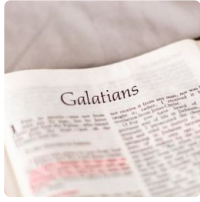


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Galatians 4:8 - 5:12



Galatians - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg provides a thorough examination of Galatians 4:8 - 5:12. He breaks down the different concepts mentioned in the text, such as the transition from law to faith, the observance of days and festivals, and the idea of being born again in Christ. Gregg emphasizes the importance of not being entangled in legalistic rules and cautions against attempting to achieve righteousness through one's own efforts. He also touches on the parallel between the two mothers mentioned in the text, Sarah and Hagar, and how they represent the old and new covenants.

Transcript

The last time we were in Galatians, we got through the opening seven verses of chapter four, and it's now important for us to make some progress through the book, so we will not delay very long. In the beginning of chapter four, Paul was talking about what the relevance of the law was, what its purpose was, since he's made it very clear that it was not intended as a means of justification. There had, prior to the giving of the law, by several centuries, already been instituted a means of justification and revealed.

In the case of Abraham, where the scripture had said, Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and having made that a prior revelation, as it were, to the law, it makes it clear that that took precedence over other opinions as to how a person might be justified. If Abraham was justified by faith, there's every reason to believe that that was God's way of doing things, of justifying men, and so the giving of the law at a later date must have been for some purpose other than for the purpose of justification, though the question is raised, what was that purpose? In chapter three, verse 19, he raises the question and he answers it in the remainder of that chapter, in the opening parts of chapter four, and the answer is, the law was added because of transgressions until Christ would come, meaning either that until the law would be written on our hearts in the new covenant, it was necessary to impose a law externally to keep us from being totally unrestrained and destroying society and ourselves and everything. It just kept people restrained to a certain extent, like law always does, and that is a good result of law, that it keeps people who would otherwise be criminal somewhat civilized.

That may be what he means by the law was added because of transgressions, or it might mean that the law was added in order to define previously existing sins as, in fact, transgressions. We wouldn't know they were transgressions if we didn't know the law. They might be wrong, they might be misbehavior, and they may well have been frequently committed, but they were not transgressions until there was a law to define them as such, and when he says the law was given because of transgressions, some commentators feel, and some paraphrasers feel that it means in order to define sin as a transgression.

In any case, he goes on to say that after Christ has come, whatever the purpose of the law was, it has served its purpose. He compares it with a jailer. We were shut up under the law until faith would come.

He compares it to a schoolmaster or a tutor who teaches and cares for and watches out for a child until he reaches the age of maturity. When faith comes, which is the stage of spiritual adulthood, then there is no longer a need for the tutor. Now, when we say that faith is the stage of spiritual adulthood, we are speaking in terms of collective adulthood of the human race, because Paul in chapter 4 talks about before Christ came, we were kept like a child who is the heir, but still no better than a slave because he is a child.

He is not old enough really to receive the inheritance, and therefore he must be kept under tutors and guardians, guardians and stewards, it says in chapter 4 verse 2, until the time that the child is recognized as not needing that anymore, and that's the time appointed by the Father. So he says we were kept under the bondage in verse 3 when we were children, we were in bondage under the elements of the world, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son born of a woman. Now, the fullness of time obviously marks a transition point in the illustration.

This is the birth of Jesus, when Jesus came forth born of a woman. That means that the childhood of the human race, the religious infancy, was prior to the coming of Christ. Everything that people had to keep them out of trouble, in terms of religious rules and so forth, even the ones that God gave, were simply, as he puts it, the elements of the world in verse 3. He talks more about the elements of the world in verse 9, which we have not gotten to yet.

We are now just summarizing what we have been through before. The elements of the world is a term that has been debated. Actually theologians are not sure exactly what is meant by it.

The Greek word is *stoikeia*, which may or may not be of any use to you to know, but it means elements or principles. It is actually a term that is used in some Greek literature for the alphabet, the basic alphabet, the basic principles, the first things a child learns in education. Actually, some paraphrases say the ABCs.

If you happen to be using a paraphrase, it is possible that verse 3 says, we are kept in bondage under the ABCs of the world. And later on in verse 9, he says, why are you returning to the weak and beggarly ABCs? This is not, of course, a literal translation, but elements was used in Greek literature, the word *stoikeia*, to refer sometimes to the alphabet or to the basic stuff of a child's education. So what he is saying is that when we were children, we were kept in kindergarten, as it were.

But when Christ came, that marked the transition to maturity. For faith could become mature, where the law could be written on our hearts, and therefore we could discard the external code, because we would have internal controls like a child does when he reaches a stage of maturity. He develops control over himself.

His parents don't need to exert the same amount of control from outside. And this is what Paul likens the human race to. Before Christ, the law was needed.

And as far as that goes in individual lives, before you come to Christ, law is needed. So what is the case in the macrocosm of the human race is also true in the individual case. Before Christ, you don't have the law written in your heart, so you need to be under law.

It may be that Gentiles were never under the Jewish law, but they still are under law. There are laws of the conscience, there are laws of the land. Every society has recognized that criminal behavior and evil behavior have to be restrained.

And yet, when a person comes to have self-restraint and self-control, and the law is written in their heart, then they don't need those restraints of the external code anymore. I'm thinking right now of something Paul said to Timothy in the opening chapter of either 1st or 2nd Timothy. John can probably tell me which one.

He talks about the laws for the lawless. Is that 1st Timothy chapter 1? 1st, I thought so. Okay.

And that would be at verse 8 or chapter, yeah, 1st Timothy 1.8. Paul says, But we know that the law is good if only one uses it lawfully. Then it says this in verse 9, Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly, for the sinners, for the unholy, the profane, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there's any other thing that's contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of our blessed God which was committed to my trust. Now, he says, people like that need laws.

People who are murderers and perjurers and sodomites, those people need law. The law is made for people like that. It's not made for people who are already righteous.

It's not made for people who already behave. And what he's indicating, by the way, you might think of a strange list of mal-factors that he gives there, murderers of fathers and

murderers of mothers. I mean, Paul could have just said murderers and made his point, but by saying murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, he's obviously trying to depict an almost exaggerated picture of how wicked persons must be to be under the law.

Whereas we who are Christians have laws written in our hearts, so we aren't murderers. We're not inclined to go out and kill people. We're not inclined to be sodomites.

We're not inclined to go out and do all these atrocities, though we don't need laws to restrain us. We are restrained by something inside. A righteous person, one who is by nature righteous, by disposition righteous, does not need laws to restrain him.

He is self-restrained. The law is given for people who have no such self-restraint. Now, if you don't have any self-restraint, you do need law.

But as a Christian, Paul is going to argue in Galatians that we don't need laws anymore, because we have the Holy Spirit. And if we walk in the Spirit, as he will go on to say in chapter 5 of Galatians, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. And we will do those things which he lists as the fruit of the Spirit, after the list he says, against such things there is no law.

That is, there is no law against love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, self-control, and the things that are on that list in Galatians 5, 22 and 23 as the fruit of the Spirit. You do those things, you are not under law, because the law doesn't forbid those things. And you do the right things, not because you are under some rule that tells you, but because you are under the rule of the Spirit.

You are under the governing of a personal Lord, who governs from inside your heart, rather than imposing from outside. Now, that is the difference that Paul is trying to say has taken place. It is like a child whose destiny to become an heir, but until he has grown up, until he has developed the internal self-control of maturity, he must be controlled by outer forces.

