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The Book of Galatians

A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter



The Battle for the Churches of Galatia and the True Gospel of Jesus Christ

The region of Galatia had a long history of fierce battles from both the Turks and the Gauls. Around 48 or 49 AD, there was another battle going on in the region and the Apostle Paul was on the frontlines of the battleground defending the true gospel of Jesus Christ against wolves who had crept into the churches preaching a return to the Law and all its impossible demands. He zealously defended the doctrine of justification by faith, backed everything he said up with Old Testament history that clearly pointed to Jesus as Messiah, and made a clear distinction between walking in the Spirit as opposed to walking in the flesh.

The book of Galatians was ground zero in this battle for truth, freedom, and the gospel. Join us in this exciting verse-by-verse commentary on the book of Galatians.



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Introduction to the Book of Galatians: Galatians 1:1-2

“Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:”

Paul now sets his focus on writing to the churches of Galatia. This was a province officially recognized by Rome. It was approximately 200 miles long north to south and 75 to 150 miles wide. Some ancient maps show it extending all the way to the Black Sea on the north border.

The name “Galatia” can be traced back to the Gauls who invaded and settled this region about three centuries prior to the time of Christ. They were a fierce and ruthless foe and swept through the region with violent force. They brought with them barbaric morals and pagan religious practices that promoted fleshly indulgence of every kind. This region includes what is now southern Turkey. The Turk influence over this region is also self-evident by the modern name.

This dark cloud of human depravity left a void for truth and decency. This yearning was first scratched by Jewish merchants who introduced them to the Law of Moses. This was followed by a wave of Jewish disciples sent by the Apostle Peter just to the East in Jerusalem which still embraced keeping the Law as a means of justification, though it is not known the extent of their influence. Consequently, these believers were confused with the early legalism that accompanied the gospel sent from Jerusalem.

Note that this Epistle was written to “the churches of Galatia” and not to one individual church. It was intended to be circulated throughout the entire region. It appears that Paul and Barnabas had some form of itinerant ministry in this region. (See Galatians 2:1)

As the book unfolds, Paul vigorously defends the gospel of justification by faith. He shares his personal testimony and even refers to what may have been the Jerusalem Council in Galatians Chapter Two. This is a very important historical document to fill in the life and story of the Apostle Paul. Undoubtedly, some Jewish believers had fled Jerusalem and settled in this region to escape the persecution of the feared “Saul of Tarsus.” He even weaves some of that story into the early part of the book of Galatians.

Please understand that the battle for the pure Gospel was being waged in this epistle and the region of Galatia was the battle ground. How fitting, for the region of Galatia had a history of fierce battles from both the Turks and the Gauls and now it was the battle-ground for Paul.

The book of Galatians shares many things in common with the book of Romans. Both defend the doctrine of justification by faith, both look at Old Testament history, and both point to the walk in the Spirit as opposed to walking in the flesh.

Prepare for an exciting study as we launch into a verse-by-verse commentary on the book of Galatians. As usual, I will try to keep this practical and applicable as we move forward.

Paul Asserts His Apostleship: Galatians 1:1-2

“1) Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), 2) and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:”

From the very first verse in the book of Galatians, Paul begins to defend his apostleship. He points out that his conversion and call was the work of God and not man. It is a reminder of his conversion and divine commission in Acts Chapter Nine. Jesus Himself had met Saul on the road to Damascus and converted and commissioned him for the gospel.

Keep in mind, the whole book of Galatians was a battle for the true gospel. Zealous Jewish teachers were combing the region and teaching that salvation involved faith in Christ but also keeping all the requirements of the Law. They were distorting and annulling the gospel of justification by faith as the sole basis of salvation.

Look ahead to Galatians 1:6-10. Paul recognized that many of the believers across Galatia were exchanging the true gospel of grace for a totally different gospel. They were confused and drifting away from Christ. They were being sucked into a life of legalism and self-righteousness based on the Law that could not save them.

Just to clarify, though Jesus saves us unto good works, He does not save us by our good works. (Ephesians 2:8-10) We can add nothing to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross to pay for our sins and purchase our salvation.

Saul, a former Pharisee, was zealous for the Law. His testimony in Philippians 3:1-16 cuts to the quick of this battle between legalism and salvation through faith in Christ alone. Focus on verses 8-10. Paul abandoned self-righteousness based on keeping the Law for a personal relationship with Christ that comes through faith. Overnight, he moved from being a persecutor of believers to a powerful preacher of the gospel.

His previous life as a Pharisee, former persecutor of the early Christians, conversion on the road to Damascus, and call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles all come into focus in Galatians 1:1. Paul was laying out his credentials to speak on behalf of Christ to the churches across Galatia.

This Epistle was destined to be read, criticized, debated, studied, and memorized by millions around the world. It has become a crucial defense and foundation stone of the gospel and the Christian faith. It is worthy of your serious attention and diligent study.

This Present Evil Age: Galatians 1:3-5

“3) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4) who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5) to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.”

As Paul continues his greeting to the churches in the region of Galatia, he extends grace and peace to them from both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins.

But now I must emphasize that Jesus gave Himself for the purpose of “delivering” or “rescuing us from this present evil age.” Though Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) and purchase our salvation (John 3:16), He did not remove Satan from his office of “the god of this world.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) Satan is still in his role as deceiver, tempter, and prince of the power of the air. This age is still evil and spiritual warfare is a reality.

According to Ephesians 6:10-20, I would argue that every child of God is called to be a soldier for Christ “in this present evil age.” Galatians Chapters Five and Six add much insight to our call to freedom and the challenge to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh.

The kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness are locked in intense conflict with one another. Make no mistake: Evil is relentless and demonic forces are at work today in “this present evil age.”

The front of the battle Paul was fighting in the book of Galatians was for the pure message of the gospel. As we shall see in the next section, Satan works hard to confuse and distort the gospel message. Why? Because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes! (See Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:18)

If the gospel is distorted and salvation through faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross is watered down, people will forever be held in bondage to sin and Satan. If we lose the pure gospel message, we lose the war in this present evil age.

The average Christian has no understanding of the plans for evil that Satan has in “this present evil age.” Grace and peace are only possible through the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan does not fear religion. It is his ploy to keep people separated from Christ and slaves to sin. Stay tuned as Paul launches into an intense battle for the gospel!

Don't Settle For a Distorted Gospel: Galatians 1:6-9

“6) I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7) which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8) But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9) As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”

Paul now shares his motivation for writing the book of Galatians. The gospel itself was under attack. The message of grace was being exchanged for a new gospel that annulled the work of Christ on the cross and made the self-effort of keeping the Law the basis of salvation. It was a return to the failed system of the Old Testament.

According to Philippians 1:7 Paul was called and appointed to confirm and defend the true gospel. He was not about to let the gospel message be distorted or watered down in any way. Adding a requirement to keep the Law as a condition for salvation meant the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for sin was inadequate to redeem humanity. It also inferred that the Holy Spirit was unable to change the heart of a born-again believer.

When you make self-effort a basis for salvation, you will never have assurance of salvation. Why? Because you will always fall short. Your relationship with God will be stripped of joy. Why? Because you will constantly be striving to earn God's love, acceptance, and approval. But worse, you will never enter into the walk in the Spirit. Why? Because your focus will continually be on self-effort.

Paul went so far as to say that anyone who distorted the gospel should be accursed. The Greek word “anathema” does not mean “disciplined” but rather “utterly destroyed.” Paul was pronouncing the strongest possible condemnation on those guilty of distorting the gospel. And in the context he says it not once, but twice! He was deadly serious about this matter!

Tampering with the gospel is condemning the hearers to a Christless eternity. It is trampling the work of Jesus Christ on the cross under foot. The books of Galatians, Romans, and Hebrews were all written to explain the purpose of the Law. It was not given as a means of salvation. The Law was given to prove that all people are sinful and lost and in need of a Savior. The Law was given to pave the way for the Gospel of grace and justification by faith.

I beg you to examine your understanding of the gospel. Do you passively believe in Jesus while trying to earn your own salvation? Are you hoping your religion can save you while missing out on a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ? Do you merely *hope* you are good enough for God to accept you or do you *know* you are sinful and lost and therefore cling to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? Are you locked in legalism or walking in grace, forgiveness, and freedom? It all comes down to your understanding of the gospel.

Stay tuned as Paul makes a case for the simple and true gospel.

More Important Than Life Itself: Galatians 1:10

“10) For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.”

Paul now asks a simple rhetorical question about his motive for aggressively defending the Gospel message; “Am I doing this to please men or God?” Another angle to this question might be; “Is this for personal gain or for the glory of God?” These are both good questions to ask ourselves.

The bottom line is that Paul had nothing to gain and everything to lose by tackling this issue. Philippians 3:1-16 makes this abundantly clear. In fact, he lost everything because of his battle of the pure gospel. In the end, he was martyred for the cause of defending a pure gospel.

Paul makes it clear in Galatians 1:10 that, as a bond-servant of Christ, he had no will of his own in this matter. He was not carrying out his own desire, he was bound to the will of God in selfless obedience.

The story of Paul and what he was willing to sacrifice, suffer, and endure for the cause of Christ underlines the importance of the pure gospel. He summarized this conviction in Acts 20:22-24. Let me quote these amazing verses because they clarify Paul's personal value system and mindset.

"22) And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23) except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 23) But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."

Every time I read these verses I am reminded that ministry and the Christian life is not about me. It is about being faithful to Jesus Christ in the way I preach the Word of God, present the gospel, and live out my life before the world. For Paul, being faithful to this charge was more important than life itself.

This is a significant contrast between the early church and the modern church. Their focus was on God. Our focus is often on self. They lived and died for the glory of God. We often make decisions based solely on personal benefit without consideration of how our actions are going to affect the cause of the gospel. We are conditioned to look out for number one – and then we see ourselves as number one. Paul lived and died with Jesus Christ as number one. These views are polar opposites.

Paul and the early believers practiced self sacrifice for the cause of Christ and the good of the Body of Christ. They were driven by a heavenly value system. Their primary concern was not, "How can I benefit from this?" Rather, it was: "How can the cause of Christ benefit from this?" As life unfolds, you will discover that what you do for self is empty –but what you do for Christ and the advancement of the gospel adds true meaning and value. This is the surpassing value that means more than life itself!

The Story Begins: Galatians 1:11-12

"11) For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12) For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

Paul now defends the gospel by alluding to his personal conversion story. Not unlike Moses who was directly recruited by the Angel of the Lord speaking to him at the burning bush (Exodus 3-4), Saul of Tarsus was directly recruited by Jesus Christ when a bright light shone around Him on the road to Damascus and Jesus spoke to Him. (Acts 9) The comparison is stunning. Both were addressed twice by name and both were given Divine Revelation.

This is so appropriate. Moses was entrusted with the Law, while Saul was given the gospel of

grace that fulfilled the Law. Moses led the Children of Israel out from slavery to Egypt while Paul led people out of slavery to sin. Moses was a central figure in writing the Old Testament while Paul became a central figure in writing the New Testament.

The point Paul was making in Galatians 1:11-12 is well taken: The gospel he preached was not of human origin. He received it by a Divine revelation of Jesus Christ. Nothing short of His testimony could explain the conversion and transformation of Saul of Tarsus. He moved quickly from being the persecutor of the church to the author and defender of the doctrine of justification by faith and defender of the true gospel.

The abbreviated comparison I gave of Moses and Paul is amusing and interesting. Nothing short of his unusual testimony would set Paul up to define and defend the gospel. His credentials as the Apostle to the Gentiles can be traced back to his amazing conversion story.

Growth Takes Time: Galatians 1:13-24

“13) For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14) and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15) But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16) to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.”

