

An Exposition of Galatians

By Harold Camping

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An Exposition of Galatians

By Harold Camping

Introduction

The Epistle to the Galatians is one of many letters written by the Apostle Paul. These letters account for the greater portion of the New Testament. Given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (II Tim. 3:16), these letters, though penned by Paul, are messages from God Himself to us.

This letter to the Galatians is as pertinent to today's churches as it ever was. Reason: it clearly distinguishes the difference between the true Gospel of the Bible, which brings salvation, and other (false) gospels, all of which lead to eternal damnation of the soul.

The immediate issue to which Paul addressed in Galatians is whether or not circumcision was necessary for one to receive salvation. But it also answers the fundamental question of whether believers are saved by grace alone, or grace plus some works. Today, many in Christendom are teaching the latter. The works required may be water baptism, membership, giving, or the "free-will" decision to receive Christ.

Historians differ as to when Galatians was written. The best estimate is somewhere between AD 55 and 60, after Paul had completed his first three missionary journeys. The churches of Galatia to which this letter was addressed were in Asia Minor, and area that approximates today's Turkey. In the First Century, the Galatian region included the cities of Antioch in Pisidia (not to be confused with the Antioch in Syria, which is near Jerusalem), Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra.

Antioch was among the first Gentile cities to which Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel after they had been commissioned as missionaries. They went there on their first missionary journey. As recorded in Acts 13, the two were originally well received. Verse 44 says, "And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." But later, the Jews, who were filled with envy, incited others to persecute them.

Paul and Barnabas, according to Acts 14:1-7, then moved on to Iconium, where they stayed and preached a long time. But again, unbelieving Gentiles and Jews started to abuse and assault them. They then fled to Lystra and Derbe and preached the gospel there.

Having been used by the Lord to begin these churches in Galatia, Paul had a continuing concern for their spiritual growth. To help strengthen the believers there, he returned to Derbe and Lystra on his second journey (16:1). And he visited and strengthened those disciples once more on the first leg of his third missionary journey as well (18:23).

Actually, between his first and second missionary journeys, Paul and Barnabas had also made a short, but highly important, visit to Galatia. When they were back in Antioch in Syria, certain people from Judea came and suggested that to be saved, Gentile believers must also be circumcised (15:1). Disagreeing with them sharply on this point, the two apostles brought the matter up before the church council of Jerusalem.

After Peter, Paul and Barnabas had testified to the great works that God had done among the Gentiles, the council decided that indeed circumcision was not necessary for salvation. Those church leaders then recorded that decision in a letter addressed to the Gentile believers in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia (15:23). Paul and Barnabas, joined by Judas and Silas from Jerusalem, then hand-delivered the letter to the churches in Galatia (15:30).

Many years afterwards, nevertheless, false prophets again infiltrated those churches and insisted that Gentile believers must also keep the law of Moses. The Galatians heeded their teaching and started circumcising Gentile Christians. It was to straighten out those misguided Galatians that Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, spelled out clearly in this letter the difference between the true gospel of grace and other false ones. He warned bluntly that those who attempt to be justified by law have, in effect, fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

As you study this epistle, you will readily see the alarming rate at which churches today are increasingly preaching grace-plus-works gospels, a practice that is so strongly denounced by God here. Hopefully, as a result of this study and by the grace of God, you will be better equipped to protect yourself and your

loved ones from being deceived by a gospel other than the Gospel of the Bible. Any other gospel, as Paul says in Galatians 1:7, is really no gospel at all.

I sincerely believe that after you have finished this verse-by-verse study of Galatians, you will have a better insight into the Word of God and a greater appreciation of the wonderful grace of God.

Chapter 1 – Only One Gospel Saves

Overview of Chapter 1

After a curt opening greeting, Paul immediately expresses his displeasure that the Galatians have deserted God and His salvation plan, turning to a different gospel instead. The apostle stresses that there is only one gospel and it is the one that he has previously taught to them. He emphasizes that he did not receive nor learn this gospel from man; it was given to him directly by the Lord Jesus Christ.

To further underscore that point, he notes that before he started to preach the gospel, he had taken but a short trip to Jerusalem, where he saw only Peter and James but no other apostles.

Galatians 1:1-5

1:1 Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)

As he does with most of his letters, Paul starts this epistle by identifying himself as an apostle. But in the introduction here, he uses some language that is not found in others. With the phrase "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father", Paul wants to stress that he was not appointed by any human being. He has a definite call from God. He has come with the full authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By establishing his credential right from the start, the apostle is preparing the Galatians for the instruction and admonition that he is about to give them. Indeed, Paul was an unusual apostle. He was not among the original twelve chosen by the Lord, of course. Nor did he fit the qualifications Peter set forth for picking the candidates among whom the Lord later chose a replacement for Judas. We read in Acts 1:21-22:

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

In other words, the candidate must have been in the company of the original apostles throughout Christ's earthly ministry, and a witness of Christ's resurrection. The word "apostle" comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means "one sent forth". Thus, the Bible in Acts 14:14 identifies Barnabas also as an apostle. He and Saul were especially picked and sent forth by God the Holy Spirit to do missionary work. We read in Acts 13:2-3:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Special Appointment

But even before that, Saul (whose name was later changed to Paul) has already been hand-picked by the Lord Jesus Christ to be an apostle. He had been a zealous persecutor of Christians. But one day, when he was on the road to Damascus, "a light from heaven" shone round about him and Christ began talking to him. After that encounter, Paul was blinded for three days and then, having been ministered to by Ananias, he was converted.

The dramatic conversion of Paul is described in Acts 9:3-18. Paul also speaks of it in Acts 22:6-21 and 26:12-18. At that conversion, God specifically declared that "(Paul) is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (9:15). This special commissioning is what Paul wants to impress upon the Galatians.

The last part of this verse, "and God the Father, who raised him from the dead", is significant on two counts. It

shows that Paul's apostleship came from God the Father as well as from Jesus Christ, and it calls attention to the central message of the gospel: the resurrection of Christ.

1:2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:

This letter is not from Paul alone; it has the full backing of all the believers who are with him. This statement implies that the doctrine which he is about to reiterate in this letter is the same one that undergirds the entire Christian brotherhood.

The salutation "unto the churches of Galatia" is unusually curt, when compared with the language Paul uses in his letters to the other churches. Paul addresses the Ephesians, for example, as "the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:1); he calls the Philippians, "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi" (Phil 1:1); and the Colossians, "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse" (Col 1:2). In this letter to the Galatians, however, the words "saints" and "the faithful" are conspicuously absent.

Moreover, to the Philippians, Paul adds, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (Phil 1:3); and to the Colossians, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints" (Col 1:3-4). He gives no compliments to the Galatians at all. As a matter of fact, he later writes, "I am afraid of (for) you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal 4:11)

The stern tone of the letter reflects his strong displeasure with the Galatians' recent behavior. It sets the stage for the serious admonition he is about to give them. And since this is ultimately the Word of God, it reflects God's displeasure with the Galatians and with all who follow in their footsteps. Thus, this letter is ultimately God's serious admonition for us.

1:3 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul, (and ultimately God, since God is writing through the apostle Paul), does desire, nevertheless, that the Galatians dwell in the grace and the peace of God. The purpose of this letter of admonition is to bring these churches back into the right relationship with God.

Grace

The word "grace" encompasses the entire atonement. It is that quality whereby He freely and unilaterally provided salvation to a group of sinners that He had chosen to save. The cost to God was enormous; it involved the death of His Son. John 3:16 says,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

But God's grace did not stop at letting His Son die on the cross for sinners and telling people to believe on Him. He has also been giving His elect the faith needed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Ephesians 2:8:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

That's because had He not given us that faith, none of us would believe in Christ. By nature, we all rebel against God. Romans 3:10-11 states,

There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Without God drawing us, we would never have repented and come to God.

Peace

Paul also desires peace for the Galatians. In the context of this letter, the peace he is referring to has to do with the state of being at peace with God.

One of the "mysteries" revealed in the New Testament is that there are two opposing spiritual kingdoms constantly warring against each other. They are the dominion of darkness, which is ruled by Satan, and the kingdom of God, which is headed by Christ. All unsaved people belong to the former; they are slaves of Satan. As such, they are at war with God. But when an individual becomes saved, this warfare has ended. This is well reflected in Isaiah 40:1-2:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's

hand double for all her sins.

By redeeming them with His blood, Christ has reconciled believers to God. They are at peace with Him.

Thus, when the apostle Paul says, "Grace and peace be to you", he effectively expresses his (and ultimately God's) desire that the churches in Galatia might know the atonement in its fullest sense, and that each individual there might experience the salvation that comes only from the true Gospel.

1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

Yes, Christ gave Himself for our sins. Because we are all sinners, the law of God demands that God condemn us on Judgment Day to spend eternity in hell. To satisfy God's justice, Christ endured God's wrath on the cross on our behalf. The suffering He underwent was equivalent to the sum total of the penalties of all believers, the equivalent to spending an eternity in hell on behalf of each and every believer.

That's perfect love. Jesus says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But Jesus is not just another man; He is God. To atone for our sins, He had to empty Himself of His glory to become a lowly man. That's because only as a sinless human being could He become our sin substitute.

Deliverance

Christ gave Himself so we might be delivered from this present evil world. We learn from Colossians 1:13 that when we become saved,

(God) hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

We are liberated from our enslavement to Satan and sin. Note that our salvation, which required the death of Christ, was the Father's will. It served the Father's purpose to send Christ to the cross as our Savior. Even before the foundation of the world, it was already the will of God the Father to save a remnant chosen by grace through the death of Christ. No one can frustrate that plan, because no one can set aside the will of God. Hence, Jesus says in John 6:37,

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

On the other hand, Christ also stresses in verse 44,

No man come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Bequest

In our everyday speech, we sometimes use the word "will" in connection with the "Last will and testament" of a person. That usage is also in view in the phrase "according to the will of God" here. (The words "covenant" and "testament" are synonyms and are translated from the same Greek word, which is equivalent also to the word "will"). God explains that in the Book of Hebrews.

Quoting from Jeremiah 31, God alludes in Hebrews 8:10 to a covenant He has made:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.

This covenant has to do with salvation by grace because right in the same context, verse 12 says,

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

God talks about that new covenant again in Hebrews 10:9-10,

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Here, we can see that God indeed uses the word covenant in the sense of a will. It is contingent upon the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Confirmation

In fact, this truth is clearly spelled out in Hebrews 9:16-17:

For where a testament (or a will) is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (the one who made the will). For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is no strength at all while the testator liveth.

In short, God prepared a will and named in it all those whom He had chosen to receive the inheritance in heaven. That will is of force only after the death of Christ. When did God write this will? Ephesians 1:4 states,

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

Who are the chosen? Those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Can you see why salvation is called an inheritance for the believers? Can you see why the believers are called "joint-heirs" of Christ? It is because God has named them in His will to inherit all of the blessings of salvation upon the death of Christ.

1:5 To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Once we realize that our salvation is entirely the work of God, we, too, cannot help but burst out with a doxology; we want to thank and praise God. To Him be all the glory. And we are grateful not just for a moment or two; we want to praise Him for ever and ever, because He has given us eternal life and we have come into an eternal inheritance.

This doxology concludes with "Amen". This word is from the same Greek word that is translated in the *King James Bible* as "verily". It means truly or surely or absolutely so. In other words, it is truly the will and purpose of God that our salvation brings glory to God for ever and ever.

May we never rob Christ of even one iota of His glory. May we never give ourselves or anyone else any credit for our salvation. All glory and honor and praise belong to God!

Galatians 1:6-10

1:6-7 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Now, Paul, writing under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, lets the Galatians know the purpose of the letter. He rebukes them for having turned away from the gospel of grace to a different gospel. He calls it "another gospel" because it resembles the true gospel. But he adds immediately afterwards that it, in fact, is not another gospel at all. There can be no other gospel; there is only one gospel that brings salvation.

At this point in our text, God has not declared what this other gospel is. But as we go on into this letter, we will learn that the problem has to do with those who teach that while the grace of God is necessary, there is certain additional work that one has to do to become saved. They have changed the gospel of grace into a gospel that acknowledges the grace of God, but also requires good works by the individuals.

The apostle Paul describes those people as "some who trouble you", or some who agitate or confuse you, and who "want to pervert the gospel of Christ". Whenever someone thinks that one has to contribute something, however small, to one's salvation, he is perverting the gospel of Christ; he is trying to rob God of some of His glory.

1:8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

Anyone who preaches another gospel, even if he is an angel from heaven, is accursed. This is a dire warning. A teacher of the gospel has a very awesome responsibility. Underscoring that point, God says in James 3:1,

My brethren, be not many masters (or teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

The implication is that if a teacher persists in teaching a false gospel, he probably is not saved; he is still subject to judgment and hell. Why is a gospel other than the gospel of grace so damnable? Galatians 5:2-4 explains:

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Key Principle

In the churches of Galatia, the work that was insisted upon had to do with circumcision. But the principle applies to any kind of work by an individual. And the principle is this: If a person thinks that he has to do something, anything, to gain salvation, he has in fact obligated himself to observe the whole law of God; the death of Christ won't benefit him at all.

You see, there are only two paths to become right with God, and we have to choose one or the other. The first path is presented by the gospel of grace. We acknowledge that we, who are spiritually dead, are incapable of doing anything to help ourselves. We trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as our absolute sin substitute; and we recognize that it is His righteousness that has been imputed to us.

Adding anything to God's grace would immediately put one onto the second path. And that second path is to become right with God by following the law of God perfectly. The trouble is, the Bible declares, even our best works are tainted by sin and are looked upon by the Holy God as filthy rags. This second path leads only to a dead-end. It is doomed to failure and leads to hell.

1:9 As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

To preach any other gospel is such an abomination to God that he says "let him be accursed" once again in this verse. He wants to make sure that we get the point.

Works Gospels

Unfortunately, many preachers are doing just that today. They are teaching another gospel, and you may very well have come under their hearing. Following are a few examples:

(1) Some churches teach that though we are saved by grace, only our past sins have been covered by the blood of Christ. So, we can lose our salvation if we sin afterwards. Such teaching implies that we have to do good works to retain our salvation. Effectively, it is a gospel of grace plus works.

The Bible teaches that "the Lord hath laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). If we are saved, all our past, present and future sins have been atoned for. Nothing can cause us to lose our salvation. As a matter of fact, when Christ went to the cross, all of the sins of those who are living today were still in the future.

The Bible says in Ephesians 1:13-14,

Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest (down payment) of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit who indwells us is our guarantee that we will receive our inheritance in the new heaven and new earth when Christ returns. Once we are truly saved, we are always saved.

The fact that we do not work in order to retain or maintain our salvation is seen later on in Galatians 3:3 when Paul asks the rhetorical question,

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh (that is, by the works of the flesh)?

(2) Some preachers say that for one to be saved, one must be baptized in water in order to become saved. What they are advocating is really similar to what the false teachers in Galatia were insisting. They have merely substituted water baptism for circumcision.

That water baptism does not save people is illustrated in the Bible by the salvation of Cornelius and his family, which is recorded in Acts 10. There, God shows us that they were saved before they were baptized in water. This corresponds to Romans 4:10, where the Bible teaches that Abraham was saved before he was circumcised. Yes, God commands us to be baptized in water, so we do it as an act of obedience. But the baptism that saves us is the one that can be performed only by God. Remember what John the Baptist said in Luke 3:16? He said,

I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

This is the only baptism that brings us salvation. It is where God cleanses us of our sins by the water of the Gospel, by the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual washing, a spiritual baptism.

Incidentally, there are those who teach that believers (all of whom have already been baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit, as we have just seen) should seek another baptism in the Holy Spirit as a means to receive special spiritual gifts (such as the gift of physical healing or of speaking in tongues, etc.). All of this

is absolutely contrary to the Word of God. Ephesians 4:4-6 declares:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are 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.

There is only one baptism; there is no such thing as a second baptism by or in the Holy Spirit.

(3) Perhaps the most insidious grace-plus-works gospel that is being widely preached today is presented by those who claim that Christ went to the cross and paid for the sins of everyone in the whole world. To be saved, however, you must do your part and claim that salvation by accepting or receiving Christ. Well, if that's the case, then you can boast that you were somehow a little better than the next person, who also heard the gospel but rejected it.

Of course, that's not what the Bible teaches. God declares unequivocally in Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Remember what Jesus says in John 6:44?

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.

So, had God not drawn you and given you the faith to trust Christ, you would never have accepted Him. No, if you have to do your part to attain salvation, then it is just another gospel of grace plus works. Following such a gospel would obligate you to follow the whole law of God, according to Galatians 5:4; and Christ's death would be of no value to you.

Receiving Christ

But doesn't John 1:12 say, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name..."? Yes, but that's not the whole statement. Look at the second part of the sentence in verse 13:

...Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

It says here flatly that the spiritual birth of the children of God is not of the will of man. You see, John 1:12 is not talking about any free-will belief or acceptance of Christ. John 3:27 explains,

A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

A believer receives Christ, therefore, only when he is given Christ from God. The idea that Christ paid for the sins of every human being, moreover, is at odds with God's justice. It was to satisfy God's justice that Christ died for those He came to save. By the same token, had He died for everyone, then God could not send anyone to hell on Judgment Day. Otherwise, it would mean punishing them for their sins after Christ had already been punished for them. And that's a clear travesty of justice.

So be very careful not to teach any false gospels. Twice in Galatians 1, God says, "let him be accursed." He is warning strongly against any modification of the only true gospel. If you teach a gospel that somehow denies Christ of His full glory, you'd better find out whether you yourself are saved. God says, "Let him be accursed."

And if you have been misled by "another" gospel into believing that you are saved, then thank God that today is still the day of salvation. Repent now, and do it right away. Do give our gracious God all the credit for your salvation.

1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

The word "persuade" is not a good translation; it does not fit the context. We never try to persuade God. The Greek word *pitho*, translated "persuade" in this verse, can also be translated "obey", as it is in Romans 2:8, which reads,

But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey (*pitho*) the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath.

It should be translated this way also in this verse. Here, Paul was asking the rhetorical question, "For do I now obey men, or God?", or "Am I now a servant of men or of God?" He then goes on to declare that if he tried to please men, then he should not be the servant of Christ.

The question Paul raised here is one every teacher of the Word must face. Is it our goal to obey God or is it our goal to obey and please men? Are we going to preach what our congregation wants to hear? Or are we going to proclaim what God commands us to say, even if it hurts?

Half a Gospel

Even in fundamental churches today, many preachers have opted for the latter. Because people don't like to hear that they are sinners who are destined to go to hell, these ministers have substituted the gospel of grace with a gospel of love. To be sure, our God is love and loving. We read in I John 4:7-8, for instance:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth no knoweth not God; for God is love.

But that's only half the message of the Bible. God is also holy; His justice demands judgment for the unsaved. Hebrews 12:29 emphatically states, "For our God is a consuming fire." And Romans 1:18 declares,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

To be a faithful servant and witness of Christ, it is absolutely essential that we bring the whole message of the gospel. We must warn that there indeed is hell and damnation coming, and then make known the wonderful escape that the Lord Jesus Christ provides. Only then will people know what Christ has saved them from. And only then will a person come to the Lord with a broken and contrite heart.

Watchman

Time and time again, the Lord tells His disciples to be watchful. What does He mean? To find the answer, consider Ezekiel 3:17-19:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

Some argue that this doesn't apply to the New Testament period - that it only had to do with Israel. But listen to what the apostle Paul says to the elders at Ephesus, who are Gentiles, in Acts 20:26-27:

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Make no mistake, we must declare the whole counsel of God, warning the unsaved of the world to flee from the wrath to come, warning them to flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Galatians 1:11-15

1:11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

To certify means to declare. Paul wants to impress upon the Galatians again that the gospel that he preached had not been given him by man. This is the hallmark of the true gospel. It is not after man. It comes from the Word of God, because only the Word of God is the divine Word. We are not to trust anything else - no matter how popular a given doctrine may be, or how well-known a given pastor is.

Even if our church or denomination has a heritage of being faithful to the Bible, what our church fathers have handed down is still not the ultimate authority. We must ascertain that it is fully supported by Scripture. In Colossians 2:8 the apostle Paul warns,

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

And in I Corinthians 2:12-13, Paul writes,

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

The gospel of the Bible is God's gospel. It is not man's gospel. And it is a gospel in which God receives all the glory in the salvation of sinners. Mankind receives no credit whatsoever. All we deserve is to be cast into the everlasting fire.

1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul received a great amount of divine truth directly from the Lord Jesus Christ – through visions and personal revelations as well as through careful study of the Bible of his day, which is our Old Testament.

Today, every one of us also receives truth directly from God. But it no longer comes through visions or dreams or any other form of personal revelation. That possibility ended when the Bible was completed. We receive it entirely from the written Word of God. In this connection, God tells us in II Timothy 3:16-17:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The righteousness to which that passage refers, of course, is the righteousness from God (Romans 1:17); it is the gospel of grace.

1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it.

Before he was saved, Paul (Saul) zealously persecuted the church. He was present when the Jewish people stoned Stephen to death. We read in Acts 8:1-3:

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

His murderous actions were further described in Acts 9:1-2:

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way (that is, Christians), whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

You see, Paul was convinced that he knew Biblical truths, so convinced that he was ready to risk his life to persecute those who did not follow his belief and accept his ways. This is true with many who are preaching works gospels today. Those who hold to these gospels are convinced that what they believe is Biblical. This is the blindness of sin. But, as we have seen earlier, any gospel that involves works in the slightest degree – including the "free-will" decision to accept Christ – is a gospel that will lead to eternal damnation.

1:14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

Paul profited or grew in the Jews' religion more than many of his contemporaries. He meant well when he persecuted the church. He confesses in Acts 22:3-4:

I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Unfortunately, his zeal was based on "the traditions of my fathers". We have this same problem today. Many ministers, rather than abiding in the Word of God, are zealously following the traditions of their church fathers.

Sabbath

Some insist, for example, that Christians should observe the seventh day Sabbath because their church founder claimed to have received a vision in which a halo hovered above the Fourth Commandment. The truth is, the New Testament makes it clear that the seventh day Sabbath, along with the other ceremonial feast days, was pointing to Christ. Since the cross, therefore, we no longer perform those symbolic rituals. Instead, we worship God corporately on the first day of the week – the New Testament Sabbath Day.

Any gospel that views human traditions with the same authority as the Word of God is a false gospel. Colossians 2:8 admonishes,

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

The wisdom of men leads to destruction.

Currently, many seminaries actually have teachers who believe in evolution and who doubt the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of Christ. The doctrines they teach all come from the minds of men. No matter how sincere those teachers are, what they teach can never bring salvation.

Paul knew afterwards that even though God had given national Israel a gospel of grace, its unbelief turned it into a gospel of works. Thus he wrote in Romans 9:31-32:

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

Confronted by Christ, Paul finally saw the truth and made a dramatic turnaround. If you have been teaching something based on the traditions of man, are you willing to change and submit to the Word of God as did Paul?

1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

This verse reveals that God had elected to save Paul even before he was born. This is true with every believer. Ephesians 1:3-5 sets this forth:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

Jeremiah is another example of God's elective program; he was saved in his mother's womb. He wrote in Jeremiah 1:4-5:

Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Two Births

In this verse, God is also setting up through Paul an analogy about the two births of a believer. The language spoke of one birth, the physical birth, the moment Paul was separated from his mother's womb. But the apostle also alluded to his spiritual birth; he talked about being called through His grace. That is the second birth. Remember Jesus told Nicodemus that unless you are born again you shall not see the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3)? To be saved, we must have a new spiritual birth.

Note that when we were born, we had nothing to do with our first birth. We didn't ask to be born; we didn't accept our parents. It was entirely an action of God. He worked through our mother and father to bring us forth. God determines our sex, our skin color, our talents, our nationality, our everything.

The same holds true regarding our second birth. We had nothing to do with it. We couldn't because, the Bible says, we were spiritually dead in our trespasses (Ephesians 2:1,5). God calls us by His grace, not by any works that we have done.

Galatians 1:16-20

1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

The first truth we find here is that God revealed His Son to Paul when Paul was called. God reveals Himself to everyone whom He saves. No one can through his own wisdom see or understand God. When Peter confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" in Matthew 16:16, Jesus answered in the next verse,

Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

The Father had revealed this truth to Peter.

To the Gentiles

Secondly, Paul was commissioned very specifically to minister the gospel to the Gentile world. In Acts 9:15-16, we read,

But the Lord said unto him (Ananias), Go thy way: for he (Paul) is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Yes, Paul had a very distinct and special mandate.

The fact is, this mandate has also been given to every believer. Look at I Peter 2:9-10:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (or special) people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Actually, the word Gentiles means nations. All believers are to proclaim the gospel to the nations of the world. We should have the same attitude as the one Paul declared in Romans 1:16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Finally, Paul did not learn his theology from men. As we've stressed many times already, even as Paul did many times in this letter, the only place to learn about the true gospel is from the Word of God.

1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

This verse tells us that after Paul had been given his special commission, instead of consulting the apostles in Jerusalem, he went immediately to Arabia to sort things out.

As a zealous Pharisee, he had known the Old Testament well. Now, while he was there, he must have gone over the Scriptures, examining them against what he had been taught by his teachers. And as he did so, he no doubt found many places where the Jewish leaders had changed or strayed from the Word of God. And surely, he began to realize that he had blindly accepted those wrong teachings as truth.

That's why in his epistles, Paul again and again quotes from the Old Testament, the Bible of his time, to show how passages there were pointing to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, passages that had altogether been misinterpreted by the Jewish teachers.