But when Jesus came, the maturity of the human race, as it were, took place. Not in the sense that everyone automatically came into that, but in God's dealings with mankind seen collectively, manhood came, adulthood came, freedom came, because a child, though he is an heir, is not free if he is under the guardianship of stewards, or he is not free. My children, some of them really look forward to being adults, so they can be free from the control that they are under as children.

I am sure many of you felt that way. I felt that way when I was a child. What I didn't realize is that when you leave home, you are not free, you just have more responsibilities that you didn't know you had, and more headaches.

But it is nonetheless the case that sometimes you feel like, at least they are my own

headaches. I don't have headaches that somebody is imposing on me. If I have headaches, the response is, they are at least ones I freely choose for myself as an adult, and that makes a difference in morale sometimes.

The point being, though, that as Christians, we are now at that stage like adult sons who can come into the inheritance, and the inheritance of freedom. We are no longer no better than a slave. We are no longer under guardians and stewards of law.

We have something inside. We have been, as it says in verse 5, redeemed from the law, and we have received the spirit of his son in verse 6, which inwardly bears witness to our sonship and causes us to cry out, Abba, Father. In verse 7 he says, Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Now we will get on to verse 8, the new material today. But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which were by nature, not God's. But now, after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, against the stoicheia, the same word that was found in verse 3, the elements of the world.

You turn back to the weak and beggarly elements to which you desire again to be in bondage. You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

What are these elements? What are these stoicheia that they are returning to? Now, here is an interesting thing. The Galatians were not going back to paganism. They were going to legalism.

They were going to Jewish legalism, circumcision and those kinds of things. Now, he indicates that in verse 3, when you were not Christians, you were in bondage to the elements of the world. Now, these Galatians were not Jews.

They were Gentiles. They were under paganism. In fact, he even admits that in verse 8, what you served before were not God.

Unlike the Jews who served God, but not according to knowledge, at least the God they served was the right God. They just didn't serve Him acceptably. But the Galatians, prior to their conversion, had served no God, had served idols.

Now, how is it that Paul says they are going back to the elements, the stoicheia again, when in fact they are going back to Judaism? Now, what is very obvious here is that Paul equates Jewish legalism with paganism. Both of them are part of the ABCs of religion prior to Jesus came. Before Jesus came, any set of rules of any religion, even God's rules that he gave to Moses, they are not the ultimate.

They are not the means of righteousness. It is the case that Judaism had better rules

than many pagan societies in terms of their moral enlightenment, because God was their author. But that doesn't mean that they served as a means of justification any more than the pagan religion served as a means of justification.

That Jewish law was no more the height of righteousness than paganism is the height of righteousness. Jesus is the height of righteousness. Having the law written in your heart and being under the new covenant and having the Holy Spirit governing your life, that stands apart equally from Jewish legalism and paganism.

And compared to that, both paganism and Judaism are just the ABCs. Now, what he is saying is that you may think that you have left the ABCs of paganism. You have come into Christ and now you are going on to the XYZs.

You are going on to the ultimate progressive advanced stages of religiosity by going into the Jewish law, too. Adding that to your Christianity, he says, no, you are not going on to something more advanced, you are going backwards. You are going back to something as bad as what you started with.

You may think you are going forward, but you are really going back to those elements. Now, what are these elements that they are going back to? Well, verse 10 gives us a clue. Verse 10 says, You observe days and months and seasons and years.

Now, this would be true of both paganism and Judaism. However, I believe this is applied to Jewish observances. Let's turn for a moment over to Colossians, because there also we find reference twice in Colossians chapter 2 to this word stoicheia, the basic elements or basic principles.

In Colossians 2.8, Paul says, Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles. The word is stoicheia, the elements of the world. This expression, the New King James basic principles, is the same Greek expression as you have in Galatians 4.3, the stoicheia of the cosmos.

S-T-O-I-C-H-E-I-A. I'll do that again. S-T-O-I-C-H-E-I-A.

And that's translated principles in Colossians 2.8 and translated elements in Galatians 4.3 and 9. But notice what he calls them in verse 8. They are Colossians. The traditions of men. That was certainly the case with much of Phariseism, although since circumcision, for example, were not traditions of men but of God.

One wonders whether he's here talking about Jewish ceremonial law, which was not tradition of men but of God. But he might be saying that what was once commanded by God, if no longer commanded by God, is only practiced by tradition of men, by men imposing it as an unnecessary thing, but they act as if it's necessary. And it's in this chapter that he says in verse 16, Therefore let no one judge you in food or drink or

regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbath.

Now, there's your days and years and months and so forth that he refers to in Galatians 4.10. The stoicheia have to do with observances of certain festivals, which are related, I think, to Judaism. And then down in Colossians 2.20, he says, Therefore if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, again, stoicheia of the cosmos, stoicheia to cosmos, the elements of the world, why as a living world do you subject yourselves to regulations like do not touch, do not taste, do not handle? These are very Jewish kinds of regulations. Now, it's quite clear to me, it seems, that most of the time when he talks about the stoicheia, he's talking about Jewish principles of don't taste that, don't eat that, don't touch that, you have to observe these festivals.

And in Colossians 2.16, it seems to kind of tie it all together. Don't let anyone judge you about food, drink, festivals, that stuff. Those are the stoicheia, those are the ABCs of religion.

You advance beyond that if you're a Christian. There's one other place where you find the word stoicheia in the New Testament, and it's really helpful in determining what it means, and that's in Hebrews 5.12. Hebrews 5.12. It says, For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles, that's stoicheia in the Greek, of the oracles of God, and have come to need milk and not solid food. Stoicheia, the basic stuff, first principles, anything but advanced lessons.

It's the opposite of that which is advanced and progressive, but that which is basic and stuff for immaturity. He goes on to talk about it as milk and compares it with solid food in that chapter in Hebrews. Getting back to Galatians, we've kind of looked at all the places that talk about stoicheia, and what's evident here is that in Galatians 4 he uses the word the elements of the world to speak of the elements of their paganism that they used to belong to.

In verse 3, We were in bondage under the elements of the world. Now, what's interesting here is he says, We. Paul was a Jew, his roots were Gentiles, and he indicates that he as a Jew, prior to being a Christian, and they as pagans prior to being Christians, were both in bondage to the stoicheia.

His Judaism and their paganism were both aspects of the ABCs. Judaism was better than paganism in terms of its origins, but they were still the ABCs. They were like children, and we had not grown up yet into Christ.

But he says in verse 9, But now, after you have known God, or rather are known by God. This expression where he corrects himself, or rather are known by God, has sometimes been a little perplexing. I mean, obviously it's not wrong to say you have known God, so why does he correct himself? Oh, I mean, you're known by God.

I guess no one can say for sure, but it appears that what he means by know is in the sense of acknowledged. Now that you acknowledge God, or rather he acknowledges you more properly, and he wants to make it clear that you're not doing God some kind of a big favor by noticing him. But the main thing is that he notices you, that he knows you, that he acknowledges you.

It's like when John says in 1 John 3, Herein is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us. No big deal that we love God. Who wouldn't? Why shouldn't we? I mean, he's lovable.

We're not. That's the amazing thing. Here's a picture of love, not that God loved us, not that we loved him, but he loved us.

And likewise, there's nothing really impressive about the fact that you've come to acknowledge God. What's incredible is that he has acknowledged you. And it may be that he's also saying that he found you, you didn't find him.

It's not as if you were some virtuous person on a search for God, and you finally found the hiding God, but that you were a person who wasn't even looking for God necessarily. You were wrapped up in contentment, you're a paganist, and God came after you and grabbed you, and got you. And he acknowledged you.

