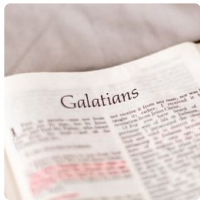


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Galatians 3:1 - 3:18



Galatians - Steve Gregg

In this commentary on Galatians 3:1-18, Steve Gregg discusses the idea that true obedience to God comes from a heart filled with love and gratitude, rather than rigid adherence to laws and ordinances. He urges listeners to focus on developing a relationship with Christ and seeking to live a holy life through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Gregg also emphasizes that salvation comes through faith in Jesus, rather than through religious rituals or works. Overall, his message encourages a deeper understanding and practice of true Christian faith.

Transcript

We're turning now to Galatians chapter 3, and I love the book of Galatians. When I come to chapter 3, I'm inclined to say this is probably my favorite chapter in Galatians, but then when we come to chapter 4, I'll look at that again and say, no, maybe this one is, and then I know the same will happen about chapter 5 and 6 as well. Chapters 1 and 2 are excellent chapters, but they don't have quite as much depth of theology.

They engage because it is mainly Paul's autobiography. It is autobiographical information with a purpose to establish a theological point, and also to defend the credibility of his ministry, which is very important. There's nothing in Galatians that I don't have great enjoyment in reading.

But when we get to chapter 3, we turn to that portion where he gets into the theological part. Now, I love theology, and I love practical aspects of the scriptures. Some people prefer just the practical, some prefer more the intellectual, the theological stuff.

I think I like both about equally. And in the shorter letters of Paul, he often divides the theological section and the practical section about in half. I mentioned before, Colossians is half theological.

The first half has theological propositions, the second half has practical applications. Ephesians is the same way, just half and half. The first three chapters are theological, the last three chapters are practical.

Romans divides up a little disproportionately more theology than practical in Romans, but that's because of the special purpose of it having been written. Galatians gives about equal portions also to the theological propositions and defense of those propositions, which is in chapters 3 and 4, and the practical application, which is in chapters 5 and 6. And so we come now to the beginning of his theological argument. He's already, of course, made his theological points in the first two chapters, but he has not argued the points so much as he will now.

He says, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain? If indeed they are, it was all in vain. Therefore, he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Now, at least a couple of times he calls these people foolish.

In verse 1 and again in verse 3. And we know that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, whoever says to his brother, thou fool, is in danger of the judgment. And whoever says, Raca, is in danger of hell fire. This has perplexed some people, how Jesus could make such a strong statement about those who speak of other people as fools, and yet Paul uses the term foolish, which, I mean, to call someone a foolish Galatian is to call them a fool of sorts.

And even Jesus himself spoke of blind guides and fools among the Pharisees. So how do we work this out? Well, this actually has more to do with our study of the Sermon on the Mount and its meaning than with what Paul means here. He means exactly what he says here.

Hearing Galatians, he means they're fools. I guess the question is, what did Jesus mean when he said that it's not good to call someone a fool? And if we could just briefly dispense with that, since that's a problem in the minds of some people. I believe that when Jesus said that if you call your brother a fool, you're in danger of the judgment, he did not mean that the word fool itself is such a harsh word or such a blasphemous word that somehow it condemns its user to hell fire.

But he's talking about the attitude of the heart. It's under the context of, you've heard that it was said, you should not murder. And whosoever murders shall stand before the judgment, being in danger of the judgment.

He said, but I say to you, whoever is angry at his brother without a cause, whoever calls his brother fool, whoever calls his brother a rocker, this also is worthy of judgment. This also is bad, like murder is bad. And what Jesus is pointing out is it's the attitude of the heart, not just the outward act of murder.

Now, calling someone fool, in the sense that he refers to, speaks of it out of anger and hatred and so forth, which is, of course, related to the motives behind murder. He's basically saying it's not just murder that's bad, it's all those murderous attitudes, all those attitudes of hatred and anger and so forth that cause people to move in the direction of committing murder, even if they don't go so far as to do so. Those attitudes are the sin, not just the act of murder.

Now, Paul and Jesus, when they refer to people as fools, we have to understand they're using the same word, essentially, that Jesus said was a bad thing to use in the Sermon on the Mount, but we have to understand that in the Sermon on the Mount he was talking about one's attitude, one's hatred and so forth, toward a person. And Paul obviously has no hatred for these people, he's simply pointing out that they're behaving as fools, that what they're saying or what they're doing is not in accord with wisdom. In the Book of Proverbs, a great number of people are defined as fools.

The fool has said in his heart there's no God, for example, and the fool is frequently described and defined in the Book of Proverbs. It is not wrong for Solomon to refer to certain people in certain categories as fools, because there is definitely a mindset that is foolish, as opposed to that which is wise. And Paul is trying to shame the Galatians into realizing that they're not thinking.

They're behaving foolishly. In fact, he even suggests they've been bewitched. Now, I don't know to what degree we should take Paul literally here when he says, who has bewitched you? He may be quite literal.

Legalism is, of course, the problem they were engaged in. They were wrapped up in a legalism in their approach to their Christian lives. And to call this having been bewitched would suggest that legalism is spiritual.

It's like an evil spirit. And that perhaps people have some witches somewhere, have cursed them, have sent some spiritual opposition against them. Now, Paul may not mean this literally.

He may be using the word bewitched more figuratively. It's as if you're in a trance. It's as if you are hypnotized without meaning that they literally are.

We could possibly use such language without being overly literal in our meaning. However, legalism is hard to define, because two people may live exactly the same kind of life in terms of outward conduct, and one be a legalist and one not. A holy life is what everyone's supposed to live, and legalism is what some people use to try to live a holy life.

They bring themselves under laws and ordinances imposed outwardly, but focusing on the outward behavior without having the right motivation and without having the

essential thing that God considers to be the essence of holiness, which is love. It is possible to be like a Pharisee, to outwardly keep every rule God ever made, but to have no love for God and no love for people, and therefore violating the two greatest rules God made, which have nothing to do, or I shouldn't say have nothing to do, but are not primarily to do with keeping ordinances and things like that, but have to do with loving people and loving God and doing the things that love would naturally dictate. Now, the difference between a walk in the Spirit and a legalistic kind of holiness is a spiritual difference, and it may well be that people who are bound up in legalism are in fact bound up in a spiritual deception.

It is a spiritual deception. It may be even demonic. I'm not saying that such people are demon-possessed.

It doesn't require a person to be demon-possessed in order to experience demonic deception. And I personally believe that if a person, well, let me just say this, everyone perhaps, every Christian has their moments where they lapse into a momentary legalistic attitude towards something or another, at least in their early years of their Christian walk. I'm sure this is almost universal.

But there are certain people you meet that are just continually prone to live in total self-condemnation and condemning others to because of the total misapplication of the biblical teaching about holiness. And these people had been deceived. They were being foolish.

He thought maybe they'd even been bewitched. Maybe there was a demon deluding them. Maybe there was some kind of spiritual warfare going on in the Galatian region between those occult pagans that dominated the area and the Christians.

However, I don't know to what degree Paul is trying to tell us that legalism really is the result of a demonic thing. It could be in some cases. The problem here is that they weren't bewitched by witches.

The people that had seduced them or perverted them were the ones who were actually Jews, who would not ever practice sorcery or witchcraft, but they were Jews who tried to bring them under the law as well as under the gospel. And therefore, it is not witchcraft per se or sorcery per se that had led them astray, but it might be equally demonic. Judaism, as practiced by the Pharisees, could easily be very demonic because it was self-righteous, it was prideful.

These are all very demonic attitudes, although we sometimes don't think of them as such. But these things are totally incompatible with the Christian life. These people had been evangelized by Paul and had begun well.

The churches had had a good start, but now the Judaizers are coming after Paul and

said, OK, that's a start, but you really can't get any further than you are now in your Christian life without taking care of some unfinished business, like get yourself circumcised, start taking seriously the law of Moses and keeping that. And so these people were young enough in the Lord and foolish enough, according to Paul, to believe this. They had, as he said in chapter one, so quickly turned.

