list isn't exhaustive. There are other works of the flesh that are similar to these that Paul says are so dangerous and wounding to us that they separate us from God's promise.

Those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Who is Paul writing to? The churches in the region of Galatia! Paul's letter is not an open letter to the pagan nations. This is to the churches!

Understand that these things are born within us! These are not external demons we are fighting, but our intrinsic sin nature: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14).

We know that the Spirit and the flesh desire to rule over the other. We know that people slip and mess up and that we all struggle with sin. But Paul warns us more than once that if we continue to embrace the works of the flesh rather than walking in the Spirit, we are essentially withdrawing from the Kingdom.

In Romans we see:

For to be carnally minded [is] death, but to be spiritually minded [is] life and peace. Because the carnal mind [is] enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:6-8).

What Paul illustrates in verses 16-21 is the futility of the human condition apart from Jesus Christ. We have all been found guilty of these things. But, we have a redeemer. We have the Holy Spirit, by whom we have hope.

These works of the flesh demonstrate our own personal agency and complicity with sin as we live out our lives in this world. While an in-depth examination of our sin nature may seem depressing, the reality is that the sin nature of our flesh is not unopposed. We are not consigned to a life of perpetual failure in this body. The Holy Spirit stands against it!

The creator of all flesh, God, desires and longs for our whole person, not just that invisible part of our person. God in the person of the Holy Spirit will prevail over our flesh, and He will rule over it. He will bring about fruits to His glory.

CHAPTER 16 | GALATIANS 5:22-26

The Fruit of the Spirit

Our text presents what are commonly known as the fruits of the Spirit. This passage is commonly taught on its own in a vacuum. Sometimes it is presented as something we ought to strive for.

But the context for the fruit of the Spirit is bound up in Paul's courageous defense of justification by faith alone, in Christ alone. He staunchly opposes legalists and Judaizers within the churches and points towards Jesus Christ. Paul demonstrates by the Scriptures that their proposed way to salvation is dependent on the works of the flesh and human effort — be better, do better, do this, don't do that, etc.

But, Paul shows them that the all-too-evident actual works of the flesh are sin — that's our natural state of being! That is what our fleshly natures bring forth.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told [you] in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

He finishes naming these works with the terrifying warning: those who practice such things WILL NOT inherit the Kingdom of God.

Then Paul counters the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Remember his words from verse 16: “Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). When we walk in the Spirit it is impossible to fulfill the lusts of the flesh — the two cannot take place simultaneously.

We then come face to face with the Biblical idea that the flesh, our bodies and sin nature, and the Spirit, God’s Holy Spirit, are opposed to one another. We must understand this, and we must be abundantly careful with our study and understanding of how the Spirit and the flesh relate to one another. Otherwise, we risk finding ourselves in the heretical territory of the early Gnostics that began to infiltrate the early church.

Gnostics believed that humans are split between the physical and spiritual world: “the true human self is as alien to the world as is the transcendent God.” They asserted that the true human self or soul is naturally divine, belonging to the same realm as the Ultimate Ground of Being, but is trapped and imprisoned by the material world. They viewed the physical body as a prison which malevolently trapped the “divine spark” within humanity.³⁴ Because of this imprisonment, Gnosticism incorporates an active hatred of the physical body, similar to Docetism. This dualistic split between the body and the soul means that the divine spark of

³⁴ Pearson, Birger. *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2007.

the human soul must be freed from the material constraints of the world in order to attain salvation and unity with the Ultimate Ground of Being.³⁵

The Holy Spirit of God opposes our flesh nature, but God desires every part of our being, including our flesh, not just our invisible parts. How we live and glorify God in our bodies matters.

So we come to the portion of our text where we see the fruit of the Spirit, and it is important that we understand why Paul refers to these attributes as fruit, rather than work. Fruit is something that is produced naturally by a plant that is living in healthy conditions — enough water, good soil, good roots, enough light, etc. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

This understanding is important, because we can very easily get pulled into a works-based theology, taking the fruits of the Spirit as an imperative - I should be doing these things, making sure I have love, joy, peace, etc. Many have walked that road in a vain and fruitless attempt to fabricate these attributes. Perhaps this is an attempt to prove one's goodness, or perhaps it's a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel, whereby the misguided hearer believes, "If I do these things then God will be pleased with me."

