

Galatians Devotionals

PREVIOUS

NEXT

GALATIANS DEVOTIONALS

Most from Today in the Word
Moody Bible Institute

GALATIANS 1

Galatians 1:1-5

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord ... that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. - 1 Timothy 1:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1976, Vie Carlson bid \$400 for the angry letter Frank Sinatra wrote to Chicago Daily News columnist Mike Royko. Twenty years later, that letter was valued at more than \$15,000. In the letter, Sinatra promised Royko \$100,000 if he could prove that Sinatra punched the elderly man Royko claimed he did. He could double his earnings if he could pull Sinatra's alleged hairpiece. "Quite frankly," Sinatra fumed, "I don't understand why people don't spit in your eye three or four times a day."

It is always telling how a person responds to criticism and personal attack, and Paul began his letter to the Galatians having to do just this. Conspicuously absent are the customary greetings and blessings of his other letters. Rather, Paul had to immediately assume a defensive posture.

Much more is at stake than Paul's personal reputation. His critics wanted to subvert the gospel he had been preaching, and their first line of attack was to discredit Paul as an apostle. If Paul was to defend the gospel he preaches, he must also defend the validity of his apostleship. He reminded the Galatians that he had been sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father. No man commissioned him, not Peter or any other elder of the church. He had a divine call, and therefore he had legitimate apostolic authority. The forcefulness of his defense, which becomes even clearer as we read on in chapter one, helps us to realize the critical nature of the attack.

The gospel is what matters most. The Galatians had to understand the gospel rightly, and these opening verses summarize the gospel. The theology of Galatians is Trinitarian: the gospel is a shared work of the Father, Son and Spirit. In these opening verses, Paul exalts the work of the God the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ. Both have willingly expressed their love for humanity. God the Father sends Jesus for our rescue; God the Son lays down His life as payment for our sins. By the end of this letter, we'll see even more clearly the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. For this spectacular mission to save the world, God deserves glory forever and ever.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul didn't always defend himself when attacked. In 1 Corinthians 4:3, Paul told his critics, "I care very little if I am judged by you." So why was Paul so eager to defend his apostleship in his letter to the Galatians? He was convinced that the truth and purity of the gospel were at stake, and he was really rallying to the defense of the gospel. When we suffer personal attack, we should follow the example of Paul and use wisdom to discern when and why it's appropriate to respond.

Galatians 1:1-5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Contemporary Americans pride themselves on personal freedom. They have much to say about the Constitution's guarantees of freedom of religion, speech, press and assembly. They want "free love" and freedom from all moral standards.

For a nation that puts so much stress on personal freedom, the book of Galatians has a contemporary relevance. Its message is liberty--freedom from the law. This appeals to our "freedom-seeking" society. We welcome the chance to be free from any personal or moral restraints. But Galatians doesn't encourage that kind of liberty. As we will discover in our study of this key book, the world's idea of freedom is very different from true freedom in Christ.

From the first verse of Galatians, it is clear that this epistle is different in tone from Paul's other writings. There is nothing unusual about the name Paul. The apostle used his Gentile name in connection with his Gentile work. Nor is there anything unusual about the fact that he calls himself an apostle. But in the Galatian churches, some were challenging Paul's right to the title of apostle--his right to speak authoritatively. In this letter, Paul takes the offensive. He declares that his apostolic authority comes not from man but from Jesus Christ.

As was customary, Paul begins with a greeting, or salutation. The common Greek greeting was "charein," which meant "joy to you." Here in verse 1, it is changed to "charis," meaning "grace to you." "Peace" is the Hebrew greeting. One would expect the apostle to the Gentiles to use a Greek greeting. But he links the Greek with the Hebrew greeting, symbolizing the union between Jews and Greeks in the body of Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

As we begin our study of Galatians, we suggest that you read the entire book straight through in one sitting sometime in the next few days.

Why do this? In spending thirty days on six chapters of Scripture, it's easy to become stuck on the details and lose sight of the "big picture." But by reading the whole epistle, you will get an overall sense of the author, his audience, and his general themes and arguments--a compass to help you navigate through the book with a clear sense of direction.

Galatians 1:1-5

Jesus Christ ... gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age. - Galatians 1:3b-4

TODAY IN THE WORD

A few years ago a popular series of posters initially looked like a jumble of patterns and colors. As one looked intently at them, the apparent chaos would suddenly resolve itself into a well-defined three-dimensional image. While it may not be immediately obvious, a long look at Galatians shows that this epistle fits nicely into the theme of wisdom that we have been studying throughout the year. Galatians represents the apostle Paul's teaching on living wisely in light of the gospel message.

Paul wrote this letter to a group of fledgling churches in the region of Galatia (located in present-day Turkey) in order to address some serious issues facing the early church. The primary problem concerned the status of Gentile Christians. Thousands of years after Christ, we can easily forget that the earliest followers of Jesus were, like Jesus himself, fully Jewish. They naturally continued to follow the practices of the Jewish Law while professing faith in Jesus. We see in the book of Acts that as the early church carried out Jesus' Great Commission, the question of the relationship of newly converted Gentile believers to the practices of the Law became an issue of serious disagreement (cf. Acts 10:9-16, 27-29; 15:1-35).

Those first Christian leaders had to work out the implications of the gospel. Some of them concluded that Gentiles needed to observe the ritual of circumcision as prescribed by the Old Testament Law in order to participate fully in the salvation offered by the gospel.

Paul came to a different conclusion. He presents an extended argument for the full acceptance of Gentile believers apart from such practices as circumcision. The starting point for his argument is the simple affirmation of the gospel message--Jesus died for our sins (that is, for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles) in order to rescue us from this present evil age.

APPLY THE WORD

It's appropriate to begin this month's study in prayer. Begin by praising the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for sending servants like Paul to help us all understand more clearly what it means to live wisely as gospel believers.

Galatians 1:4

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'Who gave himself for our sins' Galatians 1:4

Our Lord died as a vicarious sacrifice in the place of God's elect, his sheep, all who believe. Had he died in the place of every man in the world and borne all their sins, every man would be saved. But, in as much as all men are not saved, one of two conclusions must be drawn. Either Christ failed in his efforts to redeem some of those whom he represented, which is blasphemy; or he actually died as the Substitute only of those who are in fact redeemed and saved by him, which is the truth of Scripture. 'For the transgression of my people was he stricken', saith the Lord.

And our Lord's once-for-all sacrifice for sin was an effectual atonement. That is to say, he did actually put away the sins of his people, redeem us from the curse of the law and secure our everlasting salvation by his death and resurrection in our place. He did not make the pardon of sin, redemption and salvation possibilities for all men; he actually accomplished those things for some men. 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law.' 'By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.' He has 'put away sin by the sacrifice of himself'. The believer's faith does not give merit to the blood of Christ and make it effectual. The blood of Christ gives merit to the believer's faith and makes it effectual.

If Christ died only for a specific people, how can I know that he bore my sin and died for me? I know that Christ died for sinners and I know that I am a sinner. I know that he died for every sinner who believes on him and that all who believe on him will be saved, because God said so. Now as a guilty sinner I do with all my heart trust the Lord Jesus Christ as my only and all-sufficient Savior. Since I trust him, I know that he died for me. Will you trust him too? If you can, then he died for you!

Galatians 1:6

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible

To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him.—Gal. 1.6

The experience which the Apostle thus described was at once the inspiration of his preaching, and the secret of that conviction as to the authority of his Gospel which called forth this letter. To him the Gospel was infinitely more than a doctrine, a truth heard from others, and intellectually accepted. It was his very life, and the deepest thing therein. In this first chapter he made three references to his experience, which are revealing. First he wrote of a "revelation of Jesus Christ." Then, in our verse, of a revelation of "His Son in me." And finally he declared that the churches of Judaea glorified God in him. The first of these references was undoubtedly to that wondrous hour in which Jesus of Nazareth was unveiled before his astonished soul, as risen, and active in the affairs of His people. The experience on the road to Damascus was one of revolution. To this man the whole scheme of things was turned upside down. Then, in the quiet seclusion of those waiting days in Damascus, that which had been an arresting and blinding revelation from without, became a convincing and quickening revelation within his own soul. Christ was unveiled within him. That is the secret of preaching. A consciousness of Christ which is purely objective is fundamental, but it is not enough to equip any man for preaching. There must be this deeper knowledge of Christ, the subjective unveiling of Him within the life. A man who knows much about Christ, may talk about Him, A man who knows Him, can preach Him.

Galatians 1:6-9

TODAY IN THE WORD

A second-century Christian heresy was ""rediscovered"" in 1945. That year, archaeologists recovered a number of documents from an Egyptian monastery, among them a book called ""The Gospel of Truth"" by a theologian named Valentinus (or one of his followers). Once a candidate for bishop of Rome, Valentinus was excommunicated when he emerged as leader of a gnostic heresy. Gnosticism denies that the spiritual has anything to do with the physical, a heresy with which other ages of the church have also wrestled.

Valentinus interpreted the Bible in a strange, allegorical way. His teachings blurred the line between Christianity, mysticism, philosophy and Judaism. He rejected the incarnation, crucifixion and bodily resurrection of Jesus. Church leaders attacked Valentinus' heretical ideas and defended biblical truth.

Heresies and cults have always threatened the church. When falsehoods are exposed, the church must do all it can to defend the truth. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul is defending the truth of Christianity against false theology. He criticizes the Galatians for neglecting Christian liberty and for focusing instead on the error of legalism.

The Galatians may have been startled when the apostle accused them of turning from God (v. 6). No doubt they thought they were pleasing the Father by keeping the law, as did the Jews and Paul before his conversion. But God had extended to the Galatians grace through Jesus Christ, the instrument by which He brings us to salvation. The Galatians had set aside that important truth, and distorted the simple truths of the gospel (vv. 6-7).

Verse 8 states that it is not possible for another gospel to be proclaimed. Paul and his companions would not do it; God had not ordained that angels should. Therefore, if anyone at all should preach a gospel other than that which Paul has preached, ""Let him be eternally condemned.""

APPLY THE WORD

As we can clearly see in these introductory verses of Galatians, the personal context of Paul's letter is important. He was not writing a systematic theology text, but a pastoral letter to a church he had planted. He wanted the Galatian believers to grow and mature in their Christian faith and love.

Galatians 1:6-9

My dear children ... I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. - Galatians 4:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you ever watch sports, you've seen this scenario: a time-out is called, and the players gather breathlessly around the coach. The coach's words are punctuated with urgency. He doesn't smile. He gestures emphatically at his clipboard. The outcome of the game hangs in the balance.

Paul is like this coach on the sidelines. His words are urgent. The situation, as he sees it, is tenuous. Paul doesn't waste any time in his letter to the Galatians before addressing the dire problem he sees in their churches. False teachers have been given standing in the churches, and the Galatians have been deceived. The error of the Galatians actually threatens their standing in Christ. Paul accused the Galatians of having abandoned God the Father and the gospel of Jesus Christ. They have deserted the One who called them and embraced another gospel.

What Paul wants to emphasize is that the message that the Galatians have now believed is really no gospel at all. The Galatians, of course, didn't see it that way. Most likely, the false teachers hadn't asked the Galatians to renounce their faith in Christ. No, their message was probably much more subtle. They've criticized Paul's ministry, trying to discredit him and expose what they see as the error of his preaching and teaching. They've elevated their teaching as the "true" gospel. To Paul's horror, they've preached the necessity of circumcision to Gentile believers (cf. 5:2).

Paul answers back emphatically: May all of God's curses fall on them, or on anyone in fact who preaches anything other than the gospel of Jesus Christ! Paul was not going to cede any ground to these false teachers. He would not compromise the gospel, nor would he give up on the Galatians so easily.

What we start to see in this letter is Paul as a man who's fiercely committed to the Galatians and who wants to secure their total commitment to Christ. Like a coach explaining a key play in the game, Paul carefully outlined an argument in his letter for the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

In his commentary on Galatians, John Chrysostom wrote of the situation facing the Galatians, "Those who wished to deceive them did not do so all at once but gently estranged them from the faith in fact, leaving the names unchanged. For such are the wiles of the devil, not to make apparent the instruments of his hunt." For this reason, we must all guard against false doctrine, even within our churches, and imitate the Bereans, who devoutly studied Scripture (see Acts 17:10-15).

Galatians 1:6-9

Some people are throwing you into confusion and ... trying to pervert the gospel. - Galatians 1:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

The neighborhood kids decided to organize themselves into a playgroup and little Danny was their leader. All the members had bicycles and decorated them the same way so that everyone in the neighborhood would know who they were. When Sarah's family moved in, she too wanted to be part of the group. "You can join," Danny told her, "but only if you have a bicycle and decorate it just like ours!"

This story reflects something of the situation in Galatia. Paul had proclaimed the gospel there and several people had believed. Yet some in the early church were troubled. For those early Jewish Christians, the problem was that many of the people to whom Paul preached were not Jews, and Paul's message suggested that they need not become Jewish. Paul was telling Gentiles that the salvation offered by Jesus, the Jewish Messiah (the word Christ means "Messiah"), was open to them if they believed that this Jesus died and rose again on account of their sins (cf. Gal. 1:1-4).

The crux of the matter was not that Paul preached to Gentiles. It was that he preached a message that offered salvation to Gentiles apart from their submitting to circumcision. Paul was preaching a message that offered salvation on terms that seemed to conflict with the commands of the Jewish Law.

Galatians is a complicated letter. As we study it this month we will see that Paul's response to these concerns is clear and firm—to require Gentiles to submit to the Law contradicts the freedom of the gospel. Such an approach perverts the good news. The gospel message proclaims Jesus as victor over evil and Lord of all people.

APPLY THE WORD

The tendency to want to add requirements for salvation wasn't isolated to the Jewish Christians in Paul's day. Although today the issue isn't usually circumcision, many of us find ourselves thinking that salvation must depend on eating or dressing or doing things a certain way.

Galatians 1:8-9

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Making It Clear

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8-9

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? 1 Corinthians 14:8

Have you ever tried to speak to someone who didn't understand your language? When I travel, I frequently encounter this problem. I forget that the entire world does not speak English. I will only get a smile or a blank stare. No matter how vital my conversation is, the other person cannot comprehend it. When we share the Gospel with people, we often speak in a language that the unsaved cannot comprehend. We talk with words that they've never heard. The Apostle Paul stressed in his letters that we must make the presentation of the Gospel as clear as crystal. Often, we add confusing terms and conditions that only confuse the issue. This reminds me of a story about the Chevy Nova. This was a moderately successful American car for many years. The company, encouraged by the sales, began marketing this vehicle throughout the world. Unfortunately, the car didn't sell so well in Spanish-speaking countries. The company could not figure out the reason for the decline in sales. That was, until they discovered that the word "Nova" in Spanish means, "no go." Not a very good name for a mode of transportation. When we confuse terminology in presenting the Gospel, we may be sending a false message to the world without realizing it. That is why it is so important to present a clear gospel message every time we share our faith with someone. We want to make sure we are speaking their language.

I do not frustrate the grace of God. = Galatians 2:21

Galatians 1:10

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

People Pleasers

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

Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. 1 Corinthians 10:33

The Apostle Paul seemingly contradicts himself in Galatians when he claims that he doesn't aim to please men. Earlier, when addressing the Corinthians, Paul said that he tried to "please all men in all things." But, instead of a contradiction, Paul actually gives us a very important principle when dealing with others.

When it comes to the truth of the Gospel, there was no fudging on Paul's part. He wouldn't lower his standards or change his message to accommodate those who didn't believe. He believed that if he watered down the Gospel to please people, then He would cease to be serving Christ.

Yet, when Paul talks about "pleasing all men in all things," he is describing the sacrifices that often have to be made to win people to Christ. He would do whatever it took to win someone to the Lord.