Paul now gets into the nuts and bolts of his testimony and call. After referring to his previous manner of life as a zealous Pharisee in Judaism, he points out that at the right time Jesus revealed Himself to him. I am sure his story was well known.

As a young Pharisee, Saul single-handedly led the persecution against the Church. Acts 7:58 points out that those who stoned Stephen “laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” At this first mention of him in the Bible, he was overseeing the killing of the first Christian martyr.

Then in Acts 8:1-3, we discover that he began ravaging the early church. He would enter house after house and drag away men and women and commit them to prison.

The story of his old life culminates with his conversion in Acts 9:1-31. Jesus Himself appeared to him on the road to Damascus and converted him. His conversion stayed the intense persecution and brought a time of peace to the early church. (See Acts 9:31)

As we return to the story line in Galatians, we discover that after his conversion, Saul went into Arabia for three years. (Galatians 1:17) Little is known about this time in his life. It was undoubtedly a time of study, prayer, and seeking God. Most scholars agree that it was during this time that the Holy Spirit illuminated him to the gospel of grace and the doctrine of justification by faith. His relationship with Jesus Christ became very dear and precious during this phase of his life. (See Philippians 3:4-16)

Let me make a few observations: First, God is sovereign over the timing of our conversion. Some lament for years over their dark and sinful past. I urge you to do as Paul did in the above text. Forget what is behind and press forward with great zeal building your new relationship with Jesus Christ. Get to know Him in all of His fullness and glory. Take time to send your roots deep in the Word and in sweet communion with Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

Second, God wastes nothing good from our past to turn us into new people with a new mission. Saul's linguistic skills and Old Testament knowledge were very helpful once the Holy Spirit removed the veil from his heart and mind. (See 2 Corinthians 3:1-18) I can only imagine the glory of these early years as the Holy Spirit became his teacher. I believe it was during this time of solitude that his past was resolved and God launched him into a new calling for life.

Third, don't remain a loner for long. Paul returned from Arabia and sought accountability with Peter and the early church leaders. He came under the authority of the early church. They helped him refine and put the finishing touches on his gospel message. Then they commissioned him into ministry. He became part of the team.

This point is crucial. Find a good church where you can grow, be nurtured, and serve. Also ask God to send a mentor your way. Barnabas himself became a mentor to Paul. According to Acts 11:19-26, Barnabas recruited Paul to become his ministry companion in planting the church in Antioch.

This was an important decade of growth and practical ministry experience for Paul. If I have my math right in the book of Galatians, around 17 years elapsed between Paul's conversion and the Jerusalem council. Be patient. Personal growth and development takes time.

Finally, don't give up on anyone. When the timing is right, the Holy Spirit will convert people. Many planted seeds in Saul's heart. From the message Stephen preached on the day he was killed, to the testimony of countless men and women Saul put in prison, the gospel was abundantly planted and taking root in Saul. We cannot force the process. The Holy Spirit converts people on His time-table, but we can be faithful to pray and share the gospel story.

Paul's Amazing Mission: Galatians 1:18-24

"18) Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19) But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20) (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) 21) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22) And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; 23) but only, they kept hearing, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.' 24) And they were glorifying God because of me."

Paul continues to argue his point that the gospel he preached came by divine revelation from Jesus Christ and was not invented or taught to him by human agency. Let's continue with his story and talk briefly about the implications for today.

After spending three years in solitude in Arabia, Paul went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter. He stayed with him for fifteen days and met none of the other Apostles or

early leaders of the Christian faith except James, the Lord's brother. (Galatians 1:17-19)

Paul was an original. He sought accountability and a fair hearing, but he was not necessarily seeking endorsement. To Paul was revealed not only the gospel of grace, but also the mystery of how the Gentiles were fellow heirs with Israel "in Christ." (Please Read Ephesians 2:11-3:12) I would argue that this was new theological territory even for Peter. It was hinted but not expanded on by Jesus during His public ministry. (See John 10:16)

Paul was entrusted with the charge of unpacking the mystery of the Body of Christ and the church age. He was given the mission of presenting to the world the new wine for the new wine skins. This was so fitting because Paul and not Peter or any of the other early church leaders were Hebrew scholars or experts in the Old Testament scrolls.

I can only imagine the waves of illumination upon illumination the Holy Spirit wrought in Paul when the veil was removed and the Holy Spirit revealed the fulness of Christ to him throughout the entire Old Testament. (Review 2 Corinthians 3-4) The fifteen days Paul and Peter spent together were more for Peter's sake than for Paul's.

Peter actually gave a glowing endorsement of Paul and his epistles in 2 Peter 3:14-16. A careful reading of this text leads to the conclusion that Peter placed the writings of Paul on the level of inspired Scripture. He pointed out how people were distorting Paul's writings "even as the rest of the Scriptures."

In Galatians 1-2, Paul was defending more than his apostleship, he was defending the entire mystery revealed through him about the body of Christ and Jew and Gentile being one "in Christ." Jesus used Paul to unpack the mystery of the church age and how all believers are knit together in perfect unity "in Christ."

I believe the Holy Spirit wants to teach and illuminate every believer the truth as they study the Bible. But Paul, Peter, James, John, and the other New Testament writers were different. They were instruments of Divine Revelation. Their writings were inspired and intended to become Scripture.

When their mission was complete, divine revelation for this present age ended. The New Testament was finished. Revelation 22:18-19 adds a curse to those who would add to or take away from the completed cannon of the New Testament. It reads much like Galatians 1:6-10. Paul added the same curse on those who were trying to distort the gospel.

Embrace and study both the Old and New Testaments. They are inspired, trustworthy, infallible, and complete. The Bible is the finished revelation of God for this present age. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach and illuminate truth to you as you study your Bible.

But run fast and far if someone claims to have a new revelation equivalent to Scripture. They are deceivers and false teachers. Don't believe them, even if they claim an angel spoke to them. (See Galatians 1:8) Test and measure everything by the Word of God. The Bible is our final foundation for truth, philosophy, wisdom, and world-view as believers. Become a student of the Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) It has everything to equip you for successful, fruitful, and godly living.

A Tragic Breach in the Early Church: Galatians 1:23-2:10

“22) And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; 23) but only, they kept hearing, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.” 24) And they were glorifying God because of me.”

The story of Saul's conversion circulated widely. Because a time of peace came to the region of Judea, the churches there knew of his conversion but had no personal dealings with him. They would not have recognized him in a crowd.

Yet the story of his conversion sent shock waves throughout the region. They knew that he who once persecuted them was now preaching and defending the faith he once tried to destroy. Saul's conversion was being celebrated throughout the region.

There was only one problem: These Jewish believers were zealous for the Law of Moses. (See Acts 21:17-22) They had been hearing rumors about Paul and his teachings. When he finally made it to Jerusalem, it was the Jewish Christians that joined the attack on him. They had not been taught the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith. There was a huge rift between the Jewish and Gentile churches.

Because the churches of Judea were primarily Jewish, they had a very Jewish-flavored approach to faith and worship. The big clash came in the outlying areas like Galatia where the teachings of Paul to the Gentile believers and those of Peter to the Jewish believers collided.

As Chapter Two of the book of Galatians opens, Paul refers to an important meeting in Jerusalem. This was most likely what scholars call “The Jerusalem Council” as recorded at length in Acts 15:1-35.

The conclusions of the council were celebrated widely in the Gentile churches where Paul focused much of his ministry far to the West, but the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith was evidently not taught within the Jewish churches of Judea. (See Acts 15:22-35) This tragic oversight soon brought confusion and a huge rift between Jewish and Gentile churches.

From this point forward, Paul's life-work and ministry would be devoted to the defense and confirmation of the gospel. (Please read Philippians 1:7-20) This breach was never healed and ultimately led to Paul's arrest and imprisonment in Rome. This background is essential in understanding Paul's writings.

There is a huge lesson in this story about the importance of embracing the full implications of the gospel. The flesh and carnality always reign when believers are given a watered-down gospel. It may take years to embrace the full meaning of the gospel, but the transforming journey is worth the effort.

Battle For The Gospel: Galatians 2:1-5

“1) Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 2) It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of

reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. 3) But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4) But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. 5) But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.”

As mentioned earlier, scholars believe Paul was referring here to the Jerusalem Council as recorded in Acts 15:1-35. The sole purpose of the Council was to evaluate the gospel preached by Paul and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The false brethren Paul referred to in verse 4 were the many Jewish proselytes who taught that Gentiles had to keep the whole Law to be saved. (See Acts 15:5) In practice this meant that John 3:16-17 and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross accomplished nothing. People still earned their own salvation by keeping the Law and being self-righteous. The gospel was totally nullified and Jesus suffered in vain.

According to the storyline of Acts 15, the debate became very heated. Many testimonies were shared of God's work among the Gentiles. At length Peter himself stood up and shared his story of the first converts among the Gentiles. (Acts 15:7-11) He most likely rehearsed the story recorded in Acts 10 about Cornelius and the gathering in his home hearing the gospel and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the end, truth prevailed and the doctrine of justification by faith was affirmed as the cornerstone of the gospel. Personal faith in Jesus Christ was declared as the sole basis of salvation. Take time to study Acts 15:1-35 in its entirety.

Why is this important? It settles the question; “Did Jesus purchase our salvation by dying on the cross for our sins or do we earn our salvation through good works and self-righteousness?” Until you settle this issue you will never have assurance of salvation and will forever be striving to earn God's acceptance. Instead of a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ you will forever be stuck in empty religion. Instead of walking in the Spirit and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, you will be defeated by your own flesh and left in bondage to sin. (See Galatians 5:1-26) The book of Galatians was ground zero in this battle for truth, freedom, and the gospel.

Mutual Respect and Affirmation: Galatians 2:1-10

“6) But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7) But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised 8) (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 9) and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10) They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.”

Paul now describes the actual Jerusalem Council. He points out that James, Cephas, and John were recognized as leaders over this council. The reader must note that this was not James the

son of Zebedee, the brother of John who was called by Jesus to be an Apostle. (See Matthew 4:18-22; Matthew 10:2-5) A chronological reading of the book of Acts tells us in Acts 12:2 that James the brother of John was put to death with a sword. He became the first Apostle to be martyred.

So who was this James? According to Galatians 1:19, this was none other than “James the Lord’s brother.” Compare Matthew 13:55 where his brothers are named when Jesus visited his own town.

Though his brothers were critics early in his public ministry, they became convinced followers of Jesus and leaders in the early church. His brother James was used by the Holy Spirit to write the book of James, and his brother Judas, who came to be called “Jude,” wrote the small book of Jude. (See Jude 1:1)

From this meeting in Jerusalem the gospel launched forth in every direction with new clarity and resolve. Paul became recognized as “the Apostle to the Gentiles.” This was in harmony with the words of Jesus to Ananias at the time of Saul’s conversion. (See Acts 9:15-16)

At first reading this text in Galatians is a bit hard to understand. It almost sounds like there was a rude or disrespectful spirit between Paul and the leaders of the Council, but that was not the case. There was mutual respect, acceptance, and understanding. None of the power plays, politicking, or self-agendas so common in the modern church were present in this meeting. They were there seeking the mind of Christ. They were each willing to die for the gospel message affirmed at this meeting. I defer to the description from Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament to help explain this context:

“When he was there, there was no attempt made to compel him to submit to the Jewish rites and customs; and what was conclusive in the case was, that they had not even required Titus to be circumcised, thus proving that they did not assert jurisdiction over Paul, and that they did not intend to impose the Mosaic rites on the converts from among the Gentiles, Galatians 2:3-5.