We, too, should make an effort to see if all that we've been taught in our church is, in fact, the Word of God. Because many churches and even well-known seminaries have strayed far from the truth, we must remember that the bible is the ultimate authority for every doctrine in Christianity.

After his stay in Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus to preach the gospel. Damascus, of course, is the city where he became saved. This trip to and from Arabia is not mentioned in Acts 9, where Paul's conversion is recorded. After he had become saved, verse 18 tells us, he regained his sight and was baptized. Verse 19 reads,

And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

Based on what we read in Galatians 1:17, the trip to Arabia was evidently made after Paul had received meat, but before he spent certain days at Damascus.

1:18-19 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

Paul is reiterating in these verses that he was not taught by flesh and blood, but by the revelation of Christ. This is not boasting. Paul is establishing his credentials. The instructions he is giving to the Galatians must carry the authority of an apostle hand-picked by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like verse 17, the historical statement here does not correspond chronologically with anything that is recorded in the book of Acts. We must conclude, therefore, that God records some events in Paul's life in Galatians and some others in Acts and elsewhere. But putting all the information together, we know that some time after three years Paul visited Jerusalem. There, he had a private audience with the apostle Peter. He also saw James, the Lord Jesus' brother.

These two were witnesses of the fact that the apostle Paul had indeed become saved. During that short visit, which lasted only 15 days, he saw no other apostles.

1:20 Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

In this verse, the apostle Paul was effectively taking an oath before God. He wanted to emphasize that what he was telling the Galatians was the absolute truth, and to underscore the seriousness of the charge that he was going to make. The Galatians had stumbled and had begun to follow a false gospel of grace plus works. It was an exceedingly serious matter.

Galatians 1:21-24

1:21-22 Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:

Before he was saved, Paul had been a notorious persecutor of the church. He did not hesitate to publicly bring Christians to their death. After his salvation, however, he was for many years virtually unknown in the church. This contrast reflects a dramatic change in Paul's character.

One reason why the converted Paul kept a low profile was probably because he knew his limitations. He realized that he must first become adequately equipped before he could serve the Lord effectively and faithfully. So, he spent time in Arabia to meditate on the Word of God before he began to preach the gospel in Damascus. Only after he was thoroughly prepared did he go to Syria and Cilicia. That's why the Christians in those regions hardly knew anything about him.

This teaches us that before we start to teach others the Word of God, we'd better do our homework first. True, the Bible tells us that once God pours out His Spirit on all flesh, all who believe shall prophesy (Acts 2:17), which means to declare the Word of God. Indeed, we are all commanded to witness to others. But that does not mean that every believer is immediately qualified to be a Bible teacher, a preacher or the head of a congregation.

When we serve the Lord, moreover, we should not go around sounding the trumpets, boasting what wonderful missionaries we are, or how many souls we have brought to the throne of grace. We are not to seek any credit or compliments. Instead, we do it quietly, unknown to the rest of the congregation. We do it humbly and patiently simply because we desire to faithfully carry out the task that God has assigned to us. Luke 17:10 reads,

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

That is to be our attitude before God.

1:23-24 But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.

Paul had violently persecuted the church in the past and the believers in Syria and Cilicia had heard about it. But God performed a miracle in Saul's life, changing him into an apostle preaching the gospel of Christ, especially to the Gentiles. Upon learning the fact that this former enemy of God was preaching the faith, the churches in Syria and Cilicia rejoiced and glorified God.

And so, too, we rejoice when we learn that someone who used to rebel against God has turned into an effective ambassador of Christ. But realizing that all of this came to pass only because of the grace of God, we glorify God. No one else can take any credit for it. Not even the one who ministered to the unsaved person, the one who prayed for him, or the one who witnessed to him. Yes, God worked through our ministrations; but only He can open a person's spiritual eyes:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. (I Corinthians 3:6-7)

Chapter 2 – No Turning Back

Overview of Chapter 2

To underscore that he is a special apostle of Christ, Paul records in this chapter two former occasions on which he openly confronted important leaders of the church on the gospel of grace, and prevailed.

The first took place in Jerusalem, where "false brethren" had infiltrated the church and wanted to bring the church back under the law. But Paul stood firm, refusing to let his Gentile protégé Titus be circumcised. He won the support of the top three church leaders.

The second encounter occurred in Antioch, where Paul was ministering. Peter, often the spokesman for the original twelve apostles, was visiting that city. Knowing that God has extended the gospel to all people, he saw fit to eat with Gentile believers. But when he later started to observe the law just to placate some influential Jews, Paul exercised his authority and publicly rebuked Peter for having behaved hypocritically.

Recalling what he had said to Peter, then, Paul emphasizes that no one can be saved by observing the law. The only way to be freed from the law is to die to the law, and that can be accomplished only by our having been crucified with Christ. This retroactive death of ours is effected when Christ gives us His faith to believe in Him. That's why our salvation is entirely by grace.

Galatians 2:1-5

2:1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.

Like the three years noted in verse 18 of the last chapter, the fourteen-year span here is not specifically recorded in Acts. Both periods, however, probably fell somewhere between Acts 9:25, which tells of Paul being let down by the wall in a basket in Damascus, and verse 26, which speaks of his going to Jerusalem.

This particular visit of Paul to Jerusalem was not among any of those described in Acts. The word "again" in this verse indicates that Paul had previously visited Jerusalem. Presumably, the first one was the 15-day visit mentioned in Chapter 1 when Paul met with the Apostle Peter and with James, the Lord's brother. On this trip, however, Paul was accompanied by Barnabas and Titus.

Barnabas

We first read about Barnabas in Acts 4, which talks about the early Christians sacrificially selling their possessions and giving the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the needy. In that context, we read in verses 36 and 37:

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

So Barnabas was one who gave sacrificially.

The verse also records that Barnabas means "the son of consolation". The word "consolation" can also be translated "encouragement". So, Barnabas is also called "Son of Encouragement". The following account, recorded in Acts 11, shows how Barnabas lived up to his name. At that time, a large number of people had become believers in Antioch:

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord: (v 22,23)

Barnabas exhorted, or encouraged, those new believers to stay true to the Lord with all their hearts. That's a splendid example for all of us to follow. We need to exhort and encourage new Christians to grow in the Lord by abiding in the Word of God.

Titus

We do not read too much about Titus in the Bible, although one of Paul's letters in the New Testament was addressed to him. However, we do learn from II Corinthians 7 that when Paul was in Macedonia, he was severely persecuted by the Jews. Often beaten and stoned, he was constantly living in fear for his life. And he writes,

Nevertheless God, that comforted those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus. And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you... (vv. 6,7)

Thus, even as Barnabas showed that believers are to encourage other believers, Titus also illustrated that we are to comfort one another.

2:2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

The Apostle Paul went to Jerusalem in response to a revelation from God. There, he met with those who were "of reputation" in the church and discussed with them the doctrines that he had learned from Christ and had since been preaching.

Paul emphasizes that the talk he had with the church leaders was a private one. Reason: "lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain." He is suggesting, in other words, that the gospel might be perverted if it were discussed in a public meeting.

You see, among the congregation at Jerusalem, there were no doubt many new believers, who did not yet

have a sound understanding of the Word of God, especially in light of the recent death and resurrection of the Messiah. There were also many "false brethren", as Paul calls them in verse 4, who claimed to be Christians but nevertheless were unbelievers. In an open meeting, Paul could easily be outnumbered by such uninformed or misinformed people. If so, he would then have run in vain.

This teaches us that Biblical truth must never be changed in submission to public pressure or to accommodate public consensus. When questions arise over the meaning or application of an important doctrine, they should be carefully researched against what the Word of God says and then discussed privately among spiritually mature and Biblically informed Christians.

As it was in Paul's day, it's an unfortunate fact that not all members of a church today are true believers. Those unbelieving members, according to Ephesians 2:2, walk "according to the prince of the power of the air". In other words, they are ruled by Satan, who, of course, is the enemy of the church. Consciously or not, therefore, these unsaved members are working against the church. Moreover, not many Christians really spend time studying the Bible and familiarizing themselves with the commands of God. As a result, their collective views are often contrary to what the Bible teaches.

Women Teachers

The broadening desire to follow social trends, in fact, is the reason why fewer and fewer churches remain faithful to God's Word regarding women teachers in the church. In I Timothy 2:12-15, the Bible makes it crystal clear that:

I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

The reference to Adam and Eve and childbearing indicates that this command has its genesis way back in the Garden of Eden. After Eve had been deceived by the serpent, God said unto her,

I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee (Genesis 3:16).

Contrary to the common excuse, therefore, this command has nothing to do with social custom of the time. Despite that, more and more church leaders are allowing women to teach adult men or even to pastor. Why? They would rather appease some segments of the congregation than to stay faithful to what God commands. Those church leaders have run in vain; their service is of no value to God.

2:3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

The early church, especially the Jewish believers, had to make a major mental adjustment. For almost 2,000 years, the law of Moses had required that every male identified with the nation of Israel be circumcised. In fact, some of the ceremonial activities, the offering of animal sacrifices in particular, dated all the way back to the days of Cain and Abel, the first children of Adam and Eve.

But all those ceremonial activities were figures pointing to the coming Messiah. When Jesus died on the cross, He permanently fulfilled all the ceremonial requirements. Thus, God says in Colossians 2:16-17:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

That is why New Testament believers no longer observe the Passover, the different feasts, the seventh day Sabbath, and the laws concerning clean and unclean food. Nor do they have to be circumcised. To do so, in fact, would constitute a denial of the fact that Christ did come and die on behalf of His people, thereby fulfilling the physical requirement to be circumcised. Having been taught by the Lord Himself, Paul fully understands the reason for this sudden change. So, he notes here that even though Titus was a Greek, a Gentile, he was not compelled to be circumcised.

2:4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

The reason Paul brings up the subject of Titus' not having to be circumcised is that some "false brethren" have infiltrated the church. They want to bring the church back into bondage by spying on the liberty that believers have. To understand what "our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus" means, let's go to John 8. We read in verses 31 and 32:

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my

disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

The Jews then asked in reply:

We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Because they are the offspring of Abraham, they considered themselves to be God's chosen people. Jesus then answered in verse 34,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Here, Christ teaches that whether a person is a blood descendant of Abraham or not, unless he is saved, he is in bondage to sin. Before we became believers, we were all enslaved to sin and Satan. That bondage put us under the wrath of God. But the Son of God, having died for our sins and then resurrected, has freed us from that bondage. This, then, is the liberty we now have in Christ Jesus.

In this verse, Paul is telling the Galatians that, unaware to others, false brothers have been brought into the church. These intruders have been examining the liberty that believers enjoy, trying to find fault in it. Insisting that physical circumcision is required in order to be saved, they are trying to bring believers back to the bondage of sin.

Jerusalem Council

The problem the early church had with these false brothers, who were called Judaizers, was persistent and widespread. Later, some of them went to Antioch and again insisted that physical circumcision was a requirement for salvation. That resulted in Paul and Barnabas going again to Jerusalem, and the assembling of the so-called Jerusalem Council. We read in Acts 15:2:

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Instead of a private meeting with just a few church leaders, this time they discussed the subject openly before the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Council was convened after Paul and Barnabas had completed their highly successful first missionary journey. As a result, according to Acts 15:4, when they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, and the apostles and elders.

The Council then met to consider whether Gentiles had to observe the law of Moses. After having heard the miraculous works that God had done through Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles, the Council decided that it was not necessary for any person to observe the law of Moses to become saved. In a letter to the Gentile believers in Antioch and nearby cities, they declared:

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. (vv. 28,19)

Application Today

Does the directive of the Jerusalem Council apply to us today? The command to abstain from meats offered to idols was, for all practical purposes, later rescinded. Paul writes in I Corinthians 8:4:

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

In the same letter, he later elaborates:

But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (10:28-31)

In other words, because we know that an idol is nothing, eating food that has been offered to an idol is not wrong. Why should we be denounced for eating something for which we have given thanks to God? But if we are dining with someone who would be offended by it, then we should not eat it. Upsetting that person's conscience would not bring glory to God.

The command to abstain "from blood, and from things strangled" continues today. It is the blood of Christ that

covers our sins and gives us eternal life. So, the only blood that we are to partake of is that of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason strangled animals are not to be eaten is that their blood has not been drained. So, the prohibition against eating blood applies.

Fornication

To abstain from fornication, of course, is a command that continues throughout all times. The reason God specifically warns against this sin is twofold. First, the Bible says in I Corinthians 6:18:

Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

Our body is the temple of God; it must be kept holy. Secondly, God uses physical fornication to typify spiritual fornication because He likens the relationship between husband and wife to that of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32). God warns in the Third Commandment:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them (idols), nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me.

Idolatry is spiritual fornication. Any time we worship anyone or anything other than the only living God, we are engaged in spiritual fornication. In fact, God says in Colossians 3:5,

Mortify [put to death] therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence [lust], and covetousness, which is idolatry....

Thus, when God tells us to abstain from fornication, He is telling us to flee from any kind of covetousness.

2:5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Not for a moment did the apostle Paul submit to the pressures that were being brought to bear. He did not yield to any suggestion that salvation involves anything more than grace. And he is now telling the Galatians to similarly reject such heresy so that the true gospel, the gospel of grace, might remain in their churches.

The question of circumcision, of course, is hardly a problem in today's church. But we do have all kinds of counterfeit gospels that are being preached, gospels that sound like the real thing but are in reality false. Earlier in this study, we called your attention to some of the grace-plus-works gospels that are being taught in Christendom. We are never to yield to such teaching, so that the truth of the gospel continues with us.

Another counterfeit gospel that is widely circulated is that which is brought to our front doors typically by a pair of "missionaries". They preach a "Christianity" in which Jesus Christ is but a sinless person, not God. That, of course, is heresy. If Christ were not eternal God, we would have no sin-bearer, no Savior. No created being, however righteous he might be, could possibly withstand the wrath of God on the cross that would otherwise be poured on all believers on Judgment Day. Only God Himself can. How do you deal with such false prophets? The Bible says,

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deed (II John 10,11).

We are not to welcome them into our home. Sometimes, those of us who are somewhat familiar with the Bible are tempted to debate with them, hoping that we can convert them. But the Bible says, "No". We must remember that God is wiser than we are and knows more about the situation than we do.

Galatians 2:6-10

2:6 But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:

Paul says here that some of the people in the Jerusalem church seemed to be important. But whether they were or not did not make any difference with him, because God isn't impressed by how important a person looks. Besides, these seemingly important people added nothing to the truth that Paul had been preaching.

The point Paul is making here, and indeed throughout these chapters, is that the truth he teaches was given him by God through direct revelation. Convinced that he stands correctly on the issues in discussion, he is not going to let anyone, no matter how important they are or appear, to change the truth.

This is a very important principle for us to learn. None of us are taught by God through direct revelation, of course. But we now have the complete written Word of God, the Bible. If we study the Bible diligently and carefully, constantly seeking the help of the Holy Spirit, we will come to truth.

Now, some ministers holding important titles or theologians holding high positions in ministries may preach certain doctrines that sound appealing. Or certain well-known seminaries may teach some theories that are highly popular. But unless those doctrines and theories are in harmony with everything else the Bible teaches, we are not to accept them as truth. Our ultimate authority must be the Bible. The Word of God alone is our divine guide in all matters of life.

2:7-8 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

The early church divided the people they ministered to into two general groups: (1) the Jews, that is, the blood descendants of Abraham, whom they called the circumcised; and (2) the Greeks, a catch-all phrase for all non-Jews, whom they called the uncircumcision.

So, this verse is saying that, instead of the Apostle Paul being intimidated by those important looking people in the church, they were actually impressed by the fact that Paul had been commissioned by God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, even as Peter had been assigned to minister to the Jews. Realizing that the God who was doing mighty work through Peter was doing mighty work through Paul as well, they knew that the two apostles were serving the same God and proclaiming the same gospel.

Interestingly, the Roman Catholics make a big thing of Peter's being the head of their church. The fact is, the Bible declares here in this verse that Peter's chief concern was with the Jewish people. (The Catholic Church, of course, is basically a Gentile entity.) The Apostle Paul was the one who ministered in Rome, not Peter.

2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, three apostles were particularly close to Him. They were Peter, James, and John. Are these three the same three? "Cephas" is indeed Peter. When he was first brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, Jesus said to him, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas" (John 1:42). Cephas is his name in the Hebrew language. Paul identifies Peter by his Hebrew name here no doubt to emphasize Peter's Jewish ministry (which was spoken about in the last verse).

"John" here is most probably the apostle John. He was indeed active in the early church. But this "James" is not the apostle James. The latter had been killed by Herod before this letter was written (Acts 12:2). The James here is the Lord's brother. Paul made reference to this fact earlier in this epistle. In Galatians 1:19, he said he saw "James, the Lord's brother" during his 15-day visit in Jerusalem.

Born of Joseph and Mary, James was actually the half-brother of Jesus. While Christ was ministering on earth, James did not believe in Him (John 7:5). After the resurrection, though, he was converted and became the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

The word "seemed" in this verse is from the same Greek word that was translated "of reputation" in verse 2 of this chapter. These three leaders, in other words, are reputed to be the pillars of the church, the men who held up the church in those crucial transitional days. In the Old Testament, the pillars were the part of the temple that held it up. So the fact that they are spoken of as pillars here represents that they are holding up the spiritual temple, which is the church.

Right Hand

The three perceived the grace that was given unto Paul; they recognized Paul's special gift of ministering the gospel. So, they gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. In the Old Testament, shaking or striking hands was a gesture that represented a willingness to pay for someone else's debt. We read, for example, in Proverbs 22:26,

Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts.

Job echoed that idea when he appealed to God,

Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he that will strike hands with me? (17:3)

So, to shake hands is to express a close relationship of fellowship and a willingness to pay another's debts. The right hand, in particular, pictures the close relationship that exists among believers. We read in

Ephesians 2:4-6,

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

And since Christ is seated at the right hand of God, therefore, so are we.

In the parable where Jesus separates the sheep from the goats, the right side also signifies the believers (Matthew 25:33, 34). And God says in Ecclesiastes 10:2, "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left." Thus, when the Jerusalem church leaders gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas, they were expressing their total agreement and fellowship with these two brothers.

Fellowship

"Fellowship", translated from the Greek word *koinonia*, is a popular word today in many church circles. But in the minds of many, it merely means social gatherings of churchgoers, or some outward show of love or affection for one another. All of this is good, but it falls short of the full implication of the word *koinonia*. Let's look at some examples of how that word is used in the Bible:

For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. . . (Philippians 1:5)

Here, fellowship has to do with the gospel. It means that there is a common understanding as to what the gospel really is.

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit . . . (Philippians 2:1)

This indicates that when we believers fellowship with one another, we also have fellowship with God the Holy Spirit. That's because we are all indwelt by the Spirit.

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (I Corinthians 1:9)

This verse speaks of the fellowship of His Son. We are in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ as well as with His Spirit.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (I John 1:3)

Here, we have fellowship with our heavenly Father.

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. (Philippians 3:10)

This speaks about the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. In this world, Jesus warned that we will have tribulation. But He also said in Matthew 5:11-12:

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

When we go through trials for His name's sake, we fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. And Christ says, "Blessed are ye..." when we partake of this fellowship. In I Corinthians 10:16, *Koinonia* is translated "communion":

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

This verse is, of course, talking about the Lord's Table.

Koinonia, then, is the kind of fellowship among believers that finds its roots in their common salvation through Christ's sufferings and in their common fellowship with all three persons of the Godhead. That's how wonderfully rich the word *koinonia* is.

Thus, the fellowship of believers is a deep, rich and eternal union that is far more than having social gatherings together and showing some kind of superficial love. It is the fellowship that exists because we are all partakers of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ, without which we would remain condemned sinners.

2:10 Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

As noted earlier, the meeting Paul is talking about here is a private one with just a few church leaders. The Jerusalem Council took place later. At the end of this meeting, the church leaders in Jerusalem merely tell

Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor. Is this a directive telling Christians to become deeply involved with eliminating poverty in the world? At first glance, that certainly seems so. But a careful study of what the Bible teaches elsewhere reveals that this verse is not talking about the physically poor.

In His infinite wisdom, God has put a conscience in even the heart of unsaved man so that in the world, there is still some milk of human kindness. As the unsaved world sees with their physical eyes the physical suffering of the poor, it often marshals its resources and energies to bring help. That is God's common mercy on mankind.

Believers, of course, should sympathize with those suffering from poverty. But as good stewards, we are to use what the Lord has entrusted to us primarily in and for the eternal Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, for example, when God commanded His people to care for the fatherless and the widows, it was always in a congregational context. In fact, God told the nation of Israel not to have anything to do with outsiders.

Case History

In the New Testament, a clear-cut application of that principle is recorded in Acts 11:27-30:

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth (famine) throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The relief was sent on to the brothers in Judaea. When Jesus was on earth, there were many beggars in the land. And when the apostles were sent out, they must have seen many who were suffering from malnutrition. But we do not find recorded anywhere in the Bible that either Jesus or the apostles provided them with food or other material things.

True, Jesus fed the 5,000 and the 4,000. But they were not physically poor. The disciples had wanted to send them home so that they might have some food to eat. Nor did He ask the disciples to feed the multitude with their resources. Rather, Jesus was just giving a picture of the nature of salvation. Even as He feeds those who are physically hungry, the Gospel feeds those who are spiritually hungry. In the historical context, the feeding also demonstrated the creating power of the Lord Jesus (that He is the Creator of the universe).

Bigger Task

The truth is, God has assigned to us a task of helping the kind of poor that the world knows nothing about. These are the spiritually poor that the world cannot see. When we look at the unsaved through the spiritual eyes that God has given to us, we see billions of sinners heading for hell. This is infinitely more horrible than any physical malnutrition.

This truth shines through brightly from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that is recorded in Luke 16:19-26. From the world's vantage point, Lazarus was the one who required compassion. The dogs licked his sores. In contrast, the rich man had fame and food and friends. He had everything going for him. But what God wants us to see is the eternal state of affairs. There, Lazarus had everything going for him; he was in Abraham's bosom, a picture of his being in heaven with Christ. The rich man, on the other hand, was under the curse of sin. The moment he died, he was on his way to hell. And so, he is the one that we are to be concerned about; he is spiritually bankrupt. That's why Paul says in this verse that remembering the poor was the very thing he was eager to do. Paul, of course, subsequently proved to be a super evangelist, not a philanthropist.

Galatians 2:11-15

2:11-12 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

Peter was the apostle who was personally told by God through a vision that the cross had abolished the ceremonial laws. This incident is recorded in Acts Chapter 10.

In a nutshell, one day in Joppa, while Peter was praying on the roof, he became hungry and fell into a trance. In the vision, he saw a sheet being let down from heaven with all kinds of unclean animals in it.

God told him to kill and eat. When Peter said he would not eat anything impure, God told him not to call anything impure that God has made clean. After this had happened three times, the sheet was drawn back up to heaven. Immediately after that, the Holy Spirit told him to go to Caesarea and minister the gospel to the Gentile family of Cornelius. At the house of Cornelius, Peter confesses,

Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him (vv. 34,35)

Having learned from that experience that God is not a respecter of persons, Peter realized that it was perfectly proper to eat with Gentile believers. So, when he visited Antioch, he did just that. But later, when some people from the church of Jerusalem headed by James came to Antioch, Peter started separating himself from the Gentiles. Reason: some of those from Jerusalem were "of the circumcision", that is, they were among those who insisted that Gentile believers had to be circumcised.

In his fear of them, Peter decided that he had better stop eating with the Gentiles. In doing so, he inadvertently slipped back under the law, effectively denying that salvation comes from grace alone. So, the apostle Paul openly told Peter that his behavior was contrary to the Word of God.

Normally, it is not wise to confront another believer publicly. When it becomes necessary for us to correct someone who has gone astray, we should do so privately and lovingly. But Peter was a leader of the church, and when a leader sets a bad example, he must be corrected openly. Note that this account does not suggest in any way that Peter lashed back at Paul. There is no indication of any argument. Judging by what the Bible says of him, Peter no doubt admitted at once that Paul was right when he was told of his mistake. The mark of a devout believer is his faithfulness to the truth.

Similarly, when a preacher or teacher of the gospel is told that he has been teaching a doctrine that is not scriptural, and if he finds that he has indeed been wrong, he should not let his own pride get in the way of correcting himself. Moreover, he should make his correction known to those he has been teaching so that they are not misled by his former error.

2:13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

The words "dissembled" and "dissimulation" in this verse can both be translated "hypocrisy". In other words, the other Jews who came with Peter acted hypocritically also. They knew that they should no longer consider Gentile believers unclean, but in practice, they followed Peter's example and separated themselves from the Gentiles. Even Barnabas, of whom the Bible has so many good things to say, was carried away and momentarily practiced the same kind of hypocrisy.

Considering that the Jews had followed the law for thousands of years, we can understand how difficult it was for them to reverse traditions. But God has put this letter to the Galatians into the Bible not just to give us some historical facts. He wants us to know the true meaning of salvation by grace and to realize that even great church leaders like Peter and Barnabas are not infallible.

Sometimes, Christians trust their church fathers very implicitly. Some trust Martin Luther, other trust John Calvin. Still others trust Schaffer, or Wesley, or Moody. They have great following because they were champions in the faith in their day. Indeed, what they did speak and write about is Biblical most of the time. But we must remember that they, being human, were not infallible. The Bible in its entirety must be our ultimate authority for truth.

2:14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

Because Peter's hypocrisy had led other believers down the wrong path, causing them to behave in an unbiblical way, the Apostle Paul corrected Peter in front of all of them. He said, in effect, "If you, being a liberated Jew, live like a Gentile – that is, if you are now living under grace and know that you, like the Gentiles, need not observe the Jewish law – why are you forcing the Gentiles to live like the conventional Jews who follow the law?" It's a rhetorical question, of course.