It is possible to reach the lost without losing our boldness and fervor. It may take sacrifice on our part. It may involve a late night visit to a hospital, paying for someone's dinner, or giving someone a ride to church. It may even mean missing a day of work or a couple of hours on the phone. But, if we win the person to the Lord, the sacrifice is well worth the effort.

Pleasing people doesn't mean changing the message of the Gospel, but going the extra mile to share God's love. And it is an effort with eternal rewards.

A good life is the best sermon.

Galatians 1:10

Henry Blackaby - Experiencing God Day by Day

Pleasing God, Pleasing Others

For am I now trying to win the favor of people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.—Galatians 1:10

At times you will have to make a choice between pleasing God and pleasing those around you, for God's ways are not man's ways (Isa. 55:8–9). As important as it is to strive for good relations with others, it is even more important to maintain a steadfast and obedient relationship with Christ. Disobeying God to keep peace with other people is never wise. Peace with God is always paramount. Jesus warned that obeying Him might cause division in your relationships (Matt. 10:35–36). If Paul's primary goal had been to please others, he would never have become an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul went completely against the wishes of his colleagues in order to obey Christ. At times, obedience to God sets family members at odds with each other (Matt. 10:35–36). When you follow Jesus' Lordship, your family may misunderstand, or even oppose you, yet your obedience to God reflects your identity as His child. Jesus said that those who obey His will are His brothers and sisters (Luke 8:21). God does not intend to divide the home, but He places obedience before domestic harmony. It is important to get alone in quietness with God so that you understand what pleases Him. The world's thinking will mislead you more easily when you are not clear about what God desires. It broke Peter's heart to know that the opinion of a servant girl had mattered more to him than the approval of his Lord! If the desire to appease others tempts you to compromise what you know God wants you to do, learn from Peter's mistake. Determine that you will please your Lord regardless of the opinions of others.

Galatians 1:10-12

If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. - Galatians 1:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Towards the end of his second term, President George W. Bush set a record for the highest disapproval rating in the 70-year history of the Gallup poll. But in his recently published memoir, the former president resolutely affirms, "I had always done what I believed was right."

Being popular and being principled don't always go hand-in-hand. The apostle Paul realized this in the context of his own ministry. To be faithful to the call of God and the truth of the gospel would make him wildly unpopular in most places. Early on, Paul had to settle in his mind the answer to these all-important questions: Whom am I trying to please? Whose approval do I seek? As a faithful minister of the gospel, his answer had to be Christ and Christ alone. He could not simultaneously seek the approval of people and of God. He had to surrender the desire to be liked, to be understood, and to be approved. This, as we'll see later in the letter, was not true of the false teachers.

Paul's ministry is accredited by the fact not only that he exclusively sought the approval of Christ, but also that he received a divine message and call. The gospel Paul preached is not of "human origin." That is to say, Paul hadn't learned the gospel secondhand from Peter or any other leaders of the early Christian church. He was not making it up to suit his own purposes, either. Paul received his commission directly from Jesus Christ, the crucified Messiah. His Damascus Road experience made him a true Apostle.

If the gospel Paul had received were of human origin, it would weaken his message and his authority. The gospel would be subject to human ratification or amendment. And it would put Paul under the authority of his teachers. But because Paul received the gospel directly from Jesus, the message was guaranteed to be true. As such, it would be protected. As well, Paul could claim a divine authority in his ministry.

Paul's claims were bold but necessary for the defense of his apostleship and the defense of the gospel.

APPLY THE WORD

Many people claim they receive special revelation from God and then found cults like the Mormons and Christian Science. Some accused Paul of having fabricated the story of his encounter with Jesus and inventing the Christian religion. But as we'll see throughout Galatians, Paul argues for how the message of Jesus Christ is rooted in the Old Testament. God's story of providing salvation for His people has been consistent throughout time; we can have confidence in this truth.

Galatians 1:10-17

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the great leaders of the Protestant movement in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russia was Ivan Prokhanov. His career in ministry was not unlike that of the apostle Paul.

Ivan consciously followed Paul's "tentmaking" example, earning a living as an engineer but using all of his remaining time to evangelize and teach. Like Paul, Ivan suffered persecution for his faith under both Czarist and Communist governments. And like

Paul, Ivan's achievements were enormous, in areas including publishing, education, and even hymn-writing!

As Paul reviews his career in ministry for the Galatians, he moves into a defense of his right to preach the gospel of grace and Christian liberty. He must clearly vindicate his apostleship before he can vindicate his message.

He has already made it clear that salvation is by grace alone and that one can enjoy true Christian liberty by the power of Christ alone. As was to be very clear from Paul's experience, preaching of that sort would not please men (v. 10) and would not lead to an easy life.

Paul insists that his presentation of the gospel is not ""something that man made up"" (v. 11), nor does man give the gospel its authority. Furthermore, Paul did not receive his message from man--that is, he had not learned it from human teaching as his converts had. He obtained his message by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (v. 12).

APPLY THE WORD

The dramatic story of Paul's conversion is found in Acts 9:1-19. Take a few minutes to review that story today. If you're new to Paul's testimony, realize its importance as the background for today's Scripture reading--the start of his apostleship and call to ministry. If you're already familiar with the narrative, try to read it with fresh eyes, looking for a new insight or two.

Galatians 1:10-24

I received [the gospel I preached] by revelation from Jesus Christ. - Galatians 1:11-12

TODAY IN THE WORD

"You may not run in the hall!" shouted the teacher. "Says who?" the defiant ninth-grader retorted. "Says the principal, and if you don't obey, you'll spend time in detention!" Challenge authority, and you'll face the consequences.

We don't know exactly what was said by those to whom Paul is responding in this epistle, but it seems likely that they were challenging his authority. We can imagine them saying something like, "Who gave Paul the authority to spread a gospel that extends salvation to Gentiles apart from obedience to the Law?" They might have added, "Isn't Paul's gospel just a compromise intended to please people by making salvation available without requiring them to follow the practices prescribed in the Law?"

Paul's pointed response appeals to the highest authority--he is doing what he is doing and saying what he is saying because of his direct encounter with Jesus. His radical transformation in attitude and action (he changed from one who persecuted, to one who propagated the churches of Jesus) showed beyond doubt that his appeal to the authority of Christ was genuine and not a human fabrication (1:11-12, 20-23). In the end, his encounter with Jesus resulted in praising God (1:24), a sure mark that God was at work.

Paul's appeal to Jesus is important not only because it helps him establish his authority, but also because it builds up the confidence of those who read his letter, both then and now. As Christians we are committed to the belief that God speaks in all of Scripture. We are committed to the authority and truth of what we now call the Old Testament. Yet a little reading in the Old Testament raises the issue of how Gentiles can be acceptable to God apart from obedience to the Law prescribed there.

APPLY THE WORD

In our passage today, Paul gives his own testimony of a life transformed by Christ. If you were asked about your own background, could you give a testimony of how Christ has changed you?

Galatians 1:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Since it was selected for Oprah's Book Club, New-Age spiritual leader Eckhart Tolle's book, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, has sold over 3.5 million copies. When Tolle and Oprah launched a series of "webinars," over two million people participated. Tolle preaches a message that many people want to hear. According to Tolle, our basic problem is living out of our "false" self, which is ego-centered. Overcoming our false self involves discovering our "oneness" with God, who is everywhere and in everyone. Thus finding God and finding our true self is essentially the same thing, because God is in us, just as He is in everyone. It's easy to see why Tolle's message is so successful: the hard truth about sin and judgment is nowhere to be found.

The situation wasn't much different in Paul's day. There were plenty of traveling philosophers who went from town to town preaching whatever people wanted to hear and often making good money by doing so. Speakers were considered to be good if they could persuade, not necessarily if they told the truth. Such individuals often used clever-sounding arguments or trickery, but when their deception was discovered, they frequently had to leave town quickly. Apparently, some in Thessalonica were accusing Paul of doing

the same thing. They may have noted that Paul had to flee Philippi just as he had left Thessalonica. This probably explains why Paul defends himself and his ministry at several points in 1 Thessalonians, including today's passage.

In this passage, Paul sets the record straight. Despite the insult of being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi—punishment that was illegal for Roman citizens—Paul didn't hold back from sharing the gospel in its entirety when he arrived in Thessalonica. As was always the case for Paul, his message was the true gospel from God and not any fancy, but deceptive, argument. Unlike those who spoke to earn approval or money, Paul spoke because he wanted to please God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Yesterday we noted that 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 contains foundational truths, such as the need to forsake idols and to hope for Christ's return. Verse 10 also presents our rescue from the coming wrath of God: Jesus and His righteous response to sin. The glorious hope of the gospel can never be separated from this understanding of God's just judgment on sin. This message is never popular, neither today nor in Paul's day. But praise God for people like Paul who have been entrusted with the gospel and dare to proclaim it fully.

Galatians 1:10

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Dressing Up Sin

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

A man in a beat-up Volkswagen once scraped the side of a brand-new Porsche as he got out of his car at a parking lot. Noticing several people watching, he quickly took out a piece of paper and pen and began writing a note. When he was done, he placed it on the windshield. Do you know what it said, "The people watching think that I'm writing down my name and address, but I'm really not." How many times are we more concerned with our image than with our character? We live in an age shaped by opinion polls and surveys rather than by principle. The president, before making a tough decision, calls in his advisors and asks, "What will the media say? How will the people react?" Business leaders weigh their decisions by their effect on the bottom line. There's an old saying, "Be good and you'll look good." I think that is very true. Sometimes we work so hard on the impression we're giving but ignore our real spiritual needs inside. It is important to have a good testimony, but more important to have genuine Christian character. Even if you're the best at putting on a show, the real you is eventually revealed. People and polls are not our final authority. Our main objective is to please God. When we do that, our image will not only be good, but also genuine.

Character is what you are in the dark.

D. L. Moody

Background for Galatians 1

Acts 22:1-21

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth. - 1 Peter 1:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

No Compromise recounts the radical conversion of Christian singer and songwriter, Keith Green. As a young man trying to make his way in show business, Keith experimented with drugs and the free love lifestyle before coming to faith in Christ. After he was saved, his passionate zeal for Christ and personal holiness ignited spiritual fire in those who knew him and listened to his music.

The apostle Paul was also dramatically converted to Christ, and in our reading for today, he was addressing a crowd of Jews who had begun rioting in Jerusalem because he had appeared at the temple flanked by Gentiles. He had been accused of having defiled the temple and taken into custody.

What he shared confirms everything he told the Galatians. Before his conversion, he was a Jew zealous for the Law. He opposed the message of Jesus Christ, going so far as to imprison those Jewish men and women who had converted to the Way.

Everything changed one day when Paul met Jesus Christ personally on the road to Damascus. He heard an audible voice address him by name, and the voice identified Himself as none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus ordained Paul as an apostle, commissioning him specifically as the one to preach to the Gentiles.

This personal and visible encounter with Jesus Christ qualified Paul for ministry as an Apostle. Paul wasn't sleeping or experiencing

a dream-like vision of Jesus. This encounter happened, and although Paul's companions with whom he was traveling did not hear the voice, they could confirm that Paul was blinded by the divine light and changed dramatically by the turn of events.

Paul's defense of his apostleship centers around this idea of revelation: what he knows of Jesus and what he preaches of Jesus have been revealed to him by God himself. Paul had not personally sought out Jesus, nor had he taken initiative to consider the message of Jesus. Indeed, he was actively opposing Jesus when God suddenly intervened, radically turning him from hostility to faith in Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Whatever the story of our conversion, whether dramatic or seemingly ordinary, the truth is always that God sought us and revealed Himself to us. His saving action and initiative in our lives is driven by His grace and mercy. In our sinful state, we could not acknowledge the truth of who He is and what He's done on our behalf. But God's gracious revelation of Himself leads us to confession in faith. For this we give Him praise!

Galatians 1:13-16

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. - Galatians 5:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Yigal Amir was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in 1970. His mother was a kindergarten teacher, his father a Jewish scribe. As a university student, Amir became actively involved in right-wing protests against Israel's signing of the Oslo Accords. On November 4, 1996, Amir shot and killed Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. Later at his trial, Amir defended himself very simply: "According to the Halacha [Jewish legal code], you can kill the enemy."

We could compare Saul of Tarsus to Yigal Amir. Saul belonged to the strictest sect of the Pharisees, a group whose concern wasn't simply personal piety but also political revolution. Zeal for the Jew, in this first-century context of Roman occupation, called for violent overthrow of the Roman regime. As one scholar described it, "For the first-century Jew, 'zeal' was something you did with a knife."

In today's reading, Paul asserted that before his conversion to Christianity, he was extremely "zealous" for Jewish traditions. He is speaking of what once was his violent hatred for anything that stood in the way of Jews worshiping freely and observing the Torah. Saul hated Jesus of Nazareth and wanted to wipe the Christian gospel off the map. He was committed to its complete annihilation.

Saul was an educated Jew. His theology and his zeal were rooted in rigorous study of the Torah and the Jewish traditions. He was noted by his fellow scholars as one advancing rapidly in knowledge, a sort of up-and-comer in Jewish circles. He'd made a name for himself as one totally devoted to Yahweh and Torah ... and as one totally committed to the demise of this newfound Way.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul set forth this autobiographical information as an important part of his argument. The Gentile Christians in Galatia were being tempted to root their identity not in the free saving grace of Jesus but in the Jewish Law and traditions. Taking them back to his days as a zealous Jew, Paul is in effect saying, "I tried that! God rescued me from it. Don't go back there!"

APPLY THE WORD

Later in chapter 4, Paul referenced the Exodus narrative of the Jewish people. The story is meant to shape our understanding of salvation. We're called out of darkness and slavery into light and freedom. Don't go back to Egypt! Maybe you're a new believer, and Jesus called you out of particular patterns of thinking, responding, and behaving. Don't turn back to old patterns of sin. Press forward, with the help of the Holy Spirit, toward the new life you have through Jesus.

Galatians 1:15

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'By his grace' Galatians 1:15

Our salvation is not according to our merits in its commencement, in its continence or in its consummation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, least any man should boast."

The sovereign love and unmerited grace of God are the cause of our salvation. Since his love and grace are unchangeable, their effect must be unchangeable. That is to say, God constantly communicates his love and grace to every believer. Once his love is revealed and his grace bestowed upon the heart, he never takes them away: 'For the gifts and calling of God are without

repentance.' God was not moved to bestow his grace upon us by anything which he saw meritorious or attractive in us. And the absence of everything good in us will not cause God to withdraw the grace he has bestowed. When he first bestowed grace upon us, the Lord knew that we were totally depraved and sinful. He knew that we were full of evil and void of good. And though, since our conversion, we have all been guilty of ingratitude, unfaithfulness and sin of every kind, these things do not provoke the Lord our God to change his mind and withdraw his sustaining grace. He knew what we would be before he saved us. He chastens us because of our sin, like the loving Father he is, but he never withdraws his love. If he had not intended, from the beginning, to bear with our sin in longsuffering and patience and to forgive our sin for Christ's sake, he would never have saved us and called us in the first place.

This is what I am saying: the cause of our salvation is entirely in God. His electing love, redeeming grace and saving power were given to us by an act of his sovereign goodness, without any consideration of what we were or might become. There was nothing in us to attract his grace. And there is nothing in any true believer's heart or conduct which can ever, cause the Lord Our God to alter his purpose of grace and withdraw his love from us.