BUT, the notion that Paul is presenting here is that these fruits are the natural, some may even say inevitable, result of the Holy Spirit on the individual and, in a collective

³⁵ Smith, Z. G. (2016). Gnosticism. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

sense, the Church as well. The root comes first, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then the fruit is borne out of that naturally by the Holy Spirit.

In this way, Paul is showing us what a good tree looks like: You tell a tree by the fruit that it bears (Matt. 7:16). Since God is pleased with us, since we have believed, since the Holy Spirit dwells within us, then we will bear these fruits. If we see what the works of the flesh are, what a bad tree looks like, what does a good tree look like, one that is given life and sustained by the Holy Spirit?

VERSES 22-23

The first characteristic mentioned is love. It is displayed first and prominently on this list of what the Spirit produces in the life of a believer. What kind of love? A love like the Father, Son, and Spirit demonstrate. A Scriptural, holy love for God and others, one that fulfills the Law of God.

The second is joy. Believers who are filled with the Spirit are joyful! This one is quite convicting. We see just how much we fight against the Spirit when we don't allow Him to produce the fruit of joy in our lives.

The third is peace. The Holy Spirit brings believers peace in our circumstances. One text writes that the Greek term Paul employed here communicates “a state of freedom from anxiety and inner turmoil—‘peace, freedom from worry.’ ... ‘Peace’ in the sense of ‘freedom from worry’ is often expressed by means of an idiom, for example, ‘to sit

down in the heart,’ ‘to rest in the liver,’ or ‘to be quiet in one’s inner self.’”³⁶

Consider how different that is from the busybody, the one who stirs up controversy, sowing discontent and worry. The Spirit brings forth peace.

Next, we find the fruit of longsuffering as we walk in the Spirit. Another word for longsuffering is forbearance or patience. The fruit of patience is borne out in our lives by enduring peacefully through circumstances that others find to be unbearable. Practically, this is developed and demonstrated by how we bear with others. Are we quick to adopt some of the works of the flesh in our lives when we are provoked, such as outbursts of wrath or contentions? Or has the Spirit brought forth the fruit of patience/longsuffering in our lives? The Holy Spirit reminds us just how patient He is with us when we are unbearable.

Next we find kindness. The Spirit brings forth the fruit of kindness. This is again something that we demonstrate in our relationships and interactions with others. The Spirit moves us to kindness. We must be careful when we say, “I’m just rough around the edges,” or “that’s just my personality.” We are called to adopt Christ’s characteristics by the Spirit, rather than clinging to our own unkindness. Take heart! The Spirit is able to bring about this fruit in our lives as we walk in Him.

³⁶ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 314). New York: United Bible Societies.

Goodness is a fruit that seems pretty broad. Bear in mind that these fruits of the Spirit are part of the nature and defining characteristics of God, not our relativistic opinions of what they ought to be. One lexicon remarks on this broad term:

In a number of languages there is no abstract term such as ‘goodness.’ Since goodness implies some type of activity involving others, one must frequently use a verb expression, for example, ‘to be good to’ or ‘to benefit.’ The qualification ‘full of’ in Rom 15:14 must likewise be restructured in a number of languages so as to indicate the fact that one always engages in doing good, for example, ‘that you are always doing good to people.’³⁷

Faithfulness. As we grow and mature in the Spirit, we understand how important faithfulness is, and we also find that it is nearly impossible for somebody to fabricate, or fake, faithfulness. Faithfulness means keeping faith with others because of Christ. It means, “being someone in whom complete confidence can be placed...”³⁸

Gentleness. Are we dealing gently with others, or are we dealing harshly with others? Bear in mind that we do not have the authority to modify these based on our own inclinations or momentary wants. We may desire to caveat Paul’s writing where no such allowance exists. We may say, “Well, there’s a time for gentleness and a time for being

³⁷ Ibid., p. 741.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 376.

firm.” Paul is speaking here about how we will be characterized by the Holy Spirit in a general sense. It is not our place to make allowance for our own bad personalities and the works of our flesh in the face of God’s Word.