He says in verse six of chapter one, I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, a perverted gospel. Someone else had come along with a different angle on salvation. Now, we have reason to believe that the Judaizers were not denouncing Christ.

The Judaizers were not saying, oh, this Jesus, he was a false messiah, you need to come into Judaism to be saved. These were people who were trying to affix something to Christ. They were not saying that Christ was not good.

They were just saying that he wasn't good enough without adding to that a great deal of legal observances. Now, even, I'm sure everyone in this room has moments where they have a hard time understanding, well, what is legalism, then, and what is just, you know, obedience? You know, what's the difference between just being obedient to God and being legalistic? And that is why I think the spirit more than anything, because, I mean, two people can live exactly identical lives outwardly, and one being, have a really wrong spirit about it, and one have a right spirit. Obedience to God, as the Bible calls us to, is that which comes from God having written his laws on our hearts.

He's having converted us, having given us his spirit, who then produces in us a change of our orientation from self to God. It's the Holy Spirit's presence also produces the fruit of the spirit, which is love for God and for one another, and as a result of this, there's no way that a person who's walking in the joy and in the peace and in the love of the Holy Spirit cannot live a life obedient to God. Obedience simply springs happily and effortlessly, more or less, from such a life.

I say more or less because there are times of temptation where obedience is still a bit of a struggle. There's war. You know, there's resistance.

We have to resist the devil. And if we don't resist the devil, then obedience isn't that easy. And even while we're resisting, it's not always the easiest thing in the world, but the difference between the person who resists the devil in the spirit and the person who resists the devil simply because he's legalist is that the one who's in the spirit is not doing so out of terror for his salvation, as if by resisting this temptation, I'm going to secure now my salvation.

The Christian rests in the fact that Jesus has saved us, and our obedience to God is the outworking of our love for him and our gratitude toward him. Now, it may be that some of us believe you can lose your salvation. Some here may not believe that, and that's

okay, too.

There are different kinds of views on that among Christians. Some of us may in fact believe you can lose your salvation, but that doesn't mean that I suspect when I'm fighting against a particular temptation that if I lose this one battle, I'm going to lose my salvation, too. I mean, I believe that I could lose many battles against temptation without having lost my salvation, but I'm not willing to do that.

I'm not willing to lose those battles, and I'm battling not out of fear that I have to save myself by my obedience, but I'm doing it because it matters to me to please God. It matters to me not to do the thing that grieves God because I have a different heart as a result of regeneration. Chuck Smith, my former pastor, had a really wonderful illustration he used.

I always found it very impressive. It comes actually out of Greek mythology. Many of you probably know enough about Greek mythology to know about the island of the sirens.

The sirens were women. I don't know enough about them to know whether they were cannibals or what they were, but they were murderous women. And they lived on this island according to Greek mythology, and they were singers, and their voices were so beautiful that no man could resist the siren call.

You've probably heard this used figuratively. People type up the siren call of this or the siren call of that, something that is irresistible. Well, it comes from this myth that the siren's song was irresistible.

If anyone would hear it, they simply could not resist. They would be forced to turn their ship inward toward the land. They'd be drawn to this island where the sirens were singing.

However, under the water in the shallows off the island, there were these sharp rocks which would dash ships to pieces, and then I don't recall what became of the sailors then. I don't remember if the sirens ate them or what, but the sirens knew they were luring them into their death. These were very murderous, wicked women.

In any case, people who listened to the siren's song, generally speaking, didn't survive to tell the tale. In fact, it's hard to know how the reputation of the sirens got around, because I don't know how this is how myths break down. But generally speaking, anyone who heard the siren's song wouldn't live to tell the tale.

But in the mythology of the Greeks, there are two men who actually did survive, having heard the sirens sing. One of them was Ulysses, of course one of the main heroes of the Iliad. He insisted that he was going to hear that siren's song and he was going to live.

And he was sailing his ship in the region of the sirens, and he put wax in the ears of all of

his crew. And he had them tie him securely to the mast of his ship, so that he couldn't move and couldn't free himself. He didn't have wax in his ears, and he was able to hear, but all of his crew had wax in their ears.

And he told them, no matter how much I struggle, no matter how much I appear to be giving orders for you to let me go, ignore me altogether, because I will be not in my right mind, but when we go near the island of the sirens, I'm going to hear their song, and we'll go by safely. And sure enough, they came within range, and they began to hear, I mean, Ulysses heard the song of the sirens, and he struggled, and he fought, and he said, turn in, turn in, but his sailors had wax in their ears, they couldn't hear him, and so they eventually sailed beyond the range, and they couldn't hear it anymore, and they could take the wax out of their ears, take the ropes off him, and he is the first man who heard the siren's song and lived to tell the tale. The other man who did it was Orpheus, who was, in Greek mythology, a famous musician, and he also was sailing on a ship near the island of the sirens, and as they got near, and the siren's song began to waft across the waves and reach the ears of the men on the ship, and they began to turn in, Orpheus pulled out his instrument and began to play, and he played a song more beautiful than that of the sirens.

So that those who were being allured into their doom by the siren's song actually ignored the siren's song, and were more enraptured with the tune that Orpheus played, so that they also sailed on beyond to the place of safety. Now I love that story, because to me it is such a marvelous picture of the two ways in which people try to resist sin in their lives, and try to live a holy life. Everybody has motions towards sin, everybody has a flesh, everybody is attacked by the devil, everybody lives in a world that is setting on our moral destruction.

The Bible says there is no temptation taking you, but such is as common to man. Everyone has the same temptations you do, but not everybody handles them the same way. There are three ways people handle temptation.

One is the way that most sailors handled the siren's song. They crashed and burned. They didn't resist, and they died.

And that's the way that I suppose the majority of people in the world respond to temptation. Others are like Ulysses. They strap themselves against their will to a system of morals, to a legalistic religious pattern that they must observe.

And no matter how much they feel drawn, and how much they really want to sin, they won't let themselves do it. They may be screaming out, I want to sin, I want to sin, but they can't because they bound themselves to their legalistic code of conduct, and they manage in many cases to avoid the sins that others do not manage to avoid, and seem to be spiritually safe for that reason. But Orpheus is more a model of, I think, what Jesus has in mind for us.

That when sin begins to make its appeal to us, our love for Jesus is what appeals to us more. The song of salvation, the song that Jesus represents, the beauty of holiness, presents itself to us as a stronger incentive than the motive of instant gratification of our flesh. And because we love God, and we find the song of the Lamb more alluring than the song of the enemy, then this is the way that God intends for us to overcome temptation.

He doesn't want us to be strapped to a bunch of rules, that we simply are not at liberty to do what we want to. We really want to sin, but we just can't because we've got these rules. He wants our hearts changed.

He wants us to want holiness, and love holiness, and be more attracted to holiness, than to sin. And unfortunately, when a lot of preachers deal with Galatians chapter 3, or Galatians as a whole, they often, in order to avoid legalism, will go the other way and say, you know, it doesn't matter what you do. It's just believing in Jesus.

It doesn't matter. You're saved by grace, not by works, and therefore don't worry about struggling against sin and all that stuff. That's just a big pain in the neck.

If you sin, you're still saved, and don't worry about it. That's not quite the message of Galatians. That is sometimes the message that I've heard people preach, based on what they think Galatians means.

A lot of them say, by grace, therefore, it's almost like, let's continue in sin, that grace may abound. Which, of course, Paul raised as a question, and then roundly denounced. He said, shall we continue in sin, because we're under grace, not in works? God forbid.

No way. Because he said, whoever you yield your members to, as servants to obey, his slave you are. And what he's saying is, you show, whether you're a slave of God or a slave of sin, by who you yield yourselves to.

And if you have been in rapture with God, and with Jesus, with his holiness, and with his way, then sin will still, you'll hear it. You'll hear its call. It'll have an appeal.

It'll tug at you a little bit. But if you focus on Jesus, and you remember him, and you get the vision for being like Jesus, and being holy, and so forth, not the vision for living up to some religious standard, but to pleasing God, then that's a very different thing, a different experience. Both Ulysses and Orpheus got past the sirens successfully, but in a very different spirit, in a very different manner.