Galatians 1:15

Don Fortner - Grace for Today

'It pleased God' Galatians 1:15

Though to many Paul's conversion, his experience of grace, might seem extraordinary, he tells us that the method of God's grace with him was a pattern, revealing the method of God's grace with all his elect (1 Tim. 1:16). The apostle also tells us plainly what the order and method of God's grace is: 'When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood' (Gal. 1:15–16). This is the way God saves sinners. The order of grace never changes. The method of grace never varies. Salvation begins in the will and pleasure of God: 'When it pleased God'. The source of saving grace is the will of God. The cause of salvation is not the will of man, but the will of God (Ro 9:1–18). Having willed to save some of Adam's fallen race, God separated his own elect from the rest of mankind: 'Who separated me from my mother's womb.' This act of separation is God's unconditional election of his people in Christ, before the foundation of the world (2Th 2:13; 2Ti 1:1–9). The phrase 'from my mother's womb' implies the fact that this election took place before we had done anything good or bad. It is teaching God's sovereignty in election (Jer 1:4–5). Then, at the time appointed, God calls all of his elect by effectual and irresistible grace: 'And called me by his grace'. Those who were sanctified in the womb of election are given life by the call of the spirit. This call of the Spirit is always effectual because, in calling his elect to life and faith, God graciously reveals his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his elect: 'To reveal his Son in me'. Salvation comes when Christ is revealed. As the result of this revelation of Christ in the heart, God makes his elect people willingly obedient servants to his Son. God's purpose was that Paul should willingly serve him, and serve him he did. Good works will never cause God to be gracious; but God's grace always causes his people to walk willingly in good works.

Galatians 1:17-24

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. - Galatians 1:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

The movie *The Social Network* tells the story of how Facebook was founded. Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg launched the site from his dorm room, and within a matter of weeks, there were tens of thousands of users. With the explosion of Facebook's success, Zuckerberg was persuaded to move from Boston to spend the summer in Silicon Valley, headquarters for high-tech companies like Google, Apple, Intel, and Adobe.

Just as Silicon Valley is today's capital for information technology, Jerusalem was the first-century headquarters for the Christian church. One could find Peter, James, and the other Apostles, and learn more about the story of the resurrected Jesus. Jesus' disciples were gathering in local synagogues. Public baptisms were taking place. The streets were abuzz with news of this crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul went to great lengths in his letter to the Galatians to say that it wasn't until three years after his conversion that he made his first trip to Jerusalem. He vehemently declared that he had no contact with any of the Apostles before this trip to Jerusalem, and when he did in fact go, his visit lasted only fifteen days. What's more, during his brief stay, Paul managed introductions with only two of the prominent Apostles.

That Paul had not had any contact with Jerusalem in these early years is an important part in the defense of his apostleship. In the timeline that he lays out (which we can verify in similar accounts in Acts and some of the other epistles), we know that Paul was preaching the gospel immediately after his conversion and prior to meeting with Peter and James in Jerusalem. Paul's ministry was launched without approval from "headquarters." He did not need to clarify with the leaders in Jerusalem the content of the Christian

gospel. Paul's encounter with Jesus was fully sufficient for salvation and ministry, and the report that circulated about him in the years subsequent to his conversion confirmed the authenticity of the Apostle's testimony. The gospel he preached was the true gospel, and others praised God because of him.

APPLY THE WORD

Although Paul was uniquely called and commissioned by God, he still needed the support and encouragement of other believers (see 1 Cor. 12:4-29). Each of us might have a particular calling or gift that we are to use to serve God, but we still need a life of discipleship, fellowship and ministry in the context of our local churches. Our spiritual confidence comes from God alone, but He has provided us with fellow believers so that we can grow and serve. We need each other!

Galatians 1:18-24

TODAY IN THE WORD

""Staking a claim"" in the Old West was serious business. Doing so gave a person the rights over a mine or a piece of land. If a prospector found gold or silver on his claim, others would rush to stake claims nearby in hopes of striking it rich. It was not uncommon for fights to break out over who had staked a claim first or over where one claim stopped and another started. Men were known to lie, cheat, gamble, steal and even kill to get and keep their claims.

""Staking a claim"" is exactly what Paul is doing in today's reading: a claim to apostleship and apostolic authority. Not to elevate himself, but for the sake of the gospel, he proclaims his God-given authority. The Galatians must not take his words lightly!

To underscore his apostleship and his independence of the Jerusalem church, Paul observes that three full years had elapsed between his conversion and any significant contact with them (v. 18). When he finally went up to see Peter, it was not for the purpose of learning the gospel. This visit of Paul is commonly taken to be the one recorded in Acts 9:26-30. Suddenly driven from his ministry in Damascus, Paul was apparently pondering where to go next. He may have sought the advice of Peter concerning a future course of action.

At the end of Paul's fifteen-day visit to Jerusalem, some antagonistic Jews concocted a plot against him. When the believers found out about it, they took him to the seaport of Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus, his home city. Afterwards, the apostle went to Syria and Cilicia, where he preached the faith (Gal. 1:21).

APPLY THE WORD

How much do you know of Paul's biography? Many of us have heard the story of his vision on the road to Damascus, but what came next? Did you know, for instance, that he went to Arabia (Gal. 1:17)?

GALATIANS 2

Galatians 2:1-5

We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. - Galatians 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD George Washington courageously served as commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. He was a fierce patriot and was unanimously elected as America's first president. Washington served reluctantly in our nation's highest office, especially upon entering his second term. He refused a third term. His commitment to American freedom was unflagging, but he longed at the end of his life to retire from public service and return to the pastoral countryside of Mount Vernon.

Everyone who fights for freedom usually does so at great personal cost. Freedoms are won by hard-fought battles, and the spiritual freedoms afforded by the gospel of Jesus had to be fiercely protected by Paul. The freedom to which Paul refers in the opening verses of Galatians 2 is the freedom to belong as a full-fledged member to the family of God exclusively because of the death of Jesus Christ of our behalf. The false teachers rejected this "free" gospel. They preached that Gentile Christians must participate in the Jewish rite of circumcision in order to receive full membership status in the divine covenant. No doubt they turned to the Hebrew Scriptures as evidence.

This false teaching had been circulating prior to the present situation in Galatia. Paul records here details about his second trip to Jerusalem, some fourteen years after his conversion, and well before this letter to the Galatians. Paul and Barnabas, along with Titus and presumably some other disciples, had gone to deliver an offering on behalf of the Gentile churches for those affected by a recent famine (cf. Acts 11:27-30). Titus was a Gentile, and despite those who had already been arguing for the necessity of circumcision, Paul records that Titus was not compelled by the leaders in Jerusalem to be circumcised. He was apparently received and fully embraced as a brother in Jesus Christ.

This matter of whether or not circumcision was necessary for believers was not a minor issue for Paul. It posed a critical threat to the integrity of the Christian gospel and the freedoms Jesus meant for His followers to enjoy.

APPLY THE WORD

The followers of Jesus in the first-century had a sense of the “Jewishness” of the Christian gospel. We might not debate circumcision as necessary to follow Christ but we still wrestle with a “free” gospel. Every generation faces the temptation to add requirements to the gospel, creating lists of who is “in” and “out.” As we study this letter, may our hearts be open to the Holy Spirit’s instruction about how the gospel frees us from the burdens we might place on ourselves or others.

Galatians 2:1-5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Despite only three months of formal schooling and increasing deafness throughout his life, inventor Thomas Edison earned his place in history by creating numerous practical applications for electricity.

Known as the “Wizard of Menlo Park,” Edison built such inventions as the microphone, record player and light bulb. He also improved the dynamo and designed the world’s first central electric power station in New York City.

Just as electricity was at the center of Edison’s career and achievements, the gospel was at the center of Paul’s identity and ministry. This is made abundantly clear in his opposition to legalism and in the incident described in today’s reading.

Paul’s contacts with the apostles after his conversion had been few and brief. Finally, “fourteen years later” (v. 1), probably meaning since his conversion, he has some sort of official confrontation with church leaders in Jerusalem.

Titus is mentioned in verse 1 because of a controversial issue which he represented. He was an uncircumcised Gentile Christian. People were asking: Should Titus be forced to submit to circumcision as part of the legal obligation for all Christian men?

Paul and Barnabas spoke to the mother church in a general way in public addresses. They also discussed the issue with church leaders privately and in greater detail explained the gospel Paul had been preaching among the Gentiles (v. 2). He was trying to convince the church leaders of the validity of his position: that Gentiles were not under law. If he failed to do so, his past work, as well as present and future work, would be hindered.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul was above all committed to the truth of the gospel. In fact, he was so zealous for evangelism that he said: “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:22-23).

Galatians 2:1-10

James, Peter and John ... recognized the grace given to me. - Galatians 2:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

A predominantly white church and a historically African-American church in Durham, North Carolina, meet together for Easter services every year. Though the worship styles differ, those who attend the joint service always remark how blessed they are by sharing in praise with people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Yesterday we saw Paul claiming that the gospel he preached was legitimated by Jesus and not in need of approval from any earthly authority. In our text for today he emphasizes the fact that the ministry he has undertaken is in full unity with the other apostles. It was important to Paul and to the other apostles that Paul’s ministry stood in continuity with the ministry of the Jerusalem church.

We may rightfully ask why this might be the case. Clearly Paul did not feel any need to have the authority of his ministry validated by other people. Jesus, the highest authority, had commissioned him. He needed no other confirmation. But Paul likely saw the need, perhaps through the revelation he received (v. 2), to meet with the other apostles in order to ensure that the Gentile churches he had planted remain in full unity with the Jewish churches.

There are some significant lessons for us from this passage regarding the nature of unity in the church. First, we see that unity does not mean lack of diversity. The fact that Jew and Gentile were united by the gospel—without either one being forced to unite on the terms of the other—means that church can encompass all manner of diversity so long as the unifying factor is the gospel message. Second, the basis of the apostles’ judgment points the way toward balancing unity and diversity in the church. The apostles recognized the presence of God’s grace at work in Paul’s ministry. That is, they confirmed that the gospel he preached was consistent with the message they proclaimed (vv. 2, 7); and, they saw that God was using Paul effectively among the Gentiles (v. 8).

As we today seek to maintain both unity and diversity in the church, we would do well to look for God's grace at work.

APPLY THE WORD

When we praise God for an eternity in heaven, we will be surrounded by believers from every tribe and nation. Yet too often when we worship we are surrounded by people who look just like us.

Galatians 2:4

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'Our Liberty' - Gal 2:4

The Lord Jesus Christ has given us true liberty. In Christ we have been freed from sin, Satan and the law. In him we are free from all religious traditions, customs and superstitions. And in Christ we are free to use every creature of God for food, happiness, comfort and satisfaction. Neither the church nor those who preach the gospel have any authority to bring God's people under bondage again, by making their own rules, dogmas and covenants for Christian conduct. I offer these suggestions with the prayer that they may help you to honor the Lord in the exercise of your liberty in Christ.

1. Do not make the use or non-use of indifferent things a point of merit before God. Indifferent things become idolatrous when you make the use or non-use of them a means of obtaining favor with God, a means of religious devotion, or a means of obtaining a peaceful conscience.
2. Use all things in moderation. The believer's principle of conduct is not total abstinence, but temperance, moderation and self-control. Eating is not wrong, but gluttony is. A glass of wine is not wrong (our Lord did provide the wine for the marriage feast of Cana), but drunkenness is wrong. Entertainment is not wrong, but reveling is. Our principle is 'Use all things wisely, abusing none.'
3. Carefully avoid offending your brother. I do not mean that you must submit to the self-righteous notions of men. But we must not be the cause of a brother acting contrary to his own conscience. This is what Paul means by offending the brethren. We must avoid it at all costs. My brother's conscience is more important than my personal desires.
4. Make your use of all things subservient to the glory of God, the gospel of Christ and the welfare of the church. In all things, make your love for Christ and his people the basis of your actions. Use your liberty in Christ for the honor of Christ, and you will not go far astray. We must avoid both licentiousness and legalism. Both are dreadful evils. God's people are called into liberty!

Galatians 2:5

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'To whom we gave no place by subjection' Gal 2:5

In the early days of the Church there were some self-appointed, freelance preachers who came from Jerusalem to Antioch, perverting the gospel of Christ and subverting the souls of men. They were preaching the law of Moses, telling God's people that faith in Christ is not sufficient; you must also keep the law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas refused to tolerate their heresy. Paul calls these legalists 'false brethren' and 'spies'. His choice of terms was not accidental. Usually those who preach and promote the law of Moses spend a great deal of time spying on others, so that they may bolster their own claims to 'righteousness' by sitting in, judgment upon others.

Paul shows us by his example that the spirit and doctrines of legalism must not be tolerated by the people of God. It matters not whether men preach the law of Moses as a basis for justification, as the measure of sanctification, as a rule of life, as a motive for Christian service, or as the grounds of reward in heaven—all preaching of law works is an intolerable evil.

Let no one confuse the issue. The issue is not godliness or ungodliness of life. The issue is not what the believer does, or how the believer lives in this world. The issue is the motive and attitude of the heart. The legalist is motivated by fear. The believer is motivated by love. The legalist hopes to be rewarded for his work. The believer hopes to honor God in his work. All law service is looked upon and performed as a matter of duty. Prayer, Bible reading, attendance at public worship and tithing always have an element of either the fear of punishment or the promise of reward, as they are performed by the legalist. The believer prays because his heart longs to commune with God, reads the Word because he wants to know God, attends worship because he desires to hear from God and gives because he loves God. The service and work of love is considered a privilege by the one who performs it. And you can be sure of this: God will never accept anything except that which is done with a willing heart (2 Cor. 8:12).

Galatians 2:6-10

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his album ""Present Reality,"" musician and writer Michael Card explores the Christ-centered heart of Paul. Introducing the album, he writes: ""Paul was caught up in the transforming power of the realization that Christ is both living and present. The mystery of Christ, he called it, the hope of glory.""

One song contains these gospel lyrics, based on Galatians 3: ""[God] made a better way / When the moment was right He sent His own Son / And He opened the way so that everyone / Could have hope... ""

As Paul continues in today's reading to defend his apostleship, his commitment to the gospel is a constant theme. The greatness of the other apostles' reputations didn't matter to him--his gospel came from God Himself (v. 6). The message of a Christian worker is not superior or right because of the greatness of the worker. From the context it is clear that Paul does not mean to degrade the position of the Jerusalem leadership. The respect he gives them is evident from the very fact that he comes to them for a definitive solution to a knotty problem.

James, Peter and John recognized that Paul had been made an apostle to the Gentiles as Peter had been to the Jews (v. 7). They also recognized that Paul had not launched into a ministry to the Gentiles on his own; God had entrusted it to him (1 Cor. 9:17). The other apostles reached the conclusion that Paul had a commission equal to Peter's because they saw that God had wrought just as great spiritual works through the one as through the other (Gal. 2:8).

APPLY THE WORD

When Paul was commissioned and sent off (vv. 7-9), he became the forerunner for world missions. How much do you know about the missionaries supported by your church or denomination? Are you up-to-date on their ministries and prayer requests? Here are several ideas for becoming more involved with your church's missions program: (1) Browse the bulletin board for recent prayer letters. Sign up to receive one. (2) As a family, adopt a missionary family to pray for and correspond with. (3) Begin financially supporting one missionary or missionary family on a regular basis.

Galatians 2:6-10

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

Until just two years ago, tensions between minority Tamils and majority Sinhalese had plunged Sri Lanka into a decades-long civil war. Now that the war has ended, Tamils and Sinhalese are overcoming ethnic barriers and finding commonalities around two surprising things: cricket and cuisine. Once-bitter enemies have found themselves cheering for the same teams and enjoying the same food.

Tragically, ethnic conflicts have simmered across the globe, from the distant past continuing to the present day. Ethnic identity can comprise an important part of who we are, but sometimes it is twisted into a dividing line to separate "us" from "them." Even the church has suffered from this tendency.