That's what's striking about conversion. It's not that I've now come to, I have come to acknowledge Jesus. Well, Jesus should be very pleased.

But the marvel is that he would acknowledge me. And that's what Paul, I think, is getting at when he says, Now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which you desire again to be embodied? So even though they're not going back to the same religious practices that they were in as pagans, they're still going back to that which is equivalent to them. The basic stuff, the stuff that was used to keep people from being unrestrained criminals before their conversion.

They don't need that now. They should already not need those things. Now, in verse 10, he says, You observe days and months and seasons and years.

This, as we saw in Colossians 2, is very similar to what he's talking about there, where he also used the word stoichia twice in Colossians 2, and thinks he equated it with dietary laws and festival and ceremonial observances. Now, what's interesting here is that Paul, when he says, You observe days and months and seasons and years, he says, I'm afraid for you lest I have labored for you in vain. I may have lost you.

You may not be Christians anymore. Has all this labor that I had evangelizing you and discipling you fallen into nothing and you're no longer in there? It's all in vain. Now, it's amazing when you think about the implications of this, because based on the fact that

they want to keep Jewish laws and festivals, he almost acts as if they're not saved, or maybe he wonders if they are saved.

He'll later say, You've fallen from grace. He says that in chapter 5, verses 2 and 4, he says, Indeed, I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. In verse 4, You who have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law, for you have fallen from grace.

I'm not really sure how Calvinists work around that passage there. You have become estranged from Christ. You can't become estranged from him if you have no relationship with him in the first place.

And then you've fallen from grace. I've actually heard whole sermons based on, Can you fall from grace? And that pastor's opinion was, No, you can't. I mean, the whole expression, fallen from grace, comes from this verse where Paul says, You have.

How can anyone say you can't? I don't understand that. But the point, what's interesting here, he doesn't say, You've gone off into immorality and therefore you've fallen from grace. Or you've gone off into drug abuse or drunkenness and therefore you've fallen from grace.

But you've gone off into Jewish legalism, keeping Jewish rules. You've fallen from grace. Why is that? Because people do not look at alcoholism and drug abuse and sexual immorality as a means of righteousness.

They do it in spite of the fact that they know it's not righteous. But they never view themselves as getting close to God or earning any brownie points with God by going out and being a womanizer or a drunkard. But they do view Jewish legalism that way.

That is to say, you think you're being righteous enough without grace when you are keeping these laws to the letter. And it becomes a rival system of salvation to that of the true gospel. You know, rampant blatant sin never was a rival source of salvation to anyone.

It was not something that people ever thought of as a means of salvation. But they do think of legalism that way and therefore he's more concerned about the Christians who have gotten into legalism than he is about Christians like in Corinth, for whom he still is able to thank God, although there's tremendous sin in the church there. He doesn't thank God for the Galatians.

He's afraid for them. He's afraid he's labored in vain with them. Now, of course, we could explore the question of how we should feel about holy days.

I mean, you observe days and months and seasons and years. Christians do that, too, although I don't think Paul did. I don't think the apostles did.

We never read, for example, in the scripture of the disciples celebrating Easter as a Christian holiday or Christmas, which is not to say there's sin in doing so. I suppose probably it's a little different in principle because people don't observe Christmas and Easter usually in order to be righteous. They do it because they like the presence of heaven.

You know, I mean, it's time off work, it's party time or something. There is a difference. People do keep Sabbaths and Jewish festivals in order to supplement their righteousness, whereas people don't look at Christmas and Easter that way.

They just see it as time off work and a good old time. I think a lot of people do who are not Christians. And Christians do it often as, I mean, some Christians do it as a means of just honoring the Lord.

But if a person puts himself under obligation to observe any days or any holy days, I have a feeling they're falling into the same trap as the Galatians did. And that would include Sundays or Saturdays. You know, the Seventh Day Adventist would have us observing Saturdays as a Sabbath.

Other people who don't keep Saturdays often require us to keep Sundays a special day. I don't think Paul did that. In Romans chapter 14, he said, One man esteems one day above another, and another man esteems every day alike.

Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. And he said, Let no one judge you about keeping Sabbaths and things like that. Those things are shadows.

And here also, he doesn't state it as a commendation, but as a cause for concern that they keep weeks and days and months and years. So I would say if Christians today observe festivals of some kind, they need to keep their attitude such that they don't view it as any part of their Christian obligation. It may be something they do for good reason.

I mean, it's a good time to fellowship and find other people at church on that day, and you won't at other days or whatever. I mean, there's good reasons to go to church on Sunday. But one of them is not to do it because you feel like God has required you to be there that morning.

Unless he... I mean, he might well tell you to go to a particular place on a particular morning. But to believe that you have to be at church because it's Sunday is, I think, lapsing into the same error that they had. They were doing it on Saturday in all likelihood.

Now, in verse 12... Actually, verses 12 through 20 are extremely difficult to interpret. There is no theology at stake in them. Paul alludes to things that they apparently would understand that readers today have a real hard time understanding.

In fact, commentators are really kind of... They kind of throw up their hands in this section and say, well, who knows what he meant by that? And sometimes they'll throw in several different theories. But when it all gets down to it, one theory doesn't in any sense command a sense of importance more than any other about this. Let me read this section and you'll know what I'm talking about.

Brethren, I urge you to become as I am, for I am as you are. You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at first, and my trial, which was in my flesh, you did not despise or reject.

But you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you... And then there's a blank there. The New King James is stuck in the word enjoy, because they're not sure what word belongs there.

For I dare you witness that it's possible you'd have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I have given you my word? Yes, I have become your enemy because I have given you my word. And I have given you my word, because I have given you my word.

And I have given you my word, because I have given you my word. And I have given you my word, because I have given you my word. And I have given you my word, because I have given you my word.

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And I have given you my word. And I have given you my word. And I have given you my word.

And I have given you my word. And I have given you my word. And I have given you my sword.

And I have given you my sword. And I have given you and that he commends them that they had not been repulsed. He says in Galatians 4, 14, or actually verse 13, still, you know that because of physical infirmity, I preached the gospel to you at the first.

Now, some commentators say that because is not a good translation there, but it should say that in spite of or through or in the midst of physical infirmity. If it is because, it's really curious because we don't know how physical infirmity would have been the cause of him preaching to them. We read of him going among them in Acts chapter 13 and 14, and we don't read of any physical infirmity being the reason for his going there.

Of course, we don't read that he had physical infirmity at the time either, but he may have. Some people think perhaps because he got stoned and lip struck that he had continuing bleeding or pus or whatever, some kind of an ongoing injury in the head that caused his eyes to swell or something and look really awkward. It's hard to know what he's referring to here because they know more than we do about this situation.

They were there. We aren't. But he says, My trial, verse 14, that was in my flesh, you did not despise or reject.

Now, he even says in verse 15 that if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me, which is one of the reasons that people have suspected that maybe Paul's infirmity was related to his eyes. Now, to say you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me doesn't necessarily... I mean, it could be a hyperbole. It might have nothing to do with him having a need for a new set of eyes.

But it could. It could be an allusion to that, to the fact that his eyes were bad, and if they could have done it, they would have donated theirs. So, I mean, there's a lot here that's kind of veiled allusions.

It's hard to know exactly whether he meant because of physical infirmity or in the midst

of physical infirmity. In any case, I'll tell you, the gist of this section is that he's saying, You used to be a lot more loyal to me. When I came among you, you recognized that it was hard for me being there.