And I think that it's that subtle difference that Paul would have the Galatians understand, that they are seeking to be made perfect through fleshly effort, not by having a changed heart, not by a spiritual transformation, but by the employment of physical means of obeying certain rules, and so forth. And this is not what God has in mind. If anything, it is an insult to God, because it suggests that by keeping certain rules, I really can be good

enough, and if that's the case, then I'm kind of insulting God's intelligence for sending Jesus.

If I could be good enough and get saved without him, why did God make such a blunder as to send Jesus to die, and pay such a price for that which could have been obtained at a cheaper fee, like my works? Anyway, this is what Paul is up to. Also, of course, there's another angle here, because the particular legalism of the Galatians was not just good works in general, but specifically the works of the Law of Moses. And the Law of Moses, as Paul understood it, was of God, and it served its purpose for a time.

And he goes into this later on in this chapter about how the law served a purpose to lead us to Christ, but isn't needed anymore now. And the real problem here with keeping these laws is that it focuses on that which is not real, and neglects that which is real. Now, when I say not real, the laws, the ceremonial laws, were not based on any real moral absolutes.

They were ceremonial symbols of something that was more real that was coming. And once it comes, if you ignore what came and keep going with the symbols, then you're really losing out on something essential. Look over at Colossians 2. Colossians 2, verses 16 and 17.

Paul said, Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival, or a new moon, or Sabbath. These are all ceremonial laws. Food ordinances, festivals, new moon, Sabbath.

Which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Now, a substance can cast a shadow. And if you're out on a sunny day, and if you're made of something, then you'll cast a shadow.

In fact, even if you're not a person, a table or a chair will cast a shadow, a tree will cast a shadow. Whatever has substance and reality can cast a shadow, but a shadow is not reality. A shadow isn't anything at all.

A shadow is just the absence of light. It's not a thing. And what Paul is saying is that these ceremonial laws, they weren't anything at all.

Like a shadow, they bear the vague image of the real thing, but they aren't the thing itself. They simply bear testimony to the existence of the real thing. If you see a shadow, but you've not yet seen who's casting it, like someone comes up behind you, and the sun's behind you too, and you see their shadow before you see them, you know they're there.

But not because you think that shadow is anything at all. You know that that shadow is bearing witness to the presence of something that's solid, something real. And it would be crazy if you began to have a conversation with that person and just looked at the

shadow the whole time, as if you're conversing with the shadow.

The shadow isn't anything. You turn to the person, and once you turn to the person, you become oblivious to the shadow. And to focus on that which is a shadow is to miss what is real, and in this case, what is real is Christ.

The body is of Christ. The shadow is the ceremonial laws that simply bore witness, symbolically, to things about Christ. And for us to feel like we have to focus on these shadows is to focus the wrong direction.

Because when you have any kind of ceremonial religion, in this case it was the Jewish religion, which was ordained by God, but other religions have their ceremonies too. Churches have their ceremonies. Whenever you have a ceremonial religion, if you are concerned about the ceremonies at all, then you are too concerned about them.

And by that I mean they become much too important, if they have any importance. I believe, for example, that people can get really bound up in certain traditions of church. It's important to them that we have the song service before the sermon.

What if we just had the sermon and there was no song service first? Some people would be bothered by that all through the whole service. Well, we didn't have our singing yet. We're supposed to have the singing first.

Or what if they didn't open with prayer? My goodness, how unspiritual that would be viewed. Suppose we had a meeting and we didn't open with prayer. Well, let me ask you, does the Bible say that meetings are supposed to be opened with prayer? I'm not aware of it.

Obviously, prayer is always a good thing, and therefore I'm not opposed to opening meetings with prayer or praying 10 times during the meeting or at the end. But it's customary is all it is. It's customary.

And what if we thought that because the pastor forgot to pray at the opening of the service, God isn't here? Somehow we're not meeting the requirements now. I mean, instead of focusing on Jesus, which is what they're to focus on, we'd be all caught up in these shadow things, these ceremonies. And I'm not saying that prayer is nothing but a ceremony, but the requirement that there be a prayer at the beginning of the meeting and to insist that it's not a meeting unless we've had a prayer at the beginning is ceremonial.

I mean, that's getting caught up in ritual. Many of the things that are rituals are good things in themselves, but when they become ritualistic, so that they become necessary to, well, I mean, take eating cleaner and clean foods. There are Christians today who restrict their diet to clean foods.

I've got no problem with that. Paul didn't even have any problem with that. He said so in Romans 14.

But one of them is not that God requires it or that it matters to God. That's not one of the reasons for eating kosher foods. If you do it for health or you do it to avoid stumbling someone, that's a good reason to eat only kosher foods.

But to think that that's important to God is to miss the point. These things were a shadow, the substances of Christ. And what Paul is concerned about is that those who are looking at circumcision, ceremonial law and so forth, they're getting caught up in religiosity instead of Jesus.

And I'm telling you, man, this thing is insidious. This religiosity thing. It is so hard for Christians to avoid it themselves.

I mean, you know, if someone hasn't been to our church for three weeks and you find out they haven't actually been to any church for three weeks because they've been working on Sundays or something like that, to get concerned that somehow they're not meeting their obligations before God because they've missed church. Well, where in the Bible does it say how often a person is supposed to go to church? Churches don't forsake the assembling of these folks together. It's the custom of some.

How frequent is assembly supposed to be? Daily? It wasn't in Acts chapter two. They met daily. Weekly? We don't have any reference to weekly meetings in the Bible.

Weekly is not bad. But I mean, to make that a rule by which we judge, oh, my spiritual life is down the tubes because I've had to work the past three Sundays and haven't been able to make it to church, is to miss the point. Going to church, doing church things, is not what makes you a Christian.

There may be great value and is great value in going to some churches. I say some because some churches I'm not sure there's any value in going to, but there are some that I do believe there's tremendous value. Good teaching, good worship, good fellowship in the works.

That's all good stuff. But to say that I've missed it, therefore God must be displeased, I'm probably not a very good Christian now. Well, maybe you're not.

It depends on why you missed it. But if you missed it because you're trying to stay away from fellowship and trying to avoid worship of God, then there is a problem. But that's not how you decide whether you're a Christian or not, or whether you're doing the right thing, or whether God's pleased with you.

How many church services did I go to in the last month? How close have I stayed to Jesus? Has every moment of every day been consciously lived in the presence of God

with the desire to please Him and to let His Spirit do His work in me and through me toward others and so forth? I mean, relationships with others is a much bigger indicator of spirituality than any ritual is. And so, this is so common, I'm afraid. And so this is what Paul, I think, is really concerned about.

Paul is not a very religious guy. I think it's wise for everyone to go to church. I mean, if you're 20 years old, 50 years old, and the Lord, I think it's wise to go to church.

I mean, Christians need fellowship. Younger Christians very often need it far more. I mean, obviously, if I miss church some Sunday, I'm not going to backslide because of it.

But if I got saved yesterday and missed church for a few weeks and didn't have fellowship anywhere else either, I'm going to be hurting probably. But see, this is a good example, Dave, of what I'm talking about. Because something is good and commendable and helpful, the tendency is to make it a religious norm and to make it a religious necessity for spirituality.

Suppose a guy got saved and his heart was totally with the Lord and he was strong, he was like the Apostle Paul from the day of his conversion, you know. But his circumstances prevented him from going to church. Or let's say a woman.

A woman gets saved and her husband refuses to let her go to church. But she loves God with all her heart and she's aflame for God from the day she gets saved. But she doesn't go to church very often.

I mean, if we were to say, well, listen, because new Christians need fellowship and fellowship is good for people and you get fellowship at church, new Christians should always go to as many church meetings as possible. And then we begin to judge whether a new Christian is really okay with God by how many church meetings they went to. That's a problem because it wouldn't work in some cases.