2:15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

Moved by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul is using the words "Jews" and "Gentiles" here in the spiritual sense. Thus, "Jews by nature" are those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; and "sinners of the Gentiles", those who are still unsaved sinners. That's why he says we who are "Jews by nature". You see, before we are saved, we are by nature children of wrath.. In Ephesians 2:3 we read:

Among whom also we all had our conversation (or behavior) in times past in the lusts of our flesh,

fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But when we become saved, a change takes place. As II Peter 1:4 puts it:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust

We partake of the divine nature of Christ; we become God's children. But why are believers called Jews? Because God declares in Romans 2:28-29:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Here God defines that, insofar as His salvation program is concerned, a Jew is one who has experienced the circumcision of the heart, not that of the flesh. This idea is reinforced in Philippians 3:3, where God, speaking to a church that included both Jews and Gentiles, says:

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

This is one of those "mysteries" that God had hidden for long ages past, but was finally revealed in the New Testament. To truly understand Old Testament prophecies, therefore, it is imperative that we take all this new information and these new definitions into full consideration.

Galatians 2:16-21

2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

This highly positive statement, which describes the wonderful salvation God has provided for us, may surprise those who have been brought up with the idea that only after we have demonstrated faith in God will He save us.

First, let's define what "justified" means. It means that we have become just; we no longer stand as criminals before the bar of God's justice. And we have become so, as the first statement of this verse shows, not by obeying the commandments or by doing any other kind of works.

But notice the second phrase. It reads, "but by the faith **of** Jesus Christ" – we are justified by, or out of, Christ's faith. This truth is repeated in the next phrase: "even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith **of** Christ.". And in verse 20, Paul writes, "And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith **of** the Son of God". Thus, three times in this passage, God says that we are saved by – that is, out of – the faith **of** the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, the word "**of**" has been changed to "**in**" in most newer translations. In other words, they say "by faith **in** Christ" rather than "by the faith **of** Christ". In the Greek text, the word Christ is clearly in the genitive case, which denotes possession. Strictly translated, the phrase should read "**Christ's faith**". In fact, there is no preposition anywhere in this verse that could be translated "in". But most translations and commentaries, instead of taking the original Greek word at its face value, have arbitrarily changed the word to "**in**" mainly because the word "**of**" doesn't fit their understanding of the phrase. But that changes what God has in view.

Faith of Christ

The truth is, God is saying here that we are not justified by our works nor our own faith, but by the faith **of** Christ. The same truth is found in Philippians 3:9, which reads,

...(that I may) be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith **of** Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

You see, the focal point is on the faith **of** Christ – what was required by God's law to save us and in giving us the faith to trust in Him. Do you know that if we had manifested faith in Christ on our own, it would be a work of ours? Yes, indeed. That's because I John 3:23 declares,

And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you see, is a command of God, a law of God. Therefore, if we say we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ on our own in an effort to become saved, we are keeping the law. But we cannot be saved by keeping the law. So, where does this leave us? It means that the faith that saves us is altogether the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. It must be given to us by God in order for us to exercise true faith. This is what Ephesians 2:8 emphasizes,

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

Therefore, when we begin to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, it is the evidence that God has begun to save us. It is not something that we do in order to obtain salvation.

In the second half of this verse, Paul reminds Peter that they themselves have believed Christ in that they might be justified by the faith of Christ, not the observance of the law, because the act of obeying God's command cannot save anyone.

Power of God

To further understand that believing in Christ on our own is never the basis for our salvation, let us look at a couple of verses in Romans 1. In verse 16, God states through the apostle Paul:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

We have already learned that believing is an evidence of the fact that God is saving us. So, the verse is in effect saying, "It is the power of God that is manifested when we see the evidence of salvation in every one that God has saved, and that evidence is the fact that he believes." Then verse 17 elaborates:

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by (that is, out of) faith.

From whose faith to whose faith? Not from ours, since we don't have faith of our own. It is from, or out of, the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ to our faith. It is out of His faith that our faith comes. Here again, the phrase "from faith to faith" is a direct and correct translation from the Greek manuscript. But somehow, many Bible versions have arbitrarily changed it to "from first to last" or some other phrases. And so, the just shall live by faith. That is, we live out of the faith which comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where our believing enters into the picture.

Actually, God gives repentance, as well as faith, to those who are being saved. We read in Acts 5:31, where Peter is speaking of Jesus,

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

To be given repentance means we get no credit for our repentance. Both the faith (by which we believe) and the repentance (by which we turn away from our sins) are gifts of God. They all come out of the faith and the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we must never think that we merit anything that would count toward our salvation. As the closing phrase of Galatians 2:16 states, "for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." So, whenever we try to do a work to merit out salvation, we are only digging the hole deeper into hell.

2:17-18 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

The skeptic may say at this point, "Now, if I indeed believe that Christ has given me the desire to repent and to trust Him, and yet I find myself still engaging in some besetting sins, would it not imply therefore that Christ is the minister of sin, or that He promotes sin? Shouldn't I, therefore, continue to observe the law to ensure my salvation?" To that hypocritical question, the Apostle Paul answers, "God forbid. No way! That cannot be!"

If a Jewish believer, who has already been justified by the perfect obedience of Christ, places himself back under the obligations of the law, he is in effect restoring the law that has been nullified. He is rebuilding the record of his sins that has been destroyed. Then, he has made himself to be just another sinner, who is headed for hell.

2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

Paul now goes on to explain why we must not go back to the law. When we became saved, we died to the law. How did that happen? Through Christ's meeting all the demands of the law on our behalf.

The meaning of "dead to the law" is amplified in Romans 7. Verse 1 reads,

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?

This verse is speaking of the condition of mankind before they are saved. We were ruled over, and in bondage to, the law. We were constantly examined by the Word of God according to its standard. Now, verses 2 and 3:

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

Marriage Relationship

Here, God uses the marriage relationship between two people to illustrate the spiritual marriage between mankind and the law. God indicates that before we are saved, we were married to the law. When two people are married, they stay married. Other than death, there is no Biblical basis for ending that union. For every human being, spiritually speaking, this marriage relationship (to the law) is a grievous one. Every time we sin, we are guilty of spiritual adultery against our husband, which is the law. And Deuteronomy 22:22 teaches that an adulterous wife is to be stoned to death, which is an Old Testament figure pointing to eternal damnation.

Now, because every human being is spiritually adulterous, the law to which we are married demands the death penalty. That death penalty is the second death, eternal damnation. Even if we die physically, the law, our husband, will still be pointing an accusing finger at us when we are resurrected on the last day, demanding eternal damnation for us.

How can this awful marriage be broken? We cannot divorce the law. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Only death can break a marriage. But the law will never die; the Word of God exists eternally. The only way for that marriage to be broken is for us to die spiritually; that is, for us to suffer eternal damnation. But no man can spend an eternity in hell and come out at the other end. Hell is forevermore.

Sin Substitute

But as our sin substitute, God, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, took our place in experiencing eternal death. When He went to the cross, He experienced eternal damnation on behalf of all who would believe on Him. Thus, the death of Christ has made us free forever from this marriage to the law. What happened when this marriage between us and the law was broken? We read in Romans 7:4:

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

We became married to Him who is raised from the dead. That is Christ Himself.

Can you understand now why we are called the bride of Christ? Now that I am married to Christ, I find in my life an ongoing desire to do the will of God. This brings us back to Galatians 2:19, which explains why I am saved. I became dead to the law that "I might live unto God."

And how may I live unto God? I go to the same law of God, the Bible, not in order to secure salvation (which would be a work), but in order to learn how to be pleasing to God. My relationship to the Bible is entirely different from what it had been before I was saved. Now, I look upon the Bible as the guidebook on how to do it God's way. I find it a joy to live my life His way because I love to please my Savior. When I sin, I feel troubled because I know it's offensive to my Holy God, forgiving though He is, and because I know that I should be going to hell for my sins.

2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

We now come to one of the most marvelous statements in the Bible. It begins with "I am crucified with Christ". As one whom God had chosen to save, Christ took upon Himself my sins in His crucifixion. Therefore, in principle, I was crucified on the cross in Christ. I have endured the second death. "Nevertheless I live." Why? Because I have become married to the Lord Jesus Christ, the victorious Savior. Now, Christ is life. And as His bride, I have been given eternal life. Having eternal life, I will never, never be threatened again by eternal damnation.

In fact, in my spirit essence, I won't even be adversely affected by my physical death. At the moment I die

physically, I will leave my body and come into God's holy presence to live and to reign with Him in heaven.

No More Ego

Verse 20 continues, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Why does God say this? You see, before I was saved, everything in my life was wrapped up in me. I was the center of my life. I was nothing but a walking specimen of pride. But when I became saved, my ego died. In Christ, I came out at the other end of hell a new creature, a new creature that has total fellowship with God, a new creature that wants to serve Christ implicitly. And so it is not me that is important any longer. Christ is everything to me.

Admittedly, we do not see this in perfection in the lives of believers. The body still lusts after sin. And that is why we long for the end of time, when we will have our resurrected bodies. Remember what the apostle Paul says in Romans 7?

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this 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 (vv. 24,25)

Our body, which has yet to experience the resurrection, still tries to drag us into sin. But in our resurrected soul, we find our life, our strength, our everything in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been taken out of the dominion of sin, so that sin no longer rules over us. Therefore it is not I that lives, but Christ that liveth in me. I want Christ to be my master. Everything I have, I owe to Him.

By God's Faith

Verse 20 goes on: "And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God . . ." The flesh is my body. Though my soul is saved, I still have to live out my life in this body, which is not saved. That is why we have struggles in our lives after we are saved. But God brings us right back to the source of our salvation – the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the faithful one who has effected every aspect of our salvation. And He is the one who will keep giving us strength to put to death the lust of our unsaved body.

Living by the faith of Christ, we are now capable to do good works. They are called good works because we now have the right motivation. We are doing the work of God to please Him. We know that it has nothing to do with causing or keeping our salvation.

This verse concludes with "who loved me, and gave himself for me." When we read this language, we have to bow our heads in humble adoration. We know, from everything that we read in the Bible, that if God waited for us to seek Him, or if God waited until He could find something worthy in our lives to merit salvation, not one of us would have become saved. And yet, somehow we have experienced the new life. We have been crucified with Christ. Who decided that we were to be crucified with Christ? Who decided that God would take that punishment on our behalf? It was God Himself. We were chosen in Christ from the foundations of the earth.

Limited Atonement

There are those who teach that Christ went to the cross to pay for the sins of **every** single human being. That idea is contrary to the Word of God. It fails to recognize what the covenant is all about; it fails to recognize the nature of the atonement; it fails to recognize that Christ came to save only His people from their sins. Remember we looked at the will or testament of God in an earlier verse? Christ went to the cross not only to activate the terms of that will by His death, but also to qualify the beneficiaries of that will, which include only those who are named in the Lamb's book of life, to receive their inheritance.

Moreover, if Christ had gone to the cross on behalf of every last human being, then in no way could God demand that the unsaved stand for judgment on the last day. It would be a terrible violation of God's justice, because all of their sins would already have been covered, including the sin of not believing in Christ. Those theologians who teach that Christ died for everybody further teach that only those who accept Him are the ones to whom this salvation becomes available. But this kind of teaching makes salvation a result of my work plus God's grace.

Remember, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ on our own is a work. Obtaining salvation by obeying the command to believe on Christ is not the gospel of the Bible. The only true gospel is salvation by grace and grace alone.

The fact is, as this verse underscores, it is God who loved me and gave Himself for me. The whole work was done by Christ. My good works, my repentance from sin, my trust in Christ as my Savior, they are all

the result of God having saved me. Under no circumstances are they the cause of my salvation. God receives all the glory and credit.

2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

The word "frustrate" here means "to make void" or to consider something as though it were annulled. Paul is saying, in other words, that the grace of God is in full force. He then explains why: If a person can be saved by baptism, membership in the church, helping the poor, trying to be a good person, or any other work of his own, then Christ died for nothing. Why would the Son of God empty Himself of His eternal glory to become a lowly man and allow Himself to be humiliated, stoned, mocked, spat on, scourged and finally nailed onto a cross to die if salvation could be attained by other means?

No, God makes it crystal clear that even if a person rigorously kept the ceremonial law, it would not save him. If a person cannot be saved by keeping God's law, how then can any other human action save him? Salvation comes only through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace and grace only.

Summary of Chapter 2

To underscore that he is a special apostle of Christ, Paul records in this chapter two former occasions on which he openly confronted important leaders of the church on the gospel of grace, and prevailed.

The first took place in Jerusalem, where "false brethren" had infiltrated the church and wanted to bring the church back under the law. But Paul stood firm, refusing to let his Gentile protégé Titus be circumcised. He won the support of the top three church leaders.

The second encounter occurred in Antioch, where Paul was ministering. Peter, often the spokesman for the original twelve apostles, was visiting that city. Knowing that God has extended the gospel to all people, he saw fit to eat with Gentile believers. But when he later started to observe the law just to placate some influential Jews, Paul exercised his authority and publicly rebuked Peter for having behaved hypocritically.

Recalling what he had said to Peter, then, Paul emphasizes that no one can be saved by observing the law. The only way to be freed from the law is to die to the law, and that can be accomplished only by our having been crucified with Christ. This retroactive death of ours is effected when Christ gives us His faith to believe in Him. That's why our salvation is entirely by grace.

Chapter 3 – Purpose of the Law

Overview of Chapter 3

Using a series of rhetorical questions, Paul tells the Galatians to remember that they first became saved and received the Holy Spirit not by works but by hearing the gospel of grace. If the law they are now trying to observe could bring salvation, then God would not have given the promise of grace at all. Observing the law, therefore, cannot possibly save anyone.

The reason God gave His promise of grace to Abraham was because Abraham believed God and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness. The promise has always meant to be salvation by grace to people of all nations who believe in Christ. That's because Christ is the promised seed of Abraham.

Why, then, was the law given? To let people know for sure that they, being transgressors of the law, are sinners and are therefore in need of a Savior. Now that Christ, the promised Savior, has come, all those who believe as Abraham did are freed from the demand of the law. Having been cleansed by Christ, they are the heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:1-5

3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

The word "evidently" in this verse is from a Greek word which means "before written". So, the phrase "hath been evidently set forth" means "has been set forth by that which was previously written".

You see, the churches in Galatia were started by Paul on his first missionary journey. And to strengthen

them, he made subsequent visits there. While he was with the Galatians, he had no doubt carefully explained to them that salvation comes only by the grace of God, and that works have no part in it at all.

An ardent student of the Scripture, he must have shown them that God's salvation-by-grace program had in fact been written in the Old Testament, the Bible of that day. That's why he reminds the Galatians in this verse that, based on that which had been written in Scripture, they were then able to visualize the crucifixion of Christ with their own eyes.

Somehow, the Galatians have since departed from the truth and have fallen instead for the lie that all believers had to be circumcised. Reacting with amazement, Paul exclaimed, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you into disobeying the truth!" The same question can be asked today. Why are there so many doctrines that teach that to be saved, a person must be baptized in water? Or that he must of his own free will accept the Lord Jesus? Or that he must perform this ritual or that?

Misguided Concern

I believe there are two major reasons for this. The first is man's concern for the salvation of others. Well-meaning Christians are afraid that if they tell people the truth, that God had predestinated all those whom He would save, many unbelievers would be offended. Telling people that they have to make a free-will decision, they believe, is more palatable.

Well-meaning though that attitude may be, the fact nevertheless is that we cannot design our own salvation program and we mustn't think that we are wiser than God. More importantly, the fact that God has chosen certain ones to be saved and has done the whole work of grace does not mean that anyone who wants to come to God cannot do so. The Bible says that whosoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life. God promised in Jeremiah 29:13 that "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." The gospel gives the same salvation offer to everyone. The sad fact is that not one of us of ourselves will seek God with all our heart.

God flatly declares in Romans 3, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (vv.10,11). We are blinded by sin. We are dead spiritually. We do not have the spiritual ears to hear God's invitation and so we cannot respond to it.

God's Grace

Thankfully, God does not want every human to end up in hell. By His mercy and grace, He had decided that He would save a body of believers. So, He inclines the hearts of those whom He has chosen to be saved and gives them a spiritual ear to hear. Thus, the only reason why any one of us believes in Christ is that God has sovereignly drawn us to Him.

But what's wrong with bending the truth a little bit just to make sure that none of God's elect is repelled by the idea of predestination? It's wrong because it turns God's truth into a lie. God says, "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22). All our evangelistic efforts are meaningless to God if we are not obedient to His commands to begin with. Besides, Jesus promises in John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Our job, therefore, is to faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God. We don't have to, nor should we ever, second-guess God.

Human Pride

We humans are all afflicted by the sin of pride. We want at least some of our works to be recognized. We want to get some credit. That salvation can only come by the grace of God is an idea most people cannot accept. This is one big reason why unsaved people, who do not become saved, do not become saved.

When somebody makes a wrong remark about us, our pride is offended. When someone disagrees with what we say, our feelings are hurt. But we have to beat down this sin and give it no quarter. We need to pray again and again that God would give us the grace to walk humbly. Remember Galatians 2:20? There, we read that we have been crucified with Christ. There is nothing left of us. Anything that we are, we give all the credit to Christ. Therefore, every doctrine that we hold has to be examined with that in view.

If you have been brought up on a free-will gospel and you have found it hard to acknowledge that Christ has done it all, then you have to ask yourself: Is my pride getting in the way? If I truly walk humbly before God, is it so difficult to accept this truth?

3:2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

This is a rhetorical question. The answer, of course, is the latter – “by the hearing of faith.” No one receives the Holy Spirit as payment for doing the works of the law. So, Paul is effectively reminding the Galatians that they were saved “by the hearing of faith”. A commentary of that last phrase appears in Romans 10. In verse 9, we read: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." This verse is the faithful promise of God.

To "confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus" means not only to admit that we are sinners and that Christ is our Savior, but to declare that we are of the same mind with Christ. To confess the Lord Jesus thus means that we have surrendered our will to Him and that we have hung our entire life on Him.

Dead in Sin

But, as we saw earlier, we are spiritually dead and would never on our own seek God. How then can we make that confession? We find the answer in Ezekiel 36:25-26:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

You see, God initiates the action. He cleanses a rebellious sinner of his sins and gives him a new spirit, the Holy Spirit, and a new heart. And the evidence that God has done this is that this sinner begins to confess the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead. How does God, after having given us a new heart, give us the faith to trust Him? Romans 10:17 reads, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." This is the hearing that verse 2 of Galatians 3 is talking about.

Spiritual Ears

Under God's salvation program, only by hearing the Word of God, by hearing the Gospel, can one obtain saving faith. And this hearing requires the spiritual ears, which, as we discussed earlier, only God can give us. In this connection, we read in verse 18 of Romans 10, "But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." In other words, the Israelites did hear the Gospel with physical ears. But their unbelief persisted because "God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear" (11:8).

So, our trusting in God is altogether a product of God's action. God gives us the spiritual ears to hear, the faith to respond, and the Holy Spirit to indwell us.

3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Paul asks, in effect: "Having received salvation by the grace of God, are you so foolish as to try to improve upon it by doing works of the flesh?" And the answer to this rhetorical question, of course, should be "No!". Yet, there are churches today which teach that when a person is saved, all his past sins are covered by the blood of Christ; but to remain saved, he must do good works. Such teaching, as we see here, is foolishness. It again stems from the sin of pride; man wants to take some credit somehow for his salvation.

The truth is, if a person is truly saved, then all his sins, past present and future, are covered by the blood of Christ. We read in Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The iniquity of us all means all of our sins. Hebrews 12:2 therefore declares, "Jesus (is) the author and finisher of our faith". God begins our salvation and He will complete it.

3:4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

Why does Paul bring up the subject of suffering at this point? Is suffering pertinent to the subject of salvation by grace? Yes, indeed. We read in I Thessalonians 2:14-16:

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

This striking passage reveals that the Thessalonians, like the apostle Paul, suffered for the sake of Christ. They suffered at the hands of their countrymen. This is what we are to expect when we follow the Gospel of the Bible. When we become saved by responding to it, we become an enemy of Satan, and he, who

rules the hearts of the unsaved, will use the latter to persecute us.

That's why Jesus warned in John 16:33, "In the world you shall have tribulation." The Good News is, He also says in the same verse, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." If we endure, we will have victory in the end.

Persecution

Throughout the centuries, thousands upon thousands of Christians have been martyred because of their faith. Even today, believers in many countries are being severely persecuted. Here in the US, the Lord has been merciful in that we hardly suffer any physical suffering for following Christ.

Nevertheless, those who faithfully teach and obey the commands of God are still being persecuted. Typically, they are ridiculed by people within Christendom – those who take the Word of God lightly, interpret it liberally, and obey it just partly. As the end of time approaches, in fact, this persecution will intensify because the church itself will become increasingly apostate. True believers will find themselves vastly outnumbered by unsaved churchgoers.

How might the Galatians have indeed suffered in vain, as Paul suggests in this verse? Answer: if they fall into a grace-plus-works gospel and do not have salvation. It's not that any believer can ever lose their salvation. But if the Galatians do go after another gospel, it would indicate that they were never truly saved to begin with, their suffering notwithstanding.

3:5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

To drive home the point that believers are saved entirely by the grace of God, Paul rephrases the question he asked in verse 3. In this question, however, he also declares it is God Who ministers, or gives, the Holy Spirit to believers.

Now, does God give us the Holy Spirit because we have done good works? Is it because we have been baptized in water? Is it because we have reached out to the Lord Jesus Christ on our own? Of course not. Or is it by the hearing of faith? Indeed it is! God gives us the spiritual ears to hear the Gospel, and He gives us the faith to respond to it and the Holy Spirit to guarantee our salvation.

Misquoted Quote

Incidentally, a verse that many quote to prove that we have to take an independent action to receive the grace of God is Revelation 3:20. It reads,

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

At first glance, it does seem to suggest that if we do not open the door, we won't get saved. God is a gentleman, those free-will advocates often say. He won't force His way into our heart; He just waits for us to open the door. Such a conclusion, however, directly contradicts what the Bible is teaching us here in Galatians.

Actually, the key phrase of that verse is "if any many hear my voice". As we have already seen, no man of himself will hear God's voice; that is, no man will hear the Gospel call in such a way as to respond positively. Our hearing must be activated by Christ Himself. So, when Christ knocks on the door of the heart of the man that He intends to save, He also gives him spiritual ears to hear the knock and to respond to the call. Then, He will come in and sup with him. To sup with God means to participate in the marriage feast of the Lamb of God.

Miracles

Paul says here that God not only ministers the Spirit to us, He also "worketh miracles" among us. Can we infer from that statement that we should expect miracles to take place in our churches? Indeed, many congregations today put great emphasis on signs and wonders.

Sign

Actually, there are three Greek words in the New Testament that are commonly translated miracles or that which have to do with miracles. The first is *semeion*. It is usually translated "sign", as in the phrase "signs and wonders", or "miracles". It applies to those miracles when God sets aside the natural laws that govern

the universe, such as His walking on water and His multiplying the loaves to feed thousands of people. We find that word, for example, in John 2:11 in connection with Jesus' changing water into wine. That verse reads, "This beginning of miracles (*semeion*) did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."

Wonder

The second Greek word that relates to miracles is *teras*. In the Bible, it is always translated "wonder". Jesus did signs and wonders, He did *semeion* and *teras*. For a short period after Christ's Ascension, the apostles did signs and wonders as well. These were physical miracles, such as the instant healing of the sick and the resuscitation of the dead. But by themselves, even the signs and wonders performed by Jesus Himself did not produce faith. Nor were they meant to. As a matter of fact, Jesus declares, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign (*semeion*)" (Mt 12:39). We are to "walk by faith, not by sight" (II Cor 5:7).

In the historical context, however, Jesus and the apostles performed them as a means to authenticate their credentials. After the early churches had been established, such verification was no longer needed. Thus, there is no mention in the Bible of any such miracles by God after Acts 19. But the Bible does warn that toward the end of time, "there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Mt 24:24). Indeed, all of the Biblical statements that relate to end-time miracles attribute them to Satanic activity.

Power

There is yet another Greek word that is translated "miracles" or "mighty works" occasionally, although it is far more frequently translated "power". It is the word *dunamis*. In Matthew 11:20-22, for example, we read:

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his might words were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

Actually, the word *dunamis* is very closely related to salvation. In Acts 1:8, for example, Jesus says, "But ye shall receive power (*dunamis*), after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Likewise, we read in Romans 1:16,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power (*dunamis*) of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

And *dunamis* is the word appearing here in Galatians 3:5. Thus, Paul is saying in this verse, "He therefore...that worketh power among you..." He is talking about the work of salvation that God does among our lives. Does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? And the implied answer is the latter.

Galatians 3:6-10

3:6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Abraham was a sterling example of a saved person. He lived several hundred years before any part of the Bible had been written. When God told him to leave his family and go to a strange land, he obeyed. Later, when he was told to sacrifice his son Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering, he was obedient.

Regarding that second testing, Hebrews 11:17-19 explains: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." He was convinced that even if he had killed Isaac, God would raise the boy up because God had promised that many nations would eventually be blessed by his seed through the line of Isaac.

But is this verse saying that because Abraham had such a profound trust in God, God regarded him as righteous? Is the Bible contradicting itself? To answer that, let's go to Romans 4:3, which reads, "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." As you can see, this verse addresses the same point as Galatians 3:6.

No Obligation

We then read in verse 4 of Romans 4, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." This verse teaches that had Abraham done some work to become saved, then his salvation would have been a reward, not the grace of God; God would have been indebted to Abraham to provide salvation.