Finally, we come to self-control. Are we impulsive, inconsiderate, etc.? Those characteristics belong to the flesh. The Spirit enables us to control ourselves when it comes to how we live, rather than being controlled by our sinful flesh.

As a side note in regard to the gifts of the Spirit intersecting with the fruit of the Spirit, some may teach that it is possible to be “overpowered” by the Spirit in pentecostal settings. This was a huge problem in the Corinthian church, and it caused tremendous confusion in the church as the members stood up to speak over one another all throughout their gathering. Well, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. So, if one is full of the Spirit, they will be able to control themselves.

Paul writes to us that these fruits are unhindered by any Law - and why should they be? They are truly a benefit to those around us and to us ourselves. These are tremendous blessings.

Where before the Galatians looked toward the Law, fulfilled on their own terms in the flesh, Paul is teaching them that the result of being a new creation, a Jesus follower, is that the Holy Spirit lives in each of us, and He brings forth these wonderful attributes of God in our own lives in a very real and practical way.

These fruits are the evidence of our faith, rather than an effort to accomplish the Law by our own hands. All of these

fruits, mind you, are found and observed in the nature of Jesus Christ first and foremost, not because He conjured them up as performance art or in an attempt to trick people into thinking that He was morally superior (He is), but because He is one with the Father and the Spirit.

Since this is Christ's nature, these fruits are found in we who believe, because we are called to be one with the Father, Son, and Spirit as well. We are called to put to death our old nature, be new, and bear fruit because we are made into new good trees for the benefit of others. Fruit benefits others, not the tree.

VERSE 24

As we said, the Spirit stands against the flesh and vice versa. Paul uses a very graphic application, that those who belong to Jesus have crucified the flesh along with its passions and desires.

The result of coming to Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit is that we put to death our sin nature, not in a passive sense, but in an active, participatory, intentional way as we come to understand how vile our sin nature is and how offensive it is to God's holiness.

Paul states, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom. 8:12-14).

And elsewhere he says, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them” (Col. 3:5-7).

Brutal! But this body we live in wars against us. We may think, “This is too hard! I can’t do it.” That’s true, not by yourself.

When we examine the fruit of the Spirit and find that we aren’t as mature as we thought we were, that we are fabricating some of these, or perhaps become full-on depressed because the branches aren’t heavy with fruit as they should be, we can become weighed down by despair, wondering, “How do I even do this? How do I crucify the old man, the flesh? How do I walk in the Spirit?”

It is only by Jesus, loved one. He knows the struggle, for He has shared in our likeness:

Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested (Heb. 2:17-18, NLT).

Remember, it was Christ who first went to the cross for our sakes, who showed us the way. It was Christ who called the

first disciples to take up their own crosses and follow after Him when he taught them,

If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it (Matt. 16:24-25, NLT).

This is what we are called to — the cross.

VERSES 25-26

These last two verses before chapter six serve to reinforce Paul's teaching on the oppositional nature of the flesh versus the Spirit. Paul is urging the reader, "to unite with [him] in a course of action upon which he has already decided."³⁹

He has decided to shun the works of the flesh by refusing to become conceited and falsely puffed up/proud, bearing ill will toward others and provoking others. Doing so allows others to experience the sweet fruit of the Spirit.

Paul's decision, and the decision that we make when we commit to Christ, is to walk in the Spirit, since it is by the Spirit that we have found true life. Walk in the Spirit, loved one, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

³⁹ Wallace, D. B. (1996). *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (p. 464). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

CHAPTER 17 | GALATIANS 6:1-5

Further Fruits of the Spirit

Paul has spent the past several verses in chapter five explaining how the Spirit impacts the human's life. The Holy Spirit brings forth fruits in our lives naturally, not out of any contrivance of our own will, but rather because it is God's will that those who are His should bear good fruit on our branches.