I was sick, but I was still faithful to preach the gospel to you. You appreciated it. You received me, verse 14 says, as if I was an angel of God, or even as if I was Jesus Christ himself.

That's how you used to receive me. Why is it that you don't do so anymore? And in this question, verse 15, what was the blessing you enjoyed? I think the King James says, Where then is that blessedness of which you spoke? But neither expression is very clear of what he's talking about. The blessing you enjoyed might well refer to the blessing of Abraham, which was justified by faith, which you mentioned in the previous chapter.

Remember that the blessing of Abraham might come upon those who believe, and maybe he's saying that blessing of justifying by faith seems to be missing now from you. But it's hard to know how that fits his train of thought. This is a very disjointed kind of a section where Paul is being very personal, very emotional, actually, it would appear.

And then there's further problems in interpretation, because in verses 17 and 18, we find the word zealously and zealous about three times. In verse 17, they zealously court you, and then at the end of verse 17, that you may be zealous for them. And then in verse 18, it's good to be zealous in a good thing.

Now, the word zealous there, many commentators believe the Greek word should be translated or envy. And that changes the whole issue, the whole subject. But no one knows.

I mean, no one knows what Paul means by that. Those who translate it zealously, as the New King James does, suggest that it's good that people want to court you. It's good that people want you to be zealous.

It is, after all, good to be zealous if you're zealous for the right thing. But some people think that the Greek should be translated, they enviously court you, but for no good. Yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be envious for them, or may be envious of them.

So we've got serious problems in understanding the exact wording of this section. It's the hardest part of Galatians, because it's, he kind of pulls back the veil. It's unlike Romans.

Romans is logically argued point by point. Galatians is an emotional letter. He makes a lot of the same points in Romans, but he does so kind of on the fly and in haste, and he kind of breaks into tirade and things like that.

Which this section, it's not at all clear to us, but the things to which he alludes, we're familiar to them. I'm going to have to leave many of these things unexplained, because

no one can explain them finally. The commentators disagree and probably will never fully agree among themselves.

I would like to point your attention out to verse 19, though, where he says, My little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you. Now, here Paul uses the imagery of himself being a spiritual mother. To the Corinthians, he said, Though you have ten thousand teachers in the faith, yet you have only one father, their father in the faith.

I have begotten you in the Lord. In Thessalonians, he refers himself in various images, including a motherhood image, where he is like a mother to them. In 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 7, Paul says, But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

But then, down in the same chapter, verse 11, he says, As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children. He likens himself to a mother, he likens himself to a father. I would say he uses the father image simply because he was a male, but I would say that if you pushed Paul to the wall and said, OK, listen, what is it? Are you a father or a mother to these people? He'd have to say, Well, really, only God is a father.

I am at best a mother or maybe even a midwife. I am the one through whom God brought these children into the world, just like a mother brings her husband's children into the world, the father's children. So the evangelist, the apostle, even the church as a whole is like the womb through which God brings forth children into his family.

And later on in this same chapter, he's going to refer to, in verse 26, the Jerusalem above, which is free, which is the mother of us all. And I'm going to argue that that Jerusalem which is above is a reference to the church. The church is the mother of us all.

God is the father of us all. The church is his wife. The church is the avenue through which God brings forth children.

And Paul was the particular representative of the church that had brought forth those children in Galatia. So he likens himself to a mother who's already been through labor and they've been born. He says, I'm going through labor all over again.

It's like you've been unborn now. I've got to start over with you. A lot of times people who argue that you can't lose your salvation have tried to illustrate what they consider the ridiculousness of the suggestion that a person could lose their salvation and then maybe get it back later on by saying, Well, what? Once you've been born again, can you be unborn? Once you've been born again, how could you ever cease to be born? Well, I don't know.

I'm not sure how. But Paul said, You were born once. I'm going through labor again until

it happens again with you, because you've fallen from grace.

I'm afraid I've labored in vain, and it looks like we have to go through the whole process again of birthing you again. So, I mean, though it may sound ridiculous to some people that the concept of being born again and again, it apparently didn't seem ridiculous to Paul. In fact, it seemed rather tragic and traumatic to him.

I'm like a mother going through labor again a second time for the same people. Until Christ is formed in you. Now, that statement, Christ be formed in you, has made this verse one of my favorites in Galatians for many years, because it presents a vision that Paul has for his believers that Christ would be formed in their heritage.

Now, alternately, the word in you, the word in can mean among you or in your midst, which might refer to a corporate maturing of the body of Christ until Christ is formed corporately in the body, so that the body grows up. But we can't be sure. In any case, he points out that the purpose of the gospel, and God's purpose is in the life of the church and the believer, is that Christ be formed in us or among us.

That Christ is, it seems, kind of in development, almost like an embryo in us and coming to maturity in us. And that is the goal, is that Christians not just get saved, but that Christ is formed in them. As Paul put it in Ephesians chapter 4, that we grow up into him, that we grow up into Christ in all things.

Or in Colossians, he makes reference to his desire to present every man perfect in Christ. That's in Colossians chapter 1, I think, if I'm not mistaken. No, I can't remember.

Here it is. Colossians 1, 28. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, or mature, it could be translated, mature in Christ Jesus.

Paul's labor is not just to get people saved, but to get them mature in Christ, to see Christ fully formed in them. And that is something that is worth meditating on a lot, but we don't have time to discuss it as much as I would like. I want to get on now in chapter 4 of Galatians, verses 21 through 31.

There's an extended analogy he gives here, which is very fascinating. And as I said when we were talking about chapter 3, this analogy has a lot to say to us about the relevance of the Abrahamic promises to the Jews. When I say that I believe the Jews are just like anybody else, which is what the Bible says, there's no Jew or Gentile.

All are one. God does not show favoritism to people on the basis of race. The Bible says that repeatedly in the New Testament.

But when I say that, people say, well, what about those promises God made to Abraham? What about that covenant God made with Israel? Well, what about it? Paul has already

said in chapter 3, the covenant was made with Abraham and his seed. That seed is Christ, and if you're in Christ, then you're the heirs that that was talking about. You're the seed of Abraham and the heirs according to the promise.

He says it another way here through this analogy, which is very interesting, though for some reason I find some people find it hard to follow, so I'll try to make it easy to follow. Tell me you who desire to be under the law. Do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons.

Now he's making a story from the story of Abraham, yet he calls that the law. It's clear he means by the law, the Torah, which includes the book of Genesis. Sometimes Paul means the whole Torah, the whole five books of Moses when he talks about the law.

Other times he means something else. Here, when he says, do not hear the law, he means haven't you read the Torah? Genesis, for example. What about Abraham? He had sons, more than one son.

He had two sons, one by a bondwoman, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through promise. Which things are symbolic? For these are the two covenants, that is, the one at Sinai and the one that Jesus made.

The one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar, for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem, which now is, and is embonded with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. Now, people have had trouble following what Paul is saying here sometimes because of the notion that when you think of Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, if either of them refers to the nation of Israel, it must be Isaac, because Abraham had two sons.

Actually he had eight, but there are two that are under consideration here. Isaac is the one who gave rise to the Jews, and Ishmael to the Arabs. And it's hard for people knowing that to shift gears and say, OK, in this illustration, Ishmael refers to the Jews, and Isaac refers to the Christians, because he says these two sons represent two covenants.

