

GALATIANS

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary

Thomas W. Finley

Galatians

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It is always a joy to work together with others in the body of Christ for the edification of the saints.

Foreword

Grace is one of the great and glorious themes of the Scriptures. Yet, many believers do not realize the full effect and power of God's marvelous grace. While believing that a person is saved by grace through faith, many fail to understand that the new life begun by grace is also lived by grace. They understand the "unmerited favor" aspect of grace as it relates to their initial justification, but they do not know of the power of grace by which they are enabled by the Holy Spirit to live victorious Christian lives. This is why so many believers, who know they are delivered from the penalty of sin by grace, mistakenly think they must now live the Christian life under the demands of law-keeping to be delivered from the power of sin presently. You can be sure that there are many teachers who promote this distorted view of living the Christian life.

The believers in Galatia had come under the influence of just such teachers. The teaching of law-keeping for a believer's present sanctification was producing in the Galatian believers and their assemblies the devastating effects of legalism, resulting in a life characterized by the works of the flesh. It is for this reason that Paul wrote the letter to the assemblies in Galatia that we call the book of Galatians.

Tom Finley has written a wonderful and very helpful commentary on the book of Galatians in which he explains that the Christian life begun by grace through faith is lived in the same way. This commentary is both insightful and practical. Brother Tom gives an excellent treatment of the truth contained in Galatians as he traces and explains the message in Paul's letter. From the background of the letter to its conclusion, Tom gives helpful thoughts about the importance of and practical ways to use basic and sound principles of Bible interpretation. The "Life Application" sections give useful and practical help for living the Christian life. I found the footnotes and appendices to be interesting, helpful and filled with important information that contributes to understanding the book of Galatians. In writing this commentary of Galatians, Tom Finley has done a great service to all believers who desire to know the truth of Scripture.

The book of Galatians is important and needs to be correctly understood. This commentary will help you as you pursue that goal.

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Introduction

This book is not a typical Bible commentary like one might find in the United States or the western world. A typical Bible commentary in the United States would present truths of the Bible portions covered and argue in favor of certain theological positions. It may also offer some devotional thoughts, inspiring and helping people to live godly lives. This commentary, however, has been specifically designed for other countries, especially those which do not have much Bible literature. America, where I live, is really overloaded with Christian literature. I just recently received a catalog from a large Christian book distributor here in the U. S. The catalog contained over 60 pages of merchandise available for the Christian, most of it books. There were thousands of books listed as available for order and delivery within a matter of days. Yet, in most places where the church is really growing, places like Asia and Africa and the Middle East, there is not that much literature available. What is available may not be of excellent spiritual and theological quality. Thus, there is a great need for quality Christian literature in many countries outside North America.

This commentary will be different because of the intended audience. Firstly, of course, this book will aim at presenting the truth of the Scriptures in a way consistent with sound interpretation principles. The interpretation method used is the “grammatical-historical” method, which may also be understood as the literal interpretation of a passage. More will be said later on these principles. In addition to my own personal study of the text, I have used existing Bible commentaries written by others as resources in order to discover and present the truth as accurately as I can.

Secondly, this book contains scattered helps throughout the text to help students in other lands know and use some basic principles of Bible interpretation. The main purpose of this commentary is not to teach a course on hermeneutics (the art and science of Bible interpretation) as that would comprise at least a booklet in itself. But, the knowledge of some basic principles should prove a help to my brothers and sisters in other countries in employing recognized principles and avoiding common interpretive errors. Thirdly, but very importantly, this book will contain some spiritual help for

living and growing in the Christian life. Galatians is an excellent Bible book for introducing the believer to some fundamental helps for living the Christian life. In fact, Paul wrote it to the saints in Galatia exactly for that reason. Most of these helps will be highlighted in sections titled, “Life Application.” However, there are also helps in other scattered places in this volume.

Some may wonder how this commentary came about and how the author was prompted to write it. A few months ago I was spending some devotional time in the book of Galatians and became interested in doing an in-depth study of the book. Soon after I began the study I was asked to consider returning to a Bible college in Asia to teach a short course there. I felt that the Lord was opening up this opportunity and was leading me to share on the vital truths in this epistle to the students there. As I began to work on this, I realized the great need for quality literature in countries outside of the U. S. and had the desire to help meet this need by writing a commentary on Galatians. This book will serve as a textbook for the course at the Bible college, but it should also be useful to many other saints in other lands. The style will be less formal than most commentaries written for a western audience. May God use it for His kingdom and His glory.

The 2018 edition of this commentary was undertaken to make several improvements. The text of the book of Galatians is now inserted in the sections under discussion. The text used is from the English Standard Version Bible (ESV). Also, the writing has been modified to make the book more readable by those people who have English as a second language (ESL). Finally, a few technical corrections have been made to the writing style.

Background to Galatians

There is a difference of opinion among Bible teachers concerning which churches are addressed in this letter and when it was written. There is no absolute proof for which of the theories is correct, but this issue does not impact the overall teaching of the epistle or its application to our lives today.

Galatians 1:2 reads, “to the churches of Galatia.” The problem is that the term “Galatia” was used in a couple of different ways in the first century. In one use the term Galatia described a *geographic area* in the northern part of Asia Minor, which was *populated by certain ethnic tribes* (you can see this use in Bible maps). The other use of the term was in a *political* sense, as there was a Roman province termed Galatia. This province contained territory that extended into the southern part of Asia Minor, an area where Paul visited on his *first* missionary journey. Thus, the “southern Galatian theory” says the epistle was written to churches in the southern part of Asia Minor, and includes cities visited in Paul’s *first* missionary journey (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe – Acts 13, 14).

The “northern Galatian theory” holds that the letter was written to churches possibly established (but never explicitly mentioned in Acts) during his *second* missionary journey. Supporters of the northern theory point to Acts 16:6, which states that Paul and his band “passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region.” However, the reference here to the “Galatian region” does not necessarily equate to the northern area. It is argued that instead the reference in Acts 16:6 speaks of one area – the Phrygian-Galatic area within the Roman province. The “southern Galatian theory” currently holds more weight among Bible scholars.

Dating of the epistle – its relationship to the Acts 15 council

Although not critical to its message, the relationship of the Acts 15 council to the epistle of Galatians is an interesting question. Was Paul’s visit to Jerusalem noted in Galatians 2:1-10 the same occasion as his visit to the council in Acts 15? Paul first visited

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Jerusalem three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18-19). This visit corresponds to Acts 9:26-30. Galatians 2:1 records a *second* visit to Jerusalem, taking place after a period of fourteen years, meaning fourteen years after Paul's conversion. This visit could be the same as that recorded in Acts 11:30, where Paul and Barnabas brought funds to Jerusalem from Antioch for famine relief. Some interpreters say Paul did not mention this visit in Galatians. They claim Paul only referred to the supposed Acts 15 council visit in Galatians 2 as a second one, not a third one, because it was not related to his argument concerning his apostolic authority (Gal. 2:5-10).

Other Bible teachers note that the Acts 15 council does not correspond to the Galatians 2:1-10 visit because the Galatians record reports only a private meeting with certain apostles. In contrast Acts 15 records a public meeting with many present. Also, it would seem strange that the outcome of the conference in Acts 15, with its important bearing on the questions raised in the epistle to the Galatians, would not be noted in the Galatian letter. Those who support the theory that Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1-10 are speaking of the same event argue that the private meeting took place before the public one.

All of this discussion plays into the dating of the epistle. Since we know that the council took place about 50 A. D., the letter could have been written shortly after the first missionary journey in the province of Galatia, but before the council took place. (This view would also line up with the "southern Galatian theory.") The other view holds that this letter could have been written later, sometime after the council in Acts 15. Those who support a date after the council in Jerusalem usually date the epistle around 54-55 A. D., citing some similarities to other writings of Paul in that time frame.

In conclusion, to me it seems best to say that the epistle was probably written before the council in Jerusalem because the council's discussions and decisions would have been important in arguing against the Judaizers plaguing the Galatian churches. The letter also, under this view, would have been written to the churches established in Galatia on Paul's first missionary journey. Since Paul had established a base in Antioch (see Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-4; 14:26-28), it is likely that he wrote this letter to the Galatians from Antioch not long after his first missionary journey to Galatia. This would

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place the dating of the epistle around 49 AD, and make it the first of Paul's epistles, and certainly one of the very earliest of all NT books. This seems very significant. I believe the Holy Spirit inspired this epistle at this early date to help the church be clear on the distinctions between grace and law, and to help the church realize how grace is the foundation of the Christian life.

The occasion of the letter

It is clear from the letter that the negative influence of some outsiders (Judaizers) upon the assemblies gave rise to Paul's writing (Gal. 1:7; 3:1; 4:17; 5:10, 12; 6:12-13). "Judaizers" is a term that has been applied to that group of religious people who mingled among first century believers and promoted the practice of Jewish laws and customs, either as a means for being "saved" or for being "sanctified." It has its modern counterpart in "legalists" or "legalism," which will be discussed in this commentary. Paul was writing to combat the false teaching being thrust upon these churches. In conjunction with this, it seems he was also dealing with some accusations against his own status as an apostle of God commissioned with the truth.

The purpose of the letter

Paul's purpose was to bring the Galatian believers back to the true track of grace because they were being taken away by the Judaizers to the track of law. The "good news" about grace, as we shall see in detail in the comments on the text, applies both to our eternal salvation (Eph. 2:8-9) and to the progressive sanctification (holiness) of our living as born again believers.¹ Through solid

¹ The Greek word "sanctification" means to be "set apart." It is used to show how we are "set apart" to God. The root word in Greek carrying this idea is also used in translated English words such as "holy," or "holiness," or "saint." There are three primary aspects of a believer's sanctification. Firstly, every believer is already holy in his "position" before God. This *positional* aspect of sanctification involves our position "in Christ," our spiritual union with Him, based entirely upon His redemptive work in salvation (Heb. 10:10). We are already holy in our

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historical and Scriptural argumentation Paul intended to expose the false teachings of the Judaizers and reorient the believers to grace. Later we will see that grace involves the working of the Spirit of God in the believer's life. Paul was laboring once again for them—this time *not* to bring them to a new birth, but *to bring them to maturity* in Christ—“until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). Paul's purpose in writing this letter is clearly discernable, and this purpose dominates the letter repeatedly. The purpose of any letter is important for interpretation of the text. Paul's definite purpose in this letter must be kept in the front of our minds as we seek to understand what he was saying to his original audience in each section of the writing.

The theme of the letter

The theme of the letter is the grace of Christ as sufficient for both initial justification (imputed righteousness received through faith), and progressive sanctification (increasing holiness) in the believer's life. Since the recipients of the letter are already believers, the main stress is on grace for sanctification, instead of law, as promoted by the Judaizers who troubled the Galatians. An important verse of the epistle is Galatians 2:20. When placed together with 2:19, one gets a powerful picture of how Paul lived the Christian life: “For through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

position before God. Thus, the NT often calls believers “saints.” However, this sanctification does not describe our “condition”—how we might be living at any given time. The second aspect of sanctification is our experiential sanctification, and it describes our spiritual *condition* in daily life. Such sanctification in our experience should be “progressive,” whereby we are progressing in holiness of life over time (Rom. 6:19; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). The final phase of sanctification is termed ultimate sanctification and points to the future when Christ returns and the believer is finally transformed to be like Christ.

Interpretation helps

Throughout this commentary I will provide some helps on how to most accurately interpret Scripture. In this “Background to Galatians” section we see something important for understanding a book of the Bible, especially an epistle (a letter to NT believers). It is critical that one try to understand the historical setting involved with the letter, the specific occasion that gave rise to the writing, and the purpose of the author in writing to his audience. A good Bible dictionary will often give some help on these matters.

Discerning an overall theme in an epistle helps the interpreter bring into focus what major spiritual truths the Holy Spirit is seeking to make known through the human author. This will help us apply it to our lives. The overall theme will also likely have some bearing upon the interpretation of any particular passages within the letter, as will the purpose of the writing.

The first goal of interpretation is always to try to understand exactly what the author himself was actually trying to say to the original recipients of a letter or text. This is a cardinal rule of literal Bible interpretation. We must put aside our own preconceived theological ideas and seek to see what the text actually says, in line with what the author intended. Otherwise, we will be reading into the text a meaning that the author did not intend. If at first our theological framework seems threatened by the seeming plain and logical meaning of the text, then we should not try to twist the text to fit our theology. Instead, we should wait humbly on the Lord for more light and understanding, being willing to change our ideas. It is honoring to the Lord if we honestly say that we don’t yet understand a text. It is dishonoring if we can’t honestly figure a text out and yet we proceed to assign a meaning to it that fits our theology.

We must rely upon the Holy Spirit and pray in dependent faith for enlightenment as to the interpretation of any Biblical text. Yet, we cannot get correct light from the Holy Spirit if we ignore sound principles of Biblical interpretation. Sometimes light on the exact meaning of a text does not come until we have read it many times, and even over many years. The real meaning of a particular text is often confirmed by having knowledge of many other Scriptures that

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help bring the meaning into focus. Therefore, a good understanding of any verse or passage requires knowledge of the whole Bible, a correct understanding of various theological and spiritual themes in the Bible, and the more immediate context of the verse. We must be patient and not think that we can always understand Biblical texts in a quick way or an easy way. It takes much patience, much reading and study, and much reliance upon the Lord.

The growth of our own spiritual life should also go hand in hand with our pursuit of Biblical knowledge. Some academic knowledge of the Bible may be gained through study alone without the pursuit of spiritual growth. However, the knowledge of God Himself will be missed, and the true spiritual riches of the Scriptures, as well as the full truth of the Scriptures, will not be gained. The Bible is firstly a spiritual book, not just a book of facts, history, teachings and doctrines. It requires spiritual illumination to see the truths of Scripture in an enlightened way, and it is the spiritual man who can appraise the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-15).

Galatians – Outline of the Book

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Paul’s testimony: He lives by the life of Christ, not by law – 2:17-21

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Works of law contrasted with the Spirit by faith – 3:1-5

The example of Abraham – 3:6-14

The law contrasted with life and sonship in Christ – 3:15-29

Chapter Four – Law superseded by the Spirit

Now sons and no longer slaves – 4:1-7

Do not return to bondage to the elemental things - 4:8-11

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The flesh and the Spirit – 5:16-26

Chapter Six – Sowing to the Spirit

Sowing and reaping – 6:1-10

Closing remarks stressing the cross of Christ and the new creation – 6:11-18

Chapter One - The Gospel of Grace

Introduction - 1:1-5

¹Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—²and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia:³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,⁴who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul lays out his credentials as God’s apostle (which means “messenger” or “sent one”). He is not sent from men, nor even by God using “the agency of man.” He is sent out with God’s message through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. From the start Paul begins a defense of his ministry by telling the truth, not bragging. He must tell who he really is and why his message is authentic, because others are seeking to discredit him and his message. Paul is showing that his ministry is from God because those who are troubling the Galatian churches are preaching a different message than Paul’s! In verse two, Paul is including those with him in his apostolic company as supporters of this letter to the churches of the province of Galatia.

Paul’s greeting of “grace and peace” to the recipients is usual to the opening greetings of his epistles to churches. The apostle expresses his hope that his readers will experience grace and peace from God for their Christian life. Although Paul’s familiar greeting seems almost like a formality, we should not take it this way. The apostle knows that only God’s grace can keep believers living in the reality of the Christian life, and only peace from God can support us in the midst of troubles and turmoil. Importantly, we should note that “grace” is a keynote of this letter. Although the believers were called “in the grace of Christ” (1:6), the Judaizing troublemakers were turning these believers away from grace to law. This turn would cause them to “fall from grace” (5:4).

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Verse four is very interesting and somewhat unique in the New Testament in that it explicitly states that Christ's sacrifice for our sins was for this specific purpose: "to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." This age will end when Jesus returns and sets up His kingdom of 1,000 years (Matt. 13:36-40; 19:27-29; Mk. 10:28-30). The New Testament often contrasts this present age with the age to come. This age is evil firstly because it is under the devil's rule (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Jn. 5:19). The world is also filled with evil temptations and the wickedness of man (Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

However, I think Paul's thought here is that this "deliverance from this present evil age" especially signifies a release from the bondage of legalism, consisting of an adherence to religious rules for living a holy life. This understanding is in accord with the context of the epistle as a whole where liberty in Christ is stressed, especially pointing to freedom from the bondage of legalism (Gal. 2:4; 4:3, 9, 24-26; 5:1). This view is also supported by the statements of Paul in Galatians 6:13-15. There Paul says he has been crucified to the world—a religious world signified by the rite of circumcision.

The turn of the Galatians to law constituted a turning away from the very purpose of Christ's work, which was to bring believers into intimate fellowship with Christ (the experience of grace), and conform them into His image (Rom. 8:29). God's purpose is to bring men into maturity in Christ and build up the body of Christ (Gal 4:19; Eph. 4:12-14). This evil age is working against God's purpose. Aside from the problem of the lusts of this world (1 Jn. 2:15-17), we see that there are "elementary principles of the world," which include religious rules and rites (Gal. 4:9-11; 6:12-15; Col. 2:20-23). While these may seem good to the religious mind, a focus on such religious "law" frustrates believers from enjoying true spiritual fellowship with Christ in the realm of grace (Gal. 5:2-4).

It should be noted that verse four in several translations reads: "so that He *might* rescue us from this present evil age" (NASB). The word "might" is used here in some translations to indicate that the verb for "rescue" is in the subjunctive mood in the original Greek language of the New Testament. The subjunctive mood indicates that the action (being rescued) is not certain, but may

happen. Unfortunately, today there are many true Christians who are still captured by this evil age—by its temptations to sin, its pleasures or its worries, or by its religious bondage of law-keeping. They have not yet been liberated to enjoy Christ in His power and grace. The truths in Galatians can help them realize this potential rescue.

Finally, let us think about the real significance of this thought here: “who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.” Almost all Christians think this way: “He gave Himself for our sins so that we might go to heaven.” Although it is true that Christ’s death on the cross does bring us into an eternal relationship with God, here we see that Paul is stressing another purpose of God in Christ’s dying for our sins. That purpose is our sanctification, a living in this world set free from all bondage and evil influence of the present age *in order to live a life expressing Christ*. This purpose is extremely significant to God, and Paul is spiritually burdened for this purpose to be realized in the Galatian believers: “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (Gal. 4:19).

Paul’s aim for his readers is Christian maturity, a well-developed expression of Christ in their living. He sees God’s goal in Christ as something much more than just “being saved,” or having a “ticket for heaven.” Therefore, we will see that throughout the letter Paul’s main burden is not about initial “justification” with God. He is not writing with an intention to be sure that the readers are saved, or to tell them how to be saved. His aim is the *sanctification* of his readers, the progressive growth in holiness in their daily lives, resulting in a clear conformation of Christ’s life in their lives. In conjunction with this, we will see that Paul is writing to turn the Galatians back to grace and abandon the way of law for sanctification. In understanding an epistle such as this one, we should keep in mind the overall purpose for which it seems to be written. This purpose will often help the reader and the teacher more accurately understand passages within the letter.

The gospel of grace distorted - 1:6-10

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Bible commentators have noticed that this epistle includes no opening praise to God or prayer for the saints. This is unusual for Paul. One reason for this could be that he is strongly burdened about a problem, and he charges into this problem in verse six with a serious rebuke to the Galatian churches.

Verse six makes some powerful points. We must remember that Paul is probably writing this letter at some point less than two years after he visited these cities in Galatia and brought them to Christ (Acts 13:14-14:23). Thus Paul is amazed, that not long after receiving the good news, these believers were “deserting Christ” by turning to religious law-keeping. They had been called “in the grace of Christ” but now they were abandoning His grace for a “different gospel.” Paul’s use of the Greek word *heteros* for the word “different” here, instead of using *allos*, is significant. Using *allos* would have meant a difference of the same kind, but *heteros* denotes a difference of kind or nature. The “different gospel” here is radically different from the genuine gospel of grace.

The gospel here is basically called “the grace of Christ.” The “gospel of Christ,” or the “good news” about Christ in verse seven, is really the good news of grace, the grace of Christ. We should

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understand that “the gospel” (the “good news”) revealed in the New Testament is not restricted to only that information that helps us get “saved” (initial salvation; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9) or born again.² Dr. Robert Wilkin, writing in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, makes these comments on the “gospel” here in this verse: “The word *gospel* means *good news*. As he makes clear in 2:14-21, Paul’s gospel was both the good news about justification and sanctification.”³ Also, Dr. David Anderson, President of Grace School of Theology, in his comments on the effects of Galatian legalism today, states the following: “What we can know is that Paul is concerned about a group of his converts who very quickly slipped into Galatianism, which he calls a different gospel than the one he preached to them (1:6). The good news (gospel) that Paul preached actually included both justification and sanctification (Rom. 1:16-18).”^{4 5}

² Many believers think that 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 defines the entire content of “the gospel” as consisting of the truths that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and that He rose again. However, in 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul says that he “delivered to you as of *first importance*” these particular truths. The Greek phrase rendered here “first importance” is *en protos*. It means “among the first,” or “the things of first importance.” Therefore, though these truths are very important, they do not contain the total content of Paul’s gospel. In context, the terms of the gospel noted in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 by Paul are selected to support the truth of the resurrection, the topic of Paul’s argument against a significant error that had been raised in Corinth (1 Cor. 15:12).

³ Robert N. Wilkin, Ed., *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), Vol. 2, p. 824.

⁴ David R. Anderson, Ph.D., *Bewitched: The Rise of Neo-Galatianism* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2015), pp. 162-163.

⁵ The idea that the “gospel” in Romans 1:16 concerns only initial salvation (forgiveness of sins, justification by God for the sinner, and being born again through faith) is a very common one. However, there is much evidence in the book of Romans (the larger context of Romans 1:16) that “the power of God for salvation” (a word basically meaning “deliverance”) applies not only to the unbeliever, but also to the believer. The unbeliever is obviously delivered from the guilt of his sins through faith (Rom. 3:22-26). But, the believer is also delivered through the power of God from the dominion of sin, a matter of sanctification (Rom. 6:1-14). This salvation also includes deliverance from God’s potential temporal wrath against a believer’s sin (Rom. 5:9; a demonstration of God’s temporal wrath is possible for the sinning believer—1 Cor. 11:27-31, for example). Deliverance (salvation) is accomplished for the believer by the power

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As we work through the verses in this epistle, we should clearly see that Paul's usage of the words "gospel" and "grace" point to more than just initial justification. As a reminder, the term "justification" is commonly used by Bible teachers to apply to the beginning point of our Christian life, the moment we believe and are born again (Rom. 4:5; 5:1). At that moment in time we are "justified," or "declared righteous," by God because of our faith in Christ and His redemptive work on the cross. The term "sanctification," as used in the quotes just above, describes the ongoing work of God in our Christian lives whereby we become increasingly holy in our daily life. So, Paul's gospel applies both to the beginning of our Christian life, when we are justified, and to our daily walk with Christ over our lifetimes (the process of sanctification).

So, what does "the grace of Christ" mean? The grace of Christ is the giving of Himself to us through the Holy Spirit and the working of the Spirit within us. Without spending too much time on "grace," let us say a few things. Many believers have heard that grace means "unmerited favor." It is true that grace is favorable to us, and we do nothing to deserve it. But, grace is really much more meaningful

of God's life within: "much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." (Rom. 5:10). The immediate context of Romans 1:16 indicates that Paul wants to preach "the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (1:15). But, note that these in Rome, his readers, were already believers! So the gospel Paul desires to preach to them must include good news for the believer, not solely for the unbeliever. Further, verse 17 speaks of the ongoing walk of faith, and the verse stresses that the one who is righteous (by his initial faith) shall indeed *live* by faith. What is stressed here again is the matter of the new life within the believer for ongoing deliverance—sanctification. In summary, "the gospel" noted in Romans 1:16, at least includes the power of God for deliverance: justification for the unbeliever (Rom. 3-4) and sanctification for the believer (Rom. 5-8). Even glorification is included in Romans 8 as part of "the gospel" that Paul proclaimed. Much more detail to these views is provided in a commentary on Romans titled, "Romans Unlocked – The Power to Deliver." This commentary was published in 2005 and written by René Lopez, Th. M. His views are not unique, as others have made similar observations, but his book lays out a compelling understanding of the message of Romans and "the gospel" in Romans 1:16. His commentary received numerous favorable reviews from well-regarded seminary and ministry leaders in the evangelical community.

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than that. It is God giving us His spiritual riches in the person of Christ! Consider this verse on the grace of Christ in 2 Corinthians 8, a chapter about giving to others out of our riches. “For you know *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that though he was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2. Cor. 8:9). Also consider this verse: “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn. 1:16). Receiving from Christ’s own fullness is a matter of grace! We begin the Christian life by receiving Him and we continue by receiving a supply of His riches day by day (Jn. 1:12; Gal. 2:20; 3:5).

One Biblical scholar, Professor Norman P. Williams of the University of Oxford, England, wrote a book called “*The Grace of God*” where he concluded that “there is no ‘higher gift than grace’; grace is ‘God’s presence and his very Self, and Essence all divine.’”⁶ Renowned Bible expositor F. F. Bruce stated that Williams’ “inquiry into the nature of divine grace led him to the conclusion that it could be adequately understood only in personal terms—that it should be equated frankly with the person of the Holy Spirit. . . . Certainly this question removes a number of difficulties in our attempts to grasp what grace is: divine grace, we may say, is the Spirit of God in action towards man or in man.”⁷ The fact that grace is very involved dynamically in the ongoing sanctification of the believer is evident from many passages. Some examples are: 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 12:9; Titus 2:11-12; Hebrews 4:15-16.

So those who were troubling the believers in Galatia were distorting the gospel of Christ. They were changing the message from knowing Christ for holiness through grace, to religious law-keeping for holiness. The term “Judaizer” is used to describe one who promoted the Jewish law and traditions as the means for righteousness and holiness. These Judaizers were telling these

⁶ N. P. Williams, *The Grace of God* (London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), p. 110.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Grace of God and the Law of Christ*, essay in *God and the Good*, Clinton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes, Eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), as reproduced in the periodical *Searching Together*, Winter 2002, Volume 30:4, p. 6. F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) was one of the most well-known evangelical scholars of the 20th century.

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Gentile converts that to be holy and right with God they must pay attention to and keep certain rules and rites of the Old Testament and certain Jewish traditions.

It is clear that circumcision was one rite these Judaizers were particularly pushing (Gal. 5:2-3). However, in line with Paul's consistent theme throughout this letter, he denies the importance of this rite at all, pointing instead to *the reality of the new life in Christ* (Gal. 5:6; 6:15). These Judaizers were at work in Galatia, deceiving these Gentile believers, confusing them into thinking that now they needed the law in order to please God (see 3:1; 4:17-21; 5:4-13; 6:12-13). Through much argument throughout his letter, Paul underscores his basic message: the believer in Christ is not "under law" (the "law principle"), but is now under grace (the "grace principle"). We will explore these principles in more depth later in this commentary.

In verses eight and nine Paul says that any person preaching a gospel contrary to the gospel he preached to the Galatians is to be accursed! The expression means that person is to be under the curse of God. A thoughtful study of the New Testament indicates that this curse is not equal to eternal condemnation, but rather some temporal judgment from God. Paul uses this same Greek word for curse (*anathema*) in Romans 9:3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 16:22. Since Paul is a born again believer, the possibility of him coming under a curse could not point to eternal damnation (see Jn. 5:24).⁸ In Galatians 1:8 he places himself and those with him potentially under this curse if they should now preach a gospel contrary to what Paul had preached initially. What this does tell us is the seriousness of tampering with God's message of grace—grace for initial salvation and grace for sanctification of the life.

Paul states plainly that he is not one seeking to please men. Perhaps he had been accused of this by the Judaizers, who may have said that Paul teaches an easy way—without law—for the Gentiles,

⁸ The author realizes that many have been taught that salvation which has become theirs can also be "lost." However, the testimony of Scripture is that this is not so. For Scriptural proofs of the believer's eternal security, please see Appendix D. That appendix contains a booklet written by John Smith titled *Eternal Security*.

accommodating them for their favor. But Paul states he is no longer trying to please men (as he may have been in Judaism). His sole aim is to please Christ as a bond-servant. He is faithful to the truth, no matter who is pleased or how large his audience. What an example for us in a day when it seems that the size of the preacher's audience has become a top motivation in Christendom.

Paul defends his ministry – 1:11-24

¹¹For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

There must be a reason why Paul now covers some details about his personal history. In verse 20 he even states that before God he is not lying. It seems clear that Paul is defending his ministry to the Galatians against untruths told about him, his right to be accepted as a true minister of God and His message. *His sole aim is that the "truth of the gospel" be preserved.* No doubt the Judaizers, in promoting their teaching, worked to discredit both Paul's message

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and his authenticity as a messenger from God. In verses 11-12 Paul strongly claims that the gospel he preaches is not derived from any human source. It was not “man’s gospel,” meaning it is not according to man’s thoughts.

All of man’s religions and religious principles emphasize what man must do to be accepted by God. This response of sinful and guilty men began in the garden of Eden right after the fall. The first thing Adam and Eve did was to make garments of fig leaves to cover their nakedness. This action is a graphic picture of man doing his own works in order to be right before God. Guilty man spontaneously thinks he must perform some work or ritual in order to please God. So, “grace”—the gift of God to man for initial salvation, and the giving of Christ’s life to us for our sanctification (ongoing holiness)—is altogether something not according to man’s religious thoughts.

Additionally, the gospel Paul preached was not passed on to him by men, nor was he taught it, which would have been normative in Judaism, or in other religions. Even Paul himself had learned the traditions of Judaism from the famous teacher Gamliel. Instead, Paul tells us that his gospel came “through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Jesus Himself revealed the truth of the gospel to Paul. The initial revelation took place on the road to Damascus when Jesus arrested Paul with a divine appearance of Himself as the risen Son of God. Yet, more understanding no doubt came to Paul later as the Holy Spirit shined upon the many truths of the Old Testament which Paul knew so well.

In verses 13-14 Paul describes his life before Christ as a zealous Jew, excelling in learning and observing the traditions of Judaism. Further, in the name of that religion he persecuted the church of God with ferocity, wanting to completely stamp the Jesus people out. Yet, he completely changed his course! He rejected the way of the meticulous law-keeping Pharisees and embraced Christ, the very One whom the Pharisees had crucified as a blasphemer! How could such a driven religious person make such a radical and sudden change? Why would he leave the Judaism of his fathers, which he loved and served with such dedication? His dramatic change was compelling evidence that some great force redirected his course

entirely. Now he lays it out to the readers of his letter. God Himself was the agent behind Paul's change.

Firstly, Paul tells us that God had set him apart for His service even before he was born. This type of sovereign selection beforehand is certainly in line with God's dealings with the great prophets Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) and Isaiah (49:1, 5). In Acts, God says this to Ananias, which confirmed Paul's being set apart in God's plan: "Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine, to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

Secondly, God called Paul through a personal appearance, with penetrating words of life-giving grace: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? . . . I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do" (Acts 9:4-5). Notice Jesus did not tell him that God was going to judge him for his persecution, but Jesus told him to get up and go forward to learn what he must do. The Lord knew Paul would be responsive to His appearance and would acknowledge Him whom was the Lord after all. Thirdly, God revealed His Son *in* (according to the Greek) Paul. Not only was there an outward appearance of Jesus in glorious divine light, but there was inward revelation, a revelation of Christ. Now Paul knew deep within his spirit that Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God.

All true revelation is not outward seeing with the senses, but inward—in the deepest part of man, in his spirit. There he can sense and know God and the things of God intuitively and directly (Prov. 20:27; Rom. 8:15-16; 1 Cor. 2:10-15; Eph. 1:17). The Christ, the Son of the living God, was spiritually revealed to Paul just as He was to Peter in Matthew 16:13-17. This revelation no doubt deepened as Paul progressed in pursuing Christ. It should be noted in 1:16 that all of this work of God in putting Paul into ministry resulted in this: "in order that I might *preach him* among the Gentiles." Paul's preaching focused on presenting the living person of Christ to the Gentiles. We could also say that Paul's presentation of the gospel of Christ was not only in word, but also by the example of his life, as he lived Christ's life by faith (Gal. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 1:20-21; 1 Thess. 1:5-6).

Paul goes on to validate his ministry by showing further that his gospel and commission were not from the apostles who were before

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Him. He did not immediately “consult with anyone” to learn of them or be approved by them. He learned from God, who no doubt gave him great light upon the Old Testament. We do not really know what transpired in his time in Arabia, but he was likely seeking God much and learning from Him, as well as preaching Him there.

It wasn't until three years after his conversion that Paul decided to visit Jerusalem and meet Peter. Some Bible teachers say this visit is the one recorded in Acts 9:26-30, and I agree. During that visit he also met James, the Lord's brother. He then states he is not lying because he wants the Galatians to know that his gospel and his ministry did not derive from Peter and the apostles; they derived from God. Paul may have been accused by the Judaizers of either abandoning some teaching supposedly received from the apostles, or of not being subject to their authority.