The most distinguished persons among the apostles at Jerusalem, he says, received him kindly, and admitted him to their confidence and favour without hesitation. They added no heavy burdens to him, Galatians 2:6; they saw evidence that he had been appointed to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, Galatians 2:7,8; they gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, Galatians 2:9; and they asked only that they should remember and show kindness to the poor saints in Judea, and thus manifest an interest in those who had been converted from Judaism, or contribute their proper proportion to the maintenance of all, and show that they were not disposed to abandon their own countrymen, Galatians 2:10. In this way they gave the fullest proof that they approved the course of Paul, and admitted him into entire fellowship with them as an apostle.”

The full respect of Paul was noted by Peter in 2 Peter 3:14-16. In this context Peter conceded that the letters written by Paul had many things which were hard to understand, but were to be considered on par with Scripture.

This passage in Galatians 2:1-10 is a great example of accepting and affirming the gifts and

callings of others. Though their ministries headed in different directions which called for a uniquely distinct methodology and resulted in developing very different church traditions, they were unified and one “in Christ.”

It should be observed that Paul was not sent out to plant synagogues among the Gentiles. His calling was affirmed to start uniquely gentile churches with strict adherence to the gospel and the foundation of the Word of God. It was his work that eventually developed and defined a “New Testament Church.”

Our Christian heritage today can be traced back to the Jerusalem Council. We are the benefactors of the recognition of the calling and anointing of God on the Apostle Paul.

Paul Confronts Hypocrisy: Galatians 2:11-13

“11) But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12) For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. 13) And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.”

Paul now includes a story of confronting Peter and a growing Jewish delegation that some time after the Jerusalem Council had visited the Gentile church in Antioch. It seems that Peter had arrived prior to James and the rest of the Jewish delegation. During this time he dined openly with the Gentiles. But after James arrived with other Jewish believers, Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles in keeping with Jewish tradition. The pressure was so great that even Barnabas himself joined in the hypocrisy.

Paul reacted very strongly to what he called “hypocrisy.” He recognized that the doctrine of justification by faith was being undermined and the whole message of the unity of the body of Christ was being trampled under foot. If all believers are one in Christ, then we *must* treat one another with acceptance, respect, and dignity. (See Ephesians 2:11-22)

I believe he included this account of confronting Peter, James, and the Jewish delegation in the book of Galatians to demonstrate his unbending loyalty to the truth and the full application of the gospel. It underlined his claim of not being inferior to the other Apostles.

It furthermore demonstrated that he was consistent with his teaching from the beginning and had never accepted two forms of Christianity. He maintained that both Jew and Gentile were one in Christ. He refused to accept hypocrisy in living out the truth of the gospel.

Though this account of Peter and James visiting the church at Antioch is only recorded in Galatians Chapter Two, it was monumental in healing the breach that was beginning to divide the early church. Paul single-handedly forced the early church leaders to wrestle with the full implications of the Gospel.

Herein is a lesson for every believer. We must seriously wrestle with how the gospel impacts

every area of our lives. Either Jesus Christ is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. I maintain that the gospel impacts every area of the life of a believer and is not merely a “get into heaven free card” when we get to the end of our life.

Contending for the Gospel: Galatians 2:14-16

“14) But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? 15) “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16) nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

These verses build on Galatians 2:11-13 where Paul says he opposed Peter to his face because he stood condemned in hypocrisy. The word “hypocrisy” comes from Greek drama and theater. When an actor switched characters, they had a mask on a stick that they would put over their face. The mask was called the “hypocra.” It allowed an actor to play two parts. Soon the word hypocrisy evolved. It took on the meaning of being “two faced” and referred to people wearing two faces in life.

In this text Paul was accusing Peter of wearing two faces and not being consistent with the gospel. He openly ate and fellowshiped with the Gentile believer in Antioch until James and a Jewish delegation arrived. Then he switched characters and adopted the usual Jewish social distancing practices.

Paul quickly saw that the truth of the Gospel was at stake. According to Galatians 2:16, he noted that the doctrine of justification by faith was on trial with Peter's actions. Paul was pointing out that social distancing from Gentile believers according to the Law gained no favor or merit with God. Instead, by their actions, Peter and the others stood condemned. They were confusing and distorting the application of the gospel.

God used this text early in my Christian life to help crucify prejudice and discrimination. The Holy Spirit convicted me that all men and women are created equal and should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of age, race, or social/economic status.

A person's past life also comes into consideration. I have some dear Christian friends serving life in prison who committed terrible crimes before coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus has transformed them into new people. They are welcome at my camp fire any time. But this text also teaches that we need to contend for the truth of the gospel. Jesus died on the cross to save sinners, but He does not endorse sinful living. Repentance from sin and personal change is part of the Gospel message. God loves the sinner but He hates the sin that enslaves and destroys people. Jesus gives hope for a new life.

I confess, it takes courage, truth, and sincere love to contend for the truth of the Gospel the way Paul did in this text of Scripture. Godly believers need to create an atmosphere where we can stimulate one another to godliness.

I'm not talking about empowering critics. They are part of the problem. I'm talking about mutually wrestling through the application of the gospel toward godly living. This story is an example of contending for the application of the gospel in daily living. This wasn't a "put down"; rather it was a "build up!" It was part of the refining process in the early church.

Don't Rebuild a Broken System: Galatians 2:17-21

"17) But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18) For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19) For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20) I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

Paul now makes a profound case about the futility of the Law to save and sanctify people. If the Law left people so sinful and lost that they needed a Savior, what would going back to the Law add to salvation? Why rebuild a religious system after salvation that failed to produce favor and acceptance with God in the first place? For that matter, if salvation came through keeping the Law, why did God send His Son to die on the cross?

Paul goes so far as to say to Peter, James, and the Jewish delegation in this context he died to the Law that he might live to God. Justification through faith in Jesus Christ did for Paul what trying to keep the Law and earn merit and acceptance with God failed to do: It brought him into fellowship with God.

Galatians 2:20 is among my favorite verses in the Bible. Justification through faith includes the mystery that we were crucified with Christ and He now dwells in every born-again believer through His indwelling Spirit. This goes way beyond trying to appease God through good works and religious rituals. It involves being joined to Jesus Christ in a totally new and profound way. Through faith, Jesus Christ lives in every believer!

Paul is confronting Peter and the Jewish delegation with the question of how returning to the Law improves on what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. In Philippians 3:4-11 Paul made the case that as a former Pharisee, he was more zealous for the Law and Judaism than

all of his contemporaries. When he came to faith in Christ he counted his former religious system as loss, but what he gained in Christ far surpassed what he left behind.

The irony of this context in Galatians is that Paul the former Pharisee was addressing Peter and James who were former fishermen. He was by far their superior in understanding the Law and Judaism. Take time and let that point sink in deeply. They were embracing what he had abandoned through faith in Christ. They were trying to rebuild a failed religious system.

In this text in Galatians, Paul was reminding them how empty and futile his former manner of life was as a religious zealot. There was no way he was going to abandon faith in Jesus Christ and return to a failed system of legalism.

The same holds true for every believer. Going back to a former manner of life is a move in the wrong direction.

(I find Verse 18 absolutely astounding and sobering: “For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.” Paul is clearly saying that trying to achieve justification by the work of keeping the law is a *sin*! And then, in Verse 21, he says that if we try to achieve righteousness through keeping the Law, we *nullify* God’s grace and make Christ’s death *meaningless*! That is a bold and direct teaching indeed!) –dj

Piercing Questions: Galatians 3:1-5

“1) You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2) This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3) Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4) Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5) So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”

Wow! Paul now asks four rhetorical questions to the Galatian believers to demonstrate the difference between faith in Christ and trying to keep the Law through fleshly self-effort. These questions all boil down to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It should be noted that Judaism was based solely on self-effort, but faith in Jesus Christ was accompanied by Pentecost and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Before looking at these questions, it might be helpful to review Joel 2:28-32. This was the promise God made to Israel of the Holy Spirit. It would usher in something new and refreshing for the common people.

This was also Peter’s sermon text on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter two. The contrast between the old wine of the flesh and the new wine of the Spirit comes down to this text. This is what the Old Testament saints longed for!

Paul now moves right to the heart of the issue. The first question he asked in Galatians 3:2 was; “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith?” Bingo! The issue should have been settled with this first question. Did the Holy Spirit come through empty religion or by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ and responding with personal faith?

The second question was equally as profound; “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” His point was obvious. Moving back to Old Testament legalism adds nothing to the inner transforming work of grace and the Holy Spirit! To the contrary, the deeds of the flesh grieve the Holy Spirit. It dampens the walk in the Spirit. It moves from freedom back to bondage. (Preview Galatians 5)

The third question looks back on the persecution of the early believers. Peter and James were part of the harsh treatment dished out by the Jewish religious leaders. Paul asks; “Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain?”

A quick review of Acts 4-9 is sufficient to bring this question into focus. The early Christians

suffered much for the gospel. Ironically, Saul himself was the one who had inflicted much of the suffering on the early believers. Suddenly, there was a role-reversal. Paul was now the one suffering at the hands of Jewish believers for the very things they defended so courageously at the beginning. This question should have served as a wake-up call. Something had drastically changed!

The final question comes in verse five; “Does He then who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith?” During His public ministry, were the miracles coming through the priests and Pharisees or through Jesus Christ? After Pentecost where was the power of the Holy Spirit working? Was He with the Jewish religious leaders or the Apostles and early believers? The book of Acts was written to record the contrast between the empty works of the Law and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit that accompanied the gospel.

These are practical but profound questions. They bring to light the contrast between dead human religion and the life-giving power of the gospel. These questions were intended to be a wake-up call for the churches in the region of Galatia and the church leadership back in Jerusalem.

The drift from the Spirit back to the flesh happens so subtly. It is the move from dependency on grace and the Holy Spirit to self-effort and rigid legalism. It is a move from joy in the Lord to gloom and despair anchored in personal inadequacy. It is a shift in focus from God to self. It often involves displacing prayer and intercession with clever programs. It happens whenever we get so busy working for God we no longer have time to spend with God.

It can be summarized as nothing less than a remake of the Old Testament religious system complete with traditions, rituals, and lip-service to God. In this drift, people hold to a form of godliness but deny the power of the Holy Spirit and the gospel. (2 Timothy 3:5) Make no mistake, Satan loves every form of flesh-based religion so long as Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit are set aside. Empty religion satisfies the inner void for God, but displaces Him with self. The Galatian churches were drifting in that direction very fast. They were becoming Christian Pharisees.

So, be honest, how do you answer these questions in your life? God has used this text as a wake-up call for me numerous times over the years when the fire was being quenched by a return to self-effort and self-dependency. It is easy to go through the motions of religion but be tragically out of fellowship with God.

This is why revival tarries today. Revival is a radical return to God. It is often mistaken for a return to dead religion. Revival involves repenting from flesh-based religious effort and embracing Jesus Christ, the truth of the gospel, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many Sons Had Father Abraham: Galatians 3:6-9

“6) Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 7) Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8) The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham,

saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” 9) So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.”

Paul now uses his classical argument about Abraham. He notes that Abraham the father of the Jews was justified by faith and not by the works of the Law. He was referring to Genesis 15:6 and God's promise about his descendants when he was childless. This same argument is used in Romans 4:3, 4:19-25, and James 2:23.

This was a profound argument for three reasons. First, it was in keeping with the biblical account of Abraham being justified by faith in the book of Genesis. Second, Abraham lived over four centuries before Moses wrote the Law. Finally, Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation.

This leads to Paul's next argument in the book of Galatians. Abraham was the father of two groups of people. He was the father of physical descendants and he was the father of faith descendants. Paul actually goes so far as to say that the faith descendants were more significant than the physical descendants.

In Galatians 3:7 Paul states, “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.” The next verse points out that the Scriptures were laying the foundation for God to justify the Gentiles by faith. This is amazing. Paul actually says that God preached the gospel long ago when he told Abraham, “All nations shall be blessed in you.” As the song says, “Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham.”