Remember our position on the matter. We shunned the idea that the attributes of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control earn God's pleasure with us.

We flipped that idea on its head based on the notion that good fruit is the natural result of a good tree. SINCE God is pleased with us, because we are His, then we will bear these admirable fruits in our lives. AND, we acknowledged that a cultivated tree isn't meant to eat its own fruit, but that fruit is for the benefit of others!

In our text, we now come to very practical instruction based on the theory of what it means to be a good tree in God's garden, a Jesus follower, one who has crucified the flesh with its passions and desires and who lives in the Spirit. We could consider these as further fruits of the Spirit.

VERSE 1

Paul continues to address the church affectionately, as brothers even. Just because they had issues did not mean they weren't family! Oh, how much we would benefit from being persuaded to Paul's position on the church being family.

We all like to say and acknowledge that there is no perfect church, but then we act as if there are, and when we don't get our way or things get uncomfortable, we are prone to skip town in favor of another church that looks pretty good. Then after some time, we find that church to have some problems too, so we leave again. On and on the cycle of disappointment and abandonment goes. Why? Because the church is made up of people, sinners — you and I! We each know in our heart of hearts that we have bad days, and we need some grace and understanding from time to time.

Contextually in this letter, Paul is addressing many churches spread out over a region, and he has had to address some very divisive, contentious issues with them. Remember way back in Galatians 1 when Paul had these words **FOR THE CHURCHES:**

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a

different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you (Gal. 1:6-8, NLT).

Somehow, Paul still manages to regard these people as family. These are people that he cares for on a level exceeding just Sunday morning acquaintances. They are, to him, part of the eternal family of Jesus Christ - His Church. Oh, how that would bear on how we view one another.

He goes on to instruct them that if one of them is caught up in sin, those who are spiritual have a duty to restore that person gently, being careful that they are not caught up in the same sin! This verse is rich with doctrine and application.

The first item of note is that it is possible for believers, Christians, to sin:

The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions (Gal. 5:17, NLT).

So, how are we to respond when this happens? Some Christians have adopted the attitude of arrogance, harshness, and condescension. They forget so easily that they too were rescued out of their sins and withheld from judgment by God's grace! I pray the Lord would forgive us when we behave this way toward a dear brother or sister who is caught up in sin.

I am grateful that the Bible gives us very clear instructions on how we ought to respond, because if we have our way, we can often be hurtful to the dear loved one who has fallen into sin and is looking for some help. Sin often brings along with it guilt, shame, and regret. In these moments, people even close themselves off to others, God's Word, and fellowship. Unfortunately, some high-handed believer often comes along to add a double portion of all of that...what a shame and totally unbiblical.

First things first, though — those who are qualified for this restorative responsibility are “those who are spiritual.”

What does ‘spiritual’ mean? One source explains that this term is a, “(derivative of πνεῦμα ‘Spirit,’ 12.18) one who has received God's Spirit and presumably lives in accordance with this relationship—‘one who is spiritual, one who has received the Spirit.’”⁴⁰

Another goes on to say, “...in reference to persons; *one who is filled with and governed by the Spirit of God*: 1 Co. 2:15 (cf. 10–13, 16); [3:1]; 14:37; Gal. 6:1;”⁴¹

This is why we are considering this as further fruit of the Spirit, because we see that this is not necessarily how we act in our own power. We too often come off as rough, de-

⁴⁰ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 142). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴¹ Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (p. 523). New York: Harper & Brothers.

manding, polarizing, and ostracizing, even in our best restorative efforts.

This is how we WILL act when we are led by the Holy Spirit. Why? Because that's how the Holy Spirit relates to us! The Holy Spirit is many things to the believer. One of those roles that the Holy Spirit fills is that of our great comforter: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16, KJV).