Verse 5 continues, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Standing alone, this verse again seems to contradict itself since, as we saw earlier, I John 3:23 commands mankind to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Obeying the law to become saved would, of course, be a work that we do. Actually, this verse is reinforcing what Romans 3:20 has earlier declared. To wit,

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

God's Righteousness

Now, read the next three verses in Romans 3 carefully:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

You see, it is the righteousness of God that saves us and that righteousness is by, or because of, the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the same truth we saw earlier in Galatians 2:20. And it explains why Romans 1:17 says, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." The righteousness of God is revealed out of the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ unto our faith.

So, whenever we read about Abraham believing God, remember his faith was a result of the faithfulness of God in providing this salvation for Abraham. Abraham's faith was the evidence that he had become a child of God.

3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Remember, we become believers because Christ faithfully endured the wrath of God on our behalf and has also given us the faith to trust Him. Now, God declares that we which are of the faith of Christ are the children of Abraham. We are the inheritors of what God promised to give to Abraham and his seed.

Abraham, of course, is the progenitor of national Israel. The Jewish people have, therefore, always assumed that they are the seed of promise. Not so, God declares here. Only those who are identified with the Lord Jesus Christ are the children of Abraham. Jesus Himself talked about this during one of His encounters with the Pharisees. He said in John 8:37-38:

I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

We then read in verse 39, "They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Thus, Jesus was telling the Jewish religious leaders that even though they were blood descendants of Abraham, they were not in God's eyes Abraham's children. If they were, they would have followed the patriarch's footsteps in trusting God, instead of trying to kill Him. The Lord actually told the Pharisees that they were the children of the devil, saying in verse 44:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Here, the Bible is giving us a tremendous statement. It is saying that it has always been God's plan to save the heathen, the non-Jewish people, through faith in Jesus Christ. Foreseeing that, or anticipating that, the Word of God announced in advance the Good News to Abraham by telling him, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

We find in the Old Testament that God first called Abram in Genesis 12 to leave his country and go to a land that He would show him. God promised in verse 3, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." God

repeated that promise to Abraham many times afterwards. Moreover, after Abraham's death, He reassured Isaac of that promise, saying in Genesis 26:3-4:

Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply like the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Again, later on in Genesis 28:13-14, God said to Jacob, Isaac's son:

I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Promised Land

Notice that with both Isaac and Jacob, God linked the giving of the land to His promise that in them shall all nations be blessed. Actually, that was also a reiteration of what God had previously promised to Abraham. Back in Genesis 13, when Abram and Lot separated, the Lord said to Abram,

Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever (vv. 14, 15).

Later, in Genesis 17, when God changed Abram's name to Abraham (which means "father of a multitude"), He said in verse 5, "for a father of many nations have I made thee", and then in verse 8, "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

It's highly significant that the promised land was to be given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their seed for an everlasting possession. That's because they never received the promised land in their lifetime. Since God is faithful in fulfilling all of His promises, He will have to raise them up at some point to give them the land forevermore. Just as Abraham, in obeying God by offering up Isaac, believed that God would raise Isaac up from the dead in order to fulfill His promises, so indeed God will raise up Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their seed in order to fulfill His eternal promises to them.

The Last Day

When might that be? Four times in John 6, Christ says that He will raise up those who have become saved on the last day. And in John 11:24, Martha, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said of her brother Lazarus, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." The last day, of course, is the final day of this earth's existence. As II Peter 3:10 puts it, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Verse 13 then assures us, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The land that God promised to give Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their seed thus has to be the new creation. Only then will they have it for an everlasting possession. That's why in Genesis 13, God told Abraham to look as far as he could see in all four directions. You see, when God promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan, He had in mind the new and everlasting heaven and earth.

Inheriting the New Holy City, of course, is the ultimate outcome of the salvation of all believers. This is confirmed by Hebrews 11, the chapter in which God speaks of a number of Old Testament men of faith. Its last two verses read:

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Same Gospel

The Bible is thus saying that there is no difference between Old Testament and New Testament believers. They are all saved by the same Gospel of grace; they all have "obtained a good report through faith", and their salvation will all be consummated on the last day, when they will all receive the promise. Hence, when we read in Genesis 6, for example, that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, we know that he

was saved by the grace of God.

There are many who teach that salvation by grace is a dispensation only for the New Testament period; it was offered to Gentiles as an interlude after the Jews had rejected Christ. Before the cross, they say, God had a different salvation formula for ancient Israel; and after the church age ends, God will offer Israel yet another dispensation, making it into a great kingdom of God again. Well, this verse in Galatians 3, along with what we have just gone through, is effectively saying to them, "No way."

Gates of Hell

Before we leave this subject, let me also comment on what God said in Genesis 22 after Abraham had obediently prepared to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. He said in verses 16-18:

For because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

What does "thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" have to do with salvation? Well, remember the time when Peter confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"? Jesus said in response, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). Christ, you see, possesses the gate of His enemies. By His victory at the cross, He controls the gates of hell. Satan can no longer keep people from being liberated out of his dominion of darkness. So, in Genesis 22, the Gospel of Christ was again "preached before unto Abraham".

Actually, Abraham was by no means the only one who was preached the Gospel of grace in the Old Testament. We read in Hebrews 4:2, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." In that context, the "them" referred to the millions of Israelites that perished in the wilderness. They were preached the Gospel, but they did not profit from it, that is, they did not benefit from it because of their unbelief.

A Different Promise

But didn't God also promise to give a specific plot of land on earth to the Israelites? And isn't God still obligated to fulfill that promise as some theologians claim? Yes and no. Yes, in Genesis, God did give Abraham another promise pertaining to some earthly land. And no, that promise has already been completely fulfilled. We find this promise first given in Genesis 15, beginning with verse 18:

In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Unlike the other promise, the land spoken of here is given not to Abraham himself, but only to his offspring. Nor is there any mention of everlasting possession. In fact, in Deuteronomy 28, just before the people of Israel were about to possess the promised land, Moses warned them against being disobedient to God. Otherwise, he said in verse 63,

And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.

Delivered in Full

Has that promise been completely fulfilled? Those theologians who are yet looking for a golden age for national Israel do not think so. The twelve tribes never received all the land described in that promise, they say. But let's see what God Himself has to say about it. We read in Joshua 21:43-45:

And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

Also, Nehemiah 9:7-8 reads:

Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram...and foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites...to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous.

In these two statements, God declares flatly that He did give unto the Israelites all the land which He swore to give unto their fathers, and that He has indeed performed, or kept, His words because He is righteous. The reason Israel never had full possession of the land was that they failed to follow God's commands fully. If anyone says today, therefore, that God still owes national Israel certain land, they are contradicting what the Bible declares. God already gave that nation all that He had promised to give.

3:9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

This statement summarizes the discussions of the last three verses: Since Abraham was considered righteous because he was given the faith to believe God and since all believers are in God's eyes the children of Abraham whether or not they are his blood descendants, therefore all those who are saved out of the faith of Christ are blessed with eternal life along with believing Abraham.

That both the Old and the New Testaments offer the same Gospel is such an important doctrine in the Christian faith that I think we should also look a bit at Romans 4 because it is a commentary of Genesis 17. We know Romans 4 is about salvation by grace because it says in verses 4 and 5:

Now unto him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Sign of Circumcision

With that in mind, let's go back again to Genesis 17. Verse 11 read, "And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you." What covenant was that sign of circumcision a token of? We find the answer in Romans 4:11:

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

It says there that Abraham had "the righteousness of the faith" – that is, he was saved – when he was yet uncircumcised. And he was given that sign as a token that "he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised." You see, God promised Abraham even back then that he would be the father of all believers, including those who are not of Jewish descent.

No Exception

But that's not all. Romans 4:12 continues:

And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

Here, God makes it clear that national Israel is no exception. Abraham is the father of circumcision, the people of the Israelites, only to them who not only are circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of Abraham in having faith before he was circumcised. This statement belies those who claim that God had promised that He would save all of national Israel someday. We can thus understand why God said in Genesis 17:4-5:

As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

The only way for Abraham to be the **progenitor** of many nations is for him to be the **spiritual ancestor** of the people of many nations.

Everlasting Covenant

In Genesis 17:7, God further told Abraham, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." The word "everlasting" immediately tells us that "thy seed" there refers to those who are in Christ, because they are the only ones who will inherit the new heaven and the new earth everlastingly. Everything on this earth will be destroyed by fire on the last day. The Romans 4 parallel to Genesis 17:7 is verse 16. It reads:

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end that the promise might be sure to all the

seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

Here, the word "promise" is a synonym for "covenant".

Eternal Land

Finally, we read in Genesis 17:8, "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." Commenting on that, Romans 4:13 says, "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."

Notice that here, God uses "the world" in place of "the land of Canaan", underscoring thereby that the latter was not referring to the small plot of land in Palestine. Rather, it figuratively represents the new heaven and the new earth. In the Old Testament, the entry into Canaan from the wilderness was a picture of salvation.

Having seen such a weighty commentary of Genesis 17 in Romans 4, we can safely conclude that from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible offers only one Gospel – salvation by grace through faith, which is the gift of God. Any suggestion that God has different dispensations for different peoples in different periods of history is altogether at odds with what God teaches.

3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Now Paul, moved by God the Holy Spirit, begins to look at this matter of salvation by grace from a few different vantage points. In every case, he uses Scripture from the Old Testament, the Bible of that day, to support his argument. In this verse, he says that if anyone tries to gain salvation by doing the works of the law, he is, in fact, under a curse. The scriptural basis for this serious warning is Deuteronomy 27:26. There, God says, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them."

The term "all the words" means that even if a person disobeys just one tiny point of God's command, he is cursed. This warning is reiterated in the New Testament. James 2:10 states: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

The problem is, every human is born into this world with a sinful nature. The Bible says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps 51:5); and "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (58:3). So, even before we saw the light of day, we were already in rebellion against God; we were cursed before we were born.

Galatians 3:11-15

3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

Next, Paul argues that clearly no one can be justified by the law, that is, no one can become righteous in the sight of God, because the law itself states that a person is justified by faith. Here, the apostle Paul goes back to the Book of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk was a prophet ministering during the period when the southern kingdom of Judah had turned terribly apostate. Upset by the sins he saw all around him, he pleaded to God: "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save" (1:2). He couldn't understand why God could tolerate such wrong. In reply, God told him that He was raising up the Chaldeans (another name for the Babylonians) to judge Judah. That answer further confused Habakkuk. So, he asked the Lord, in effect, "But how can you, a righteous God, let your people, disobedient though they are, be destroyed by an even more wicked nation?"

God then told Habakkuk to be patient, assuring him that the proud conquerors would eventually be punished and that at the proper time, He would save His people. With that in mind, we can better understand verses 2-4 of Habakkuk 2:

And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

That last phrase is that which Paul quotes in Galatians 3:11. It proves that God has always meant to save only those who live by faith.

3:12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Having stated in verse 10 that anyone who tries to keep the law is under the curse of the law because he is bound to disobey it, and in verse 11 that no one can be justified by the law because the law itself declares that one can only be justified by faith, Paul now points out that the law cannot possibly justify anyone because it is not of faith; it operates by works. This time, he quotes from Leviticus 18:5: "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them." In other words, if you keep my law, you will have to live by the law.

In effect, then, the apostle is saying, "Since the law does not operate on faith and since the righteous shall live by faith, if you therefore choose to live by the law, you will have to remain under the curse of the law."

3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.

Still based on Old Testament Scripture, Paul now shows why, in contrast to the hopeless path of following the law, we can have eternal life through faith. Christ, he says, has redeemed us from the curse of everlasting damnation. The verse Paul quotes here is from Deuteronomy 21:22-23, which reads:

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree; His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Remember, in the Old Testament, the normal way to execute a criminal was to have him stoned to death. So, when a person had to be put to death by being hanged from a tree, not only was he physically killed, he was also cursed by God – so much so that if he were left on the tree overnight, the whole land would be defiled. That is a picture of the second death, eternal damnation in hell.

Well, Jesus died hanging on a tree. What crime did He commit? None at all. He was altogether sinless. He died to pay for our sins. Strictly speaking, if the Lord Jesus Christ had been stoned to death or had He been executed in some other manner, He could still have atoned for our sins. But the crucifixion was vivid evidence that Jesus suffered not only physical death, but the wrath of God on our behalf as well. For every believer that He redeemed, He suffered the equivalent of an eternity in hell.

3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

What is the blessing that might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ? It is the faith that God had given Abraham, the faith that was accounted to him for righteousness. This verse is thus saying that because Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by dying on the cross, salvation might come upon the Gentiles. Since Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8), this again shows that it has always been God's intention to save people out of the Gentile nations as well as out of the nation of Israel.

The second half of this verse, which essentially restates the truth of the first half, can be understood in two ways. First, it says that the Gentiles who have become saved as Abraham was saved will receive the promised Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus made that promise the night before He went to the cross, saying, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17).

It was repeated by Peter in Acts 2:38-39, who said in his sermon:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Indeed, since Pentecost, every believer has received the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation, because Romans 8:9 declares, "...if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Guarantee

"The promise of the Spirit through faith" also means that God has given every believer the Holy Spirit as a promise that his salvation will be consummated when he finally receives his glorious, spiritual body. This is what Ephesians 1:13-14 means when it says, "after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." The word "earnest" there means, in today's parlance, down payment.

All believers have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, which is the down payment that guarantees that we will receive our inheritance, eternal life in the new heaven and new earth.

3:15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

Paul now begins yet another new line of argument for the Gospel of grace. Using a human analogy, he likens God's promise to Abraham to the will that people make. In our world, we call such a document the "Last Will and Testament". The word "testament", in fact, is from the same Greek word that is translated "covenant" in this verse.

When a man writes his last will and testament, he puts within that will his wishes as to what is to be done with his estate. Among other things, he specifies who are to be the beneficiaries. He is under no obligation to include them in the will, and the bequests are not compensation for what the beneficiaries have done. That fact nevertheless is that if they are named in this will, then they are to receive the inheritance.

Paul notes here that even in the case of a human will, once it has been confirmed or validated, the terms therein cannot be altered. After the death of the testator, its instructions must be carried out in every detail. The implication is that the testament of God, who is infinitely more trustworthy than man, is all the more dependable and unchangeable.

Galatians 3:16-20

3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

Following that line of argument, Paul says, God specified in His will that the beneficiaries were to be Abraham and his seed. The apostle calls particular attention to the word "seed", as distinguished from "seeds". And that singular seed that God had in view, he declares, is the Lord Jesus Christ, not all the blood descendants of Abraham.

We can well understand why Abraham was named as one of the beneficiaries. He was the one to whom God first made the promises, and the promises, as we learned earlier in this chapter, are salvation from the curse of sin and the free gift of eternal life.

But why was Christ also specified in that divine will as a beneficiary? He is God; He didn't need to be saved. Of Himself, of course, Christ is sinless. But He came to earth as our sin-bearer. On the cross, as a result, He underwent the wrath of God as if He was plunged unto an eternity of hell. For Him to successfully pay for our sins, He had to be taken out of hell.

That Christ indeed had to be redeemed is reflected, among other places, in Psalm 69. This is a Messianic Psalm because the first half of verse 9 – which reads, "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" – is quoted in John 2:17 in connection with Christ clearing the merchants from the temple. And the second half of that verse, "And the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me", reveals that He became sin for us. Our reproaches had fallen on Christ.

Messianic Prayer

This is what the Lord said in verses 13-15:

But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.

Can you now see why Jesus was named in God's will to receive the promise of salvation? As the testator of the will, He had to die to activate the bequest. But because He is also a beneficiary of that will, after He had paid in full for our sins, He received the promise of salvation also. Instead of remaining in hell, He was resurrected and inherited the new heaven and the new earth.

Later on in verse 29, we will see that because the Lord Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham, all those who are in Christ are joint-heirs according to the promise.

Zacharias' Song

Actually, even before Christ became flesh, the New Testament reveals that He is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

In Luke 1, we read about the birth of John the Baptist. When he was eight days old, he was circumcised and was given the name John. At that point, his father Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, sang a song of praise. And this is what he sang in the first half of that song:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham. (vv. 68-73)

Knowing that his son would introduce Christ to the people, he praised God for performing "the oath which he sware to our father Abraham".

3:17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

This verse ties back to verse 15, which argues that the terms of even a human will cannot be altered once it has been validated. Paul now points out that the promise to Abraham of salvation by grace, which was subsequently confirmed by God, surely cannot be nullified by the law, which was given some 430 years afterwards. The 430 years here refers to the period Israel spent in bondage to Egypt. This is revealed in Exodus 12:40. And the law, of course, was given shortly after Moses had led the people out of Egypt.

Evidently, then, God must have reiterated His promise of salvation just before the children of Israel went into Egypt. Indeed, He did. In Genesis 45, Joseph had finally made himself known to his brothers and told them to bring their father Jacob, renamed Israel, to Egypt. We read in verse 28, "And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." Then, Genesis 46:2-4 records,

And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again.

This is the confirmation to which this Galatians verse refers. Before that, as we noted earlier, God had told Jacob in Genesis 28:13-14:

And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Unchangeable Promise

Hebrews 6 also emphasizes that the promise God gave Abraham cannot be changed. We read in verses 17 and 18:

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

One might wonder why, then, was it necessary for God to repeat that promise to Isaac and Jacob? For one thing, God might be anticipating the argument here that a will, one "confirmed", cannot be nullified. More importantly, God made it clear through those repeated promises that the promised seed of Abraham, the Messiah who would bring salvation to all nations, would come through the line of Isaac and Jacob, not those of Ishmael or Esau. The latter are the progenitors of the Arab nations.

3:18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

To further set apart the law from the covenant of grace, God points out in this verse that if one should receive an inheritance as a result of our having kept the law, then it would indicate that the inheritance had nothing at all to do with a covenant or a will. It would no longer be of promise. But God did promise to give the land, that is, the new heaven and new earth, to Abraham and his seed. And He made that promise without any strings attached. Inheriting that land, therefore, cannot possibly have anything to do with keeping the law.

Remember, the promise in question has to do with the will in which God had named all those whom He had chosen to save. That will was made even before the foundation of the earth before anyone had done any good or bad works. And since Christ was in principle the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the

earth, the instructions of the will must be carried out no matter what.

3:19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Since God's promise of salvation by grace cannot be nullified by the law, it's only natural for one to ask, "Why, then, did God give us the law? What purpose does it serve?" The apostle explains here that the law was added because of transgressions. But in I John 3:4, God defines that sin is the transgression of the law. So, how could there be any transgression of the law before the law was even given? Answer: while the law was given in written form only beginning with Moses, it had been in existence right from the very beginning.

Abel and Cain knew, for instance, that they had to offer sacrifices. And the first thing Noah did after the flood was to build an altar unto the Lord and offer burnt offerings thereon. Evidently, God had told them what they should or should not do and that their sins, their failures to follow all His commands, had to be atoned for.

The law was given even to those who had no contact with God. Romans 2:14-15 tells us: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts." The Word of God was written in their hearts. That's why God was able to say that the people of Noah's day were desperately wicked.

Official Indictment

But to indict mankind officially for transgressing the law, it was necessary for God to add the written law. Once that's in place, it becomes clear that every human is a sinner, since no one can possibly keep the law perfectly. Besides showing mankind of their sinfulness, the law, notably the ceremonial law, also pointed to the atonement that the Messiah would bring. With the use of figures, it spelled out to the Old Testament believers the nature of the salvation that God had provided. Hence, David knew enough to write, for example, in Psalm 51:1, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

This verse further declares that the law was added "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made". Here, God makes it clear that the primary beneficiary of the promise is Christ, the Seed. The law was added until He came with the new covenant.

Angels?

The second half of this verse – which reads, "and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" – is difficult to understand as it stands. We find the same language in Acts 7:53. There, Stephen was accusing the Jews for having killed the prophets, and he described them as those "who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it". Similarly, Hebrews 2:2-3 reads, "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation."

What did angels have to do with the giving of the law?

Messengers

Actually, the word "angels" in these passages is translated from the Greek *aggelos*, which can also be translated "messengers". Speaking of John the Baptist, for instance, Jesus says in Matthew 11:10, "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger (*aggelos*) before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."

If we substitute the word "messengers" in these verses for angels, they will make much better sense. Also, the hand is often used in the Bible as a figure to represent one's will. To come under the hand of someone is to submit to the will or rule of that person. And the word "ordained" is from the Greek word *diatasso*, which means administered.

Thus, this part of Galatians 3:19 is saying that the law was administered to mankind through messengers by the will of a mediator. Who were the messengers? Moses and all the other prophets.

Mediator

And who is the mediator? The Lord Jesus Christ. We read in I Timothy 2:5-6:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

That the law was given according to the will of Christ is significant. It underscores the superior position of the grace of God over the law. God's original promise to offer salvation by grace is of top priority. The written Word must conform to the terms of the covenant. That's why it cannot in any way change or modify the Gospel.

3:20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

Now, there is no need for a mediator when only one person or party is involved; a mediator is someone who helps to reconcile two opposing persons or parties to each other. The Lord Jesus Christ is our mediator because He reconciles us to God. He answered to the demands of the law on our behalf by dying for our sins so that we can become right with God. Otherwise, we will all be condemned to spend eternity in hell.

"But," in this case, "God is one." Whereas a mediator is normally just a third party that helps to bring two parties together, Christ Himself is intimately involved in the whole salvation plan. He wrote the covenant. He is the Testator of God's will. He is the one who dies to activate the promise. And He is the prime beneficiary of that covenant, the principal Heir to receive the inheritance. He is all one.

In short, the whole plan of salvation has come from the grace of God. He developed it, He executed it and He will finish it. No one else can claim one bit of credit.

Galatians 3:21-25

3:21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

Is the law then against the promises of God? Is the law a competitor of the covenant? Is observing the law, as opposed to the Gospel, another way for one to attain salvation? As pointed out earlier, there are those who suggest that God has different dispensations for saving people in different periods of time. Under the dispensation that was in effect between the time the law was given and the start of the church age, keeping the law did indeed bring salvation to the Jews. (They also teach that after the church age is over, God will have yet another dispensation, under which Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years and everyone in national Israel will be saved.)

But this verse says, "God forbid." That's not possible! Why? "For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." In other words, if God had given the law which could bring eternal life to those who could keep it perfectly, then salvation would surely have come by the law.

Great Sacrifice

You see, what Christ went through to bring us salvation was most horrendous. He emptied Himself of His heavenly glory, came to earth as a suffering servant, and then endured the wrath of God, which is equivalent to spending an eternity in hell for each person He saved.

Remember that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane? Luke 22:44 says, "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." What was He praying for? "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

While He reaffirmed that God's will be done, the horror of the damnation was so great that Christ pleaded if God might spare Him from that suffering. But there was no other way. And this is what the Bible is saying here. If anyone could become saved by keeping the law, God would have used it as the means for people to attain righteousness.

3:22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

The reason there's no alternative is that the scripture hath concluded all under sin. The word "concluded" means to shut or close up together. And the scripture, of course, is the law of God. In other words, the law has shut all of us up together under sin.

Incidentally, the law of God is not restricted to the Mosaic law that was given to the nation of Israel. The whole Bible is the law of God and it is given to all mankind. Hence, we are all lawbreakers; we are all locked up together in sin. That is why Christ had to suffer God's wrath so "that the promise by faith of Jesus

Christ might be given to them that believe".

Is God saying here that we must first believe and then the promise is given to us? No. Remember, to believe means to have faith. And where did that belief come from? From the faith of Jesus Christ.

3:23-24 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

God now begins to tell us in more specific terms the many functions of the law. You know, some people think that because we are saved by grace, our salvation has no relationship to the law, the Word of God. They are quite mistaken. We read in Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." God works through His written Word to save us; He applies the Gospel to our heart.

Back in verse 19, it was revealed that the law was added until Christ came. This verse amplifies that truth. Before the Lord Jesus came, God introduced the law to keep every person under its demands. Here, the law is spoken of as our schoolmaster. A schoolmaster rules over his students. He has the authority to punish or discipline them when they disobey him. But a schoolmaster also teaches his students truths, helping them to gain wisdom and guiding them onto the right path.

Progression

So it is with the law of God. Before faith came, we were kept under its authority. As our schoolmaster, it demands that we are punished with eternal damnation for our sins. But it also teaches us that we can escape that punishment by coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. It brings us unto Christ; it takes us to the point of believing in Christ. The phrases "shut up unto the faith" and "bring us unto Christ" in this passage indicate that there is a progression in our salvation process.

The Bible starts out by showing us that we are sinners who are subject to eternal damnation and who are in need of a Savior. It then tells us that Christ is the Savior of all those who believe in Him. Then, in His perfect timing, God opens our spiritual ears, applies the Gospel to our heart, and gives us the faith to believe in Christ.

3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

But after we have received the faith of Christ to believe in Him, we are no longer under the authority of this schoolmaster. We find this truth echoed in Romans 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace"; and in Romans 7:6, "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

In other words, once the law has brought us to the Lord Jesus Christ, the penalty of sin no longer threatens us; the law no longer stands as a sword over our heads ready to bring us to eternal damnation. We have emerged from the control of the schoolmaster; we have graduated, so to speak.

Galatians 3:26-29

3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Once God has given us the faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we become children of God. Again, our adoption by God has nothing to do with what we have done. Rather, it was God's good pleasure to stipulate in His will that we would be adopted. Thus, we read in Ephesians 1:5, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." But how do we know that we have become a child of God? Romans 8;15-16 answers:

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

We know by the fact that we have received the indwelling Holy Spirit and somehow, He testifies to our spirit through His Word that we have been adopted by God. And by the Holy Spirit, we cry to God, "Abba, Father" – "Abba" being the intimate Aramaic word for Father.