After Paul left Jerusalem, he continued to carry on his own God-given ministry for several years in Syria and Cilicia, apart from coordination with the apostles in Jerusalem. During all of this period Paul was unknown by face to the churches of Judea. The point of Paul telling all of this history is to demonstrate that he had no reason to be under Jerusalem's “authority” because he had his own authority from the Lord Jesus Himself as God's minister to the Gentiles (see Acts 26:15-18). Additionally, his gospel did not derive from those in Jerusalem. Paul had already been preaching his gospel before his visit to Jerusalem, a gospel which he had received from Christ.

John R. W. Stott spells out Paul's defense in this section marvelously: “What Paul has been saying in verses 13 to 24 may be summarized thus: The fanaticism of his pre-conversion career, the divine initiative in his conversion, and his almost total isolation from the Jerusalem church leaders afterwards together combined to demonstrate that his message was not from man but from God. Further, this historical, circumstantial evidence could not be gainsaid.”⁹

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, USA, 1968), p. 36.

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The last two verses of chapter one speak about Paul's effect upon the Christian community. The saints were glorifying God because of what God was doing in Paul. What an amazing turn around Paul had! The believers could only marvel at the work of the Spirit of God in Paul. To this day, Paul's story is resounding—not only in the church, but even in the world of unbelievers. Most people who are educated and have had any exposure to Christian things know of Paul's dramatic conversion and subsequent labor for the Lord. Surely God has been glorified mightily through Paul! We too can have an effect on the world around us and on the church. All we need do is seek to make Galatians 2:20 our reality also. This experience is available to us.

Chapter Two - Paul's Defense of Grace in Personal Experience

Paul's second visit to Jerusalem – 2:1-10

¹Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—⁵to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles),⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Acts records five trips which Paul made to Jerusalem, which seem best arranged in this sequence: (1) After his time in Damascus three years following his conversion; Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18-20; (2) The visit to bring famine relief; Acts 11:27-30; 12:25; (3) The time of the Jerusalem council; Acts 15:1-30; (4) The visit to greet “the church” after completing his second missionary journey (most Bible interpreters identify “the church” in Acts 18:22 as the

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one in Jerusalem); Acts 18:22; (5) The last visit where Paul was taken as a prisoner by the Romans; Acts 21:15-23:31.

Bible teachers are divided on whether the visit recorded in Galatians 2:1-10 is the second one noted above or the third one. See the "Background of Galatians" in this writing for more detail about this issue. It seems that the best explanation is that when Paul says "I went up again to Jerusalem" (Gal. 2:1) he is referring to the next visit after the one in Galatians 1:18-20. This would be the visit prompted by the predicted famine (Acts 11:27-30), which resulted in some brothers from Antioch taking relief funds to Jerusalem.

Paul writes in Galatians 2:2: "I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain." Now, we know that Paul has a purpose in this portion of the letter, namely, to show that his gospel and his ministry were validated by the apostles in Jerusalem. So, he does not mention the relief funds, because they are most secondary to his purpose and to his personal spiritual burden for this visit. In this verse we can see that Paul had something very important on his heart when he took this trip to Jerusalem after "fourteen years," likely using the time of his conversion as a beginning marker for time references in this letter (1:18; 2:1). What Paul had on his heart was the matter of the truth of the gospel.

There was a revelation given to Agabus about the famine in Acts 11:28, which was the cause of the trip to Jerusalem. This may be the revelation referred to in Galatians 2:2. Yet, Paul makes it very clear that his spiritual burden on the trip concerned the gospel, not primarily the relief funds. It may be that Paul had an additional revelation from God prompting him personally to go to Jerusalem ("I went up") for the sake of his gospel work, that it might not be in vain. The idea here is *not* that maybe Paul had the gospel wrong after all. That would not be a valid interpretation based upon Paul's clear statements about the God-given derivation of his gospel (Gal. 1:11-12). Instead, Paul was likely concerned about the influence of Judaizers, which was undoubtedly already being felt in Syria and Cilicia. He feared that his ministry to the Gentiles might be severely hampered, even rendered ineffective (being "in vain"), if the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem were somehow sympathetic to the views of the

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Judaizers. He sought to determine if the leaders in Jerusalem agreed with his law-free ministry to the Gentiles, perhaps especially as it concerned circumcision as a necessity for the converted Gentiles. The context here shows that there was much pressure by some persons to get the Gentile converts circumcised (see 2:3-4). Yet, Paul was clear that circumcision was not needed for the Gentile believers.

In line with Paul's concern about the truth of the gospel, he tells us in verse three that not even Titus, a Greek convert who went with him to Jerusalem, was compelled to be circumcised. This probably means circumcision was not compelled by those who received them in Jerusalem. Verses three through five are a parenthetical thought that enters into the text here, and Greek experts note that the grammar of these verses is jumbled and poor. This shows, perhaps, the suddenness with which these thoughts occurred to Paul as well as his passion in relation to this matter of Judaizers. These Judaizers were a danger to the truth of the Christian's liberty (from the law) in Christ.

In other words, the matter of circumcision for Gentile converts was at least a significant background issue there in Jerusalem. It existed because of false brethren who were pressing for circumcision because of its prominence in the law. Some Bible teachers believe that verse four references Judaizers who had actually invaded the meeting in Jerusalem with their demands. Others believe that Paul is noting a problem he had with Judaizers at another time. Thus, he cites the incident as support for his position that Titus, or any Gentile convert, should not be compelled to be circumcised. It is not important that we know for sure when the events of verses four and five took place. What is important to understand is that Paul would not yield to this legalistic threat to his gospel. In line with that he was bold enough to take uncircumcised Titus with him to Jerusalem. He was prepared to resist any attempt to compel Titus to be circumcised.

In verse six and verse nine Paul notes the leaders in Jerusalem as those of reputation. However, in verse six he adds that their seeming status did not matter because he also had an apostolic status to the Gentiles (verses 7-8). Perhaps Paul was answering here a case made by the Judaizers that the apostles in Jerusalem were special and Paul

should fall in line with them, showing them deference. In verse six Paul states that the leaders in Jerusalem “added nothing to me;” that is, they did not add anything to Paul’s understanding of the truth. In fact, those in Jerusalem recognized Paul’s apostleship and the working of God’s Spirit in his ministry.

Notice how God’s working in the apostles (verse eight) is equated with “the grace that was given to me [Paul]” in verse nine. This again testifies of the dynamic meaning of grace being God’s work in the believer. Further, they even gave to Paul and Barnabas the “right hand of fellowship” for their field of ministry, honoring their calling by God to His work among the Gentiles. In summary, the private meeting with the apostolic leaders in Jerusalem led to a confirmation of Paul’s law-free gospel for the Gentiles. Also, the account reveals that his apostolic calling was recognized as genuine and on an equal footing with the apostles in Jerusalem. This history added much to Paul’s defense of his ministry against the undermining claims of the Judaizers, those distorting the gospel of Christ.

This section on Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem closes with verse ten and an appeal by the apostles in Jerusalem to Paul and Barnabas to “remember the poor.” A question arises here. If this meeting took place at the time when Barnabas and Paul brought a gift for famine relief to Jerusalem, why would the leaders in Jerusalem ask those from Antioch to “remember the poor”? They already seemed to be doing this. We can only guess at the timing and circumstances of this appeal, which took place at the private meeting. It is not unreasonable to imagine that this appeal arose some amount of time after the gift was given, perhaps hours or maybe even a day or more afterwards. In this case, it is likely that this was an appeal for ongoing recognition of the needs of the poor, probably referring especially to the poor Jewish brethren in Judea.

Here Paul reveals his heart for the unfortunate poor by saying it was indeed *the very thing he was eager to do*. This shows that although Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, he did indeed have a heart for the poor of the Jewish churches. No doubt this kind of concern helped the unity in the body of Christ. Not only that, this reveals that even a great apostle, with much responsibility for the ministry of the word of God, had a tender heart of love and concern for the practical needs of the saints. Those who desire to teach and

preach the word of God should measure their spirituality by this example.

Cephas opposed by Paul for the truth of the gospel – 2:11-16

¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹²For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” ¹⁵We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

This section opens with this phrase: “but when Cephas came to Antioch.” Firstly, let me give an estimate of when this incident took place with Cephas. I believe that this event is being related in line with the orderly chronological sequence so far given by Paul in Galatians 1:15-2:10. A number of good Bible interpreters take this position. Perhaps Peter visited Antioch not too long after the meeting took place in Jerusalem (2:1-10). Or, perhaps his visit took place after the first missionary journey, shortly before the council transpired in Acts 15 around 50 A. D. Secondly, this introductory phrase opens up a contrast between the meeting in Jerusalem and the incident in Antioch. In Jerusalem there was agreement on the gospel message. But in Antioch Paul had to stand up to Peter’s error for “the truth of the gospel.”

The main issue of the truth here is not solely circumcision, even though the problem arose due to a visit from “certain men from James.” These men may have been the same as “the circumcision party” (Gal. 2:12), or strongly influenced by them. One issue here

was one of distinctions between Jewish and Gentile believers, and respective requirements upon each group. Of course, we see this matter addressed again at the council in Acts 15 (a later event in our understanding).

Peter is shown here as being in the wrong. Let us remember that Peter had a vision from God in Acts 10:9-15 showing him that what God had cleansed he should no longer consider unholy. Peter understood this vision to mean that Jewish social interaction with Gentiles was perfectly in line with God's purposes and intentions. In the past, he had understood that it was "unlawful . . . for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation" (Acts 10:28). Now, after this vision, he presented the good news of Jesus at Cornelius' house and saw these Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is apparent that he stayed with Cornelius for a few days afterwards, and even ate with these converted Gentiles, which gave rise to criticism from his fellow Jews (Acts 10:48; 11:3). But, Peter defended his eating with the Gentile believers on the grounds of the vision and the Spirit's instruction to him to go to Cornelius' house (Acts 11:4-18). It was at that point that the Jews who objected realized that God was including the Gentiles in the blessings of eternal life in an entirely new divine arrangement.

The visit to Cornelius' house took place sometime before this confrontation with Paul in Antioch. What happened to Peter's clarity on this matter of eating with Gentiles and God's work of making them as holy as the Jews? When Cephas first came to Antioch he practiced eating with the Gentile believers, as other Jewish believers did. This "eating" fellowship probably included participation in the Lord's table, which at that time was taken together with a meal. But when certain men "from James" came he began to withdraw from eating with the Gentiles, "fearing the circumcision party."¹⁰

The fear of man took hold of Peter. Although the text says that these certain men from Jerusalem were "from James," that may refer

¹⁰ It seems unlikely that this group was the same group referred to in Acts 15:1. Those from Jerusalem in this chapter took issue simply with the matter of eating with Gentile believers, a matter of living after salvation. Those in Acts 15:1, however, focused on the need for the Gentiles to be circumcised before they could even be saved.

to how they presented themselves at Antioch. The reality probably was, however, that James did not truly “send them,” especially not to correct Peter. More likely this traveling party had a strong connection to those back in Jerusalem who were Jewish *believers* “from the circumcision,” yet still strongly held to the old Jewish ways. It seems likely that they were a powerful group in Jerusalem and Peter feared the trouble that they might make for him. But, Peter did not act on principle here because he already knew the truth. He had received direct revelation from God that Jewish believers should no longer consider the Gentiles unclean (Acts 11:1-18). His separation from them was based upon cowardice to stand up for the truth of the gospel that both Jews and Gentiles who believed in Jesus were fully accepted by God through faith. Thus he was a hypocrite, acting against what he knew was right.

When Paul observed that Peter began to withdraw from table-fellowship with Gentile believers, Paul “opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” Peter’s actions were public and they touched the core of the gospel truth. Therefore, Paul boldly opposed him publicly. Peter stood condemned, not by some person, but by his own actions, which were against the truth he already knew. Sadly, even Barnabas, a seasoned co-worker at Antioch who also knew the truth, followed Peter in hypocrisy.

Paul was fearless of criticism or peer pressure from the powerful or influential. He tells us in chapter one about this: “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (1:10). He was boldly committed to the truth and his rebuke of Peter was due to the importance of the gospel truth. In verse 14 he explains how he addressed Peter because he saw that Peter and others had not conducted themselves “in step with the truth of the gospel.” Peter previously had been freely associating and eating with Gentile believers in Antioch. Thus, Paul could describe him as a Jew living like a Gentile. But now, through yielding to the pressure of the Jewish party from Jerusalem, Peter was reverting to strict Jewish ways. Such an action sent a message to the Gentile believers that Jewish customs were a correct standard for holiness. Consequently a pattern was set for the Gentile believers to follow Jewish ways. This is what is meant when Paul asserts to Peter, “How can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Paul's Defense of Grace in Personal Experience

One of the problems that Bible interpreters face in this section is where to end Paul's direct statements to Peter. The original Greek language had no markers for actual quotations like quotation marks. Older English versions do not show any quotation marks for Paul's talk to Peter. Modern English versions generally try to offset the discussion by quotation marks. These Bible versions begin the quotation marks in verse 14, where Paul begins to relate what he said to Peter. But, should the actual confrontational statements which Paul made to Peter end at the close of verse 14 or at a later point? It is impossible to tell, but some modern versions end the quotation at verse 14, while some others take the discussion all the way down through verse 21. I think there is some ground for ending the discussion at the end of verse 17. We will look at that when we reach verse 17.

It is significant to note that the way verse 15 begins shows an argument by Paul from the standpoint of Paul and Peter's mutual background as Jews. The Jewish perspective is that they were a special people of God, distinct from the Gentiles with special privileges. Two things made them particularly distinct: circumcision and the law. The Jews held a disdainful attitude towards the uncircumcised. Circumcision marked the Jews as belonging to God. Also, the Jews felt that the law made them holy, but those without the law were sinful until they embraced the law as God's standard for righteous living. You can see this attitude especially in Romans 2:17-24. One can also see that the law constituted a great dividing barrier between the Jew and the Gentile (Eph. 2:14-15).

Thus, to the traditional Jewish mind, the Gentile could only leave the category of "sinner" if he was circumcised and began to follow the commandments of the law. But now Paul argues how these traditional imperatives have been erased by the gospel of Christ! He writes: "yet we know that a person [even a Gentile] is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we [Jews – Peter and Paul] also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified" (2:16).

It is important to note that starting with verse 15 Paul gets to the root issue of the problem that manifested at Antioch. *The real issue here, and throughout the Galatian letter, is how man is to relate to*

God. For centuries the Jews had related to God through the law He gave at Sinai. When we get to Paul's arguments in chapter three, we see that the law served only a temporary function until Christ came, and faith came. Once faith came, the law was no longer the way for the Jews to relate to God, but it was replaced by faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, not only Jews are affected, because the Scripture here tells us that all men, not just Jews, are to relate to God by faith (Gal. 3:5-10). There is a "law principle" that all fallen men, Jews and Gentiles, tend towards naturally. This tendency is to live by *man's efforts*—"works of law"—to fulfill the requirements of some code of conduct, whether it is the Old Testament law given by Moses or any code of conduct that men may have, shaped by society, tradition, or man's fallen mentality. Therefore, we should not read the Galatian letter, as if "law" always means the Jewish Old Testament law. Being "under law" is simply a principle of living up to some standard of righteousness (often represented by a set of commandments), which in turn requires the effort of man to do so.

The entire NT presents a contrast between such a "law principle" and a "grace principle" (see Rom. 6:14). Living by grace, through faith, simply means living in union with Christ Himself by the supply and power of the Holy Spirit. To live by grace (to live by faith) *is to live by another life, the life of Christ*. It means living unto God Himself in dependent faith, not exercising one's efforts to obey some standard of right living. We will explore this more as we proceed to expound this epistle, but this is the key concept that one must keep in mind for understanding the meaning of this letter and for understanding the Christian life. Remember that Paul defines succinctly the problem among the Galatian believers and why he is writing to them: "I am astonished that you are so quickly **deserting him** who called you in **the grace of Christ** and are turning to a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6). The good news is the grace of Christ! This grace is God Himself supplied to us, and experienced by us, through faith. This grace is not only for our initial justification, but is for our daily walk of holiness with God, our sanctification. This is what the epistle is all about.

Paul is arguing that the Jew who believes in Christ is not justified by works of law, but solely by faith. The basis of righteousness before God then is faith, not law. Since the Jew and Gentile now

have the common ground of faith, and the law has been replaced by faith, there should be no distinction or separation between Jew and Gentile believers. Paul states this truth strongly later in the letter (Gal. 3:28). The distinction between the two groups has been erased in Christ, so *for Cephas to pick up the practice of the law again* is to display “conduct . . . not in step with the truth of the gospel” (2:14). The gospel, as we saw in chapter one, is all about “the grace of Christ” (1:6). When Peter followed the lead of the Judaizers in separating from the Gentiles based upon Jewish law, he ignored what God did in Christ, making the two groups into one (Gal. 3:28).

Paul's testimony: He lives by the life of Christ, not by law – 2:17-21

¹⁷But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Verse 17 is one of the most difficult verses in this epistle to interpret, and there have been various explanations by commentators. The best explanation seems to be that Paul is continuing to explain what happens when Jews come to faith, when they seek to be justified in Christ. As they come to Christ in order to be justified they realize, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that all of their efforts at law observance *have not made them righteous before God*. Therefore justification by the works of law is futile. Thus, Jews who trust in Christ for salvation recognize that *they are also sinners* even though they have God's law! When they place their faith in Christ alone, *they leave law-works behind* and out of the salvation process entirely.

Paul now confronts a wrong conclusion: that the believer may live as he pleases after coming to Christ. This was most probably

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the conclusion of the Judaizers, since they focused on the danger of not having a God-established standard of behavior (OT law). In their minds this would logically lead to a license to sin. But Paul states that the view which proclaims *a law standard is needed* to avoid sinful living would lead to an inconceivable conclusion—that the holy Christ, in setting aside law-works in salvation, would then become a “servant of sin.” “Certainly not,” says Paul. It may be that Paul picked up this term “servant of sin” from the lips of the Judaizers, who accused Paul of being such because he was not promoting law observances for Gentile believers after salvation. Justification by faith, apart from law (which the Jews relied upon for “holiness”) does *not* mean the demand for holiness upon the believer is gone. It only means that *the way of holiness* is no longer by trying to carry out the works of some law standard. In the next few verses Paul expands upon this, unfolding a key revelation of the epistle.

In verse 18 we note that Paul drops the use of “we” and begins using “I.” Some Bible commentaries explain here that Paul is still recording his actual conversation with Cephas, and Paul uses “I” as a kindness toward Peter, not accusing him directly of reverting to law and thus being a transgressor. This seems most unlikely, considering both Paul’s earlier strong rebuke of Cephas in verse 14 as well as the awkwardness of using “I” to prove a point meant for the person being corrected. It seems more plausible that Paul has ended the record of his conversation with Cephas at the point of his strong conclusion in verse 17, which knocks down the logic of the arguments by those promoting law for sanctification. Then, in verses 18-21, he expands on the theme of law versus true Christian living by grace. His attention is now fully turned from the event with Cephas to the needs of his readers in Galatia. His explanation is marvelous both in simplicity and spiritual depth. By personal testimony of his own tested experience Paul explains how the Christian life is lived.

“For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor” (2:18). Here Paul is stating what the case would be for him, if he himself might become one who turned back to the law as a means of sanctification, a means of living a Christian life. What Paul once destroyed in his personal life is a life under law, as indicated by the next verse. In what way would Paul prove himself

as a transgressor? Anyone who tries to live by law will find that he cannot, as efforts to live up to the law stirs up sin within man (Rom. 7:7-11; 1 Cor. 15:56). A study of Romans chapter seven leads one to conclude that the experience there of defeat was one Paul experienced after he was saved (“I was once alive apart from the law”; Rom. 7:9) and then tried to follow the law, ending in failure. Not only would Paul be a transgressor of the law’s requirements, but it may be that this verse is also indicating that he would be a transgressor against God’s revealed way of living in union with Christ, as the following verses indicate.

Verse 19: “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.” A more accurate and literal translation would show that there is no article “the” before law in both places in this verse. Darby’s translation is more of a literal rendering: “For I, through law, have died to law, that I might live to God.” Most English translators assume Paul means the Torah, the Jewish OT law, and thus most English translations insert an English “the” before “law.” Paul does, certainly in one sense, refer to the Jewish law because he indeed was a zealous Pharisee (Phil. 3:5). But, it is clear that he has a deeper sense of “law” in mind, the entire principle of law—man striving to keep a standard of conduct for approval by God, or even by man.¹¹ Later, Paul expresses concern that the Galatians, whose background was Gentile, were now those who were turning back to a law principle that they had once practiced (4:9-10). Paul died *to* “law” as a principle—a way of being approved by God—that he might *live to God*.

Some Christians believe that “legalism” describes a practice of picking up extra-Biblical rules. However, legalism is really just the principle of man living “to law,” setting some code of conduct before him to be obeyed in order to be approved by God. That code

¹¹ On this point J. B. Lightfoot, whose older, yet still respected scholarly commentary on Galatians, makes the following comments on this verse: “The written law—the Old Testament—is always *ὁ νόμος* [the law]. At least it seems never to be quoted otherwise. *Νόμος* [law] without the article is ‘law’ considered as a principle, exemplified no doubt chiefly and signally in the Mosaic law, but very much wider than this in its application.” J. B. Lightfoot, D. D., *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1866), p. 117.

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could consist of genuine Biblical commands, but it could also include extra-Biblical rules. In the New Testament, God does give commandments, but we should understand that these are to be carried out in our lives in a different way than the way of law, a legal principle. One verse that shows this is 1 Corinthians 9:21, where Paul spoke of his way of dealing with unbelievers in order to win them to Christ: “To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.” We have been released from a set of rules that we must keep, but we should live by *the law of Christ*, the life principle of the person of God’s son.

Another passage that confirms God’s life principle is Romans 8:2-4:

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Here we clearly see that law cannot set us free from the dominion of “the law [principle] of sin and death” within us. So, God provides us with “the law [principle] of the Spirit of life . . . in Christ Jesus.” When we walk according to the Spirit (by the power of the Spirit of life and following the leading of the Spirit), then we spontaneously fulfill all the *righteous standard* of the law (Rom. 8:4). This is because the life of Christ lives up to God’s full standard of righteousness. When we live in union with Christ, the Holy Spirit will lead us in God’s way, and we often realize His leading as He reminds of His commandments. Yet, our focus and dependency remains on God Himself (not the commandments) and He empowers us by His life to obey Him.

When we reach chapter five of Galatians we will again see the truth of the power of the Spirit for obedience to God: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the [sinful] desires of the

flesh” (Gal. 5:16). We will also again see the contrast between the way of law and the way of grace: “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal. 5:18).

It was through the OT law that Paul, as a transgressor, was condemned by that code (Gal. 3:10-11). But, Paul’s separation from law was something very deep spiritually. He does not say he “gave up the law” after he came to faith. Rather, he says he actually “*died* to the law” (Gal. 2:19). This can only refer to his co-crucifixion with Christ (Rom. 6:6; 7:4-6). “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ [His body on the cross], so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God” (Rom. 7:4).

All believers have died to law in their death with Christ. Our co-crucifixion with Christ, and our burial with Him into His death, as well as our co-resurrection with Christ, are real “spiritual facts,” utterly true in the spiritual realm (Rom. 6:3-6). When we were put into Christ by God, we were also put into His death and His resurrection. We must believe and stand in faith on the truth of our death with Christ and our resurrection with Him. All that is true of us “in Christ,” must be appropriated by faith, and lived out in obedience, to become real in our lives. We see this in Romans chapter six (Rom. 6:11-13) and we see this in this passage on Christian living in Paul’s testimony: “the life I now live in the flesh I live *by faith* in the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20).

The important point to be made on this verse is that our break with law (the law principle) is something that happened with Christ’s death. In His death on the cross Jesus died to His identification with Adam (the whole human race), and the way of law in Adam, breaking that identification. Then, after burial, He was raised *to live unto God*. All men are born with the fallen nature of Adam. Inherent in the Adamic nature is the tendency to try to live up to some moral or religious standard in order to be acceptable to God (or even a false god, as in the case of many false religions which teach that men should live by their code). The works of man to gain God’s approval began with Adam and Eve making leaf aprons to cover their shame. This means that fallen man tends toward living under some “law,” some standard that he tries to meet in order to feel he is right morally or religiously. We can even see

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this when men compare their behavior to others, trying to prove that they are morally superior and thus acceptable.

Galatians 2:20 is one of the most important verses in the Bible as respects the living of the Christian life. In conjunction with verse 19, a key concept is revealed here in the book of Galatians by means of Paul's personal testimony. Paul shows the Galatians (and us) how he himself, a former legalist, has escaped the trap of legalism and lives in freedom to please God. We can follow Paul's pattern of freedom from law to living Christ's life by faith.

Verse 20 adds further information on how Paul "lives to God," which he just stated in verse 19. Firstly, Paul deals with the negative—the problem of his old life before regeneration, the old "I" that was Paul himself. "I have been crucified with Christ." The verb is in the perfect tense; the action was completed in the past and it has present results. Paul is standing in faith on the truth of the spiritual revelation that his old man was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6). In Paul's experience (like ours) his old nature was still *present* with him, being a source of all sorts of wrong desires and motives. Yet, the death of Paul's old "I" was made effective through his faith, rendering the old "I" inoperative as respects living out its sinful desires. Because Paul's death and resurrection with Christ was true in the spiritual realm, and was made effective through his faith, he could say "it is no longer I who live." The old life of Paul was no longer expressed in his living, and the same can be true of us.

Now Christ is living in Paul. Yet, this Christ-life is a life which Paul himself lives: "but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith." The new Paul is living in spiritual union with Christ. He is joined to Christ and Christ has now become his life (Rom. 7:4; Col. 3:4). Paul writes: "the life I now live in the flesh *I live by faith.*" Faith is trust, and in the Christian life it is trust in Another. The Christian life involves the rejection of trust in one's self and dependent trust in Christ. Paul is allowing Christ to live through him in dependent and yielding faith. Paul is not trying to live up to a code of conduct, or even trying to "imitate Christ." Instead, he is participating in Christ, sharing in His life by faith. He is trusting God's revealed truth and trusting the Son of God. Paul's faith is "in the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself up for

me.” His faith is also a response to the immeasurable love of Christ towards him.

Verses 18-21 are a real turning point in this epistle, a bridge connecting two portions together. Galatians 1:11-2:17 are biographical, where Paul relates his history, but, of course, with real purpose in mind. In this portion, in biographical form, he is trying to make his apostleship and the truth of the gospel very clear to the readers. Then, in 2:18-21 Paul gives the testimony of *his personal practice* of his Christian faith. Again, his writing, which is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is deeply purposeful. He is laboring to correct the Galatian error of utilizing the law as a means of Christian living or Christian sanctification. In Galatians chapters three and four Paul moves *from the biographical to the doctrinal*, expanding his arguments about law versus grace.

I will use “grace,” or the “grace principle” to be the all-inclusive term for the true way of living the Christian life. In chapters three and four we don’t see the noun “grace,” but we do see the term “faith” and the all-important truth of the “Spirit” in the believer’s life. (We do have a verbal form of grace in Galatians 3:18.) Both “faith” and the “Spirit” are key elements of the grace principle (especially note Galatians 5:4-5). When we live by grace, we live by the power of the Spirit through faith.

Law and grace are two totally different principles. The history of the Christian church throughout the centuries records how these two principles have competed against one another for the theology of the church and the practice of the believers. Unfortunately, law has mostly prevailed in the Christian church, setting aside God’s way of grace. Although many churches claim to believe in “grace,” in actual practice they embrace living under some form of law. This is why the book of Galatians is so important and needs to be understood correctly.

Galatians 2:21 is a continuation of Paul’s testimony of his present experience: “I do not nullify the grace of God . . .” It is important to note that he is talking about his present experience, how he now lives as a believer, just as verse 20 is talking about his practice as a believer. A significant principle of Bible interpretation is the principle of paying attention to context. What is the immediate context of the word or phrase or sentence? If we use the context to help us understand the meaning of a word, phrase or sentence then

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we are on the right track of understanding what the author intended to convey. The context of verse 21 is verse 20, which shows Paul's present experience, declaring how he is living the Christian life.

Also, the context following verse 21 again reveals Paul's thoughts in this passage are on living the Christian life (sanctification), not on initial justification. This is seen in Galatians 3:2-5 where Paul directly argues with the Galatians concerning how the Christian life should be lived by them. Based upon the fact that they have already begun their new lives in Christ by receiving the Spirit, he argues that it is then foolish that they should now try to mature in their Christian lives by the efforts of their flesh to carry out works of law. So, in verses 3:2-5 Paul is not arguing for a correct understanding of how to "get saved," or be justified. He is arguing for a correct understanding on how to mature as a believer, how to progress in sanctification.

Therefore, when Paul states that he now does not nullify the grace of God (2:21), we must recognize that he is not talking about initial grace in salvation (justification). He is talking about God's grace transmitted to the believer in order to live the Christian life (sanctification).

In the entire section of 2:19-3:5 we see Paul contrasting the two principles of law and grace (and he will continue this contrast on through chapters three and four). When we see this context, in conjunction with *Paul's underlying purpose in writing*—to bring the Galatians back to grace after being diverted by law—then we can understand his statement in the latter part of verse 21 and the first verse of chapter three.

In Galatians 2:21 Paul states: "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law then Christ died for no purpose." A more literal translation would show that "through the law" is simply "through law." In Paul's practice of the Christian life he lives so that he does not nullify—frustrate, or render inoperative—the grace of God. That is, he is living by grace, and does not stop its effectiveness by picking up law. He explains *that law cannot produce righteous living that would meet God's standard of righteousness*, for if it could, then Christ's death would have been unnecessary. Stated another way, we might say, "Christ's

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death was needed because the law could not produce righteous living, a righteousness acceptable to God.”

Romans 3:9-20 tells us that no one lives righteously, Jew or Greek, and through law only comes the knowledge of sin. Paul's testimony in Romans chapter seven tells us that even after he believed in Christ the law could not deliver him from the power of sin. The inability of law to produce a truly righteous living is described further by Paul in Galatians 3:21: “For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.” *The law does not supply the power (the life) to be righteous.* All attempts to live by the law principle, whether by an unregenerate person, or by a regenerate person, only results in sins (1 Cor. 15:56). Thank God for the power of grace!

Galatians 2:21 is connected to Galatians 3:1 because both explicitly mention the death of Christ. “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?” (Gal. 3:1) The Galatians were being foolish in picking up the way of law because with their spiritual sight they had seen Christ's crucifixion, which was a solid testimony against any efforts of man to live righteously. The validity of law as a way to be approved by God is utterly refuted by the cross. Now they were being “bewitched,” or deceived, by someone, namely the Judaizers, who promoted the law as the way for these believers to live a righteous life before God.

Life Application

A word should be added here about the old life to which Paul died, and to which we are also called to die unto by faith. For Christ to live in us, *we first must die*. The Bible reveals a number of ways in which our old life was lived out before we became believers. We should keep these aspects of the life of our old man in mind, knowing that we must die to these tendencies *by faith*. We should *die to law*—our efforts to perform for God by living up to certain standards or obligations (Gal. 2:19). We should *die to self*, our preferences, our plans, our rights, our ways and our choices (Lk. 9:23-24). We should *die to sin*, what we tend to think of as the sins of the flesh (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:19-21, 24; Col. 3:5). We should *die*

to the world, its principles and its lusts (Gal. 6:14; Col. 2:20-23; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

The history of the Christian church shows us that those saints who have learned the secrets of living the Christian life have learned the great importance of the “identification truths.” These are the truths of our identification with Christ, especially in His death and His resurrection (see Rom. 6:1-14; 7:4-6; Gal. 6:14; Col. 3:1-4). Any believer who really wants to live Christ’s life must spend time with these truths, memorizing them, meditating on them regularly and putting them into practice by faith, believing and acting on them. Confessing these verses in communion with God also strengthens our faith, especially in times of temptation.

An important point should be made about appropriating the death of Christ into our walk (our living) by faith. If we are not willing to die to some sin, some worldly desire, to law, etc., then claiming our death with Christ “by faith” will not work. We must be willing to die to all that is of the old man: sin, the world, the self and the flesh. Then, when we stand on the truth of our death with Christ in faith, disregarding our feelings, victory becomes increasingly evident in our lives.

Some Bible teachers have illustrated the reality of the believer’s experience as a railroad train consisting of three railroad cars. I would label the three cars as **fact – faith – experience**. The word of God is absolute truth, so we take what it says as “**fact**.” In this “train” of Christian experience, the word must come first as the engine of the train, then our faith in that word, and finally, as a result, experience of the Holy Spirit will follow. If we look for some type of “feelings” we will fail. “Feelings” would be emotions, sensations, or even the absence of the desires of the old nature. We must place our faith, our full trust, in what the word says, and then the experience of Christ (through the Holy Spirit) will follow. Of course, we also place our faith in Christ Himself.

Faith never regards feelings. For example, a believer may have a strong sinful desire at the very time he is trying to practice living Christ’s life by faith. In living by faith one must always stand upon the “spiritual facts” of God’s word and not regard his own feelings. As he stands on the truth of God’s word, trusting it, confessing it and acting upon it, he will not carry out the fleshly desire, but will

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instead let Christ's life live through him. The more a believer meditates on these truths, and appropriates them by faith, the more they will become real to him or her and progressively manifested over time in the believer's life. I challenge you to begin this practice if you have not already done so.