The Holy Spirit is our comforter, our abiding helper. How we respond to other dear believers who have been caught up in sin is by His nature, not our own flawed human nature which is clouded with biases, bad logic, and the attitude that shouts, "you get what you deserve!" That ignores the spirit of grace that God has toward us wherein we received what we don't deserve, namely, His eternal favor.

We are to RESTORE these dearly loved believers that have been overtaken by sin. This involves so much more than leaving them with some clever catch phrases or pithy platitudes. What are things we sometimes say to others who are in need of restoration without meaning it?

- I'm praying for you (when we aren't).
- God uses all things for good (He does, but we don't mean it. We're just trying to get out of the uncomfortable conversation).
- You just gotta have faith.

Here in God's Word we find ourselves instructed to PARTICIPATE in the restoration of others. If that feels heavy, it is, but it's not on us to make it come to pass. True restora-

tion only comes by Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate Restorer:

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the LORD [is] upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to [the] poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to [the] captives And recovery of sight to [the] blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’ Then He closed the book, and gave [it] back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ (Luke 4:16-21).

In a glorious moment of God’s divinity intersecting with our humanity, we are called to participate in the restorative process. WE GET to help

- preach the gospel to the poor
- heal the brokenhearted,
- proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
- set at liberty those who are oppressed
- proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD

WHY and HOW? Because that is the nature of Jesus Christ that lives presently in the saints. Because we have cast aside our old nature of corruption and hate, nailing it to the cross, and we have adopted the nature of Christ, or, more truthfully, He has adopted us to His nature, filling us with the Holy Spirit.

Next, we find that the manner in which we participate in the restorative process matters in God's eyes. If we are taking place in restoration, we are to be characterized by gentleness, even as Jesus Christ was characterized by gentleness. This doesn't mean naivety. It is possible to be discerning, wise, and gentle at the same time: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16).

This correlation between wisdom and gentleness finds itself borne out in Paul's instruction to those who are participating in restoration, calling us to consider ourselves lest we also be tempted.

We aren't restoring people because we are beyond temptation. We are certainly prone to sinning ourselves, and we are quite good at it. But we are to keep a clear eye and a clear head as we seek to serve others gently as led by the Holy Spirit.

Do not let the lie of pride deceive you into falling along with the people we are restoring. The characteristics of humility and gentleness as brought forth by the Holy Spirit will guard against such arrogance.

Proverbs states, "Pride [goes] before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 Better [to be] of a humble

spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Prov. 16:18-19).

VERSE 2

Continuing in this same line of thought, Paul instructs the Galatians to “bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). We know that Christ summarized God’s Law by teaching that complete fulfillment of the Law is bound up in loving God completely and loving people.

Paul restates this notion in Galatians 5:14: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, [even] in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Loving people is more than just lip service, more than just theory. It’s the actual sharing of hardship, bearing burdens, and carrying weight together.

VERSES 3-5

There are some within the Church who believe they have ascended to such a height that they shouldn’t be sullied by bearing the burdens of others. This is straight-up pride! To allow Christ’s dear saints to be crushed under the weight of sin without lifting a finger is severely hateful.

These people within the Galatian churches were all about religion — do this, do that, don’t do that, eat this, don’t eat that, etc. However, when it came to the real practical living with one another, caring for one another, it appears that they were not involved. Paul clearly instructs them that part of being the Body, the Church, is bearing one another’s burdens without getting too big for our own breeches, so to speak.

VERSE 3

Paul brings this home when he tells us that we can be deceived into thinking we are more than we actually are. The implication is that there were those within the Church that hung their own self-worth on the work and personality of somebody other than Jesus - probably the high-minded Judaizers and legalists who crept into the Body.

This happens today too. People become impressed with themselves based on who they were trained by, disciplined by, what school they may have gone to, etc. Even more so when there are those falling around us! Oh, how good we look when our dear loved ones are caught in sin!

But, where is the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.)? Where is the practical love demonstrated by bearing one another's burdens?

Don't be deceived!