3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Once we are saved, we become the sons of God also because we have been baptized into Christ, which in turn qualifies us to put on Christ. Now, what does "baptized into Christ" and "put on Christ" mean?

First, let's find out from the Bible itself the meaning of the verb "to baptize", because many wrong doctrines and practices have resulted from the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of it. Most people are taught, for instance, that to baptize means to immerse in water. But that is not the meaning God has in

view when He uses that word.

In most cases in the Bible, the word "baptized" is simply translated from the Greek word *baptizo*; and its noun "baptism", from the Greek word *baptismos*. Unfortunately, these transliterations do not help us at all in understanding the meanings of the words. But there are a few instances where the contexts do not allow a direct transliteration into either baptize or baptism. And comparing scripture with scripture, we can just let those verses define the meaning for us.

God's Own Definition

The same Greek verb and noun, for example, are found in Mark 7:4:

And when they come from the market, except they wash (*baptizo*), they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing (*baptismos*) of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables.

Obviously, they weren't immersing tables in water just before they ate; they washed them. Similarly, we read in verse 8, where Jesus accuses the Pharisees in the same context: "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing (*baptismos*) of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do."

We also read in Luke 11:38, "And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed (*baptizo*) before dinner." It would not make any sense at all for the Pharisee to marvel that Christ had not first immersed before dinner, would it? To baptize simply means to wash.

Still another place where God uses the word *baptismos* is in Hebrews 9:10. We read there, "Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of the reformation." The "divers washings" here refers to the water ablutions of hands and feet and various temple objects.

So, to be "baptized into Christ" means to be washed into Christ. We are washed by the blood of Christ, as a result of which we become joined into Christ. Actually, the Bible repeatedly associates washing with salvation. Titus 3:5, for instance, speaks of "the washing of regeneration". And we read in Ephesians 5:26 that Jesus gave Himself for the church "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

Putting On Christ

Next, what does the phrase "put on Christ" mean? It means to put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. You see, before we are saved, we are spiritually naked before the Lord; all our sins are exposed to His all-seeing eyes. That's why Adam and Eve were ashamed of their naked bodies after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. In Ezekiel 23:28-29, God also relates Judah's apostasy to nakedness:

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy mind is alienated: And they shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare: and the nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.

But when one is saved, his sins are covered by the blood of Christ. Isaiah 61:10 says,

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels.

3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

In this world, there is prejudice everywhere. People are being discriminated because of their race, sex, social standing and whatever. But God is no respecter of persons. In Christ, all believers stand on the same ground; we are all condemned sinners saved entirely by the grace of God.

This beautiful truth, however, has often been distorted. There are those who claim that because there is neither male nor female in Christ, women, as well as men, can be preachers, elders and deacons of a church, and they can teach men in a Sunday school. Such an interpretation of this verse is contrary to the Word of God.

Elsewhere in the Bible, God has carefully set up lines of authority for the church, the family and society. These lines have never been rescinded. Thus, even after they have become saved, women are still

forbidden to teach or have authority over men in the church; children must still obey and honor their parents, wives should still submit to their husbands, and slaves must still obey their masters. The equality spoken of in this verse refers to the eligibility of **salvation**. God is promising that all those who believe in Christ – rich or poor, young or old, black or white – will not perish, but have everlasting life.

3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

As long as we are in Christ, we are the seed of Abraham and we are the heirs named in God's will to receive the inheritance. That's because Christ is the primary beneficiary. Romans 8:17 elaborates on this point, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

This inheritance comes to us in two steps. As we've learned from verse 26, we become sons of God as soon as we are saved. We can never lose that inheritance. But much as we try to live a life that is pleasing to our Father, we fail again and again because we still have a sin-cursed body. Hence, there is a second step in our inheritance as joint-heirs. We read in Romans 8:23,

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

The absolute completion of our salvation will occur when Christ comes again. When He does, we will receive our resurrected bodies and inherit the new heaven and the new earth forevermore. That is why we eagerly long for His return.

Chapter 4 – Adoption by Grace

Overview of Chapter 4

Having shown that those who are in Christ are the true heirs according to God's promise, Paul now explains that to receive their inheritance, these heirs must first be adopted as sons of God at the "fulness of time". Paul reminds the Galatians of the loving relationship they had with him when he first came with the Gospel of grace, and expresses his concern that, in light of their recent return to the law, they might not have become saved after all.

Finally, Paul uses Ishmael and Isaac, the two sons of Abraham, as an analogy to illustrate the difference between those who are enslaved to the law and those who have been freed from that bondage by the grace of God.

Galatians 4:1-5

4:1-2 Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

While everyone that God has chosen to save is potentially an heir to receive an inheritance, his standing before God is no different from that of an unsaved person until he has actually become saved. This is analogous to a child who has been named to receive an inheritance. Until he is actually given authority over his estate, he must still follow the instructions of his tutors, guardians and trustees. To the extent that he is subject to the commands of others, he is really no different from a servant.

4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

The word "elements" here is from the Greek *stoicheion*, which is also used in Colossians 2:20: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances." There, it is translated "rudiments". From the context of that verse, we can see that *stoicheion* has to do with the ordinances that God has given mankind. Thus, the phrase "elements of the world" refers to the law of God. All unsaved people are in bondage under the law of God.

This verse is thus saying that until we become saved, we are like that child in the analogy, remaining in bondage under the law of God.

4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

The analogy of a child applies to God's elect in another sense. While they were all named in God's will to receive the inheritance, they had remained in bondage to the demands of the law until God the Father

sent forth His Son to earth at the fullness of time. Jesus Himself talked about His having come at the fullness of time when He started His earthly ministry. Right after He had been baptized, He went into Galilee and began preaching the good news of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15)

Made of a Woman

The fact that Christ was born of a woman is important on two counts. First, it shows that Christ was fulfilling a prophecy God had made right after man's fall in the Garden of Eden. Back in Genesis 3, after Satan had deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit, God cursed him, saying in verse 15: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This verse makes it clear that Christ is that seed of the woman. At the cross, Satan bruised Christ's heel in having Him crucified, but Jesus bruised the serpent's head. He destroyed the devil.

Secondly, it underscores that Jesus was a real man. He did not just come in the form of a man, as He had when He appeared to the Old Testament patriarchs, for example. It was man who had sinned against God and it is man who is under the wrath of God. To atone for the sin of those whom He had come to save, Jesus Himself must be a man Himself. These two truths about Christ having been made of a woman are also implicit in Hebrews 2:14:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Under the Law

As the one who wrote and gave the law, God is above the law. But Christ came to save mankind, who are under the law. To fulfill God's justice, He had to be born under the law. That's why Jesus says in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Jesus fulfilled the law by living a perfectly righteous life. Though He was tempted just as we are, He never committed a sin. We read in Hebrews 4:15, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Christ was made under the law also in the sense that He came under the curse of the law. Jesus became sin for us. Second Corinthians 5:21 says,

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Why did God send forth His Son at the fullness of time? To redeem or buy the elect from under the law. There are many who teach that Christ came to die for every human being, but that only those who accept Him are redeemed. Christ came to redeem only those whom God had chosen to save.

When Joseph first discovered that Mary was with child, remember, he was going to put her away quietly. But an angel came and told him in Matthew 1:20-21,

Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

He came to save **His** people, not all people. Of these people of His, Jesus said in John 6:39:

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

Christ came to redeem those God had predestined to save by dying on the cross. Does this mean that no one could be saved before the cross? No, because theoretically, Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth. It's just that at the appointed time, He had to be actually crucified.

Adoption

By redeeming us from under the law, Christ paved the way for our adoption by God as sons. God speaks of this adoption as a two-step process in Romans 8. In verses 15 and 16, He says,

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children

of God.

That is the first step; it takes place at the moment we are saved. We become sons of God. But while we have a born-again spirit, we still have a sin-cursed body. Thus, we read in verse 23,

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

The second step, the redemption of our body on the last day, completes the adoption process. We will then be the sons of God in the fullest sense of the word. As I John 3:2 puts it, "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." And we will be with Him forevermore.

Galatians 4:6-10

4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Once God has taken the first step to adopt us as sons, He will surely take the second. We read in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"; and in Ephesians 1:13-14: "ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Sealing with the Holy Spirit is what this verse is also saying. Having adopted us as sons, God has sent the Spirit of Christ into our hearts. This miracle is difficult for our finite minds to comprehend. But we can see it in the changed lives of believers as they increasingly display the fruit of the Spirit.

It says here that the Spirit of Christ cries "Abba, Father" as He comes into our hearts. But in Romans 8:15, we have just read that we are the ones who cry "Abba, Father" as we receive the Spirit of adoption. Taken together, these two statements point to the close union that exists between our spirit and the Spirit of Christ.

Great Intimacy

"Abba" is an Aramaic word for father. Significantly, the only other place in the Bible where "Abba, Father" appears is Mark 14. On the eve of His crucifixion, the Lord was deeply troubled in the garden of Gethsemane. He prayed in verse 36, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt." That the Lord addressed His Father "Abba, Father" in His moment of deep distress reveals that "Abba, Father" is an expression of the greatest intimacy between father and son. It is an expression of total dependence on and total obedience to the Father.

This, then, is the relationship we have with God. The Holy Spirit that indwells us helps us realize deep in our hearts that we are totally dependent on Him, and that we are to be totally obedient to Him.

4:7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The word "servant" here is translated from the Greek word *doulos*, which means "slave" or "bond servant". It is the same word Paul, James, Peter and Jude used in the letters they wrote when they introduced themselves as "the servants of Jesus Christ". In saying that we are no more a servant, however, this verse is not contradicting those statements in the epistles. Here, God is saying that once we have been adopted as a son of God, we are no longer a slave under the demands of the law. But out of sheer gratitude, we automatically want to devote our lives to serve Christ; we joyfully consider ourselves to be His slaves.

To drive home the point that we believers are indeed the ones whom God had named in His will to receive the inheritance, this verse points out that if we are sons of God, then we are heirs of God through Christ. We are heirs through Christ because, as we learned from Chapter three, Christ is the prime beneficiary of that will; He is the promised Seed of Abraham.

4:8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

Paul now begins to express his concerns as to whether the Galatians have really become saved. He starts by reminding them that when he brought the Gospel to them, they did not know God at all; instead, they were serving those who by nature are not gods. This is true of all unbelievers. They "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator", according to Romans 1:25. Man should be able to see in the creation that there is a God, but he rejects God and makes his own god out of created things.

4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

Notice the way Paul phrases this question as he refers to those who had become saved. Although

"knowing God" is a term frequently used in the Bible to denote a personal relationship with God, Paul takes pain to point out that to be precise, it is God who knows us. God is the one Who seeks us out from among the lost and saves us.

The phrase "weak and beggarly elements" ties back to the "elements of the world" spoken of in verse 3. It contrasts with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" that God's children enjoy, according to Ephesians 1:3. Paul is effectively asking the Galatians if they, after having been blessed with all spiritual blessing, really want to go back under the bondage of the law. The latter is weak and beggarly because it cannot save people; it is spiritually bankrupt.

4:10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

The "elements" that the Galatians are returning to are, in particular, the ceremonial laws. In the Old Testament, God commanded that certain sacrifices be made daily, monthly at the new moon, seasonally and yearly at various feasts. Those sacrifices all pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, who would come as the Lamb of God, the only sacrifice that could atone for our sins.

The trouble with ancient Israel was that they missed the whole point of the sacrifices. They thought they could be righteous before God by performing these rituals and observing the law. In short, they did not see the need of a Savior. Paul now chastises the Galatians for committing the same sin.

Galatians 4:11-15

4:11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Paul has no doubt spent much time and energy witnessing, teaching and discipling them, and he must have prayed much for them as well. Seeing that they have started to go back to the law, therefore, he is afraid that his labor has been in vain; the Galatians may not have become saved after all.

Behind Paul's concern is the fact that those who are truly saved cannot be deceived by false prophets. In John 10, the Lord Jesus, describing Himself as the Good Shepherd, says of His sheep, "And a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (v. 5). Like Paul, every pastor and every Bible teacher should ascertain that the ones they teach truly understand what salvation by grace really means and recognize the danger of following a gospel involving works of any kind.

4:12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have injured me at all.

Paul now urges the Galatians to become a follower of Christ just as he himself is. Is he being conceited here? No, using himself as an example is especially pertinent here because he himself was once a zealous keeper of the law. But after God enabled him to see the truth, he has become the champion of the Gospel of grace.

That's why Paul emphasizes that he is no different from what they are. In another passage in the Bible, he even calls himself the "chief of sinners" because he once persecuted the church vigorously. His point is, in God's sight, everyone stands on the same ground. We are all sinners; we all must come humbly to the foot of the cross of Christ begging for mercy.

The word "injured" here means "hurt" or "wronged". Paul is telling the Galatians that their turning away from the truth has not hurt or wronged him personally; his pride is not the issue. At issue, rather, is their salvation.

4:13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

Paul now reminds the Galatians of the close relationship they shared when he first preached the Gospel to them. At that time, he had an "infirmity of the flesh"; he was not physically well. Somehow, in fact, it was because of that infirmity that he came to preach to them. That Paul had some physical problem is also indicated in II Corinthians 10:10. There, his critics are quoted as having said this of him: "For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

Exactly what his problem was, the Bible has not revealed. Possibly, he was suffering from poor eyesight. In verse 15, as we'll soon see, he says that the Galatians would have given their own eyes to him, had it been possible. And in verse 11 of Chapter 6, he talks about the "large letters" in which he has written this letter. But since the Bible is silent on this infirmity, it does no good for us to speculate.

Thorns in the Flesh

We need not speculate, however, that this infirmity has nothing to do with the "thorn in the flesh" spoken of in II Corinthians 12, although many do teach that the latter refers to his bad eyesight. That thorn in the

flesh could not be a physical illness because Paul describes it in verse 7 as "the messenger of Satan". The fact is, illness is neither a messenger nor of Satan. It is something God gives mankind after man's fall. We read in Exodus 4:11, where God asks Moses rhetorically, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD?"

Moreover, Paul says in verse 10 of II Corinthians 12, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." The emphasis is on the sufferings he endures for Christ's sake, the persecution he receives because of his service for the Lord. By comparing scripture with scripture, we can find the meaning of that thorn in the flesh in Numbers 33. There, God commanded ancient Israel to drive out all the Canaanites from the promised land. He warned,

But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell (v. 55).

Notice that the wicked people who would harass Israel are described by God as thorns in their sides. So, by the thorn in the flesh, Paul is referring to someone who is harassing him because of his efforts to bring forth the Gospel. That person is a messenger of Satan.

4:14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

The word "temptation" here is from the Greek *peirasmos*, which means trial. It is the same word we find in the Lord's prayer where it says, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil", and in James 1:2, which reads, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." You see, we beseech the Lord not to give us too many trials. But when we do go through difficult times, we are to rejoice nevertheless, knowing that God uses trials to strengthen our faith and help us mature spiritually.

Here, Paul is talking about the physical problems mentioned in the preceding verse. It was evidently trying even to the Galatians who had attended to him. But in spite of that, they did not despise nor reject him; they did not treat him with contempt or scorn. Instead, they welcomed him as though he was an angel of God, or even as though he was Christ Jesus Himself.

4:15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

Their relationship with Paul was so good and their reception of the Gospel was so enthusiastic that they spoke of that time as a period of blessedness, a period of great joy. They were obviously grateful to Paul for having shown them the way to salvation. Moreover, the Galatians loved Paul so much that had it been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him. In John 15:13, the Lord Jesus says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." While the Galatians didn't go that far, their loving attitude did suggest that they had become saved.

But now, Paul asked, "What has happened to you people? Where is that blessing that you enjoyed so much then?"

Galatians 4:16-20

4:16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

Things have since changed a lot. The Galatians, having started to follow other gospels, no longer like what Paul has to say. So Paul now asks them point blank if he has become their enemy because he is teaching them the truth.

What is the truth? The whole Word of God, of course. It is the sword of the Spirit, a two-edged sword. While it brings salvation to the elect, it cuts at the unsaved. On Judgment Day, it will condemn the unsaved to hell. That's why people of the world generally resent the Gospel. They don't like to be told that they are sinners who are not good enough to go to heaven on their own merit. Hence, Jesus warns in Matthew 10:22, "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

That last point is highly significant; it implies that only the truly saved will stick with the truth to the end. So, if you don't like to hear that you are a sinner headed for hell, or if you sugar-coat the Gospel when you witness to others, you need to ask yourself honestly, "Am I really a child of God?"

In this verse, likewise, Paul is effectively asking the Galatians, "Are you really saved?"

4:17 They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

By "they" here, Paul is referring to the false prophets that have infiltrated into the Galatian churches. And the word "exclude" here means to shut out. The word "affect" is found only three times in the Bible: twice in this verse, and once in the next. The way it is used in these two verses does not help us define its meaning. But the Greek word *zeloo* from which it is translated is translated "covet" in I Corinthians 12:31 and "desire to have" in James 4:2. Applying those translations here helps us better understand this verse.

So, Paul is telling the Galatians, in effect, "They are zealously coveting you; they want you on their side. But they are not courting you with well-meaning. They want to shut you out from the kingdom of God so that you would desire to have fellowship with them and serve their master, the devil."

Indeed, false prophets do often work zealously in their attempt to gain converts for Satan. In Matthew 23:15, Jesus says to the Jewish religious leaders:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves.

And we can see this vividly in our day. The members of one popular cult, for example, typically come to our doors in pairs, patiently and even passionately trying to make us accept their religion. And the people following those gospels that feature signs and wonders and tongues are noted for their zeal and success in spreading their gospel all over the world.

But as this verse warns, loving and sincere though they appear, they are keeping people from becoming saved. And as Jesus says of the Pharisees, they are making the unsuspecting victims doubly the children of hell.

4:18 But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you.

There is nothing wrong in being zealous. In fact, it is good to be zealously desirous of a good thing. And the only good thing is that which is in accord with the Word of God. Remember Jesus told the rich young ruler that "there is none good but one, that is God" (Mark 10:18)?

Evidently, when Paul first spent time with the Galatians, teaching them the Word of God, they were most eager to learn. So now, the apostle tells them they should continue to have that kind of zeal even though he is not with them. Christ demonstrated His zeal for a good thing when He drove the merchants and money changers out from the temple twice. Those clean-ups were a fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 69:9: "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up". They were also a picture showing that Christ came to straighten out the spiritual house of God.

We believers are now the temple of God, and we are to keep the temple clean. As this verse teaches, we should zealously and continuously seek the good thing, the true Gospel from the Word of God. Then, like Paul, we can warn others of false prophets trying to exclude them from salvation.

4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

This is an expression from the heart of a caring pastor who dearly loves his congregation. Compassionately addressing the Galatians as "My little children", Paul tells them that he is suffering for them the kind of acute pain that a woman experiences when she gives birth to a child. And he says that he will keep on having this pain until Christ is formed in them – that is, until the Galatians conform more and more to the image of Christ.

In other words, Paul is aching for their salvation. That's because becoming more and more like Christ is an important evidence of salvation. James 2:20 says, "faith without works is dead." A person who claims to be a Christian but who shows no evidence of turning away from sin is probably not really saved. Nor is anyone who follows a gospel involving works.

Compassionate Savior

A deep compassion for the unsaved was expressed by Jesus Himself. We read in Luke 19:41-42:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

Christ wept over Jerusalem as He made His triumphal entry into that city. He was grieved by Israel's failure, as a nation, to recognize that He was the Messiah. They were blind to the true Gospel.

These are examples for all of us to follow. When we see our unsaved friends and loved ones misled by the wrong gospel so that their salvation is suspect, we, too, should feel such a pain deep down in our

heart that we want to compassionately bring them back onto the right path.

4:20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

Paul so wants to correct the Galatians that he says, in effect, "Oh, how I wish I could be there with you personally. I wish I could straighten you out so I don't have to write to you in such a stern and apprehensive tone. I wish I could be with you in person because I'm afraid you are in deep spiritual trouble."

Remember we learned just a few verses earlier that when Paul first brought the Gospel to the Galatians, they embraced it enthusiastically? The fact that Paul now has doubts about their salvation points to another important truth:

We cannot assume that a person is truly saved just because he responded positively to the Gospel once or even because he was active in the church for a period of time. If he falls away from the obedience that comes from the faith, we have a good reason to doubt his salvation.

Parable of the Sower

This principle is vividly enunciated by Christ in the Parable of the Sower, which is found in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8. Of the four groups of people, the first was obviously unsaved. Jesus says, "these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts" (Mark 4:15).

The second and the third groups, however, both respond to the Gospel positively at first; some "receive it with joy". But they either fall away "when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake" (v. 17) or become unfruitful because of "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things" (v. 19). Only the last group brings forth fruit.

Remember, Jesus said in John 15:2, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." So, only the last group is truly saved. Let me hasten to clarify that this parable is not teaching that a so-called backslider can lose his salvation. Once a person is truly saved, he is eternally saved. What it is teaching is that no matter how much a person appears to be a good Christian, if he falls away and dies in that condition, such a person was never saved to begin with.

On the other hand, the Bible does not teach that believers do not stumble. We still live in a body that has a sinful nature. But a truly saved person, led as he is by the indwelling Holy Spirit, is bound to show an underlying spiritual growth throughout his Christian walk. He becomes more and more like Christ.

Galatians 4:21-26

4:21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

Paul now tackles the Galatians' problem with yet another argument. He asks those who want to go back to observing the law if they are aware of what the law really says. He is going to show them that even in the Old Testament, God was talking about the Gospel of grace.

Ironically, there are many theologians today who believe and teach that salvation by grace is something available only in the New Testament time. But take Romans 1, for instance. It introduces the Gospel in verses 2 and 3 as that "which (God) had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord".

Likewise, Hebrews 4:2 declares, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." The "them" there refers to the Israelites that perished in the wilderness. The same Gospel that is preached to us now was preached to them then. It didn't bring them salvation because they did not hear it with faith.

4:22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

Paul begins his new line of argument by pointing to something that was written in the law, the fact that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, and the other by a freewoman. The account of Abraham having two sons, of course, is recorded in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. This is significant because people often equate the law to the Ten Commandments, which were given some five hundred years after Abraham had had two sons. This reference to Abraham thus makes it clear that when the Bible speaks of the law, it is not talking about the Ten Commandments only.

God actually uses many terms to describe the Word of God. In Hebrews 1, for instance, we read, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days

spoken unto us by his Son" (vv. 1,2). There, the Old Testament, the only written Word of God then available, is identified as that which was spoken by the prophets.

In Luke 24:27, where the resurrected Christ was talking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we read: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

In Revelation 22:7, Jesus says, "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." There, "this book" refers to the entire Bible since the commands that believers are to keep are given throughout the Bible.

4:23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

To better understand Paul's argument, let's review briefly the account of Abraham's two sons. When the Lord first told Abram to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees to go unto a land that He would show him, God promised, "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen 12:2). It implied that Abram would eventually have many offspring. Abram was 75 years old then and his wife Sarai was 65, and they had no children.

After they had gone into the land of Canaan, God repeated that promise, saying,

I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered (13:16).

Human Action

Ten years went by and they still didn't have any children. Sarai, now 75, knowing that she had well passed her child-bearing age, said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her" (16:2). Abram agreed and soon the maid Hagar was with child. Hagar then turned arrogant and began to despise Sarai, who in turn dealt with her harshly – so much so that Hagar had to flee from her. But the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar and told her,

Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude (vv. 9,10).

Thus, God promised Hagar that she, too, would have innumerable offspring. Hagar went back and bore Abram a son, whom they named Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old then.

Son of Promise

Thirteen years later, when Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to him once more and said, "I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." Stressing that point, He changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "the father of many nations". He also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, which means "princess", and said,

And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her (17:16).

To make it clear that Ishmael was not the son of promise, God said to Abram in verse 21, "But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." (The name Isaac means laughter). The following year, when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, Isaac was indeed born. Sarah then said, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me" (21:6).

This, then, is the background to which Paul is referring. Ishmael, the son of the bondmaid, was born after the flesh – that is, he was born in the ordinary human way. On the other hand, Isaac, the son of the freewoman, was born as the result of a promise by God.

4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

While these are historical facts, God now tells us that they are nevertheless an allegory, a symbolic representation of some spiritual truth. This reveals how wisely God has written the Bible. Hidden in most, if not all, of the historical events are deeper spiritual truths that reveal different aspects of salvation. These spiritual truths are meant to be understood only by God's elect. Thus, Paul writes in I Corinthians 2:7-10:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath

revealed them unto us by his Spirit.

Two Covenants

Here, Paul reveals that the two women in that Genesis account actually represent the two covenants of God. To understand why there are two covenants, let's review briefly what we studied back in Chapter 3.

Remember God actually gave Abraham two different promises? In one of them, He promised to give Abraham himself as well as his seed a land for an everlasting possession. We saw that it has to do with salvation. That promise will not be fulfilled in total until the last day, when all believers, including Abraham, receive their glorified bodies and inherit the new earth.

But God also promised to give a plot of land on this earth to Abraham's seed, the nation of Israel. God fulfilled that promise when He let them possess the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. It was while the Israelites were there in the wilderness en route to Canaan that God gave them the law through Moses at Mount Sinai in Arabia.

This Mosaic law, God now explains, is the covenant that is represented by Hagar (Agar in the Greek). And this covenant genders, or begets, children that are in bondage because they are bound to keep the law perfectly. Since that is an impossible task, that covenant effectively bound the children to eternal punishment in hell.