Chapter Three - The Supremacy of Faith over Law

Tracing the flow and meaning of Paul's arguments in chapters three and four

If we wish to understand what Paul is trying to accomplish in his arguments in chapters three and four, then we need to pay attention to the *flow* (the movement and progress) of his arguments, and the *critical junctures* of the text. This is a basic factor in interpretation of a Biblical text, and is really a significant factor to understand any non-fictional literature. We pay attention to these things *so that we can understand the real thrust, the essence, of what the author is saying* and often why he is saying it.

Below is a brief outline of the *flow* of chapters three and four, and into the beginning of chapter five. This summary will also highlight some critical junctures in the text that show us where Paul is going and what he is after. Some popular commentaries state that chapters three and four can be summarized as Paul's defense of the doctrine of justification by faith. However, although the truth of justification by faith is there in the text I believe we will see that a defense of this doctrine is not the main point of this section of the letter. Here is an outline of the text:

3:1-5 – Paul accuses the Galatians of being tricked and foolish. Why? Because they were trying to be perfected in their Christian lives through the efforts of their flesh to keep the law. Paul points out that they began by the Spirit through the hearing of faith, so this is the way they should continue.

3:6-14 – Paul uses the example of Abraham to support his argument for the way of faith. He contrasts the curse of those who use the law with the blessing upon those who are of faith. So Paul is building upon what he taught in verses 1-5 in showing the supremacy of faith over law.

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3:15-29 – Paul moves in his argument to prove that faith preceded law because the promise was made to Abraham in a covenant before the law was even in place. Therefore, the law cannot put aside the promise of the covenant. The law could not give life. The law was only given to prove to man his sinfulness and to prepare him, as a tutor (or guardian), for faith in the Savior. A key juncture here is at verses 25 and 26: “But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” The apostle has laid out his argument for a purpose: to pull the deceived Galatians back into faith and grace, and away from law. He is showing us that the principle of *faith has made us sons of God, bringing us into a life-union with Christ*. Thus, it is not man’s efforts to do something for God (law) that produces true Christian maturity and service, but *man’s new life in Christ* (see Gal. 6:15).

4:1-7 – Paul is showing us here that all men were living under bondage to law until the Son of God came into the world to redeem us. The outcome of that redemption, for those who believe, is “adoption” (the Greek term means “placement as a son”) as sons of God, which involves the reception of God’s Spirit into our hearts. A key juncture verse is verse seven, which concludes: “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Again, the apostle is writing to show that the law is over with as a way to relate to God, and now we have a life relationship to God as sons.

4:8-11 – Paul is expressing his dismay that the believers, in light of the facts that for them “law” is over, are returning to the “elemental things” of religious observances. A Christian life focused on obligations to observances is legalistic. Paul’s fear is that his labor is in vain because true Christian maturity of life is missing. Verses 9-11 constitute a critical juncture in the text, revealing the apostle’s deepest concerns and showing us exactly why he has developed the arguments in 3:1-4:7. Because these believers are returning to the law principle for living, Paul fears his labor may end up in vain.

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4:12-20 – Here Paul gives a personal and impassioned appeal to the Galatian readers. He is begging them to return to grace, free from law as he is. He confesses he is in labor over them until Christ is formed in them, that is, until they are brought into a mature expression of Christ’s life in their daily living.

4:21-31 – Paul here uses one last argument to show these believers the contrast between law and grace. The old covenant of law is only one of bondage and is characterized by the flesh. The new covenant of grace produces children who are free from enslavement to law and are born of the Spirit. His concluding word in this section is a key verse: “So, brothers, we are not children of a slave but of the free woman” (4:31). This verse states the “spiritual facts”: the Galatians are, in spiritual reality, God’s heavenly people, born of the Spirit, and *are not* children of law.

5:1 – Based upon the spiritual facts, the truth, of all that the apostle has laid out in chapters three and four, Paul now makes a *conclusive command* for application in the readers’ lives: “stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery [law].” This is obviously a most critical verse coming at the point of conclusion of a long series of arguments. In verse four we can see that those who keep insisting upon being under law “have fallen away from grace.”

Works of law contrasted with the Spirit by faith – 3:1-5

¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith

Now we turn to look at particular sections of chapters three and four in more detail.

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We have already covered most of the meaning of Galatians 3:1 at the end of the last chapter. The main point of the verse as respects the content of chapter three is that the Galatians were being deceived by the Judaizers. The Judaizers taught them that observance of the law was God's way for the Galatians to have a holy walk with God (to be sanctified). Paul then proceeds to lay out an argument for these believers. How did they begin their Christian life? The answer is that they received the Spirit of God, and this happened through their "hearing with faith." That is, they believed the gospel preached to them by Paul, placing their trust in Christ (Gal. 4:13-14).

At the moment of belief a person receives the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:14; Acts 11:15-17; Eph. 1:13). In verses 2-5 we see the Spirit paired with "the hearing of faith." Then we also see the flesh paired with "the works of law" (the Greek text reads "works of law," not "works of *the* law"). These pairings are significant and Paul is using them to contrast two ways. One way is the principle of grace: the Spirit by faith. The other way is the principle of law, indicated by works of law by man's flesh.

In the grace principle, man believes what God has said, and the result is that the Spirit is given to him. In the law principle, man focuses on a set of rules or standards and uses the effort of the flesh, his natural ability, to try to live up to the standards. The law principle requires man's effort to "achieve" something for God by his own strength and ability. The law principle involves *independence* from God since the requirement centers on man's performance. The grace principle requires man to simply trust God's word and thus receive the Holy Spirit in order to live Christ's life. The focus in grace is upon Christ Himself, and the entire attitude is *dependence*. Please see Appendix A at the end of this book to learn more about these two important principles. Knowing how these two principles work and tend to affect our lives is critical to living an overcoming Christian life.

Paul's argument is very simple. If you Galatians began the Christian life through grace, simply receiving the Spirit upon belief, why are you now trying to mature by the efforts of your flesh to live up to some law standard? Then in verse four Paul wonders if they had suffered so many things for their faith in vain. After believing, these believers had endured persecution. Now that they were

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turning to law and not maturing, will the price they paid to follow Christ be for nothing? Following Christ in true discipleship, even in suffering for His name, brings maturity of character and also future reward (Matt. 5:10-12; 10:24-25; 19:27-29; Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:2-4). But Paul wonders if their past suffering will prove fruitless since they may not now go on to maturity, a real goal for the believer (4:19). Further, future rewards (at Christ's Judgment Seat) for faithfulness can be reduced by later unfaithfulness (2 Jn. 1:8).

Galatians 3:5 is one of those verses which is really powerful, but it seems most of us miss its significance in our reading. This verse speaks of a *supply of God's Spirit* to the believer. The believer's spirit is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But, just like electricity must flow to a light bulb from the power plant, even though already connected to the source by wires, so the Spirit must flow to us from God above. This verse tells us that God supplies believers with His Spirit in an ongoing way by the "hearing with faith." Through the believer exercising faith in God's word, the Spirit is supplied. The power of the Spirit enables us to live Christ's life, not our own "will power" efforts to imitate Christ or obey His commandments. Our "will power" efforts are just the efforts of "our flesh," our natural life (apart from the Spirit of God). The law principle calls for our own efforts to obey. It calls us to do "works of law," which are acts of obedience to a code of conduct. The grace principle calls for us to receive the Spirit's power through our faith so that we may live His life. Also, any miracles that may be worked through a believer come in the same way.

Life Application

At this point I would like to pause the commentary notes to speak about life application of these important truths. In Galatians 2:19-3:5 Paul unveils two ways that believers can try to live the Christian life. There is the "way of grace" and there is "the way of law." I would suggest that the law principle comes naturally to all of us. We tend to conform to rules and traditions. How do you view your Christian life? Do you see your Christian life as consisting of certain activities or duties you should do? These duties might be attending church meetings, "proper behavior" in the meetings,

agreement to certain doctrines, recognizing certain holy days, honoring certain leaders, doing what is expected by these leaders, reading your Bible regularly, saying some “prayers” at traditional times in a certain manner, witnessing for Jesus and trying to do some service for Him. Also included would be doing your best not to commit sins. Are you trying to “do your best for Jesus?” If these things are your focus—what you strive “to do”—then you are really living under law with a focus on performance, rules, standards and traditions. You are using your “flesh,” your best efforts, to live up to a code of conduct.

In contrast, how can we describe “grace” living? Living under grace firstly focuses our inward being on the person of Christ (Heb. 12:2). We are truly seeking after Him with our hearts and seeking to learn from Him and know Him increasingly in our daily life. We want to draw all of our life and strength from Him. We want to hear His “voice” and to be led by the gentle indications of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. To have the “hearing with faith” and to live by faith, we will seek after Him and meditate on His Word, not just for doctrinal understanding, but for spiritual life from His Word to us (Matt. 4:4; Lk. 8:15; Rom. 10:17; cf. Heb. 10:38). Remember, the Spirit is supplied to us by “the hearing with faith.”

Our attitude towards Christ and living the Christian life should be marked by humility: showing a lack of trust in one’s self and one’s abilities to be or do anything rightly before God. Living in humility involves living in utter dependence upon Him in all matters, not just in “Christian duties.” “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6). Life lived by grace is not passive, waiting on God to do something in us or to inspire us. It is active, whereby the believer uses his will to seek God and the things of God (Matt. 6:33; 7:7; Rom. 8:5; Col. 3:2; Heb. 4:16; 11:6). In living by grace *the believer does not use his will to achieve something for God, but to seek God and receive from God.*

To learn much more about living the Christian life, please see the author’s book, *The Victorious Christian Life: A Lesson Series for the Earnest Christian*. This book is available for free download at the following website: www.seekersofchrist.org.

The example of Abraham – 3:6-14

⁶just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? ⁷Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ¹⁰For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The apostle now moves his argument from the experience of the Galatian believers (3:2-5) to the example of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. His word on Abraham is given to again prove that faith is greater than law. Here faith is shown as the principle God used to reckon Abraham to be righteous. Verse six makes it clear that Abraham was counted as righteous before God simply because he believed God’s word to him. The OT quotation in 3:6 is from Genesis 15:6.

Verse seven declares the simple principle of relationship to Abraham: those who are *of faith* are “sons of Abraham.” This includes the Gentiles who have faith because verse eight refers to “all the nations” being blessed in Abraham. Further, verse nine concludes that “those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” Verse eight would be taken to heart by the Gentile Galatians because Paul states the Scripture definitely

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foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles (the nations) by faith. Some may wonder how the word in Genesis 12:3 to Abraham—“in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”—could be the proclamation of “the gospel.” Please refer to the footnote below for the explanation.¹²

The blessing and the curse are attached to two different principles in verses nine and ten. To try to perform works of law is futile and brings in a negative result, even a curse, for the one who tries it. But, Abraham, and those who are also of faith, receive a marvelous blessing from God. In looking more closely at verse ten it is interesting that the verse does not say “those who break the law are

¹² Acts 7:2-3 and Genesis 12:4 show us that God appeared to Abraham and spoke the promises in Genesis 12:1-3 while he lived in Mesopotamia. This personal visit and word from God must have made a great impression upon Abraham. God told Abraham that he should be a blessing and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:2-3). It seems likely that Abraham had some realization that the peoples around him who worshipped idols needed salvation from God. He was surely aware of the flood judgment upon a sinful world and the judgment at Babel upon rebellious man. When Abraham came into the promised land God appeared to him a second time, and Abraham built an altar in worship to the one true God (Gen. 12:7). He knew a Savior was needed and likely knew of the promise of the seed, or offspring, of Genesis 3:15. The statement in Genesis 12:3 that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” was clarified in 22:18 to be “in your offspring.” That is, the blessing in Abraham would come from his descendants. And this word “offspring” can be taken as a singular descendant, referring to the coming Savior, Jesus Christ, as shown in Galatians 3:16. This background gives us a way to understand what happened in Genesis 15. At that time, God’s words of reassurance came to Abraham (Gen. 15:1). However, Abraham was puzzled, as God had not given him an heir born from his union with Sarah. Abraham wondered if his servant was to be his heir (Gen. 15:2-3). But God told him that one born from his own body would be his heir. God took Abraham outside to see the stars and assured him that as the stars could not be counted, so his descendants would be (Gen. 15:5). At this point, Abraham simply believed God’s word and this faith was counted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6-8). The good news here was all about how God would produce a future offspring (a descendant of Abraham) who would bring in blessing for all peoples. Therefore, the Bible reveals that God preached the gospel to Abraham in God’s promises about the blessing through the offspring (Gal. 3:6-8). The object of Abraham’s faith was the promised coming offspring, Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself stated: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.” (Jn. 8:56).

under a curse.” Rather it states that those who would simply attempt to live by the works of the law are automatically doomed. The reason is clear: the law itself places a curse upon everyone who does not continually perform all the things written within it. The OT law had 613 commandments! To carefully keep these day after day is impossible for man.

The OT law was a reflection of God’s standard of morality and holiness. There is simply no way for fallen man to live up to God’s standard perfectly. Therefore, under law man is under a curse due to his inability to live in a holy way before God. Even those who are not under the OT law, but under some other code, fail, of course, to meet God’s standard of a holy life and thus are condemned (Rom. 3:9-20). Romans 3:19-20 declares that the whole world (Jew and Gentiles) has become accountable to God, and “by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight.” The curse is death (v. 13). The blessing of Abraham here seems to be justification by faith, which Abraham received when he believed God (v. 6).

Galatians 3:11 cites a verse from Habakkuk to prove that justification (here meaning being declared righteous by God) cannot be achieved by law (the Greek text uses “by law,” not by *the* law). The connection between righteousness and faith is shown in the OT passage. Verse 12 then makes the simple declaration that the law is not of faith. This is because one operating under law must perform works of that law. Faith, however, is not based upon our doing; it is based upon trust in God.

The OT law contained a penalty of being hung upon a tree: “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God” (Deut. 21:22-23). This verse shows us that Christ bore our sins for us and took the penalty of death in our place (cf. Jn. 1:29; Rom. 5:6, 8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24). Thus, we have been redeemed from the curse of the law and are no longer under the penalty of eternal death.

Verse 14 continues by showing us that since Christ has died for our redemption, the blessing of Abraham, justification by faith, could come to the Gentiles. That was the blessing in which “all nations” might participate *by faith* (see 3:8). This section on

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Abraham ends with this verse which reveals that this blessing of being reckoned righteous makes it possible for the promised Spirit to be received simply by faith (see Gal. 3:2).

The purpose of Paul in writing about Abraham here is to show the supremacy of faith over law. He wants to redirect the Galatian believers back to faith and grace, and away from law-keeping. We should note that Abraham was justified by faith *before the law* was given (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6). Further, we should note that the word to Habakkuk that “the righteous shall live by faith” came to the prophet *during the era of the law* (Gal. 3:11). This means that the law was not given to Israel as a means for justification, but that the principle of faith remained as the way for justification during the time of the law. The law was given as instruction to Israel on how to live before God in a holy way, but not as a way for them to obtain God’s justification, a declaration of their righteousness before Him. Then, of course, *after the law* was over and Christ had come, justification by faith is clearly seen in this passage (Gal. 3:8, 9, 14). Dr. David Anderson summarizes the principle of faith in this passage:

The only requirement for receiving the benefit of Christ’s substitutionary death is faith. Paul has shown that faith was the requirement *before* the law (Abraham), *during* the law (Habakkuk), and *after* the law (the Gentiles). . . . There was grace before the law, during the law, and after the law. So also with faith. The requirement for the justification salvation of man is always the same—faith. The object of our faith has always been the same—God. The means of our salvation, always the same—the blood of Christ. Only the content of our faith has differed as we move along the timeline of human history. God did not reveal as much to Abraham as he did to David, or as much to David as he did to Peter. His ultimate revelation was Jesus Himself (Heb. 1:1). But let it be clearly said, the requirement has always been and always will be the same—faith.¹³

¹³ Anderson, *Bewitched*, p. 97.

The law contrasted with life and sonship in Christ – 3:15-29

¹⁵To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. ¹⁷This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. ¹⁸For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. ¹⁹Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. ²⁰Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. ²¹Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. ²²But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 3:15-18 explain why the promises made to Abraham were not invalidated by the law. Paul is perhaps explaining this in order to counter any arguments by the Judaizers that when the law came in it took precedence over the promises. We need to cover

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some background in Genesis to help understand this passage. God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:2, 3, 7 contained personal blessings for Abraham, national blessings for Abraham's descendants and universal blessings for all the nations. These promises clearly indicated that Abraham would have descendants. These promises were the basis of the Abrahamic covenant, a great feature of the Bible. Scripture reveals how these promises were later further explained and expanded in various passages.

A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. Importantly, in Genesis 15, God visited Abraham and assured him that he would have descendants from his own body. God then ratified the covenant with Abraham through an ancient ceremony involving the passing between two rows of split animals. In such a ceremony it is common for both parties of the covenant to pass between the animal parts, *if* both parties have obligations to fulfill in the covenant. However, in this case, only God (represented by the smoking oven and the flaming torch) passed between the two rows. This action revealed that this is a covenant that God Himself would work to bring to pass for the nation of Israel, descendants of Abraham.

God's intention to bless all nations in Abraham, who would become a great nation, was confirmed again by God in Genesis 18:18. Also, the phrase "in your [Abraham's] offspring" was added later to clarify that the blessing would also come through a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 22:18; 26:4). Paul's point in Galatians 3:16 is that the word of promise to Abraham was also to his "offspring," indicating its fulfillment would be found in one descendant, Christ. In verse 16 Paul states that the word is not "offsprings," meaning many, but "offspring," singular. Expositor F. F. Bruce says we should not be overly concerned about Paul's insistence that the OT text uses "offspring" instead of "offsprings." Bruce explains it this way:

The essence of his argument can be expressed quite acceptably if it is pointed out that the biblical text uses a collective singular ('offspring') which could refer either to a single descendant or to many descendants. In the first instance the reference is to a single descendant, Christ, through whom the

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promised blessing was to come to all the Gentiles. In the second instance the reference is to all who receive this blessing; in v 29 all who belong to Christ are thereby included in Abraham's offspring. Paul was well aware that the collective noun could indicate a plurality of descendants or a single descendant.¹⁴

Verse 17 is very straightforward. The OT law, which came 430 years later, cannot invalidate the covenant God made with Abraham previously. Thus, *the promise* of the covenant for the blessing to the Gentiles through the offspring still stands even after the law is introduced.

The conclusion is in verse 18. Now Paul introduces the thought of "inheritance." An inheritance is something that is for the children from their father. We see that fact in 3:29 and in 4:7. There is a spiritual inheritance based upon the promise: "God gave it [the inheritance] to Abraham by a promise" (v.18) Our spiritual inheritance, as sons of God, is something tied to the promised blessing of Abraham. For the NT believer, it includes our justification, the reception and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and our becoming sons of God (3:14, 26; 4:5-7; cf. Rom. 8:17). These things do not become ours by law, because they were already promised before the law, under a covenant with Abraham, and "those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (3:9).

Galatians 3:19 asks a key question that surely comes to the reader's mind after reading chapter three so far: "Why then the law?" If everything is granted to us through the promise, why then did God give the law? It was added "because of transgressions." However, Greek scholars (such as W. E. Vine and A. T. Robertson) feel that the preposition here is inadequately translated as "because." A better understanding of this word is shown in the margin of the New American Standard Bible as "for the sake of defining." The idea here is that the OT law was given to reveal that man's sins are transgressions of God's holy law.

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 172.

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Romans 4:15 tells us that “where there is no law there is no transgression.” The meaning of transgression involves stepping over a line, a boundary. The law reveals to man that his sins constitute transgressions of God’s law, legal offenses against Him. Ultimately, “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Galatians 3:19 further shows us that the OT law was temporary in God’s program, given “until the offspring [Christ] should come to whom the promise had been made.” In other words, the OT law was given to show man his sinfulness, until Christ came and was revealed as the One who provides forgiveness of man’s sins through His substitutionary death on the cross. Once again the Judaizers are exposed as ignorant of God’s plan. They were pushing the practice of the OT law upon the Galatians. However, the law was only temporary and never provided a means of justification or sanctification. It only exposed man’s great need of a Savior.

The OT law was given by angels through the mediator Moses, “until the offspring should come” (v. 19). Verse 20 continues the thought of a mediator and is probably intended to contrast the Abrahamic covenant of promise with the Mosaic covenant (the law). Verse 20 is not easy to interpret and many solutions have been offered. It may be saying that although a mediator is normally needed for a covenant between two parties, God being “one” indicates that He alone has initiated and will fulfill the promises of the covenant with Abraham.

In verse 21 Paul asks, “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?” Many translations use the word “against” instead of “contrary.” Paul answers emphatically, “Certainly not!” The truth is that the OT law and the promise were working together in different roles in order to achieve one end. We will see that in verse 22. The remainder of verse 21 tells us the real shortcoming of law—it does not impart life. Here Paul is speaking of eternal life, the life that is in the Son of God, the only life that can produce righteous living. In comparing the ministry of the OT law covenant with the ministry of the New Covenant, Paul writes: “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6c).

In verse 22 Paul shows that “the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” The testimony of the entire OT is that men are fallen; man has a tendency towards sin, and everyone has a

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record of sins. A clear declaration is made in Psalm 14:2-3: “The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”

So the Scripture, especially the OT law which defines sin and enlightens man as to his guilt before God, *works to prepare man* to see the only solution to his guilt—the promised Savior, the offspring who was to come. In the Savior, forgiveness, justification, and eternal life are freely given by God to those who place their faith in Him.

Galatians 3:23-24 add an even more descriptive picture of how the OT law prepared the Jewish people for faith in Christ, and by extension carried over to all people. Romans 2:14-15 tells us that even though the Gentiles do not have the OT law, nevertheless the work of the law is active in their hearts by nature, through the conscience of man. Romans 3:19-20 shows the universal application of the law to charge all men as guilty: “Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may become accountable to God . . . since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

Galatians 3:23 reads: “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.” The Greek verb for “held captive” could be used for guarding someone so that they could not escape (so used in Acts 9:24; 2 Cor. 11:32). The Greek word for “imprisoned” means kept under restraint or hemmed in.¹⁵ The overall picture of the role of the

¹⁵ In Bible interpretation it is often helpful to try to do some research on the meaning of the actual Greek words used for key words in a passage being studied. The translators do their best but often a check with some Greek word dictionaries helps us see more. Of course, not everyone has a library with Greek dictionaries. If one has access to a computer, then there are some excellent free study resources on-line. One is a free Bible study program called e-sword. Several commentaries and dictionaries can be downloaded with the program. The link is www.e-sword.net. Another excellent source for on-line Bible study tools is www.studylight.org. It does not require downloads.

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law here is that it is like a jailer, keeping us in a prison until faith is revealed.

Then verse 24 continues with another picture of the role of the law. “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” The word translated as “guardian” in Greek is *paidagōgos*, which was used in ancient Roman and Greek cultures for a slave who had charge of a boy in order to supervise his conduct generally and to escort him to and from school. One particular aspect of the guardian’s supervision is brought out by John R. W. Stott: “The AV [“Authorized Version,” meaning King James Version] translation ‘schoolmaster’ is unfortunate, for the *paidagōgos* was not the boy’s teacher so much as his disciplinarian. He was often harsh to the point of cruelty, and is usually depicted in ancient drawings with a rod or cane in his hand.”¹⁶

Given the expressive pictures provided in 3:22-24, we may see more clearly the role and work of the law in preparing men for the gospel and the Savior. The Scripture has clearly demonstrated that all men are under the sway and guilt of sin (v. 22). Being under law is like being held by a jailer and kept in restraint in a prison (v. 23). And the law acts as a strict supervisor over our lives, with a rod ready to apply disciplinary punishment to us (v. 24).

Now, let us see if we can understand these illustrations of the work of the law in verses 23 and 24 more clearly. The OT law gave many demands upon the people of Israel and threatened various punishments upon them for disobedience. It was very strict, like a strict guardian over someone in their custody. In addition, failure to uphold all of the requirements of the law brought a curse upon the people (v. 10). Not only did the law make strict demands, but the law itself provoked the people to sin, because of the sin nature within them (1 Cor. 15:56). Therefore, the people were held in a cycle of bondage: the demand to follow the rules, the recurring failures to do so due to indwelling sin, and finally condemnation because of their failures.

Even though God provided a temporary remedy for the people’s sins through the sacrifices, these sacrifices were not effective to give

¹⁶ Stott, p. 97.

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them a clean conscience. The sacrifices only continually reminded them of their sins, reinforcing their sense of condemnation (Heb. 10:1-3). So, the law worked to hold people in a cycle of failure and condemnation, just like a jailer would confine people.

It is most interesting that in 2 Corinthians 3:2-9 Paul compares the ministry of the law (“tablets of stone;” “the letter”) to the ministry of the New Covenant. He summarizes the ministry of the law as “the ministry of death” and “the ministry of condemnation.” The purpose then of the law was to define sin and bring all those under its rule to know that they are sinners under condemnation. Therefore, it plays a perfect role in preparing men for the good news that Jesus, the Messiah, has borne the penalty of their sins for them on the cross. And God freely grants forgiveness to the condemned, justifying them through faith in Jesus Christ. The law acts, therefore, to actually bring us to the Savior.

We may summarize Paul’s explanation of “Why then the law?” (v. 19). It was “added,” meaning that it came in later than God’s original covenant based on His promise. So it was to serve only a temporary purpose. It was given “for the sake of defining transgressions”—revealing men’s sins as offenses against God’s righteous standards. It was shown to be unable to impart spiritual life. Finally the law served the purpose of placing men under condemnation for their sins, thus preparing them to place their faith in Christ alone for their justification before a holy God.

Life Application

In chapter three so far Paul has been writing to show us the inferiority of the law principle compared to faith (another description used of the grace principle). His intention is that the Galatians will no longer try to live by law, since it has ended its intended function for them and it cannot enable believers to live righteously. Whenever we attempt to live by law, we will be brought into a cycle of failure and condemnation, as living to a set of rules or standards will actually provoke sin within us (1 Cor. 15:56). Even the great apostle, Paul, learned this lesson when he tried to keep the commandments after he was saved. This period of attempted law-

keeping in Paul's life is spelled out for us clearly in Romans 7:7-25. His efforts to keep the law ended in great frustration and condemnation for continual failure. Finally, he saw the right way. It is only the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, not a law of rules, that can set us free from the law [principle] of sin and of death within us (Rom. 8:2). If we walk according to the Spirit, depending upon Him for His direction and life-empowerment, then God's requirement for righteous living is met (Rom. 8:4).

To walk increasingly according to the Spirit, not by our own efforts, is a learning process for us that is never ending. We must understand that God wants us to give up on "ourselves," our own efforts to live up to some standard. He wants us to trust in Jesus for everything and look away solely unto Him. We will have many failures along the way. But, as we learn to give up on our efforts, we are also learning to look away unto Jesus more, drawing all of our strength and direction from Him. Through this process we should experience a growing consistency in holiness of life, one with fewer failures. Whenever we do have a failure, we should take heart that God is ever ready to forgive us and He wants us to get up and step out again along the path of grace and faith. His forgiveness is found in our simple confession, our agreement with Him when He indicates to us that we have sinned—1 John 1:9.

Now we return to the text with Galatians 3:25. This is a key turning point, a declaration of importance based on what has been related in verses 19-24. "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian." "Faith has come" means that Christ has come for the fulfillment of the promise. Faith was existent with Abraham, but he looked forward in faith to the offspring to come for the fulfillment of the blessing. When Christ came, He fulfilled the promise. Therefore, since Christ has come, "*we are no longer under a guardian [law].*" The law does not apply to the believer in Christ. Those in Christ are "not under law" (Rom. 6:14). For the Galatian believers to pick up the way of law is against God's revealed plan.¹⁷

¹⁷ It should be clear in this chapter that God has a definite plan that calls for a period of promise (from Abraham until the giving of the law). Then came a

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The next few verses are packed with wonderful truth about who we are in Christ and what our inheritance is as “those who are of faith [and] are blessed along with Abraham” (Gal. 3:9). Firstly, Paul says, “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (v. 26). (Notice that Paul has used the pronoun “we” in the prior verses to speak of the Jews, but now he uses “you” to address the Galatians, who were Gentiles.) Importantly, this verse tells us that our relationship with God as NT believers is one of life. Our union with Christ in life is highlighted in verses 26-29. We are *related to God by sharing in the divine life and nature*. We are *not related to Him by law*, trying to imitate Him or trying to live up to His high standard of character. Colossians 3:4 states: “Christ who is your life.”

Verse 27 states the marvelous truth that “for as many of you who were baptized into Christ put on Christ.” Let us be clear that this is not talking about our water baptism, but our spiritual baptism into Christ, an action that takes place in the spiritual realm. Our union with Christ takes place at the moment of belief, as the context of the preceding verse shows. The sole condition for becoming sons of God in verse 26 is declared as being “through faith,” not faith plus something else (like water baptism).

Verse 27 begins with the explanatory Greek preposition *gar*, which means our sonship through faith is further explained by our spiritual baptism into Christ. The idea of baptism means immersion into something, often implying a union, an identification, with that into which the object is immersed. We are now fully identified with Christ—He is our life. Moreover, we died with Him and we were raised up with Him, and we are “clothed” with Him (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27). “And *because of him* you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). It is God who has placed us *in Christ* when we believe, and thus Christ has become our righteousness. Our obedience in water baptism is simply an outward

temporary period of law, which was intended to last only “until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made” (v. 19). Now that Christ has come, we who have faith in Christ are under grace and no longer under law (Rom. 6:14).

The Supremacy of Faith over Law

testimony of the inward reality of our union with Christ, which becomes ours at the moment we believe. We are sealed *in Him* with the Holy Spirit when we believe (Eph. 1:13).

Verse 28 follows with another great blessing of our inheritance in Christ. All natural distinctions among men tend to cause prejudice, pride, feelings of superiority or inferiority, or simply uncomfortableness with others who are different. The result is often separation and division. In Christ, however, we are fully united to one another: “you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The distinctions noted in this verse are not erased in Christ, but if we live by His life such distinctions have no power to damage harmony, respect, love and mutual service toward one another. God has some difference in roles for men and women for service in the body of Christ, but this does not affect their equal value before God, nor should it affect their value in one another’s eyes.

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). As those who have been brought into union with Christ, we surely belong to Christ, and we receive the blessing of the promise made to Him. As sons of God, we are heirs according to promise. That inheritance includes the blessing of justification, the possession of eternal life as a son of God, and membership in the body of Christ. It certainly includes the blessings of an eternity with God in glory. As we will see later, there are other elements of inheritance that relate to reward, not to the gift of God in salvation.

Life Application

In the “Life Application” section at the end of Galatians chapter two the matter of fact-faith-experience was shared. The wonderful truths in Galatians 3:26-29 are surely spiritual facts in which we can place our faith. Bible teachers recognize some key truths in the NT are about the believer’s “position” in Christ. That is, these truths involve who we are and what has been done for us “in Christ”—our “position” *in* Christ. These “positional truths” do not refer to our “condition,” how we may be living at any time—which may be good or bad, obediently or disobediently. The truths of our position are always true, regardless of how we feel or how we may be living. For example, we “are all sons of God” (3:26) at every moment of

our lives, once we have been born again. We “have put on Christ” (3:27) and we “are Christ’s” (3:29).

For us to walk in victory in the Christian life, we must walk by faith. So we need to take truths like these, and others, and pray over them and confess them in our daily communion with God. This practice will strengthen our faith and definitely improve our actual experience. For example, at some point in time you may feel like you are not close to God even though you have confessed every known sin. At that time, you should stand in faith on the word of God, perhaps confessing in prayer, “Lord I confess and I believe Your word. Thank You, I am a son of God right now because of my faith in Jesus Christ.” Maybe you feel very unholy because of thoughts the enemy keeps trying to place in your mind. Maybe you feel tempted to sin. That is the time to stand on the truth. You might pray this way: “Thank You, God that by Your doing I am in Christ Jesus and He has become my sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). I am not looking to my own sanctification, Lord Jesus, but I am trusting in You as my sanctification. Thank You, Lord, You are my sanctification.” This type of daily confession of truth is very practical and very real. It helps us win the spiritual battle over sin and the devil. Godly saints throughout the ages can testify to this.

Chapter Four - Law Superseded by the Spirit

Now sons and no longer slaves – 4:1-7

¹I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Paul wants to confirm to the readers their status as sons and heirs of God in this section of chapter four. Once again he shows how the law plays only a temporary role in God’s plans for His sons. He begins with an illustration in verses one and two. In the family life of the ancient world children were heirs to a certain portion of their father’s estate designated for them (see Lk. 15:12). However, as long as the child had not reached adulthood he did not enjoy his inheritance but lived “under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.” So, even though such minors were heirs, Paul’s point is that their actual experience is not different from that of a slave during this time of childhood.

Paul then applies this illustration to the situation with men. Speaking broadly in verse three, Paul notes that “we” (now speaking of all the heirs in Christ, Jew and Gentile) “were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” Of course, the bondage here corresponds to the image of being a slave in verse one.