One covenant, the first one, which is Ishmael, actually Hagar is the covenant and her son, Ishmael. The first covenant is Hagar, Mount Sinai, and that corresponds to earthly Jerusalem, that is Judaism. Judaism is likened here to Ishmael.

Why? Because Ishmael's mother was a slave, and he was therefore, by Paul's way of thinking, a slave. And Judaism makes slaves of people. Abraham has children by Hagar, and he has children through Judaism, the natural Jews.

They are Abraham's children, through the Jewish system and through Jewish genealogy. But he says, like Ishmael, they are only children of the flesh. OK, so Ishmael is like the

modern Jew in Judaism, or any Jew at any time in Judaism, children of Abraham according to the flesh.

Ishmael was, too, but he was not chosen, he was not the elect. But he had physical descent from Abraham, and that's what most Jews can say about their relationship with Abraham, they are physically descended from him, that's all. However, the covenant that brought them forth, the covenant that birthed them as sons of Abraham, is a covenant of bondage.

Like Hagar, the slave woman, who wears children into bondage. So, the old covenant bore children for Abraham into bondage, the bondage of the law, which Paul has already argued in the previous verses, we're not under that bondage anymore. But he says, the Jews today in Jerusalem are in that state.

They are children of Abraham, it may be, but of the same sort that Ishmael was. They're in bondage. They've come through a system, through a mother that's in bondage.

But, it says in verse 26, but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. Now, I said Jerusalem above is the church. Another way to say it is the new covenant.

There's a Jerusalem on earth, and a Jerusalem that is spiritual. A spiritual Jerusalem, and a physical Jerusalem. This is very important to remember when you study the Old Testament prophets and they talk about Jerusalem, and the glory of Jerusalem.

Because many of the passages in the Old Testament that talk about the latter day glory of Jerusalem, there are people who interpret this as being natural Jerusalem, but the apostles quoted many of these verses and applied it to the church, the spiritual Jerusalem. Now, where do I get off saying the church is spiritual Jerusalem? Well, look over at Hebrews chapter 12. We can see that the apostles certainly thought of it this way.

In Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 18, he's contrasting the old covenant with the new, just like Paul is in Galatians. For you have not come to the mountain that might be touched, that burned with fire and with the blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the words should not be spoken to them anymore. There's a reference to Mount Sinai.

You haven't come to Mount Sinai. You haven't come into the old covenant, is what he's saying. But in verse 22 he says, but you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn.

That is, Jesus is the firstborn. We have come to the general assembly called the church, which he also refers to as Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. See, Jesus called his disciples a city set on a hill.

He said, You are the light of the world, a city set on a hill. The disciples of Jesus, the church, are the city that is on the hill. It is the illuminating city.

It is the spiritual Jerusalem. Now, by the way, in verse 22 of Hebrews 12, where the writer says, You have come to Mount Zion, it's plain he's not talking about natural Mount Zion. That's where physical Jerusalem is set.

The city of Jerusalem is built on a mountain called Mount Zion. But the reason we know he doesn't mean natural Mount Zion is because he's already said in verse 18, You have not come to a mountain that may be touched. That is, we haven't come to a physical mountain like Mount Sinai.

We've come to a non-physical, a spiritual mountain, Mount Zion, the city of God, that city on a hill which we belong to, where we are an alternative community living in the world. And that's called the heavenly Jerusalem. It's the mother of us all.

It's the church under the new covenant. By the way, in the book of Revelation there is an extensive description of the new Jerusalem, the spiritual Jerusalem, in Revelation 21. And we won't go into it in detail now, but it seems to me a very symbolic description of the church.

The city of Jerusalem has twelve foundations, which are the twelve apostles of the land. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, according to Paul. The building is a cube-shaped, like a holy of holies.

There's the glory of God alone illuminates it, just like the holy of holies. No light of the moon, sun, or stars is there. Likening, I think, the city to the holy of holies, which is what the church is like today.

The habitation of God, the temple of God through the Spirit. I believe there's a lot of symbolism in it, but I believe that when the Bible talks about the new Jerusalem in the New Testament, the writers have the church in mind. Certainly the writer of Hebrews identified the new Jerusalem, or the heavenly Jerusalem, with the general assembly and church of the firstborn.

So, I think Paul had the same thing in mind, that the Jerusalem of God is free. OK, now, what Paul has said in this section is, sure the Jews can claim to be children of Abraham, so could Ishmael. Children of the flesh.

But as you know, Ishmael didn't receive the inheritance. But another son of Abraham did, and that was Isaac. He was a child of a promise.

Now, why did he say, child of promise, instead of something like spiritual? He said that Ishmael was a child of the flesh, in verse 23. He was born of the flesh, but he of the free woman was, he would have thought maybe, through the Spirit. But actually, Isaac was

also a child of the flesh.

So he wasn't any more spiritual than Ishmael was. So that wouldn't fit Paul's illustration to contrast flesh and spirit here. Instead he contrasts flesh and promise.

That is to say, Isaac would never have existed, could never have come into existence, except by the promise of God. He was miraculously born. If God had not promised him, he would have never come around.

Ishmael came along without any promise from God. Ishmael came along as a mere product of human sexual physical interaction. It's nothing about him sensational or supernatural.

He's just a child born of the flesh. But Isaac existed because God promised a special seed and gave him, and he could not have existed otherwise because he was born after both Abraham and Sarah were two old dead children. Now he likens that to us, Gentiles, the Galatians, who are Gentiles, Christians, because we would never have become children of Abraham either, except by a miracle.

Now the Jews, they're children of Abraham, but not miraculously. They're born physically, they're of the flesh, like Ishmael. Some of them may also be Christians, but every Jew can claim to be Abraham's seed according to the flesh.

We cannot. If it was the children of the flesh who were saved, then we'd have no hope because we can't change our parentage. We can't change our pedigree.

But by a miracle of regeneration, because of the promise God made to Abraham that he'd be the father of many nations, God has brought those of us who are members of other nations than Jews in by a miraculous birth, just like he did Isaac. So that Paul has seen here a parallel between the two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, and the two covenants, the old covenant and the new, by which persons become children of Abraham. And the two different kinds of children of Abraham are the children of the flesh, like Ishmael, and the children of promise, like Isaac.

He says very plainly, those who are children of the flesh are in bondage in natural Jerusalem and connected to that Jewish system. But the children of promise is who? The Galatian Christians, the Gentile Christians and ourselves. And by the way, that would include Jewish Christians, too, because in Christ, Jew and Gentile ceases to be a distinction.

But the point is, the new covenant has produced children of Abraham of a different sort than the old covenant did, and they don't have to be Jewish to be children of Abraham. Now the question then remains, do both sets of children receive the promises? Do the Jews receive the inheritance and the church receives the inheritance? Well, that's what Paul goes along to talk about. Verse 27, For it is written, now the quotation here is from

Isaiah 54.1, which is right after Isaiah 53, by the way.

Isaiah 53 talks about the death of Jesus, and Isaiah 54.1 talks about the birth of the church as a result of the death of Jesus. And Paul quotes Isaiah 54.1, Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear. Break forth and shout, you who do not prevail.

For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband. Now what's that all about? Well, I'll tell you. The desolate, the barren, refers to the Gentiles, those who have never been used by God in Old Testament times.

They were never a source of children for God. They were like a barren woman who had never born children for God, the Gentiles. The married wife, or she who has a husband, is Israel.

God was her husband. God was married, was in covenant with her. But what it says here is that the barren woman is going to bear more children than the married wife.