Anything that won't work in some cases can't be universal. Anything that's normative Christianity has to work in every case. And wherever you can find something, some obligation that some Christian in some circumstance could never meet because they're in jail or they're in the middle of the desert and can't get baptized or whatever, there's some kind of a, whenever there's something that some circumstance could prevent some person from being able to do it, that can't be part of the universal requirements that God has on people.

The one thing that God requires is what everyone can do. And that is love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and love their neighbors and stuff and do what they know to do and can do to please God. I mean, this is the normative walk in the spirit, I believe.

But, Dave, I don't want to say that you shouldn't encourage new Christians to go to

church. I would certainly, I always do. I mean, I try to get them to go to church as much as possible.

But one of the problems I see is that we quickly begin to identify church attendance or frequency of church attendance even as the barometer of whether a person is backsliding or not. And that's not a safe bet. I mean, I know a lot of people who don't go to church very often, not because they're backslidden, but because the churches are backslidden.

I mean, the people there in question are sometimes as on fire for God as anything you'll ever meet. But there's a whole different reasons. There's a lot of different reasons why people can't or don't do all the same things that are good to do.

The best barometer to see if someone is backsliding is to see whether they're... Well, first of all, we can't see clearly as much as they can. I think it's up to them to judge themselves. Paul says, examine your own selves and see if you're in the faith.

He didn't say first examine others to see if they are. But the best way to examine yourself is to say, well, OK, I haven't been doing as many religious things as I used to do. Do I still love God with all my heart? I mean, it does every day.

Is everything I'm doing motivated by my desire to please God? And are the things I am doing, in fact, the kinds of things that the Bible says pleases God? There's another question there. It's not just, am I motivated by desire to please God? I know a lot of new age people say, oh yeah, I just want to please God all the time. But they don't let God tell them what pleases Him.

They decide to do what their hunch is that God would like. Whatever their instincts or glands tell them God would like. But obviously, in addition to looking at the heart, you have to look at how the heart is expressing its desire.

If my desire, if I can look at myself and say everything I have, I have because I think God wants me to have it. If He wanted me to get rid of any of it, I'd be very happy to do so because He is everything to me and none of these things are anything to me. Every decision I make, every career decision, every educational decision, every expenditure I make, if something in the back of my mind is, this is what God wants me to do, I believe it is.

I'm doing this because I believe God wants me to. And I can check with Scripture and find out that it agrees. And if I say, yeah, okay, this is the kind of thing God wants me to do, then that is much more, I mean, that's different than a bunch of religious things.

The Bible, you can often tell that someone is growing cold in their love for Jesus by the fact that they stop going to church so often. But the fact that they stop going to church so often is not the real indicator more than anything. It may be one of the symptoms.

The real problem is that their love for God is growing cold and their love for the brethren, and maybe they're trying to conceal something from the brethren because they're living in sin that's more compromised than they used to be in their life and they're afraid they're coming to the light. There's maybe a number of reasons. All I'm saying is that what we consider to be the essence of Christianity is something much, much simpler than any religious system, Christian or otherwise, has ever imagined.

It is simply loving Jesus, doing what pleases Him, and having Him below to your life. See, when Jesus' disciples violated the Sabbath, when they took grain in their hands and rubbed it and ate it, they were accused of violating the Sabbath, and Jesus didn't say they hadn't. Jesus didn't say to the Christians, no way, guys, they haven't violated the Sabbath, they just violated your uptight traditions about the Sabbath.

Jesus didn't argue that way. He just said, haven't you heard what David did? David violated the law, too. I mean, He basically took it for granted that His disciples did violate the Sabbath, but David did, too.

And why don't you condemn him? I mean, it's interesting that Jesus never suggested that His disciples didn't violate the Sabbath, but what He said was, however, the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath day. Which means that He is the Lord every day, including the Sabbath, and so long as my disciples are doing what I want them to do, which is the essence of my Lordship in their life, it doesn't matter whether it's the Sabbath day or any other day. The Sabbath is irrelevant, as well as any other ceremonial thing is irrelevant.

What matters is whether I'm the Lord of their life today. I'm the Lord even of the Sabbath. And that means that even on the Sabbath, the only concern my disciples have to have is whether they're doing what pleases Jesus today.

And if plucking grain and eating it is technically a violation of what the ceremonial law said should be done, well, the more important thing is this is what Jesus wants me to do. Now, anyway, this is the other part. There's two parts of the legalism of the Galatians.

One is simply the generic legalisticness of it, that they were interpreting spirituality in terms of imposed works. The other part was that the particular imposed works they were committed to were the works of the Jewish ceremonial law, which, of course, the reason for Paul's concern was that these things are distractions from Jesus. They're not helps to spirituality, they're distractions.

You begin to look at these things, the shadow, and you miss the substance. And so this is his concern here. Now, he says in verse 2, this only I want to learn from you, did you receive the spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? And there's a similar question in verse 5, therefore he who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Both of these questions are the same question, really, I mean, of sorts.

One is, how did you receive the spirit? The other is, how have the works of the spirit been done among you? Has it been through legalism or has it been through faith alone? Now, the answer to this would be quite simple for them, because the Holy Spirit came to them through Paul's ministry. Paul preached the gospel to them, they received Christ, they were filled with the spirit. The works of the spirit were done among them both through Paul's ministry and no doubt after his departure as well, the Holy Spirit continued to do marvelous works.

These are what Paul must mean in verse 1 when he says, before your eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified. Paul's preaching was clear and the demonstration of the power of the spirit was proof of his way of preaching. Christ was clearly portrayed among them as the crucified Christ that Paul preached.

But, you know, they received all of this without having gotten circumcised, because Paul didn't require them to get circumcised. Furthermore, they received it without having to go to synagogues on Sabbath days and without having to abstain from unclean foods. What he says is, listen, how did you receive the spirit anyway? You recall you did receive the spirit.

What did you have to do to do that? Did you have to keep the law? Not as I recall, you didn't keep the law. You simply believed the gospel. I preached the gospel and you heard it with faith and the hearing of faith caused you to receive the Holy Spirit and has caused ever since the Holy Spirit's work to be done among you.

The Christian life is the work of the spirit and this has been done through faith, not by you doing the works of the law. Now, the point he's making is, well, listen, what did you lack that you have to add the law for? I mean, what you got from God through faith was the spirit of God and the working of miracles and so forth by the spirit of God. I mean, what more is it you want? And how are you going to get it if not by the same means that you got what you already have? He says in verse three, Are you so foolish having begun in the spirit? Are you now being made perfect in the flesh? And by that, he means that, listen, if you start keeping the law, that is the work of the flesh and receiving the spirit by faith, that's the work of the spirit.

The question is, who's doing this Christian life? You or God? That's really the issue. Who's living the Christian life? If you are, then it's flesh. And Jesus himself said in John chapter six, he says, it's the spirit that gives life to flesh, profits nothing.

If you're just doing this in your own strength, you just had to adopt a religious idea called Christianity that came ready equipped with a set of morals that you have to keep and certain rituals like you've got to read your Bible. You've got to pray a certain amount every day. You've got to go to church a certain number of times per month.

You've got to give a certain percentage of your money to the church. You've got to

witness so many people per year. I mean, these rules are all built in and you've got all this.

And you're just doing it in your own strength, the same way you live your life before you're a Christian. Whatever you're doing, you did in your own strength. Now you're just doing this in your own strength.

You're doing it in the flesh. And by the way, circumcision and dietary laws, there's nothing spiritual about that. It doesn't require inspiration or power from the Holy Spirit to abstain from pork, chocolate maybe, but pork, no.

And, you know, it's not particularly a spiritual thing. It's something anyone can do. A pagan can do it.

A pagan can restrict his diet. A pagan can circumcise his foreskin. A pagan can keep certain festivals.

If a pagan can do it as well as you can do it, then there's nothing particularly spiritual or Christian about it. It's flesh. Anyone without the spirit can do it.

There's nothing distinctively Christian in it. Now, on the other hand, holiness. A pagan can't do that.