In the first-century, new Christian believers didn't automatically lose the ethnic labels of "Jew" and "Gentile." Jews who had converted to the Christian faith still retained a strong sense of their Jewish-ness. Gentiles struggled to overcome the "outsider" status that had been theirs in the worship of Yahweh for many centuries. The Galatian churches found themselves at the center of these ethnic tensions. Did identifying oneself with Jesus and choosing to follow Him mean shedding the ethnic distinctions of centuries past? What did it mean to be a Jew or Gentile in the light of the cross?

In Galatians 2, Paul shares details of his second trip to Jerusalem, which turned out to be a very amicable meeting with Peter. They affirmed each other's calling by God: Peter had been commissioned to take the gospel to the Jews, Paul to the Gentiles. Paul affirmed that God was indeed at work through the ministry of Peter, and despite their later disagreements, he did not seek to discredit Peter's ministry in any way.

But for all the respect and honor that Paul pays to Peter and to his ministry, there is no sign of Paul's subordination to Peter. Paul knew that the false teachers had accused him of being a second-tier apostle with a second-rate gospel. But he will not back down from the defense of his apostleship.

APPLY THE WORD

Today's reading paves the way for Paul to discuss the later disagreement he had with Peter. He models for us what constructive disagreement can look like in the church. Disagreement does not have to be synonymous with personal attack. Paul respected Peter

and believed they were partnering together in the work of the gospel. And on the other hand, Paul didn't assume any kind of false humility. He unapologetically confronted a fundamental compromise of the gospel.

Galatians 2:11-13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Those who don't practice what they preach are hypocrites, perhaps none more so than those who preach God's Word.

Yet according to a newsletter of the Global Evangelization Movement, ecclesiastical crime is on the rise. From a tab of just \$300 at the start of this century, and only \$5 million in 1970, the loss is expected to top \$13 billion by the year 2000. As the newsletter's editor points out, that will exceed the total spent for global foreign missions!

Ministers stealing? What a shocking inconsistency between words and actions! A similar situation of inconsistency developed in Antioch, and it led to Peter's being guilty of hypocrisy.

After the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch. Great rejoicing occurred there over the council's decision (found in Acts 15:19-20). Gentiles were not under law but were expected to avoid certain pagan religious and social practices for the sake of their Christian testimony.

For a while all went well in Antioch. Such great love sprang up between Jewish and Gentile believers that they ate the agape-feast, or love-feast, together. This practice was an emblem of Christian unity, and the interruption of it was sure to harm the church. An outbreak of division in the church, contributed to by Peter, therefore drew fire from Paul (v. 11). He opposed Peter openly, the only way to clearly support the principle of Christian liberty.

What had happened? As a result of a visit by Jews from the Jerusalem church, pressure was exerted on Jews in Antioch not to eat with Gentiles, but to be more scrupulous about law-keeping. Peter, who had taken such a forceful stand for Jewish fellowship with Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18), buckled under social pressure (Gal. 2:12). When Peter capitulated, other Jews found it hard to stand against the tide. Even Barnabas ultimately fell before the social pressure (v. 13).

APPLY THE WORD

Even a great apostle like Peter was not immune from the disease of hypocrisy (v. 13). What about us? Throughout the Gospels, Christ had harsh words for hypocrites. Hypocrisy or inconsistency hurts our witness for Him, which is why Paul had to confront Peter about his behavior. If Peter fell prey to this sin, we certainly can fall prey to it as well!

Galatians 2:11-14

I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. - Galatians 2:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Help, a novel by Kathryn Stockett, tells the story of African American maids who worked for wealthy white families in Jackson, Mississippi, in the 1960s. One of the white women decides to push for a "Home Help Sanitation Initiative" that would require a toilet in the garage for use by the help. After all, she reasoned, no one should have to share a bathroom with blacks.

This racial segregation resembled the strict segregation between Jews and Gentiles as commanded by the Jewish law. But this separation was being overthrown in light of the gospel. In Acts 10, Peter had received a vision from God where all foods were declared clean by God. This vision preceded a providential introduction to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who converted to faith in Jesus. Peter was strongly criticized for having eaten with Cornelius (a Gentile), but Peter testified to the work of the Spirit in Cornelius and his household.

What Peter learned during his visit with Cornelius, he seemed willing to put aside when confronted by certain Judaizers. At Antioch, he refused to eat with Gentile believers. Even worse, this decision was really cowardice, motivated by fear of what the advocates for circumcision would say about him.

The church at Antioch was the first of its kind: thoroughly Gentile and Christian. It was the first place in fact where followers of Jesus were called "Christians." When Jewish believers had been forced out of Jerusalem because of persecution, they spread out into surrounding regions, taking with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. Upon arriving at Antioch, the word was preached to the Greeks. A church sprang up, and Barnabas came to Antioch and became the church's first pastor. He soon called upon Saul to help him in the work of shepherding these new believers (see Acts 11).

At Antioch, Paul saw Peter's refusal to eat with Gentiles as a serious threat to the gospel. He publicly called Peter a hypocrite. The

intensity of Paul's reaction to Peter derived from the impending danger Paul saw for the church if this teaching on circumcision prevailed and the separation between Jew and Gentile remained.

APPLY THE WORD

Because Paul had a very clear sense of what the gospel meant, he confronted Peter, not about mere technical points of doctrine, but about something Paul saw as fundamental to the gospel. Paul feared that Peter's decision not to eat with Gentiles threatened the gospel and would fracture the church. The gospel message is a message about the salvation of individuals, but it's also radical message of unity, bringing together all people who call on the name of Jesus.

Galatians 2:11-21

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. - Galatians 2:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many of us don't seem to learn a lesson the first time. This seems to be the case with the apostle Peter, who still had trouble accepting differences in Gentile eating customs even after the Lord had given him a vision saying, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15).

When Peter separated himself from Gentile Christians, Paul recognized that he was failing to live wisely in light of the gospel (v. 14). Peter's refusal to eat with them made an implicit statement—Gentile believers are not equals. Paul understood that Peter was, in effect, denying the heart and power of the gospel message. By refusing to eat with the Gentile converts Peter was essentially saying that the justification God had granted to Gentiles as a result of their faith in the gospel was of no effect, for until they adopted the practices of the Jewish Law, they were not fully equal members of Jesus' church. To Paul's dismay, even Peter, one of the original disciples, failed to grasp the meaning of the gospel.

One of the benefits of this unfortunate conflict is that we get to see what Paul says about wise gospel living. In response to Peter, Paul argues that the Law has reached its fulfillment in the crucifixion of Christ. Peter, as a believer in Jesus, agrees with Paul that justification (that is, being declared righteous) comes only through faith in Christ, not through the Law (vv. 15–16, 21). Yet the implication of this is that one also dies to the Law (v. 19).

Paul's point is this: everyone who believes in Jesus has in effect been crucified with Jesus. Such a one has vicariously died with Christ to the Law. This vicarious inclusion in the death of Jesus implies that one is also included in His resurrection to new life. As a result of Jesus' death and resurrection, justification is available, by faith, for those who belong to Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Many of us can relate to Peter and his reluctance to let go of his old notions of what it meant to serve God. Although God may not send us a dramatic vision as He did to Peter, He still speaks through His Word to us to align our ideas with His.

Galatians 2:15-21

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! - Galatians 2:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Jewish tradition, a meal shared together has been considered something sacred. The dietary laws of the Old Testament were a means to consecrate the table, the food, and the participants of the meal. For Jewish followers of Jesus who maintained many of these traditions, they struggled to understand how to share meals with Gentiles. The very act of sharing a meal with Gentiles required significant compromise with everything they had thought was important.

Jews who followed Christ were never forbidden to practice their Jewish customs. They weren't commanded to give up the practice of circumcision or abandon all of their dietary restrictions. But it proved problematic that their Gentile brothers and sisters in the faith lived differently. One proposal, as we've seen from those belonging to the circumcision party, was to have all Gentile believers circumcised. Then, having received the sign of the covenant, these Gentiles could be considered full-fledged members of God's family. That would solve the problem of sharing meals with them.

Paul diametrically opposed any such proposal! That's not the gospel, he argued! We're not members of God's family because we follow the law, Paul reasoned. A new era has dawned. Jesus has come! And it's faith in this Jesus of Nazareth that makes us members of God's family. Gone are the old distinctions of "Jew" and "Gentile" (sinner), as if Jews have insider status and Gentiles don't. And let's face it, Paul noted: We've already all been eating with Gentiles. If now, for some reason, we pull away and refuse to, we only admit that we're guilty of the very law we're trying to resurrect.

What matters most is the cross of Jesus Christ, and because of the cross, Paul asserted that he lived differently. All believers live by faith in this Jesus and in the knowledge of His love and sacrificial death and resurrection. All followers must recognize the grace of God afforded through Jesus, so as not treat it as rubbish. If it's true that Torah and circumcision make us members of God's family, then Christ died for nothing!

APPLY THE WORD

What does it mean in your life to be crucified to Christ? This process of transformation and surrender is never easy. But holding on to our way of doing things or our comfortable routines will cost us much more. Consider writing down the phrase, "God loved me and gave Himself for me," and post it somewhere where you can meditate on it often. We can more easily let go of our false security and piety when we realize that we are embracing the redeeming love of our Savior.

Galatians 2:14-19

TODAY IN THE WORD

As the American Civil War dragged on, significant Christian revivals occurred among both Union and Confederate troops. One chaplain commented: ""The whole army is a vast field, ready and ripe to the harvest... The susceptibility of the soldiery to the gospel is wonderful... With the simplicity of little children, they listen to and embrace the truth."" Lifestyles changed as well. As soldiers trusted Christ, they abandoned the profanity, gambling, drinking, sexual immorality and petty thievery that had up to that time characterized many army units.

The gospel changes lives. For the soldiers to return to their old ways would have been a backward step of hypocrisy. So when Peter stepped back toward legalism, Paul had to confront him for the sake of the gospel.

Paul challenged Peter (v. 14): If you, a born Jew, live like a Gentile, why do you now by example compel Gentiles to live as Jews? Obligation to law-keeping would not be ""in line with the truth of the gospel"" or the pronouncements of the Council of Jerusalem.

In fact, no one can be justified by observing the law (v. 16). The law was a standard of conduct so exacting that no one ever kept it wholly; therefore, all the law could do was condemn (cf. Rom. 3:20). Justification, or being declared righteous in God's eyes and released from any condemnation resulting from failure to keep the law, comes by faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 3:21-24).

The law demanded death for lawbreakers: all stood condemned to death for their sins. The solution? The Lord of glory became incarnate and paid the penalty. Once any law has exacted the death penalty, it cannot do so again. If we are joined to Christ by faith in His finished work, we share in His fulfillment of the righteous demands of the law. The law has killed Him and us, and we are no longer subject to the law.

APPLY THE WORD

Where did Peter go wrong in his behavior? What made him turn from living by grace to living by law? One factor was peer pressure. He didn't want to be thought poorly of by the Judaizers. Peer pressure is a powerful force. ""Everybody's doing it,"" the saying goes. And Peter in turn set a bad example and led others astray. Had he taken a stand, he might have exerted ""positive peer pressure.""

Galatians 2:20

F B Meyer

Our Daily Walk

CHRISTIAN LIVING

"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Gal 2:20.

THE HEART of true religion is to believe that Christ is literally within us. We must not simply look to Him as our Mediator, Advocate, and Example, but as being possessed by Him. He is our Life, the living Fountain rising up in the well of our personality. The Apostle Paul was never weary of re-affirming this great fact of his experience, and it would be well if each of us could say every day, before starting forth on our daily duty: "Christ is in me; let me make room for Him to dwell."

We must say No to self, that the life of Christ may become manifest in and through us, and our standing become a reality in daily experience and conduct. When evil suggestions come to us, we must remember that we have entered a world where such things have no place. We are no longer in the realm of the god of this world, but have passed into the realm of the Risen Christ. Let those who are tempted believe this, and assert it in the face of the tempter, counting upon the Holy Spirit to make their reckoning a living experience.

In Eph 6:13-17 is described the armour of the Christian soul; in Col 3:12-14 the habit or dress which he wears beneath his coat of mail. We must be careful to be properly dressed each day. If we lose our temper over trifles, or yield to uncharitable speech, it shows that we have omitted to put on the girdle of love; if we yield to pride, avarice, envy and jealousy, we must not simply endeavour to put off these evils, but take from the wardrobe the opposite graces. It is not enough to avoid doing wrong. Our Master demands that we should always do and be what is right. When we fail in some sudden demand, it is because we have omitted to put on some trait of Christ, which was intended to be the complement of our need. Let us therefore day by day say: "Lord Jesus, wrap Thyself around me, that I may go forth, adequately attired to meet life's demands." In Christ for standing; Christ in us, for life; we with him, for safety.

Galatians 2:20

Henry Blackaby - Experiencing God Day by Day

An Exchanged Life

... and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.—Galatians 2:20

The Christian life is an exchanged life. Jesus' life for your life. When Christ takes control, your life takes on dimensions you would never have known apart from Him. When you are weak, then Christ demonstrates His strength in your life (2 Cor. 12:9–10). When you face situations that are beyond your comprehension, you have only to ask, and the infinite wisdom of God is available to you (James 1:5). When you are faced with humanly impossible situations, God does the impossible (Luke 18:27). When you encounter people whom you find difficult to love, God expresses His unconditional love through you (1 John 4:7). When you are at a loss as to what you should pray for someone, the Spirit will guide you in your prayer life (Rom. 8:16). When Christ takes up residence in the life of a believer, "all the fullness of God" is available to that person (Eph. 3:19). It is marvelously freeing to know that God controls your life and knows what it can become. Rather than constantly worrying about what you will face, your great challenge is to continually release every area of your life to God's control. The temptation will be to try to do by yourself what only God can do. Our assignment is to "abide in the vine" and to allow God to do in and through us what only He can do (John 15:5). Only God can be God. Allow Him to live out His divine life through you. He is the only One who can.

Galatians 2:20-21

TODAY IN THE WORD

A strip of zinc and a strip of copper are suspended in a salt solution. Although the zinc and copper atoms are losing and gaining electrons, both strips maintain an equilibrium. Then the two are connected with an electrical conductor. Electrons are forced through it from the zinc strip to the copper strip. As long as the conductor is present, a chemical reaction keeps the electrons flowing.

Sound impressive? That describes one of the most common power sources in the world--an ordinary battery.

Paul might have asked in today's reading: What are the ""batteries"" for Christian living? Is there power in keeping a set of rules? Or does it flow from our being crucified with Christ?

Verse 20 makes it abundantly clear that Christianity is not a matter of legalism--of carefully checking off a list of dos and don'ts. Neither is it a human effort to bring off a superior kind of morality, but divine life surging through the individual.

This reliance on God as our ""power source"" follows from verse 19. Paul died to the law because he had been crucified with Christ; he lived to God because Christ lived in him.

""I live."" But in a sense it is not ""I"" who live, not ""I"" in my own strength who achieves. Instead, ""Christ lives in me."" Incredible! What a powerful cure for discouragement, frustration and weakness! And what a warning against returning to law (Gal. 4:9).

Instead, says Paul, I live the Christian life by faith. At the end of the verse comes a final reminder that the sacrifice of Christ is ultimately responsible for all that Christians are and all the blessings we enjoy.

APPLY THE WORD

As you may have already discovered, we at Today in the Word recommend Scripture memorization as an excellent spiritual discipline (Psalm 119:11). If you haven't already memorized Galatians 2:20, these classic words would make an outstanding recharge for your ""spiritual batteries.""