He then puts the hammer to the nail in Verse 9 and says, “So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.” By doing this Paul points out that the roots of the gospel and the doctrine of justification by faith goes all the way back to the promise God made to Abraham. He was arguing that the redemptive plan for the Gentiles was not new – rather it was God's plan from the beginning!

This was a bullet-proof argument. His full line of reasoning takes two chapters to unpack. As a new Christian, I thought Galatians 3-4 were mundane. But as I started growing in the Lord, I came to realize they were profound and empowering!

When you fully comprehend these two chapters, the whole Bible takes on new meaning and you and I become part of a much bigger story that goes all the way back to the book of Genesis. As Gentiles, we were in the mind and heart of God from the very beginning!

The story can actually be traced back to Genesis 3:15 when God told the serpent that a future descendant of the woman would crush his head. This was the first promise of a Messiah/Redeemer. Make no mistake – you and I are part of a much larger plan than we can imagine!

The Curse: Galatians 3:10-14

“10) For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.” 11) Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live

by faith.” 12) However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practices them shall live by them.” 13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— 14) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

It was a profound moment when I understood the implication of Deuteronomy 27:26 as quoted by Paul in verse 10. Anyone who fails to keep the whole Law comes under a curse. Breaking one point of the Law is sin. It is like a chain, if one link is broken, the whole chain is broken. One sin results in people falling short and missing the mark. All have sinned and are under the curse. (Romans 3:23) Therefore the system of the Law brings condemnation and death to all people. (Romans 6:23)

However, Jesus lived a perfect life. He kept every command and ordinance of the Law. He was righteous and accepted by God. But when He was crucified, the sins of humanity were placed upon Him. He became a curse for us, as it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:22-23) In this way, Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the Law. He became a curse for us and our substitutionary payment for sin. He was judged in our place. He became the curse that canceled our curse.

The end result was that Jesus became the way of salvation for all who put faith in Him. The work of Jesus Christ dying on the cross for the whole world opened the door for the blessing of Abraham to come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (See Galatians 3:14)

The Gospel is amazing. It is the great equalizer for all people to have hope of salvation. It is not based on our performance. It is based entirely on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

But this is not an excuse to live a reckless and sinful life. The Holy Spirit converts and changes all true believers. The Law was an external demand of absolute conformity. The Holy Spirit works internally by cleansing and changing people. Righteousness by the Law is dependent on my self-effort and good works as measured by the Law. Righteousness by faith is dependent on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the sanctifying work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Righteousness by the Law brings death, but righteousness by faith imparts new life! (Study 2 Corinthians chapter three)

But there is a catch! The blessings of Jesus Christ are only imparted to those who place saving faith in Him. He died for all, but not all receive Him. But all who receive Him through faith are born-again and become children of God. (See John 1:10-13)

The Promise: Galatians 3:15-18

“15) Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. 16) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ. 17) What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. 18) For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based

on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.”

Sometimes small insights carry huge ramifications. Such are the points Paul makes in these four verses. The promise made to Abraham that in his “seed” all the nations would be blessed was not conditional on the Law for three reasons:

First, it was made to Abraham based on a promise from God and not on any condition of the Law. This is evident because the promise was made 430 years before the Law was given. The promise was based on the character of God and not on the goodness of man. God, and not man, was responsible to keep the promise. The Law did nothing to change God’s Covenant.

Second, the promise made to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 and later to Abraham in Genesis 22:18 of a coming Redeemer was singular and not plural. It was the “seed” of the woman and not “seeds.” Paul points out in Galatians 3:16 that this was a reference to Christ. God so loved the world that He worked out the details for human redemption in such a way that it was not dependent on human effort. Man always falls short, but God never fails.

Finally, Paul points out that if the promise was dependent on the condition of keeping the Law it was no longer a promise. Verse 18 says, “God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.” That’s a very good thing because Abraham had numerous character flaws. From lying about Sarah being his wife to sleeping with Hagar, Abraham messed up multiple times. He struggled with his sinful flesh like everyone else.

Make no mistake, Abraham did not earn salvation by his own goodness. He was justified by faith that God would keep His promise. (See Galatians 3:6 & 11) Abraham was justified by faith in God.

So how does this affect you and me? Well, if you back up one verse from this context, Galatians 3:14 talks about the blessing of Abraham coming to the Gentiles and that they would receive “the promise” of the Spirit through faith. Bingo! The promise to Abraham was ultimately talking about the indwelling Holy Spirit given to all believers.

How do we know that? Take a moment and read Acts 1:4-5; 2:33, and 2:39. The promise from the Father pointed to the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit. Now turn and read Titus 3:4-7. Personal faith in Jesus Christ places the believer in the promised dynamic work of the Holy Spirit. This amazing relationship with God is for all believers. This was God’s plan and promise from the beginning.

Extraordinary Times: Galatians 3:19

“19) Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.”

It is a valid question; “If justification is by faith, what was the purpose of the Law?” Actually, it was given for several reasons. For example, the Law defined and established the holiness of God. It also demonstrated the sinfulness of man, because all have fallen short of keeping the Law. As such, the Law was a restraining force for evil. It put boundaries around good and bad

and held fallen human nature in check.

But in this verse, Paul explains another purpose of the Law: It pointed to the promise of a Savior. It kept the nation of Israel looking expectantly for the time of the Messiah. It was there until “the seed” should come to the promised One.

Because the line of the Messiah was through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Jewish nation had to be set aside and preserved. The Law was intended for that purpose. Paul dives into this deeper in the next chapter.

So, what did Paul mean by “ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator?” Let me try to unpack an important concept about God confirming both the Old and New Covenants. The Angel of the Lord was abundantly involved in the giving of the Law. He appeared to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3 and throughout their wanderings in the wilderness. He was there as a cloud by day and fire by night.

No period of time in Old Testament history was accompanied by more “signs and wonders” than surrounding the Exodus and the giving of the Law. (See Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:16; & Acts 7:36) God was supernaturally confirming that He was setting Israel free from slavery and giving them the Law.

Now let’s fast-forward to the New Testament. It is not surprising that the ministry of the Messiah and the gospel of grace was accompanied by equally abundant “signs and wonders.” (See Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6; 2 Corinthians 12:12) God was bearing witness of a change from the Law to the Gospel of Grace. It was accompanied by another time of abundant signs and wonders. He then used signs and wonders to confirm the Apostleship of Paul (2 Corinthians 12:12), and that the Gentiles were included in God’s plan of Redemption. (Acts 14:3; 15:12; Romans 15:18-19)

Let me make a biblical observation: Two periods of time in biblical history were accompanied by extraordinary amounts of signs and wonders: 1) the giving of the Law through Moses, and 2) the giving of the gospel of grace through Jesus Christ and the early Apostles. Why? Because God was stepping up to the plate and confirming that He was the One at work! (See Hebrews 2:4). These were special times that called for extraordinary confirmation by God. These two periods stand out way beyond the ordinary working of God.

So, does God still do miracles today? Of course He does just as He did through Elijah, Elisha, and others in the Old Testament. But it does not rise to the same level as inaugurating the Law through Moses, confirming the identity of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, or the signs and wonders done through the Apostles to confirm the Gospel and the church age.

I have seen numerous miracles over the years and they often came to confirm the preaching of the gospel, but honestly, they are not as abundant today as in the book of Acts. This has nothing to do with a lack of faith among God’s people. It is solely connected to the timing and plan of God as the Mediator of the Old and New Covenants. These two extraordinary events called for extraordinary confirmation by God.

This does not minimize the power of the Holy Spirit in the daily life of the believer. We live and walk in Divine grace, power, and favor. This is the church age accompanied by the ministry of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. We are commanded to walk by the Spirit in this present age. (See Galatians 5:16-26)

Before we leave this subject, I need to briefly mention 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12. As we approach the end times, Paul warns that Satan is going to attempt a false period of abundant signs and wonders to establish his reign and new world order.

Make sure that you build on truth and not the sensationalism of signs and wonders. Abide “in Christ” and His Word even though persecution and difficult times come and it appears as if the god of this world is in control. He will be granted a brief time of power and deception to mislead many. Do not be deceived! Test the spirits and examine the Word of God for truth! As John 15 says, “abide in the true vine.”

The Mediator: Galatians 3:20-22

“20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. 21) Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22) But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

Paul was not throwing out the Law, he was merely putting it in its rightful place. The Law is not against the promise of God, it is simply not the vehicle to deliver the promise of salvation or life. Jesus became the mediator of a better plan. He became the “go-between” or “peacemaker” between God and man. (See Hebrews 8:6; 9:15 and 12:24). The Law became a wall between God and man. Jesus Christ became the bridge or mediator.

The Law did a great job of conveying God's holiness to man, but it was not able to make mankind holy. Why? Because by nature people are plagued with a sin nature. The human flesh is bent toward sin. (See Romans 7:14-25) Instead of imparting life, the Law amplified human sinfulness.

According to Galatians 2:22, there was a purpose behind the Law shutting up all people under sin. It paved the way for Jesus Christ and the gospel. (See Romans 3:19-26) It prepared the way for the promise of life to be given to those who place faith in Jesus Christ.

So is the Law bad? Not at all! It accomplishes exactly what God intended it to do. It still has the same power today to convict people of sin or “missing the mark.”

I often use the Ten Commandments in witnessing and evangelism to show people that they have fallen short and are sinful. The obvious conclusion is that they need a way other than self-righteousness to be acceptable by God. Jesus Christ is that way. He is the mediator between God and man.

The Tutor: Galatians 3:23-26

“23) But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24) Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25) But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

The concept of a tutor was common within the Jewish community. Many families hired a tutor to complete the education of their children. This process prepared them for adulthood. Middle class and poorer families would often opt for an apprenticeship program or even indentured servanthood. Paul says the Old Testament was a tutor for Israel.

The word picture Paul used here for the Old Testament is profound. It is full of types, prophecies, examples, and illustrations that point to Jesus Christ and the gospel. The purpose of the Law is to pave the way for the Messiah and salvation through faith. When a person becomes a Christian and the veil is removed, the Holy Spirit begins to illuminate and reveal Jesus Christ throughout the whole Old Testament. (See 2 Corinthians 3:12-18)

When viewed in this manner, the Old Testament is neither obsolete nor irrelevant. It was the primary text of study for the early believers. It is quoted extensively in the New Testament. I believe it is impossible to be a knowledgeable and mature Christian without a growing foundation in the Old Testament.

But keep in mind, the primary role of the Old Testament is not to be an end in itself, it is to prepare people for faith in Jesus Christ. It was intended to point them to salvation.

That is exactly what Paul said the instruction in the sacred writings did for Timothy. The instruction he received from his mother and grandmother prepared him for salvation. It gave him the wisdom that leads to faith in Christ Jesus. (See 2 Timothy 3:14-15)

As I look back at my own life story, the seeds to the gospel were planted in me as a young child being forced to go to Sunday School and vacation Bible School. I wasn't very cooperative or consistent, but those early Bible stories became my heart's tutor. They eventually pointed me to faith in Christ.

Never minimize the importance of the Old Testament. As Paul said to Timothy; “16) All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17) so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Great Equalizer: Galatians 3:26-29

“26) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27) For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29) And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.”

Faith in Jesus Christ is the great equalizer. There is no favoritism based on age, race, gender, or social status. In fact, being rich or famous could be a personal stumbling block. The only way to become a child of God is through simple saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul further says in verse 29 that if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant and an heir according to promise. You enter into the fullness of the blessing.

How you build upon your foundation in Christ is up to you. According to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, you can build with quality materials or scraps. You can build something great or something pathetic. Salvation places everyone on equal ground. The choices we make and the diligence we put forward in seeking God determines the kind of life we build. Why not build something great?