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To what does Paul refer when he mentions “the elementary principles of the world”? The Greek word for “elementary principles” is *stoicheion* (plural form). Greek scholar W. E. Vine states this about the word in his Greek lexicon: “used in the plural, primarily signifies any first things from which others in a series, or a composite whole, take their rise; the word denotes ‘an element, first principle.’”¹⁸ As respects the word’s usage in Galatians 4, Vine comments: “the rudimentary principles of religion, Jewish or Gentile, also described as the ‘rudiments of the world,’ Colossians 2:20, and as ‘weak and beggarly rudiments,’ Galatians 4:3, 9. RV, constituting a yoke of bondage.”¹⁹ (A few translations translate the word with another meaning, “elemental spirits.” We will discuss this when we reach verse nine.) I believe Vine has stated it accurately. Both Jews and Gentiles (those as future heirs of God in Christ), as indicated by “we” in this verse, were under the slavery of the elementary principles of religion in the world system. However, in verse five we see that God sent His Son to release men from this bondage of religion.

Verse four indicates that God sent His Son “when the fullness of time had come.” Some Bible teachers have suggested that the conditions (such as roads for travel, language, etc.) of the Roman Empire at that time were ideal for the spread of the gospel and this gives a reason for the timing. A careful study of Scripture by the Jews could, and probably did, bring some of them to the conclusion that God’s time for the Messiah had come. Daniel’s prophecy predicted that the Messiah would be “cut off” (killed) after the 69 weeks of years (483 years) were completed (Dan. 9:24-26). This timeframe could have been calculated by a knowledgeable Jew.

The Bible does tell us that some seeking ones among the Jews were expecting the Messiah: “all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk. 2:38). Even the magi from the east discerned that the time had arrived (Matt. 2:1-2). But all of the reasons God determined that this exact time in history would be “the

¹⁸ Vine, W. E., M. A. Entry for ‘Elements’. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words. <http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/ved/view.cgi?n=868>. 1940.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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fullness” (the completeness) of time are known only to Him. The phrase, “God sent forth his Son,” points to Jesus’ divinity. The phrase “born of woman” points to His humanity. “Born under the law” indicates that He, as a Jew, would perfectly keep the law, even fulfill it.

Galatians 4:5 shows the purpose of the Son’s coming. Firstly, He would redeem those under law. He would do this by being the perfect sacrifice and the propitiation to satisfy God’s wrath against sin. He would redeem us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, dying as our substitute (3:13). The OT law only provided for the blood of animals to cover sins, but when Christ came, He gave His own blood to accomplish eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11-12; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Secondly, the latter part of verse five shows us something in addition to redemption. In line with the illustration in 4:1-2, we can be brought into the place of a son of full age, which equals the “adoption of sons.” Dr. Warren Wiersbe gives us an excellent understanding of this adoption:

The New Testament word for *adoption* means “to place as an adult son.” It has to do with our *standing* in the family of God: we are not little children but adult sons with all of the privileges of sonship. It is unfortunate that many translations of the New Testament do not make a distinction between *children of God* and *sons of God*. We are the children of God by faith in Christ, born into God’s family. But every child of God is automatically placed into the family as a *son*, and as a son he has all the legal rights and privileges of a son. When a sinner trusts Christ and is saved, as far as his *condition* is concerned, he is a “spiritual babe” who needs to grow (1Pet. 2:2-3); but as far as his *position* is concerned, he is an adult son who can draw on the Father’s wealth and who can exercise all the wonderful privileges of sonship. We *enter* God’s family by regeneration, but we *enjoy* God’s family by adoption.

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The Christian does not have to wait to begin enjoying the spiritual riches he has in Christ.²⁰

When we are “placed as an adult son,” then we are no longer under the bondage of religious principles. Such principles include “law” of any type, whether Jewish law or religious principles and practices from Gentile religious traditions. We have gone from being slaves in bondage to religion to being sons of the living God!

Verse six: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Our sonship is accompanied by a spiritual rebirth. The Spirit of His son is crying out within us to the Father in an intimate way. “Abba” would be equivalent to “Daddy,” showing a close personal relationship. Romans 8:15 states: “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” So in Galatians 4:6 it says *the Spirit* cries out, but in Romans 8:15 it says that *we* cry out! Thus, we ourselves and the Spirit cry out together. This shows our life-union with the Spirit. Romans 8:16 then states: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” When we cry out, the Spirit also cries out together with us, testifying with us that we are indeed children of God.

Galatians 4:7 begins with the word “so.” This word is indicating a conclusion or a consequence from what has been written just before. In this case the word introduces a marvelous conclusion to all that has been argued in verses 1-6. The conclusion is that each of the Galatians believers—“you”—“are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” You have been freed from bondage to law and religious principles. You are a son of God with an inheritance that is now yours!

Let us recap the picture here in these verses. A son can come into the reality of his inheritance only when he is mature, at a certain date. Until that time, he is just like a slave. All people were held in slavery under elemental religious principles until the time Christ came and redeemed those who were “under law.” This redemption

²⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary NT* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), p. 564.

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opens the way for adoption as sons. When we receive Christ and what He has accomplished for us, then we are placed as a mature son in God's family, possessing all of the rights and privileges of a son of God. As sons, the Spirit of His Son comes into our hearts so that we can cry, "Abba! Father!" We are no longer under the bondage of "law" and religion, but are sons and heirs of God!

Do not return to bondage to the elemental things - 4:8-11

⁸Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Galatians 4:8 tells us that before the Galatians believed in Christ they were still living under bondage to the religious practices of their culture. This included the worship of idols and heathen deities. Idols is likely what is meant by "those that by nature are not gods." This same phrasing is seen in Acts 19:26: "And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that *gods made with hands* [man-made idols] *are not gods.*" In Acts 14, when Paul was in Galatia, the crowds wanted to call the apostles Zeus and Hermes, Greek deities (14:13). Then in Acts 14:15 Paul called for the people to turn from "vain things to a living God." The Scripture commonly labels idols as "vain things." The Greek gods (such as Zeus and Hermes noted in Acts 14:13) were worshipped in conjunction with the veneration of idols and statues (see the record of idol worship in the Greek city of Athens; Acts 17:16).

Then Paul asks a penetrating question. Now that you are "known by God"—now that you have a living relationship with Him—"how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?" The Galatians were not turning back specifically to their former deities and idols. Yet they were turning back to the "*elementary principles*" of religious practice, the Jewish law practices that were

being promoted by the Judaizers. Paul spells out these practices. “Days” would be Sabbaths, “months” would be recognition of new moons, “seasons” would be “set times” for festivals (such as Passover and Pentecost), and “years” would refer to sabbatical (seventh) years of release and to the fiftieth year of Jubilee.

Later in the chapter Paul makes it clear that the Galatians were now those who “desire to be under the law” (4:21). These religious things, states Paul, are “weak and worthless.” They are “weak”—not powerful to sustain godly living. And they are “worthless”—not able to enrich the believers in their present spiritual life, or in the coming age of reward. Although the “elementary principles” in verse nine clearly refer to religious rites, according to the context, some commentators and translators believe this term refers to “elemental spirits” or “elemental forces.” See the footnote below for comments on this view.²¹

Some may read verse ten and wonder if it is wrong for believers to hold any days as special. This does not seem to be true as Romans 14:4-8 shows us that Paul believed that Christians could hold different days as special, but that should be based upon their own persuasion of mind in the matter, as we “live to the Lord.” The key is that we should do all unto the Lord in a living fellowship with Him. The problem with the Galatians taking up Jewish observances was that they were living to rules and regulations of the OT law. They were thinking that their practice of holidays was something that God *required* and they were carrying that out in mechanical routine. In legalism, the externals always seem to prevail: am I

²¹ Some commentators hold that the Greek word for “elementary principles” in verses three and nine (*stoicheion*), means forces that are angelic or demonic beings. However, the context argues against this. In verse three, the context is release from law, as demonstrated in the latter part of chapter three. Again in verse nine the context is religious law observances as seen in the following verse, which details the specifics of Paul’s charge as being religious holidays. Additionally, the larger context of the whole book, with its purpose of rescuing the Galatians from the bondage of law to freedom in Christ, supports the position that the “elementary principles” here are religious rites and rules. A cross-reference passage in Colossians 2:20-21 (NASB) also shows the “elementary principles of the world” to be religious rules to which the saints were wrongly “submitting” themselves.

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dressed right; do I eat right; am I practicing the observances correctly; do I do things right in the meeting, etc. Under legalism the internal condition of the heart and the fellowship with a living God suffer. God wants us to deal with the attitudes, the desires and the problems of our hearts, not merely with external things (see Matt. 23:25-26). To accomplish this, God wants us to learn to live in the light of His holy presence and be under the Spirit's guidance.

In verse 11 Paul writes: "I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain." Paul means that if they return to living under law, then his labor has not achieved the intended result. This does not mean that his work among the Galatians produced no result at all. Surely, it did. Paul's initial labor in preaching the gospel resulted in their salvation. What the apostle fears is that his labor upon them since their conversion may not reach the goal—that Christ be formed in them. "I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (4:19; cf. Col. 1:28-29). For "Christ to be formed" means to be formed as a developed or mature expression of the life of Christ. This should happen with the individual believers, and then it will also be manifested in a corporate expression, the life of the assembly.

Life Application

By now you, the reader, should have some grasp on the problem of living "under law," and how God wants us to be freed from that to live Christ's life by the Spirit through faith (grace living). One way to help us come into this grace living is through specific requests of God in our prayers. Overcoming saints throughout the centuries have practiced bringing their longings in prayer to God. So, I advise you to practice this regularly. Prayer never needs to be formal, for God is our Father.

Let me illustrate how one might pray in his or her longing to be set free from any known, or unknown, living under law in order to live by grace. "Dear Father, I am just not sure how much I might be living under law, concerned about rules instead of drawing upon the life of Christ for my walk. Please enlighten me and let me know when I am living unto rules and being "under law" so that I might be set free. Please show me more each day how to live by grace. When I am in Your word, please teach me how to have the hearing of faith

and receive a fresh supply of the Spirit. Please help me to learn about the internal things of the heart that matter to you and not focus on the external things. I desire to grow into maturity in Christ and trust in You to lead me towards this goal. Thank You, Father. I am asking for these things by faith, trusting You to answer.”

Paul’s personal appeal – 4:12-20

¹²Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.¹³You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,¹⁴and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.¹⁵What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.¹⁶Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?¹⁷They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.¹⁸It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you,¹⁹my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!²⁰I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

In this section of the letter we encounter an intensely personal appeal from Paul to his readers. The verses also tell us something of his past history with them, although we cannot fully understand all the details of that history.

In verses 12-15 Paul reviews his history with the Galatians. When he first visited them, he became as they were—those without law, even though he was a Jew. This was his practice in order to bring salvation to men (1 Cor. 9:19-21). Now he begs them to become as he is (without law), seeing that they have now come under Jewish law through the Judiazers. The clause “You did me no wrong” actually belongs more naturally with the following verses. Some modern translations include the Greek connective word (*de*) between verses 12 and 13. Note this other translation: “You did me no wrong, **but** [*de*] you know that it was because of a bodily illness

that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you . . . you did not despise or loathe” (NASB). The thought here is probably that Paul’s bodily condition “was a trial” to the Galatians that could have caused them to “despise or loathe” him. Yet they did not; they did him no wrong. Instead, they received him as an angel (or messenger) of God (v. 14).

The Galatians had experienced a blessing from Paul being with them. “What then has become of your blessedness?” asks Paul (v. 15). When Paul states that they had such love for him that they “would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me,” we can probably assume that Paul had experienced eye trouble at the time of his visit. Otherwise, this saying *would have made no sense to the readers*. This seems to be supported by Galatians 6:11.

In verse 16, Paul suggests that now he is being considered an enemy to them. Perhaps such a negative view of Paul has been planted within the minds of the Galatians by the Judaizers. However, Paul states that he is telling them the truth, the sign of a friend, not an enemy. Next Paul begins to speak more directly about the Judaizers who are the cause of the problem. The Judaizers desired to “shut out” the Galatians from Paul and his ministry of grace so that they could be ones “made much of,” or highly regarded. Thus the Judaizers’ interest in the Galatians was not for a good purpose, but for a selfish purpose. The apostle comments that “it is always good to be made much of for a good purpose,” one which is marked by pure motives and a godly cause.

The next phrase reads: “and not only when I am present with you” (v. 18). There are two possible explanations of this verse. Here Paul may be signaling a gentle rebuke to the Galatian believers. When he was with them the Galatians had sought to hear from Paul. Yet, now that he was absent they had lost their zeal for the truth of his ministry. The other possibility is that Paul is saying it is good always for someone to be sought for a good purpose, even if it is someone else besides him, as indicated by his statement: “and not only when I am present with you.”

We see Paul’s intimate and fatherly concern for the Galatians when he addresses them in verse 19 as “my little children.” He tells them plainly that he is once again “in the anguish of childbirth” for them. The Greek verb here is specifically used for a mother’s childbirth pains. Here it is used figuratively to illustrate the

intensity of labor and the love involved in that labor. A mother endures the birth pangs because of her love for the child about to be born. As noted above, the goal of Paul's labor is now Christian maturity, a mature expression of Christ in the lives of the believers. This would be in line with Paul's own testimony of the genuine Christian life, not a life of rules, but, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

In verse 20 Paul wishes he could be with the Galatians for a personal interaction with them. Being present with them might enable him to change his tone, which in the letter comes across as being very blunt and even harsh in places. He admits that overall he is perplexed about them. This likely means that he is at a loss on what he might do further about their surprising defection from grace to legalism.

Two covenants representing bondage and freedom – 4:21-31

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written,

*“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than those of the one who has a husband.”*

²⁸Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son

of the free woman.”³¹ So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Paul turns to one final argument from Scripture to help the believers in Galatia realize their mistake. Even the OT law itself, as here brought to light by Paul through the Holy Spirit, pictured the bondage of the law and the freedom of the Spirit through the promise. Taking OT persons, places and events, Paul uses them figuratively to bring out important spiritual truths. Thus he writes that he is speaking “allegorically.”

Greek expert W. E. Vine explains that the Greek word allegory “came to signify ‘to speak,’ not according to the primary sense of the word, but so that the facts stated are applied to illustrate principles. The ‘allegorical’ meaning does not do away with the literal meaning of the narrative. There may be more than one ‘allegorical’ meaning though, of course, only one literal meaning. Scripture histories represent or embody spiritual principles, and these are ascertained, not by the play of the imagination, but by the rightful application of the doctrines of Scripture.”²² This way of speaking in an allegory is distinctly different from the serious error termed the “allegorizing method of interpretation,” which dominated the interpretation of Scripture for many centuries and continues in some circles today (see the important footnote for a further explanation).²³

²² Vine, W. E., M. A. Entry for 'Allegory'. Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words. <http://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/ved/view.cgi?n=87>. 1940.

²³ The “allegorizing method of interpretation” began when the church was still in its early stages. Origen and Augustine were two of the most well-known early Bible interpreters that used this method. This method conflicts with the literal interpretive method, which is used by sound Bible teachers today. The literal method is also described as the “grammatical-historical method.” It is based upon the grammatical construction of a passage as well as the historical and cultural background to the passage. The literal method strives to understand the author’s intended meaning in a normal way, the way one would understand any writing. This does not mean that symbols or figures of speech are not anticipated, as these are used in normal speech and writing. Such language features, however, are to be understood in a normal way. In contrast, the “allegorizing method,” does not seek to expound the plain, literal meaning of a passage. Rather, it downplays or even disregards the literal meaning altogether while seeking to find some hidden

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Abraham had two sons: Isaac and Ishmael. But their two mothers, and the way they were born, are brought out in a very meaningful way by Paul. The apostle's main point in this allegory is to contrast bondage (being enslaved) with freedom. As is evidenced throughout this letter, bondage is a condition we experience under law, whereas freedom is our experience in Christ through the Spirit. Paul develops his argument noting that the two sons come from two very different women: Hagar the slave and Sarah, the freewoman. The Hebrew word often translated as "maid" or "servant" for Hagar in Genesis 16:1 actually means "female slave."²⁴ Ishmael, Hagar's son, "was born according to the flesh," indicating a natural birth. Yet, "flesh" here also carries a reference to man's efforts (Gal. 3:3). But Isaac "was born through promise," indicating a supernatural birth as God performed a miracle to bring about this son at the advanced ages of Abraham and Sarah (Rom. 4:17-21). Isaac's birth only came about due to God's promise and God's power.

spiritual meaning. To such an allegorizing interpreter, the "truth" of the passage, or the "exposition" of the passage, is not the literal at all, but another meaning altogether which must be "discovered." Therefore, the plain meaning of the text is considered to be only like a code language that must be decoded into the real, hidden secret meaning. One can see that with this method different interpreters can come up with greatly varying "interpretations," since each one thinks he has found the "secret meaning" through his own code analysis. Great damage has been done to theology through this "allegorizing method." Two examples of the damage are: 1) a literal millennium, where Christ reigns upon the earth is denied (even though the plain texts of OT and NT Scriptures teach this); 2) some of the plain OT promises made to national Israel are "spiritualized" and transferred to the church, leaving Israel completely out of God's future program. This is called "replacement theology," where Israel has now been replaced with the church, which is seen as the true Israel. This is one of the most significant errors in theology today.

²⁴ Strong's Concordance: "a female slave (as a member of the household)."

Verse 24 tells us that the two women stand for two covenants: the Mosaic covenant (law) and the Abrahamic covenant (promise). Hagar is identified with Mt. Sinai, “bearing children for slavery.” This means the descendants of Hagar (the slave) are also slaves, who are bound by the law. Further, her descendants are those of the earthly Jerusalem, the headquarters of Judaism. In contrast, the children of promise are children of the Jerusalem above. That heavenly city is the “our mother”—the mother of all those who are sons of Abraham, those who are of faith, whether Jew or Gentile. That Jerusalem is free from the bondage of law! The apostle’s analogy has turned the picture of the OT descendants of Abraham upside down, so to speak. Naturally speaking, Hagar’s descendants would be the Gentiles, coming from Ishmael, not Jews. And Isaac’s descendants would be the Jews. But Paul views the Jews of his day as being the children of Hagar, *because he sees them as still in bondage to the law.*²⁵

A table follows showing the points of correspondence in the allegory:²⁶

²⁵ F. F. Bruce comments on this unusual analogy by Paul. “In the present ‘allegory,’ there is a forcible inversion of the analogy which is unparalleled elsewhere in Paul. Whereas in other typological passages the OT account is left intact, the argument here is up against the historical fact that Isaac was the ancestor of the Jews, whereas Ishmael’s descendants were Gentiles. This unique clash between type and antitype demands an explanation, and a highly probable explanation has been put forward by C. K. Bartlett . . . namely, that the incident of the two sons of Abraham had been adduced by Paul’s opponents in Galatia in support of *their* case, and that Paul felt obligated to refute their argument by inverting it and showing that the incident, properly understood, supported the gospel of free grace, with its antithesis between flesh and spirit.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 218.

²⁶ This table has been adapted from a table by Dr. David Anderson in his book. Anderson, *Bewitched*, p. 148.

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ABRAHAM	
ISAAC	ISHMAEL
SARAH	HAGAR
FREE	BOUND
BY PROMISE (faith / the Spirit)	BY THE FLESH
ABRAHAMIC COVENANT	MOSAIC COVENANT
JERUSALEM ABOVE	JERUSALEM BELOW
SPIRITUAL SEED	PHYSICAL SEED
FREE FROM THE LAW	BOUND TO THE LAW
PERSECUTED	PERSCUTOR
HEIR	CAST OUT

In verse 27 the apostle picks up an OT reference, Isaiah 54:1, which he *applies* to the situation brought out in this analogy. He is not expounding Isaiah 54:1 or claiming he is identifying its fulfillment. Rather, he is using that reference in application with a main point to be made: the spiritual descendants of the Jerusalem above will be more in number than those of the earthly Jerusalem. In the OT story Sarah was barren, but she will be in labor and rejoice over her children, per the application of Isaiah 54:1. The one “who has a husband” (v. 27) would be a reference to Hagar, the mother in the analogy of the Jews, those still in bondage to the law. One may be bothered that in the OT story Sarah was the one who seemingly had the husband, but the story does record that “Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife” (Gen. 16:3). The children “of the one who has a husband” would be those born from Hagar while she had Abraham as her husband.

The actual prophecy in Isaiah 54 refers directly to the nation of Israel. She is pictured as “barren” while she would be in captivity in Babylon. The Lord would abandon her as her husband (Is. 54:5-6) during the captivity. But, once Israel was to be restored from captivity, she would be fruitful beyond what she had been with her

Law Superseded by the Spirit

husband, her Maker, before the captivity. The passage in Isaiah 54 also leaps further prophetically to the blessings that Israel will enjoy when she is in the millennium. Again, however, we should note that Paul is only picking up this passage in Isaiah 54 to use it in *application* to his analogy story with Sarah and Hagar. Paul is not trying to say that the Galatians 4 analogy explains the Isaiah 54 prophecy.

In verse 28 Paul assures the Galatian readers that they, like Isaac, are children of promise. So, they should expect persecution from those who are of the flesh, not born of the Spirit (v. 29). In verse 30 Paul returns to the OT story of Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael. He applies the facts of Genesis 21:10 to his analogy, showing that Hagar and her son (her descendants) are cast out of an inheritance with God. In contrast those who belong to Sarah are heirs of God. Again, Sarah is identified as “the free woman,” stressing freedom from the law. Hagar, however, is termed “the slave woman,” meaning that she and her descendants are in bondage to the law with its rules and demands. Paul ends the chapter with a reassuring statement to the Galatian believers that they are not children of a slave, but they are indeed of the free woman. Paul has no doubts about the fact that the recipients of his letter are born again.

Chapter Five - Living in Freedom by the Spirit

Seeking righteousness through law contrasted with grace living – 5:1-6

¹For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ²Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Galatians 5:1 opens with a statement of spiritual fact: Christ has set us free. We have been placed in freedom through Him. This fact is the summation of the argument of bondage versus freedom in chapter four. This is a *positional* truth, stating what we have by virtue of our union with Him. However, as is ever the case in the NT, our actual *condition* in our experience must be brought into line with the reality of our *position* in Christ. That is what Paul deals with next when he writes, “stand firm therefore [in your freedom], and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (v. 1).

It is evident that the Judaizers had been putting pressure upon these Gentile believers to be circumcised. After all, circumcision was a pillar of the Jewish religion, being a “sign of the covenant” that the nation had with God (Gen. 17:10-11). It may well be that the Judaizers were pressuring the believers in Galatia to be circumcised as a major step to show their commitment to follow the Jewish law. But, as far as *the truth* was concerned, circumcision was a part of the “yoke of slavery”—the law. To practice it in order to

be righteous under the law was absolutely contrary to the believers' position of freedom in Christ.

So now Paul boldly addresses the effort to get the Galatians circumcised: "Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you" (v. 2). The phrase "no advantage" is translated by a number of other versions as "no profit." We not only have gain from Christ through initial belief (such as forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life) but we also can experience present blessing, as well as future reward, from Christ through our living in spiritual fellowship with Him.

Living in true fellowship with Christ allows us to enjoy the spiritual riches of His life in our daily affairs. His grace enriches us in the small things of life and in the big challenges of life, as we draw upon Him for strength, comfort, counsel, hope and godly living in the midst of a fallen world. Living unto Him in grace also prepares us to receive a good reward from Christ at His Judgment Seat. Paul is telling these believers that their "obedience to the law" does not bring gain at all. Living to the regulations and rites of law eliminates any benefit from Christ, and thus is valueless in the eyes of God.

Further, the apostle states: "to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law" (v. 3). This thought was already covered in Galatians 3:10. What we see here is the real "bondage" of the law. The bondage of the law may be seen in its never ending demands and threatened consequences. Romans 8:15 speaks of this bondage in this way: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear." The OT law stands over the person like a cruel taskmaster seeking to force their obedience at every turn in life, with the threat of being under a curse for lack of obedience to every point of the law. Paul reminds them in verse three that if indeed they receive circumcision, then they must comply with every point of the law. This bondage only produces fear in the person. In contrast, Romans 8:15 says this about the spirit of adoption: "but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" Our obedience to Christ does not flow out of fearful coercion, but out of a willing heart in response to God our Father.

Now we come to Galatians 5:4, which is likely one of the most misunderstood verses in the epistle. To understand every aspect of

this verse, the interpreter must draw upon the context, the exact meaning of certain words, the grammar, logic, and sound theological understanding. Let's think about the immediate context first. Verses one through six constitute a distinct context for verse four due to a common theme and argument that begins with verse one and ends with verse six. Verse one sets up Paul's flow of assertions in verses two through six by stating that all believers in Christ have been freed from the law and are in this freedom. Then verse one continues by the apostle charging the believers to not be subject again to a yoke of slavery, to the bondage of law.

It is clear from 4:31 and 5:1 that Paul is certain that his readers are already saved, already "justified," or declared righteous, by God through faith (Gal. 2:16; 3:24). Yet, Paul is admonishing these believers not to go back to law in the latter part of verse one (cf. 4:9-10). Based upon the points raised in verse one, Paul now gets specific, and I paraphrase roughly here—"Don't get circumcised! If you do, Christ will be of no profit to you and you will have to keep the whole law." So, Paul is telling them from verse one through three not to pick up the law as a way of trying to live your Christian life.

Verses four and five speak of two different ways of trying to live before God. We should see that these two ways are just a summation of all that has been argued in chapter four and even part of chapter three (a larger context). The right way to live the Christian life is "through the Spirit, by faith" (v. 5; compare Gal. 3:3). This is actually living by grace because the previous verse says: "*you* have fallen away from grace," or it could be translated as "fallen out of grace." That means that at one point these believers were in grace (living in grace), but now had fallen away from grace.

The next phrase is showing the difference of "through the Spirit, by faith, *we* ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness." In other words, those who practice living as shown in verse five have *not* fallen away from grace. Those described in verse five are practicing an ongoing *way of living*, while "waiting for the hope of righteousness." Therefore this grace spoken of is the experience of grace (living through the Spirit by faith), not a position of grace. Those interpreters who teach that "fallen away from grace" means losing one's salvation are not on clear and solid theological ground

as eternal salvation cannot be lost (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 6:37-39; 10:27-30; Rom. 8:29-30).²⁷

Now we must look at the first two phrases of verse four: The first phrase is: “You are severed from Christ.” This cannot mean that they never were saved. Against such an interpretation is the clear indication that Paul believed these Galatians were indeed saved, but were being misled. Further, if they have “fallen away from grace” that means that at one point they were living in grace. Only a believer could be “in grace.” What does “severed” mean here? This Greek verb has a range of meanings, including to be separated from, to be loosed from, to be alienated from, to be deprived of force or influence or power, and more. To be “severed from Christ” means we have lost our vital fellowship with Christ and are not being led by Him or supplied or strengthened by Him. Whenever we pick up the law as the way of living the Christian life we immediately are severed from the experience of a living fellowship with Christ. When we are living by the effort of the flesh, we are no longer living by the supply of the Spirit, and have left the experience of grace (cf. Gal. 2:21).

The second phrase in verse four is translated as: “you who would be justified by the law.” To get technical here, the verb translated “justify” is *dikaioō* (Strong’s Concordance #1344). Although most English translations use the word “justify” here, not all do. There is a real problem though, with translating the verb as “justify.” Most Bible teachers in the western world have “imported” a specific theological meaning into this word. They take “to justify” as meaning to “declare righteous” and strictly apply it to “initial justification,” the act of God declaring a person righteous upon his belief in Christ due solely to the efficacy of His redemptive work. This declaration of righteousness performed by God towards us is eternal in effect and is not affected by any actions of ours later. It is

²⁷ Many believers have been taught that one can lose his salvation. However, this is not Biblical. There are a number of passages that unequivocally show that salvation cannot be lost. Yet, there are also other passages that seem to be severe threats to the believer. These other passages do not refer to the loss of salvation but involve the doctrine of rewards. Please see Appendix D, where the booklet *Eternal Security* explores this topic in much detail, balancing eternal security with the theme of rewards.

positional righteousness, due to our union with Christ. However, Greek words are normal words of the Greek language and do not carry a *specific theological* meaning.

The point is this: when translators use the English word “justified” in Galatians 5:4 almost all Bible students and readers jump to the conclusion that this means “initial justification.” But does it? Were the Galatian believers seeking initial justification by the law? Logically, this understanding of the phrase does not make sense. If they were doing this, then this means that either they were not saved or very confused about their already existing salvation (justification) before God. We know, however, that they were already saved as discussed.

But if, on the other hand, they now were confused, and did not know that their initial justification was already a settled issue, then it would be logical to expect Paul to give much more emphasis to this matter in his letter. He would have done so in order that they could be settled in this knowledge and not be constantly seeking initial justification. Such an emphasis by Paul would also be expected *immediately after* he states “you who would be justified by the law.” He would use the next few verses to say something like, “Do you not remember what I told you when I was with you, that all of your sins are forgiven forever and that you are justified from all things? Do you not know that whoever simply has faith in Jesus is a child of God and cannot be lost; that he has passed from death to life forever?” And, in the case of verse five, he would have reworded it something along this line: “For *we* have believed in Christ for our justification and have full assurance that we belong to Him forever. Now we are simply waiting for the blessed hope we have in Jesus to be realized when He returns.” Instead, in verse five Paul describes how “*we*” are living—“through the Spirit, by faith, *we*.” That reflects a contrast with how “*you*,” the Galatians, were living the Christian life, not how they were trying to become a Christian.

A much better understanding of the phrase would firstly change the English word commonly translated “justified.” In this verse, since we believe that the Galatian believers were using the law as a means to live righteously, we could translate the verse as follows: “You were put away from Christ—you whoever are making yourselves righteous by law; you fell out of grace.” This translation

is by Norman Young, an expert in NT Greek. (See the footnote for additional technical considerations of the Greek form of this verb.)²⁸

Now we return to verse five. What does Paul indicate when he switches to “we” in verse five as a contrast to “you” in verse four? The introductory word “for” in verse five tells us that what is presented in verse five helps us better understand verse four through pointing out the contrast between the two ways of living. The “we” seems likely to be speaking of the class of people who have *not* fallen away from grace and are therefore described this way: “through the Spirit, by faith, *we* ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.” This fits perfectly with the distinction that Paul has been making throughout much of the letter, the distinction between the way of law and the way of grace. This chapter is on sanctification and this distinction applies to two ways of approaching sanctification—through living by law or living by grace.

It is important to also note that in verse five Paul directly introduces a topic that perhaps has only been indirectly hinted at

²⁸ Here the verb is in the present tense and the indicative mood. The present tense means, of course, the action is taking place in the present time and here it seems likely that it is an ongoing action describing the ongoing efforts of the Galatians. The use of the indicative mood shows here that the action of the verb describes a fact. Then we must take into account the “voice” of the verb. If the voice is “active” it means that the subject of the verb is performing the action (example: “I see the people”). If the voice is “passive” that means that the subject of the verb is receiving the action (example: “I am seen by the people”). If the voice is termed “middle” that means that the subject of the verb performs in some way that concerns himself. The tricky part in this case is that when a verb is present indicative, the Greek form of the verb is exactly the same for both the passive and the middle voice. That means the translator must decide which voice is probable, given the context. Then, he must translate the verb, if possible, to reflect the voice in some way. By translating the verb “would be justified,” we can see that the translator has made an interpretive decision that the voice is passive. This translation reflects the idea that the subject is the object of an action by another—the subject is “justified,” or “declared righteous,” by God. On the other hand, if the translator (or interpreter) sees the middle voice as the correct option, then a translation of “you who are seeking to be righteous by law” is perfectly valid. In this case, due to the context and other reasons given, the middle voice seems correct.

before. This is the topic of the coming of the Lord and the coming age of righteousness, the millennium where Christ reigns. Throughout the NT in many passages believers are instructed to live righteously in this life as we await the coming Kingdom where Christ reigns (see Titus 2:11-13 for example). The next age will be marked by righteousness as Jesus will reign from His throne in Jerusalem with a “righteous scepter” and rule with “a rod of iron” (Is. 24:23; 32:1; Ps. 2:7-9; Mic. 4:7-8; Matt, 19:28; 25:31; Heb. 2:8; Rev. 19:15). We believers long for the day when there will be righteousness in the earth, as we mourn over the unrighteousness that characterizes the world today.

The NT reveals that Christ will reward His faithful believers with some participation in His Kingdom and His reign. So we must live righteously today, by the Spirit through faith, in order to share in His future Kingdom rule (Matt. 19:28; 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-26; 2 Tim. 2:12). To those who are faithful in life and service, loving His appearing, the Lord will grant them Kingdom rule, awarding them a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul has now directly introduced the topic of rewards for the next age. We will see this important topic again in chapters five and six. May we take the way of grace in order to be ready for His coming and His Kingdom!

The apostle finishes this section of chapter five with a conclusion to the matter of circumcision. Verse six states: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” Paul is so blunt! The whole matter of circumcision means absolutely nothing! This is surely a strong word that destroys the Judaizers and shocks all who have revered the ancient custom. Outward rites mean nothing in the NT economy. Only living unto God by faith, which finds its outworking in love, not rituals, is the reality of the Christian life.