4:25-26 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

The word "answer" in this verse means to correspond. This verse is thus saying that the bondswoman Hagar, which represents the law given at Mount Sinai, corresponds to the earthly city of Jerusalem; she and her children are all in bondage. While it represented the kingdom of God on earth before the cross, this "Jerusalem which now is" is no different than any other earthly city. It will be destroyed by fire on the Last Day.

By way of contrast, the covenant that is pictured by the freewoman corresponds with the Jerusalem above. We read about this Jerusalem, among other places, in Revelation 3:12. Jesus says,

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God.

Also, in Revelation 21:9, an angel said to the apostle John in a vision, "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." Then, verse 10 continues, "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." In short, the Jerusalem above is the eternal kingdom of God into which all true believers enter.

That's why this verse in Galatians concludes that Sarah, who represents the covenant that corresponds to the Kingdom of God, is the mother of all believers. It ties back to what we read earlier from Genesis 17:16, where God said of Sarah, "she shall be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her."

Only One Salvation Plan

Before we leave this subject, let me clarify an important point regarding these covenants. Because the Bible talks here in Galatians 4 of two covenants and in Hebrews 8 of a new covenant replacing an old one, some theologians have concluded that the salvation plan God had for the nation of Israel was different from the Gospel of grace that is now offered to all people. Essentially, they teach that God had given the Israelites a gospel of works. Under the old covenant, they were to become right with God by keeping the Mosaic law. There are indeed many passages in which God promised to bless Israel if they kept all His commands, but also warned that if they became disobedient, they would be cursed.

The trouble is, no Israelite could have been saved under such a gospel, since the Bible declares in Psalm 58:3, for example, that every person is in rebellion against God from his mother's womb, speaking lies as soon as he is born; and in Romans 3 that there is none righteous, no not one.

Same Commands

Actually, in the New Testament, God gives the same commands. For example, Jesus says in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." To be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect is just as impossible for any human to attain as it is to keep the Old Testament law.

The New Testament also warned against disobedience. We read in II Corinthians 5:10,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

In both the Old and the New Testament, God declares that the wages of sin is death.

God reveals elsewhere in the New Testament, however, that despite their imperfection and disobedience, those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ no longer have to appear before the judgment seat because Christ already appeared there on their behalf. Having been found guilty with their sins, He suffered the wrath of God on the cross. But even in the Old Testament days, men like Abraham, Moses and David were also saved by grace through the blood of Christ. None of them kept the law perfectly; they all sinned one time or another. Hence, David was able to sing in Psalm 32:1, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." He knew that his sin was covered by the blood of Christ.

Same Grace

Indeed, when we study the Old Testament carefully, we find that it offers the same Gospel of grace. In Exodus 31:13, for instance, we read,

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.

It is the Lord, you see, who sanctifies people. One does not become holy before God by keeping the law. In the Old Testament, God puts heavy emphasis on the Sabbath day to underscore the fact that we do not do any work whatsoever toward our salvation; we rest on the finished work of Christ.

In Deuteronomy 4, God told the Israelites to carefully keep all of His commands. But even in that context, we find this statement of grace in verse 29: "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." That is the same language as "Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened" that we find in the New Testament.

Other promises of salvation by grace are sprinkled all over the Old Testament. In fact, it was to let the Israelites know that they could only be saved if their sins were atoned for by the shedding of blood that the law demanded animal sacrifices. The shedding of blood focused, of course, on the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Corrupted by Israel

The trouble is, Israel took the Old Testament covenant of grace and changed it into a covenant of works. On this point, God says in Hebrews 8:7-8:

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

You see, the first covenant was faulty because God found fault with them, them being the people of the nation of Israel. The covenant itself was perfect, but "they (the Israelites) continued not in my covenant". They corrupted it by misapplying it. Instead of waiting for the promised Messiah to come, they tried to earn their salvation by their own efforts.

That was exactly what Abram and Hagar did, wasn't it? Instead of waiting for God to let Sarah give birth to the promised son, they tried to do it on their own. Ishmael was thus the result of man's attempt to realize the promise of God. That's why the Bible now equates Hagar with the old covenant.

Galatians 4:27-31

4:27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

Besides the allegory given by Sarah and Hagar, Paul now shows that the Gospel of grace was also long prophesied in the Scripture. To prove his point, he quotes here verse 1 of Isaiah 54,

Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith

the LORD.

This verse in Isaiah alludes, of course, to Sarah in the first instance. Before she gave birth to Isaac, she had been barren; she was way past her child-bearing age. But having become the mother of all believers, she has far more children than a typical married woman.

But why does it imply that Sarah did not have a husband? Because the moment Hagar started carrying the child of Abraham in her womb, she was more of a wife to Abraham than Sarah. In a sense, therefore, when Sarah asked Abraham to go into Hagar, she had forfeited her husband to Hagar.

Another Picture

But in Isaiah 54, God is also alluding to another barren woman who has no husband. This woman is a picture of national Israel. That nation has been barren because, spiritually, it has failed to produce fruit; it has persisted in unbelief. Just as Christ is the husband of the church (Eph 5:32), God was for a period the spiritual husband of Israel. But He subsequently divorced her. In Jeremiah 3:8, God said,

And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

There, God declared that although He had divorced the northern kingdom of Israel because of her spiritual adultery, the southern kingdom of Judah was not afraid, but continued to commit the same sin of playing the harlot; so, He was going to divorce her also. As a result, the entire nation of Israel became a woman without a husband.

But Isaiah 54:1 promised that out of the barren nation of Israel will break forth the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And of course, all those who are in Christ are the children of God and the seed of Abraham. They are so numerous that they become, as Revelation 7:9 puts it, "a great multitude, which no man could number".

4:28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

God declares here that every believer is a child of promise as Isaac was. That's because, like Isaac, we become children of God not as a result of any action that we have taken. This fact is amplified in John 1:12-13:

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Note that verse 13 makes it clear that we are born not of the will of man, but of God. Contrary to a doctrine that is widely taught nowadays, we don't become saved by making a decision to receive Christ. We have received Christ because God, having named us in his will, has given us the faith to trust Him.

4:29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

This verse refers to an incident recorded in Genesis 21 that also involved Isaac and Ishmael. We read in verses 8 and 9:

And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

When Isaac was weaned, his father had a feast to celebrate the event. But his half-brother Ishmael started to mock him, that is, to make fun of him.

Significantly, this verse uses the word "persecuted" to describe what Ishmael did to Isaac. God is thus explaining through Paul that the historical event of Genesis 21 is a picture of the spiritual persecution that comes to all true believers. Paul underscores this point by saying, "even so it is now." Indeed, throughout the centuries, Christians have been persecuted by unbelievers to varying degrees. The more faithful we are in teaching and obeying the Word of God, the more we are ridiculed and persecuted.

Notice that Ishmael was of the family of Abraham; he was a half-brother of Isaac. It's not surprising, therefore, that some of the most grievous persecutions directed at faithful Christians have come from people within the corporate church. Typically, those who preach works or grace-plus-works gospels tend to be the most vigorous persecutors.

4:30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

After Sarah saw that her son was mocked by Ishmael, we read in Genesis 21:10-11:

She said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

That request by Sarah was grievous in Abraham's sight. He, like any good father, loved Ishmael. This teaches us that every parent should love his children, regardless of how rebellious or obstinate they may be. Sometimes, we need to show special care for the rebellious child because we realize that he has special needs. But verse 12 continues:

And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

Decreed Separation

God tells Abraham to grant Sarah's request and send Hagar and Ishmael away because it is through the seed from the line of Isaac that God will call those whom He has promised to bring into the kingdom of God. To comfort Abraham, God promised to bless Ishmael also, saying in verse 13, "And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed." That promise has since been fulfilled. Ishmael and Esau, a grandson of Abraham, were the progenitors of the Arab nations.

But God had another reason for telling Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. He was guiding history so that it conveys the important truth that is now revealed in this Galatians verse: "for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Here, God emphasizes once again that those who try to obtain God's promise through their own efforts, as typified by Hagar and Ishmael, shall not become heirs along with the children of promise. They are not eligible to receive the inheritance; they will be cast out.

4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

You see, all those who had been named by God before the foundations of the earth to receive the inheritance will be given the faith to believe in Christ. Like Isaac, we are children of promise.

We are not children of the bondwoman; we were not born into bondage as Ishmael was. Saved by the grace of God, we are free from the law, free from sin, and free from the penalty of having transgressed God's law. We have been liberated by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5 – The Christian Liberty

Overview of Chapter 5

Having concluded in Chapter 4 that believers, like Isaac, are liberated children of promise, Paul now warns the Galatians that if they go back to observing the law, they would in effect be putting themselves back under the yoke of slavery, and Christ would then be of no value to them. The apostle then tells the Galatians that the people who are trying to mislead them are false teachers who themselves will be judged by God.

Finally, Paul explains that believers, having been called to liberty, are free to resist their sinful nature. As they follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and put to death the passions and lusts of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit should and will be seen in their lives.

Galatians 5:1-5

5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

What liberty did Christ bring us when He made us free? Answer: The liberty of not having to pay the penalty of our sin, not having to keep the law to become saved, and not remaining enslaved to sin and Satan.

Once we have become saved by the grace of God, we should stand fast in that liberty. That is, we should stick firmly to the Gospel of grace. Pursuing any doctrine that suggests in any way that our own works

somehow contribute to our salvation will muddy the water. The question will then arise as to whether or not we have truly become saved.

Erroneous Teaching

I've heard preachers telling their congregations that they had better keep the commandments, because they will otherwise have to stand for judgment and give an account of what they have done. Some pastors go so far as to say, "Yes, you have been saved; but you are liable to lose your salvation if you do not live a holy life."

Whether they realize it or not, they are bringing their congregations back under the yoke of bondage. That's because such teaching suggests that by my holy life, I am guaranteeing my salvation. If that were the case, my salvation would then be based upon my work plus the grace of God, rather than an altogether free gift from God.

These preachers do not understand that once we are saved, we are a new creature in Christ. Having a resurrected soul, we naturally want to keep the law of God. We want to do so not to merit something towards our salvation, but to demonstrate our love for our Redeemer. We are the happiest when we are doing the will of God. No, let's not again be entangled with a yoke of bondage. Otherwise, our salvation would be suspect.

5:2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

In this verse, Paul zeroes in on circumcision, a seemingly incidental part of the law that the Judaizers are telling the Galatians to observe as an insurance to guarantee salvation. The Judaizers no doubt think that their teaching is solidly scriptural, because Genesis 17:14 does declare: "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."

What the Judaizers have failed to do is to read the Bible in the light of what the rest of the Bible teaches. True, when Paul wrote this letter, the Old Testament was the only written Word of God available. The Judaizers, therefore, did not have the added truths and insights that God has revealed in the New Testament.

Heart Condition

But even in the Old Testament, God made it clear that He was mainly concerned with the circumcision of the heart, and that the physical circumcision that He had commanded the Jews to undergo was just an outward sign of what was supposed to happen within their hearts. Thus, God says in Deuteronomy 10:16, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked." He then explains in Deuteronomy 30:6 how that is to be accomplished:

And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

You see, it is God who circumcises our heart so that we can love God with our heart and soul. Unless He does so, we remain unsaved and are subject to eternal damnation. That is what God really means when He says in Genesis 17:14 that those who are not circumcised will be cut off from their people.

As I noted earlier in this series of studies, many churches today teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation; others insist that to become saved, we must invite a waiting Christ to come into our heart. Like those of the Judaizers, such teachings are entangled with a yoke of bondage. They render valueless the finished work of Christ.

5:3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

The word "testify" means to solemnly bear witness for the record. Paul uses that word here to underscore the importance of what he is saying. To wit, if anyone becomes circumcised, he is obligated to observe the whole law, which would only lead to damnation. A similar warning is found in James 2:10,11:

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

The fact is, no human can possibly keep the whole law perfectly.

5:4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

As we have learned before, to be justified means to be made just before God, to be able to stand before

the judgment throne of God and be found sinless. As believers, we are justified by the grace of God. But if we follow a grace-plus-works gospel, we effectively are trying to become justified by keeping the law. When we do that, Christ's death on the cross will have no effect on us. As God says here, ye are fallen from grace.

This statement, "ye are fallen from grace", has been taken by some to mean that a believer can lose his salvation. If we isolate this verse from the rest of the Bible, we can indeed get the impression that whoever has fallen from grace was previously saved because he was previously under the grace of God.

The Bible makes it very clear elsewhere, however, that once a person is saved, he is always saved. Among the passages testifying to this supreme truth is Romans 8:38-39:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What, then, does "fallen from grace" mean? It means that a person, who has come under the hearing of the Gospel of grace, has gone back to observing the law in an effort to earn his salvation. As a result, he has fallen from the path of grace that leads to salvation. Such a person was never saved to begin with. And unless he turns from that wrong path and comes back onto the path of grace, He will not be saved.

5:5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

The word "wait" in this verse appears only a few times in the New Testament. In every case, it has to do with waiting for the last day, when Christ returns. We read in Romans 8:19,23-25, for instance:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God . . . And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Since we believers have so far received only our resurrected soul, we are waiting for Christ to return on the last day, when our sin-cursed bodies will be redeemed for glorified ones. And then the creation will know exactly who the sons of God are. Meanwhile, we can wait with patience for something we cannot see because God has opened our spiritual eyes enough for us to know for sure that we have become saved.

Hope of Glory

The "hope of righteousness" that we are waiting for is Christ Himself because God tells us in I Corinthians 1:7 that believers are "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". We also read in Colossians 1:27, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Christ is thus our hope of glory, our hope of righteousness. He is the hope that we are patiently waiting for.

Galatians 5:6-10

5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

This verse reiterates that our salvation is entirely the result of faith that has been given to us by God. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything. No outward act of ours counts for anything. What's important is the fact that we are in Jesus Christ.

This is the first time in this letter that Paul refers to the concept of believers being in Christ. He has just spoken in verse five of the hope of righteousness that comes out of faith. Now, he points to the significance of being in Christ. Let's examine this concept. In Romans 8:1, we read, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

When we are saved, we have entered into God Himself. As the Psalmist puts it, God is our eternal habitation. We do not understand this, we cannot draw a picture of this, but this is the language God uses to show the intimate relationship that exists between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith through Love

The last phrase of this verse should read, "but faith which worketh through love" because the participle "by"

is from the Greek word that means "through". It teaches that the intimate relationship that exists between God and us comes through faith, a faith that worketh through love.

The love that faith works through is, of course, the love of God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him..." To believe is to have faith. Whoever has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ believes on Him, and that faith works through the love of God. It has nothing to do with any works or deeds on our part.

There is another love that faith works through. Within the hearts of us believers, a love for God and for our fellow man has developed. The love for God is particularly expressed in our desire to do His will. And in our love for our fellow man, we want the best for him, which, of course, is eternal life. We demonstrate that love by doing our part in sending forth the Gospel to all nations.

5:7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

The apostle Paul often speaks of the Christian life as a race. I believe the passage that can best help us understand that concept is Hebrews 12:1-2:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Back in Hebrews 11, God has talked about a number of Old Testament men of faith. They are the cloud of witnesses to which this passage is alluding to. They are witnesses of how salvation had given them faith to trust in God. Against that background, God begins Chapter 12 by telling us to get on with the task of running the race. We are not running for personal reward or glory. Nor are we running to attain or retain our salvation. The goal of the race is the Lord Jesus Christ. We run with patience looking unto Jesus. We live out our lives to the glory of God.

To do so, we need to lay aside the sin which so easily besets us. Because we are still living in a body that lusts after sin, all of us still have a tendency to sin, especially when we take our eyes off Christ. As we attain victory over it, we bring glory to God because it is God Who has given us the power and the liberty to become victors.

We also need to lay aside "every weight" that hinders our race. Confronted with trials and problems, we often tend to carry the burden ourselves with our own strength. That hurts our testimony. Instead, we should look unto Jesus and let Him do the battle for us. This is where faith comes in.

The Galatians started their race well. "Ye did run well," Paul writes. But by the rhetorical question, "who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?", he indicates that they have since been hindered. Someone has caused them to disobey the important truth that salvation comes entirely from the grace of God.

5:8 This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

The argument that has persuaded the Galatians into disobeying the truth has not come from God. Similarly, none of those grace-plus-works gospels that are widely being preached is of God in any sense. The Bible does not teach that you must be baptized in water or make a free-will decision to receive Christ in order to become saved. And the Bible never teaches that you have to do good works after you have become saved in order to retain your salvation.

True, many of these other gospels can be backed by a selection of isolated passages in the Bible. But when a doctrine is not in harmony with everything else the Bible teaches, such a "persuasion" cannot be attributed to the Word of God.

5:9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Here, Paul is picking up on a statement the Lord made to the disciples shortly after He had miraculously fed the five thousand and the four thousand. In Matthew 16:6, we read, "Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." The disciples didn't understand what He was referring to, thinking that the Lord was talking about physical bread. Jesus then reminded them of the miraculous feedings and chided them in verse 11, saying,

How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

We then read in verse 12,

Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

God was using leaven to symbolize false doctrines. Here, Paul is warning the Galatians that if those who have hindered their Christian walk are allowed to keep teaching their grace-plus-works gospel, that false gospel would eventually spread throughout the congregation.

5:10 I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

Even though the churches in Galatia have been ravaged by false prophets, there are nevertheless some true believers in those congregations who still trusted their salvation entirely on the grace of God. To encourage these believers, Paul tells them that they would not be snared by the wrong teaching.

How can he be so sure? Because Jesus, as we saw earlier, is the author and finisher of our faith. He says in John 6:39, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Of the elect, He also says in John 10:5, "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."

What a marvelous promise that is! If your loved ones are truly children of God, therefore, you can take comfort in knowing that they will not become snared by any of the false gospels. Likewise, if you are truly a child of God but have followed a grace-plus-works gospel, God will eventually open your eyes to the Gospel of grace. He may even use this study to convict you into repenting and coming back to truth.

Condemnation

The second half of this verse warns, meanwhile, that he who brings a false gospel will himself come under God's judgment. If we ever preach a gospel that would lure people away from the true one, we will have to answer to God for these sins. This underscores the seriousness of being a teacher or a preacher. If we ever think that we have been called to preach or teach the Word of God, we had better ascertain that we have indeed been given the gift to do so. We had better ask God constantly to give us the wisdom to learn the truth so that we don't run the dreadful risk of becoming a blind leader of the blind.

In Matthew 18:6, God warns, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." That is language that talks about hell. So, while a false prophet cannot lure true believers from Christ, he does trouble and offend them. And God warns that he will be severely judged.

Galatians 5:11-15

5:11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

Evidently, the Galatians have been told that Paul himself is still preaching that circumcision is a prerequisite to salvation. Before he was converted, Paul had no doubt insisted that every male be circumcised; he was then a zealous Pharisee. But once he became an apostle of Christ, he has made an about-face turn. He now preaches the Gospel of grace only.

But it's not unusual at all for false teachers to misinform or misrepresent others. So, as you preach the truth, don't be surprised if you find yourself being maligned by others. Here, Paul quells the rumor by asking rhetorically, if he were still teaching circumcision, why then is he still being persecuted by the circumcision advocates; why then hasn't the offense of the cross stopped.

To understand the phrase, "the offense of the cross", let's read Romans 9:31-33:

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Paul explains there that although the law itself is righteous, the Israelites failed to attain salvation by observing it because they did not observe it by faith. They failed to realize that the law was pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, Christ became a stumblingstone and rock of offence to them. The quotation at the end of that Romans passage came from these two verses in Isaiah: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (28:16); and "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel" (8:14).

Putting those two verses together, Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, indicates that even as Christ was the foundation of salvation to all believers, He was the stumblingstone and the rock of

offence to the nation of Israel. We find the same truth in I Corinthians 1:22-24, among other places:

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

This teaches that the offense of the cross is by no means limited to the Jews. The Greeks, which in this context represent all people other than the Jews, consider the Gospel of grace through the blood of Christ foolishness. So, if we are faithful in presenting the true Gospel, we can expect to be persecuted.

5:12 I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

The false prophets, remember, have been telling the Galatians to be circumcised. So Paul says here that instead of just cutting off the foreskin, he wished that the circumcision advocates would go so far as to even cut themselves off.

In the Old Testament, cutting a person off from his people was one of the severest punishments. It was a symbol of total separation from the kingdom of God, a denial of any blessing from God. In short, it pictured eternal damnation in hell. That, in Paul's opinion, is what the false prophets deserved. With this remark, Paul is reiterating what he stated at the beginning of this letter:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (1:8,9)

What should we do, meanwhile, if we find such a person within our congregations? Titus 3:10-11 teaches: "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." Meaning: First, we are to give such a person two warnings. If he does not repent after that, we are to have nothing to do with him. Such a man is self-condemned.

5:13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

After having emphasized and reemphasized that believers are saved by grace, Paul now begins to tell the Galatians how they are to conduct themselves as Christians.

He starts by reminding them once more that believers have been called to liberty, the liberty of not having to keep the law to either attain or retain their salvation. He then admonishes that believers are not to take advantage of this liberty to satisfy the lust of the flesh.

To people of the world, taking advantage of God's grace seems to be the natural thing to do. Not so with believers. Paul explained in Romans 6:1-4:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Believers are dead to sin; they are freed from the bondage of sin. With their old life having been buried with Christ, they now live a new life in Christ. In his resurrected soul, the truly born-again Christian doesn't have the urge to sin; he wants to lead a life that is pleasing to his Savior.

Service through Love

Paul points out that one way to live a life that is pleasing to God is to serve one another through love. We serve one another not because we want to get something in return, but out of our love for God. And we want to follow the example Christ has set for us. Christ Himself says that He came to serve, not to be served, and that greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

The false teachers in the congregation have been telling the Galatians that they must keep the law of Moses. In contrast, Paul tells them that all of the law is fulfilled in one word, or one command, and that command is: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This is the same command that Jesus gave in Luke 10. When a certain lawyer asked Him, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?", He answered in verse 27, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

The lawyer then asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" In reply, Christ told him a parable in which a

good Samaritan helped a man who had been robbed, beaten and left half dead. That wounded man had earlier been bypassed by a priest and a Levite. Of this Samaritan, Jesus said in verses 34 and 35:

And (he) went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Jesus then asked in verse 36,

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?

And we read in verse 37,

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Parable of Salvation

That parable is really a picture of a person being saved. The man was described as being half dead because every unbeliever is spiritually dead, though physically alive. The oil and wine that were applied to him represented the Holy Spirit and the blood of Christ.

So, to love your neighbor as yourself is to show mercy to your unsaved fellow human beings. It means that we sincerely desire salvation for the unsaved. And it involves praying for them, witnessing to them, helping them see Christ in us, and doing whatever else we can to send forth the Gospel to all nations.

5:15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

Loving one another within the family of God is especially important. Jesus says in John 13:34-35:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

This is echoed in I John 4:20-5:1:

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

In other words, once a person becomes a child of God, he naturally has a desire to love his fellow believers. This does not mean that believers always agree on everything. In Acts 15:39, we read of a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabus. But if we truly belong to the family of Christ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, such disagreements would not develop into hatred in any sense.

Conversely, if we "bite and devour one another", we are liable to be consumed by one another. Why? Because such a behavior would suggest that we may not have become saved at all.

Galatians 5:16-21

5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Now Paul begins to discuss why those who have been saved by grace are able to have a changed life and love one another. To walk in the Spirit means to live as the Holy Spirit would have us live. The reason why we are able to do so can be found in Ezekiel 36:25-27:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

As we become saved, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in us. He gives our spirit a new birth and in that spirit, we have everlasting life. And He causes us to "walk in my statutes", that is, to live obediently to the Word of God. A saved person, therefore, naturally desires to do the will of God.

However, our resurrected soul lives in a body that still has the lust of the flesh. In this verse, Paul explains to the Galatians that the problem is solved not by forcing oneself to observe the law, as the false prophets are teaching, but by following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Then, they will succeed in not submitting to the lust of the body. In Romans 8:11-14, the apostle Paul discussed this point in more detail:

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the

dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

In other words, the Holy Spirit that resurrected Christ is now indwelling us. More than that, He will someday give us a new and glorious body. Therefore, we have a natural obligation within our heart to follow His leading, and not to live the way our sinful flesh wants to live.

On the other hand, if we continue to satisfy the lust of the flesh, then it means that we don't have the Spirit in us, which, in turn, means that we are not of Christ. And if we are not saved, we will be condemned to eternal death on Judgment Day.

5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Paul stressed here that the lust of our sinful body and the leading of the Holy Spirit are entirely opposed to each other. Our body, which is headed for the grave, is in total rebellion against God, while our born-again spirit, which is united with the Holy Spirit, wants to be obedient to God's command. So, the Christian life is a battle.

The Apostle Paul wrote about this battle in his own life in Romans 7. Here are some of the key statements:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do . . . For I delight in the law of God after 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 shall deliver me from the body of this death? (vv. 18,19,22-24).

Paul was agonizing over the fact that although his mind wanted to follow the "inward man", that is, the resurrected soul, it had to war against his members, his body of flesh. So painful was the struggle that he cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

This is the kind of warfare that every true believer faces daily, a battle that will not end until he dies, when his soul leaves the sin-cursed body and goes to be with the Lord, or when Christ returns and gives him a resurrected body. Meanwhile, because he does want to be obedient, every time he yields to his sinful nature and commits a sin, he feels miserable in his soul.

5:18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

The good news is that if we are led by the Spirit, we are no longer subject to the penalty of the law. Our sins can no longer condemn us to hell. Why? Romans 8:14 declares, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." And if we are sons of God, then all our sins have been paid for by our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, therefore, is a good way to check yourselves to see if you are truly saved. Ask yourself honestly, "Do I have an earnest desire to study God's Word and to obey His commands? And whenever I do sin, am I deeply remorseful and repentant?" If your answers are "Yes", then you have a good reason to conclude that you are indeed led by the Spirit and are a child of God.