Abba Father: Galatians 4:1-7

"1) Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2) but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3) So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4) But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5) so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6) Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' 7) Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Paul now uses an illustration that was common in both Jewish and secular culture back in his days. A son was placed under guardians and tutors to oversee their education. These guardians had significant authority or jurisdiction over the child and assumed responsibility for them until the time appointed by the father. This was often to the age of fourteen.

Some cultures practiced a tutor until age fourteen and then a guardian or manager would take charge until around age twenty-two. Royalty was often mentored in this fashion. While under this arrangement, the guardian had full authority over the child until the time appointed by the father.

At the appointed time, the child became the full legal heir of the father. It was often accompanied by an elaborate ceremony. At that point, the child officially stepped into adulthood and began his own journey through life often as a co-owner in the family business.

In this text, Paul points out the Law was intended to fill that role for Israel. At the right time, Christ came to redeem Israel and adopt them by faith into the family of God. With salvation, the Father sends the Holy Spirit into our heart and we begin to cry "Abba Father!" That means, "Dear Daddy."

Paul argues that once the Messiah came, the Guardianship of the Law over Israel was fulfilled. It was time for faith and salvation. It was time to become children of God through the gospel and walk by the Spirit. A new relationship with God was ushered in. It was time for a change.

The Bond of Sonship: Galatians 4:4-7

4) But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5) so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6) Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our

hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7) Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.”

I want to look at these verses a little deeper. The contrast is between slavery under the Law to a Sonship relationship with the Father through faith in Christ. This comparison is extreme and drastic. It paints radically different relationships with God.

But the endearment to God in this text goes far beyond that comparison. The adoption is not like the strained relationship of a rebellious or prodigal son to the father. Notice, “He sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying “Abba Father.” It is the very Spirit of Jesus Himself within us crying out to the Father. There is no closer relationship than that of the Father and His only begotten Son.

There is no strain, no inhibition, and no barrier to this relationship between Father and Son. The relationship we enjoy with the Father through faith in Christ is as deep and precious as the relationship between the members of the Trinity.

This means total acceptance, access, favor, love, and influence. It affects our prayer, praise, worship, standing, and future inheritance. Paul is stressing that we are connected to the Father with the family umbilical cord of Jesus Himself.

Why stand apart from God as a slave through the rigid Law, when you can be cuddled in the bosom of the Father through Sonship? This was the case Paul was making to the Galatians.

Paul was arguing that returning to the Law was distancing themselves from God. It was replacing the barrier between themselves and God that Jesus died on the cross to remove. Paul was utterly baffled by their actions.

But what about you? Have you embraced the acceptance and bond with God through faith in Jesus Christ? If there is a wall between you and God, it is a wall of your own making.

The Sufficiency of Christ: Galatians 4:8-11

“8) However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9) But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? 10) You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11) I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”

In these verses, Paul was expressing his genuine concern for the churches of Galatia. They had started well in their understanding of the gospel and the freedom it brings from keeping the ceremonial law, but they had started embracing legalism again.

They were turning back to observing every detail of the Law. They had put themselves back under the obligation to keep the entire Jewish religious calendar with every ceremony, religious rite, sacrifice, and self-purification ritual. They were moving back into slavery to the Law.

They had lost sight of the fact that Jesus Christ had fulfilled the Law. He was the final sacrifice.

He atoned for the sins of humanity once and for all. Nothing was lacking or insufficient with His sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Going back to the rituals of the Law was an expression of confusion about the gospel.

Make no mistake, Paul was fighting for the truth of the gospel. They claimed to believe in Christ, but they were living in denial of the total sufficiency of Christ to reconcile man to God.

Paul was arguing that returning to the ceremonies of keeping the Law was a denial and distortion of the gospel. When the schoolmaster of the Law pointed people to faith in Christ, its job was done. It was time to step into Sonship and embrace being a child of God.

They were moving backwards. They were embroiled in religious confusion. They were no longer embracing Jesus Christ as their sole basis of salvation. They had lost the sufficiency of Christ to save to the uttermost those who believe in Him.

Advancing The Gospel Through Personal Weakness: Galatians 4:11-16

“11) I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. 12) I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; 13) but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14) and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. 15) Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. 16) So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?”

These verses are a bit difficult to follow. It appears that Paul was looking back at his first preaching of the gospel among them. It sounds like he was suffering from some form of bodily ailment. He mentions that his bodily condition was unsightly to behold, yet according to verse 14 they received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus Himself. The early affection and bond between them was very strong.

Many believe his ailment is related to a condition with his eyes. Note the reference in verse 15. They had so much love and compassion for him, that “if possible they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to me.” I believe this reference was more than an expression of speech. Paul was indicating that he had problems with his eyes.

This may have been his thorn in the flesh referred to in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. He entreated the Lord three times to remove it, but He responded; “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

We now have one of the great ironies of the early church. The one who healed many could not be healed himself. The stated reason was to keep him humble and prevent him from exalting himself. (2 Corinthians 12:7)

Though he could not see well in the physical realm, he had extraordinary vision in the spiritual realm. The above chapter in 2 Corinthians began with the story of being caught up into Paradise and hearing inexpressible words. Much had been revealed to him, yet he was limited by a physical handicap.

I have learned that God often gives extra grace in our area of weakness. In so doing, He gets the glory for what He accomplishes through us. The gospel was spreading through Paul because the Holy Spirit was working. It could not be measured or explained by his own talents, abilities or good looks. To be clear, the Holy Spirit was working in spite of Paul's weaknesses.

Stop making excuses. God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Whatever your weaknesses, God wants to magnify Himself through you. He works in ways we do not understand.

Know What You Believe: Galatians 4:16-20

“16) So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17) They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. 18) But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19) My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— 20) but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.”

In these verses, Paul was expressing his utter dismay about the Galatian Christians. They had abandoned the gospel of faith in the finished work of Christ as the only basis of salvation for a different gospel based on self-righteousness and the Law. (Review Galatians 1:6-10) They were buying into the lie that salvation had to be earned through self-effort and good works.

False teachers had come in like sheep, but they were wolves in disguise. They presented themselves as friendly and loving, but their motives were to distort the gospel. They held to some parts of the gospel but basically wanted to persuade the undecided back into traditional Judaism. Paul warned about them in Acts 20:28-32. They were spreading deception, lies, and confusion.

In these five verses in Galatians 4:16-20, Paul was expressing his concern for the churches in the region of Galatia. At the time of his writing, he was geographically removed from them, yet he yearned to be present with them so as to review the pure gospel.

Many believe the book of Galatians was written prior to Romans. The two books are tightly interwoven. It was providential that Paul was absent and moved by the Holy Spirit to write this letter. What he viewed as a disadvantage to being present and teaching in person ultimately resulted in the book of Galatians. All of his Epistles were written because of similar circumstances. Never underestimate the mysterious ways of God!

What you believe is important. It is not enough to simply say, “I believe in God!” You need to get the gospel right and have a foundation of biblical truth in your doctrine. I encourage you to daily study the Word of God as you build and refine your belief system. Make sure the books of Galatians and Romans are reviewed often as you move forward in your faith. They are foundational to pure Christian doctrine.

Profound Allegory: Galatians 4:21-31

“21) Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23) But the son by

the bondswoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.”

In this broader text, Paul uses the story of Abraham as an allegory to help illustrate the gospel. He notes that Abraham had two sons. Ishmael was born according to the flesh. His birth was Abraham trying to fulfill God's promise in his own way. He went into Hagar and she conceived a son. But he was not God's promised son.

The second son was through Sarah. Even though she was old and beyond child bearing years, she was the avenue of God's promised son. Romans 5:16-25 uses the story of the birth of Isaac as the basis of the kind of faith that brought justification to Abraham.

Paul's point is clear: The works of the flesh do not bring the promise of the Spirit. Trying to gain acceptance with God through the self-effort of keeping the Law is like Abraham fathering Ishmael. By contrast, justification by faith is like the story of the birth of Isaac.

But the allegory is even more profound. The promised Messiah did indeed come through the lineage of Isaac. Verses 28-29 go on to explain that the son of the flesh persecuted the son of promise. Even to this day, the Middle East conflict can be traced to the two sons of Abraham. Those from the flesh always persecute those from the Spirit.

As he moves into Chapter Five, Paul makes another profound point: The flesh always results in bondage, but the Spirit brings freedom. The Law does not have the power to deliver from sin. To the contrary, it brings only guilt and condemnation. But faith in Jesus Christ brings forgiveness and freedom.

Paul's deeper argument on this point in the book of Romans leads to his profound observation of Romans 8:1-4. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because Jesus fulfilled the Law for us and He gave us His Spirit by faith. We fulfill the requirements of the Law by walking in the Spirit. He makes people clean and holy from the inside. He fills genuine believers with agape love which automatically leads to the fulfillment of the requirements of the Law.

Paul uses Abraham as the prime example of the difference between works and faith, bondage and freedom, and condemnation and justification. His arguments are bullet-proof. The promise only comes through the avenue of faith.

Paul closes this context in Galatians 4:28-31 by pointing out that those who put faith in Jesus Christ are the children of promise and of the free woman. After being saved through faith in Jesus Christ, going back to the Law is a move in the wrong direction. It is a move back to the flesh and the story of Hagar and Ishmael.

The Galatian churches were being pressured into going backwards. They were abandoning faith for works, the Spirit for the flesh, and freedom for bondage. Take time to review Paul's amazing questions in Galatians 3:1-5. Paul was still building his case based on those questions.

The Hope of Freedom: Galatians 5:1-6

“1) It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2) Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3) And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4) You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5) For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.”

Paul's argument now turns to a defense of freedom from the power of sin and the flesh. In Romans chapter seven he concluded that the Law was good, but sin uses the Law to bring people into bondage and captivity. Fallen human nature has no power to liberate itself from the deadly venom of sin.

However, Jesus Christ died on the cross to bring freedom from sin and Satan. He died to free people from the condemnation that comes from being under the Law. The violation of one small point of the Law means a person is guilty of breaking the whole Law. Therefore the Law brings condemnation and death. Why?

In Galatians 5:3, Paul makes it clear that those who choose to live by the Law are under obligation to keep the whole Law. The problem with trying to gain acceptance with God by keeping the Law is that the Law becomes your prosecuting attorney. You must prove that you have kept the whole Law to be vindicated. Therefore, based on the Law, the verdict is always “Guilty.” Why? Because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death. (Romans 3:23 & 6:23)

But those who place faith in Jesus Christ have a radically different verdict. It is always “Forgiven!” Why? Because their sentence was already paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross! In this way, Jesus sets us free from the curse that is inevitable when we try to be justified by keeping the Law.

Paul then uses circumcision as an example of the futility of starting down the pathway of trying to keep the Law. Circumcision is merely the first step into the bondage of being forced to keep the whole Law. Read Acts 15:6-11 very carefully. Peter was opposed to putting a yoke on the Gentiles that Israel could not bear; but rather he opted for justification by faith as manifest by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Holy Spirit works through faith to make people clean, but sin works through the Law to make people dirty.

Some argue that Paul was not talking about the whole Law, but rather just circumcision. To them I ask the obvious question; “So on what basis are women sinful before God?” They are not circumcised. What is the basis of their guilt? The answer is simple: The Law stands as a witness against them. They have the same yoke of slavery around their neck as men.

The crux of Paul's argument in this context comes in verse 4: “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace.” You cannot have it both ways. The system of the Law and the system of grace are in opposition to one another. Let me make a brief comparison:

The system of the Law is based on self-work. The system of grace is based on faith in the finished work of Christ. The system of the Law is dependent on human flesh to be good and righteous. The system of grace is dependent on the inner work of the Holy Spirit to make people good and righteous. The system of the Law leads to guilt, fear, and death. The system of grace leads to forgiveness, a clear conscience, agape love, and life. The system of the Law leads to condemnation. The system of grace leads to forgiveness. The system of the Law leads to bondage and a yoke of slavery. The system of grace leads to freedom and acceptance in the family of God as joint heirs with Jesus.