*Living in freedom means living by the Spirit to love one another -
5:7-15*

⁷You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion is not from him who calls you. ⁹A little

leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰*I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.* ¹¹*But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.* ¹²*I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!* ¹³*For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.* ¹⁴*For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* ¹⁵*But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

Verse seven is straightforward. Paul states that there was a time when the Galatian believers "were running well." This statement points to an earlier time when they were living their Christian lives by grace. But, someone hindered them from obeying the truth, the truth that the Christian life is to be lived unto God by the power of God's Spirit, not unto rules by the effort of the flesh.

Verse eight points out that this false way does not come from God. Next Paul issues a serious warning: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump [of dough]." The leaven is legalism, living by rules and religious ceremonies and traditions. Leaven in the Bible frequently symbolizes something evil. The first mention of leaven in the Bible is in Exodus 12:15. The first mention of a topic in the Bible can be significant and present some pattern or principle. In Exodus 12 the children of Israel were preparing to leave Egypt right after God "passed over" them in the death judgment of the firstborn in the land. On the very first day of the Passover feast, the Israelites were to remove all leaven from their houses. Many Bible teachers indicate that the history here presents a picture of the Christian experience, showing that after we are saved by the blood of the Lamb, we are immediately to get rid of sin and evil in our lives. Such an application of this particular OT history to our experience is supported by 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

Did you realize that legalism is *evil* in the eyes of God? This is because it is against God's way of grace. The warning here is that even if a little leaven of legalism is allowed to remain in the midst of

Galatians

the church it will permeate and affect the whole assembly! Its evil influence will damage grace living in the assembly.

In verse ten Paul expresses confidence toward these believers that they will correct their course and see the view that legalism is evil and the way of grace is right. Note, however, that Paul's confidence is "in the Lord." He is praying for them, no doubt, and trusting God to bring repentance over the legalism that has been permitted to invade the assembly through the Judaizers. Whoever the Judaizer might be, Paul is sure that he will indeed bear a judgment from God at some point. The evil of legalism is serious business in the mind of God, the Judge.

Galatians 5:11 reads, "But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed." It may be that Paul has brought up his own preaching on the subject of circumcision in answer to a claim made by the Judaizers in Galatia that Paul also promoted the practice. At one time Paul did preach circumcision. That was when he was an unbelieving Jew and zealous for the law. But, once he saw the Savior and God's way of salvation apart from the law, he abandoned the promotion of circumcision, especially for any Gentile (Gal. 2:3-4).

Later Paul would write the letter to the Romans and tell us that "circumcision" is not something outward, but "circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit," meaning the cutting off of the flesh, the old nature (Rom. 2:29). In Philippians, he warns the believers about "evildoers" (Judaizers) who promote a false circumcision of the flesh (Phil. 3:2). And he goes on to say that believers "are the [true] circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory [boast] in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). The practice of outward religious rites causes the religious person to boast of his accomplishments and place his confidence in what he can do (the efforts of his flesh). We will see this in Galatians 6:12-13 where the Judaizers want the Gentile Galatian believers to be circumcised so that they can boast in their religious "success."

Paul says if he is still preaching circumcision, then why is he receiving persecution from the Jews and the Jewish legalists? The cross is an offense to the religious, legalistic person because it marks

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an end to the value of anything he can “do for God” by his efforts. The cross denies the value of man’s works in eternal salvation and it also denies the value of the fleshly efforts of a believer to “achieve” something for God or to advance spiritually (Gal. 3:3). All works of the flesh “for God” will be rejected for a good reward at Christ’s Judgment Seat (1 Cor. 3:3-4; 10-15). Verse 12 is quite graphic. Paul is so upset by the work of the Judaizers he wishes that they would even emasculate (castrate) themselves. Of course, this desire of Paul’s is dramatically figurative—he wants their evil work to be utterly cut off.

Life Application

We see from this portion in 5:7-12 how serious legalism is in the eyes of God. It keeps us from running the Christian race. Legalism injects a growing and corrupting influence into the local church that ruins its vitality and its testimony for Christ. Promoting principles of legalism brings judgment upon the one who promotes or teaches them. Living by rules blocks the working of the cross against the believer’s flesh. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each believer to deal with legalism whenever it raises its ugly head. We cannot afford to overlook it in our lives or the life of the assembly where we fellowship.

If we sense legalism is present in our assembly, we should not “look the other way.” Rather, we should pray to God for His wisdom for how best to deal with it. Although all of us carry this responsibility, this admonition should be particularly heeded by the overseers of the flock. They are responsible before God for the welfare of the flock and will give an account to Christ for their watchfulness and care before the Judgment Seat of Christ. If you are an elder or pastor please consider this: are you teaching the saints to live by rules, regulations, traditions and religious habits in their personal lives and in Christian meetings? Or, are you helping the believers, by word and example, to live to God in the Holy Spirit, looking to Him for direction and fellowship? Elders themselves must first learn to live increasingly by the Spirit by faith, not by conformity to outward practices and rules. Then they can more successfully help the saints live in this victorious way. I

encourage every one of you, especially those called to be elders, to humble yourselves before the Lord and pray in a definite way over this matter. Let the Lord speak to you.

We now return to the text with Galatians 5:13, which is a wonderful and important verse. “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” This verse gives us an important warning and also positive counsel on how to live. The warning comes because there is always the possibility that we believers may misunderstand freedom and grace. The Greek word translated “opportunity” in this verse means a “starting point,” or a “base of operations.” In other words, no one should misunderstand and misuse the idea of Christian liberty in order to launch out into fleshly living. The idea that we could do so is a lie from the devil.

We have been called to freedom from the bondage of law. But, does being “free” mean that we now have some license to do whatever we desire, including indulging the flesh with its fallen and self-centered desires? No! There are two aspects of man’s fallen flesh. One aspect involves man living without restrictions, indulging all of the base lusts of his fallen nature. The other aspect involves fallen man’s efforts to be righteous by trying to live up to regulations for goodness and holiness. True spiritual freedom in Christ not only frees us from law, but also frees us to be holy. So, instead of misusing freedom for a chance to fulfill our fallen lusts, we should, through love, serve one another.

To serve one another is the opposite of living for one’s self, which is the way of the flesh. Legalists will always insist that we need law with its rules and regulations in order to keep us from sinning. However, under grace we live directly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is steering and empowering us unto holiness, not sin. Under law we were held in bondage; under grace we are free to serve God and one another.

The Jewish Torah (the first five books of the OT) contained 613 distinct commandments for the Jew. Yet, here in Galatians 5:14 Paul states that the whole law stands fulfilled in just one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is a quote from Leviticus 19:18. This commandment expresses the entire true spirit of the OT

law. We may say that this word also expresses “the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). This is surely the way Christ lived on this earth, for the sake of others. We must not fix our attention upon a huge list of commandments, but we need to pay attention to the living Christ. He is living to love others. Let us yield to Him each day, yielding our new lives in Christ to serve Him and love others. As we “look to Jesus” in faith He will gently guide us in loving and serving others.

Unfortunately, it is just at this point in his writing that Paul must point out an opposite behavior that can occur even among saints. It seems likely that the problem of “biting and devouring one another” is mentioned by him due to some report he has received about the saints in Galatia. This kind of behavior is often the fruit of legalism, which results in self-righteousness with its disdain of others, accusations against others, and the mistreatment of others. Such actions are often justified by one’s strict allegiance to his religious code! Paul is warning them that such behavior will result in self-destruction of the churches in Galatia.

The flesh and the Spirit – 5:16-26

¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

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Paul has left his long arguments about law and grace. Instead of large theological ideas, in this section he is now touching the practical lives of the believers. In verse 15 he uncovered a real problem of sinful living that apparently was evident among the Galatians. Now he must go on to deal with the sinful flesh exposed in that verse. The apostle's counsel to overcome the fallen flesh is amazingly simple: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (v. 16). The idea of our conduct in daily living is often pictured by the term "walk" in the NT. If we have our conduct "by the Spirit" then we will not carry out the desires of the flesh. Some translations show the phrase to be "in the Spirit" instead of "by the Spirit," but the meaning of both is the same. The meaning is that our conduct, our living, is under the influence, control and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As long as we yield to the Holy Spirit in faith, then we will not carry out the wrong desires of the fallen flesh.

Note what the verse does *not* say. It does not say that if we walk by the Spirit we will *not have* the desires of the flesh. The desires of our fallen flesh will be ever present with us as long as we are in this body. The most mature saint still has sinful desires in his life daily. It is not sinful to *have* a sinful or wrong desire, but it is sinful when we yield to the desire after it arises (see Jas. 1:13-15). Some sins that we commit are outward, such as outbursts of anger (Gal. 5:20). Others are inward, of the heart, like jealousy, and morally impure imaginations of the heart (5:19, 20).

Although none of us likes to have sinful thoughts or desires arise within us, we should never come under condemnation just because they arise. But, we should immediately turn to the Lord in dependent faith for His power in order not to *yield* to the sinful desire, and to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5). If we yield to the temptation by acting outwardly, then we have sinned. Or, if we respond to a thought by inwardly dwelling on it for some time, allowing it to become a sinful imagination or emotion, then we have sinned. If we are experiencing a normal fellowship with God, we will recognize that we have indeed sinned through the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin.

It is possible, if a Christian repeatedly resists responding to conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit, that his conscience will become

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seared and his heart hardened. As a result, he will become insensitive to the Holy Spirit's work of conviction in his life (1 Tim. 1:19; 4:2; Heb. 3:7-8). When we are convicted of sin, we must confess before God that we have sinned and trust that God has forgiven us and cleansed us (Prov. 28:13; 1 Jn. 1:9).

Galatians 5:16-18 contains a series of connected thoughts that fit together into one picture. The first verse gives the key of victory: walk by the Spirit and the believer will not act to gratify the desires of the flesh. Then verse 17 explains that there is a conflict within the believer, wherein the flesh, our old fallen nature, has strong desires that oppose the desires of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives within the believer, and the believer's re-born human spirit corresponds to the nature and desires of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:6; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). Because there is a strong conflict within us of our old nature (the fallen flesh) and the indwelling Holy Spirit, the believer cannot simply choose to do the good and accomplish it in his own power. The meaning of the last half of verse 17 can be understood to mean, "The result of this conflict is that you cannot do the things that you wish."²⁹ In other words, you cannot carry out the things that you desire to do. Raw willpower against the flesh will lose every time. You may choose to do the right thing, the thing the Holy Spirit desires, but your own best resolve and effort will not win the battle.

The next verse (v. 18), gives again the secret of victory—it is reliance upon the Holy Spirit. This is what we saw in verse 16 at the beginning of this small section. Being led by the Spirit in verse 18 means that we are submitting ourselves to be willingly led by Him and we are fully depending upon Him in faith. When that happens, "you are not under the law." This phrase may seem out of place, but when we realize that self-effort to do right (in the previous verse) equals being put "under law," then we see the connection. And, whenever we are "under law" failure will come in. Being led by the Spirit *takes us out from under law*, and the Spirit wins the victory over the flesh! "Being led by the Spirit" equals being "under grace" in our experience.

²⁹ Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 244.

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In Romans 7:14-24 Paul describes *his efforts* to overcome the power of the sinful flesh. Again and again in that passage he uses the word “I,” speaking of his agreement with the will of God and *his efforts* to carry out that will. But, it all ended in failure. It was Paul trying to accomplish righteousness, living up to the law’s demands. It is only in Romans 8 that we see the word “Spirit,” and it is the Spirit who wins the battle over sin in the believer. Similarly, in Galatians 5:17 there is a struggle within the believer, but the believer *himself* cannot win the victory.

Here is an illustration. Suppose you are a 110 pound school boy and you are being bullied day after day by an older, muscular boy weighing 140 pounds. He comes from a bad family with ugly habits and wants to beat you up. You, however, come from a very nice family with good habits. If you try to fight him, guess who will probably win every time? However, suppose one day you bring your big brother with you to the school yard. He is a good boy and also weighs 175 pounds and has been taking boxing lessons from an expert. He has already won several junior age boxing competitions. Now when the bully approaches you and taunts you, wanting you to fight, what will you do? Will you try to box with him and see if you can win? That would be foolish and destined to failure. Instead you will realize that your older brother is there, ready to fight this bad bully. So, you will step aside and tell him, “Go, ahead, brother, you fight the bully. I believe you can win. In fact you have already proven that you are a champion.” Jesus has already won the victory over sin, death and Satan. We can let Him fight the battle by putting our faith fully in Him and following His leadership.

The apostle next lays out a list of “the deeds of the flesh,” which are some of the more prominent and ugly sins of the fallen flesh of man. Verse 19 firstly lists three sexual sins: “sexual immorality, impurity and sensuality.” The first term, “sexual immorality,” is a broad term that includes any type of illicit sexual conduct. “Impurity” refers to impure sexual thoughts, words and deeds, including deviant sexual behavior. Viewing pornography would be included. “Sensuality” is sometimes translated as “wantonness,” which involves a throwing off of all sexual restraint, even openly exhibiting shameful sexual behavior publicly without any sense of shame.

Verse 20 firstly lists two sins in the spiritual category. “Idolatry” was very common in the ancient world with many images receiving worship. This is highly offensive to God (Ex. 20:4) and the worshipper of an idol is actually involved in demon worship (1 Cor. 10:19-20). Sex with prostitutes was often involved with the religious rites of pagan gods and idols. “Sorcery” involved contact with the evil spirits and was often accompanied by the use of mind altering drugs. The Greek word for sorcery is *pharmakeia*, from which our modern English word pharmacy is derived. During the great tribulation period sorcery will be prominent (Rev. 9:21).

Verse 20 and 21 list several sins which involve our relationships with others. First there is “enmity,” or hostility towards others. This could be outwardly expressed hostility or an inward simmering attitude of hostility. “Strife” would be open conflict or quarrels with others. “Jealousy” is the sinful desire for the success or the recognition of others to belong to us. “Fits of anger” are next, and such outbursts come from a sinful heart. The same Greek word for “rivalries” is translated in other places as “selfish ambition,” which certainly manifests itself in rivalries and disputes. “Dissensions” lead to people “taking sides,” and causing division. “Divisions” indicates separation into actual parties. “Envy” involves wanting what others have. “Drunkenness” is a sin and should be recognized as such. “Orgies” speaks of riotous partying, especially with alcoholic drinks. Paul closes the list with “things like these,” which we can only surmise means other obvious sins, “deeds of the flesh.”

Paul now forewarns his readers, believers, just as he had before, “that those who do such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God.” There are two parallel passages in Paul’s epistles: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Ephesians 5:3-5. The phrase rendered here as “do such things” refers to an ongoing practice, not just a brief slip into sin. The Greek verb here for “do” is *prasso* (Strong’s #4238) and is most commonly understood as “practice.” A number of English translations translate the word as “practice” in this verse (American Standard Version, International Standard Version, Literal Translation of the Holy Bible, Williams, New American Standard Bible, Christian Standard Bible).

We must understand this warning clearly as it pertains to the important doctrine of rewards, and this matter of “inheriting the kingdom” is an extremely significant one in the NT. Unfortunately,

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there is much confusion and misinformation surrounding this idea. Therefore, it will require several pages to explain this very important concept.

In greater Christendom there are three basic views about the meaning of this warning here. The first two views take the warning of “will not inherit the kingdom of God” to mean that the sinning person will not be in God’s kingdom in eternity. Instead, they will be lost forever in hell. The first view thinks that this passage is talking about believers who sin and thus lose their salvation. This is the view of the Arminians (those who follow the basic tenants of a theology begun with Jacobus Arminius [1560-1609]). The second view is one that is espoused by most Calvinists. It takes the position that a genuine believer can never live in a continuing lifestyle of sin and thus claims this warning is not addressed to genuine believers. The third view is that this warning of non-inheritance is speaking of potential loss of reward for believers, not eternal salvation, and applies to the coming 1,000 year kingdom of Christ (Rev.20:4-6), not to the eternal phase of God’s kingdom (Rev. 21, 22).

Let us briefly evaluate these three views. As we have stated previously, a genuine believer is not in danger of losing his salvation according to plain statements in the word of God (see comments on “fallen away from grace” in Gal. 5:4). The view that a genuine believer cannot persist in sin is against the plain testimony of Scripture. Those addressed in the Corinthian church were considered as “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” were addressed as “brothers,” and had been justified (1 Cor.1:2, 10; 6:11). Yet, they were plagued with divisive ways, jealousy and strife and were “of the flesh” (1 Cor. 1:10; 3:3-4). Paul warned them that they must build with precious materials because their work would one day be judged (at Christ’s Judgment Seat).

All fleshly work, like divisiveness, of a believer will be burned up by Christ’s burning judgment, and the believer will “suffer loss, though he himself will be saved” (1 Cor. 3:15). So there in the church in Corinth genuine believers were persisting in sin and, although their fleshly works will be burned up at Christ’s Judgment Seat, they themselves will be saved. In 1 Corinthians 5 we have the case of a brother who was involved in ongoing sexual immorality. Yet, Paul does not say he is not a believer. Instead Paul delivers

him to Satan for chastisement, “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5). At the point in time Paul delivered him over, Paul did not know if the man would repent of his sin. He did know, however, that the man’s spirit would be eventually saved “in the day of the Lord,” a reference to the coming time of Christ’s judgment.

In 2 Corinthians 2:7-8, after Paul learned that the man had repented, he wrote to the church in Corinth and urged them to receive him back, forgive him and comfort him. This was a badly sinning believer who was restored. If Paul had not prayed for his chastisement he may never have had a real turn back to the path of sanctification. Also take note that in 1 Corinthians 11 genuine believers were taking the elements of the Lord’s Supper without judging the sins in their lives. Their sins were so bad, apparently ongoing, that God judged some of them with sickness and death. This discipline was explained thus: “But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32). These sinning people were obviously believers who were not under eternal condemnation like those in the world.

The view that perseverance in holiness is assured of all true believers is distorted and not in accordance with the record of the NT or our experience. Instead of persevering, some fail miserably (1 Tim. 1:19; 2 Tim. 4:10; Rev. 2:4-5, 20-23; 3:2-3; 3:15-19). Although every believer is equipped with God’s life and the Holy Spirit within, nothing could be clearer from the New Testament than the fact that believers do vary in their degree of cooperation with God and their consequent maturity and actions. We are in a battle with the flesh within and the devil and the world without. There is no guarantee of victory for every believer. Regrettably, we all know genuine Christians who have given themselves over to the world or the flesh.

This warning passage in Galatians 5:21 (as well its parallels in 1 Cor. 6 and Eph. 5) is not a “sham” passage, written to warn people about the consequences of behavior they were incapable of doing. That is, it is not written to genuine believers who actually cannot practice such sins. Nor is it a “sham” passage written to warn fake believers about the consequences of their sins, when the context of the passage and letter shows that those warned are believers. The

letter is addressed to “the churches of Galatia,” and in this verse Paul is *forewarning these believers* concerning the very serious consequence of sinful living. Those who take the view that the sinful living noted in verse 21 cannot speak of true believers must account for the glaring lack of logical interpretation here.³⁰

To arrive at the correct interpretation of the warning in verse 21 we need to understand some terms. What is the “kingdom of God” here? What significance does the term “inherit” have? It is clear that in verse 21 Paul is speaking in the future tense, about a kingdom of God that is yet future. In thinking about the future kingdom of God, we should realize that there are varying phases of God’s kingdom throughout the ages. “Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, and thy dominion is throughout all generations.” (Ps. 145:13, Darby). There are two future phases of God’s Kingdom yet to come. The next phase will be the millennial (1,000 year) Kingdom of Christ, which He will establish upon His return (Lk. 19:11-12, 15; Acts 1:6-11; Rev. 11:15). During this 1,000 year kingdom Christ will openly reign on the earth from His throne in Jerusalem (Is. 2:1-

³⁰ Here is a lesson in sound Biblical interpretation. Interpretation must be logical. John R. W. Stott was a good believer and a respected minister of God (Stott’s lifespan: 1921-2011). However, he reveals his lack of logic and his theological bias in interpreting this verse. He did this because he held to a theology that no true believer could persist in sinful living (the second view above). So, when he writes on this verse, he states: “To this list of works of the flesh in the realms of sex, religion, society and drink, Paul now adds as solemn warning: *I warn you*, he writes, *as I warned you before* (when he was with them in Galatia), *that those who do such things* (the verb *prassontes* referring to habitual practice rather than an isolated lapse) *shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (verse 21). Since God’s kingdom is a kingdom of godliness, righteousness and self-control, those who indulge in the works of the flesh will be excluded from it. For such works give evidence that they are not in Christ. And if they are not in Christ, then they are not Abraham’s seed, nor ‘heirs according to promise’ (3:29).” Stott, p. 148. Paul had already written to the Galatians recognizing that they had received the Spirit by faith and that, “you are all sons of God” (3:26; 4:6-7). So, contrary to Stott’s conclusion, the epistle plainly teaches that those warned here are “in Christ.” Regrettably, Stott let his theology override what the actual text stated (a warning to true believers), according to a grammatical and logical understanding. Instead of saying that he did not understand the verse, he gives an interpretation against logic and leads the reader into confusion and error.

3; 24:23; Mic. 4:6-8; Matt. 19:28; 25:31; Rev. 20:4-6). At the end of Christ's reign He will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father, bringing in the final, eternal phase of God's Kingdom, which is realized in the new heavens, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem (1 Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 21:1-2).

There are many Bible teachers who do not believe in a literal future reign of Christ for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4-6). So, a number of Bible teachers see no millennial kingdom, but only an eternal kingdom. Other teachers may agree with a millennial reign of Christ, but still think the reference to "the kingdom of God" in Galatians 5:21 refers to eternity.

We must see that the Bible reveals that the next age, when Christ rules openly upon the earth, is extremely significant in God's plan.³¹ The background to its significance was laid in the OT. The prophets foresaw a time when the earth would be gloriously renewed from the curse and the promised Messiah (meaning "the anointed one") from God would rule over the restored earth (Is. 2:1-4; 11:1-10; 24:23). The Jews understood that participation in that blessed era was determined by God's judgment upon one's works after the resurrection, and *life in that age* was designated "eternal life" (literally, *age-lasting life*, or *life for the age*; Dan. 12:2). There is no word in either Hebrew or Greek that explicitly means endless or eternal. A literal translation of the term would be "age-lasting life" or "life belonging to the age."³²

The term "eternal life" appears in the New Testament 42 times. In most of those occurrences it refers to the eternal life that the believer receives inwardly as a gift upon belief, which is the life of the Son of God (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 1 Jn. 5:11-12). However, there are other

³¹ Appendix B of this book contains much more detail on the 1,000 year kingdom of Christ and its significance.

³² Much of this paragraph (as well as the rest of this note) is taken directly from the booklet, *Eternal Security*, in Appendix D. "Both the Hebrew word (*olam*) and the Greek word (*aionios*), which are sometimes translated as 'eternal' or 'everlasting,' mean a long period of time (perhaps indefinite) or an age. *The context of the term must determine the exact meaning.* When the Greek word *aionios* is used in conjunction with God's life, it clearly means eternal, because God is eternal and His life is eternal (Gen. 21:33; John 1:1-4; Rom. 16:26; 1 Tim. 6:15-16, Heb.1:10-12; 7:3, 15-17; 1 John 1:1-2)."

occurrences of this term that refer to a future experience of life (shown by some verses to be “in the age to come”), the possession of which is *dependent upon obedience* to God (for example: Matt. 19:16, 29; Mk. 10:17, 29-30; Lk. 10:25; 18:18, 29-30; Jn. 12:25-26). The possible outcome of “eternal life” in Daniel 12:2 follows a future judgment of works after the resurrection, so it refers to life in “the age to come.” The result of that judgment is shown to be kingdom inheritance in Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; 18, 22, 27.

It was the great longing of every Jew that they could be approved to participate in the Messiah’s kingdom, the blessed age to come. But, they understood that such participation was based upon God’s judgment of their lives—how they had lived (Dan. 12:2)³³. With this background, we can see that the question which the rich young ruler (a Jew) asked the Lord Jesus did not refer to being born again, but referred to being qualified to participate in the future kingdom of the Messiah. The young man asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mk. 10:17) The correct literal translation is, “What must I do to inherit life for the age (or age-abiding life)?” He was clearly asking, “What must I do to inherit life in the Messiah’s kingdom of the coming age?” See the same thought in Jesus’ conversation with the lawyer (an expert in the Jewish law) in Luke 10:25-28. Jesus’ answer to the lawyer, “Do this, and *you will live*” means that the lawyer *would have life in the coming age* if he actually did love God with all of his heart.³⁴

Thus we see something of the great desire for the Jews to participate with the Messiah in His coming earthly kingdom. In addition, we see that this participation was dependent upon the living

³³ If the reader desires more detail and academic sources on these Jewish beliefs then he should consult Chapter Two of the book titled, *Worthy of the Kingdom*, by Thomas W. Finley (the author of this book). In that chapter the following scholarly works are cited to prove the ideas presented here: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Alfred Edersheim); *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (W. E. Vine); *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Colin Brown, ed.); *Palestinian Judaism in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Joseph Bonsirven); *Encyclopedia Judaica*; *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. The book, *Worthy of the Kingdom*, can be viewed on-line or downloaded at www.seekersofchrist.org.

³⁴ Some of this paragraph is taken directly from *Eternal Security* (Appendix D).

of the Jew in this life. The Lord told the rich young ruler that keeping the commandments was not enough—not what Christ really required of him—for inheriting life for the age. He told the young man that he must sell what he loved, his possessions, and “come, follow me” (Matt. 19:21). This was simply an application of Christ’s basic principles of discipleship to this man. Christ’s basic discipleship principles are: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Immediately after the encounter with the rich young ruler, Jesus applied these lessons of discipleship (*following* Christ in obedience) to his own disciples:

Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world [the age of the restored earth, Messiah’s kingdom], when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold **and will inherit eternal life.**” (Matt. 19:27-29)

The parallel accounts (of Matt. 19:29) in Mark and Luke specify *when* this life will be inherited: “and in the age to come eternal life” (Mk.10:30; Lk. 18:30). These requirements of following the Lord at a cost are *not* requirements to be saved from God’s wrath and to have life with God throughout eternity! The *only* requirement to be saved from God’s wrath and to never perish is to believe (place one’s trust) in Jesus (Jn. 3:16; 5:24). To be saved in the sense of eternal salvation is simply a *gift*, received at the moment of simple faith, *not of works* (Acts 13:38-39; 16:31; Jn. 5:24; Eph. 2:8-9). But, to be approved by Christ in order to reign with Him in His 1,000 year kingdom is a matter of works, our doings. It involves our following Christ in discipleship after we are saved. Our works will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ with the determination of kingdom inheritance at stake.

This brings us to the point that there are two great principles in the Bible, especially clear in the NT. One principle we may term as the “Gift Principle.” It has to do with the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life as an inward possession. It has nothing to do with our works, but is connected to our initial faith in Jesus. Once we believe, we possess this gift. This gift includes our place in glory with God in eternity. It is based upon Jesus’ work for us, not our cooperation with Jesus in works. The other great principle is the “Reward Principle.”³⁵ This principle is “according to works,” and the Bible clearly teaches that a reward (better rendered “recompense”) awaits every person following God’s future judgment of the person (Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12; 22:12). The believer will be judged prior to the millennium at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and that judgment will determine whether or not the believer will reign with Christ and participate in His kingdom (2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:12). The dead unbelievers will be judged at the great white throne judgment at the close of the millennium (Rev. 20:11-12).

Now we are ready to put the final piece in place for this phrase, “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” We have seen that the kingdom referred to is not the eternal kingdom, but the kingdom of Christ’s reign on the earth for 1,000 years (the next age, “the age to come”). We have seen that the Bible consistently points to our works, our following of Christ in discipleship, as essential to being approved to reign with Christ in this marvelous kingdom of a restored earth. There is another key in the word “inherit” which confirms all of the points already made. This word has its basic meaning of “be an heir.”

Remember how in chapter three we learned that we who belong to Christ simply through faith become “heirs” according to promise (3:29)? And in Galatians 4:7 that Scripture states, “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

³⁵ Understanding these two great principles is essential if we are to correctly understand the Scriptures and if we desire to be “approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). A good introduction to these principles can be found in the latter part of the booklet titled *Eternal Security*, located in Appendix D. Further studies can be found at the website www.seekersofchrist.org, under the section labeled, “The Judgment Seat of Christ, Rewards and The Kingdom.”

That means simply by being placed in God's family as a son we have an inheritance, we are already an heir. However, that inheritance is comprised simply of those things that belong to every child of God, such as forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal life within and a place with God in eternity.

Yet, the Bible reveals that there is another inheritance available to the believer beyond this basic inheritance. We can see this clearly in Romans 8:17. The translation below of this verse, very accurate according to the Greek construction, is by Zane Hodges, who was a professor of Greek and exegesis for many years at Dallas Theological Seminary. Hodges goes on to comment about the meaning of the verse after the translation.

8:17. And if we are children, we are also heirs – heirs, on the one hand, of God, and on the other hand, co-heirs with Christ if we suffer together with Him so that we may also be glorified together with Him.

Precisely because of our status before God as His children, we have also the status of heirs. To begin with, we are **heirs . . . of God**. This fact indicates that we have an inheritance by virtue of our fundamental relationship to God the Father as children. . . . But in the text before us, Paul has *two forms of heirship* in mind. This double heirship is clearly signaled by the *men . . . de* [Greek] construction that we have rendered

on the one hand . . . on the other hand. Not only are God's children *heirs of God*, but they may also become **co-heirs with Christ** on the condition that they 'co-suffer' with Him. . . . According to OT inheritance law, the firstborn son in a family normally received twice as much as the other sons (Deut. 21:17). It should not be assumed that Paul is working outside of this OT conception of heirship. In fact, a few verses further on he actually describes the Lord

Jesus Christ as ‘the Firstborn among many brethren’
(v. 29).³⁶

The additional inheritance is the extra portion given to the firstborn. All believers have this inheritance potentially, but it may be forfeited by them through their lack of cooperation with the Lord in their living. This is what happened to Esau, who is cited as an example for us by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 12:16-17). Please see Appendix C for a short paper on “The Birthright (The Rights of the Firstborn).” That paper explains that this inheritance, which can be lost, is the reward of participating with Christ in His kingdom reign during the coming kingdom of 1,000 years.

At last, then, we should be able to accurately see what Paul was talking about when he issued a warning “that those who do [practice] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Most commentators think this is a reference to the future eternal kingdom, and that it pertains to eternal salvation. However, when we understand that “the kingdom of God” here speaks of the millennial kingdom, and that the verse belongs to the “Reward Principle,” not the gift of eternal salvation, we are on the right track.

Paul is giving a genuine warning to genuine believers: living in sins like these will cause you to miss the inheritance of the millennial kingdom. We should not think, however, that if we *only* don’t practice these gross sins then we will qualify for the kingdom reward. These sinful lifestyles are certainly “disqualifiers,” but that does not mean that the absence of them is all that is needed to qualify for the kingdom reward. Basically, we should live in true discipleship to qualify for this inheritance. We must die to self, take up the cross (God’s will), and follow the Lord Jesus fully. If we do that, then we will qualify.

But, what if we have had terrific failures, or periods of being out of fellowship with the Lord for some time? Be assured, the Lord is merciful and is always ready to give us a new start with Him. Sins that have been repented of and confessed will be forgiven by God.

³⁶ Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), pp. 224-225.

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Yet, after confession, He is requiring us to go forward and be diligent to grow into Christ-like maturity and to be faithful in genuine spiritual service in order to be approved by Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ for a good reward (Matt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:11-26; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). We should never be tempted to take an “exit” for a while off the “highway” of consecration to follow Christ. We may think that we can just dabble in sin or worldliness for a season, but the testimony of Scripture and experience shows that it is very difficult to get back onto the highway.

A simple chart showing some differences between the millennial age and the eternal age follows. “Overcomers” is a term for victorious Christians. Probably only a minority of believers are overcomers.

THE 1,000 YEAR KINGDOM	THE ETERNAL KINGDOM
Reward according to works (Matt. 16:24-27; 19:27-29; 25:14-30; 2 Tim. 2:12; Col. 3:23-24; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6)	Gift (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 10:25-26; Eph. 2:4-9)
The regeneration (Matt. 19:28) The times of restoration (Acts 3:21)	A new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1)
The age to come – the next age (Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30; Heb. 6:5)	The eternal phase of “the ages to come” (Eph. 2:7)
Fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17; Heb. 3:14)	Heirs of God (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7)
Overcomers reign with Christ (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6)	All believers reign (Rev. 22:3-5)
Overcomers rewarded with a magnified enjoyment of eternal life (Lk. 18:30; Rev. 2:7, 17; 3:4, 12)	All believers enjoy fullness of eternal life (Rev. 22:1-3)

Life Application

Perhaps you are like many believers who have not clearly seen the whole of God's future plan for you, which includes a possible good reward or a possible significant loss. Many believers only see the matter of salvation in terms of being saved from their sins, with the single goal of "going to heaven," or being with God in eternity. After reviewing these matters of the coming kingdom reward, it is hoped that all of our eyes would be open to see that the future for the believer after this life is much more than just "going to heaven."