But if you still live a carnal life and love the things and pleasures of the world, if you have little interest in studying God's Word, let alone obeying it, then even though you go to church regularly and engage in many activities there, you are probably still unsaved and are therefore subject to eternal damnation.

5:19-21a Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like:

Speaking through Paul, God now gives us an outline of the sins that can easily be seen. He introduces them as "the works of the flesh". The flesh, in this context, represents the sinful nature of mankind. For the unregenerated, this nature dominates the whole being. The soul, or the spirit essence, just goes along with the flesh.

Out in the world, of course, these sins can be found everywhere we look. But these sins are also found within the church. And that's what we're particularly concerned about. With that in mind, let's take a close look at this list of sins.

Adultery and Fornication

Most people tend to think that adultery has to do with a married person having an affair with someone other than his or her spouse, whereas fornication refers to sexual relationship between unmarried people. The scriptural definitions of these words, however, are somewhat different.

In the Bible, fornication is used to denote any kind of sexual impurity, including adultery. Actually, it's the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get the English word "pornographic", which describes that which is immoral and sexually unclean. While adultery generally means sexual misconduct that defiles a marriage, Jesus includes in the sin of adultery even the thought of sexual lust. He says in Matthew 5:28, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." So, fornication and adultery are really closely linked.

Could adultery ever be a product of love, as some suggest? No way. When a person causes another to commit a grievous sin against God just to satisfy his or her own lust or pleasure, that person can never have any true love for the other.

The Bible frequently uses adultery or fornication to picture spiritual apostasy. God created man to love and have an intimate relationship with Him. But when we sin, when we go our own way, we are committing spiritual adultery, spiritual fornication. We are showing love for some other gods.

We would also be guilty of spiritual adultery if we claim to have a personal relationship with Christ but follow after gospels that are not the true one, or if we change the commands of God to suit our own desires. Sadly, this kind of spiritual adultery is quite prevalent in the churches today.

Uncleanness

Have you heard the statement, "cleanliness is next to godliness"? I like that statement; I think it's fine to be clean. But that is not from the Bible. The "uncleanness" in this verse is not talking about physical dirt. It has to do with spiritual filth.

In Ezekiel 36:25, God said, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be cleansed of all your uncleanness." As we saw earlier in our study of Galatians, the context of that verse is the promise of salvation. We can thus see that the "all your uncleanness" that God promised to cleanse us of is all of our sins.

Lasciviousness

Lasciviousness is a word that expresses the unbridled character of one who is in complete rebellion against God. Another word that might be used in its stead is "licentiousness". A licentious person is one who thinks that he has a license to do whatever he wants; he has a total disregard for rules and controls. God speaks of this sin among the unsaved in Ephesians 4. Starting from verse 18, we read:

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

In other words, their conscience is seared; they're past feeling. So, they are able to go in any direction that they care to without feeling any bit of guilt.

Again, this sin is becoming increasingly common in Christendom. More and more churches today disregard what the Bible teaches. The doctrines they teach, the gospel they bring and the life-style they advocate are all designed after the thinking of man's mind. The rules of the Bible are simply set aside. This ultimately is lasciviousness.

Idolatry

Idolatry, of course, has to do with idol worship. But it goes beyond just bowing down to man-made images and idols. It has to do again with worshipping other gods. In Colossians 3:5, God says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." There, covetousness is described as idolatry.

Do people who profess to be Christians commit this sin? Indeed they do. When they consider making money or climbing up the occupational ladder the big goal of their life, when they make their bank accounts and investments their security, they are coveting. Likewise, when churches are more interested in having a large membership role than in presenting the whole counsel of God, they are engaging in

idolatry.

Witchcraft

The Greek word for "witchcraft" here is *pharmakeia*, from which the English word "pharmaceutical" comes. And the word "pharmaceutical" has to do with drugs and various potions.

The word *pharmakeia* appears in a couple of places in the Bible that are not particularly connected with the church. Take, for example, Revelation 9:21, where God is speaking about the short period just before the end of time. We read: "Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries (*pharmakeia*), nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

As the word "sorceries" could also be translated "enchantment with drugs", it has extra significance today in light of the current widespread use of mind-destroying drugs. This drug use is not only in rebellion against the laws of the land, but is often connected with spiritual activity of one kind or another. It has become a substitute religion for many people. We also read in Revelation 18:23, where God is again talking about Satan's especially strong rule during the final tribulation period:

And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

The first part of that verse indicates that, as far as the corporate church in general is concerned, the true Gospel will no longer be preached. Why? Because Satan and his emissaries will have deceived the people of all nations by their sorceries. This usage of the word *pharmakeia* thus implies that ultimately, anything that is in rebellion against God is of Satan. It is witchcraft.

Hatred

God uses a rather unusual Greek word for hatred here. In such other verses as "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (I John 3:15) or "ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Mark 13:13), God uses the word *misco*. In fact, that's the Greek word used throughout the New Testament for hate. The word "hatred" here, however, is *echthra*. Elsewhere in the Bible, it is always translated "enmity". We read, for example, in Romans 8:6-7,

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity (*echthra*) against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

In Romans 8, God is describing the difference between the true believer and an unsaved person. A believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit; he minds the things of the Spirit. On the other hand, the carnal minded, that is, those who have the mind of the flesh, are at enmity with God.

This enmity can be found right within the church. Those who call themselves Christians but still want the things and pleasures of the flesh are carnally minded. Hence, they are at enmity with God. They are guilty of this sin of hatred, as well as idolatry. They are still unsaved.

Variance

This is a word that is frequently translated "contention" or "strife". It conveys the idea of quarreling. If we look at I Corinthians 1, where that word is also used, we can get some insight as to what God has in mind. We read in verses 11-13:

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

The word "contentions" there is the same word that's translated "variance" here. There is quarreling; there is fighting. There is no focal point on the Lord Jesus Christ. Each one has his own idea about where the lordship really rests. All this has resulted in strife and quarreling.

We can see much of this taking place in the congregations today. They quarrel over this and quarrel over that, making issues of things that should not be issues. True, we have to rightly contend for the faith. But variances over insignificant matters have no place within the church. There is to be a spirit of love and a spirit of unity.

Emulations

Emulations is a word that does not always refer to something sinful or evil. To emulate simply means to imitate or to be like someone. In the Bible, though, this particular word is invariably used in the bad sense. Frequently, it means "envy" or "jealousy". In Acts 13:45, for example, we read:

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

You see, the Jews were filled with envy, or emulation, because they were jealous of the fact that Paul was attracting the multitudes. They no longer had the leadership.

Is there envy in our churches today? Is there jealousy? Indeed, there is. Envy can develop within a congregation when a Sunday school teacher gets a larger class than another, or when someone is given special recognition for his service. There are many, many other instances where some members of a congregation are jealous of others.

Wrath

In this context, wrath has to do with unrighteous anger. We see this very dramatically in Luke 4. There, Jesus is preaching to His own countrymen in Nazareth. They don't like at all what He has to say. And so we read in verse 28, "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath." What did they do? Verse 29: "(They) rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong." You see, unrighteous wrath leads to murder. It is the next step toward murder.

Oh, the unrighteous anger that can develop within a congregation! Have you ever been wrathful against someone so that you cannot bear the sight of him? Or you actually wish that some bad thing will happen to him? Well, that's what wrath is.

Strife

We've already looked at the matter of strife in the context of another word. Here, God is emphasizing in particular the strife that is found within the congregation.

Seditions

This is a word that means division. In Romans 16:17, in fact, it is translated "division". There, we read,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

There is indeed much division within the congregations today, division caused not by contention for that which is holy. There can be a holy strife, certainly. But it is division brought on by those who come with doctrines contrary to what the Bible teaches. They have come with heretical teaching and behavior. And this brings us to the next sin on the list.

Heresies

Heresy is a sin that is decidedly connected with the church. One of the most dominant places where God speaks of this sin is II Peter 2:1-2:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

God warns there that heresy is something we can expect to come from within the congregation. Frequently, it is brought in by those who come with an "I-love-you" attitude. They may look sincere and kind and yet what they teach is not totally based on the Word of God. Oh yes, they may pay lip service to the Bible, but they are not ready to let the Word of God be the whole authority.

Whoever refuses to stand forthright and squarely on the Word of God is guilty of bringing heresies within the congregation. But wonderfully, we can test any doctrine by the Word of God. In the Bible, we do have a trustworthy authority by which we can separate for ourselves heresies from truths.

Envyings

We've already looked at the word envying under the heading of emulation. This is a different word, but has virtually the same meaning. To be sure, it can be used in a good sense. James 4:5, for example, talks about the Holy Spirit envies, or is jealous for, the holiness of God. But ordinarily, it is used in the Bible with a negative connotation.

Murders

Have we finally come to a sin that is not found within the church? Certainly, you don't find people in the congregation who murder others. Don't we? Remember what Jesus says in Matthew 5? We read in verses 21 and 22:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

Yes, we in the congregation can be guilty of this sin. Momentarily, we can even see it in our lives. But this is a work of the flesh; it should not be found in the life of a true believer.

Drunkenness and Revellings

Drunkenness immediately makes us think of those who are drunk with wine and strong drinks. And revellings makes us think of those who live a life of debauchery. And that, of course, is one sense of these words. In Romans 13:13, we read:

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

The word "rioting" there is from the same Greek word as "revellings" in this verse. But in the Bible, these words are used also to picture spiritual conditions. Back in the Old Testament, God faulted the priests in ancient Israel, saying in Isaiah 29:9,

Stay yourselves. and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.

Why were they drunk? They were following other gospels. Instead of the wine of the Holy Spirit, which typifies the blood of Christ, they were drunk with strange wines.

5:21b of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

As I said earlier, out in the world sins abound everywhere. But in Galatians 5, God has been dealing with those who think that they are saved but may not be so, because they have begun to follow a grace-plus-works gospel. It is in such a context that God presents this list of sins.

In our study of this list, therefore, I have purposely avoided pointing the finger at the people out there in the world. Instead, I have found places in the Bible where these sins were named in the church itself. This serves to remind us not only that not everyone in our congregation is saved, but that every child of God is liable to stumble momentarily as he takes his eyes off Christ.

When a true believer sins, he is so convicted by the Holy Spirit that he simply feels miserable inside. But if you could identify with any of these sins on an ongoing basis, then you should ask yourself, "Am I really a child of God?" This is so because God concludes this passage with this dire warning: "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Galatians 5:22-26

5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law.

Now, Paul indicates what should be seen in the life of the believer. Notice that the phrase "the fruit of the Spirit" is distinguished from "the works of the flesh" in the preceding passage. When we work for something we are entitled to payment. And the wages of sin, of course, is death.

But once we have become saved, we no longer work for payment. True, we speak of good works, but they are a normal response of people who have come to know the love of God. No payment is sought or

expected from being obedient. It is the fruit that is seen in the true believer's life. Of this fruit, Jesus says in John 15:5-6:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

We bring forth fruit only when we are united with Christ. His Spirit indwells us, and we are in Him. If the fruit is not seen in our life, we are like a withered branch. To be cast into the fire and burned is biblical language showing that such a person is unsaved and will be eternally condemned.

Now, let's examine these characteristics one by one:

Love

It's not surprising that love heads the list. Remember the closing verse of I Corinthians 13?

Now abideth faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love.

The love that comes forth from the child of God is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. The chief substance of that love is obedience. This is underscored in John 14, where the Lord says: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (v.15) and "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him....He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings"(vv. 23,24). God also declares in I John 2:5:

But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

This is the sense of the love that God wants to convey to us. We love Him by obediently doing His will. And in our obedience, we also love our fellow man.

Joy

Does this mean that a child of God will always have a smile on his face? That there cannot be times of real sadness in the life of a believer? Of course not. How can we smile when our loved ones continue in their unbelief? Our hearts are torn. We're weeping inside. How, then, can a fruit of the Spirit be joy? Let's look at the Lord Jesus Christ for a moment and see what God has in view. We read in Hebrews 12:2:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

What was the joy that was set before the Lord Jesus Christ? It was the joy of obedience. And it was the joy of fulfilling all that God had given Him to do. That was the joy in Christ's life.

Sometimes, even after we have become saved, we think that there is much joy or happiness in some kind of sin. Well, that's the deception of sin. After we have committed that sin, we find great remorse in our soul. By way of contrast, the joy of obedience is so much more long-lasting and satisfying. There are many, many verses in the Bible that speak of joy; we are not going to exhaust them. But let's just look at one more. We read in I Peter 1:8, where God is talking about believers who love the Lord Jesus:

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

What is the reason for this "joy unspeakable" - joy that cannot be expressed in words? Our having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can't see Him with our eyes, but God has given us the faith to believe in Him. Instead of heading for eternal damnation, we know that when Christ returns, we'll inherit the new heaven and the new earth and be with the Lord Jesus forevermore.

Peace

The great desire in the world is to have peace. Oh, we long for the time when the nations will make war no more. But when Jesus says in Matthew 5, "Blessed are the peacemakers", He is not talking about those who have won the Nobel Peace Prize. The peace that God is concerned with is spiritual peace.

You see, before we became saved, we were at enmity with God. Being slaves of Satan, we were at war with God because Satan is the enemy of God. But once God saved us, we have entered into Christ's kingdom. We are at peace with God. Thus we read in Isaiah 40:1-2:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem...that her warfare is accomplished (or ended), that her iniquity is pardoned.

This is an inner peace that only the child of God rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ can experience. And what a wonderful peace it is. There is absolute comfort, an absolute strength and security and serenity in our life. While we fear God in the sense that we revere Him, there is no fear of damnation, no fear of terror, because we are at peace with God. A person who is unsaved does not and cannot have that peace in his heart, because he is not at peace with God.

Longsuffering

In I Peter 3:20, the Bible describes the longsuffering of God. We read: "when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." Going back to Genesis 6, we find that man had become exceedingly wicked. Verse 5 reads:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

That sounds as though God was about to destroy the whole creation. Yet, we read in verse 3, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." God actually gave mankind a grace period of 120 years. This is the longsuffering, or patience, to which II Peter 3 refers. You see, God had committed Himself to save Noah and his family, so He waited patiently for Noah to build the ark. During that period of 120 years, God gave the wicked people an opportunity to repent. They didn't, however, and so they perished in the flood.

In II Peter 3, we read about the longsuffering that God is currently displaying. That chapter first talks about the fact that one day, the whole universe will melt with fervent heat and that God will create new heavens and a new earth for His people. Then we read in verses 14 and 15:

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.

In other words, God's perfect salvation plan is currently being worked out. And He is withholding judgment on the world until all the elect of God have become saved. Meanwhile, He is patiently allowing all of this sin to go on. He is putting up with the rebellion of the unsaved with longsuffering.

Thus, longsuffering is a characteristic that ought to be found in the life of the believer. True, sometimes we find it hard to forgive someone who has sinned against us, especially if that person keeps doing that same thing. But nothing he does to us can compare with the way we have sinned against God.

We can indeed be longsuffering if we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, remembering that we are in the hand of a loving and caring God. Everything that comes into our life is known of God and He has promised in I Corinthians 10:13 that He will not allow us to be tested above what we're able to bear. Frankly, I'm convinced that God sends reverses into our life to teach us to be longsuffering, because this is the fruit of the Spirit. During these trials, it helps to remember Romans 12:19: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Gentleness

The Greek word for gentleness here is *chrestotes*, which is normally translated as "kindness" or "goodness". This is the only place it is translated as "gentleness". An example of how God uses this word in the Bible can be found in Ephesians 2. Speaking about our being saved by grace, God explains in verse 7,

That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Here, God uses the word *chrestotes* in the context of all that He has done for us. Oh yes, our salvation is a function of His love, in that He so loved us as to die for us. It is also a function of His grace, because we do not deserve it at all.

But here, God relates His magnificent salvation to His kindness toward us. It is the goodness, the wonder of God's mercy. It embraces the very finest attitude toward those who are unlovable. In Romans 2:4, God speaks of His kindness toward the unsaved as well. We read,

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the

goodness (*chrestotes*) of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Even though the unsaved keep rebelling against God, He continues to give them all kinds of blessings, such as the warm sunshine, the beautiful flowers, the creature comforts that come in this world, and, above all, the possibility of salvation. God always holds that out as a real possibility to anyone who would believe on Him.

And so, we can see that the goodness or the kindness of God relates to wanting the very best for those around us. If we say that we are a child of God, then the fruit of the Spirit certainly ought to be seen in our life. If we see the lostness of this world and have no desire in our heart to send forth this precious Gospel of salvation, then we must admit that this fruit of the Spirit, this kindness, is not seen in our life.

Goodness

The Greek word for this "goodness" is altogether different from the one above. It really means godliness. Remember the encounter between the rich young ruler and the Lord Jesus? That young ruler did not recognize Jesus as God Himself, but looked upon Jesus simply as a very fine rabbi. So, when he addressed Jesus, "Good Master", the Lord shot right back at him and said, "There is no one good but God." He wanted to show this rich young ruler that his standard of goodness was wrong. In other words, God defines there that goodness is something that is godly; it conveys the idea of that which is completely in harmony with all that God is and all that God declares.

Is that the characteristic of our life? The fruit of the Spirit is goodness. Is it really true that as we live out our lives we find more and more in our life a desire to do everything God's way? Remember, we still have a flesh that lusts after sin. So, we're not going to find perfect goodness within our life. Nevertheless, we should at least become more and more like Christ.

Faith

As in the case with peace, joy and the other Christian virtues, if we want a standard of faith to look at, it has to be the faith of the Lord Jesus. He was perfectly faithful in carrying out the task that God had given Him to do. Because He trusted God implicitly, His whole passion worked out to God's glory. Remember we saw in Galatians 2 that it was Christ's faith that saved us?

Wonderfully, Romans 1:17 tells us, we go out of faith into faith. The faith that is the Lord Jesus Christ finds expression in the faith that is seen in our lives. And that faith, too, is a gift of God. Remember, it's the fruit of the Spirit. We are able to trust God because the Holy Spirit indwells us.

Believing that Jesus is our Savior is by no means the full extent of faith that believers are to have. We can readily confess that Christ has paid for all of our sin, and that by faith we know we have eternal life. But what about our day-to-day living? Do we really believe that He will never leave us nor forsake us, that He will care for us, that He will supply our need as we seek His kingdom and His righteousness?

To strengthen our faith in this area, God often sends testing programs into our life. By forcing us to recognize that apart from Him, we really can do nothing, we begin to learn to rely more and more on His provision and His strength. And oh, how we need it, because every one of us has to admit that, even after we've been a child of God for a long time, our faith is so often so imperfect.

Meekness

Normally, when we think of a meek man, we think of someone who has no courage, who has no get-up-and-go. He walks in the shadow of others. His presence is hardly known. But that is not what God has in view. Speaking of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, Matthew 21:5 says, "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." Note that the Lord Jesus Christ is described as being meek. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus Himself says,

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Was Jesus a weak person? Not at all. He came as the King. But note that He didn't come with all the royal pomp and circumstances; He came as the suffering servant. He mingled with the publicans and sinners, making no outward pretenses of any kind. Even when He went into Jerusalem, as we read in Matthew, He didn't ride on a prancing white horse. He came on a donkey, or rather two donkeys. None of the leaders then recognized Him as the King at all.

So, when we have meekness as the fruit of the Spirit, we live humbly in this world. We don't call attention

to ourselves. We don't try to look important. Why? Because we know that except for what God has done in our life, we wouldn't amount to anything at all.

You know, one of the greatest of men of the Old Testament was Moses. He was given the difficult task of taking Israel out of Egypt and leading them throughout their forty years in the wilderness. Yet, we read in Numbers 12:3, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." He walked humbly, and so do all believers who have the fruit of the Spirit.

Temperance

Temperance is an old English word that means self-control. Perhaps the best passage in the Bible that would help us understand this is I Corinthians 9:24-25:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

Here, God likens a believer to an athlete. An athlete is very hard on himself. He does not indulge in the things that he wants because they would weaken his condition. He practices and practices and practices. While others are eating all kinds of foods, he follows a strict diet. While his friends keep late hours pursuing pleasure, he goes to bed early. Because he wants to win the prize, he does everything under a discipline.

This is the kind of self-control that Christians show as the fruit of the Spirit. Unsaved man by nature is not spiritually disciplined. Haven't you heard people say, "I want what I want" or "I want to do my own thing"? Haven't you met people that have a vicious temper? When things go bad, they just fly off the handle and let the other person have it. That is not the characteristic of a child of God.

To have self-control means having victory over our sin weaknesses. Do you have a bad temper? Is your pride easily hurt? Is it hard for you to resist sexual temptation? Do you just love to gamble or speculate in the market? Well, if you are a child of God, you have the Holy Spirit there to help you overcome such sins. Just cry out, "Oh God, have mercy on me. Give me strength to control myself."

As we ask the Lord to strengthen us, and as we turn away from this sin or that sin, we will be exercising temperance or self-control. That is the fruit of the Spirit. And oh, what a joy it is to find that you have victory over this sin or that sin.

No Law Against Such

Verse 23 concludes with the statement, "against such there is no law." This is to be understood, I think, in at least two senses. First, if we follow perfectly the leading of the Spirit, thereby manifesting fully the fruit of the Spirit, then we are entirely in agreement with the law. In the measure that we are obedient to Christ, we are not against the law.

However, I think the bigger meaning is this: In every child of God, the fruit of the Spirit will be seen to some degree. True, these virtues are more clearly seen in some believers than in others. But we're all growing in grace. When they are seen in our life, it is an evidence that we have become a child of God. As such, the law no longer has any claim upon us. We're not under the law, we are under grace.

Instead of being against us, the law has become a friend of ours, a standard by which we strive to live a life that reflects our love for Christ and our gratitude for what He has done for us.

5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Earlier in this study, we referred to Colossians 3:5, which reads, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." To mortify means to kill, to put to death.

Here, it says that "they that are Christ's", meaning those who have truly become saved, "have crucified the flesh..." This is a statement of fact. Putting to death our sinful nature is how the Holy Spirit sanctifies us. Actually, this is an ongoing process. In this life, we will never attain perfect holiness. Romans 7, which we looked at earlier, clearly teaches us that. Paul says there, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." But growth in this area is something we should expect in our life. Otherwise, we must ask ourselves honestly if we are truly saved.

Affections

We can readily understand that lusts are associated with our flesh, our sinful nature. But shouldn't Christians be affectionate? Actually, the Greek word involved is translated "affections" only in this verse. In Romans 7:5, it is used to convey the idea of evil emotions. That verse reads, "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin...did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." The word "motions" in the phrase "motions of sin" is from the same Greek word.

Elsewhere, it is always translated either as "afflictions" or "sufferings." For example, Hebrews 10:32, "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions." And II Corinthians 1:5, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."

Putting all this together, we can see that the affections that the Holy Spirit is putting to death in us are the sinful emotions that afflict our thinking and behavior.

5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

We live in the Spirit in the sense that we are living in the Lord Jesus Christ, or in the Holy Spirit. We have become saved. And if we have become a child of God, then let us walk in the Spirit. That is, let us walk in a way that is pleasing to God. That not only is a mandate, but is a truism. It's a mandate in that this is how God wants us to live our life. But it is a truism also because, as we saw earlier, every child of God will naturally display the fruit of the Spirit more and more.

Why, then, has God put all these commands in the Bible? Because the Word is the sword of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses these commands to sanctify us. He applies the Word of God to our heart and conscience. That's why as a believer grows in sanctification, his conscience increasingly reminds him of what the Bible says.

5:26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Back in verses 19-21, God listed sin after sin after sin that are the works of the flesh. Then, in verses 22-25, God showed us the virtues that are the evidence of God's grace in our lives. Now, He gives us this final admonition.

Significantly, God focuses on two particular sins. I really believe it's because the number one sin among believers is vain glory. And it leads directly to the sin of "provoking one another" and "envying one another". Vain glory means empty glory, or futile glory. It is glory that has no substance. A believer should not desire any glory of his own at all because to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, should always be all the glory. Whatever we do, we do it to the glory of God. This is the reason why God has created us and saved us.

But man also wants glory. Even believers often desire to have glory. We find it hard to admit that we are dirty rotten sinners. Our pride does not permit this. Likewise, we find it hard to admit that we do not contribute one iota to either our sanctification or our salvation. We would like to think that somehow, there is some good in us that has enabled us to grow as a Christian.

Jealous God

Nevertheless, God is very jealous of His glory because He rightfully deserves to receive all the adulation and all the praise and all the honor and all the respect. And this is why God comes right out flatly, as He concludes this section of Galatians, and says, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory."

Now, the Bible does talk about believers being glorified. But it is Christ's glory that is imputed to us. The Bible also speaks of our receiving a crown of glory. But notice Revelation 4:10-11:

The four and twenty elders (who represent all believers) fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

An outcome of being desirous of vain glory is the sin of provoking and envying one another. When our pride is manifested in our words or actions, it causes others to become wrathful against us. Conversely, when someone else tops us in this department of our life or that, our pride suffers. As we envy him, all kinds of other sins follow.

The antidote to all of this, of course, is to walk in the Spirit. Yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He brings to our remembrance what the Word of God has taught us. To paraphrase Philippians 2:12-13, "we need to work out the fruit of the Spirit with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Chapter 6 – Living Out the Faith

Overview of Chapter 6

At the close of the last chapter, Paul exhorted the Galatians to walk in the Spirit. Now, he shows them the way to live out such a spirit-led life. He indicates how they are to relate to God, to other Christians, to teachers of the Word and to people in general. He then concludes the letter by reiterating the key points that he has discussed.