Paul was trying to get the Galatian Christians to understand the utter futility of trying to combine the two systems. It might be easier to mix water with oil than blend the Law and grace. Verse 5 explains Paul's resolve; "But we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."

The Pathway to Freedom: Galatians 5:7-9

"7) You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8) This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. 9) A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough."

The believers in the region of Galatia had started well. They were running strong in their faith until they were hindered from obeying the truth. What was the problem?

A little deception about self-righteousness based on the Law was like hanging a heavy yoke around their neck. (See Acts 15:10) They failed to heed the warning of Hebrews 12:1. They were trying to run encumbered by fleshly sin and compromise.

The human flesh does not have the ability to break the power of sin. They were exchanging dependency on the Holy Spirit for self-effort. They were bogged down in their spiritual lives.

Paul recognized the seriousness of this situation. As this chapter unfolds he launches into a deep discussion on the importance of walking by the Spirit and not the flesh.

He followed the exact same line of reasoning in Romans 6-8. After talking about the power of sin to use the Law to lead people into bondage to sin in Chapter Seven, he launches into the power of the Holy Spirit in Chapter Eight. The flesh cannot please God.

In Galatians 5:9, Paul uses a profound illustration of sin. He says, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." He used the same terminology in 1 Corinthians 5:6. Sin never remains passive. It spreads and multiplies quickly. It is also contagious and can quickly infect those around us.

The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and dependency on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit are the only way to defeat the heavy weight of sin. Legalistic religion based on self-effort will fall short every time. Returning to it will weigh you down and eventually hinder your spiritual growth.

If you are stumbling in your Christian life, it is vital that you embrace truth and the power of the Holy Spirit. If walking by the Spirit is a new theme for you, I beg you to devour John 14-16,

Galatians 5, and Romans 8.

You will never lay aside the weight of sin in your life apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who applies the liberating truth of Jesus Christ in your life. This is your pathway to freedom.

Embracing Personal Freedom: Galatians 5:13-15

“13) For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14) For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15) But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”

It is important to clarify that the call to freedom is spiritual and not national or political. Paul was writing to Christians and not the nation of Israel. He was referring to freedom from the power of sinful bondage in our lives.

Philippians 3:20-21 is a significant clarification of this point. It says; “20) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

Paul was not saying Jesus Christ and the Gospel is aimed at liberating Israel from Roman oppression. Rather he was saying that the Gospel has the power to set people free from the reign of sin in their lives. This is personal freedom.

This freedom should become the basis to serve one another in genuine agape love. Paul pointed out that “the whole Law is fulfilled in the statement, “you shall love one another.” This was the new command that Jesus gave His disciples. (See John 13:34-35)

In Romans 5:5, we discover that one of the roles of the indwelling Holy Spirit is to pour out agape love within the heart of every true believer. This love automatically keeps the Ten Commandments. It hits the target of holiness.

But Paul warns that the flesh and sin are crafty. They lurk even in the shadows of Christian community. Christians can exploit, bite, devour, and abuse one another. When the Spirit of God is grieved, carnal and fleshly-driven Christians are capable of shameful and destructive things. I have seen marriages and families fall apart and churches reduced to battlegrounds. I have worked with many spiritual leaders trapped in shameful slavery to immorality who are sincerely seeking freedom. I believe there is hope for victory and lasting freedom for every believer.

A longer list of what the flesh is capable of is given in the next paragraph of this chapter of Galatians. (See Galatians 5:19-21) Christians are not exempt from sin. When freedom is not protected, the flesh has an opportunity to do great damage within the body of Christ. Sin can spread like leaven among God's people.

This chapter screams very loudly that the only avenue to freedom is for every Christian to walk

by the Spirit, manifest the fruits of the Spirit in every relationship, and crucify the flesh every time it rears its ugly head. This starts on a personal level with every individual Christian coming to freedom “in Christ” and then must be lived out in Christian community.

The longer I am in ministry, the clearer it is to me that biblical discipleship involves getting in the trenches with believers and helping them come to freedom in the areas of their shameful sins, bondages, and junk. It focuses on guiding them through the journey to personal freedom and wholeness “in Christ.”

This was the way the early church raised up mighty men and women who became abundantly fruitful for the glory of God. (See 2 Peter 1:2-11) This has become a significant part of our ministry focus as GoServ Global moves forward. My heart's desire and passion is to raise up many mighty men and women for the glory of God.

God is pulling together years of ministry experience, biblical study, and connection with other fruitful ministries to launch an effective strategy to genuinely help many Christians and churches come to freedom. I believe the calling to freedom is within the grasp of every believer! Stay tuned!

The Great Game-Changer: Galatians 5:16-18

“16) But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”

Paul now zeroes in on the walk by the Spirit. It should be noted that the Holy Spirit was not given to accompany the Law, He was given to fulfill the promise of the Father to accompany the gospel of grace. Joel 2:28-29 is one example of the future promise of the Holy Spirit, but there were numerous others given in the Old Testament.

However, Galatians 5:16-18 makes it clear that the flesh and the spirit are in opposition to one another. I believe God created mankind as body, soul, and spirit. At the fall of Adam and Eve, the spirit of man where God-consciousness takes place was dealt a deadly blow. Instead of being the intended governor of each person, the flesh took over that role. Every human was born with the flesh in control and is therefore in slavery to sin.

The Law did nothing to change the inner makeup of people. It merely introduced an external moral code of good and bad, right and wrong. It defined God's holy character and the basis of righteousness. But instead of bringing life, it brought condemnation and death. It exposed the sinful and lost condition of humanity. It paved the way for the Savior.

During His life, Jesus fulfilled the Law and with His death He paid the penalty of humanity's sin. Establishing the gospel of grace came with the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Read John 14-16)

When the Holy Spirit was given to believers on the day of Pentecost, He became the great

game-changer. The inner spirit of man came alive and became host to the indwelling Spirit of God. He imparts new life, agape love, various fruits, and divine spiritual gifts.

The indwelling Holy Spirit makes it possible for every believer to crucify the flesh and establish the revived human spirit as the new inner Governor. Walking by the Spirit can change the character of people, but the flesh does not give up easily.

Galatians 5:17 makes it clear that the flesh and the spirit are locked in a battle for control. They are in opposition to one another and they seek radically different outcomes. The flesh wants to please the world and make provision for sin, and the spirit wants to honor God.

But there is a huge debate about the exact meaning of this text. Scholars are divided on how to translate the word “spirit” in this context. The same word is used for both the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. So was Paul talking about the regenerated human spirit being in control of the new Christian or was he talking about the indwelling Holy Spirit being in control?

The obvious problem is that the Divine Holy Spirit could easily wipe out any desire of the flesh and turn Christians into robots with no will. But God always honors human free will, even in born-again believers. Instead of becoming an inner dictator, other texts of Scripture seem to indicate that the Holy Spirit actively works on inner regeneration. (See Ephesians 5:26 and Titus 3:4-7) He changes people from the inside out over time.

This is where two theological terms become important. “Justification” and “Sanctification” are closely related but they are different. “Justification by faith” relates to the righteousness of Christ legally imputed to the new believer at the moment of salvation. From that point forward God sees us “in Christ” and thereby in the family of God.

But “Sanctification” is the process of the indwelling Holy Spirit making every believer righteous in character and conduct. The goal is that we become “Christ-like.” This is a lifelong growing and maturing process.

So how does this relate to Galatians 5:16-26? Paul seems to be equating this ministry of the Holy Spirit to the ongoing sanctification process. The Christian journey to maturity is accompanied by many trials, bumps, bruises, and learning experiences. Paul seems to be describing the process of daily living. He was talking about the need to daily walk by the Spirit.

Exposing The Flesh: Galatians 5:19-21

“19) Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21) envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Paul moves very fast through this list, but let’s slow down and try to grasp the bigger picture from all of Scripture. There is a lot behind these three verses.

Paul is basically saying that the human flesh is bent toward sin. These sins include 1) passion sins rooted in sexual immorality; 2) spiritual sins rooted in idolatry, sorcery and the occult; 3) interpersonal conflict sins rooted in jealousy, strife, anger, and disputes; and finally, 4)

self-centered sins rooted in pride, greed, materialism, and chemical addictions. We all struggle to various degrees with these sins. They all aim at human condemnation and bondage.

Since Paul has been talking so much about the Law in the book of Galatians, let me simply point out that these sins are a direct assault on the Ten Commandments. We have all missed the mark of God's holiness. One function of the Law is to expose the sinfulness of human flesh.

The words of Romans 8:5–8 about the flesh now take on significant meaning. Let's review. Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on fleshly things. The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God and refuses to subject itself to the law of God. It has no capacity to do so. The flesh is bent toward sin and death and it cannot please God.

Wow! Those are very blunt statements.

Apart from the work of redemption through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the inner sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, there is no freedom from the inner destructive force of sin. Some people may attain a degree of self-righteousness apart from Christ, but many will pull their moral anchor and drift into the sea of human depravity. Human flesh has a magnet toward sin.

According to Romans 1:18-32, as human society slides down the slippery slope into a moral abyss, the flesh becomes even more dark and empowered. Entire populations can become aggressively bent against God and decidedly evil. What was formerly considered "bad" or "wrong" by society becomes openly defended, embraced, promoted, and accepted.

But even at a point when the morals of a society breakdown, there is an inner longing for religion and some form of "god." Historically, this is where Satan showed up with false religions anchored in idolatry, the occult, sexual immorality, and even human sacrifice. From the pre-flood world through the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, fleshly human religions became dark, sinful, vile, exploitative, deceiving, and anti-truth.

The New Testament and the book of Revelation predicts a return to dark Babylonian religious rites in the end times. (Read Revelation 12-18) This will be accompanied by great deception in secular society and the hatred and persecution of Israel and genuine Christians. Biblical morality will be aggressively attacked.

Make no mistake, fallen human nature is an easy target for the craftiness or "craft" of the serpent of old. Sin and Satan aim at human captivity and eternal destruction. Apart from the true gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no pathway for human redemption.

Notice that Paul moves from a description of the deeds of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-24. Let me make a brief observation; only the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the inner working of the Holy Spirit can produce these qualities. They are opposite of what secular humanism and all false human religions produce and promote. Everything else from human philosophy, psychology and false religions excuse and empower the flesh to various degrees. Do you think this is mere coincidence?

Make no mistake, human flesh is locked in rebellion against God. It is God in His love and mercy that has always been reaching out to lost humanity. Humanity has been twisting, distorting, and running from the truth about God throughout human history.

Whether you realize it or not, you and I are part of a much greater battle. God has a strategy to reach and liberate one soul at a time through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He then wants to move us to freedom and empower us to spread His Kingdom through the gospel.

The war between the flesh and the Spirit is part of an age-old battle. It is part of the battle between evil and good, deception and truth, hate and love, darkness and light, false religions and the true gospel, hell and heaven, and ultimately Satan and Creator God. This is the backdrop behind reality. This is where your struggles with the flesh are rooted.

Fruit of the Spirit: Galatians 5:22-24

“22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

The more I study these verses, the more I realize how beautiful and supernatural these qualities are. And , it must be noted that only the Biblical God of Creation prizes and characterizes these qualities. All other gods and deities are vile or immoral and bent toward the devious. They line up with the deeds of the flesh and not the fruit of the Spirit.