Galatians 2:21

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible

If righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought.--Gal. 2:21

Dr. Rendel Harris has aptly described this letter of the great Apostle to the Gentiles as an "explosive epistle." Its force lies more in the truths it declares than in the way in which they were stated; yet the method of statement is most arresting. Perhaps in the course of the whole argument, nothing is more tremendous in the impact upon the mind than this superlative declaration. If the Law, which does reveal righteousness, is able to produce righteousness, then the death of Christ was a mistake; it was unnecessary; He died to accomplish something which might have been accomplished in some other way. Those then who hold that a man may reach righteousness through the Law are compelled either to get rid of the whole conception of the atoning death of the Lord, or to say that God was mistaken. Moreover, if the Law could not make righteous, and the death of Christ is able to do so, then why super-impose upon faith in that which is able, the rites and ceremonies of that which is without force? That is the whole case of the letter; and it is that truth, so force-fully stated, which has made this letter the high explosive which more than once in the history of the Church has shattered false doctrine as to the way of salvation. It was Martin Luther's weapon. Because the heart of man is ever prone to add something of human device to the Divine provision, it is well to keep this writing at hand, for its power is as great as ever.

GALATIANS 3

Galatians 3:1-5

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? - Galatians 3:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some churches prominently display a cross, often behind the pulpit or communion table. Other churches prefer not to display a cross, either to be less intimidating to newcomers or because they prefer not to adorn the sanctuary with any symbols. But whether a wooden cross hangs visibly or whether preachers simply proclaim the message of the cross, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross must be central to our faith. As John Calvin referred to such preaching this way: "When the Church has such painters as these, she no longer needs wood and stone, that is, dead images; she no longer requires any pictures."

Faithful proclamation of the gospel will always include the message of Christ crucified. And that's where Paul begins in chapter 3.

Paul reminded the Galatians that the gospel he preached to them was the message of Jesus who was "clearly portrayed as crucified" (v. 1). There's no getting around the crucifixion. As we saw yesterday, if Jesus was indeed crucified, why then the need for circumcision? The letter then poses a series of rhetorical questions intended to reveal the foolish deception. Did you, people of Galatia, come to faith by submitting to circumcision (works of the law) or by faith? By faith of course! And now that you've begun by faith in the grace of God through Jesus, will you reject it in favor of human efforts? And have you so quickly forgotten all that God has done among you since believing on Jesus? Your own eyes have witnessed miracles. Has God worked among you because you've been circumcised or because you've believed?

Paul was trying to take the Galatians back to their earliest days of faith. There was every evidence that God was at work among them. God's Spirit was active in their hearts and in their midst as communities of faith. Did that not validate the message that Paul had proclaimed to them? Did that not disprove the claims of the false teachers, who preached the necessity of circumcision?

Satan tries to persuade believers that their conversion has not been real. He wants to mire us in fear because it will paralyze our energy and sense of mission for God. Our first line of defense of course is the promises that we have from Scripture. But we can also appeal to the witness of the Spirit in our lives. When and how has He been present and active? Ask other believers to affirm how they see God at work in your life!

Galatians 3:1-5

TODAY IN THE WORD

American statesman Frederick Douglass was originally born into Southern slavery. The story of his early life is found in his first autobiography, published in 1845. There he writes of his escape to freedom: ""I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate... I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions.""

In Douglass' later career, he became a famous orator, civil official, and African-American leader. Would he have surrendered his freedom and returned to slavery? What an absurd question! Of course not. Yet from Paul's perspective, the Galatians were giving up their newfound freedom in Christ and willingly entering into the bondage of the law.

Having defended his apostleship and the authority of his message, Paul now vindicates the truth of his message. In today's reading, he tells the Galatians that their reason and experience should have convinced them of the all-sufficiency of faith. "You foolish Galatians!" (v. 1) means not that the Galatians were stupid or senseless but that they have been foolish in allowing themselves to deny the sufficiency of Christ.

Paul declares irrational the mixture of law-keeping with faith in Christ and implies that they should have been able to reach this conclusion themselves.

As Paul begins, he is willing to rest his case on one issue: "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?" (v. 2). The question the apostle raises is rhetorical. The Galatians knew very well that their salvation and accompanying spiritual power (v. 5) had come by faith alone.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul reminds the Galatians of their conversion and original faith in order to address the error of legalism and bring them back to the truth.

Have you also been reflecting on your testimony, the "personal history" of your faith? We're checking back with you on the suggested application for April 3rd. Do you feel confident in sharing your testimony? Does it include basic gospel truths so that another person could trust Christ by hearing it?

Galatians 3:1-5

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the Law, or by believing what you heard? - Galatians 3:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

When arguing a case in the American legal system, great stress lies on the proof that both sides can present to back up their arguments. In criminal cases, the burden of proof lies with the prosecution, who must demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that the accused person actually committed the crime.

The next move in Paul's argument is a critical one. He first draws the Galatians' attention back to the crucifixion of Jesus (v. 1). In keeping with the point we saw him arguing yesterday, Paul reminds his readers that Jesus did die. Implicitly he is pushing them to reflect on the point he has just made in 2:11–21. Their own profession of faith in the gospel involves this confession about Jesus. Once they recall that they do accept the fact that Jesus died on a cross, they ought then to accept the rest of Paul's argument—that those in Christ have died to the Law.

However, in a series of rhetorical questions, he bolsters his case by urging the Galatians to consider how it was that they came to enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The answer he expects is clear—the Galatians, as Gentiles, received the gift of the Spirit simply by believing the gospel message.

Paul's real point is implicit in his list of questions. He wants his converts to consider the fact that as Gentiles they received the Spirit by believing in Jesus. Well before it ever occurred to them that they had not adopted the practices of the Jewish Law, they had been blessed with the full benefits of life in Christ. If they possess the Spirit, and Paul is hinting that they do, they are thus justified and have received the fullness of God's promised salvation. Their sins have been taken care of and they have been freed from the present evil age. What then could they possibly gain by adopting the practices of the Law?

APPLY THE WORD

Those who believe in the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection have the Holy Spirit. His presence with us is one of the irrefutable proofs of our salvation. He is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise in John 14:16-17.

Galatians 3:3

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible

Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?—Gal 3.3

In these questions we have the principle for which the Apostle contended, applied to the processional aspect of Christian experience. If Christ did not die for nought—that is, if we indeed are admitted to the possibility of righteousness through faith in Him, and through that alone—then is it to be supposed that we shall be able to realize in actual experience the things of righteousness by going back to those methods which were unable to create the possibility or to communicate the power of righteousness? The first

phase of salvation is justification; that is, the reconciliation of our essential spirit-life to God. There we begin our Christian life. Is it reasonable to suppose, that departing from that central and initial way, we may now hope to make progress in the Christian life and experience by employing the methods of the flesh? Is it so, that any activity of the flesh whatever can strengthen the life of the Spirit? It is inconceivable. And yet here is the place where repeatedly the children of God have been carried away. All sorts of fleshly devices have been resorted to in the vain and foolish hope that activity of the flesh tends to strengthening of the spirit. It is ever so. The process is exactly opposite. The spirit controls the flesh, employs it, commands it, sanctifies it and thus makes it the instrument of service to others. Therefore the process of the soul to perfection is ever by faith, a spiritual activity; and never by works, a fleshly method.

Galatians 3:6-9

Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham. - Galatians 3:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

We can hardly imagine God asking more of us than He asked of Abraham. First, He instructed Abraham to leave his family home and strike out for an unknown destination. Then God asked Abraham to believe that although his wife was barren, his descendants would be numerous. And then when he finally did have a son, God told him to sacrifice Isaac. Yet Abraham steadfastly believed God's promises.

Paul is at pains to show that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit those first Gentile believers experienced when they professed faith in Jesus was, in fact legitimate. To make his case, he turns to the story of Abraham. He wants to establish two key points. First, he wants his readers to see that God's act of justifying sinners is not something brand new. Abraham, one of the most important figures in Jewish history, was "justified" by God in the very same way as those who believe in Jesus. He had faith in God's promises and so God declared him righteous (3:6). Those today who also believe God's promises follow in the footsteps of Abraham and are even included in his family (3:7).

The second point concerns the inclusion of Gentiles into Abraham's family. Scripture had foretold that God would one day bring Gentiles into Abraham's line (3:8). The words that the NIV translates as "Gentiles" and "nations" are identical in the Greek language in which Paul originally wrote. For Paul it was very clear that God did not limit his promises to Abraham only to the Jews. Rather, through Abraham's descendants blessing would go out to all the peoples of the earth.

APPLY THE WORD

If someone were recording our life story as a journey of faith, how would it read? Have we ever been in a position of absolutely trusting God when the situation seemed crazy or hopeless? Have we experienced God's faithfulness when we obey Him regardless of the cost?

Galatians 3:6-9 Genesis 15:1-6

Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. - Galatians 3:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

It has been said that tradition is the living faith of those who are now dead, while traditionalism is the dead faith of those who are now living. If we understand tradition in the positive sense as the passing on of a body of beliefs or teachings, then this statement helps to explain the difference between the vital faith of Abraham and his spiritual descendants. It also gives us insight into the agenda of those who were always trying to hang the yoke of the Jewish law on the necks of believers.

The close connection between the Old and New Testaments, and the rich heritage of our Christian faith, stand out clearly when today's texts are placed side by side. Despite the centuries that separated Paul's life from Abraham's, Abraham was saved, or justified (to use two New Testament terms), in the same way that believers are saved on this side of the cross--by faith.

When Abraham believed God's promise that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars, the Bible says God credited His righteousness to Abraham's account. This is legal language; God was handing down His verdict on Abraham: ""Not guilty.""

That's exactly what God does for those who believe today. When we put our faith in Christ, we were declared not guilty by God because the blood of Christ was applied to our sin debt and it was paid in full.

The difference is that Abraham, and all the Old Testament saints, looked forward to God's Redeemer by faith. As Christians we look back to that Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and put our faith in His finished work on the cross.

Abraham was the ""man of faith"" because his faith was the model for all believers, and because his faith helped open the way of

salvation to all nations. This is Paul's point in Galatians 3:8-9 when he says God told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him (see Gen. 12:3).

What was it about Abraham that pleased God so much that He ""announced the gospel in advance"" to Abraham (v. 8)? It was his faith, which started an incredibly rich heritage of trust in God that all believers are still inheriting today.

APPLY THE WORD

Glance back at Galatians 3:1-5 and you'll see that Paul's great teaching about Abraham was part of an argument against letting anyone put Christians under the bondage of legalism--which is trying to please God by your own efforts. We know that salvation is by faith alone. But sometimes we can fall into the trap of trying to force others to conform to our ideas. Are you judging another believer by a personal list of do's and don'ts? Why not tear up the list and allow your fellow Christian the freedom to follow Christ?

Galatians 3:6-9

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Book of Virtues, William Bennett's best-seller, kicked off a national trend linking stories and values--or rather, a recognition of the already-existing link between what we value and the stories we tell. The idea is that the best stories show characters and actions that we will want to imitate or ideas that we will want to incorporate in our lives. A story, then--from history, literature or other sources--can act as a moral teacher.

Mark Twain's story of Huckleberry Finn, for example, forces us to evaluate the morality of Huck's actions as he befriends an escaped slave and helps him--an action his society condemns but which readers have many reasons to find admirable. In the novel, we witness Huck's inner moral wrestlings and choices. The way we understand and respond to Huck's struggles tells a lot about our own moral character and choices.

In his attempt to prove the doctrine of justification by faith, Paul appealed to the story of Abraham. Jews or Judaizers would have had high regard for Abraham. In fact, the Judaizers were urging the Galatians to be circumcised as Abraham had been. Paul appealed to them on the basis of the fact that the children of Abraham were not under law but under promise.

Abraham's faith (v. 6) was anchored in the person of God and His promises. Abraham committed himself totally and unreservedly to his God. Righteousness was not inherently his but was given to him by God on the basis of faith; works were not involved in obtaining justification. This lesson would not have been lost on the Galatian Judaizers.

APPLY THE WORD

Since Paul uses Abraham to illustrate his points both here and later in Galatians 3, this might be a good time for you to refresh yourself or your family on the history of Abraham and Sarah.

Galatians 3:6-14

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several years ago, model and actress Anna Nicole Smith died suddenly, leaving behind a five-month old daughter. What ensued was a public and messy paternity dispute. Five men claimed to be the father of Smith's daughter—and they wanted a share in Smith's potentially half-billion dollar estate.

In Galatians 3, Paul lays out an argument that answers the question of spiritual paternity. Who are the children of Abraham? Those who require circumcision have come to Galatia preaching that only the circumcised are the children of Abraham. The Gentile believers at Galatia have been made to believe that they are somehow inferior to the Jews or that their salvation experience has been incomplete. In addition to believing in Jesus, they must also become circumcised.

To settle the question of paternity and to disprove the claims of the false teachers, Paul highlighted the spiritual DNA of Abraham. Who is Abraham, and how do his children resemble him? Quite clearly, Abraham was a man of faith. There is no mention here of circumcision (which God did in fact give to Abraham later as a sign of the covenant). Instead, Paul focused on the faith of Abraham. He believed God. He would be the father to all who believed. Through him, all nations would be blessed. It wasn't as if God promised certain things to Abraham and the Jews, and then, when they didn't live up to His expectations, changed course and invited the Gentiles to join His family. God's eternal purposes have always included the Gentiles.

Abraham is a man of faith, and his children are also people of faith. What Paul contrasts here is faith and law. Faith, rather than following the law, makes one a child of Abraham. Reliance on the law (which would include circumcision) invites a curse because

the law demands perfect obedience. No one is capable of that perfect obedience, and we are all therefore cursed if we follow the way of the law. Faith points us to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose death in our place ensures that all who believe in Him will inherit the blessings of Abraham.

APPLY THE WORD

We might consider verse 8 an unusual gospel pronouncement, since it makes no mention of the Messiah to come. Inherently, the most important blessing Abraham would inherit and pass on would be restored fellowship with God, and that happens through Christ. Yet the gospel means more than just the blessings we inherit. It forms us into a people who participate with God in loving and redemptive purposes to bless the world. Through the gospel, we become a blessing!

Galatians 3:6-14.

THE ROYAL AIR

John Henry Jowett

EMERSON says somewhere that he has noticed that men whose duties are performed beneath great domes acquire a stately and appropriate manner. The vergers in our great cathedrals have a dignified stride. It is not otherwise with men who consciously live under the power of vast relationships. Princes of royal blood have a certain great "air" about them. The consciousness of noble kinships has an expansive influence upon the soul. The Jews felt its influence when they called to mind "our Father Abraham."

So is it with men and women of glorious kinships in the realm of faith. Their souls expand in the vast and exalted relations. "The children of faith" have vital communion with all the spiritual princes and princesses of countless years. They have blood-relationship with the patriarchs, and psalmists, and prophets, and they dwell "in heavenly places" with Paul, and Augustine, and Luther, and Wesley.

Surely, such exalted kinship should influence our very stride, and set its mark upon our "daily walk and conversation." It ought to make us so big that we can never speak a mean word, or do a petty and peevish thing.

Galatians 3:10-14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Ukrainian Christian Yan Romanovitch grew up in an atmosphere of poverty and abuse.

When Yan's father crippled his Christian mother in a drunken rage, he was sent to a special school for children--a virtual orphanage. Later, when he married a government official's daughter and gained money and power, he thought his life would change.

But inner pain and emptiness remained. Yan took to drinking and fighting and left his wife and job. One day he cried out, "If you are real, God... change me."

One week later, while shopping in the marketplace, he met four Christian workers. They witnessed to him and led Yan to a saving faith in Jesus Christ!

As Paul describes the goodness of God in saving us, he shows the impossibility of justification by the law and deliverance from the works of the law through Christ.

If we are condemned by the law (v. 10), it is evident that no one can be justified by law-keeping (v. 11). "The righteous will live by faith," the apostle says, quoting Habakkuk 2:4. In doing so, he shows that even under law the way of faith was superior to the legal way. Underscoring this point, he declares that in the law works were the fundamental but hopeless principle (Gal. 3:12).