The Holy Spirit alone can produce holiness. And yet, if you walk in the spirit and your life exhibits a holy conduct where you love righteousness and hate evil, but you love evil people. I mean, in other words, there's another mark of legalism versus grace in the life.

A person walking in the spirit will hate evil, but a legalist will hate evil and they'll hate evil people too because they threaten them. You know what? I think partly a legalist because his heart, he's just bound to the master's ship. His heart is still with the siren.

His heart is after the siren. And he kind of resents those who aren't bound to the master's ship who get to go see the siren. I mean, it's a jealousy thing.

You can tell a person is a legalist in their behavior by the fact that they get jealous secretly in their hearts. And sometimes it's exhibited in condemnation and criticism and hatred of people and self-righteousness and so forth. That they're jealous of people who are doing the things that they're not doing.

Now, if you're jealous of someone who's doing something you're not doing, you must want to be doing that too. You're just not letting yourself. Let's just say your neighbor is not living a very holy life or someone in your church is not living a very holy life.

Maybe they're not even saved, but they're there and they're not living a holy life. If you are resentful toward them and spiteful and gossipy toward them and so forth and condemning toward them, then the likelihood is that you're angry because you can't do

the things they seem to be getting away with. If you love holiness, you'll pity them.

When you look at someone who's in sin and that's not what you want for your life, you don't hate them, you pity them. You want to reach them. I mean, it's the total different attitude between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The Pharisees loved sin but wouldn't allow themselves to do it. Jesus loved holiness and didn't allow himself to sin either. But Jesus loved sinners and the Pharisees didn't.

They couldn't. Sinners were too much of a threat. Because they were doing the things that the Pharisees really wished they could do too, but their religion wouldn't let them.

There's a lot of people living their Christian life that way too. They're in the flesh. What they have done, they've done in the flesh.

There's no spiritual change in their life. There's no spiritual orientation. There's no walking in the power and the love and the fruit of the Spirit.

It's just religion. And because it's religion, they resent having to do it, but they can't bring themselves to give it up. It's like Hannah Whitehall Smith said in the beginning of her book, *A Christian Secret of a Happy Life*, she said that she was told by a non-Christian, she said, you Christians remind me of somebody who's got a splitting headache.

It hurts you to keep your head, but you don't dare part with it. And that's how it is with your Christianity. It makes your life miserable to be a Christian, but you don't dare give it up.

Anyway, that's flesh. If you began in the Spirit, you're not going to be made perfect in the flesh. If God worked a work of His Spirit at your conversion, He intends for your entire sanctification to take place through the same power.

Now, the hard thing here, and this is why I think so many preachers just kind of opt for a total antinomianism when dealing with Galatians, because Paul is speaking so harshly against legalism. Most people, the only alternative to legalism they know is antinomianism. Well, just don't worry about sin.

Don't worry about holiness. I mean, you're saved by grace. Don't worry about the way you live.

I mean, no one's perfect. I mean, that is antinomianism, and that is what a lot of people do with Galatians. Paul doesn't do that with Galatians.

Paul is for holiness. Paul is for a faith that works through love. And you don't have to swing between legalism and antinomianism as the two options.

What normal Christianity is holiness, and the problem here is it looks so much like legalism to somebody who doesn't have a holy heart. If you have a holy heart and you're living a holy life, people who don't have a holy heart are going to look at you and think you're a legalist. Initially, at least.

They'll think, oh, you're just too hard on yourself. You're not free. Well, you're free because you're doing exactly what you want to do.

That's freedom. But you want to live a holy life, and that's why you're doing it. They don't want to, and so they think you're a legalist.

But the distinction between legalism and holiness is simply in some of these spiritual areas. Is a person interpreting his holiness in terms of religious things he's doing? How does he feel about people who aren't doing it? Is he jealous of them, or does he pity them? Honestly, I mean, now, everyone's going to say, oh, I pity them, because that sounds so condescending and so right-minded. But honestly, I think an awful lot of Christians secretly envy sinners.

The Bible specifically says don't envy sinners in the Psalms, but I think Christians do, because they know enough to make them afraid of hell, but they don't love God enough to make them hate sin. And hatred of sin is not legalism. Hatred of sin is being like Christ, being like Paul, being like a Christian.

Legalism is where you don't particularly have the work of the Spirit working in you a hatred of sin and a love for holiness, but you commit yourself to holiness of outward conduct because it's just something you do in the flesh. There's no work of the Spirit corresponding. And you seek to make your life holier by adding flesh things that you can do, fleshly religious things that you can do in your natural strength.

Paul says in verse 4, Have you suffered so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain? Now, have you suffered so many things in vain, must refer to initially when Paul first evangelized them, there was persecution among them, and they had suffered for the gospel's sake, and they'd witnessed Paul's suffering in their midst for the gospel's sake. But now he says it's all been vain. If you're going to turn away from Christianity, all that suffering, you paid the price, but you didn't get the product.

I mean, it's a shame to suffer in vain. It is possible for your sufferings to be worthless, and that's a shame because the Bible indicates that sufferings can be precious, but the trial of your faith being much more precious than if gold that perishes, though it be charred with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The trying of your faith, the testing, is precious, but it can be worthless, depending on your response to it.

Suffering can be the means by which God sanctifies you, or it can be the means by which

you just pay the price out of stubborn religiosity and never really grow and never become closer to God by it. These people had suffered, but now it was all in vain if they were drifting away, rather than being made more firm in their loyalty to the gospel by their suffering. We conclude verse five.

Let's go to verse six. Just as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now, this verse, of course, is familiar to us.

It's quoted in Romans. It's quoted in James. I believe it even appears in the book of Hebrews, and originally it's found in Genesis 15 and verse six.

And Paul uses it a great deal because it makes an important point about how a man is right before God, how a man can be justified before God. The way to be justified before God is to be counted righteous by God. And here, fortunately, we have a direct statement of the Old Testament Scripture about how a man was counted righteous by believing God.

That is, by faith he was justified. Now, Abraham makes a very good example, too, because he lived before the law. So here's a man who was justified by God, just as we hope to be, but he never kept the law.

He did get circumcised because God told him to do that, but that was not part of his justification. He was actually declared to be justified in chapter 15 of Genesis, but not circumcised until chapter 17. So that his justification was independent of circumcision or of keeping any laws.

It was just based upon his faith in God. And this is what Paul's pointing out. He says, you who have received the Spirit, you didn't receive that through the works of the law, but through the hearing of faith, just as Abraham believed God.

And it was imputed to him for righteousness. So Abraham is the role model for us or the prototype of the man who is righteous before God. In the rest of this chapter, practically, Paul spends his time pointing out that even though the law has come around since the time of Abraham, it hasn't changed the means by which men are justified.

The advent of the law did not introduce a new means of justification. We'll read on here. Verse seven.

Therefore, know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham and the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the nations or Gentiles by faith, preach the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying in you, all the nations shall be blessed. That quote, of course, is from the earliest recorded words to Abraham in Genesis 12, three. In what we call the Abrahamic covenant, God said that in Abram, all the nations shall be blessed.

Now notice what Paul says in these two verses. Verse 70 says only those who are of

faith. Now, by the way, *only* is in italics in the New King James.

So you might have a Bible that doesn't say *only*, and that's fine, but it is implied. What Paul is saying is those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. No more, no less.

Now, realize that there's a lot of people in Paul's day and in ours, too, who would claim to be sons of Abraham, but didn't have any faith in Christ. These are people that are called Jews. Jews who are not believers in Christ are not sons of Abraham, according to Paul.

Those who are of the faith are the children of Abraham. And Paul develops this out later because, of course, the Gentiles have been approached, these Galatians have been approached by Jewish Christians who profess to have something superior. They profess to have a more advanced form of Christianity that the Galatians have not yet heard of, that they have to add these legalistic things in order to have a superior kind of Christianity.

And the assumption is, the implication is, well, God talked to us Jews first. He gave us the law. You Gentiles, you're latecomers, but now you can learn from us some of the things God told us before about the law.