These fruits are not normal human qualities. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are desired qualities but impossible for sinful people to consistently manifest apart from grace and Divine help. But this context teaches that these qualities should become normal for Christians. These are fruits or natural outcomes of walking in the Spirit.

This is undoubtedly what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 7:16-20 when He stated “you will know them by their fruits.” The Spirit of God pours out agape love in the heart of every true believer. (Romans 5:5) This is an undeniable fact of regeneration.

This is why Jesus noted in John 13:34-35 that His followers would be distinguished by the way they loved one another. This “New Commandment” to love one another as a direct byproduct of the inner working of the Holy Spirit automatically fulfills the Law. (See Romans 13:10) Christians need not be legalistic, they merely need to focus on becoming loving and Christ-like. The fruit of the Spirit produces inner holiness.

Note what Paul concluded about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23; “... against such things there is no law.” None of the Ten Commandments can be broken when consistently walking in the Spirit and producing these fruits.

The flesh cannot keep the Law. The deeds of the flesh as recorded in Galatians 5:19-21 are why the Law was given. It was given to put boundaries around human depravity and attempt to reel in sinful corruption. But the Law failed to make people good because it was dependent on the effort of the flesh. (See Romans 8:1-4). According to these verses, Jesus has a different

plan to transform people. He focuses on salvation and the walk in the Spirit.

I always scratch my head when supposed Christians argue about the importance of trying to keep the Law. The only way that is possible is through being born-again and walking in the Spirit. The flesh cannot keep the Law!

In fact Galatians 5:24 hits the nail on the head when it says; “Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” There is no excuse for any Christian to live in bondage to the deeds of the flesh.

Jesus died on the cross to set us free. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every true believer is a journey toward freedom, inner healing, and wholeness. He washes and sanctifies every true believer. He moves us toward holiness.

The New Life: Galatians 5:24-25

“24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

Verse 24 often gets skipped over because it is attached to the end of the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul states that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

This sounds a lot like Galatians 2:20 where Paul said “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

We now discover that the word “flesh” has two meanings. The first in Galatians 2:20 relates to living in a physical body. The second in Galatians 5:24 relates to our sin nature or the power sin has over our lives.

Paul was saying that those who belong to Christ have been freed from the power of sin. Christians are no longer slaves to sin. Our daily experience needs to catch up with this truth of theology.

The battle is real. Practical victory in our lives is only possible as we learn to walk by grace, by faith, and by the Holy Spirit. This is the only way to die to our fleshly passions and desires.

Those four rhetorical questions from Galatians 3:2-5 suddenly become very relevant to this discussion. You cannot lean on your flesh to carry you through the valley of temptation. It is the Holy Spirit who gives strength for the battle. Your flesh will fail you when temptation presses in like a flood.

Walking by the Spirit is not optional. If you want to embrace your fullness “in Christ”, you better embrace the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You will never win the inner war apart from His intervention in your life. Verse 25 says, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Our new life “in Christ” is based on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

(Jesus Himself stressed the ministry of the Holy Spirit for all of us. When His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He taught them the Lord's prayer –and concluded that teaching by telling them in Luke 11:13, “ So if you, despite being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” If you read the whole event in context, it becomes clear that Jesus teaches us to ask for the Holy Spirit in our lives as often as we ask for our daily bread.) -dj

Breakdown Within Christian Family and Community: Galatians 5:15; 25-26

“15) But if you bite and devour one another, take heed lest you be consumed by one another. 25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26) Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”

Notice I have put verse 15 with verses 25-26 for this discussion. It seems that the Christians in the early church had more than a small amount of contention between them. They were biting and devouring one another. Some were boastful while others were challenging each other or allowing themselves to be filled with jealousy. Why do I point this out?

Most people think about the walk in the Spirit in the context of power or anointing for spiritual service, but the backdrop of this text is interpersonal relationships. No place is the fruit of the Spirit more important than in our relationships with other people.

When you think about it, formal ministry is a very small part of our lives. Even the busiest preachers and teachers spend a relatively short period of time each week in front of people, but interpersonal relationships happen constantly. From marriage and family living to work and community involvement, we are constantly rubbing shoulders with people.

I maintain we often think about the fruit of the Spirit in wrong terms. The fruit of the Spirit is not a special occasion wardrobe, the fruit of the Spirit is all-occasion attire. Soon after becoming a Christian, the fruit of the Spirit should flow constantly from our lives. These qualities should become entwined with our personality.

Take another look at the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. If Christians constantly displayed love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control the divorce rate would be zero. There would be no need for family counseling. Church conflict would be non-existent. Christians would never be fired from jobs and Christian employers would be sought after in the marketplace.

Another phenomenon would also take place, groves of people would be drawn to Christ as Christians become the intended salt and light in the world. It is this ministry of the Holy Spirit that is intended to define Christians. According to John 13:34-35 we are to be identified in the world by our love.

This discussion is of paramount importance. There is a huge breakdown within Christian family and community when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. Something has gone tragically wrong! This is part of the reason why revival tarries.

(The next time you see or hear of some tragic conflict among people and it seems you don't

know how to pray for those involved, try praying the fruit of the Spirit into that situation. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control are powerful weapons in the battle against the enemy of our souls.) –dj

Restoration Ministry: Galatians 6:1

“1) Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”

This is a crucial verse for coming alongside of a backsliding brother or sister. Notice that Paul uses the wording “caught in any trespass.” He does not say “sin.” There is a difference between these two words.

The word “sin” means to miss the mark and can be unintentional. It is falling short of God's holiness. Sin can be as simple as bad attitudes or wrong thoughts. God does not want us running around and policing other people. There is no spiritual gift of holy meddling.

However the word “trespass” is more severe. This is the idea of intentionally stepping over a set boundary and remaining stuck in a sinful behavior. Again, it is important to recognize the idea of being “caught in any trespass.” The brother or sister is so entangled in their sinful ways that they need intervention to break free.

I would suggest we are now dealing with a sinful bondage. This can be any of the deeds of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21 that controls our life.

It can relate to sexual immorality, pornography addiction, some form of demonic activity, anger and bitterness or a chemical dependency. The idea is that the person is a fellow believer, but is entangled in a trespass that they can not break free from on their own.

The text does not specify whether or not the person is asking or seeking help. Christian love should pick up on the bondage or struggle and at least offer some form of help.

Notice that the goal is to restore the person. The idea is to bring the person back in proper fellowship with God. 1 John 1:5-10 explains how sin can interrupt our fellowship with God. John points out that the goal for every believer is to walk in the light. When a person is “caught in a trespass” they are walking in darkness and most likely living in deception.

Please notice that it is important to approach the person with a spirit of gentleness. There is no place for a condemning or judgmental attitude. It takes genuine love and humility to come alongside a person caught in a trespass. They are most likely dealing with guilt and self-condemnation and need someone who can offer hope, grace, and forgiveness.

Restoration ministry is a vital part of the body of Christ. Most believers will have seasons of struggle and need someone to come alongside them and tug them back to Jesus.

In my personal evangelism, I encounter many people who are stuck in sin and out of fellowship with God and a good church. Many have given up on the church altogether. Satan loves to entangle Christians in sin and then isolate them in self-condemnation. A significant number of

believers are caught in these situations and need loving intervention.

There is a final word of caution in this verse; watch yourself when you seek to restore others lest you also be tempted. Many pastors and spiritual leaders have fallen into sin in the process of trying to restore others. Let me give a word of caution: It is easy to get emotionally entangled with others. This is especially true if you view yourself as a “fix it” person. Keep in mind, it is the Holy Spirit who needs to do the deep restoring work in people's lives. You can be pulled into their sin if you are not careful.

Many times it is wise to plug them into other ministries like Celebrate Recovery or get them involved as quickly as possible with a good Christian support group. Trust the body of Christ to pick up the slack and enfold them. If you try becoming a one-person rescue mission, you will burn out and eventually crash yourself.

Bearing One Another's Burdens: Galatians 6:2

“2) Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

This is an important verse for many reasons. Agape love helps carry the needs of others. According to the context of verse one, some of this might be the result of restoration ministry. The burdens of someone overcoming a chemical dependency or sexual addiction may require commitments in terms of time and strange hours. Their early walk to freedom can be a heavy burden to help carry.

Of course, there are also the needs of those who are terminally ill, handicapped, jobless, or grieving the loss of a loved one. Victims of a natural disaster also qualify as well as the needs of widows and orphans. Agape love shows up to meet the needs of others.

According to Hebrews 10:32-34, the early church also had huge needs resulting from persecution. Some Christians were thrown in prison and their children were left destitute. Others had all their property seized and were left homeless for the sake of the gospel. This resulted in significant burdens for the early church to carry.

Paul was not specific about the cause or scope of the burdens. They can vary greatly. But in the context of his discussion of the fruit of the Spirit, he fully expected Spirit-filled Christians to step up and help as needs came to their attention.

However, it should be noted that the early church promoted a strong work ethic. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, Paul warned the believers not to condone or enable laziness. Sometimes the best intervention in these cases is to help the brother or sister find a job and learn how to work.

The second part of this verse is also significant. Paul referred to the law of Christ. This might be a reference to the golden rule as recorded in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31. We should treat others as we would want to be treated in a similar situation.

It may also be a reference to the New Commandment to love one another from John 13:34-35. Jesus made it clear that Christians would be identified by their love. It can be assumed that this was love in action and not a mere emotion or feeling of euphoria. Agape love steps into shoe leather and puts on work gloves in the face of needs.

Philippians 2:1-18 hammers out the practical theology behind bearing one another's burdens. Just as Jesus was mindful of the needs of others above Himself, so should His followers care for others. He modeled that true ministry involved meeting the needs of others.

A Proper View Of Self: Galatians 6:3-6

"3) For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4) But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. 5) For each one will bear his own load."

These are profound verses. Let's see what meaning we can squeeze out of them. For starters from verse 3, beware lest pride overtake your life. Don't be overly impressed with yourself. Everything truly good about you can be credited to God and the investments others have made in you. Learn to be grateful.

On the other hand from verse 5, assume responsibility for yourself and your actions. Don't be reckless and a burden to others and don't live as if the world revolves around you. Purpose to be a giver and not a taker in life. This is true on every level. It is true spiritually, physically, emotionally, and financially. Don't be the one talking all the time. Take time to listen and learn.

Then, sandwiched in the middle according to Verse 4, set aside time for courageous self evaluation. Take an honest inventory of your relationship with God and others. Are you self-centered and egocentric? Are you stuck in ruts? Are you going forward or backwards in life? Are you working on personal growth and development? Don't be so impressed with yourself that you are blind to your many shortcomings.

Remember, the context of these verses was talking about restoration ministry from verses 1-2. Be honest with yourself. Are you the one in need of intervention? Are you caught in a trespass that you are too proud to confess to others? Don't waste another day there! Seek help.

I believe the word "boasting" in verse 4 falls short of capturing the meaning of what Paul was saying. A better thought might be "celebrating" your progress and growth in life. This involves learning the secret of goal setting and self-discipline. Set big annual goals and then break them down into smaller steps needed to reach your goals. This prevents you from drifting through life and wasting your time. Don't be ashamed to celebrate your accomplishments along the way.

In the end, God wants us to be mature to the point of being whole and fruitful in life. The Holy Spirit wants us to be both examples of God's mercy and goodness while becoming vessels of His work and grace to others. He wants us to be whole, functional, and contributing members of the body of Christ.

This involves a proper view and attitude about self. The lens through which you see yourself

becomes the window through which you view God, other people, the world, your life circumstances, and your future. If that lens is blurry or messed up, it distorts our whole picture of life and reality. Take time frequently and ask the Holy Spirit to clean your lens. Invite Him to help you see yourself clearly from His perspective.

Financial Stewardship: Galatians 6:6

“6) The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.”