Paul now gladly turns to the positive side of his argument: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" (v. 13). To "redeem" is to pay the purchase price. It is as if Christ entered the slave market and paid the required number of sesterces (Roman coins) for those in bondage. The curse of death for sin came upon Him, and His substitutionary death on our behalf released us from the curse (2 Cor. 5:21; Is. 53:6).

APPLY THE WORD

If we all "got what we deserve," we'd be in big trouble! Sin deserves death, and we've all sinned. But Christ paid the price (v. 13), and by His grace we can now live as children of God.

Galatians 3:10-14

He redeemed us ... so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. - Galatians 3:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you've ever spent time around toddlers, you can understand the emphasis of Paul's argument in our passage today. As soon as you warn a two-year-old not to put his fingers in the fan, nothing seems more enticing to him. If you instruct her that carrots are good for her, she wants nothing to do with them.

Everything Paul has said since Galatians 2:15 regarding Jews, Gentiles, Law, faith, righteousness, justification, the Spirit, and Abraham comes into focus in this passage. His main point is simple: observing the Law never produced righteousness. He knows this because Scripture says very clearly that those whom God deems righteous live by faith (Hab. 2:4), while those who live by observing the Law are not living by faith (Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:11–12). The problem with this latter way of life is that it places one under the Law's curse since no one can actually do all that the Law commands (v. 10).

Paul is probably thinking about the blessings and curses pronounced when the Law was given again in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 28:1–14 promised blessing to Israel so long as they did all the Law said. Deuteronomy 28:15–68 recounts all the curses that would come for failure to obey. Paul knew Israel's history. Israel had been forced into exile in the past and, even after they had returned to the Promised Land, they had lived for most of that time under the rule of foreign overlords (see Deut. 28:32–66). Israel continually found itself under the curse of exile and foreign domination predicted by the Law. For Paul this could only mean one thing—those who had tried to live by the Law had inherited curse rather than blessing. The promised blessing had to come from some other source.

APPLY THE WORD

If we are tempted to think of Christianity as a set of rules or a list of do's and don'ts, we've missed the point of Galatians! Following a set of rules can never produce the righteousness that enables us to enter God's presence.

Galatians 3:13

Don Fortner - Grace for Today

'Christ hath redeemed us' - Galatians 3:13

With those four words Paul states the whole doctrine of redemption as it is revealed in the New Testament. Christ alone is our Redeemer. Christ bore our sins. Christ endured the wrath of God, Christ satisfied the claims of justice against us, as our Substitute. The work of redemption was fully accomplished. 'Christ hath redeemed us.' Nothing is left to be done by us. Christ has done all. The blood of Christ poured out in death for the atonement of sin accomplished an effectual redemption. 'Christ hath redeemed us.' Our Lord did not provide for redemption or make redemption a possibility for all men, leaving it into the hands of man's free will to comply with his work and make it effectual. Redemption was performed by Christ alone. Redemption was accomplished at Calvary. And that redemption accomplished at Calvary was an effectual atonement for sin. The apostle Paul also makes it plain that the benefits of Christ's atonement are designed for and limited to God's elect. 'Christ hath redeemed us.' God plainly says, regarding the death of his Son, 'For the transgression of my people was he stricken' (Isa. 53:8). The Bible nowhere states, nor does it anywhere imply, that the Lord, Jesus Christ shed his blood and died to redeem all men from the curse of the law. I do not believe that doctrine which says that Judas was redeemed by Christ. It is not possible that our Lord died as a Substitute in Judas' place, hearing the curse of the law for him. Any who embrace such a doctrine must also embrace one of three absurd and blasphemous conclusions: (1) Either Judas is in heaven, which is to deny the Word of God; or (2) Christ failed to redeem the ones for whom he died and failed in his work of redemption as the sinner's Substitute; or (3) the justice of God has fallen to the ground, for if God punishes both the sinner and the sinner's Substitute for the same offense he would mock his own justice. This is the doctrine of Scripture: 'Christ hath redeemed us!'—All God's elect, all who believe.

Galatians 3:10-18

No one is justified before God by the law, because, ""The righteous will live by faith."" - Galatians 3:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

If we are going to appreciate the Old Testament roots of our faith, we need to see how the law of Moses fit into the plan of God, both for God's people yesterday and for us today.

This isn't just an academic question. We believe that posting the Ten Commandments in our homes, schools, and churches is a great way to teach God's holy demands to ourselves and our children. And we believe any generation that is deprived of the knowledge of God's requirements is a morally crippled generation. Unfortunately, the '90s will be remembered for its tolerance of immorality.

The law of God is holy and good (Rom. 7:12). But when you are dealing with an infinitely holy God, there is no such thing as toning down His demands or looking the other way when someone disobeys.

This is why the law could never save anyone. In fact, woven through the law was the sharp sting of a curse for those who failed to obey it completely. After hundreds of years of living under the law, Israel received a guilty verdict from God. What was needed was not a better law, but better people. The reality of human sin, however, made that impossible without God's intervention.

That's exactly what God did, sending Jesus to bear the curse of the law and pay the penalty for us. He is the reason we are not still being judged and condemned by the law of Moses.

Paul makes this argument about the law to prevent the believers in Galatia from allowing anyone to put the yoke of the law around their necks.

But the apostle's argument is not all negative. The positive side of Christ's work is that it activates a principle that was in effect centuries before the law was given, and was never canceled. This is the principle of faith.

The point is that Abraham was justified, or saved, by faith when He believed God's promise (Gen. 15:1-6). Faith in Him has always been God's chosen means of redemption. He sent Christ as the seed of Abraham to fulfill the law and become the object of faith.

We have much to learn from the law of Moses, but we owe our salvation to Jesus.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul leaves no doubt that ""The righteous will live by faith"" has always been the principle by which God intended His people to live. This is faith for more than just salvation. We live by faith every day. Are you trusting God right now to meet a need in your life, reach a lost friend or family member, or do a new work of His grace in another believer's life? God honors faith; ask Him for the grace to keep trusting.

Galatians 3:15-18

God in his grace gave [the inheritance] to Abraham through a promise. - Galatians 3:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Whenever a lawyer builds a defense case, he prepares arguments and counterarguments. He needs to be able to take different vantage points, to anticipate questions and formulate answers even before those questions are asked. And that's what Paul has been doing throughout his letter, preparing a very thorough defense of his apostleship and of the gospel.

The argument goes in two directions. Paul's ultimate aim is to dissuade the Galatians from believing they must be circumcised. His arguments are rooted in the Old Testament because it is from the Old Testament that the false teachers have twisted their faulty logic. There has been a fundamental misunderstanding of the promises made to Abraham and the purpose of the law. The Gentile converts in Galatia, now doubting their identity as Abraham's children and heirs of the divine promises, wanted to become circumcised to guarantee their status as members of God's family.

The first direction of this argument is from an example in everyday life. Paul asks them to consider human covenants, or contracts. Can they be dissolved or annulled? When two parties mutually agree, when the covenant is confirmed by shaking hands or signing a piece of paper, it cannot be reversed without compromising the integrity of one of the parties.

Now consider the covenant that God made with Abraham. God cannot compromise His character. What He has promised, He will do. His contract with Abraham is irreversible. Moreover, what He's promised to Abraham will come through his "seed" or offspring (cf. Gen. 12:7). Galatians clarifies that the seed to which God refers in Genesis is not in fact the children of Abraham (who are many) but Christ (who is One). Christ becomes the true heir of all the divine promises made to Abraham.

The second direction argues from the timeline. The promises were made to Abraham more than four centuries before the law was ever given to Moses. Could the law really supersede the promises if the promises were given first?

APPLY THE WORD

Our trust that God is faithful to His promises is critical to our faith. Write down the promises you find in the pages of Scriptures as you read, and prayerfully reflect on those promises. Ask God to help you believe in His faithfulness. If you're afraid, remember that He's promised to be with you. If you're uncertain, remember that He's promised wisdom. If you're broken over sin in your life, remember He's promised forgiveness.

Galatians 3:15-18

TODAY IN THE WORD

One stormy and extremely cold Sunday morning, a minister was on his way to church. On the road he met one of his neighbors, who, shivering miserably, said to him, "It's very chilly, sir."

"Oh," replied the minister. "God is as good as His word."

The other, not comprehending, asked what he meant. The minister answered: "God promised about three thousand years ago, and He still makes it good today, that 'as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat... will never cease.'"

The minister's reply was meant as a joke, but his point is true: God always keeps His covenants and promises.

In today's reading Paul observes that when a human covenant is ratified, no one sets it aside or amends it, neither the author nor a second party (v. 15). Of course the implication is that if that is true with people, it is even more true with God. A second covenant, the law, could not set aside the promise made to Abraham (v. 17).

The Abrahamic covenant could only be fulfilled by Christ (v. 16). Only in the infinite Son of God could all the families of the earth be blessed. But Christ is viewed in this chapter as also being the head of a new family; all who receive Him by faith become sons of Abraham in a spiritual sense (Gal. 3:28-29).

A most startling and amazing truth becomes clear. The age of law was merely a parenthesis between the age of promise and the age of grace (v. 18). All of the legalistic teaching the church has endured for nearly two thousand years is entirely incompatible with the teachings of grace and the spirit of promise.

APPLY THE WORD

Two days ago, we suggested that you review the biblical narrative of Abraham and Sarah. If you did so, you probably found yourself held spellbound by a story filled with impossible promises, difficult journeys, angelic visitors, and obedient faith.

Galatians 3:15-22

What, then, was the purpose of the Law? - Galatians 3:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

If we think back to our illustration yesterday on the willfulness of toddlers, someone might ask, "Why go through all the trouble of giving them instructions if they are just going to do what they want?" This question misses the true point of the instruction. We want to protect children from things that will harm them, but we also want to train them so that they can make wise, healthy choices when they are mature enough to choose for themselves.

Paul entertains two questions that his preceding argument might raise: first, why was the Law given if the promised blessing comes by faith; and second, does the Law oppose the promises? The response begins with the observation that the promise of an inheritance for Abraham's seed was ultimately directed toward Christ (v. 16). That is, the "many people" who follow the Law and call Abraham "father" are not in the first instance the object of the promises. He points out next that the promises were given before the Law (vv. 17-18). The Law does not trump or set aside the prior promises.

Having laid this groundwork, he turns to the first question—why the Law? The Law served the purpose of cleansing sin, but only in a provisional and temporary way. The commands and sacrificial system were limited, not full and perfect, in dealing with sin. The Law was always only intended to be in effect until Christ "the Seed to whom the promise referred had come" (v. 19).

His answer to the second question—does the Law oppose the promises?—is closely linked with his answer to the first. The Law was provisional and temporary, so it could not bring about the righteousness that comes by faith (v. 21).

APPLY THE WORD

The blessing of the promise was for all nations, but many people are still waiting to hear this good news.

Galatians 3:19

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'Wherefore then serveth the law?' - Gal 3:19

The law of God is holy and just and good. But it becomes a very great evil when it is perverted and used for something other than its divine purpose.

Now Paul tells us what the design and purpose of God's law is. It was never intended by God to be a means of justification or sanctification, a motive for Christian service, a rule of life for believers, or a code of moral ethics. The law of God has but one singular purpose. It exposes man's guilt and sin before God, shutting him up to faith in Christ alone for salvation. 'It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.' 'The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.' To use the law for any other purpose is to pervert and abuse the law.

Once a man comes to Christ by faith, the law has no more claim upon him and no longer has dominion over him. The law was not made for a righteous man. The language of Holy Scripture in this matter could not be clearer or more emphatic. 'After that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.' 'We are not under the law, but under grace.' 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' 'Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.' We who are free dare not entangle ourselves again with the yoke of bondage. Our freedom has been purchased at too high a price, the precious blood of Christ. We have a higher, better, more effectual motive for our obedience, service and devotion than the law given by Moses. 'The love of Christ constraineth us!' When true love reigns in the heart there is no need for law. Love for Christ causes us to love one another. This love makes God's elect patient, kind, honest, generous and faithful. And this love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 3:19-25

The law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. - Galatians 3:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Star of the popular reality show, Supernanny, Jo Frost flies in to help frazzled parents who have come to their wits' end because of their children's behavior. Her practical, no-nonsense style and advice helps parents to identify why their own discipline is failing. Jo Frost has become a modern-day Mary Poppins.

Paul describes the important purposes of the law in today's reading, one of which is to act as a "nanny" for God's children. As we'll study today, God's law has various functions. We'll understand that the law and the promise are not at odds with each other. They don't work against each other but rather towards the same end. The law was an essential part of God's plan. It was never the primary means of relating to God, for we've already seen that the promise was given first, centuries before the introduction of the law. But it was necessary for an appointed time.

Of course the question Paul anticipates from the Galatians for all the arguments he's made so far is this: If faith supersedes the law, if our inheritance comes through Abraham and not the law, then why did God even give the law? What are the purposes of the law?

The law was necessary for the purpose of revealing and condemning sin. The Old Testament law, with all of its regulations for human behavior and interaction, with its strict guidelines for sacrifices and worship, revealed the depravity of human beings. It revealed our inability to ever measure up to God's standards. It illuminated the hopeless state of humanity before God. In this sense, the law imprisons and holds us captive (v. 23).

But the law's functions aren't exclusively negative. In a positive role, the law serves as our guardian. It holds us captive, yes, but in so doing, keeps us safe and delivers us finally into the arms of Jesus. Once Jesus had come, the hopelessness of our spiritual state, as revealed to us by the law, would be the very thing to drive us towards an embrace of God's grace.

APPLY THE WORD

The Mishnah, the written collection of Jewish oral teachings and traditions, teaches that following the law leads a person to life: "Lots of Torah, lots of life." Paul says that the law can never impart life or spiritual well being. Even today, we have to be very careful of our tendency to want to define our spiritual lives by rules and regulations, keeping a list of do's and don'ts. Following rules doesn't make us Christians and doesn't ensure our favor with God. Faith in Jesus does.

Galatians 3:19-22

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1838 the British government sent word to Jamaica that slavery was at an end and that therefore those who were slaves were now free. On that night of emancipation, a mahogany coffin was made. Former slaves filled the coffin with whips, branding irons, coarse clothing, handcuffs, and other tools and symbols used during their years of bondage.

The coffin lid was bolted shut and at midnight the coffin was lowered into a grave, dug especially for the occasion. Then the thousands gathered celebrated their new freedom by singing the doxology!

Once released, people who have known slavery would never willingly surrender their freedom. Instead, they move forward joyfully to a new way of life. This is the very point Paul is trying to make to the Galatians. "You have been set free from the law's condemnation," he tells them, "so start acting like it!"

If the law is not in force for the believer now that Christ has come, what good was it? What function did it serve? The answer is that the law was given until the Seed should come and that it was therefore only preparatory, ending with the coming of Christ (v. 19).

If law is inferior to promise, is there opposition between these two divine arrangements? Paul says, "Perish the thought." The law is all right as far as it goes, but it really could not compete with the promise because it could not give life.

The function of the law was to convict transgressors. The picture in verse 22 is variously painted by translators as "shut up like a fish enclosed in a net," "enclosed entirely by barriers," and "shut up on every side as in a prison." Everything pertaining to men--thoughts, words, and deeds--is all locked up and thus doomed under sin.

APPLY THE WORD

We've nearly reached the halfway point of our study of Galatians. We hope you are enjoying and learning from this meaty book!

We suggest today that you sit back and reorient yourself to the "big picture" of Paul's epistle. (If you're working today on the tax forms that are due tomorrow, you could do one of these activities as a break!)

Galatians 3:23-25

TODAY IN THE WORD

A good teacher is like a guide, not only knowing but also showing the way. A teacher's life-experience can be a valuable part of a student's learning experience.