VERSE 4

Paul tells them to take a look in the mirror and examine themselves. Then they can rejoice in their own work, rather than hoping that somebody else's discipleship or somebody else's spiritual formation becomes their own. We should keep our eyes on our own work and on Christ, guarding against arrogance that can come when we see a brother or sister crushed under the weight of sin that we have helped to bear.

...our business lies more at home than abroad,
with ourselves than with other men, for what

have we to do to judge another man's servant?... it appears that if Christians...employ themselves in this work they might easily discover those defects and failings in themselves which would soon convince them how little reason they have either to be conceited of themselves or severe in their censures of others; and so it gives us occasion to observe that the best way to keep us from being proud of ourselves is to prove our ownselves: the better we are acquainted with our own hearts and ways, the less liable shall we be to despise and the more disposed to compassion and help others under their infirmities and afflictions.⁴²

VERSE 5

Two weights are mentioned here — burdens (verse 2) and loads. Burdens are crushing, but loads are expected. Paul tells us that part of our work in the Kingdom involves carrying our own loads. We each carry our own weight, our own pack.

I can't carry you into God's Kingdom! Nobody else can either! I wish I could sometimes. The only one who can carry you into God's Kingdom is Jesus Christ, AND Jesus calls us to WALK!

⁴² Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (p. 2304). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Ever wonder why we Christians use that term so often — walk? As in, “How’s your walk with the Lord?” Did we come up with that on our own? No! The Bible instructs us to walk worthy of our calling; walk in newness of life, walk according to the Spirit, walk properly, walk by faith, walk in good works...

Jesus Christ Himself instructs us to take up our cross (our load) and to follow after Him. What does that mean but to walk in His path? He has established the way. We don’t have to make a new path. But we must walk, we must bear the load that we have been given, the cross that we have taken up, to follow after Him.

And what we will find as we are bearing our load and following after Jesus is that there are others on that path too, dear brothers and sisters who are following hard after Jesus.

What shall we do when they, or we ourselves, stumble? Let them lie there under the crushing weight of sin? Let them perish? Let them die? No, but carefully, gently restore such a one so we can continue to walk together.

CHAPTER 18 | GALATIANS 6:6-18

Having gone through the work of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit, and instruction on bearing each other's burdens while carrying our own loads, we move into even more practical application of bearing with one another, caring for one another, and what it means to be in fellowship with one another.

VERSES 6-10

We find ourselves at a verse about supporting the Bible teacher, the one who serves the Body through teaching. If we allow them to be, these instances can prove to be uncomfortable and awkward, because we find it quite unseemly to talk about money.

In our culture, we are surrounded by example after example of churches who have abused God's Word to only focus on money. Every week there is a sermon on giving! And the pastors who, in Martin Luther's words, have never smelled a Bible, live lives of luxury and indulgence while their congregations foot the bill.

This isn't that! God's Word is holy and good, and we would do well to remember that, keeping all things in context.

About such verses Martin Luther had this to say, and I quite agree with him: "These passages are all meant to benefit us ministers. I must say I do not find much pleasure in ex-

plaining these verses. I am made to appear as if I am speaking for my own benefit.”⁴³

What we find in the New Testament in regard to supporting those in ministry is a paradox of sorts, demonstrated in Paul’s ministry. First and foremost, the Bible teaches that it is right and good to provide for the one who commits their time to rightly dividing the Word of God for the benefit of the Church.

If we are looking for a more vague or non-committal reading of such a verse in order to relieve ourselves of supporting our ministers, those who labor in God’s Word, we won’t find it easily.

One commentator explains, “From the mention of bearing one another’s burdens, he naturally passes to one way, and one case, in which those burdens may be borne—viz. by relieving the necessities of their ministers (thus [read] almost all Commentators)...”⁴⁴

We find also that the Greek text relays the idea of, “entering into fellowship, joining one’s self as an associate, making one’s self a sharer or partner,” and “to share one’s pos-

⁴³ Guzik, D. (2013). *Galatians* (Ga 6:6–10). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

⁴⁴ Alford, H. (1976). *Alford’s Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary* (Vol. 3, p. 63). Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press.

sessions, with the implication of some kind of joint participation and mutual interest.”⁴⁵

So we understand that it’s not just about putting a few bucks in the offering plate or box and cutting the man a paycheck so he can feed his family. Rather, it is a joint fellowship and caring for one another, recognizing that the people who put their hand to the plow in this way have joyfully taken their fair share of sleepless nights, pouring over texts, much prayer, and study, on top of the ordinary routine cares of life in order to feed God’s people by His holy Word.