Now what this really boils down to is that the Gentiles are going to produce more children for God than Israel is, the married wife is. God's married wife has not produced too many children of God because the majority of Jewish people throughout history have never been people of faith. It's true.

The first Christians were Jewish. Jesus was Jewish. The apostles were Jewish.

And many Christians today are Jewish by birth. I mean, there are many Jewish Christians, but they are far from the majority of Jews. The majority of Jews are unbelievers.

And of course, by the way, in all fairness, the majority of Gentiles are unbelievers too. It may well be, in fact, that a higher percentage of Jews have become Christians than the percentage of Gentiles in the world who have become Christians. Nonetheless, when you take the total number of Christians, by far the greater number are Gentile than Jew.

And that's what Paul sees as a fulfillment of this statement in Isaiah, that the barren, fruitless, Gentile woman, as it were, has produced more children for God than the Jewish society, the Jewish race, which was his wife. And he sees Isaiah as celebrating that fact. And Paul says in verse 28, Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

Now notice, Paul's a Jew. His readers are Gentiles. He says, We.

But we are like Isaac. Now, Paul's a Jew and they're Gentiles. How can they both be like Isaac? Because they're both in the New Covenant.

And when Paul and the Gentiles came in the New Covenant, they ceased to be Gentiles or Jews. They're one in Christ. There's no Jew or Gentile, Paul said in chapter three.

Or these distinctions disappear in Christ. We who are Christians, in other words, are the

Isaac. We are the promised seed of Abraham.

The Jews who are not Christians are the Ishmael. They are not the heirs of the promise. And he goes on to make this very clear in verse 29.

He says that as he who was born according to the flesh, that's Ishmael, then persecuted him that was born according to the spirit, that is, Isaac. He's referring to the fact that when Isaac was being weaned, Ishmael mocked. And this led to Ishmael's expulsion from the family, as you may recall from Genesis.

Because as he was born of the flesh, then persecuted him that was born of the spirit. So even now is it today. What's Paul saying? The Jews persecute the Christians.

Now, that isn't true today, here now in America. The Jews are not persecuting us. If anything, the Jews would have grounds to complain that the Christians or those who profess to be Christians have persecuted them in more recent history.

Paul probably couldn't imagine a time when Jews would be persecuted by Christians, because Paul probably couldn't imagine time when Christians would be persecutors of anybody, much less the Jews. But in his day, the opposition Paul was receiving was not from the Roman officials. It wasn't from the Greeks, it was from the Jews.

The Jews were the enemy of the church in Paul's day. And he said, look, the children of the flesh, like Ishmael persecuting Isaac, the Jews are persecuting the Christians. The children of the flesh persecute the children of the spirit.

Which, obviously, according to the spirit, equates with those who are promised in the previous verse. Now, verse 30. Nevertheless, what does the scripture say? He quotes it.

The scripture he quotes is in the context of Ishmael mocking Isaac, and Sarah saw this. This is in Genesis 21, verse 10 and 12. It says, cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

Now, these words that are quoted are actually Sarah's words. Paul applies it to the words of scripture. So, apparently, he's... And by the way, God confirmed Sarah's words, because when the thing displeased Abraham, God said, listen to your wife.

Get rid of Ishmael. Okay, so Paul quotes this as the words of God himself. The words of scripture.

Not just the words of Sarah. God put his amen on these words of Sarah. What are the words, and why does Paul quote them here? Cast out the bondwoman and her son.

That's Ishmael and Hagar. For the son of the bondwoman, Ishmael, shall not be heir with the son of the free woman, Isaac. Now, how does that fit Paul's illustration? Well, there's only one way it could fit.

Is it not obvious? The children of the flesh will not receive the inheritance. Only the children of the promise. The children of the bondwoman have no place in the inheritance of the promises to Abraham and his seed.

Only the children of the free woman, who is the Jerusalem above, who is the mother of us all as Christians. That is to say, he said the same thing here, he said in chapter three a different way. When he said, if you are Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and you are the heirs according to the promise.

Here he says it another way. We are like Isaac. The Jews are like Ishmael.

When I say the Jews, I mean Jews who are not Christians. We both have our own ways of calling Abraham our father. The Jews can call Abraham their father the same way Ishmael could, in that they both were physically descended from Abraham, but it didn't do Ishmael any good in terms of inheriting anything from Abraham.

Ishmael did not receive an inheritance. He was not to be heir of Abraham's estate or of Abraham's promises. And that's like the natural Jew, he says, who is not a Christian today.

But those of us who are Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, Paul is a Jew, he's really for Gentiles, but he considered that to be no difference. Jews and Gentiles who are Christians, they are the promised seed. They are the ones who are inheriting Father Abraham's benefits.

And the natural, the children of Bondwyn, will not be heirs together. So it's not that Gentiles now have one part of the inheritance and Jews have another part. And this is the way that some theologians, I could tell you the name of the theology, but I think you've heard me say it enough.

Some understand that the Jews will forever have a separate place in the heart of God from the Christians in a positive sense, that the Jews will be forever God's earthly people, Christians will be forever God's heavenly people, that each has an inheritance because of our relationship to Abraham, that because the Jews are physically descended from Abraham, they will receive the physical inheritance of the land and so forth, and that because we are spiritual descendants of Abraham, that we will receive the spiritual blessings and salvation and so forth, but the Jews will receive some too. And this just doesn't jive with Paul. Paul said, no, it only goes to one heir.

Ishmael and Isaac didn't divide up the inheritance. Ishmael was cast out and Isaac got it all. He said, that's how it is.

That's how it is. The children of the Bondwyn will not be heirs with the children of the free one. And he says in verse 31, so then brethren, we are not the children of the Bondwyn but of the free.

Now his reason for saying that is that we are not under the law. Remember the Bondswyn was Hagar, Sinai. And he's trying to tell these people, we're not under the law of Moses, we're not children of the Bondswyn, we're free.

Why are we free? Because our hearts have been changed. We can be trusted without those rules. God has built the rules into our nature.

We've become partakers of the divine nature. We have a different set of inclinations. We're going in a different direction than before, and therefore we're free to do, in a sense, as we wish, because we wish to serve God.

We wish to be righteous. The law was necessary for people who don't wish to be righteous, to make them behave anyway. But we are not of that category.

Now we go on to chapter five. Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Now, I've actually heard people use this verse as a support for throwing off tyrants and fighting for our freedom as Americans and so forth.

Don't be entangled again in the yoke of bondage. Obviously, Paul hasn't got any such idea in mind as revolt against tyrants or anything like that, although many Americans have become so accustomed to their freedom, and that we've never had kings, that if someone begins to tyrannize us, we almost feel like that's something Christians should never tolerate. Well, I'll put it this way.

Christians should never wish to be under a tyrant, but we may have to tolerate a great number of things that we don't wish for, and that's another issue altogether, whether we should tolerate it. Paul does not ever say that we shouldn't tolerate tyrants. In fact, he says to submit to them.

Throughout his writings, whenever he counseled, and so did Jesus, whenever Jesus or Paul wrote to people who were under tyrants, like the Roman emperor, they just said, submit to them, be good citizens, obey, you know, win people that way, it's the Lord. This stand fast in the liberty is about spiritual liberty, liberty from Jewish legalism or from any kind of legalism. Don't let somebody begin to interpret your religious life in terms of rules that they wish to impose, whether Jewish or Christian or any other kind.

Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't some places where rules apply. For example, if you're in, well, here, in school, we have rules here. Or children, you know, the parents make rules for them.