Galatians 6:1-5

6:1 Brethren, If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which art spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

The word "fault" here is from the same Greek word that normally is translated "trespass". Thus, the first phrase can be read, "if a person be overtaken in a sin." And "ye which are spiritual" refers to those who are living and walking in the Spirit.

Before we go further, let me hasten to point out that this verse is not a license for Christians to go around finding fault with others. Elsewhere in the Bible, God repeatedly instructs us not to judge others. For example, we read in Romans 14:10,13:

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

Authorities

In the Bible, God has given just three groups of people the authority to judge others. First, parents have the authority to point out the sins in their children. As they carry out their duty to raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they can guide and chastise them, even using the rod on them, if necessary. But they are not to provoke them to anger.

Secondly, in the church, the pastor and the elders or deacons have the authority to admonish and look for the sins in the congregation. As spiritual leaders, they assist the congregation in getting victory over those sin. But they also have the right to excommunicate those who persist in sinning.

Finally, there are the civil authorities – the policemen, the judges and so on. They must pass judgment on the people over whom they rule. They are established by God to point out wrong-doing within society and demand penalties. They have a right and a duty to do that.

Restoration

Here in verse 1 of Galatians 6, God is not talking about passing judgment of others. He is talking about restoring someone who has been overtaken in a sin. The Bible has indicated at least two areas where a believer caught in a sin needs to be restored.

When a born-again believer is convicted by the Holy Spirit of having sinned, he becomes very bothered. The guilt weighs heavily on his soul. Sometimes, such a Christian would seek help from a fellow believer. And that's when we are to help restore him.

Notice that we are to do it in a spirit of gentleness. That means we must be careful not to have a reproaching attitude, realizing all the time that we ourselves are wicked sinners saved by the blood of Christ. Rather, we are to patiently and compassionately encourage him to seek God's guidance and comfort from the Word of God. We should also pray with him as well as pray for him. James 5:16 teaches, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye maybe healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." As he confesses his sin to God, his burden will lighten.

The Excommunicated

An example of the second area of restoration can be found in II Corinthians 2. There, the apostle Paul tells the Corinthians to forgive and comfort someone "who has caused grief". Though we cannot know for

sure, he may be talking about the man whom he had ordered to be excommunicated in I Corinthians 5.

That person was a member of the church of Corinth. He thought he was a believer, but because he was engaging in the terrible sin of incest, he evidently was not. So, the apostle Paul instructed the church to excommunicate that person, not in the spirit of hatred, but to impress upon that person that he was not saved. That person has since come to his spiritual senses. He has repented. And now he wants to be restored into the congregation. And so, Paul tells the Corinthians to bring him back into fellowship in the spirit of love.

Not too many people are being excommunicated nowadays. Nevertheless, the principle behind that example still holds. A former member of the church may have gone back to live a worldly life, thereby indicating that he was not saved. But now, if he truly repents and desires to live a new life for Christ, we need to help restore him.

Spirit of Meekness

Note that we are to do it in the spirit of meekness. That means we must be careful not to have a reproaching attitude, realizing all the time that we ourselves are sinners by nature. The last part of this verse says, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." It warns that we need to watch ourselves, making sure that we do not fall into sin in the process.

The latter could happen, for instance, when we violate the trust of a troubling believer who has confided in us in confidence. This is a sin that can generate all kinds of gossip. We may also be tempted into sinning if we think of ourselves as being more righteous than others. The Bible says, "Pride comes before a fall," and "God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble." So, if we proudly think that we would never commit such a sin, watch out. That's the time when we are most likely to fall.

Finally, we need to make sure that all the advice we give is scriptural. Sometimes, in our eagerness to be compassionate, we are tempted to offer worldly solutions or condone behavior that is contrary to the Word of God. If we do that, we will just be blind leaders leading the blind.

6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Remember back in Chapter 2, we talked about the Jerusalem Council? In the letter that the Council wrote to the Gentile believers in Antioch, we read in Acts 15:28-29: "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols.." and so on. From the context, we saw that the word "burden" refers to the special responsibilities that Christians have to carry as they live out the life of a believer. To obey God's commands in a world that flouts those commands is a burden.

As a child of God, we are also subject to being chastised by God. It is His way of showing His love for us. We read in Hebrews 12:6-8:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Chastening by God serves to strengthen our faith and increase our dependence on Him.

Still another kind of burden believers have to shoulder is the affliction and persecution that result from our standing up for Christ. Jesus warned, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33) and "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (15:19).

All of this encompassed by the command that we are to bear one another's burdens. The Bible teaches that we are not an island. If at all possible, we are to be a member of a congregation. We all belong to one body. When one part of the body hurts, we all hurt. We are indeed our brother's keeper; we must have a concern for one another.

Remember Galatians 5:14? It reads, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." We saw that the love that we are to have for our fellow man is that he might be saved and experience the love of Christ. Here in Galatians 6:2, the same principle shines through. As we bear one another's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ because we personally experience the love of Christ working through us.

6:3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Paul now begins to discuss the manner by which believers are to live before God.

In Luke 7, we read about Jesus dining in the house of Simon the Pharisee. A woman, who was possibly a prostitute, came in and began to weep over Jesus' feet. She broke a box of ointment and anointed His feet with it, and then wiped His feet with her hair. The Pharisee was upset by this, saying, "Don't you know, Jesus, that this woman is a sinner? How can you let her touch you at all?"

This is the kind of attitude against which God is admonishing us in this verse. If we think that we are something when we are nothing, we deceive ourselves. The fact is, outside of Christ, every one of us is nothing but a dirty rotten sinner on the way to spending eternity in hell.

As a child of God, therefore, we have to walk very humbly, recognizing that every good gift has come from above. God has given us the health, the skill and the mind to make a living. We must give all the credit back to God.

6:4-5 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.

Back in verse 2. We were told to bear one another's burdens. Isn't it a contradiction for this passage to say that every man shall bear his own burden? Not at all. We are looking at two different Greek words. In verse 2, as we have already learned, the burdens involved have to do with the problems and trials that believers go through as they live out their Christian life. They are burdens that come after one has become saved.

The "burden" here, however, has to do with salvation itself. We find this particular word used in Matthew 23:4:

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

There, God is indicting the Pharisees for telling people that they had to perform all kinds of works to become saved. So, this burden relates to the way one is to become saved.

Self-Examination

With that in mind, we can better understand why it says here that we are to prove, or to examine, our work to see if there can be rejoicing. We have to ask ourselves whether or not what we are doing will get us right with God. Will the path that we are following bring us to salvation so that we can rejoice?

The salvation program of the Bible is a personal one. Yes, we can pray for others and witness to others. But ultimately, whether a person is saved or not depends on whether his sin problem has been taken care of. Just because your parents are saved or just because you have come from a long line of missionaries does not mean that you yourself are a child of God.

When we test our own work and find that our best works are as filthy rags, and when we realize that the only basis for our salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ, then we cannot rejoice in ourselves. We rejoice in the fact that Christ has become our personal Savior.

Galatians 6:6-10

6:6 let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

"Communicate" is an old English word that means to provide for. We see this in Philippians 4:15, where Paul writes:

Now ye Philippians, know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

You see, God is laying down a principle here that those who are blessed by the Word of God through faithful teachers and preachers, are to provide for the physical needs of those teachers as a thanksgiving to God. This is a principle God first set forth back in Old Testament time. The priests who offered the sacrifices in the temple received their food from the sacrifices. They were paid from the tithes that were brought by the Israelites.

This is alluded to in I Corinthians 9:13. It reads, "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" The next verse then brings it up into the New Testament age, saying; "Even so hath the lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Thus, if a congregation has a pastor who works full time to care for the spiritual needs of the flock, that congregation has an obligation to share all good things with him. In fact, this is the obligation of every individual member of the congregation. Note that this verse uses the singular

pronoun "him" in the phrase, "Let him who is taught the word..."

This principle also covers, of course, those who teach the Word through para-church ministries. We who have benefited from their teaching have the obligation to provide for them as well. Today, many Christians are actually getting more spiritual feeding from such ministries than from their local churches.

Oh this subject of giving, God gives us this additional information in II Corinthians 9:6-7:

But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.

Thus, when God tells us to supply the needs of those who have brought us the Word, He is saying, "Now don't do this grudgingly. Don't do this with an attitude, 'Oh, I guess I have to do it. I guess I better write out a check somehow.'" No, God wants everyone to do it cheerfully.

6:7-8 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Still on the subject of providing for teachers of the Word, Paul admonishes that we must have our priorities right. We must sow to the Spirit, not to the flesh. In the Bible, sowing sometimes refers to the sending forth of the gospel. The parable of the sower found in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8 is a good example of that usage. Jesus Himself explains that what the farmer sows is the Word of God.

But in this Galatians verse, where sowing to the Spirit is contrasted against sowing to the flesh, it has to do with the use of God given resources. In fact, that is how God uses the word "sowing" in the II Corinthians 9 passage that we have just looked at.

So, God is warning us here that we cannot mock God about how we are using our wherewithal. When we use them to satisfy our sinful nature, we will only be deceiving ourselves. While we may think that we have become saved, we will in fact be reaping corruption, which means that we are still under the curse of God.

Conversely, when we give cheerfully to help carry out the Great Commission, when we put the money God has entrusted to us to use in His kingdom, we reap life everlasting because it is an evidence that we have indeed become saved.

Reciprocal

In Luke 6, there is a beautiful statement on this subject of giving. We read in verse 38:

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

In other words, as we give bountifully, God will fill our cup of blessing to overflowing. It's as though He's pressing the content and shaking the container to make sure that every void is filled so that our cup really runs over. That's the way God comes to us with His promises. We find the same truth in II Corinthians 9. After having told us that God loves a cheerful giver, He says in verse 8, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Now, it doesn't mean that when we give, we seek a reward or a large "investment return", of some kind. Then, we will not be giving with the right motive. On the other hand, when we give generously and cheerfully because we want to do the will of God, He will bless us so abundantly that we will abound to every good work. In II Corinthians 9, God gives us a further reason why He wants us to give cheerfully. We read in verse 12,

For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God.

In other words, as we give generously, we not only are obeying the command that we are to supply the needs of the saints and those who teach us the Word of God, but are showing our thanksgiving to God at the same time. We are expressing in a practical way our gratitude for the wonderful salvation that God has provided for us.

6:9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

This is a very practical admonition. Sometimes, we just grow weary of giving our life, our time and our resources to serve God and His kingdom. When we are being persecuted, when our evangelistic efforts don't seem to generate any response, when those we minister to do not show any appreciation, we wish

we could sit back and indulge in our own creature comforts for just a while.

Well, the Bible says, don't be weary in well doing. In time, you will reap. We may not see many of the benefits immediately in our life, but when we come into the presence of the Lord, we'll be greeted by those who have been saved because we have been faithful in sending forth the Word.

Remember, this verse comes in the context that begins in verse 6. The well doing that we are not to be weary of has to do with sowing and reaping. We sow by laying our life on the altar of service, by making our money and time available to share the gospel with others. We do so untiringly because in due season, we shall reap. A very beautiful verse in this connection is I Thessalonians 2:19. It reads,

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.

We will have great joy when we come into the presence of the Lord and see all those who have been saved because we have laid down our life on the altar of service.

Eternal Friends

This truth is underscored by the parable of the unrighteous steward, which Jesus told in Luke 16. This sinful steward, who was about to be fired, told those who owed his master various goods to take their bills and reduce the amounts they owed. He did that to make friends, as he prepared for the time when he would no longer be working for this master. Verse 8 then reads,

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

What a terrible indictment that is. The unsaved of the world are wiser in their generation, that is, in their environment of wickedness, than the children of light in the kingdom of God. They are wiser because they intuitively prepare for their future in this world, whereas we believers give little thought to the future in the kingdom of God other than knowing that we have become saved. We don't think much of the future as stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

In verse 9 of Luke 16, we read: "And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." What we should really do with the money of this world is to make eternal friends so that when we go home to glory, they will be there to greet us. Yes, if we faint not, in due season we shall reap.

6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Is this verse telling us to do more good to believers than to other people? It certainly seems so, according to the way we normally use the word "especially". But the Bible does not use the word "especially" as a means to zero in on one group among a larger group.

In Acts 25, for example, there is the account of Festus talking to King Agrippa about the apostle Paul. Festus told Agrippa that while the Jews wanted Paul killed, he found that Paul had done nothing deserving of death. But because Paul had appealed to Caesar, he, Festus, had to send him to Rome. But he didn't know what to charge Paul with. So, Festus said in verse 26,

Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

The word "specially" there is the same word as "especially" in Galatians 6:10. Note that when Festus said, "I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee", he was not selecting a part from a whole; both "you" and "thee" referred to King Agrippa. The second phrase is to emphasize that King Agrippa is the very one from whom he needs some particular thing. Let's look at another passage, I Timothy 4:9,10:

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

We knew from everything else in the Bible that Christ is the Savior of all who will believe, not all human beings. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he will save **his** people from their sins." So here again, the "specially" is not meant to put extra emphasis on a small group of people among the whole mankind. The second phrase is meant to let us know in particular whom the "all men" are.

The same holds true in I Timothy 5:8: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Again, "his own" and "these of his own house" refer to the same people. The word "specially" is used mainly to give added emphasis.

So, here in Galatians 6:10, God is defining for us that the "all men" to whom we are to do good are all those who belong to the family of God. That includes these who will come into the household of faith as well as who are already saved. We do good to them by bringing the gospel to them and then feeding them with the Word of God.

Galatians 6:11-14

6:11 Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

At first glance, this verse seems out of place, having little to do with what this letter is teaching. But it really isn't. From the middle of Chapter 5 up to verse 10 of this chapter, Paul has shown the Galatians how they are to live as believers. Beginning with the next verse through the end of the letter, he will summarize the important points that he has written in the first four and a half chapters. This verse thus serves as a transitional statement.

More importantly, the reference to the "large letters" underscores that what he is about to say deserves special attention. It also serves to remind the Galatians once again of his bad eyes, and of the affection they once had for him, when they "would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (4:15).

Finally, Paul sometimes dictated his letters to a scribe. In the last chapter of his epistle to the Romans, for instance, we read in verse 22, "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord." Tertius was the one who transcribed Paul's dictation. But here, Paul takes pain to tell the Galatians that "I have written," this letter himself in spite of his eye problem. It stresses his personal involvement in the spiritual well-being of the Galatians.

6:12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

Paul now begins to reiterate the primary reason for having written this letter to the churches in Galatia. He wants to impress upon them that salvation by grace is the only true gospel, and that those who have been telling them to become circumcised have been doing so for ulterior motives.

For one thing, those false prophets are interested in making a good showing, or having a large number of people circumcised. They did not really care whether those people have truly become saved or not. For another, they are advocating circumcision to avoid being persecuted by the Judaizers themselves.

A parallel situation exists today in Christendom. All too often, individuals, churches and evangelistic organizations like to talk about the number of people that have "made a decision" to receive Christ, answered an altar call, or prayed "the sinner's prayer" as a result of their witnessing efforts. They don't really care whether those people have really become saved.

Then, there are those pastors who privately concede that salvation comes entirely by the grace of God, and that man's works contribute nothing to it. But to placate the pride of the people they preach to, they've opted to teach that an individual has to make a free-will decision to accept Christ. In short, they have substituted the truth with the grace-plus-works gospel because they are afraid that they would otherwise be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

6:13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

Paul goes on to expose the inconsistency of the legalists by noting that the Judaizers do not really practice what they preach. Earlier, Paul has declared "that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing, For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law" (5:2,3).

But while the Judaizers are telling the Gentiles to be circumcised, they themselves are not keeping other parts of the Mosaic law. They no longer celebrate the feast days the way such feasts were supposed to be observed, and they no longer offer animal and other sacrifices at the temple.

The word "glory" here means boast. The legalists in the Galatian congregation want to boast about the number of people that they have persuaded to follow their teaching. They just want numbers. Again, the same problem exists today. In order to boast about the number of people they supposedly have converted, many doing evangelistic work have effectively become high-power salesmen of the gospel.

To prepare the mind-set of their audience, they follow some well-formulated steps, using some specially-prepared tracts, slides or a movie to make their presentation. At the end, they ask the big question: "To you want to receive Jesus into your heart and get all these blessings?" By that time, the people have become so mesmerized that many are ready to say "Yes" even though they don't really know what it's all about. Thus, as this verse points out, these evangelists glory in the flesh of the "converts". They boast

about the large number of "decisions made" after each presentation without really knowing how many have truly become saved.

But salvation isn't a matter of selling the gospel or the lord Jesus Christ. Salvation doesn't have to do with getting a person to agree to a certain series of statements. Salvation has to do with God applying the gospel to a man's heart, causing him to realize that he is a sinner and that only by trusting in Christ can he escape eternal damnation.

6:14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

That is the big truth. My glory, my boast, is all in the lord Jesus Christ. That's because my salvation is altogether in Christ. He is the One who died on the cross to pay for my sin, and He is the One who has given me the faith to believe on Him. Because God has saved me, a death has taken place between me and the world. This truth can be seen from two vantage points. First, the world is crucified unto me. That is, the world has been put to death by Christ. It no longer has any hold on me. It cannot enslave me anymore.

Secondly, I have been crucified unto the world. I am dead to the world. The things and pleasures that it offers don't appeal to me anymore. I have lost my interest in these worldly things; I just want to live for Christ.

These statements that Paul makes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit really clip us, don't they? It hits me very hard. It makes me desire more than ever that my life might tell for Jesus. It makes me realize that when we put life in its proper perspective, the things of this world are so unimportant. What does it matter how many suits we have or how big a house we live in? What does it matter how much money we have in the bank? Our life on earth is short; sooner or later we will die, if the lord tarries. And when He returns, this whole universe will be destroyed by fire what really matters is that I'll be with the lord throughout eternity. That's the only thing that counts.

Galatians 6:15-18

6:15 For in Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Here, Paul encapsulates succinctly what salvation by grace is all about. There are no conditions to our salvation. Whether or not we have been circumcised does not mean anything. We are saved only if we are in Christ. And we are in Christ only if we are a new creature, or a new creation.

Does any one of us have the power or potential to make of ourselves a new creation? Of course not. We're a human being. Physically, we grow for 20 years or so and then after a period of leveling off, our body begins to age and weaken. We might do some exercise to keep in shape a bit longer, but that isn't a new creation.

Only God can create. And God has made us a new creation by giving us a brand new soul or spirit essence. And He has given us the Holy Spirit to ensure us that on the last day, He will give us a brand new body as well. There is nothing that we have done, or we can do, to create a new soul or a new body. Our salvation is altogether a gracious gift from God.

6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Salvation does not come in all colors and descriptions and paths and highways. There is only one walk that we are to walk, and that is the way of the cross, the way of the Lord Jesus Christ, the way of grace alone. We are to walk by that rule. It is a very narrow path and very few find it. These who find it are the remnant chosen by grace whom God has drawn.

Narrow is the way and constricted is the gate that leads to eternal life. But broad is the way, and many there are thereon, that leads to eternal destruction. The ones who walk by the narrow path, the narrow rule of grace alone; are the ones who are at peace with God. They also have God's mercy. This is the first time the word "mercy" appears in the Book of Galatians. What does that word mean? In the Bible, it is used to describe the forgiveness of God to those who are in a pitiable, helpless condition.

Before we were saved, we were in a terrible spiritual condition. Because of our sin, we were destined to go to hell. But God saved us. It's not because we were worthy and because we reached out for God. It's only because God had mercy on us. God says in Romans 9:15, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." In His magnificent mercy, He saved us. He has forgiven our sins. Those who walk by this rule, the rule of salvation by grace alone, have obtained mercy. They are the Israel of God.

6:17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Paul started this letter by documenting the fact that he was a hand-picked apostle of the lord Jesus Christ to establish his credential. Now, as he closes the letter, he reminds the Galatians that he is a loyal servant of Christ, as evidenced by the marks or scars of his sufferings. He does so to warn the false teachers there that they had better not cause him any more trouble henceforth.

Paul has indeed suffered a lot for the cause of Christ. He describes some of his experience in II Corinthians 11:23-27:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Actually, Paul considers it a privilege to share in Christ's sufferings. He wrote in Colossians 1:24, "(I) now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of a Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."

As we do our part to help build the church of the lord Jesus Christ, therefore, we too should expect to endure sufferings of one kind or another. Christ Himself set the precedent. He endured enormous suffering on the cross, of course. Even before that, He was stoned, scourged, mocked, maligned and spit on and He endured it. But then, we read in Philippians 2:9-11:

Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Yes, to share in that glory, we who are children of God should expect to share in His suffering. In Romans 8:17, God says:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

6:18 Brethren the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit Amen.

What a beautiful closing statement that is. May the grace of the Lord be with the Galatians. Paul's deepest desire is that the Galatians would turn from their dangerous path and again seek the gospel of grace.

Notice that he says the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit instead of be with you. This ties back to the idea of believers being a new creation. When we become saved, it is only our spirit that is altogether new. Our body will not be resurrected until the last day. When the Lord returns, the grace of the Lord Jesus will then be with our body as well as our spirit.

The closing word "Amen" means "truly" or "So let it be". Everything that Paul has written in this letter, as well as his loving concern for the Galatians, is absolutely true and totally trustworthy. That's because he, moved by the Holy Spirit has written it on behalf of God.

May all of us take these truths to heart. May we never be snared by a gospel other than the only one that gives eternal life – the gospel of grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

* * *

Background Information

Family Radio

The following information was copied from the Family Radio Web site:

The Ministry of Family Radio

Broadcasting Christ-centered programs to the United States & around the world!

Committed to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

Family Radio is committed to the Person and salvation work of Jesus Christ as revealed in God's divine Word, the Bible. We are a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to obeying our Lord's command to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Family Radio programs include no commercial advertisements. Air time for other Christian broadcasters on Family Radio is free of charge. The ministry relies solely upon God working through listeners for the financial support of day-to-day operations. We as a ministry desire to be entirely faithful to God's divine, infallible Word, the Bible. Every effort is made to accurately present the Gospel of the Bible. In purpose and belief, we stand out from other radio and TV ministries in our faithful reliance on the Bible as the ONLY infallible authority.

First Broadcast in 1959

Family Radio was organized in 1958 under our official name, Family Stations, Inc., and began to broadcast February 4, 1959, over KEAR FM in San Francisco. Since then, God has enabled the ministry to purchase a number of powerful AM and FM stations and several smaller educational facilities and translators around the country. Our domestic broadcasts reach metropolitan areas such as Birmingham, Charleston, Chicago, Cleveland, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Omaha, Philadelphia, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

International Broadcasts

An important addition came in 1973 with the purchase of an international short-wave station, which we called WYFR, in Scituate, Massachusetts. With the use of many transmitters and antennas, the Gospel is proclaimed in ten languages from thy WYFR facility, now located in Okeechobee, Florida. In 1982, our international outreach was expanded to India and the Far East with the use of powerful transmitters in Taiwan. Family Radio has become a worldwide ministry; our broadcasts now span the globe so "That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:60).

A Diversified Outreach

In addition to the broadcasts, Family Radio offers Bible-based pamphlets and tracts to teach and exhort and other diverse means of spreading the Gospel, including the following.

Family Radio School of the Bible

Primarily a correspondence school, Family Radio School of the Bible courses are designed to help laymen and professionals to minister in the church, on the job, and at home through the study of various subjects and certificate and degree programs. The school operates on the principle of Matthew 10:8, "freely ye have received, freely give." In accordance with this principle, the FRSB does not charge tuition; it is dependent upon the generosity of students and friends.

Missionary Tours

Family Radio sponsors "Missionary Tours" which provide opportunities for staff members and listeners (at their own expense) to help spread the Gospel through tract distribution. Our ambassadors for Christ have visited cities in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia (every continent except Antarctica).

On the Internet

Our Christ-centered programs are now available worldwide, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on the Internet. Access to the Internet may be via computer or television (with the proper equipment). In addition to the programs on the Internet, Bible studies such as "The Glorious Garden of Eden" and "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9" are on our Home Page. Downloadable books include "What God Hath Joined Together" and "God's Magnificent Salvation Plan." The Internet also has our program guide, short-wave schedule, and The Bible. Tell your friends and family that they can find Family Radio on the Internet at: <http://www.familyradio.com>

Supporting Family Radio

If you believe God would have you financially support Family Radio you can send your tax-deductible gift to:

Family Radio

Oakland, CA 94621 USA

Or use our "Secure Internet Check Form!"

End of Web site information.

For biblically based answers to your questions, you can listen to the *Open Forum* on Family Radio stations in many locations in the USA on Monday through Friday evenings at 8:30-10:00 p.m. Eastern Time (5:30-7:00 p.m. Pacific Time) or call 800-322-5385 (from within the USA and Canada) during the program to ask a question or make a comment. You can also listen to live broadcasts on Family Radio's Web site at <http://www.familyradio.com/> during those hours. There are also recordings of past programs available on this Web site.

The Open Forum is translated from English into nine other languages and broadcast by short-wave radio around the world. You can also listen to prerecorded short-wave broadcasts on the Web site. Write to Family Radio at the above address to obtain a short-wave broadcasting schedule for your area or call these numbers:

Toll Free: 800-543-1495 (from within the USA and Canada)

Toll Call: 501-568-6200 (from outside the USA and Canada)

This Study (Ver:1010 4/30/2001)

This study was reformatted from material obtained from a Web site of a Family Radio listener and checked for accuracy against Family Radio's printed booklets (i.e., one booklet for each chapter of the *Galatians* study). This was done by two Family Radio listeners who have grown in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior over the years (with help from the questions and answers about the Bible as heard on the *Open Forum* program and other Family Radio materials) and who desire the same for others.

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