With these axioms in mind, in 1986 evangelist Leighton Ford began a ministry to find and develop young evangelical leaders. In 1992, he started the Arrow Leadership Program, a focused, group-oriented, two-year training program emphasizing evangelism and leadership skills.

Ford told Christianity Today: "I sensed a desire among the younger generation of emerging leaders for a highly personalized leadership development program. They hungered for mentoring relationships with older leaders and affirmation between peers--and above all, a program that stressed character development alongside skills for growing ministries."

As Paul explains in today's reading, the law was God's "development program" for the Jews, teaching and guiding them. First, yesterday's main idea continues: that the law led to the fulfillment of the promise. The verb in verse 23 often has the connotation of protecting rather than imprisonment for punishment, and probably should be so understood here. God protected His children from the excesses of the heathen nations through the controls of the law. The purpose of this protective function of the law was to urge or push people to faith.

In verse 24 the law as a teacher leads men to faith. In Greek the law is called "paidagogos," not a "didaskalos." In other words, the law was an inferior slave or servant ("paidagogos") committed with the task of bringing the master's son to school or to the schoolmaster ("didaskalos"). The "pedagogue" was charged with disciplining the child and giving him moral training, by protecting him and regulating his outward habits. That was all the law could do; but when it led the son to Christ, its work was finished. Christ was the schoolmaster ("didaskalos"), a point of Paul's illustration which would have been clear to the Romans of that day.

APPLY THE WORD

Salvation is one of the most precious gifts God has given us. As we've been studying Galatians, our hope is that you are gaining a greater appreciation for God's grace and our redemption in Christ.

Galatians 3:23-29

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed. - Galatians 3:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

A young first-year Latin teacher was preparing his fourth-graders for their drills that morning. "Now once we learn these conjugations, we can move on to the fun stuff!" he promised. But the children responded, "We love to conjugate! This is fun!" Indeed, as the class went on, the teacher discovered that the power of repetition with the drills prepared his students to enjoy and understand the language.

As we recall, Paul has been arguing that the Law is not opposed to the promised blessing. The Law served as an instructor for the Jewish people that provided protection and training in preparation for the coming of Christ and of faith (v. 24). That is, the Law was the guardian of those people through whom God intended to bring salvation to all the nations.

Prior to the coming of that salvation, the Law performed the necessary function of distinguishing between God's children, His chosen people Israel, and the Gentile nations. With the first advent of Jesus, the Law reached its fulfillment and the time for the promised blessing to go to the nations had come (v. 25).

So that we do not miss the significance of this last point, Paul spells it out--the coming

of Christ marks the coming of the promised blessing to all the nations. As we have already seen, Paul is repeating himself when he makes this statement. Yet this repetition includes an important elaboration. Now we see why the Law is no longer that focal point of God's activity in the world. In Christ the Law has been fulfilled. Now that the promise has come, the sons of God are distinguished by being clothed with Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Educators have long understood the power of repetition. We can use this power in our spiritual lives through memorizing Scripture. The process of repeating God's Word as we memorize sears His truth into the fabric of our being.

Galatians 3:26-29

You are all one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

The caste system in India creates a rigidly stratified culture where opportunities for social mobility do not exist. In fact, Hinduism actually sanctions the hierarchical, birth-ordained Indian caste system. It's little wonder, then, that the Christian gospel has held appeal for many Dalit, those least regarded in India who were formerly known as the Untouchables.

The Christian gospel, quite contrary to the teachings of Hinduism in India, celebrates the joyful announcement of the unity and equality of all people in the name of Jesus Christ. Disparities based upon ethnicity, economic status, and race disappear. People are not valued based on these distinctions. God's family members are all equal to one another.

This was radically new for these believers in Galatia, who were undoubtedly quite familiar with first-century attitudes. It was common for the Pharisees in Paul's time to give thanks to God that they were not Gentiles, slaves, or women. Clearly,

a great deal of prejudice existed against these groups as well as others. But the false teachers who had come from Jerusalem had not yet embraced this new message of equality: by preaching that Gentiles must become "Jewish" and be circumcised was to insist upon the rules of the old system and reject everything that had been made new through Christ.

Paul sums up much of the argument of chapter 3 in these closing verses. Christ Jesus is Abraham's rightful heir. When we declare faith in Christ, we are baptized into Him and are guaranteed to inherit all the divine promises and the family name of Abraham. We are fully and completely adopted by God into His family. In this family, it does not matter if one is a Jew or Gentile, a slave or a free man, a man or a woman, because what becomes the most defining piece of our identity is that we are "Christian." We belong to Him through faith, not through the law. The law was a guardian for us, but now this new era was hailed when Jesus the Messiah came.

APPLY THE WORD

The message of unity in Paul's letter to the Galatians is still relevant today. We often separate from one another based upon our race, economic status, or other differences. It is a beautiful and dramatic testimony to the gospel when Christian communities are formed among people who are different from one another. True unity comes from our recognition that we are all recipients of saving grace from God through Jesus Christ. This is unity we should pray for and work towards.

Galatians 3:26-29

TODAY IN THE WORD

Oliver Otis Howard, a New England abolitionist, served as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War. He never drank, smoked or swore, and his soldiers called him ""Old Prayer Book.""

After the war, Howard led the Freedmen's Bureau, a government effort to assist former slaves. He helped to found a university for African-Americans in 1867--Howard University, today one of the leading black universities in America. He also stirred controversy when he tried to integrate a church.

Howard understood the truth of today's verse: racial and ethnic barriers have no place in the body of Christ.

Despite Jew-Gentile frictions, Paul could give his Gentile converts in Galatia the assurance: ""You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus"" (v. 26). ""Through faith"" should be underscored because again and again in this epistle the apostle means to emphasize faith as opposed to works.

Those who have received Christ by faith have been baptized into Him (v. 27). They have been linked to Him in a living union and made positionally to participate in His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4).

In the process they have also ""put on Christ"" or ""clothed"" themselves with Christ. This is a reference to a significant ceremony for a young Roman male. When he came of age he was invested with the toga virilis, signifying that he was now a grown-up son, with the accompanying rights and responsibilities.

The image helps to explain how we mature as God's children. We are joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit and clothed with Christ's robe of righteousness, by which means we can stand before God without fear of condemnation.

In this divine family all are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). None of us are entitled to superior Christian privileges, no matter what our spiritual or cultural background. A beautiful example of this is seen in the slave Onesimus, who in Christ became a ""dear brother"" to his master Philemon (Philemon 16).

APPLY THE WORD

Galatians 3:28 captures the tremendous reality of believers' unity in Christ.

What distinctions or barriers separate Christians in our culture or community? Barriers of race? Social class? Economic status? Education? Career choice? It's time to break down those walls!

GALATIANS 4

Galatians 4:1-7

TODAY IN THE WORD

The story is told of an English nobleman who worked for many years as a railway porter, unaware of his true identity. One day a gentleman entered the railway station, made some inquiries, and asked the porter his name. Upon hearing it, the visitor said, ""I have come to tell you that you are an Earl and entitled to a large estate.""

Do you think that man continued to behave as a railway porter? Certainly not. He rushed from the station to take possession of his inheritance! We as Christians should do the same. From Paul's perspective, however, the Galatians were acting like children, failing to claim their inheritance.

In today's reading humanity is presented as a child until Christ's coming, when the guardian (law) was done away. In Paul's day, as long as he was a child, an heir was no better off than a slave, though he be lord of the whole estate by title and birthright.

In verse 3, the apostle applies this legal rule of society to our Christian lives. Once we were spiritually like children. But the gospel wrought a remarkable change, by which we were transformed from a position of spiritual childhood to adult sonship.

What is the gospel? God sent His Son (v. 4). Taking on human form so He could identify with fallen humanity, the Son was born of a woman. Born under the law, He perfectly kept that law, fulfilled it, and ultimately paid its curse for all mankind.

The result of redemption (v. 5) is adoption to divine sonship. The voice of the Holy Spirit within believers confirms their sonship and cries out to the Father in love (v. 6).

APPLY THE WORD

Salvation by faith is one of the great truths that fueled the Reformation. But this is just the beginning of what God intends for His heirs.

Martin Luther, for instance, found that saving faith undergirds Christian love: ""Lo, thus from faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss.""

Galatians 4:1-7

When the time had fully come, God sent his son. - Galatians 4:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Every year young Shane looked forward to his birthday--not just for the presents, but because his dad would grant him new privileges. When he turned six, his dad gave him a bicycle without training wheels that he could ride in the driveway. When he turned seven, he was allowed to ride in front of his house. By the time he was twelve, he could ride his bike around town with his friends. Shane learned that proving he could handle his current level of privilege meant that his dad would grant him additional privileges as he grew older.

In an attempt to clarify the point he made in the previous passage, Paul compares the time of being under the supervision of the Law to the life of a firstborn child living under the care of a guardian. The child stands to inherit the estate of his parents, but he must wait until the date set by the father. The father will not allow the child to inherit the estate until he has matured into an adult. He is the son, but he is little better than the household slaves, subject to the commands of the authority set over him until he reaches the age of maturity.

During the age of the Law, God's people were like that child--heirs, but not yet in possession of the promised inheritance. Then, at the date set by the Father, Jesus was sent into the world. With the coming of Christ, the fullness of time had come. The guardian was no longer needed and the children were no longer subject to its commands. The heirs of the promise now had the full rights of sons (v. 5). They had now obtained possession of the promised inheritance--the presence of the Spirit.

APPLY THE WORD

Galatians 4:6 says, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' " On our own we could never approach God in this intimate way. But through faith in Christ and the resulting presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are able to have a relationship with God that is supremely personal and powerful.

Galatians 4:1-7

When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, ... born under the law, to redeem those under the law. - Galatians 4:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

The reasons behind God's timing are not always apparent to us, although the Bible assures us that God is never late or early. Abraham may have waited twenty-five years for a son, but God had not delayed. The Israelites might have agonized during their cruel oppression in Egypt, but God was not late. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise" (2 Peter 3:9).

Paul affirms that God chose to send His Son Jesus into the world at the "set time." We cannot fully know why Jesus would crash into time when He did. It might have been because the Greek empire had provided a common culture and language, which would speed the spread of the gospel. Or maybe it was because the Romans had constructed new roads throughout the empire, which would also aid in missionary endeavors.

For whatever reason, God sent Jesus at His approved time. The Son that God sends is both fully God and fully man. He was sent (pre-existing before His birth) and therefore divine; He was also born (of a woman, under the law) and therefore human. Paul lays out a very clear understanding of the Incarnation in this passage and sees its direct correlation in helping the Galatians understand their status as sons.

The story of the Galatian believers is formulated according to the Exodus narrative, a familiar and fundamental story for the Jews. The Jews had been slaves in Egypt, rescued by God's hand, and delivered into freedom. The Galatians, too, were once slaves. They'd been held captive to the "elemental spiritual forces of the world" (v. 3). Scholars have interpreted those forces as either the law itself or the pagan gods of the Gentiles.

Either way, liberation was theirs when Christ came. He came as God, fully able to rescue those held in slavery. He came as a man, fulfilling the demands of the law, and by His righteousness, obtaining for us salvation. He bore the punishment that should have been ours. And to complete the Trinitarian work of salvation, God the Spirit now testifies in our hearts that we are God's children.

APPLY THE WORD

Pastor and theologian John Stott writes about this passage, "God sent His Son that we might have the status of sonship, and He sent His Spirit that we might have an experience of it. This comes through the affectionate, confidential intimacy of our access to God in prayer." Paul taught the Galatians that when they pray the words, "Abba, Father," it's then they have the clearest sense of belonging to God (v. 6). Our prayer life is a vital part of our spiritual health!

Galatians 4:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you watch any television today, you'll probably be reminded that there are only 38 shopping days until Christmas. This time of year, ads often communicate the not-so-subtle message that if you truly love someone, you'll buy expensive gifts for them. Now it's true that when we love someone we naturally want to give that person gifts or do something special for him or her. But today's passage shows that the greatest gift ever given wasn't given because the recipients were so loving or deserving. Instead, God's free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ is given to sinners who rebel against Him.

Earlier this month, we looked at Romans 1 and saw the terrible downward spiral that results from failing to give thanks to the Creator God. The amazing depth of God's love is that He sent His Son to die for the very individuals described in Romans 1. The word powerless in Romans 5:6 indicates that there was absolutely nothing that any of us could have done to have changed our own dead spiritual condition—nothing apart from God's work in Christ.

To underscore how remarkable it is that Christ would die for us, Paul notes that, sometimes, under the right circumstances, a person might die for a righteous or good person. But it defies all human logic that Christ would die for sinners. Yet this is what He did! By His death, we've been reconciled with God, into a new relationship with Him. By His death, the penalty for our sin has been paid.

The rest of today's passage draws a sharp contrast between the effects of Adam's sin, which brought death, and Christ's gift, which brought life. Judgment was the inevitable consequence of Adam's rebellious act. Logically, the many sins committed after that should have resulted in more judgment. Instead, Christ paid the price for all these sins, so that His one act demonstrated God's abundant grace and brought forth reconciliation and life.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Romans 5 describes God's gift in Christ in terms of new life and justification. But let's consider other aspects of this supreme gift. Because of Jesus Christ, we belong to God (1 Cor. 6:19-20), we have all we need in Christ (Eph. 2:10), we're free from condemnation (Rom. 8:28), we're citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), we have an eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-5)—and so much more! Look up each of these verses and express in your own words your gratitude for the greatest gift ever given.

Galatians 4:4-7

God sent his Son, born of a woman, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. - Galatians 4:4-5

TODAY IN THE WORD

At a Web site bearing the address www.precious.org, you'll find the "Internet Adoption Photolisting" by Precious in HIS Sight, which lists more than five hundred children currently available for international adoption.

Since 1994, the Precious photolisting has featured over eight thousand children, linking families who want to adopt with agencies who can guide and facilitate the process. The site boasts more than one million hits per month!

One couple told Precious: "We saw our daughter on this site in November, and she was in our arms in March. Words certainly can't explain the happiness she has added to our family!"

Adoption is a beautiful thing, especially when done by believers who want to show the heart of God. We ourselves are adopted children of our heavenly Father. How can this be? Because Christ became a man.

At the right time in God's plan, He sent His Son to earth. Jesus met two prerequisites for His mission of redemption: He was "born of a woman" and "born under law" (v. 4). "Born of a woman" is a simple phrase underscoring an amazing truth of Jesus' human birth: the Incarnation, "God with us." "Born under law" refers to the Mosaic Law, which until Christ no one had kept perfectly (cf. Rom. 8:3). In the overall context of Galatians, we conclude from these two phrases that Jesus was a perfect human being.

As such, He redeemed us—that is, He paid the price necessary to free us from the "slave market" of sin. More than that, He adopted us into His family with the "full rights of sons" (v. 5). We went from being slaves of sin to children of God, from condemned prisoners on death row to inheritors of heaven (v. 7; cf. Rom. 8:17)!

God the Son made possible our adoption into the family of God the Father, and as His sons and daughters we've thus received God the Holy Spirit. "Abba" (something like "Daddy") emphasizes this close family relationship (cf. Rom. 8:15-16).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you've been enjoying this month's study on the humanity of Christ and would like to delve into Christology in greater depth and detail, we have a book to recommend.