Or governments make laws for the citizens to obey. Or employers have certain policies that the employees have to follow. These are rules, too.

Paul is not saying throw off all authority, throw off all restraint, and don't let anyone ever

tell you what to do. There are certain institutions that we participate in where authority and rules have a place in the smooth functioning of the institution, whether it's the government or a school or whatever. What Paul is concerned about is that people never begin to look at rules as having anything to do with personal righteousness before God.

We have, as you probably know, kicked people out of the school before for violating the rules. And some of them, you know, accused us of being too legalistic about the rules. We had to explain to them, well, legalism is a little different than what we do here.

If we told you you had to keep these rules to be saved, or even to be a good Christian, then you're right, we would be legalistic. We don't think you have to avoid special relationships for nine months in order to be saved, or even to be a good Christian. You can be a good Christian and have a special relationship for those nine months, you just can't do it here.

It's not a question of what's righteousness, it's a question of what's functionally allowed for the program. If we said that everyone ought to go through this school, and in the school they have to keep these rules in order to be spiritual, then we'd be legalistic, because we'd be enforcing something on Christians that we have no right to enforce on Christians. But if someone comes to live in my house, and I say, listen, you're welcome to live with me, but we don't allow smoking in the house.

I might say, you can smoke and still be saved, but you can't smoke in my house. That's a different issue. You don't have to live in my house to be saved, but if you choose to be in my house, you can't smoke there.

We don't want cigarette smell on the curtains. Actually, we don't have any curtains, but on the furniture, or whatever, or on our clothes. This is not legalism.

When you say, OK, listen, here's an optional thing you can participate in, you want to, if you do, here's the terms. Here are the rules. And employers do that.

Governments do that. Families do that. All forms of institutions do that.

Rules are necessary for people to function together in any kind of a society, or a project, or an institution. But the problem is, when people begin to interpret whether you're right with God or not, by whether you're keeping any particular set of rules. Now, you might say, well, what about if someone's committing adultery? Don't we have every right to assume they're not right with God if they're committing adultery? Of course.

But not because of rules, but because they're not walking with Christ. They're not submitting to the Lordship of Jesus. If you submit to Jesus' Lordship day by day, or another way of putting it, moment by moment, and walk in the Spirit, you won't be doing those things.

If you do those things, it's not because, the problem is not that you're breaking the rules. The problem is that you're not walking with Jesus. And that's what saves you, is being with Jesus.

It's not keeping the Ten Commandments. If you break the commandment about adultery, or about murder, or about theft, you're not hurting with God because you broke the Ten Commandments. You're hurting with God because you're not walking with Jesus when you do those things.

Jesus is your salvation, not some law. There are certainly things that a Christian could never do while walking with the Lord. There are things that Christians could never do if they're walking in the Spirit.

Because Paul said, walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. So to say we're not under rules, or that our spirituality is not determined or gauged by observing rules, you need to understand, I'm not saying there are no standards. There are principles by which a person will always live if they're living in obedience to Jesus, because Jesus could never approve of the contrary principle.

You can never murder somebody and be walking in the Spirit at the same time, because Jesus would never approve of that. But it's not because you're under the rule, thou shalt not kill, it's because you're under Jesus' Lordship, and that makes a difference. And you're walking, Jesus is incited by His Spirit, and He's guiding you to do something very different than murder.

So you can, of course, measure a person's state of life with God by behavior of sorts. But we need to remember, it's not that we make a bunch of religious rules and impose them on people, it's rather, is a person doing something that Jesus could never approve of? If so, then they must not be walking with Jesus at the moment. It's a fine line.

It's a fine line. I can tell my son, listen, I don't ever want you to chew gum when I'm not around. Don't chew gum in the house, because I keep finding gum stuck underneath the chairs and things like that.

I just, no, we've got a rule, no chewing gum in the house. Now, we don't have that rule, but I'm just making this up off the top of my head right now. But if, if he was with me, and I said, here, have a piece of gum, and we happen to be in the house, and I was going to be with him, and I didn't mind him chewing gum when he was with me, it would be wrong for him to say, well, I can't chew gum, because we have a rule against that.

I mean, for him to do what I want him to do is more important than keeping any rules. The thing is, there are certain things that Jesus would never approve of anyone doing. Chewing gum in the house is not one of them.

But, you know, murder and adultery and theft and anything unloving would certainly

have to be on that list of things that the Holy Spirit would never approve in your life, to do anything unloving. So you can tell if somebody is walking with Jesus by whether they're being loving or not, and whether they're doing those things that conform to what he would approve. We are free, but we're free to do those things that are pleasing to God.

We're free from the yoke of bondage of rules. Verse 2, he says, Indeed, I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. Now, some of you are starting to sweat right now, because you are circumcised.

I was circumcised as a baby. Gosh, does that mean, uh-oh, can I not be saved? I've been circumcised. I didn't have anything to say about it.

I'm in trouble. Well, Paul was circumcised, too, remember. So, and he was saved.

What he is saying is, if you go out and be circumcised because you are bringing yourself under the law that says you must be circumcised, then you are depending on something other than Jesus for your salvation. You're depending on legalistic stuff, like circumcision. And as soon as you start becoming dependent on that kind of stuff, Christ isn't doing anything for you anymore.

I mean, He'll stand back and say, Listen, you want to save yourself? You want me to save you? You know? If you're going to save yourself by being circumcised and keeping the rule, go ahead. But I'll just wait over here until you come back. You know, because you're not following me when you're doing that.

You can't have Him and some other form of righteousness, too. And Paul says, You've got to make your pick. If you choose circumcision and legalism as a means of righteousness, then Christ won't be your means of righteousness.

He'll profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man that becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. Again, this doesn't apply to people who are involuntary circumcised as babies or who do it for medical reasons or whatever.

He's talking about those who do it because they've been convinced that it is a Christian obligation to keep the Jewish law of which circumcision is a part. He says, Well, listen, if you take that step, realize what you're doing. You're acknowledging that you are under the law.

And if you are under the law, you're no longer under Christ. If you're trusting in the law of your righteousness, then you're not trusting in Christ anymore for it, and therefore He's not going to profit you any. Furthermore, realize what you're getting into.

If you acknowledge the validity and the bindingness of that much of the law, realize the whole rest of the law comes with it, too. If you affirm that you're under the law, there's a

lot there besides circumcision that comes with the package. He says, I testify to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

He says, you have become estranged from Christ. You who attempt to be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace. Now, I've tried to understand this expression, you have fallen from grace, in whatever way it might be understood without speculating loss of salvation.

Some people say, Well, you've fallen into a religion that is lower than grace. I mean, it's hard to believe it. Frankly, what this suggests is you were in grace because you can't fall from it if you weren't there first.

But you've fallen from it, you're not in it anymore. So it raises serious questions about those who say once in grace, always in grace. These people clearly had been in grace, and they've fallen out of grace.

They've fallen from grace. Now, there may be, I have to admit, there may be some other meaning of that statement that has totally eluded me. But, A. W. Tozer used to say, he liked to read the Bible and understand things the way an intelligent, plain man would.

Not a stupid person who can't think very well, but a person who is intelligent, but plain. He doesn't have some elaborate theological agenda to defend. He just wants to know what it means.

He just takes it as its fairly obvious meaning, unless there's something that's not obvious, then he has to sort it out more. But Tozer used to speak frequently of an intelligent, plain man would understand the scripture this way, and he was usually right. Basically, it was the obvious.