And you need to accept the law. But what Paul is saying is, these people, they may claim to have some pedigree of some kind, but they're not even worthy of the label children of Abraham. If they are not trusting in Christ fully, if they're trusting in the flesh or in the law, then they aren't even children of Abraham, which is perhaps their boast.

Look at John chapter 8, if you would, real quickly. Jesus is conversing with the Jews about their pedigree. In verse 33, John 8, 33, the Jews to whom Jesus was speaking said, We are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone.

And in verse 37, Jesus said, I know that you're Abraham's descendants. So he grants them that. They are physically descended from Abraham.

But you seek to kill me because my word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with my father and you do what you have seen with your father. He answered and said to them, or they answered and said to him, Abraham is our father.

And Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham didn't do this.

You're not doing that, which would show that you are true children of Abraham. He admitted in verse 37, they are descended from Abraham. Yes, but you're not the children of Abraham.

You're not the sons of Abraham. If you were, you would exhibit Abraham's spiritual

nature. You would not, for example, seek to kill a man who told you the truth.

Abraham didn't do that. And you would do the works of Abraham if you were really his children. And, of course, he goes on to say, you are of your father, the devil, because you'll do what he wants.

You can show your parentage. You're either, it's interesting, we would say a child of God or a child of the devil. Jesus makes the contest a child of Abraham or a child of the devil.

Because to Paul, a child of Abraham and a child of God are the same thing if the term child of Abraham is rightly understood. Look at Romans chapter 9, and I'll show you this. Romans chapter 9, beginning of verse 6. Paul said, it is not as if the word of God has taken no effect.

For they are not all Israel who are of Israel. For nor are they all children, because they are the seed of Abraham. But in Isaac your seed should be called.

That means there were others besides Isaac who were children of Abraham, but they weren't called. They were seed of Abraham, but they weren't children of God. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Now, the seed of Abraham, the true seed of Abraham, are the ones who are the promised seed of Abraham. Not those who are of the flesh. These are not the children of God.

To Paul, those who are the children of God are the true children of Abraham. And so he says in Galatians 3.7, Therefore know that only those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. Now, this has very important ramifications with reference to the Abrahamic covenant.

And Paul actually begins to unpack some of that in the next verse. Verse 8. Now, he quotes in verse 8, Genesis 12.3, which says, In you all nations shall be blessed. But how? How is this fulfilled? How is it that all nations are blessed in Abraham? Well, Paul tells us.

The scripture when it said that was foreseeing that God would justify the nations of the Gentiles by faith. This statement, in you all the nations shall be blessed, Paul calls that God preaching the gospel to Abraham. And what is the message? That God would justify the nations by faith.

The faith that Abraham had became the prototype for the faith of anyone, of any nation who would be saved. And we receive that same blessing of justification through faith, which was the blessing that Abraham had. And all who have the faith of Abraham are his spiritual children.

And Paul goes on to develop that. But the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled in the church. All nations are blessed in Abraham, that is in his seed, because Christ is the seed and all nations are blessed through the gospel of Christ.

Verse 9. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. Now, it says, For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. This means that if you are depending on the law and on your obedience to the law to save you, it's not going to save you, it's going to curse you.

You're under a curse because it's written and this is in the law that it's written. In Deuteronomy 27, in verse 26. Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

I mean, if there's ever been one time that you didn't pay 10% of your income fully to the temple, if there was one time that you touched an unclean thing and didn't go through the ceremonial cleansing for a week, if there's one time you violated one thing in the law, you are under the curse because the curse of the law is cursed. Cursed is everyone who does not continue in the things that are written in the book of the law to do them. If you didn't continue, if you didn't do them, then you're under this curse.

That doesn't sound like a gospel. That doesn't sound like good news. But he says, But that no one is justified by the law, verse 11, in the sight of God, is evident for the just shall live by faith.

This statement, the just shall live by faith, is quoted frequently also by Paul. It's from Habakkuk 2.4. Yeah. And he quotes it also in Romans 1.17. It's also quoted in Hebrews 10.38. It's a very favorite verse because basically saying that those who are just before God will be just before God because of their faith.

They live by their faith in God and not by the law. So Paul has made a contrast in verses 10 and 11 between the standards of the law and the policy of faith. Basically, you either come under a curse because you trust in the law, which you have never fully obeyed and therefore come under the curse of those who don't obey it.

Or you can do what God said. You can live by faith. That is through having faith in God, not through keeping laws and rules.

Yet the law is not of faith, but the man who does them shall live by them. Now, the law is not of faith. What he's saying is the man who does the law shall live because he does the law.

However, no one does it. Therefore, no one lives through it. That's why the just has to live through faith.

You've got two ways of living. The just shall live by faith, quoted in verse 11, and the

man who does the law shall live by that. In verse 12, therefore, we have two contrary means of living.

Living by faith or living by the law. And Paul says, therefore, the law and faith are not in harmony with each other. They are at odds with each other.

They present alternative methods of seeking life and living life. A man who is a godly man will live because he has faith and he will live through faith. Paul said that back in Galatians 2, verse 20.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I live now in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

I don't live by law. I live by faith in Jesus. Now, a lot of times people, when they use the term living by faith, they have a more narrow view than what Paul has in mind here.

To some people, living by faith just means you don't have a job. You don't have any visible means of support. And that is not what Paul means when he talks about living by faith.

Paul means that my whole life is a life that has salvation, has holiness, has obedience, has everything it's supposed to have by one means. And that is trusting Jesus. Trusting Jesus to do it all.

I have to cooperate with him. By the way, there is such a thing as obeying the faith and obeying the truth. He mentions that in chapter 3, verse 1 here.

He says that you should not obey the truth. Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth? The truth is something to be obeyed. But you obey Jesus because he is your Lord and you trust in his Lordship, not because you believe in a certain set of rules and if you keep these rules rigidly, with or without Jesus, you will be a holy person.

Faith means I don't have any confidence in myself, I have confidence in God. My faith is in the righteousness of Christ, not mine. The law is I am striving and trusting that I will do good enough to measure up to what God requires of me so that on the last day I will be saved.

I will be justified because I have kept these laws. That's not trusting in Christ, that's trusting in you. It's trusting in your flesh, in your ability to do right.

And he says these are two conflicting means of living and of seeking right life with God. Verse 13, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. That statement, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree, is Deuteronomy 21, 23.

It's an interesting thing. Deuteronomy basically indicates that people who are hanged on trees are hanged on trees because they are cursed. In Deuteronomy, a person was not hanged on a tree like on the gallows in the Old West when they hang a man, but rather a dead body after being slain by the sword or some other means was hanged up on a tree for display or sometimes on a post or something else.

It was common in ancient Middle Eastern cultures that if a person was a hated person, either their body or their head or both would be hanged up for public display after they were killed. When Deuteronomy speaks of a person being hanged on a tree, the ordinary circumstance that it's envisaging is a person who has been slain because of some crime against God. They've had to be executed by the magistrates and they're hung up on display to be an example to everybody.

It's a curse. They are cursed by God and therefore they're hung up to show this kind of thing. It brings God's curse, whatever this person did, whatever they were killed for.

Now, Paul applies it a little bit differently here because Jesus didn't die because of disobedience or anything that he did. And of course, he died on the tree. He wasn't hung up afterwards.

So there are some things about the picture, the Deuteronomy pictures, that are different than Jesus' case. But Paul is able to say, well, listen, there's this law here that says everyone who's hanged on a tree is cursed. Isn't that interesting? Jesus hanged on a tree, although not because God was upset with him.

But, of course, in Paul's theology, as I understand it, Jesus did come under God's curse on the tree because he who knew no sin became sin for us. And so Jesus became our sin and came under the curse for our sins. So that whereas we deserve to be cursed because we're under the curse of the law for disobedience, Christ became a curse for us.

It's just another way of saying Christ paid the penalty for us or Christ died for us. The wages of sin is death, but Jesus died for us. The wages of violating the law is a curse.

He took the curse for us. He endured a curse and that's even seen in the fact that his method of death was that he died on a tree. Now I want to say something about the curse of the law that's in this passage, in verse 13, because Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.