This is a stand-alone verse. It is setting up a model for compensation of those in full time ministry. As Acts 6:4 says, it is vital for spiritual leaders to be set aside for prayer and the ministry of the preaching and teaching.

Study, message preparation, seeking God earnestly in prayer, and shepherding people is hard work. Those who excel work long hours and often get called anytime day or night. They need to be compensated by the body of Christ so they can devote themselves full-time to this calling.

There is a place for church-planting or beginning a new mission work for what is sometimes called “tent making.” This comes from Paul’s willingness on occasion to work with his own hands to provide financially for his support. (See Acts 18:1-5).

Notice there came a point where Paul devoted himself full time to the ministry. Why? Because as ministry grew so did the workload. It can be assumed that the support base was also growing.

God wants every Christian to practice giving and stewardship. In the Old Testament this was called the “Tithe” and was based on 10% of annual income. It went to support the priests, Levites and the work of the temple. There is far more overhead in ministry than merely the salary of the workers.

Texts like 2 Corinthians 8-9 develop this theme in depth for New Testament believers. Giving went beyond mere tithing and is more often referred to as “stewardship” and “free will offerings” in the New Testament.

We set 10% as our base to the church and formal ministry and then give as God prompts us beyond that to special needs. We also support a few missionaries on the side of our giving to the church.

I consider giving as a part of worship and acknowledgment that God is the Provider of all things. God loves a cheerful giver and He rewards generosity. (See 2 Corinthians 9:6-11). The Bible is full of financial advice, and part of it includes giving.

If you need to get your financial house in order, I would encourage you to follow this simple plan for every dollar that comes your way:

1. Give 10% to God's Work
2. Save and invest 20% (Pay Yourself!)
3. Live the rest of your life on 70%

4. Become debt-free as soon as possible
5. Live within your means
6. Avoid credit cards like a curse... paying interest drastically reduces your overall spending power.
7. Consume wisely: Shop clearances, buy quality used items, pray for God's provision, negotiate purchases when possible, and learn contentment.
8. Increase your giving as God blesses your investments and capital.

These eight points are based on practical biblical wisdom and will put you on a pathway for financial freedom and prosperity over time. I would highly encourage you to take a Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University course as soon as possible. The way you handle your finances tells volumes about your character and view of God.

The Law of the Sower: Galatians 6:7-10

“7) Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8) For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9) Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10) So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

In this text, Paul applies the Law of the Sower to the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. He basically says, “What you sow in morals and attitudes you reap in life!” There is no getting around this principle. It is equal for all people in every social group and economic status.

Verse 8 is extremely clear. If you sow to your flesh you will reap corruption and consequences in your life. The Old Testament is full of stories of this universal principle. It is true for individuals and nations. It is true for the rich and the poor. It is true for common people and political leaders. Your personal morals will shape your life circumstances.

It is equally true that those who sow to the Spirit reap amazing blessings and eternal life. As Hebrews 11:6 says, “... God rewards those who seek Him.” God abundantly blesses those who live for Him and keep His ways.

This text was foundational to my personal journey to freedom and has significantly shaped my life philosophy. I learned very early as a Christian that if I wanted my life circumstances to change, I first needed to change the seed I was sowing. It takes time to produce a crop, but you can start changing your seed immediately.

It is true that changing destiny takes time but changing direction can happen immediately. The Law of the Sower also has a compounding effect. Abundant sowing consistently over time produces incredible results.

The Law of the Sower can be applied to every area of life. It is true for your spiritual life, physical fitness, mental well-being, relationships, and finances. What you do consistently on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis will determine your future.

Verse 9 is a great summary; “And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due season we shall

reap if we do not grow weary.” The Law of the Sower says, “You reap what you sow in life.” It also says, “You reap as you sow in life.” (See 2 Corinthians 9:6) If it’s worth doing, do it big! Don’t plant a small garden of good seed when you could plant a huge field. It is from the backdrop of the Law of the Sower that we can tackle the subject of the negative consequences of bad habits and the positive results of good disciplines. Understanding this Law produces huge personal motivation. It gives the promise of monumental change in life and the wisdom to accomplish that change.

Simply identify the area you want to change and start sowing different seeds in that area. You are not a slave to fate, chance, your addictions, bad habits, or bad “karma.” God has given you the power to change. This is rooted in the Law of the Sower.

Observing life and people through the lens of the Law of the Sower has given me deep fear and reverence for God. There may be a few bumps in life from unexpected events like accidents, natural disasters, or the actions of the wicked, but overall the Law of the Sower is the most influential force in life because it is rooted in the character and nature of God. I will leave you to think that through on your own.

Becoming a Source of Good in the World: Galatians 6:9-10

“9) Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10) So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Ok, sit back and let’s have a little chat about “going good.” This is a conversation long overdue in many Christian circles.

I believe in the importance and value of doing good. I know the world has plenty of bad, but God wants His people to constantly sow good. Verse Nine starts by saying, “Do not lose heart in doing good.” Why?

First, because God is good and can only do good. James 1:16-17 tells us not to be deceived about the immutability of God in going good. “17) Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” God is absolutely good and only does good! He does not change in “doing good.”

Second, we should “do good” because of the Law of the Sower. What you sow you reap in life. Galatians 6:7 uses the same phrase as James 1:16; “do not be deceived” and then it adds, “God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, he will reap.” The implication is that if you want to receive good, be constant in sowing good. Verse 9 concludes that “in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.” Keep in mind, the context is about “doing good.”

Third, with a very large stroke of the brush, in an evil world God wants His people to be the source of good. Because He is the Father of lights, He wants us to shine as lights in the world. (Combine James 1:17 with Matthew 5:14-16) This becomes the basis of our witness and the expression of the kingdom of light of which God makes us a part at the time of salvation. (see

Colossians 1:12-13)

Finally, the conclusion is that Christians should create opportunities to “do good” in the world. That’s exactly what Galatians 6:10 concludes. We are to look for opportunities to do good and in the process be clothed with good deeds.

Make no mistake, we are not saved by good works, but we are saved **for** good works. Ephesians 2:8-10 makes this absolutely clear. Good works should follow in the wake of every Christian like waves behind a speedboat. God wants us to constantly make good waves in the world for the glory of God.

Nothing interrupts Satan’s evil plans in the world more than millions of Christians devoted to sowing good daily. When was the last time you pondered Romans 8:28? Read it slowly; “28) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.”

God wants you and me to be part of His source of good in the world. If you cannot find an opportunity to do good, then look for some hurt, pain and suffering and breathe agape love, hope, and grace into it. Purpose to be a beam of light in otherwise dark places. Nothing paves the way more for sharing the gospel than being a source of good in the world.

A New Creation: Galatians 6:11-16

“11) See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12) Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13) For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. 14) But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15) For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16) And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

As Paul concludes the book of Galatians, he returns to the subject of circumcision. This time he makes the point that many who were pushing the gentile Christians to be circumcised were doing it merely to avoid persecution. Rather than preaching the cross of Christ, they focused on the outward signs of keeping the Law.

Paul found this to be a hypocritical paradox. They stressed outward circumcision but neglected to become godly people. The prophet Micah touched on this in Micah 6:8; “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

God harshly judged His people all through the Old Testament because they focused on the externals but inwardly were wicked and sinful people. They circumcised their babies and kept the festivals, and even presented sacrifices, but they were full of greed, and gross immoralities. They exploited widows and orphans and openly worshiped other gods.

They kept the external requirements of the Law, but broke every one of the Ten

Commandments. By contrast, the gospel changes people. Verse 15 points out that circumcision is nothing, but what matters is becoming a new creation. This is the fruit of the gospel and being born-again by the Spirit of God. Genuine faith in Jesus Christ changes people.

Because of this contrast, Paul boasted in the preaching of the cross of Jesus Christ and laid his life down to defend the gospel. Keep in mind, Paul himself was circumcised according to the Law and spent his early years as a Pharisee, but he was sinful and lost.

According to his testimony in Philippians 3:2-11, it was personal faith in Jesus Christ that changed him. You really need to stop and read his testimony to clarify what he is stressing as he closes the book of Galatians. Faith in Jesus Christ accomplished for him what the Law had failed to do! It changed him into a new person. He points out that those who put faith in Jesus Christ become a New Creation!

Paul concludes in verse 16 by saying that those who become believers in Jesus Christ are the true Israel of God. He pronounces a blessing of peace upon them. They might have persecution from people, but they gain peace with God!

Brand-Marks For Jesus: Galatians 6:17-18

“17) From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. 18) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.”

The greatest affirmation of your belief system can be measured by how much you are willing to suffer to defend it. Paul uses that point to drive home his final argument about the gospel of justification by faith that he preached. He paid a high personal price because of his love for Jesus Christ and the gospel. Ultimately, he gave his very life to defend the doctrine of justification by faith.

2 Corinthians 11:22-33 shares parts of his story and how much he suffered for the gospel. Every time I read this text it deeply challenges me. Let me summarize.

Paul was often put in jail or prison, beaten times without number, five times he was subjected to public lashings of thirty-nine blows, three times he was beaten with rods, one time he was stoned and left for dead. Besides that, he was shipwrecked three times and on one of those occasions he spent a full night and day floating around at sea until he was rescued.

Besides that, he went on many journeys by foot and covered thousands of miles. On those trips he often went without food and drink while suffering much hardship from the elements with cold and exposure, sleepless nights, wild animals, and robbers. He was in constant danger from people who wanted to kill him. When you signed up for a short term mission trip with Paul, you literally signed with your own blood. Traveling with Paul was not for the weak or faint-hearted.

But that doesn't come close to telling the whole story. When he was put in jail in Philippi, he and Silas were locked in the inner jail with their hands and feet in stocks and bonds. Beyond that, as a prisoner of Rome he wore chains much of the time. May I observe that chains and shackles were not designed for bodily comfort. Paul's body was literally covered with scars, calluses, and leanness.

With that background, you now have an idea of the meaning of Galatians 6:17. Beyond that, some believe he may have actually been branded with a hot branding iron to mark him as an enemy of Rome. He suffered daily for Jesus and the gospel entrusted to him to preach.

His point was very clear; “The gospel preached by me is not motivated by personal gain. I have lost everything and suffered in unimaginable ways for this gospel. I have been willing to pay this price because of my sincere love for Jesus Christ and the defense of the true Gospel.” How could anyone ignore the weight of this closing argument?

Now Paul gives the final verse in the book of Galatians; “18) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit brethren. Amen.” His whole discussion of the flesh and the spirit earlier in the book of Galatians comes into focus once more in these closing two verses. Paul was willing to suffer in the flesh that he might prosper in the spirit. He understood that God’s grace could strengthen the inner man even when the outer man was suffering and decaying. (See 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

I sometimes chuckle when people inquire about going on a short-term mission trip. One of the first questions they often ask is; “Can you guarantee my physical safety?” It tells me from the onset that their focus is on the flesh and not on the spirit.

This is the issue that concerns me most about the western church as we move into the end times. The obsession with personal physical comfort will result in many so-called Christians abandoning their faith in the face of persecution.

Jesus said that those who seek to save their life will lose it, but those willing to suffer and even lose their life for Him and the gospel will gain true life. (See the context of Matthew 10:39 and 16:25) This is the turf the faith of the early Christians was built on.

Stop right now and analyze your focus and priorities. Are you willing to suffer in the flesh that you might prosper in the spirit? Does the smallest thought of physical discomfort cause you anxiety? Can you persevere through pain and discomfort to accomplish a task? Are you willing to suffer in the flesh to keep your word and your convictions? Do you embrace the value system of Paul as verbalized in Acts 20:22-24? Is your love for Jesus greater than your love for this life and the world?

These are questions you need to settle in defining yourself and evaluating your true faith walk. Do you have any brand-marks earned because of your love for Jesus?