My question for us to consider this morning is this: Since we live in an era where the professional clergy is expected, where we take for granted that our Bible teachers are provided with enough from the Body to feed their families, why did Paul have to write this in the first place?

I think we find that the reason is wrapped up in some common, enduring misconceptions such as, “The Pastor doesn’t have a real job,” or “What are they going to do for 40 hours a week?”

The work of the pastor is never over. Pastors are on call 24 hours a day, and they MUST spend diligent time in prayer and study or the Body will suffer for it when the pastor spews out some nonsense he came up with on the fly. This

⁴⁵ Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (pp. 351–352). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 568). New York: United Bible Societies.

does not include hours of counseling, phone calls, hospital visits, administration of the church, paying the bills, board meetings, leading their own homes faithfully, and in many cases working a second full-time job just to pay the bills.

But why did Paul have to write about the necessity to care for Bible teachers on more than one occasion?

He says, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer [is] worthy of his wages’” (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

As a side note, the oxen relates to threshing, and this law is found in Deuteronomy 25:4.

Paul had a difficult time communicating this basic imperative to the Corinthians. They had a rough relationship:

Or [is it] only Barnabas and I [who] have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a [mere] man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say [it] altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, [this] is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his

hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, [is it] a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of [this] right over you, [are] we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat [of the things] of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of [the offerings of] the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it [would be] better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:6-18).

Later, he writes:

Now [for] the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but

the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved (2 Cor. 12:14-15).

So...Paul taught that the churches should provide for their elders. But we also see that he refused to be paid for his labor, at least by the Corinthians. It appears that they perhaps loved their money more than they loved Paul. Other churches had to step in to take care of him even while he was at Corinth - so weird and unseemly!

Paul says:

Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages [from them] to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep [myself] (2 Cor. 11:7-9).

It may very well be that the reason why the churches needed to hear this was because it doesn't come naturally. We, by our flesh, desire to sow to the flesh. We do not highly esteem the things of God naturally. It is difficult for us to commit to paying a salary in support of a Bible teacher when that salary can be used for other worthy things.

In this mental calculus, our value system is revealed. We place a premium on the things you can see, touch, and own.

We devalue the invisible yet eternal things that feed our souls. We would much rather sow to the flesh. Churches get caught in this trap all the time. We see so many better ways to spend our money in order to gratify our fleshly desires, do we not?

If we can buy a bigger building, better stuff, etc., then people will think we are legitimate and more people will come and give more money, and we can buy more stuff. Round and round the ugly cycle of sowing and reaping corruption goes.

What is required of us is to bear one another's burdens, carry our own weight, and support those that God has placed in the ministry without extravagance. What a shame when Bible teachers abuse these verses for their own gain or for the gain of the corporate structure they are building.

Let it not be so — let us sow to the Spirit and so harvest everlasting life.

As a Body of saints who are deeply committed to one another, let us not grow weary while doing good, because there is harvest coming. But it's not the harvest that some promise — boats, houses, money, etc. That leads to corruption. It is the spiritual harvest of saints — people reconciled to Jesus Christ.

Do not lose heart, loved one. We are all in this together, and we can and should support one another. Even as Paul says do good to all. Who? ALL! Especially those of the household of faith.

So it doesn't begin and end with supporting the Bible teacher. We are ALL to do good to one another. We are all equally responsible for caring for those in the household of faith in spiritual and practical matters!

It is our joy to make sure that we can feed people with God's bread, which is worth more than all the riches we possess. And it is our sacred duty and privilege to provide people with actual bread! When these two are aligned our faith moves from the theoretical to the practical — caring for people and doing good unto all.