If you've ever been in word of faith circles, you'll find that this is a verse that is often quoted because the word of faith teaching, among other things, is that we as Christians are exempt from certain unpleasant things, most notably sickness and poverty. And they have various ways of trying to defend this notion that we're exempt from sickness and poverty. Their view flies totally in the face of scripture, but they have a few verses they think they can manipulate to make this point.

And this is one of them. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. Now what's that got to do with sickness and poverty? Nothing really, but what the word of faith people say is that if you read Deuteronomy 28, you'll read the various curses that God said would come on Israel if they violated his law.

They included, you know, crop failures, famines, no rain, wars, sickness, miscarriages. I mean, all kinds of things are listed that God would bring on the Jews if they were disobedient. The word of faith people, however, take that whole chapter of Deuteronomy 28 and say there's three things, essentially, that are mentioned there.

They say sickness, poverty, and death. Now this is an artificial reductionism. I mean, the passage lists probably dozens of various things that would happen to people.

But Kenneth Hagin, E.W. Kenney, and these people, they say, well, this all reduces down basically to three things. Poverty, sickness, and death. And that's the curse of the law.

Now, they say Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law. Therefore, he's redeemed us from poverty, he's redeemed us from sickness, and he's redeemed us from death. Now, I disagree with the argument up to this point, but even if I could follow the argument this far with agreeableness, I would still not take it to where they take it.

They would say, since Jesus has redeemed us from poverty, sickness, and death, we never have to be sick, we never have to be poor. But to my mind, I think, well, let's go a little further. Doesn't that mean we also never have to die? I mean, if he's redeemed us from poverty, sickness, and death, and that means we don't ever have to be poor or sick, doesn't that also mean we don't have to die? They say, well, that's spiritual.

Of course, we have to physically die. They would admit that. But it's spiritual death he redeemed us from.

Oh, I see. Okay. But in Deuteronomy 28, there's no mention of spiritual death.

The only death there was death by the sword by their enemies. So, if we're going to spiritualize death, maybe we need to spiritualize poverty and sickness, too? Well, that's not acceptable. They take that literal and death spiritual.

Well, I would say this. Jesus, in fact, of course, has, but it has nothing to do with what Paul's saying here. Jesus has redeemed us from poverty, sickness, and death, and when we're in the resurrection, we'll experience neither poverty, sickness, nor death.

In the meantime, we groan, Paul said, looking for the redemption of the purchased possession. He said that in Romans chapter 8, that we are groaning in this tabernacle while we await the time when he will, in fact, redeem the purchased possession, our bodies, and then, of course, whatever is negative will no longer be there. But, this use of this verse is way out of line, because Paul is not even talking about Deuteronomy 28.

He's not talking about particular curses. He's talking about the curse of the law. The curse of the law is, as he quoted it earlier, in verse 10, cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Now, that's not even a quote from Deuteronomy 28. That's a quote from Deuteronomy 27, 26. And it's not a statement of specific curses.

It's just a statement of being cursed by God, being under God's wrath, being under God's curse. A person who violates the law is under God's curse, under his wrath. And Christ has redeemed us from that situation, because he came under God's curse.

He became a curse for us, and he took God's wrath on himself. Therefore, we've been redeemed from that wrath. We've been redeemed from that curse associated with the law.

Not the curses. He does not talk about the curses listed in Deuteronomy. He talks about the curse singular, which is simply the statement, everyone who doesn't follow the law is cursed by God.

But so is everyone who hangs on a tree. So, since Jesus hanged on a tree, he received our curse for us. This is how Paul is arguing.

Now, by the way, a lot of people would object to the logic of Paul's argument here, and say, well, he's kind of using words that aren't the same in their original context, as if they all mean the same thing. Well, that may appear to be so, and that's the case in a number of cases where the apostles quote Old Testament scriptures. I mean, a person has to make his own mind up, but to my judgment, when it says in Luke 24, 45, that Jesus opened their understanding that they might understand the scriptures, meaning the apostles.

He opened the apostles' understanding so they could understand the scriptures, that is the Old Testament scriptures. I take it that they were right. I take it that even if he saw something I didn't see, maybe it's because my understanding wasn't opened like his was.

Therefore, I let him open mine by telling me what he saw. I accept the inspiration of Paul's writings, and some people say, well, the argument seems to have a snag here. Some people think that is true.

But I personally believe that Christ opened the apostles' understanding and they understood it correctly. And we might read some of those verses in their original context to read something else, or to mean something else. But I'll go with the apostolic authorized interpretation.

Verse 14, So that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus,

that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Now, this verse 2 is employed by the Word of Faith people. I'm not going to talk much about them in Galatians, but we just hit a hotbed of their proof text here.

Part of the Word of Faith teaching is what's called the prosperity doctrine. And the idea is that God wants you to be materially prosperous. It's part of your salvation.

I mean, it's not that you get saved by being prosperous, but it's just part of what God has in mind for every Christian, is that they be rich. It glorifies the Father for people to see that his children are well provided for, they say. And for a Christian to be poor is a bad testimony.

And God never intended for you to be poor. And if you're poor, then the devil's ripping you off of all the money that God wants you to have. This is the actual teaching of the prosperity teachers.

And they don't have much to go on biblically, of course, because the Bible teaches just the opposite. But one of the verses they think they have in their sight is this verse 14. Now, here's how Hagin and others would say this.

Listen. The blessing of Abraham. Do you recall? Abraham was a very rich man.

He was blessed with much livestock, servants, cattle, all that stuff, camels, gold, silver. He was a very wealthy man. And the Bible says that that blessing of Abraham is supposed to come out of us, Gentiles who are in Christ.

Therefore, we should be rich like Abraham was rich. That's the blessing of God on him. Now, to my mind, I mean, when I read this kind of argument as a teenager, I struggled with that.

Oh, man, I don't know. That doesn't seem right. But, man, it looks like maybe it could mean that.

That is so naive. I mean, as an older person, just looking at the Scripture and the flow of thought and so forth, there's not even any struggle to see my way around that one. I mean, Paul is not here discussing the blessings, every blessing God gave him.

I mean, if that's the case, then we should expect God to give us a son in our old age because God promised Abraham that too and gave it to him. That's a blessing of Abraham, too, isn't it? I mean, so when I'm beyond when my wife beyond menopause, I should be able to claim a son from my wife. And when I'm 100 years old, he lives to be 175 years old.

That's a blessing, too, wasn't it? I guess I can claim to be, you know, it's God's blessing of Abraham on me. I should be 175 years old having kids after I'm 100 years old. And one

of my kids should change the whole world because that's what the promise to Abraham, too.

I mean, to suggest that every individual thing that reflected God's blessing upon the life of Abraham, every individual promise that God fulfilled him, somehow the exact same promises to be fulfilled in my life exactly the same way, is an absurdity and has nothing to do with what Paul is saying. What is the blessing of Abraham that Paul is talking about here? He's already referred to it. It's back in verse 6. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

He was justified. That's the blessing. He was blessed, not cursed.

Those who are under the law are under a curse. Abraham was blessed. He was justified, not cursed, not condemned.

The blessing of Abraham was that he was justified by faith. By the way, Paul discusses the same issue over in Romans 4. Let me turn you quickly there. We're not going to get any further than this in Galatians 3, I'm afraid, but I want to take the rest next time.

But chapter 4, that is, or chapter 3. In Romans 4, I don't know, we might get a little further. We'll see. In Romans 4, check this line of argument out.

This is parallel to Galatians 3, the verses we're reading. Now, to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as a debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. He quotes Psalm 32. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. Now, what does the scripture from David and the scripture from Abraham have in common? Both have to do with imputation. The Genesis 15, 6 scripture quoted here in Romans 4, 3, is Abram believed God and it was accounted or imputed to him for righteousness.

God imputed Abraham righteous by his faith. Well, in David's quote in Psalm 32, here in verses 7 and 8, blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin. If God doesn't impute sin, he imputes righteousness.