Whether or not we will share in the additional inheritance available in Christ's coming kingdom all depends upon how we live our lives now. If we seek earnestly to learn to live by the Spirit, then there is much hope for us to gain the kingdom reward. If, on the other hand, this kingdom matter is not that significant to us then we will likely not be so diligent to put to death the deeds of the flesh and live by the Spirit. God has designed the kingdom reward as a great incentive for us to diligently run the Christian race. Paul urges us to "Run in such a way that you may win" (1 Cor. 9:24, NASB). I encourage you to pray over this matter and ask God to make this more real and more significant to you.

Now we return to the text in Galatians. In great contrast to the deeds of the flesh, is the fruit of the Spirit. The "fruit" here is expressed in the singular, not plural as "fruits." This shows us that these qualities are all in a unity, reflecting the life of God. Of course, these virtues are not produced by the Christian, but are expressed through the believer as he lives the life of Christ by faith (Gal. 2:20). Note that there are nine qualities listed in verses 22 and 23. A number of Bible commentators have noted that these nine qualities of the fruit of the Spirit are grouped in threes, with each cluster of three showing the Christian's attitude in three differing orientations. The first three qualities—love, joy and peace—are *firstly* directed towards God. The second group of qualities—patience, kindness and goodness—is directed towards others. The third cluster—faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—is related to one's self.

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The first expression of this life is shown as love, which is a supreme and pure expression of God since “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16). The believer’s primary object of his love is God Himself. This truth is revealed in the gospels when one of the Jewish scribes asked Jesus which commandment was the foremost of all. Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’” (Mk. 12:29-30). As we allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives, our love for God will grow.

Love is also the overarching virtue of the Christian life (5:14), and it will certainly find its expression towards believers and unbelievers. The Greek word here for love is *agape*. This word in the Greek language did not specifically mean “God’s love,” or “God’s kind of love.” The Greek word *agape* did not have the qualities of affection and emotion connected to it as did other Greek words for love. Thus, this Greek word fits best with Christian love, as God’s love is not based upon emotion, but comes from an act of the will and an attitude of the mind.

In God’s love, there is selfless care for the welfare of another. Its action in loving or giving is not based upon the other’s worthiness or the other’s qualities. Unfortunately, human love usually operates based upon an evaluation of the other party’s qualities. Human love has “conditions” on its being exercised. But God’s love is unconditional. A line from a gospel song by Dottie Rambo puts this well, “He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.” When men were living a sinful lifestyle, offending God’s holiness, He demonstrated His own love (*agape*) towards us by sending Christ to die for us (Rom. 5:8). So we also see that God’s love is willing to sacrifice self to an unimaginable extent for the sake of others. In 1 Corinthians 13 we see an expanded Biblical definition of how God’s love operates in its care towards others.

The next quality in the list of the Spirit’s fruit is joy. Normal human joy is dependent upon very good circumstances. When things are going well for people, they may feel joyful about life. The joy we experience in Christ, however, is different. It is not dependent upon circumstances and, in fact, God’s joy comes often in the midst of adverse circumstances. How would one normally feel after being whipped and told to stop doing what he desires to

do? However, after the apostles were whipped and told to speak no more in the name of Jesus, “they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41). Joy is an inner satisfaction and happiness that comes from being in close fellowship with the Savior, finding our joy in Him and in the great and encouraging truths in God’s word.

David wrote of “the joy of your salvation” (Ps. 51:12). Jeremiah wrote of the joy that comes from the truths of God’s word: “your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart” (Jer. 15:16). There is a deep inner satisfaction and joy that we can know when we serve the Lord while abiding in Him and doing His will. Jesus testified of this to His disciples after He served the woman at the well: “But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about’” (Jn. 4:32). So it is a normal Christian experience for us to “serve the Lord with gladness,” even when the toil is demanding (Ps. 100:2).

Paul wrote that “we rejoice in our sufferings,” knowing how they are preparing us for coming glory (Rom. 5:3). Thus, we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). We can “count it all joy” when undergoing all kinds of trials when we recognize their value in forming Christ’s character in us (Jas. 1:2-4). In Romans 12:12 Paul also instructed believers to “rejoice in hope.” The circumstances of this world, being under the curse of the fall, can tend to depress us. Sometimes we see the severe difficulties of people or the cruelty of others towards men, and sometimes even we ourselves are directly affected by them. This is the time we should lift up our eyes to see our hope—the blessed hope of Jesus’ return. We rejoice in the hope that He is going to come and set all things right, reversing the curse and the damage of sin. In that coming day those who suffer sickness will be healed (Is. 35:5-6). Under Christ’s reign, righteousness will prevail and evil will be judged (Is. 11:4). He is going to come and relieve His people from all the cruelty and mistreatment they have suffered (2 Thess. 1:5-10).

Jesus also tells us: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12). A wonderful summary verse for the joy realized in believing is

found in Romans: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13).

Notice that the next realization of the Spirit’s fruit is peace, and it is connected to joy in the verse cited just above. Peace and joy often go together in the Scriptures. Peace is contentment and a sense of wellbeing. Between parties, it comes when harmony is there and discord is gone. How does peace come to us from the Holy Spirit? We gain “peace with God” when we first believe in Christ (Rom. 5:1). We can have peace with other believers as we respond to the arbitration of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Col. 3:15). The Bible instructs us to seek peace with all men so far as it depends upon us (Rom. 12:18).

There is also peace in our hearts that comes when the “peace of God” guards our hearts from anxieties and disturbing thoughts. This is given when we pray to Him in the midst of an emotional or mental “storm,” bringing our requests to Him with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6-7). Praying “with thanksgiving” means thanking Him for His answer to our prayers, fully trusting Him for His will and His timing in the answer. This famous verse in Isaiah puts it well: “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Is. 26:3). The expression “stayed on you,” means to be focused upon the Lord, while trusting fully in Him.

Now we come to the second cluster of qualities, which portray the believer’s life as directed towards men. “Patience” is produced in us as we depend upon the Lord. This word means longsuffering under some kind of provocation, or we could simply say it means “slow to anger.” People can tend to irritate us, often those whom we know well. Others may step on “our rights,” do something really offensive towards us, or actually persecute us in some way. Not letting their actions or attitudes trigger in us a fit of frustration or anger is the virtue of patience. This kind of virtue can only be produced in us as we agree to let the Spirit put to death our feelings of frustration and anger and forgive the other person their faults and offenses. It is well to remember that we probably also aggravate or hurt others in some way by our habits, our faults or our insensitivities. Let us forgive others and hope that they forgive us.

“Kindness” (Gal. 5:22) consists of an attitude of care, consideration and graciousness towards others. God’s kindness is

extended towards all men. “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45b). Luke 6:35 tells us: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”

“Goodness” is one of the virtues of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When we think of “goodness” we may think of good deeds done by people. But, the word here goes deeper. Dr. David Anderson gives us some excellent insights on divine goodness in this verse, produced only by the Holy Spirit:

The Bible uses two words for “good”: *agathos* and *kalos*. The latter word refers to an externally observable excellence. It would be used to describe a fine horse or an expensive car. The former word refers to an intrinsic, internal good—not necessarily something that can be observed with the naked eye or at first glance. . . . *Agathos* is the adjective we translate “good”; the noun is *agathōsunē*, which is the fruit of the Spirit listed here in Galatians 5:22 and translated “goodness.” So we are talking about a **goodness** that is not necessarily observable to people on the outside. In fact, I would **define** this kind of goodness as “**any virtuous act or attitude, seen or unseen by men, which makes a positive contribution to the kingdom of God.**” We could call this “divine good” versus “human good.” Our sin nature can produce human good that will not contribute to God’s kingdom or open the gates of heaven. If this virtue of *agathōsunē* is a fruit of the Spirit, then it is a divine good that will last forever. . . . But we must distinguish between human good and divine good. Human good/goodness is sourced in our flesh (meaning our sinful nature); divine good is sourced in God himself through His Holy Spirit. Human good cannot gain right standing with God for the unbeliever (Isa. 64:6), and the human good of the

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believer will be burned up as wood, hay, and stubble at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 13:1-3). But when we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, empower us, and even to fill us, then divine goodness can be experienced and displayed in our lives.³⁷

The final cluster of three Spirit-produced qualities describes virtues that are oriented towards the believer himself. These are “faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” These qualities reveal the character of the believer’s inner life under the Holy Spirit’s control. The first virtue listed is “faithfulness.”³⁸ The Bible tells us: “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). Jesus is our supreme example in faithfulness in carrying out the Father’s will (Jn. 6:38; Heb. 2:17; 3:2). A great verse for inspiration for our faithfulness is John 17:4: “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”

In the Lord’s work, faith and faithfulness are not unrelated. As we live in fellowship with Christ, the Holy Spirit will inspire us to carry out certain works which God has prepared beforehand for us to do (Eph. 2:10). To us, each such work becomes a “work of faith,” where we have the faith that this task is an assignment from God for us (2 Thess. 1:11). As we move forward to carry out the task God has given us, we should employ dependent faith in God. In conjunction with this activity, the Holy Spirit will produce faithfulness in us and empower us for carrying out the task unto completion (2 Thess. 1:11).

This is a good reminder for us as we seek to serve the Lord. God has not asked us to “do things for God.” He has only asked us to do things according to His will and His guidance. All “good things” we might initiate by ourselves to “do for God” will be burned up as

³⁷ Anderson, pp. 331, 334.

³⁸ The Greek word here translated as “faithfulness” is *pistis*, which is most commonly translated as faith. Greek dictionaries do allow for a meaning of faithfulness in some cases for the word (note Rom. 3:3 and Titus 2:10). There are a few translations which prefer “faith” as the meaning in this verse but the great majority of modern translations use “faithfulness.” Here, in the context of a list of character traits, it would seem to be “faithfulness.” As explained above, in our experience faith and faithfulness work together closely.

wood, hay and stubble at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-15). So, “let each one take care how he builds” (1 Cor. 3:10). Saul was anointed as king, but this did not make him independent of God. God told him what to do through Samuel, but Saul decided to do something else. Instead of killing all the animals captured in battle with the Amalekites, he thought it would be a *good* idea to save the best of them to sacrifice unto the Lord (1 Sam. 15:3, 9, 13-15). For this presumption and disobedience, Samuel told Saul that he was being rejected from being king (1 Sam. 15:23). Samuel told Saul, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22).

The next word in this triad is “gentleness.” Some translations render it as “meekness.” Gentleness is certainly a virtue that Christ exhibited. It is an inner quality of the heart. A significant meaning of the word is that a man accepts God’s dealings with him without resistance or complaint. For example, in Matthew 11:20-30 Jesus described the future judgment that would come upon those cities which rejected Him and His message. Yet, He thanked the Father that He allowed this rejection of Jesus, noting that it was well-pleasing in the Father’s sight. Jesus acknowledged that *all things that happened to Him were indeed handed over to Him by His Father*. Then, He invited His disciples to “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29). Here we see Christ’s gentleness, or meekness, in accepting what God allowed in His life without resistance or complaint.

Jesus invites His disciples to co-labor with Him (be yoked together with Him for work), learning from Him both the virtue of meekness, and of lowliness (taking a low place, humility). God will sovereignly allow certain difficulties, set-backs or trials in our lives. We must learn to see His hand and not resist Him during such trials. (There may, however, be attacks from Satan which we are to resist in prayer. We need discernment.) Towards God, then, this quality of gentleness means being *submissive* to God. An ancient usage of the Greek word here (*prautēs*) is for a wild horse after it has been broken. Through discipline, the horse has learned to put away its stubbornness and be under his master’s control. Any such horse will

not be hard to handle and resistant, but will be gentle. The horse is still quite powerful, not weak, but his power is under restraint.

God is training us, wanting us to be broken from our self-will and our resistance to His will and His sovereignty over our lives. He wants us to live under His restraint. The opposite of a meek or gentle person is one who is proud, self-assertive and contentious, unwilling to give up his rights or suffer any perceived injustice. Those who are not meek before God are also not meek or gentle in their dealings with men.

The third virtue in this final group of the Spirit's fruit is "self-control." The idea is that a person has a power within himself by which he can exercise control over his own passions and desires. Of course, that is impossible for mere humans. The sin nature makes it so. However, as born again believers we have the Holy Spirit who can give us a supernatural internal power that can overcome the strong passions and desires of the fallen nature.

Some Bible interpreters believe that this self-control refers mainly to appetites of the body, such as sex, food, and intoxicating drink. Similar word forms are used in 1 Corinthians 7:9 and 9:26 which point in the direction of curbing bodily appetites. However, in view of the many deeds of the flesh already described beforehand, it is probably not limited to just the bodily appetites. This word is also used in Acts 24:25 and 2 Peter 1:6, which portray a broader application—mastery over all the various passions and impulses of the fallen flesh. It is good to remind ourselves again that self-imposed rules and regimens will never enable men to overcome sinful desires (Col. 2:20-23). This is the great mistake of asceticism, which has taken on various shapes throughout Christian history.

Verse 23 closes with an unexpected statement: "against such things there is no law." The law was in existence, in one regard at least, to show what doings of man were prohibited in God's eyes. But no prohibitions are needed on a life lived by the Spirit. This is a purposeful understatement to show the marvelous goodness of a Spirit-led life, and to remind us again of the superiority of grace over law.

Galatians 5:24 reads: "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Here Paul encourages the readers with truth, giving them the way to victory over the flesh. As is usual in the NT, it is *positional truth* that lays

the foundation for victory in our *condition* (our experience). When we believed, we entered into our union with Christ, including our co-crucifixion with Him (Rom. 6:2-7; Col. 2:11). It was in this way that *we* crucified the flesh, through our belief in Christ. Our crucifixion with Christ is a “spiritual fact,” or a *positional truth*. Now, we must “walk by faith” in the spiritual fact.

Our co-crucifixion with Christ also ushers in our new life in resurrection (Rom. 6:4-5, 11). This fact of new life is stated in the first part of verse 25: “If we live by the Spirit.” The second part of the verse then gives a command: “let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” The Greek verb here translated “keep in step” is different than the earlier word used in verse 16 to “walk by the Spirit.” The idea of this “keeping in step” is to walk in a line in a very orderly manner. The verb was used of soldiers marching in a row, but not exclusively used in this way. Some Bible teachers believe that the use of this verb points to following the Spirit in the setting of the local church (like soldiers marching together orderly), so that the disintegration of the church as pictured in verse 26 does not happen. What we can say is that it means a close following of the Spirit’s guidance.

Verse 26 is surely linked to verse 25. Paul is concerned that if the Galatians do not follow the command to keep in step with the Spirit, then they will disintegrate into a group of boastful, self-seeking people who care nothing for one another. This would be the opposite of what the goal is for them: “through love serve one another” (v. 13). It seems Paul carries a genuine inward concern that these saints are on the verge of possibly “biting and devouring one another” (see v.15). Unfortunately, this is often the fruit of legalism. It makes one proud, self-seeking, critical and combative. Such behavior is utterly opposed to the fruit of the Spirit. So, we must pay close attention to the Spirit’s guidance, dying to self and letting Christ live through us.

Chapter Six - Sowing to the Spirit

Sowing and reaping - 6:1-10

¹Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵For each will have to bear his own load. ⁶Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸For 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. ⁹And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

After contrasting fleshly living with the fruit of the Spirit, the apostle now gives some exhortations regarding how we can practically cooperate with the Spirit in loving and serving one another. The first five verses of chapter six are connected with one another, but it takes some careful thinking to make the connections. Let us go through these verses and, hopefully, see the connections.

Verse one is an exhortation to help a brother or sister who has been “caught in any trespass.” This phrase does not mean that the sinning believer has been living a lifestyle of sin for some time (as in “practice” in 5:21). Such a trespass is an isolated incident. However, it must be serious and have a significant effect upon the person committing it because it requires restoration. How is the person to be restored to a right path once he has made a significant step off the path? Firstly, the restoration should be done by “you who are spiritual.” The “you” here is plural and emphatic in the

Greek. Dr. David Anderson notes that the Greek construction here is important and makes the point that this means that the restoration is not to be undertaken by a single individual.³⁹

Being “spiritual” means being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Also, spiritual persons have spiritual discernment concerning the things of God (1 Cor. 2:15). The restoration is to be done “in a spirit of gentleness.” The word for gentleness is the same word we encountered in 5:23 as one of the virtues of the Spirit’s fruit. Such a restoration should not be done in a harsh or condemning way, but with gentleness and sensitivity. The Greek word for “restore” here means to mend what has been broken or torn. It was used at times of setting broken bones. Naturally, when setting a broken bone the doctor must be gentle and careful in order for the job to be done well. Otherwise, further complications will ensue. We should also note that just as broken bones need some time to heal, believers who have had a significant failure usually also take some time to heal completely before they are fully restored to their former usefulness.

Finally, note Paul’s instruction to those involved in helping the Christian who has stumbled: “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Perhaps the believer who failed had a moral (sexual) failure, or an ugly incident of public drunkenness or a terrible display of temper. We should not think that we have no possibility of having the same failure or a terrible failure of another kind. If we think this way, then we are guilty of spiritual pride. The Bible warns us: “Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Verse two gives us the general principle that as believers we should be ready to bear one another’s burdens. Verse one gives us an introduction to this principle by providing an example of bearing another’s burden, in that case the burden of a significant failure in Christian living. Burdens are something that believers struggle under, just like a large sack of potatoes is a heavy burden on the back of a farmer. Christians can carry many different types of

³⁹ Anderson, *Bewitched*, p. 221. Anderson also comments: “The place for going it alone is in Matthew 18:15 when someone has sinned against *you*. Then you first go alone to the offending person. That is not the situation here.”

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burdens, such as sorrows from the loss of loved ones, sickness, financial trouble, marital difficulties, children who are troublesome or who have gone astray, job troubles, etc. All believers certainly should come to God and “cast their burden on the Lord” (Ps. 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:7). Yet, we should also realize that God gives personal and sympathetic human help to the hurting, troubled and discouraged saints through other members of Christ’s body.

The apostle writes that as we bear one another’s burdens we “fulfill the law of Christ.” Most Bible commentators equate “the law of Christ” here with Christ’s new commandment to love one another (Jn. 13:34). That is certainly plausible, especially since in chapter five this new commandment is identified as the word that fulfils the whole law: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (5:14). Note carefully how John 13:34 reads: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: *just as I have loved you*, you also are to love one another” (emphasis added). Christ Himself is the great burden-bearer for all of mankind. He bore our sorrows, our pains, and our sins on the cross (Is. 53:4-6; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). These were burdens that were too heavy for us. We were crushed under them with no way to handle the load ourselves. Jesus described His coming to this world this way: “the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Is it possible that the “law of Christ” in Galatians 6:2 is not just the new commandment given to us, but reaches even deeper so as to describe *the very principle of Christ’s life*? For this possibility see the cross-references of Romans 8:2 and 1 Corinthians 9:21, as well as the discussion of the life principle of God’s Son in the earlier comments on Galatians 2:19. We can certainly say in truth that when we bear one another’s burdens, such action is nothing less than Christ living out His life through us to help others.

Verse three is connected to verse two by an introductory “for.” It is unfortunately possible that a believer would be unwilling to bear the burden of another Christian. One of the reasons would be because the unwilling believer has an attitude of superiority to the burdened believer. He may think that the believer who has been caught in a trespass has proven he is a failure, whereas the one unwilling to bear the burden considers himself a spiritual success. This is often the attitude of the self-righteous legalist, who manages

to keep his own particular rules in his eyes. Or, if the burden is something besides a failure, the one with a superior attitude may feel that the burdened one should learn to handle his problems by himself with God. He may have an attitude that he is too important to be bothered with helping the weak, the troubled and the struggling. However, the person who thinks that “he is something,” being higher than others, is self-deceived. In fact, we all are nothings. We all are on the same plane, with all of us being needy people who must depend upon God for everything.

In verse four the line of thought continues. Instead of comparing one’s self to others and having an inward “boasting” in the comparison, the believer should simply examine, or test, his own work before God. One translation puts it this way: “But each person should examine his own work, and then he will have a reason for boasting in himself alone, and not in respect to anyone else” (HCSB).

The Greek verb for “test” in verse four was used in classical Greek for the testing of ore or metals by an assayer when he placed them in a fire to reveal their quality. Yet, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:3, “I do not even judge myself.” (NASB and some other versions translate this word as “examine.”) It seems from this verse that Paul does not “test,” or “examine,” or “judge,” his work. Although the Greek word for “judge” in 1 Corinthians 4:3 is a different word from the one used for “test” in Galatians 6:4 it still carries the thought of discovering what the quality is of the thing tested. The word in 1 Corinthians 4:3 is used of a judge or a court official investigating a person for the purpose of judgment.

So how do we reconcile the idea in Galatians 6:4 of one examining his own work and Paul’s statement that he does not judge or examine himself in 1 Corinthians 4:3? I believe that there is reason to believe that the answer is found in the passage in 1 Corinthians 4. There Paul states: “For I am not aware of anything against myself” (1 Cor. 4:4). Instead of examining himself, or being examined by other humans or a human court, Paul seems to be indicating that *he is fully open to God to be examined, or judged, by Him*: “It is the Lord who judges me” (see 1 Cor. 4:3-5). Paul learned how to walk in the light of God’s presence and God’s word,

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which gave him an indication where he was right before God or where he had a shortcoming or made a misstep.

When we humbly seek God with our whole heart and are willing to hear His voice, then we can receive His evaluation and correction. As we seek Him and spend time in His word, *then the Holy Spirit enlightens us* concerning our actions, our attitudes, our motives, etc. The light of His presence and His speaking from His word approves or disapproves our actions (Heb. 4:12-13; 1 Jn. 1:5, 7). We might say that placing ourselves humbly under God's enlightenment is similar to placing ore into the fire, bringing forth the impurities and the qualities of a metal by such testing.

The testing, or examination, in verse four certainly does not involve introspection. Introspection involves the practice of one looking *within* himself to examine his thought processes, emotions and motives. It is self-analysis. Some sincere believers have mistakenly employed introspection as a supposed path to purifying their walk before God. However, introspection is a false and dangerous way for a Christian to determine the quality of his actions or his spiritual condition. In conclusion, for a believer to "test his own work" means that he places himself willingly and humbly under God's enlightenment, open to hear His approval or correction.

When 6:4 states that "then his reason to boast will be in himself alone," it is not suggesting that we should be prideful or boastful about what "we have done." The word for boasting in this verse really means rejoicing or exulting. There is a wonderful rejoicing and thankfulness within when we find that Christ has worked through our lives (Rom. 15:17-18). Such rejoicing should only be in regard to ourselves and what God has done in us, never looking to compare ourselves to others.

Verse five is again connected with the whole train of thought, as shown by the connecting "for" at the beginning of the verse. It gives the reason that each person should focus on testing his own work: "For each one will have to bear his own load." This verse points to the responsibility of each believer before God as respects his conduct and the carrying out of his ministry. Importantly, the "load" in verse five should not be confused with the "burdens" in verse two. Two different Greek words are used here. The word used in verse two places emphasis on the weight of the burden. There it means it is too heavy for one person. The word in verse

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five was commonly used of a soldier's pack and thus it is fitting to speak of each one bearing his own load. Verse five is speaking of the responsibility of each believer to live uprightly and to carry out his assigned ministry before God. This thought certainly has in view the coming Judgment Seat of Christ where each believer will stand before Christ and be judged for the things he has done. It is for this sobering reason that each Christian should take care to "test his own work."

When we arrive at verse six we may think that Paul has shifted topics. However, I believe a careful overview of this entire section (6:1-10), which contains some practical exhortations, indicates that it is tied together with some key ideas or principles. Please consider that the following may constitute key principles in this passage, which have already been introduced earlier in the letter: (1) v. 2. "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." This is a basic principle of a Spirit-led life—caring for others in the body of Christ (see 5:14); (2) v. 5. "For each one will have to bear his own load." Here is the principle of responsibility before God, which carries with it the matter of future accountability (see 5:5, 21); (3) vs. 7, 8. Here the matter of sowing to the flesh or the Spirit is noted, with consequences. The theme of the flesh and the Spirit as two contrary forces has already appeared in the letter (3:3; 5:16-23). The consequences of the believer choosing the flesh or the Spirit are related to future recompense for the believer (see 5:5, 21). These basic principles seem to constitute the fundamental elements of this passage, whereas the practical instructions (6:1, 4, 6, 9-10) all seem to relate to these basic principles lived out.

We can only guess why Paul selects the matter of financial giving to teachers as a specific exhortation in this section. It is of interest that the historical background here is such that Gentile temples collected fees from worshippers. The Jewish religious system had clear demands for expected support of the temple system and the priests. But the Christian faith, new to these Galatian Gentiles, had no "regulations" for giving. All giving was voluntary and here Paul is reminding them of the importance of giving voluntarily to support good teachers (certainly not the legalists).

The giving here is a matter of "bearing one another's burdens," as an elder especially active in teaching normally must put aside at

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least some secular work (see 1 Tim. 5:17). The Bible also mentions traveling teachers, an example of those devoting themselves significantly to teaching, as those who should be supported (Titus 3:13-14; 3 Jn. 3-8). The Bible states that “the laborer deserves his wages” (Lk. 10:7; 1 Tim. 5:18). The teacher *serves other believers* in helping them know the truth. Those who are taught *serve the teachers* by helping them with their financial needs. This is a mutual sharing, and verse six says “share all good things.” The verb “share” here is *koinōneō*, which means to “enter into fellowship.” Through the teaching and the giving a fellowship is realized.

Although verses seven and eight reveal a broad principle, this principle is surely connected to the practical instruction in verse six. Unfortunately, the “flesh,” man’s fallen nature, loves money and wants to hold onto it for its own pleasures. When money is kept for selfish motives, that is a sowing to the flesh. But the use of one’s finances is only one example of the principle of sowing and reaping. There are two great “fields” in which a believer can sow for a crop—the field of the flesh and the field of the Spirit. When a believer sows to the flesh he aims to gratify the “desires of the flesh,” and, conversely, when he sows to the Spirit he aims to gratify the “desires of the Spirit” (5:17). We should also keep in mind that the flesh in Galatians is not marked simply by the ugly deeds of the flesh (5:19-21), but also by the effort of the flesh to live up to some standard for God’s approval (3:3).

In the principle of “sowing and reaping,” the “seed” sown is always smaller than the crop realized, and the harvest does not come until a period of time passes. Here is where the one who sows may deceive himself, not recognizing the harvest that he will reap. Verse seven is probably better translated as “Do not be deceiving yourselves.”⁴⁰ I use this translation because the believer is really not being deceived by anyone other than his own thoughts. He thinks a little sowing to the flesh is not a problem for him and he can get away with it. But the next phrase in verse seven tells us that “God is not mocked.” That is, you can’t mock God by attempting to defy

⁴⁰ Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest takes this translation approach also. He takes the verb as being in the middle voice. Wuest translates it: “Stop leading yourselves astray.” (Wuest)

His unbending principle: “for whatever one sows, that he will also reap.”

Verse eight explains the sowing and reaping principle in more detail. By sowing to the flesh, the person will eventually reap something—“corruption” (this Greek word can also be translated “ruin” or “destruction”). In terms of his life now, the believer who sows to the flesh somewhat freely will later reap an increased moral decay in his life. We have all seen this happen to people, both believers and unbelievers. No one can escape the principle. The more we sow to the flesh, the greater the moral decay becomes evident in our lives over time. Not only does the harvest arrive later, but the quantity of seed sown influences the size of the crop (2 Cor. 9:6). Some of us have seen believers whose lives in later years have turned out poorly. I have witnessed believers who have gotten divorced after many years of marriage and now live to indulge their flesh and their worldly desires. It seemed like they were doing alright in earlier years, reading their Bibles and going to church. But, in their unseen moments they were sowing to the flesh with some evil or worldly habits. Eventually, they reaped a crop that could be seen by others.

On the other hand, it is beautiful to witness believers who steadily over the years have been sowing more and more to the Spirit. They are genuinely seeking the Lord, spending time in His word, and seeking to live uprightly before Him. They confess their sins immediately upon conviction and turn back to His ways. They increasingly learn how to live by grace, depending upon the Lord in faith. They seek to practice dying to self and letting Christ live in them by faith. They seek to follow the Spirit. After many years it becomes more and more evident that they have been sowing increasingly to the Spirit.

Although we can see this principle of sowing and reaping at work in this life, there is good reason to think that Paul is pointing especially in this verse to the outcome (the “reaping”) that occurs at the Judgment Seat of Christ with its impact on the next life, in “the age to come” (the millennium). The primary reason for this interpretation is Paul’s statement about reaping eternal life (v. 8), combined with his statements in verse nine. The reader should recall the discussion under Galatians 5:21 about inheriting the

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kingdom. In that discussion there is a chart comparing some features of the 1,000 year kingdom with the eternal kingdom. One of the features noted there for the overcomers is the reward of a magnified enjoyment of eternal life in the millennial age. In addition to the verses noted there (Lk. 18:30; Rev. 2:7, 17; 3:4-5,12), we could also add John 12:25, which indicates that the disciple who loses his life (dies to self) in this world “will keep it for eternal life,” meaning he will enjoy life in the world to come.

Our appearance before the Judgment Seat of Christ will be a time where we are recompensed for how we have lived now. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether **good or evil**” (2 Cor. 5:10). We will receive back, or reap, what we have done. The recompense can be “good or bad”—positive or negative—depending upon the nature of our doings, whether they are good or bad (evil). Those who have practiced sowing to the Spirit and confessing their sins will reap the positive recompense of this extra enjoyment of eternal life during the coming age. Those who have practiced sowing to the flesh will reap a negative recompense of “ruin” at that time. We cannot define here all that this “ruin” might entail, but it will be a significant loss.

Verse nine reads: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” “Doing good” here means caring for others through sowing to the Spirit, following the desire and leading of the Spirit. It does not mean just “doing good things” according to mere human evaluation. There are many charitable organizations, some Christian and some not, which perform good acts of care for people. However, here the Bible is talking about “doing good” that is according to the Spirit’s working. It refers to things done through the prompting and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (see the discussion of “goodness” as part of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22).

The phrase “in due time” points to the ultimate time of reaping: at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Notice, however, the qualification of this potential reaping—“*if* we do not give up.” This means that our final reaping depends upon our steadfastness and endurance in doing good, sowing to the Spirit. Two reward passages show how endurance in being faithful to do the will of God is needed for a good reward in the coming kingdom. “Therefore, do not throw

away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of *endurance*, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised” (Heb. 10:35-36). “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12a).

Verse ten is a concluding verse to this section (6:1-10) as it begins with “So then.” The verse reads: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” It is significant that the “doing good” is modified by the phrase “as we have opportunity.” The Greek word for “opportunity” here is *kairos*. It is not just “time” as such. In other words, the verse does not mean do good as you find time or have time. The word *kairos* as used here means a fixed and definite time when things are just right. It seems to me that this verse is a sister verse to Ephesians 2:10, which reads, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” There are good works which God, in His foreknowledge and sovereignty has prepared for each believer to walk in. These are not good works that we just dream up on our own and set about doing them. No, these are good works *which God has prepared*, and if we are sensitive to the Spirit we can recognize them and cooperate with God in carrying them out (“walk in them”).

Our aim should be to walk in close fellowship with our Lord each day. When we do this, we will discover that there will be occasions along the path of our life where the Spirit is gently nudging us to carry out some task of good towards someone. The “good” we do may be something very small, like speaking an encouraging word, visiting a person, or serving others in a small practical task. Or, God may impress us that we need to do something much more significant that involves a commitment on our part of a great deal of time, energy or money. If we “sow to the Spirit” by following the Spirit’s leading in carrying out the good work, then we can be sure that the Spirit will accomplish something through us for His glory and the kingdom of God, leading on to reward. These good works can have unbelievers as their beneficiary, as God is gracious to all. Yet, the verse mentions that those of the “household of faith” are most often the particular beneficiaries of these good works. So these last two verses pick up the fundamental ideas of bearing the burdens of

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others, bearing our own “load” of responsibility as a Christian, and sowing to the Spirit and reaping a good reward.

Life Application

Galatians 6:1-10 really give us a lot to think about, and to pray about. We should be awakened to the significant principle that bearing one another’s burdens is an action that fulfills the law of Christ. This fact should be constantly with us, encouraging us to take on the attitude in Philippians 2. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). These verses in Philippians are great verses to memorize and pray over, asking God to work this attitude within us.

Then there is the principle that reads: “For each will have to bear his own load” (Gal. 6:5). We must carry with us always the fact that we are servants of Christ. We all have a responsibility to live His life as a testimony before the world, and to carry out His work. This is our highest responsibility as a human, and must be a priority we place above our other human responsibilities, such as earning a living or caring for our family. Yes, we must earn a living and we must care for our families. Yet, we cannot carry out these human responsibilities without first picking up our responsibility as servants of Christ. We should never think that only “full time ministers” or “leaders” are God’s servants. This thought is against the truth of the Bible. Christ has called us all to serve Him, and each one of us will give an account to Him for our service when He returns (Matt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-26).