VERSES 11-13

Paul often used a recorder or scribe to write his letters. It is believed that he would dictate to one of his traveling companions his thoughts. We see here, however, that Paul is writing in his own hand, and he is using large letters.

Some believe that this was because Paul had failing eyesight, potentially because of losing his sight temporarily when he saw Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. There are also other indicators in this epistle that may speak of Paul's declining eyesight (Gal. 4:15). Or perhaps Paul is emphasizing this point, and it is so important to him that he decided he must write it for himself.

He encapsulates his entire letter here at the very end: there are those in the Church who desire to put on a good show, to present a false reality by having others adopt the Jewish Law, and for men that meant becoming circumcised.

They could hold that up and boast in their legalism, their spiritual accomplishments, by saying, “Look how many we have convinced to be circumcised.”

But Paul reveals their motives: they are afraid of suffering. More directly, they are afraid to suffer persecution because of Jesus, and since that is the case, they are unwilling to adopt the fullness of the freedom of the gospel.

Beware, loved one! Much of our daily living falls into this category. What worldly attributes have we adopted and what holiness have we shunned so that we might avoid persecution?

VERSES 14-16

Paul makes it clear that he will not follow anything else, focus on anything else, or boast in anything else except the cross: “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

May this be our heart as well!

It is not the Law that saves, and it is not our attack on the Law that saves. It is Christ alone and Him crucified that saves. By the cross we have been made new creations. All of our old, wretched attempts at morality and holiness are vile compared to the cross.

But as new creations focused on Jesus, we have a very real newness, and that is something to talk about.

Ultimately it is that conviction, that commitment, that brings peace in our lives. We can stop worrying about the Law. We can stop rebelling against and defaming the Law.

The conversation on the Law can be summed up by noting that it was Christ who fulfilled the Law for us! We have no part in its fulfillment!

God's mercy is displayed toward those who cling to this blessed hope. Remember, mercy is God withholding his righteous wrath from those who deserve it. We have received God's mercy because of Jesus Christ. Those who are Christ's rest in God's peace and mercy, benefits that we carry with us to others.

VERSE 17

Paul has spent much of this letter refuting a crooked obsession with the work of the flesh. Now it's almost as if Paul is saying, "You want to talk about being marked in the flesh (as circumcision was a mark in the flesh)? I'll show you what it means to be marked in the flesh - I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

We understand that to mean that Paul was physically scarred because of his ministry, and these scars marked him as one committed to the gospel.

This word for scar is translated from a term that means, "... a permanent mark or scar on the body, especially the type of 'brand' used to mark ownership of slaves...In Ga 6:17 Paul is most likely alluding to scars resulting from wounds received in the service of Jesus, but στίγμα [stigma] may also imply ownership and hence suggest that such scars served as brands."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 100). New York: United Bible Societies.

VERSE 18
Ending with Grace

In verse 16, Paul remarks on the peace and mercy extended to those who live according to the gospel. Now, he ends with grace. Whose grace? The grace of Jesus - unmatched, and never-ending.

Where does that grace reach us? Our spirit — that deep part reserved for God that brings about the sanctification of our flesh.

About this blessed letter Martin Luther had this to say in his *Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*:

But where Christ is truly seen, there full and perfect joy in the Lord is inevitably present, and also peace of heart, where the heart surely thinks: 'Although I am a sinner according to the law and according to the righteousness of the law, yet I do not despair. For I do not die, because Christ lives, and He is my righteousness and my eternal and heavenly life...Where the law accuses me, death reigns and devours me. But beyond this life I have another righteousness, another life, which is Christ, the Son of God, ...Because of Him, even this, my dead body, shall be raised again and freed from servitude to the law and sin, and shall be sanctified together with the spirit.'⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Helfferich, Tryntje. *The Essential Luther*. 2018. p.255-256.

Know, loved one, that this is how we endeavor to end as well — by grace. Let the final word of our discipleship, our lives, and our care for the Body, for one another, be marked by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
Amen.

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