He either imputes you sinful or righteous. That's the two possibilities. Both David and Abraham knew the same phenomenon.

Justification by faith. Now, notice this in verse 6 of Romans 4. He says David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness. There's a blessedness about being imputed righteous by faith.

David describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness. That is the blessing of Abraham that he was imputed righteous. In the context of Galatians 3, Paul is not talking about all the things God did for Abraham.

He's not talking about whether Abraham was wealthy or had four wives or had eight children or lived 175 years. He's not talking about all that stuff when he says the blessing of Abraham. He's talking about the only blessing of Abraham that he's brought up earlier and that is Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

That's the blessing of Abraham and God has redeemed us, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law so that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles in Jesus Christ. That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. That's the blessing, it's the promise of the Spirit who is the earnest of our justification, the earnest of our salvation.

He's talking about salvation. He's not talking about bank accounts here. He's not talking about prosperity.

He's talking about salvation. That's all he's talking about. And he's saying, listen, Abraham wasn't justified by keeping the works of the law.

In fact, no one has ever been justified by keeping the works of the law. The law condemns and curses. The way Abraham was saved was not by doing a bunch of religious things.

Now, by the way, there was religious activity in Abraham's life. He built altars and offered sacrifices. He got circumcised and so forth.

But all of that was essentially peripheral to the issue of his justification. That was outworking of his piety, of his love for God and his desire to worship God, which every Christian should have in their life, by the way, a desire to worship God. But he wasn't saved by offering animal sacrifices.

He wasn't saved by being circumcised. He was saved by faith and that's like we are. So what Paul is saying, it doesn't add anything to add works to that.

Now, I do have a little more time than I thought looking at the machine there. So I'm going to go a little further. Verse 15.

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men, though it is only a man's covenant, yet it is, if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Once a covenant has been confirmed between men, even if God's not involved in it, it's unchangeable is what he's saying. Now, to Abraham and his seed were the promises made.

He does not say to seeds, as of many, but as of one. And to your seed, who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was 430 years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ.

That it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise. But God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Now, what's this about? He starts off by saying, well, let's use the illustration of how covenants work. Now, we don't have many covenants in our modern society. We have marriage as a covenant.

But beyond that, we usually have contracts and other things that are not really the same as covenant. In the ancient times, where we would use a contract today, they would usually have a covenant. A covenant was an agreement that was binding on both parties.

And unlike a contract, see, if you and I made a contract, I'm going to buy your car, and I'm going to make payments of \$100 a month. And then both of us decided that was a bad deal, you didn't want to sell your car, and I didn't want to make the payments. So I said, listen, can I get out of that? You say, sure, we're out of it.

So there's no violent stuff. We both agreed on the contract. We both agreed to get out of it.

Marriage isn't that way, although some people think of it that way. Marriage is such that even if both people wanted out of it, they can't get out of it. It's a covenant.

Covenant is binding for life. It's unchangeable. And Paul's reason for that, because in those days, covenants were more common than contracts.

People made covenants. Now, he says, even with a man's covenant, once it's been thoroughly confirmed and ratified and so forth, it's unchangeable. Well, then what about God's covenant with Abraham? Just because the law came along 430 years later, doesn't change what God established with Abraham.

God had a covenant with Abraham. And that covenant was essentially that the Gentiles would be blessed through him the same way he was, that is, by faith. Now, that's a covenant God made with Abraham.

Just because the law came along several centuries later, it can't change the covenant. The law didn't replace it. The law didn't alter it.

The law was something different than it, and it was not intended to alter the terms of the covenant. The law was a schoolmaster, he goes on to tell us. The very next verse after when we read, verse 19 says, What purpose then does the law serve? Well, he tells, the

law had a purpose, but its purpose was not to change the covenant stipulations.

It wasn't now necessary to keep the law to be justified. Justification was already established by covenant with Abraham as a matter of faith. And, you know, the law, that had significance, that had a purpose, but its purpose was not to change the terms by which God justifies men.

And the law doesn't do that, doesn't change the terms. It doesn't justify men either. Now, something very important here, well, a couple of things, one of more and one of less importance, where Paul says the law which came 430 years later, technically the number is not exact.

430 years is the number of years the Jews were in Egypt. Abraham, however, lived a few hundred years before that. He died before they went into Egypt.

By a generation or two. And therefore, Paul is not given the exact number. The fact is, the exact number is not known.

How long from the time that God spoke to Abraham to the time the Jews were in Egypt. I mean, there is, it can be calculated within some degree. But Paul is not interested in trying to work out the mathematical details.

What he's pointing out is, it was clearly at least 430 years later because there was that long the Jews were in Egypt between the time of Abraham and the time of the law. He's not arguing that it was only that number of years. But that's enough years to show that it was quite a bit later.

And because it was later, doesn't make it replace what was older. The law didn't come to replace or change the covenant God made with Abraham. Now, the other thing that's more important here is verse 16.

Because it says, it's to Abraham and his seed that the promises were made. The covenant was made with Abraham and his seed. Now, every Jew and every dispensationalist today, I think, believes that this covenant exists with Abraham and his physical seed.

That is, the Jews. But Paul didn't believe that. If you talk to people today who are dispensationalists, they'll say, yes, the Jews are still God's chosen people.

They'll always recall the Abrahamic covenant. God made a promise to Abraham and his seed. True, he did.

But what did he mean? Did he mean the Jews? Well, take a look. Paul said, in verse 16, he does not say to seeds as of many. In other words, the promise is not to the multiple seeds of Abraham, but to one seed of Abraham, who is Christ.

The promise, the covenant was to Abraham and to Christ, Paul says. No one else. Just Abraham and Christ.

Now, where does that leave everyone else? Well, it leaves them either in Christ or out of Christ. It's not in Israel or out of Israel. It's not Jew or Gentile.

Those are not the issues anymore. The issue is, are you in Christ? And if so, then you are Abraham's seed. Because Christ is Abraham's seed.

And if you're in him, you share in his seediness. In his seedliness, or whatever. He is the seed, and you are seed in him.

Paul says it, by the way. We'll leap ahead for a moment at verse 29. He says, and if you are Christ's, meaning if you are in Christ, then you are Abraham's seed.

There you go. You Christians are Abraham's seed, and you are the heirs according to the promise. I guess that leaves out someone else from being.

I don't know how anyone, since the time of Jesus or Paul, could argue that the Jews, who are not believers in Christ, are somehow still Abraham's seed, still have promises to be fulfilled to them, and so forth. Paul said, no, if you belong to Christ, he is the seed. It was not to seed many, like many Jews or even many Christians.

Just one seed, Christ. But if you're in Christ, you're not many. You're one.

You're one in Christ. And as one, you are that seed to whom the promises are made. This view is sometimes scornfully referred to as replacement theology.

The sensationalists think that people like me have replaced Israel with the church. No, I haven't replaced anyone with anyone. I have no authority to do that.

The question is, what has God done? Has God replaced Israel with the church? Well, one way of looking at it, you could say that. But another way of it is, Israel was never the seed, in total. Only the believers, only those who have the faith of Abraham, are blessed with faith like Abraham, Paul said.

Therefore, it was always the case, even in the Old Testament times, that only those Jews or Gentiles, like Ruth, who had faith, were the seed. The Jews who didn't have faith never were the seed, and aren't now. Only those Jews who are believers, and Gentiles who are believers, are the seed.

That was true in Old Testament times. It's true now, too. Only those who have the faith of Abraham are saved.

That's why Jesus said to the Jews, if you are really children of Abraham, you do the works of Abraham. You are the descendants of Abraham, but that's not Abraham's seed. You

are not of his spirit.

You don't have his faith. So this is something that has very great ramifications. We don't have time to discuss it in detail right now, but it will come up again in chapter 4. That is the relationship of the Jews, the unbelieving Jews today, to the covenant promises.

Paul gives a very strong teaching about that at the end of chapter 4, and that is that they will not be heirs, together with the children of the free woman, who are the Christians in Christ. But we'll talk about that another time, since we're out of time this day. We'll pick up probably around verse 19 next time.