The obvious meaning that anyone who had no other agendas to impose upon it would take it to mean. And when he says you have fallen from grace, there's an obvious meaning of that, that any intelligent, plain man would see, unless he was determined to hammer through a shoehorn in some kind of a theological system that that didn't fit very well into, but force it in there somehow, come up with all kinds of ingenious explanations of why it doesn't say what it sounds like it says. But I guess I'd rather just stick with being an intelligent, plain man.

It seems to me like these people had been in grace, and because they have now trusted not in Christ any longer, but in the law, they have fallen from grace. Now that doesn't mean they can't come back. He's urging them to come back.

He's urging them to trust in Christ and not in the law. But when you begin to trust in yourself or in some other thing than Christ for salvation, this suggests very strongly that you can't trust in two things at once, not with any effect. You can't trust in Jesus for your righteousness and yourself too.

You have to trust in him or yourself. And if you trust in yourself, he profits you nothing. Now, see, trusting in the law is just trusting in yourself.

Trusting in my observance of the law, my keeping certain rules, my measuring up, that's trusting in me. So I can trust in me, in which case I will profit myself whatever I'm capable of profiting myself, but Christ will profit me nothing. There's no grace in it.

If I bring myself under rules, then I'm under rules. I'm under law. There's no grace in that.

I used to be in grace, but I've fallen from grace when I moved to that position. Grace is where you're trusting wholly in Christ. Nothing in my hand I bring.

What is it? Only to your cross I cling. Is that how it goes in the old hymn? But I don't bring anything to the proposition except my submission, except my faith, which is not a meritorious thing at all. It's just my surrender and my reliance on him.

And that's what Paul very adamantly and with surprising sharpness says, that you simply can't benefit from Christ and from a righteousness that's based on good works at the same time. Verse 5, For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but faith working through love.

Now he says, We hope and wait eagerly for the hope of righteousness by faith. Now, the hope of righteousness almost sounds like we don't have it yet. We're waiting for it, like we're not righteous yet.

And in a sense that appears to be what he is saying, but there's two angles, of course, to righteousness. One is what God thinks of us at the moment. The other is what he declares to be the case at the day of judgment.

In both cases, we're talking about justification. Christ has justified me. He's declared me righteous.

But that declaration will be seen at the day of judgment. When I stand before the throne and the question under consideration is, Am I lost or saved? And Christ says, You are justified. You are righteous because of your faith.

That is something I'm looking forward to. I mean, I enjoy it by faith now. On the day of judgment, I know I will be declared righteous.

And that's what Paul is talking about. We're waiting eagerly for the hope of being declared righteousness because of our faith. But he's not denying that we're already righteous by faith.

It's just that we haven't stood before the throne and had that declared publicly as a final

verdict yet. It is, as it were, a settled matter, so long as we're trusting Christ. But we're waiting eagerly for the time when we will know we've finished the course, we've endured the end, we have not fallen away into legalism, we have not drifted from grace, we have held on to faith as the only means of our salvation.

And at the end, God will declare us righteous because of our faith. That's what we're eagerly looking forward to and hoping for. Now, when he said, In Christ Jesus, verse 6, neither circumcision or uncircumcision avails anything but faith working through love, this is very clear that Paul agrees with James on this matter of faith.

James said in James chapter 2, Faith without works is dead. Paul doesn't always say it so clearly, but he does here, and quite obviously he agreed with himself all the time. He didn't always say it, so when he said we're justified by faith, he didn't say what that faith looks like, but here he does.

What avails with God, certainly not a question of whether you're circumcised or not, what avails with God is whether you have the right kind of faith. But there's more than one kind of faith. The one that works is the faith that works.

The faith that works in saving you is the faith that works in your life. The devil has a faith, but it doesn't work. He won't be justified in the last day because his faith is without works.

His faith does not work through love. He has a faith that's academic merely. It's merely mental.

But the faith that saves a person is one that changes his whole perspective, his whole life, his whole direction. Of course, that is something that when you have that kind of faith, God works a supernatural work of regeneration in you, and that produces a new heart, that produces new works, works of love. So you can, in fact, tell whether faith is present by whether there are works of love there.

If a person claims that faith, but they don't work love, they don't work works of love, then they don't have the faith that makes any difference to God, apparently. Verse 7, you ran well, again he's alluding to their past when they were not yet fallen into this legalistic spell. You ran well.

Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from him who calls you. Him is here capitalized in the New King James, which apparently means God, at least so the translators felt. It's also possible, since it's not capitalized in the Greek, it might be a reference to Paul.

Paul, who called them to the gospel, did not endorse this other form of gospel that they're now following. It could be taken either way. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

That was apparently a proverb of sorts. It's not found in the Old Testament, but Paul quotes it also in 1 Corinthians 5.6. There he's talking about sin. In 1 Corinthians 5.6, Paul's talking about a man living in sin with his father's wife and says, you've got to get that out of the church.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump. In other words, if you leave sin undealt with in the church, the whole church will become compromised. Sin spreads like a cancer in the body.

But now he uses the same proverb about legalism. You allow a little legalism? Man, that spreads like a cancer, too. And boy, is that ever clear.

Churches run toward legalism about faster than they run towards sin. Yes. 1 Corinthians 5.6. It's apparently a proverb, a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

You only need a little bit of yeast to cause a whole lump of dough to rise. But he said sin is like that, and so is legalism like that. And he says, I have confidence in you.

He's kind of hoping against hope here, in the Lord, that you have no other mind, but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. He's talking about the false teachers there. And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

Now, he says, if I still preach circumcision, it sounds as if maybe he's been accused of that. Now, we mentioned that in our introduction, that perhaps the accuser was saying, well, sometimes he preaches circumcision, sometimes he preaches legalism. No circumcision.

Just whatever pleases people. If he's with a crowd that would like him to preach that, that's what he preaches. If he's with a crowd that doesn't like it, then he doesn't.

Saying he's inconsistent, he says, listen, if I preach circumcision when I'm around the Jews, why do they hate me so much? Why do they persecute me so much? Why do they still find my message so offensive? The offense of the cross would have ceased if I preached circumcision. What is the offense of the cross, then? The cross says that I can never be good enough. I can never please God in the flesh.

If I could, why would he send Jesus to die? He's earlier said if there was a law by which righteousness could be had, then justification would have been by the law. He said in chapter two, verse 21, I do not set aside the grace of God for if righteousness comes through law, then Christ died for nothing. Christ died in vain.

Galatians 2, 21. If a person could be saved by law, then God would not have sent Jesus. The fact that he did send Jesus proves that man cannot be saved by his own efforts.

That offends some people. People don't want to believe they're that bad, that uncorrectable, that unredeemable. I mean, most people feel like, well, if I just really determined to turn over a new leaf, I could be a good person.

No, the cross says otherwise. If you could be a good person by turning over a new leaf, then why would Jesus bother to die? The fact that he came and died meant that you can't ever be good enough on your own. And that's offensive to the pride of man.

He said, if I preach law, if I preach circumcision, that wouldn't offend people as much as I tend to. But he says in verse 12, I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off. Now, I mentioned, I think earlier, there's even a margin reference here that says mutilate themselves.

It's referring to castrate themselves. It's a bit of a play on ideas that they're trying to get everyone circumcised. The New Jerusalem Bible says, tell those who want to circumcise you, I wish the knife would slip when they're circumcising themselves.

I mean, he's wishing something very uncharitable upon them, and perhaps after he wrote this, he repented later. I don't know. But he's very harsh.

He's more harsh in this epistle than he is in any other epistle that he writes.