Lastly, we should not deceive ourselves that sowing to the flesh will not have any significant consequences. Conversely, we should not think that sowing to the Spirit will not bring us any significant benefit. If we think like this, then we are deceiving ourselves. “For whatever one sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7). God promises significant reward to those who are faithful to sow to the Spirit. He also warns of significant loss to the believer who thinks he can get away with sowing to the flesh. Like most humans, we want to “take it easy,” and not be too strict with ourselves. But, God has called us to responsibility. In His redemption of man He is recovering man’s

high calling to be a responsible steward for the living God. Such a calling may seem too difficult for us to carry out well, but that is true only if we look at our own resources, what we have just in ourselves. But God has given us grace in the person of His Son. He is our source of power and strength to accomplish all that God requires of us. I encourage you to pray about these things.

Closing remarks stressing the cross of Christ and the new creation – 6:11-18

¹¹See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. ¹²It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. ¹⁷From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

At this point Paul has discharged his main purpose in writing the letter so he moves on to a close. Verse 11 mentions that he writes large letters at this point with his own hand. This is likely because he had someone else write the previous portion of the letter for him at his dictation. Using a scribe in such a way was not uncommon. Paul did the same thing in 1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18; and 2 Thessalonians 3:17. The use of “large letters” seems likely due to an eye condition (Gal. 4:15).

Verse 12 reveals an awful truth about legalistic preachers. They aim to make an outward show of their “success” by having their listeners fall in line with the outward regulations they preach. They often seek to produce something visible they can brag about

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(buildings, number of people in attendance, budgets, activities, etc.). In this case, they attempted to get the Galatian believers circumcised. When the Jews made converts to Judaism some Gentiles agreed to circumcision as an introductory commitment to keeping the Jewish law. Similarly here, circumcision for the Galatian believers would be a gateway commitment to keep the law. To promote man's religious doings through his self-effort does not stir up persecution. But to preach the cross of Christ, which testifies to the total impotence of man's works before God, brings indignation and persecution from religious, self-righteous persons. (See the comments on 5:11.) Verse 13 tells the truth that the Judaizers did not even keep the law themselves! But, they do want to boast about what they can "accomplish" through their ministry. Boasting and legalism go together in a very natural pairing because legalism calls forth a man's best external religious efforts, and boasting follows with "I did it!"

Now Paul tells of his boast. He has nothing to boast of that he himself has done, but only what Christ has accomplished on the cross. In His cross, Christ has crucified the world to the believer and the believer to the world. Both the world and the believer have been judged at the cross. The world here especially points to the religious aspect of the world system since the context is circumcision in the prior and following verses. The result is that the religious world no longer has any power to motivate or control Paul. His orientation is Christ Himself, a person, not a system of rules and regulations (Gal. 2:19-20).

Even though this verse emphasizes the religious aspect of the world system, the fact presented here is that on the cross the *entire* world system was judged. Today's world system is under the control of the devil (1 Jn. 5:19). This system is comprised of many features, such as education, entertainment, commerce, hobbies, family life and tradition, and religion. These features may not be inherently sinful, but the devil uses the system to deceitfully usurp people from loving God and doing His will (Eph. 2:2; Jas. 4:3-4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

The world system is like a strong magnet that attracts men to it. And the fallen nature of man is like a piece of iron that is strongly attracted to the magnetic system. What can break this attraction so that we can be free to follow the Lord? It is a "spiritual fact" that

the cross of Christ has broken this attraction. “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” The cross has set us free from the strong pull and control of the world over our lives. This verse is one that every believer should memorize and appropriate by faith in prayer to God often. I testify that I use this verse often in my own life in simple prayer before the Lord, claiming its truth in order to free me from the magnetic pull of the world. The power of the work of Christ’s cross is released when we stand in faith upon this great spiritual truth.

Verse 15 adds to the comments of verse 14. It further explains the work of the cross. Since the religious world, as part of the world system, has been judged at the cross, the matter of circumcision as a religious rite means nothing. Since circumcision has no value, it is only logical that lack of circumcision certainly has no value before God either. Both mean absolutely nothing! The only thing that matters with God is the new creation He has brought about through the death and resurrection of Christ. The new creation is the church, the body of Christ (Col. 3:10-11). Individual believers are in this new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Verse 16 says: “And as for all who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.” What Dr. Robert Wilkin writes may explain the meaning here of “walk by this rule.” Wilkin writes: “Paul wishes peace and mercy for those who walk consistent with the idea that what matters is the new creation, not circumcision or uncircumcision.”⁴¹ The term, “the Israel of God,” probably does not refer to all the physical descendants of Jacob. Rather, it seems to refer to those who are born as Jews but also are born again as spiritual children of God, “children of promise” (see Rom. 9:6-8).

The expression “the Israel of God” may look forward in anticipation of the final remnant of Israel that will be saved at the very end of the age—“so all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26). Some Bible teachers think that the verse should be translated as “*even* upon the Israel of God.” This would equate the new creation

⁴¹ Wilkin, pp. 856-857.

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(the church) with Israel. However, this view is problematic. Firstly, every other NT reference using the term “Israel” refers to people of Jewish birth, not the church. Secondly, the grammar of the verse uses “upon” twice (*upon* them and *upon* the Israel of God), seemingly indicating two different entities. Thirdly, those who equate the church with the “Israel of God,” teach that the church has replaced Israel completely as God’s people and now God has no future plans for national Israel. That view is clearly against Scripture as God has a future plan for national Israel (Rom. 9-11). The nation of Israel has only been temporarily set aside and is under a partial hardening due to their rejection of the Messiah (Rom. 11). A surviving remnant of national Israel will return to the Lord in faith during the great tribulation (the last three and a half years of this age).

In verse 17 Paul wrote: “From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” The Judaizers had troubled the Galatian believers (1:7; 5:12), interfering with their progress in the Christian life and threatening to cause Paul’s work among them to be in vain (4:11). Paul now presents his credentials to these troublers—the scars he has received in his appointed service to his master. The “marks” referred to here are “brand-marks,” which were placed on a slave in the culture of that time. These marks identified the slave as belonging to a certain master. Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1) and the Judaizers should recognize his unique credentials.

The final verse closes with the epistle’s theme of grace, giving encouragement to each believer to experience grace.

Appendix A

Law and Grace Principles

LAW PRINCIPLE	GRACE PRINCIPLE
Focuses on rules and religious traditions (Rom. 7:25b; Gal. 3:12; 4:9-10; Col. 2:20-22)	Focuses on Christ (Rom. 8:5; Col. 3:1-2; Heb. 12:2)
Operates by self-effort (Gal. 3:3, 12)	Operates by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20; 3:5; 5:5-6)
Empowered by the flesh (Gal. 3:3)	Empowered by the Spirit (Gal. 3:3, 5)
Performs for God (Gal. 3:12; Phil. 3:4-6)	Receives from God (Jn. 1:16; Gal. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:10)
Uses human will to achieve for God (Gal. 3:3; Phil. 3:4-6)	Uses human will to seek God, receive from God, and cooperate with the Spirit's work in us (Col. 3:1-2; Heb. 4:16; Phil. 2:12-13)
Imitation of Christ (Matt. 7:22-23; 1 Cor. 1:12; 13:1-3)	Participation with Christ (Jn. 15:4-5; Rom. 15:18; Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 15:10)
Lives out the life of the self (Matt. 6:1-2; Gal. 6:12)	Lives out the life of Christ (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21)
Independence from God (Gal. 5:4)	Dependence upon God (Jn. 15:4-5; 2 Cor. 12:9-12; Jas. 4:6)

Appendix B

The 1,000 Year Kingdom in God's Plan

Kingdom (*basileia*, Greek) primarily means God's authority or rule. Yet its usage includes not only the sovereign rule of God, but also the people and realm over which He rules.

God's Kingdom runs throughout all eternity. However, it takes on different characteristics in **successive stages or phases** throughout the course of time and eternity. "Thy kingdom is a **kingdom of all ages**, and thy dominion is throughout all generations." (Ps. 145:13, Darby)

The **present stage of God's Kingdom** has a spiritual realization among today's believers who have had God's word and life sown into their hearts (Mk. 4:3-20). Believers have been transferred into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13) and enjoy the Kingdom of God in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

Two future phases of God's Kingdom are yet to come. **The next phase will be the millennial Kingdom of Christ**, which He will establish upon His return (Lk. 19:11-12, 15; Acts 1:6-11; Rev. 11:15). This next phase will last 1,000 years and Christ will openly reign on the earth from His throne in Jerusalem (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; Is. 2:1-3; 24:23; Mic. 4:6-8; Rev. 20:4-6). At the end of Christ's 1,000 year reign, there will be a final rebellion of some of mankind and Satan, which God will judge (Rev. 20:7-10). Then Christ, at this point, will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father. This will bring in **the final, eternal phase of God's Kingdom**, which is realized in the new heavens, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem (1 Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 21:1-2).

The millennial Kingdom (1,000 years) has more prophetic Scripture devoted to it than does any other prophetic topic. **We must see its importance in God's plan, including His plan for**

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believers. Below are some of the names and meaning of this phase of God's Kingdom:

- **The Sabbath rest.** (Heb. 4:9) This rest is foreshadowed by God's rest on the seventh day after His creative activity (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:4). This rest follows God's redemptive activity.
- **The age to come.** (Matt. 12:32; Mk. 10:30; Heb. 6:5) This will be the next age, brought in by Jesus' second coming (Matt. 13:39-40; 24:3).
- **The regeneration.** (Matt. 19:28) Also called the "the times of restoration" (Acts 3:21) as a fulfillment of prophecy (Is. 11:1-10; 65:18-25). This title indicates that this period is a time when the earth is released from its bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:20-21).
- **The 1,000 year reign of Christ.** (Rev. 20:3-6) Popularly termed "the Millennium". Christ will rule over the earth from His throne in Jerusalem during this period (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; Is. 24:23; Mic. 4:7; Zech. 8:3). He will rule with a "rod of iron" to keep all evil in check (Rev. 2:27; 19:15).
- **The Kingdom** (in certain verses). (Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 16:28; 19:23-24; 22:2; Lk. 9:62; 13:28-30; 18:24-25, 29; 19:12,15; 22:29,30; Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1,18; Jas. 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:10-11; Rev. 12:10).

Blessings upon the earth during the 1,000 year Kingdom: The lifting of the curse. The curse brought in by Adam's sin is lifted to a great degree in the coming Kingdom age. The creation is released from its bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:21; Is. 11:6-9; 35:1; 55:13). **Satan will be bound** (Rev. 20:1-3). He will not be able to tempt and destroy. **Health for the redeemed** (Is. 33:24; 35:5-6). Christ's earthly healing ministry foreshadowed the Kingdom condition (Matt. 8:16-17; Heb. 6:5). **Peace** (Is. 2:4). **Righteousness and justice** (Is. 11:4; 32:1). **Joy** (Is. 14:7; 51:11). **Comfort** (Is. 49:13). **Truth will prevail** (Jer. 33:6; Zech. 8:3). **Material prosperity** (Jer. 31:12). **Holiness** (Is. 11:9). **Fullness of the Holy Spirit** (Is. 44:3).

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Other blessings will also exist. The remnant of the Jews will be converted at the end of this present age, and certain Gentiles will become subjects in this Kingdom (Ps. 2:7-9; Zech. 12:9-10; Rom. 11:26-27; Matt. 19:27-28; 25:32-34).

Significance of the millennial Kingdom. Since this coming age seems to the natural mind to be only a brief prelude to eternity, we may make the mistake of downplaying its importance. However, since God has paid so much attention to this coming age in His Word, it seems to have great significance in His overall plan. We can only suggest some reasons why God has placed such importance upon this coming age:

- **The Messiah's Kingdom.** Firstly, this Kingdom is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, where He openly rules over all the earth. Here, He is at last manifested as the true and worthy Sovereign. His roles as Prophet, Priest and King are fully seen. His full supernatural power, His righteousness and His full authority are displayed. Many names of the Messiah will find their fulfillment in this age. Some of these names are: the Branch, the Lord of Hosts, the Rod of Jesse, the King, the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Redeemer, the Shepherd, the Stone, the Teacher, the Son of Man. In God's plan, this age will be used to uniquely display the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Many promises to God's people Israel will be fulfilled.** God is faithful to His promises and covenants with His chosen people, the tribes of Israel. Thus, the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, the Palestinian (or Land) covenant, and the New covenant all find fulfillment in this era.
- **This Kingdom Age will be a display of God's triumph** over the damage done to the earthly sphere by Satan and the fall of man. God's authority and God's wisdom in creation were challenged by Satan and Adam and Eve. Yet, this Kingdom age brings about the "times of restoration" (Acts 3:21) showing God's triumph over evil.
- **In the "age to come" God's plan for man** is realized and displayed through **Christ and the overcomers**, who are Christ's

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joint-heirs (Rom. 8:17; Heb. 1:9; 3:14). God's purpose for man in creation was for man to be in His image and for man to exercise dominion for God (Gen. 1:26). Adam lost the right to rule through disobedience and the earth was usurped by Satan. God's plan is finally realized in the Millennium (Heb. 2:5-9; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6). **The overcomers are those faithful believers** who overcome the obstacles of this life to faith and obedience. The overcomers are pictured by Joshua and Caleb, who were the only adult men who **fully followed the Lord** in the exodus generation. They were rewarded with entry into the good land (a picture of the Kingdom reward). The overcomers are also pictured by the overcomers of each of the seven churches of Rev. 2 and 3. The various **rewards to these overcomers portray some aspect of the Kingdom reward**. In this age (in our lifetimes) God is seeking to prepare believers to be fit to reign in the next age. Those who learn self-denial and obedience now will be prepared to reign then and also be priests to God (Lk. 19:16-17; Rom. 8:17b, 2 Tim. 2:12a; Rev. 20:6). The reward to the overcomer also includes a magnified enjoyment of Christ as eternal life, which is in accord with man's design of being created in the image of God (Lk. 18:30; Jn. 17:3; Rev. 2:7, 17; 3:4, 12). It is clear that the overcomers share in Christ's rule over peoples on the earth (Matt. 19:28; Lk. 19:11-19; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10). They also seem to have some share in the New Jerusalem above the earth during this time (Rev. 3:12; 21:2).

- **A final test and opportunity for sinful man.** Children born to adults who enter the Kingdom will have sinful natures. Such persons will have opportunity for salvation. Yet, even under the ideal conditions of Christ's reign, many people will finally rebel against God at the end of the Millennium when Satan is loosed. This final rebellion proves fallen man's wickedness (Rev. 20:7-10).

- **The era of reward.** Scripture seems to place the focus on rewards for believers during this period (Matt. 19:28; Lk.18:29-30; 1 Cor. 6:8-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-7; Rev.2:26-27). All saints reign in eternity (Rev. 22:3-5).

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The Kingdom prize (reward) is the goal of the Christian race and is given by God as a great incentive for us to run with endurance (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 10:35-36; 11:24-26).

Appendix C

The Birthright

(The Rights of the Firstborn)

The warning concerning Esau and the birthright (Heb. 12:16-17).

Esau's birthright (actually plural: literally, "rights of the firstborn") was what belonged to him because he was the firstborn son. The Old Testament reveals special privileges for the firstborn of the family. This passage on Esau's loss of the birthright privileges is a part of the fifth warning passage given to the Hebrew believers in the letter to the Hebrews. Chapter 12 taken as a whole may be considered as the fifth warning.

Immediately following the case of Esau a contrast is given between the Old and New Covenants (Heb. 12:18-24; OT in verses 18-21 and the NT in verses 22-24). One of the blessings of the New Covenant is the fact that we have come to the "church of the firstborn." Although God has given us certain privileges belonging to a firstborn, it is clear from the warning passage that these privileges can be *forfeited by our actions*, as was the case with Esau. The "birthright" does not have to do with our eternal salvation, which cannot be lost because it is not based upon our works (Eph. 2:8-9); rather, it has to do with our reward.

The birthright as seen in the Old Testament

The birthright of a firstborn son in Israel consisted of the following major three privileges⁴²:

⁴² Insights into these three privileges come from chapter 7 of the book "*In the Arena of Faith*" by Erich Sauer.

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1. He had a double portion of the inheritance from his parents, whereas the other sons had only a single portion (Deut. 21:15-17)
2. He received a position of authority in the family, and also in the kingdom if he was the king's son (Gen. 27:37; 1 Sam. 20:27, 29; 2 Chron. 21:3).
3. Priestly service. Instead of the firstborn of all Israel serving in the tabernacle, the Levites were taken for service. (Num. 3:12-13; 8:17-19) Besides the temple service given to the tribe of Levi, there was also a measure of priestly duty within the family given to the firstborn son. The record of 1 Samuel 20:27, 29 indicates that the (eldest) brother made arrangements for the family sacrifice.

The birthright could be transferred to one who was not literally the firstborn. In 1 Chronicles 26:10 we see that Shimri, not the firstborn, was made first (“chief”) by his father, giving him the privileges of the firstborn. The *main meaning* of being the firstborn, then, becomes one of being chief, or having the pre-eminence in rank. This is in distinction from just being biologically the first son born. This privilege of having the chief rank normally belonged to the first one born, but could be transferred. The meaning of Christ as “the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15) carries with it the idea of pre-eminence and ruler over all, not birth order.

Examples of loss of the rights of the firstborn:

1. Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob. (Gen. 25:31-33)
2. In Jacob's family, Reuben was literally the first one born. However, he lost his birthright due to his sexual sin (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4) “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright.” (1 Chron. 5:1). Reuben's sexual sin and loss may have been the thought behind the first clause of Heb. 12:16: “that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau . . .”

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When Reuben lost his birthright, those privileges were divided up as follows:

1. The double portion of the inheritance (of the land) went to Joseph through his two sons (Ephraim and Manasseh), each being given a portion of the land. Genesis 48:21-22 reads: “Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. **I give you one portion more than your brothers**, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.’” See also 1 Chronicles 5:1 above.
2. The priestly service was given to the tribe of Levi. (Num. 1:47-51; Deut. 33:8-10)
3. The position of authority was allotted to Judah, the tribe from which the Messiah, the future King, would arise. (1 Chron. 5:2)

New Testament application

The “rights of the firstborn” in the Old Testament typify the privileges of the overcoming believer of the New Testament. The Greek verb for “to inherit” is *kleronomeo* (Strong’s #2816) and it means to obtain an inheritance. The OT Israelites took possession of their allotments of the promised good land through the casting of lots (Num. 26:52-55, 34:2). Their inheritance of the land pictures our inheritance of spiritual possessions. Lots are not cast, of course, for our inheritance, but God’s will determines our inheritance. In the OT family, **all sons received a portion** of the inheritance, **but the firstborn received a double portion** (Deut. 21:17). In God’s NT plan, all believers freely receive eternal salvation through grace, apart from works (Rom. 4:1-4; 11:5-6; Eph. 2:8-9). However, the New Testament affirms again and again the principle of *reward according to works*. It is on this principle that some Christians will obtain an *extra portion* of spiritual possession or blessing.

The common single portion of eternal salvation inheritance is spoken of in verses like Ephesians 1:14 and Hebrews 9:15, where our works are not noted. The extra portion of the inheritance has to do with *the 1,000 year Kingdom reward*, and is spoken of in verses

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like Col. 3:24: “the **reward** [consisting] **of the inheritance.**” Note that the context of Colossians 3:24 is related to our doings, our works.

One verse in particular points out both the common inheritance of all believers and the extra portion of inheritance together with Christ (in His 1,000 year Kingdom)—“and if we are children, we are also **heirs—heirs on the one hand, of God, and on the other hand, co-heirs with Christ**, if we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him.” (Rom. 8:17, translation by Zane Hodges, Greek professor). In this verse being an heir of God is dependent solely upon being His child. However, being a co-heir with Christ when He inherits His coming 1,000 year Kingdom is dependent upon our willingness to suffer with Him (experience His crucifixion in our lives to die to the world, sin and self).

The threefold spiritual possessions of the Kingdom reward for the overcomer:

1. A special portion of the enjoyment of eternal life (the life of God and Christ – Jn. 17:3) in intimate fellowship with Him during the 1,000 year Kingdom age (Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30; Rom. 2:6-7).
2. Priestly service in partnership with Christ (Jn. 12:25-26; Rev. 1:6 with Heb. 3:14 [“partakers” means companions or partners], sharing priestly service with Christ; Rev. 20:6).
3. Ruling with Christ (Lk. 19:17, 19; Rev. 2:26, 27; 20:6).

The warning to the believer of the possible loss of the birthright.

The sole place in the NT where the loss of the “birthright” is mentioned specifically is in Hebrews 12:16, where Esau’s story is brought forth as a warning. The lesson here is that Esau despised his birthright by selling it for a bowl of stew. The spiritual meaning for us is that he traded the temporal enjoyment of the pleasures of this world for the future enjoyment of the Kingdom reward. He did not clearly see the value of his birthright. The decision he made was irrevocable. Once the decision was made, it could not be reversed. The verses on Esau may be paraphrased as follows:

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“Lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau, who for one serving of stew sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance—a change of mind by Isaac, altering his father’s decision—though he sought the blessing diligently with tears.”

The great spiritual warning to the believer is that one’s heart may be so subtly enticed by the pleasures of this world that an inward decision is made, setting his course to pursue worldly pleasures. This pursuit is at the expense of a complete consecration to follow Christ, at any cost, for the Kingdom reward. Hebrews 12:16 shows us that what we may think of as “sin” (“lest there be any fornicator”) is not the only danger to the Christian’s life and the Christian’s reward. Equally dangerous is the love of this world and the pleasures it offers, as depicted in Esau. These pleasures can often seem quite “innocent” compared to immorality, yet they *can be just as costly to a believer as gross sin.*

The warnings against the dangers of worldly pleasure are numerous in the Scripture (Lk. 8:14; 12:19-21; 17:31-33; Phil. 3:17-20; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; 2 Tim. 3:4; 4:10; Jas. 4:3-4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). Yet, the loss of the 1,000 year Kingdom inheritance can stem from other lifestyle problems besides the love of this world. Note 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5-7. The “kingdom” in these verses refers to the coming Kingdom of 1,000 years, the “age to come.”

Appendix D

Eternal Security

John H. Smith
(with others)

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you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8). But as stewards of what the Lord sends in to finance this project, we do not send this booklet out indiscriminately. We seek to use wisdom and discretion in the matter, for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).

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Statement About the Bible

The writers of this booklet believe the Bible to be the Self-revelation of the one true eternal God. Fallen mankind worships many different gods and holds many different beliefs concerning what is truth. Therefore, absolute truth must come from outside of man. Without an absolute standard of truth, mankind has no solid basis from which to reason and arrive at valid conclusions concerning why he exists and what his purpose is on the earth. The writers of this booklet believe the Bible is that absolute truth. The Bible alone reveals the only true and living God and shows us how to know Him personally—one God Who is triune as Father, Son, and Spirit. God’s Word, the Bible, did not originate from man, as stated in 2 Peter 1:21, “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” This writing seeks to present only what God says in His Word. It is the sole authority for faith resulting in salvation, practical Christian living, and full maturity in Christ.

A Simple Outline of Bible Truth

From eternity to eternity God’s kingdom rules over all (Ps. 90:2; 103:19). God is “the King of the Ages” (1 Tim. 1:17) and “He will reign unto the ages of the ages” (Rev. 11:15). Mankind was created in God’s image for dominion according to God’s purpose and His heart’s desire. God loved the man that He created and could never be defeated in His purpose. Therefore, Christ came to redeem fallen mankind and creation so that God’s image could be perfected in him, thus qualifying him to rule on God’s behalf. The first stage of God’s purpose for man is fulfilled when, at the close of this present age, Christ will reign with His overcoming saints for 1,000 years on the earth (Rev. 20:4, 6). Following this is His eternal reign from the eternal city, the New Jerusalem, where all of His redeemed will reign with Him forever and ever (Rev. 22:4-5).

ETERNAL SECURITY

To the beloved brothers and sisters who are in Christ, that they may stand firmly and joyously on the assurance of their salvation.

Eternal security is a vast subject that is integrated in biblical truth as a whole. This makes it imperative that we understand the great themes and principles of God's purposes and working that run throughout the whole Bible. Obviously, we can't cover all of these great themes and principles in one little booklet; however, we will note certain governing principles of Bible interpretation.

To begin with, we must understand that the Bible is a unity of truth. Passages of Scripture must be interpreted (1) taking note of their cultural context, (2) according to their historical context, (3) according to their immediate context, (4) according to the context of the entire Bible, and (5) in light of other Scriptures that are very plain and clear in their bearing on the issue, especially where hard-to-understand passages are concerned. The divinely inspired, God-breathed Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) never contradicts itself. If one passage seems to contradict another, there is a problem with our understanding rather than the text itself. If one verse seems to contradict a large number of references that are unmistakably clear, then this one verse is not being interpreted correctly. Also, we must realize that we are dealing with the Word of the infinite, all-knowing eternal God Who is not limited to time and space as we are.

God's wisdom in a mystery, that was predetermined before the ages of time for our glory, can only be understood as the spirit of the believer communes with the Spirit of God Who indwells his human spirit. The Spirit of God alone searches and knows all the deep things of God. The things God has prepared for those who love Him are spiritually discerned and taught by the Spirit. The thoughts of our natural man are not the thoughts of God. God's thoughts are much higher than our thoughts, even as the heavens are much higher than the earth (Isa. 55:8-9). Therefore, we must always approach the Word of God with prayer for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Only by revelation will we understand the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-13; Eph. 1:17-23; Col. 1:9-13).

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Please meditate on and carefully consider all the verses given in this booklet. Praise our God, that the Holy Spirit in our spirit will give revelation increasingly if we seek for it. (Remember that the Old Testament was first written in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites. And, almost all of the New Testament was first written in the Greek language that was commonly spoken in Jesus' time. Since then, it has been translated into numerous languages.)

There are a very large number of Scriptures that speak plainly of the eternal security of the believer. Scriptures that are said to teach otherwise are being misinterpreted. Some of the reasons for this are: (1) Lack of understanding concerning the coming kingdom which involves the matter of reward or loss of reward. Such rewards are based upon the believer's life and service to the Lord, which has nothing to do with being eternally lost (explained later in this booklet); (2) Mixing law and grace in the matter of salvation so that salvation by grace alone is actually denied; (3) Confusing Israel with the Church; (4) Lack of sight concerning God's eternal purposes in the creation of man in God's image for dominion. These purposes run from Genesis 1:26-27 through the entire Bible and without which the Bible cannot be clearly understood; (5) Not understanding that eternal life is the free gift of God's grace. This gift must be distinguished from reward, or recompense, rendered to believers at the judgment seat of Christ (where only believers appear). These are positive and negative rewards given in respect to the believer's works; (6) The need to see more deeply the believer's relationship to God as that of a new creation child born of Him as Father and predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son, and (7) The need to thoroughly understand the great provisions for our salvation in the finished work of Christ. When on the cross our Lord Jesus Christ said, "It is finished," He had completed the work the Father gave Him to do for the salvation and redemption of mankind and the universe. As far as God is concerned, from His eternal viewpoint, His work is all done and only remains to be worked out in man on the earth and in the heavens. As long as Christians do not understand the items mentioned in this paragraph, they would tend to believe that a truly born again Christian can be lost for eternity.

There is little doubt that every born again child of God has at some time been attacked with regard to the assurance of their

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salvation. Satan is the accuser of the brothers (Job 1:9, 2:5; Zech. 3:1-2; Luke 22:31; Rev. 12:10). God's purpose in creation is to have humanity (mankind) in His image to express Him and to rule on His behalf (Gen. 1:26-27). Satan's desire is to interfere with and destabilize our relationship with God. Satan does this in order to prevent our maturing into the full image of Christ, which is necessary for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose of image and dominion. When this image is fully reached, believers will be qualified to rule and reign with Him (Rev. 20:4, 6), and Satan will be cast down (Rev. 12:9-11). Therefore, he fights fiercely to occupy believers with the possibility of becoming lost and thinking about what works they must do to keep themselves saved. This interferes with the Father-child relationship and stunts the believers' growth to maturity. In view of these crucial matters, let us consider some great indisputable passages that testify to the eternally secure salvation of every believer.

We Were Transferred Out of Adam Where All Die and Placed in Christ Where All Are Made Alive

We were born positioned in Adam, being sons in his image with a fallen nature (Gen. 5:3). We were completely lost and without any hope (Eph. 2:12). In our natural birth position we were dead in trespasses and sins, but "in the Christ, all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22, YLT; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 5:12, 19).

Beloved brothers and sisters who make up the Body of Christ, in the counsels of God in eternity (the timeless realm where God exists with no beginning or ending), the blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with the power and reality of every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). The language of the original Greek text is indisputable. It shows that although the fulfillment of these blessings is a process in our individual experience, in God's timeless sight all these blessings are already accomplished. Consider the blessings that will follow!

God our Father placed us eternally in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:30). Our Father chose us "in Him" before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). As a lost and helpless child of the streets is often rescued and placed as a son in a loving home, so God marked us out beforehand (predestined us) to arrive at sonship through Jesus Christ

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to Himself (Eph. 1:5). Full sonship means spiritual maturity through transformation into the image of Christ in Whose image we were created (Gen. 1:26-27; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). Think of it! In eternity past, before the foundation of the world, God took pleasure in choosing you to be His son! Praise Him! We are viewing here the God of the universe doing what pleases Him (Eph. 1:5). In Isaiah 46:10, God says, “My counsel will stand and I will do all my pleasure” (lit.). And in verse 11, “I will work and who shall hinder it?” (lit.). Is it not unbelief if one dares to stand before God and declare that our Almighty God will lose one that He chose before the foundation of the world? (See John 6:38-40.)

Some have asked the question: “Does God then also predestinate some to destruction?” For an answer, hear with a hearing ear the infallible Word of God. God is love, and He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). God is also righteous (Rom. 3:26; Deut. 32:4; etc.). He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). Therefore, He does not predestinate to destruction. His choosing and predestination are in accordance with His perfect foreknowledge of the choices every child of Adam will freely make in his life on the earth (Rom. 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2). With regard to these matters, Satan will both accuse us and slander God just as he did to Eve in the garden. Let us, as finite beings, bow before our infinite God in wonder, awe, humility, and worship, and let us stand upon the unmistakable statements of His holy, infallible Word.

Now chosen and placed in Christ, our Father has taken us into His grace and favor (Eph. 1:6). Please see this picture dear brothers and sisters! You are in Christ Who is in the presence of the Father; therefore, *you* are in the presence of the Father. So the Father accepts you just as He accepts Christ! God has put us in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ ascended to the Father with us in Him (Eph. 2:6). Now our life is hidden there, with Christ, in God (Col. 3:3). God accepts us because He is satisfied with Christ and the salvation He has wrought on the cross and through resurrection. Positioned by God in the Beloved (Christ), in living union with Him, we continually have the completed redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offences (Eph. 1:7). In Him also we were *chosen* as His inheritance—those marked out beforehand to participate in

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God's plan to bring all things in the heavens and the earth (i.e. the whole universe) under the headship of Christ. Thus we are predestined according to His purpose that, transformed and transfigured, we shall be to the praise of His glory. As Israel was chosen of old to be an elect nation, believers were chosen beforehand to be an eternal gift to God the Father. This predestination is according to God's eternal purpose and will absolutely be accomplished by the will and power of God (Eph. 1:10-12).

Furthermore, having believed, we were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is now indwelling us as the down payment, the pledge, the *guarantee* of our inheritance. Our inheritance will be the full redemption (that is, the full transformation of our souls and the resurrection of the body) of God's own purchased possession (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). We are that possession purchased by the price of Jesus' blood (1 Cor. 6:20). In ancient times, a seal gave legality to a document and marked its ownership. A king stamped his seal on certain possessions indicating they belonged to him (Esther 3:2; 8:8; Jer. 32:11). So the Christian is confirmed as God's child by the seal of the indwelling God, the Holy Spirit Who never leaves us (John 14:16; Rom. 8:16, 23; 2 Cor. 1:22; 1 John 3:24). We are one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The Holy Spirit in us is God's seal signifying that He owns us (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

To summarize, in this glorious portion of the Word (Eph. 1:3-23) we find ourselves: (1) *blessed* with every spiritual blessing in Christ, (2) *chosen* in Him before the foundation of the world, (3) *predestined to sonship* (becoming mature sons), (4) *taken into favor* (accepted) in the Beloved, (5) *forgiven* of our sins, (6) *predestined to an inheritance* when all things are headed up in Christ, (7) *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, and (8) in verses 22-23 *a part of His body* that fills all in all (the universe). What grace, what mercy, what love, what safety in the eternal arms! All these unspeakable blessings are the acts of our eternal God Who says, "I act and who can reverse it?" (Isa. 43:13, NASB). None can reverse it! The believers in Christ will never be lost.

Brothers and sisters, God is your real Father. When you received Christ by believing on His Name, you were born of God. This birth was neither of man's will nor the will of the flesh. God gave birth to you by the exercise of His own will (John 1:12-13; James 1:18). We

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were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Peter 1:2). Peter then uses a strong expression: “God caused us to be born again” (1 Peter 1:3, NASB). It is an obvious truth that one born to natural parents cannot be unborn! Due to irresponsible or wicked behavior, the father may withhold that son’s inheritance, but he will never cease to be a child of his father. (We will explain this further in the last section of this booklet.) God’s work in giving birth to us according to His will cannot be undone by man (Isa. 43:13). Man’s will is not the initiating cause of the new birth, nor does man have the power to produce the new birth. But man is responsible to exercise his will to receive by faith the gift offered by the Holy Spirit. It is also true that God knows who will receive and who will reject this free gift (1 Peter 1:2), and that man has free will to do either (1 Thess. 1:6-9; 2:13; Matt. 23:37; John 5:39-40). Man’s responsibility to receive, together with God’s will and choice, is easily seen in John 1:12-13—those who “received” were “born of the will of God.” Whosoever (literally “every one who”) believes on Him will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus commanded all men to repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:15).

The new birth of every believer, which is 100 percent by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a new creation that had not existed before (2 Cor. 5:17). Every believer’s human spirit is now a new creation, having been regenerated and created anew by being born of the Spirit of God (John 3:6). Many other verses explain this further. You were born again by the Spirit of God entering your human spirit as the Seed, the Sperm of God (1 John 3:9). Sperm (Greek, *sperma*) is the actual word translated as Seed. Surely it is easy to understand that a father’s human sperm brought his life into his children. In the same manner, the Sperm of God brings the life of God into the spirit of man. Stated in a stronger way, in our salvation the Sperm of God brings in God Himself.

The Person of all three of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit) is eternal life. In 1 John 1:1-2, John clearly tells us that the Person Who came from the Father—the One Who he and others had heard, had seen with their eyes, and had handled with their hands—was eternal life manifested on the earth. Jesus Himself said, “I Am the Life” (John 14:6, NASB). Again John writes in 1 John 5:20: “He

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[Jesus Christ] is the true God and eternal life.” The book of Hebrews speaks of the Spirit as an eternal Person (Heb. 9:14). The gospel of John says that eternal life is to know the only true God and the One Who He sent, Jesus Christ (John 17:3). So it is clear from all these verses that the Person of God *is* eternal life.

As an example, if the person of John H. Smith could become a spirit and enter your body, then you would have John’s life come into you. Just so, the entrance of the Person of the Holy Spirit into your human spirit was the entrance of eternal life. By this vital, living union of the Holy Spirit with your spirit, you were joined to the Lord as one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). So this Seed of God that came into you is incorruptible, and therefore it is imperishable. Its source and cause is the constantly living and constantly abiding Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). If a saved person can be lost, then you are found saying that the Seed of God, which is the very life of God, is perishable.

When a child is born into a human family, he quickly recognizes his father and begins to call him “Daddy!” In the same way, as a son born of God, Who is your Heavenly Father, you have received the spirit of sonship in your spirit in which you cry, “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:14-15). Yes, even Christ within you cries, “Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4:6). The Indwelling Spirit of God within you bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God (Rom. 8:16).

Salvation Is by Grace Through Faith

According to Ephesians 2:8-10, salvation is by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works that no one may boast. Verse 8 specifically says, “By grace you have been saved through faith.” This phrase “have been saved” is a Greek perfect tense that emphasizes the continuing, eternal effect of our initial salvation. Our fallen self with its works has no part in our regeneration into a new creation. Christ alone is the means of our salvation. It is impossible to earn it by our works (Rom. 4:4-5). Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace (Rom. 11:6). We are exclusively His workmanship. This workmanship is a completed action of creation in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). We are a new creation that God alone can create (2 Cor. 5:17).

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However, the works *following* our becoming a new creation are not to *obtain* eternal life; they are works that follow *after* we have received eternal life. They are works that God prepared beforehand for each one of us to walk in *after* we are saved. They are works that we do in the power of God's gift to us, which is His new creation life (2 Cor. 5:17), and His all-powerful, all-sufficient, empowering grace (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Tim. 2:1).

So it is clear that we cannot obtain or keep eternal life by any works or any righteousness of our own. There is no way to obtain salvation other than by receiving it as a gift on the basis of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, followed by His victorious resurrection and ascension. His righteousness is imputed to us as a gift when we believe. The word "imputed" means that Christ's righteousness is put to our account. God, the righteous Judge, accepts it. As Isaiah said long ago, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6, DARBY). It is as if you owed a debt that you could not pay, and then someone came along and totally freed you from that debt by putting their money to your account.

We lack space to further explain imputed righteousness, but for your study consider the following: (1) It is of necessity a righteousness apart from law-keeping because no one could keep the law to obtain it (Rom. 3:19-21); (2) It is a righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:22-23); (3) On the basis of Christ's work this righteousness is put to our account as a gift when we believe (Rom. 4:5-6, 13; 5:17); (4) Christ Himself is made this righteousness to us by an act of God when He put us in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). Paul also tells us in Romans 10:3-4 that Israel did not obtain righteousness because they were seeking their own righteousness through keeping the law. Further, they refused to submit to the righteousness of God, which is the only righteousness acceptable to Him. Verse 4 tells us that Christ is the end of the law (the termination of the law [law-keeping] as a means of righteousness) for righteousness to every believer. There is no more law-keeping in order to obtain righteousness. He fulfilled all the demands of the law (Matt. 5:17), and now by faith we receive Him as our righteousness. "Knowing that a man is not justified on the principle of the works of the law, but by faith, therefore we believe on Christ Jesus that we might be justified

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[literally, placed in a right standing with God] on the principle of faith” (Gal. 2:16, lit.). Galatians 2:21 says emphatically that if anyone insists that he must gain righteousness by his own works through the law, then he sets aside the grace of God and treats Christ as if He died for nothing. This, brothers and sisters, is an awful thing in God’s sight because His free grace and the finished work of Christ are despised. To insist on establishing your own righteousness by your own works actually perverts the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7). Paul terms it as “another gospel” and pronounces a curse upon anyone who teaches so (Gal. 1:6-9).

John 10:27-30

In the gospels, the Jewish leaders had refused Christ’s claims to be the Messiah and rejected the miracles that proved His claims. He had plainly told them Who He was, but they did not believe because they were not of His sheep (John 10:24-27). Surrounded by a crowd of Jews in the porch of Solomon, Jesus then spoke words of eternal assurance and comfort to those there who were His true sheep, and to all believers until He comes again (vv. 27-30).

I give to My sheep right now (present tense, not future) eternal life and they shall never, no never (a strong double negative) perish (v. 28). In John 5:24 Jesus said, “He that hears my word and believes on Him Who sent Me has eternal life [right now as a present possession] and does not come into judgment [eternal death], but has passed out of the death into the life” (lit.). Notice the use of the article “the.” *The* death means the realm or sphere of death into which we were born as children of fallen Adam (Rom. 5:12, 14; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1). *The* life is the realm or sphere of life into which we pass immediately when we believe in Christ. That sphere is “in Christ” where we will be eternally. God is eternal life, and Christ personally is eternal life (John 17:3; 1 John 1:1-2; John 14:6). As is God Himself, this life has no beginning or ending. By the very definition of the word “eternal”, if a person could lose it, then he never had it. This is because it is God’s life which has no beginning or ending. The phrase “has passed” is a Greek perfect tense, which means this life continues unendingly in our experience. So the sheep can joyfully shout, “We have passed out of the realm of spiritual death in Adam into the realm of eternal life in Christ!”

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Our Lord continues by saying that no one can seize one of His sheep out of His hand. Furthermore, the Father, Who is greater than all, gave us to Christ and no one can seize us out of the Father's hand. Rejoice, believer, that the Father gave you to Christ, and neither man nor devil can seize you out of Their hand! Praise the Lord, the impossibility of believers being lost does not depend upon any strength of their own, but rests upon the finished work of Christ and the mighty power of God (vv. 28-30).

Romans 8:28-39

All believers are called according to and for the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:9-11; 3:9-11). We were called before the ages of time (2 Tim. 1:9). It was a call into the fellowship of the Son (1 Cor. 1:9). The One Who called us is the eternal God "of Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things" (Rom. 11:36, lit.). This is to say that: (1) God is the source of all things; (2) He brings everything to pass that He planned in His eternal counsels; (3) and all things ultimately return to Him for His satisfaction and eternal glory. Therefore, we are confident that nothing will stop Him from accomplishing His purpose. He will cause all things to work together for good to those who love God, believers whom He has called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

We were *foreknown*, in eternity past, by God (Rom. 8:29). We were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God on the basis of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus and the sanctifying work of the Spirit (1 Peter 1:1-2). The believers whom God foreknew He predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son. This confirmation to the image of the Son is mature sonship (Eph. 1:5) that is also described as the measure of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Can someone say that those foreknown, chosen, and predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son could ever be lost? Never! To say such a thing contradicts the plain Word and is an affront to the very character of our God Who foreknew, predestined, and will see us conformed according to His unalterable purpose for which we were called.

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In Romans 8:30 we have four terms: *predestinated*, *called*, *justified*, and *glorified*. In the original language all four of these verbs are action words, which are in what is called the aorist tense. This means that these four actions of God on behalf of His eternal purpose and us, His children, are viewed in their entirety. You may say they are timeless. As far as our sovereign God is concerned, they are already accomplished. Therefore, all is viewed as one entire, eternally completed salvation described in these five timeless (eternal in character) words: foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified.

All of this takes place in Christ where God put us (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1). Every believer was eternally foreknown, called, justified, predestinated to be conformed to Christ's image, and glorified. We, living in time, are in the process of transformation and glorification that God sees as already done. It is impossible that God would fail. It is therefore impossible that a saved person could be lost and end up in the lake of fire. To believe this would be questioning the character of God.

As Paul continues his triumphant praise we hear the language of heaven that is beyond human thought. Meditate on it, brothers and sisters, with a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. If God be for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31). The answer, of course, is NO ONE! Neither man nor devil can defeat our Father God. Our enemies are His enemies. The irrefutable argument continues. Since God did not spare the greatest possible gift, His own Son—God manifest in the flesh—then He will surely give us all things. The “all things” are gifts immeasurably less than the supreme gift of the Son and are actually included in Him (Rom. 8:32).

The next verses in Romans 8 speak of our clearance from guilt and condemnation (vv. 33-34). God is the judge before Whose court we have been justified. Anyone who would bring a charge against God's chosen ones must face the Judge (God) Who has justified them, that is, set them in right standing with Him (Rom. 3:21-31). Neither man nor Satan, the accuser of the brethren, is able to bring a charge against them (Rev. 12:10-11). Neither can anyone condemn God's elect because Christ has already condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3) and now stands as our Advocate, our Representative in God's court. Christ has already fully satisfied God's just

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requirements for our sins and those of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2). All who would bring false accusations against God's chosen and justified ones will be turned away in defeat.

And finally, our glorious risen Lord at God's right hand is constantly interceding for us (v. 34). He is there ever living to intercede and complete the process of our full salvation (Heb. 7:25). This begins with the regeneration of our spirit, proceeds through the transformation of our soul, and is consummated with the resurrection and glorification of our body. In Jesus Christ's matchless prayer in John 17, He wills to have us kept in the Father's name (v. 11), kept from evil (v. 15), sanctified by the truth (v. 17), and to be with Him where He is (v. 24). The only lost one, Judas Iscariot, was never a child of God; he was never saved. He was the son of perdition, the son of destruction. His spiritual parentage was of the devil, not God. This is the very phrase used for Antichrist in 2 Thess. 2:3. Jesus said plainly that of the twelve He chose, Judas Iscariot was a devil (John 6:70-71). In John 8, Jesus told the Pharisees that they did the works of their father (v. 41) and that their father, their spiritual parentage, was the devil (v. 44).

In the closing verses of Romans 8, Paul triumphantly states that no circumstance and no created thing can separate the chosen and called believers from Christ because of His love for them (vv. 35-39). Christ's love, from which we cannot be separated, is perfect (John 13:1; 15:9; 1 John 4:8). So regardless of what is happening to us, we may abide in His love continually.

The terms in Romans 8:35 describe pressure from the outside, inner distress and anxiety, persecution from any antichrist source, deprivation of food, deprivation of normal things of life such as clothing, and even danger by the sword that brings physical death. Suffering and even death has been and presently is the lot of many of God's people (v. 36). But such cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Rather, we are more than conquerors, super-conquerors, through Him that loves us. From the blood of the martyrs recorded in the Bible, through the multitudes who suffered persecution and death through the centuries, to the present day (when 90,000 yearly shed their blood for Christ's sake), the triumphant shout goes up: "More than conquerors through Him Who loves us!" "It has been granted to us on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but

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also to suffer for His sake” (Phil.1:29, lit.). Paul himself gloried in his tribulations (Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

What marvelous words close this chapter: neither death, life, angels, evil principalities, human or supernatural powers, things present in this world now, things to come, height, depth, nor any created thing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, traverses the universe and finds nothing that can separate the chosen, called, and justified believer from his Lord.

1 John 5:6-13

Although there is some repetition of previous statements, it is profitable to look into this passage by itself. Near the end of his gospel (glad tidings), John tells us that the signs in his gospel were written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31, NASB). And in his first epistle he says, “These things I have written to you who believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, NKJV) and be filled with joy in fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:4).

Now let us notice carefully the apostle’s language. The Spirit Who is Truth bears witness to Jesus, the Christ (1 John 5:6). The testimony of the Spirit is the testimony of God. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which He testified of His Son (v. 9). He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son (v. 10; Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6, NASB). And this is the testimony: that God has [once for all] given us eternal life and this life is in His Son (v. 11). Then verse 12 concludes, “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (NASB). “These things (in verses 9-12) I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you (those who believe in the name) may know that you have eternal life” (v. 13, NASB). The stress here is upon believing God’s testimony about His Son, that the eternal life is in Him. Therefore, we who believe in and have the Son may be assured that we have

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eternal life. Our assurance is based upon God's testimony concerning His Son, not on our condition! And as stated above, we have the witness in ourselves that what God has said about His Son is true.

We feel that we must again strongly emphasize the Person of Christ. Notice that the original text and the NASB use the article "the" in verse 12 and read "the life", emphasizing that the Person of Christ is the eternal life. If you are given a bag with several items in it, you receive not only the bag, but also the items contained in the bag. Just so, when you receive "the Son" you get "the life." In his gospel, John wrote, "In Him was life" (John 1:4). Jesus said, "I [personally] Am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25, JS). In John 14:6 He said, "I [as distinct from any other source] Am the life" (JS). The word "Am" means that His very being is life. In Colossians 3:4, Paul declares that Christ is our life. By this he means that the Person of Christ is our life. Then we come to that matchless passage (1 John 1:1-2).

Here, John tells us that the disciples heard, saw, and handled the Word of Life that was from the beginning. The first verse of John's gospel states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This is Jesus Christ Who became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us (John 1:14). The eternal life that was with the Father was manifested! When they heard, fixed their gaze upon, and handled Jesus Christ, they were hearing, seeing, and handling eternal life (1 John 1:1-2). We all believe that Christ came into us when we were born again. How glorious is the fact that eternal life is one of the names of Christ! When our spirit was born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6), Christ Who is our life came into us. Christ dying for us on the cross became Christ in us to be our life. So John says, "He that has the Son has the life" (1 John 5:12; John 14:20; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27).

Now John assures us that he wrote these things (the epistle of 1 John) in order that we who believe on the name of the Son of God might *know* that we have eternal life (5:13). The Greek language has several different words that define different aspects of knowledge. All are usually translated by the English word "know." The word "know" used in verse 13 means a settled inner knowledge, a

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conscious absolute knowledge that we possess eternal life in the Person of Jesus Christ Who indwells us. We shall never be separated from Him. We have seen this already from many references in the Word. Beloved brothers and sisters, rejoice! Stand upon this mighty truth and grow in Him.

In closing, John sums up the whole epistle, “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding [through our spirit] so that we may know Him Who is true; and we are in Him Who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He IS the true God and eternal life” (5:20, JS).

Thus far, we have shown that eternal life is a gift received by grace through faith with no works of man’s fallen self involved in gaining it (Eph. 2:8). Now, in the closing sections of this booklet, we will briefly consider some crucial misunderstandings that lead dear believers to doubt the security of their salvation.

Two Great Principles of Truth

Often there is confusion regarding two great principles in the Bible. The *first principle* is that eternal life is a free gift of God by grace through faith totally apart from works. The *second principle* is that there will be positive or negative rewards for the works of a believer during his Christian life *after* his new birth. These two great principles of truth concerning God’s salvation and God’s righteous government run throughout the Bible. Many Scriptures relate to one of them or the other, but not to both of them.

As an illustration, suppose there are two shelves in a home. On one shelf the family keeps all of the utensils they use for eating and drinking. But, on the other shelf, only the pots used for cooking are kept. These two shelves are similar to the two principles we are talking about. All of the items on each individual shelf have a common purpose, but confusion results if eating utensils and cooking pots are mixed on the same shelf. One is for the principal of eating, while the other is for the principle of cooking. This illustrates how confusion arises over the matter of our eternal security. If verses that teach reward according to the works of a born again believer are viewed as referring to eternal life, then confusion will result. If verses that teach eternal life is the gift of God through grace are viewed as reward for works, this also will result in

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confusion. We will refer to these two principles as “*Gift Principle*” and “*Reward Principle*.” (Please note that the two original Greek words usually translated in our Bibles as “reward” or “recompense” have the varied shades of meaning, as translated in their various contexts, of pay, wages, reward, recompense, gain, retribution, punishment, repay, and return. You can easily understand how all these terms fit in with the two terms, reward or recompense.)

Concerning the *Gift Principle*, we have established that man’s eternal salvation (eternal life) is a gift of God. A gift is something prepared by the giver. God prepared our eternal salvation for us through the finished work of Jesus Christ (John 17:1-4). The person receiving the gift does nothing to earn it by any of his own works; he simply takes the gift by faith. “It is God’s gift, not on the principle of works” (Eph. 2:8-9, lit.). Paul was very careful to explain to us that eternal life is by grace alone and cannot be gained by any works of our own (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16, 21).

A large number of Scriptures teach us that positive or negative reward for our life and service to the Lord is according to works. Jesus said: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12, NASB). The works of all men who are not saved by grace will be judged, and their reward (their recompense) will be the lake of fire (Rev. 20:12-15). The only possible escape from this judgment is for one’s name to be in the Book of Life by virtue of the *Gift Principle* (Rev. 20:15). The question is sometimes asked, “Does this mean that a Christian can freely sin and live a fleshly life with no consequences?” The answer is, “No, he cannot!” This is because Jesus promises to reward every man, both unbeliever and believer, according to his works. For the believer, this judgment will take place at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10; Matt. 16:27; 1 Peter 1:17; Rev. 11:18).

Because he has both the old “flesh principle” and the new life resident within him, the believer’s works may be good or bad. The intense warfare between the two, Spirit and flesh, is described in Galatians 5:16-23. The reward, or recompense, from Christ may be positive or negative (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:23-24). Christ will judge only those works committed *after* we become Christians (1 Cor. 3:8-15). Please rest assured, however, that sins we commit after

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becoming Christians will not be held against us at the judgment seat of Christ *if* we sincerely confess these sins (1 John 1:9). Notice carefully that this verse says “If we confess our sins,” *then* God is faithful—and on the basis of the blood (1 John 1:7) is righteous—to forgive the confessing Christian and cleanse him from all unrighteousness.

The timing of the application of these two principles in the life of a Christian is important and helpful to us. The *Gift Principle* applies to us the very minute we place our trust in Christ for forgiveness. As stated earlier, at that moment we are eternally forgiven, we pass from death to life, we are born again by the Spirit of God, and we become a child of God. Also, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of our future completed redemption when our body is transfigured. We are eternally saved! (Acts 13:38-39; Eph. 1:7; John 5:24; 1 Peter 1:23; John 1:12; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Phil. 3:21).

As shown previously, it is by the gift of righteousness put to our account that we receive eternal life. But having received the gift of righteousness and thereby the gift of eternal life, we must now pay attention to the *Reward Principle*. This is especially important in light of the fact that our entire Christian life will be evaluated by Christ at His judgment seat.

Paul likened our whole Christian life to that of an Olympic race, all with the goal of winning the prize (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He was racing for the prize of an imperishable crown, the positive reward given at the judgment seat for those who run victoriously. This crown, like other crowns gained by believers, points to the reward of ruling with Christ in His coming 1,000 year kingdom (1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:2-4; Rev. 2:10; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6). Other writings will explain this more fully. These overcoming believers bear His image and rule with Him over the earth in the millennial (1,000 year) kingdom. That kingdom is the first stage of the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose for the creation of mankind (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:4-6). This will be followed by the eternal day seen in the last two chapters of the whole Bible (Revelation 21 and 22). With such a great calling, it is little wonder that Moses, who could have had power and riches in Pharaoh’s court, considered “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Heb. 11:24-

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26, NASB). In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Paul wrote that he might be disqualified (rejected or disapproved) if he did not maintain strict self-control over his body. Christians, who take this to mean that Paul could lose his salvation, put these verses on the wrong “shelf.” Paul’s buffeting and leading captive his body was with the view of gaining the reward of the crown according to works. It was *not* with the view of gaining eternal salvation (which he already possessed). So by reading these verses carefully, you will see that Paul was not racing for eternal life, which he already possessed as a born again believer. Rather, he was racing for a prize, which was a reward for how he ran the race.

The coming kingdom was prophesied in the Old Testament and was portrayed as a time of great blessing. The earth would be gloriously renewed from much of the curse and the Messiah would rule (Isa. 2:1-4; 11:1-10; 24:23). The Jews understood that participation in that blessed era was determined by God’s judgment upon one’s works after the resurrection, and *life in that age* was designated “eternal life” (literally, *age-lasting life*) (Dan. 12:2). Here we need to point out that the term “eternal life” can have various meanings in the Scriptures, even as terms tend to have in any language. There is no word in either Hebrew or Greek that explicitly means endless or eternal. A literal translation of the term would be “age-lasting life” or “life belonging to the age.” Both the Hebrew word (*olam*) and the Greek word (*aionios*), which are sometimes translated as “eternal” or “everlasting,” mean a long period of time (perhaps indefinite) or an age. *The context of the term must determine the exact meaning.* When the Greek word *aionios* is used in conjunction with God’s life, it clearly means eternal, because God is eternal and His life is eternal (Gen. 21:33; John 1:1-4; Rom. 16:26; 1 Tim. 6:15-16, Heb.1:10-12; 7:3, 15-17; 1 John 1:1-2). As we have received God’s eternal life as a gift, we have an eternal relationship with Him and an eternal salvation (John 3:14-16; 5:24; Rom. 6:23).

However, for proper interpretation of many Scriptures we must realize that *the Jews of Jesus’ day had no concept of eternal life as God’s life inwardly experienced in the new birth.* Nicodemus, for example, was waiting for Messiah’s coming kingdom, which was prophesied repeatedly in the Old Testament. But his question about

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returning to his mother's womb and coming out again shows that he had no idea of the new birth (John 3:3-10). The rich young ruler also had no idea of the new birth. It was Messiah's kingdom, *life in the age to come*, which the young ruler sought. And Jesus confirmed that entry into life in that age was to be gained through obedience to God—not just to His commandments, but by following Him (Jesus) (Matt. 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-30). The young man asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (literally, “life for the age” or “age-abiding life”). The correct literal translation is, “What must I do to inherit life for the age [or age-abiding life]?” He was clearly asking, “What must I do to inherit a place in the kingdom of the next age?” (See the same thought in Jesus' conversation with a lawyer in Luke 10:25-28.)

Jesus defined the issue in their meeting as having “treasure in heaven.” The word *treasure* carries the meaning of a deposit. How the young man followed Jesus would determine his deposit of treasure (reward) in the coming kingdom age. Here again we mention that at birth a child receives the irreversible free gift of life and a place in the family. Receiving the kingdom age inheritance, however, will depend upon his conduct of life. In Colossians 3:23-25, verse 24 shows us that the reward (recompense) consists of the inheritance and is based on service to our Lord Christ. In the passage concerning the rich young ruler, Jesus was speaking of His coming 1,000 year kingdom as being realized in “the age to come,” which would also be the “regeneration”—the era of the earth's renewal (Matt. 19:28-29; Luke 18:29-30). The “age to come” (singular) cannot speak of eternity because there are “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7; 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17).

Eternal life is realized in our spirits now, through the new birth, as a gift of God (John 3:6; 17:3; Rom. 6:23). But *eternal life* is also viewed as a reward for our obedience as a believer, and this reward is in the 1,000 year kingdom age to come. Conditions in that age will be wonderfully blessed: “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9b). The *reward* in that age for the obedient disciple— “*eternal life*”— will entail *a greatly magnified and perfected experience of our fellowship with God and our experience of His life* (Luke 18:28-30). This reward in the coming kingdom is only for those believers who forsake all to follow Him (Luke 18:28-30). For the obedient

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disciple, Jesus promises: “and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30).

The Bible has warnings about believers missing the blessings of the kingdom. If, as some Corinthian believers, we persist in fleshly living, we will not possess the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:7-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-5). Also, in Matthew 10:38-39, 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38, Luke 9:23-26, and John 12:25, Jesus teaches us that we must lose our life (soul life) now in order to find it at the time when He returns to reward men according to their deeds. This means that if we will deny our soul the fulfillment of its desires, pleasures, and satisfaction in this life today, and take up our cross to do God’s will (Matt. 26:39), then, in the future when Christ returns, we will find the true satisfaction of our soul. This passage refers to reward, as mentioned in Matthew 16:27. Discipleship here involves works of obedience. When the Lord returns, a believer can lose the satisfaction of his soul by missing the kingdom joy, or he can gain it in the kingdom by denying himself now and following Jesus in obedience.

The faithfulness of our Christian life will determine our participation in Christ’s coming 1,000 year kingdom. We must live according to the highest standard of practical righteousness in order to enter the kingdom (Matt. 5:20). We must do the will of the Father in order to enter the future kingdom (Matt. 7:21). If we are faithful in our service to Christ, He will reward us with entry into the joy of the kingdom and the privilege of ruling with Him (Matt. 25:14-23; Luke. 19:11-19). But, if we fail to serve Him, we will forfeit this reward (Matt. 25:24-30; Luke. 19:20-26). Thus, we shall be cast into “outer darkness,” a picture of exclusion from the glory of the kingdom (Matt. 25:30). This will cause the weeping of sorrow and regret. All of the Lord’s judgments of His slaves (believers) are based upon works of service, so “outer darkness” *cannot mean loss of eternal salvation. These passages all have to do with positive or negative recompense at the judgment seat of Christ* (Matt. 25:19; Luke 19:15).

The book of Hebrews speaks of the inhabitable earth to come in the next age and that man, not angels, will co-rule with Christ (Heb. 2:5-6). Jesus, as the captain of our salvation, is bringing (leading) many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10). That is, through the progressive

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sanctification of their lives and their service to Him they can gain participation in the glory of His kingdom. Remember that mankind was created for God's purpose of manifesting His image and ruling on His behalf (Gen. 1:26-27). God's purpose will be fulfilled in its initial stage (before the advent of the New Jerusalem when all evil will be put away) in the next age when Christ, with the overcoming believers, rules on earth for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). Therefore, the various warnings in the book of Hebrews have nothing to do with the loss of eternal salvation. Rather, they clearly set forth the danger of missing entrance into the land (the kingdom in type) through various shortcomings mentioned in Hebrews: unbelief, disobedience, hardening of the heart (Heb. 3:18-19, 4:6-7), not going on to spiritual maturity (Heb. 5:11—6:8), not holding fast the confession of their hope based on the complete sufficiency of Christ and His work (Heb. 10), neglect in running the race looking to Jesus while under the Father's child-training (Heb. 12:1-11), and selling one's birthright as Esau did (Heb. 12:12-17). Space forbids detailed explanation of these passages, but rest assured that the principle we stated above applies. Christ is presented in many aspects as the complete solution for entrance into the kingdom (Sacrifice, High Priest, Intercessor, etc.).

The children of Israel were delivered from Egypt and into the wilderness, from which only a few entered the reward of the land, which is a type of entering the millennial kingdom (Deuteronomy, chapters 1-10 and many other passages). This history of the Israelites is probably the clearest, simplest, and best-known example concerned with the free gift of salvation and positive or negative reward. Besides the significant example in Hebrews, First Corinthians 10:1-13 clearly sets forth as instruction and warning the same wilderness examples for those of us upon whom the completion of the ages has come. We will now briefly retell the story that many of you already know.

As God's people, they were *all* redeemed by the blood and passed out of Egypt through the sea into the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-2). They *all* ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. The manna represented Christ as their food and the water from the Rock represented Christ as their drink (vv. 3-4). But because of their repeated disobedience (Num. 14:22), most of them did not please God and died in the wilderness (vv. 5-11). *All* of them

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were redeemed from Egypt and could never go back even though they proposed such a thing (Num. 14:1-4). As their journey continued, it is clear that they remained the children of God. They were fed with miracle food and drink, and their clothes did not wear out. Nowhere in the account of their journey or in the whole Old Testament does it say they ceased to be the people of God. Yet it is also clear that most of them missed out on the reward of entering the good land, which was not entering God's promised rest—a type of the reward of the coming 1,000 year kingdom (Heb. 3:12-19, 4:1-9).

James 2:14-24

Now that we understand the two principles of *gift* and *reward*, James 2:14-24 becomes clear. If the gift of eternal salvation is truly by faith alone, why does James speak of being justified by faith plus works? Many Bible readers have not been able to reconcile this passage with Romans 3:26—4:6. It is apparent that James is trying to motivate his Christian readers to proper living and good works. In verses 12 and 13 he begins with speaking about the coming judgment of believers: “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged” (James 2:12, NASB). Verse 13 follows with a continuation of the theme of the coming judgment seat of Christ where only Christians appear to be judged for their service, not with respect to eternal life. Immediately following is James' question: “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works?” Can that faith save him? (v. 14, NASB).”

The key to understanding this passage is the meaning of the word “save.” The verb “to save” in Greek simply means to keep from loss, danger or ruin, or to make whole (see uses in Mark 5:23; Luke 8:36; Acts 27:20). The meaning of the word “save” *must be determined by the context*. Only in some cases does it mean to deliver from eternal condemnation to eternal life (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8). Here in James it is salvation from a negative judgment regarding a Christian's life and service at the judgment seat of Christ that would prevent him from entering the kingdom as a reward. Those without good works are pictured by the unprofitable servant, who is negatively judged and loses his reward (Matt. 25:24-30). When Paul was assured that he had victoriously finished his course

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(2 Tim. 4:7), he could say, “The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom: to Whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (2 Tim. 4:18, ASV). (For another example of being saved for the kingdom, compare Matthew 24:12-13 with 2 Timothy 2:12.)

So there are two justifications in the New Testament. According to the *Gift Principle*, “justification is a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24, lit.). As shown earlier, this means that God declares us righteous as a legal act because of our faith in Jesus, apart from works (Rom. 3:26-28; 4:5-6). Because of this justification we can never be eternally condemned (Rom. 8:30-34), and we have new life in Christ (John 5:24; Rom. 4:25; 5:18). According to the *Reward Principle*, there is also a justification by works mentioned by James (James 2:21-24). This is justification for satisfactory service as a believer that brings reward. All believers must appear before Christ, Who will judge our works (1 Cor. 3:12-14; 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17). We may be disqualified from receiving a positive reward (1 Cor. 9:27) or we may be approved (James 1:12). There is justification through faith alone unto eternal life and justification through works bringing millennial reward. When, at the end of his life, God revealed to Paul that he had run victoriously, he was then confident that the righteous Judge would approve him to receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul’s possession of eternal life was never in question.

Conclusion

We now trust that each reader can apply the two principles of *gift* and *reward* to the many passages that were once confusing. May all be confident that the God Who chose us for Himself and predestined us to be His sons will also keep us for eternity (Eph. 1:3-5; Rom. 8:29-39). None of the threatening passages speak of the loss of eternal salvation, because God has delivered us from eternal punishment by the work of the cross. However, God, as a loving Father, may chastise us in this life, or according to His righteous governance may have some dealing with us in the kingdom age. The penalties thus incurred may be severe, but not eternal (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 11:29-32; Luke 12:41-48). In the unending ages of the ages “there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning,

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or crying or pain; the first things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4b, NASB). By His astonishing mercy and grace the days of discipline unto transformation will be over. There will be no more curse and we will serve Him and see His face. His name will be on our foreheads, and we will live in His light and reign to the ages of the ages (Rev. 22:3-5).

Imagine a father who runs a great business enterprise. His heart longs that his children mature and prove themselves responsible so that they may run the family business with him. In the same way, God now longs that we would grow up in all things in Christ (Eph. 4:15) and be responsible servants, willingly serving Him now and ruling with Him in the ages to come. Let us grow to maturity, standing upon the firm foundation of our eternal security in Christ. Let us count the sufferings of this present and strategic time not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in us and unto us (Rom. 8:18). Let us then fulfill our responsibility to the cursed creation that is waiting with anxious longing to be liberated from the bondage of the curse at the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18-23). So, let us “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1, NASB).

May the Lord bless every reader with a “spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Eph. 1:17-18) that each may stand on a firm foundation of truth and walk in a way pleasing to his Lord. “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).

About the Author

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