Galatians 4:6

Henry Blackaby - Experiencing God Day by Day

Abba, Father

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"—Galatians 4:6

The word father conjures up different images for everyone. To some it brings the picture of love, laughter, respect, and acceptance. Unfortunately, others associate the term father with fear, rejection, and disappointment. That is why it is so important not to take your understanding of your heavenly Father from your experience. Take it from Scripture. You undoubtedly had an imperfect earthly father, perhaps even one who brought you harm. But, as in all of your Christian life, the key is not to understand the Bible based on your experience, but to understand your experience in light of the Bible. God is your model of a father in the truest sense of the word. Your heavenly Father was willing to pay any price in order to save you (Rom. 8:32). Your heavenly Father is always ready to meet your needs (Luke 11:11–13). Your heavenly Father loves you so much that He is willing to discipline you to bring you to Christian maturity (Pr. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:5–10). Even when you rebel against Him and reject His love, your Father continues to do what is best for you (Rom. 5:8). He does not make His love for you conditional upon your love for Him. He loves you even when you are not loving Him (1 John 4:19). He has made you His heirs and reserves a home for you in heaven (Rom. 8:15–17).

This is what a father is like biblically. If this has not been your experience, it can be now. There is One who has adopted you and who wants to love you in a way you have never experienced. Take comfort and strength from Him—your heavenly Father.

Galatians 4:8-11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Earlier this month, we told you about Frederick Douglass and noted that the idea that he would have given up his freedom to return to slavery was ridiculous. Who would ever want to make such a trade?

Strangely enough, the Bible records that the Israelites wanted to do exactly that! During their exodus from Egypt to Canaan, they grumbled against Moses and the Lord. Tired of manna, they spoke fondly of the food they had enjoyed in Egypt (Num. 11:5-6)-- apparently ""forgetting"" their slavery there. Later, discouraged by the spies' report on the Canaanites, the Israelites wondered aloud if Egyptian slavery wouldn't be better than what God had in store for them (Num. 14:2-3).

According to the apostle Paul, the Galatians were being equally foolish. Now that he has in this epistle shown them their exalted position as sons and heirs of God, therefore free to enjoy spiritual adulthood, he appeals to them not to return to bondage.

The Galatians had come to know God (Gal. 4:9). But so that they didn't try to take any credit for this, Paul reminded them that, ""rather,"" they had come to be known by God. He had chosen them and predestined them to the adoption of sons (Eph. 1:4-5) and attracted them by His Spirit to come to know Him personally.

In light of this, how could they turn again to bondage? As Gentiles they had suffered under the bondage of heathenism. Now as converted Gentiles, why did they want the bondage of Jewish legalism? The Galatians meticulously observed special days (Gal. 4:10) with the belief that this would gain them merit, but this is entirely out of keeping with the spirit of Christian liberty. Every day is to be lived for the glory of God!

APPLY THE WORD

Based on salvation through God's grace, Paul urges the Galatians not to return to legalism and bondage. If they would apply the truths they already knew, they would change their ways.

What about us? Are we living ""out of sync"" with the basis for our salvation? Here's a question to ponder: Given what God says about salvation, grace and faith, what would my life look like if I lived it 100% in line with these truths?

Galatians 4:8-11

Now that you know God ... how is it that you are turning back? - Galatians 4:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the great concerns in the American criminal justice system is the amount of recidivism, the rate at which prisoners who have

been released from prison commit another crime and end up back in jail.

Many factors influence the likelihood of repeat offense, but a common reason seems to be that many former prisoners find it difficult to function outside the order and structure of prison. Faced with making choices on their own, they end up committing crimes that will lead them back behind bars.

As we think back to the beginning of this letter, we recall that Paul contends that wise living in light of the gospel message means discerning that Gentiles do not need to submit to the Law--the very practices that separated and distinguished them from the Jewish nation--in order to be full participants in the people of Jesus Christ.

Having explained and elaborated on the ways in which the logic of the gospel message leads to this conclusion, Paul now applies his argument to the debate going on in the Galatians' churches: whether adopting the specific practices of the Law is tantamount to returning to the position of the child under the guardian. Such a move makes one no better than a slave, subject again to the authority of the supervisor.

More importantly, acceptance of the Law puts Gentile converts back in the position of being distanced from God. In Christ they know God, or, even better, are known by God. Prior to the coming of Jesus and of faith, they were estranged from God, subject to the evil powers and principalities of the world (3:8). Only the Jews had the right to call God "Father." Now that Jesus has come, those who were distanced from God, who had no way of dealing with their sin, have been brought near to him. Gentiles now know and are known by God.

APPLY THE WORD

We can all relate at some level to the temptation facing these Gentile Christians in Galatia. We may not feel pressured to follow the rites of Judaism, but we may feel pulled back into our old ways of life before we were converted.

Galatians 4:8-11

Do you wish to be enslaved ... all over again? - Galatians 4:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Following the end of the Civil War, President Andrew Johnson worked to piece the nation back together, but it wasn't easy. Slavery had been abolished, but prejudice had not. In the South, state legislatures were working hard to pass laws that disenfranchised blacks and effectively made them slaves again. Unemployed blacks could be seized, fined for vagrancy, and forced to work for private employers in order to pay those fines. It was a form of slavery without the name.

Paul pleads with the Galatians in this letter not to return to their former spiritual slavery. He wants them to understand their new identity. They once were slaves, having no freedom and being imprisoned by their own sin and the moral demands of the law. They were also enslaved to pagan idolatries. At one time, many in the churches in Galatia had bowed to the ancient Greek deities. Or possibly, they had dabbled in astrology and the signs of the zodiac. They were distanced from God and estranged from relationship with Him.

Since Christ had come, and the gospel of His death and resurrection had been preached to the Galatians, everything changed. They have been made new. They've now gained the status of sons and been adopted into God's family. The inheritance is theirs: spiritual freedom has been granted them.

Why reject all that God has given you by His grace? Why turn back to slavery? If you can live like the sons and daughters of God with all of its privileges and freedoms, do you really want to return to living like slaves? And that's in effect what the false teachers were prodding them toward. They wanted the Galatians to be circumcised, and they were having them observe the Jewish calendar rites.

What we will begin to see in the rest of chapter 4 is Paul's tender heart of affection for the Galatians. He admits to his concern and worry for them. And he fears that somehow, all the time he has spent preaching and teaching in their churches has been wasted because they were on the verge of abandoning the gospel in favor of slavery.

APPLY THE WORD

Yesterday, we saw that Paul compared the Galatians' story to the Exodus. If you remember reading from the book of Numbers, the generation of Jews who left Egypt had many moments when they wished they could return! Somehow slavery looked better than freedom. Perhaps it was a question of familiarity. We, too, prefer what feels easy and comfortable and familiar. But when God grants us freedom to move to a new place of abundance, don't shrink back in fear.

Galatians 4:12-16

Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? - Galatians 4:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

People who have some sort of facial disfigurement, whether from birth defects, illness, or injuries from an accident, often suffer from a great deal of mental anguish in addition to their physical trauma. Studies are finding that psychological support is an equally important part of their care as are surgical procedures.

We don't know the exact nature of the illness or disfigurement that Paul alludes to in today's reading. We have some clues that whatever it was, his problem was plainly visible and would have normally inspired reactions of horror or scorn. Perhaps it was a problem with his eyes, because he describes the Galatians as being willing to gouge out their own eyes and give them to him. But despite the disadvantages such an ailment would have normally presented (Greeks and Jews both often saw disability and disease as evidence of divine displeasure), it became an opportunity for him to share the gospel with the Galatians. Scripture doesn't tell us exactly why, but the very thing that debilitated Paul was the precise reason he even stopped in Galatia to preach the gospel. When Paul arrived in Galatia, he was greeted very warmly. They immediately embraced Paul's message and believed him to be divinely sent. They treated him as if he were an angel or better yet, Christ Jesus Himself. The affection that Paul felt for the Galatians was obviously at one point reciprocated by those to whom he writes. Their commitment to Paul was undeniable. They would have given anything to help him.

But since the arrival of the false teachers whose efforts have been aimed at discrediting Paul and his message, the Galatians' affection had waned. It wasn't even just simply a matter that their friendly feelings for Paul had cooled. They were even treating him as an enemy. Most likely, they questioned what he said and his motives for saying it.

Paul obviously had to overcome a great deal when writing his letter to the Galatians. He had to defend his apostleship and the gospel and win back the hearts of his disciples. He was willing to do this because of his love for his spiritual children.

APPLY THE WORD

When pastors and teachers are faithfully proclaiming the gospel, sometimes they have to say what is not easy for their congregants to hear. If they preach the truth of Jesus Christ, it will always offend someone in some way. Be grateful when you hear your pastor challenging you and loving you enough to speak hard truth into your life. Know that this is the greatest evidence of their faithful commitment to you and to Christ, and commit to faithfully lifting up your spiritual leaders in prayer.

Galatians 4:12-16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Advertisers understand the power of imitation. If a famous basketball player puts his name on a pair of shoes, young athletes and fans rush out to buy them. If a beautiful actress uses a certain brand of shampoo, women who want their hair to look and feel better may purchase it. If a hard-working Baby Boomer finds cold relief in a favorite medicine, those who empathize will remember that ad the next time they go shopping.

""You can become like this person"" is the message of such ads. ""You'll play better basketball."" ""You can be as beautiful as she is."" ""You deserve to feel as good as that person.""

Advertisers take a powerful human drive, the urge to imitate, and use it to turn a profit. Paul, however, uses it to teach. In today's passage, he appeals to the Galatians to imitate his example.

""Become like me, for I became like you"" (v. 12). As a Jew, Paul was very faithful in keeping the law, but after his conversion he became like the Gentiles--no longer living under the law.

Then a curious thing happened. The Galatians, who as Gentiles were not under the law, after their conversion put themselves under the law. So Paul pleads: Live like me, enjoy your Christian liberty.

The first time Paul came among the Galatians, he did not plan to stay for any length of time. However, when he contracted a serious illness (probably malaria), he had no choice but to stay for a while (v. 13). During his recuperation he preached the gospel and many believed.

The Galatians did not succumb to the temptation to despise either Paul or his message because of his illness and his weakened condition (v. 14). Instead they received him as an angel, a heaven-sent messenger, a representative of Christ Jesus. The apostle freely bears witness to the Galatians of their love. If possible they would have dug out their eyes and given them to him.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul is a good model for us to imitate in our relationships and ministries. Even as he steers his way through complex theological issues, his pastor's heart shines through. In this chapter, he calls the Galatians his ""dear children,"" longs to be with them, is ""perplexed"" about them, and spiritually feels ""the pains of childbirth"" on their behalf. His spiritual passion puts our own to shame.

Galatians 4:12-20

It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good. - Galatians 4:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the campaign before the Iowa caucus in January, Democratic candidate John Kerry was surprised by an unexpected speaker at one of his campaign stops. The man took the microphone to describe how Kerry had saved his life 35 years earlier when they both served in Vietnam. He had not seen Kerry since, and was, in fact, a registered Republican. But as he talked about his gratitude and admiration for Kerry, he revealed a bond forged in combat that crossed the lines of political parties. That loyalty led him to endorse Kerry, and some political analysts credited his statements with Kerry's eventual win in the Iowa caucus.

As we saw yesterday, submitting to the Law would result in Paul's Gentile converts being pushed away from God rather than being brought nearer to Him. There were additional implications. Not only would the Galatian Christians be driven from God, they would also be alienated from the very people, such as Paul, who first pointed them to Christ (vv. 16–17). Given this alienation both from God and from others, Paul hints at the obvious conclusion—zeal for the Law is the antithesis of zeal for Christ (vv. 17–18).

Before Paul leads his readers to consider this, he sets about reminding them of the joy and love they once shared with one another (vv. 12–16). He recounts how he first came to Galatia and preached the gospel there. Apparently he stayed in that region on account of illness. Those to whom he first gave the good news of Jesus lovingly cared for him during this time of sickness. Paul is convinced that the bond they shared with one another was so close that the Galatians would have plucked out their own eyes if it could have helped him.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul describes a bond with these Galatian Christians that is remarkable; clearly, they had a deep love and concern for him.

Galatians 4:17-20

TODAY IN THE WORD

American Gwen Torrence ran hard, but she ran outside the lines. At the 1995 World Championships, she was disqualified in the 200-meter race when she broke the rules by running out of her lane. Coming around a curve, Torrence stepped on or over the inside line of her lane at least five times, shortening the distance she sprinted compared to that of the other athletes. Her gold medal was awarded to another runner.

Running outside the lines, no matter how fast, is useless in a race. Similarly in the race of the Christian life, zeal in the wrong direction is useless and possibly harmful. And for Paul, legalism was definitely the wrong direction!

Continuing his argument against legalism, Paul warns the Galatians against following poor-quality, insincere leaders (v. 17). Despite their zeal, the Judaizers were not pursuing the best interests of the Galatian converts. In their efforts to separate themselves from Paul's influence and teaching, they were depriving the Galatians of the true gospel and the true church.

So that the Galatians wouldn't conclude that he wanted to monopolize their affections, Paul says, ""It is fine to be zealous""--the issue is whether for a good cause or a bad cause (v. 18). He would not be hurt if they followed the teachings of others, as long as their course of action was honorable. As in Philippians 1:15-18, his only concern is that the gospel be preached and God be glorified.

But the Galatians had been zealous in error. The Judaizers had turned them away from the gospel of grace. When Paul was with them the first time, he had suffered birth pangs, as it were, until they were born into newness of spiritual life. Now he was suffering birth pangs a second time until they could be released from the bondage of Jewish legalism (Gal. 4:19).

APPLY THE WORD

This is a powerful promise: Christ is being formed in us (v. 19). This is also clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 3:18: ""And we... are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.""

Galatians 4:17-20

I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. - Galatians 4:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Sadly, far too many pastors or TV evangelists have public ministries that have won a lot of converts and even persuaded a lot of people to give their money, only to later have something is disclosed publicly that reveals fraudulent character of either the minister or the ministry. What seemed to be a spiritual empire crumbles and proves to be a sham.

Paul warned the Galatians that the false teachers were not who they claimed to be. They might declare allegiance to Jesus Christ. They might tout their credentials and claim their ministry and message were superior to Paul's. From all appearances, they were clearly zealous and passionate. Perhaps they were masters at public oratory and incredibly dynamic from the pulpit. But all this was a ruse.

The false teachers were zealous—but for the wrong purpose. For all the reasons that Paul listed in previous chapters, their teaching abandoned the true gospel of Jesus Christ. They wanted the Galatians to take on Jewish traditions, and they made this a necessary requirement for following Jesus. They misunderstood the promises made to Abraham and the purposes of the law. They added additional criteria for following Jesus, leading the Galatians astray.

Behind what appeared to be affection for the Galatians was greed for influence and power. They wanted to turn the Galatians away from trusting and believing in Paul's message. They wanted the Galatians to disavow any allegiance to Paul simply so that they could gain fans. Their ministry was not motivated by the humble servitude we see in Christ Himself. Instead, these false teachers were full of pride and selfish ambition.

Paul's attitude stands in stark contrast. He had paternal affection for the Galatians as well as sincere concern for their spiritual growth. His only aspiration is that Christ be formed in them. He wanted them to be living like Jesus, with His strength and joy. He wanted the Spirit of Christ to be filling them. His concern in his letter isn't so much that they've somehow drifted away from him personally. He's concerned that they were walking away from Jesus.

APPLY THE WORD

How many of us have known the deep anguish Paul felt for the Galatians over their spiritual state? He loved them so much and wanted passionately for Christ to live in them. As parents, we can pray for this passionate affection for our children and their spiritual growth. As servants and leaders in the church, we can pray for Paul's heart for the babies we hold, the children we teach, the youth we serve, as well as every adult sitting in the pews.

Galatians 4 Background

Genesis 21:1-14

It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. - Genesis 21:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you miss the beginning of a movie, you risk missing the opening scene, which often provides a lot of context for what's happening in the film. Neither is it a good idea to skip the opening chapter of a novel. You might miss out on an introduction to a major character or conflict of the book.

We're jumping out of Galatians today and back into Genesis, simply to provide some of the back story for Paul's forthcoming arguments. If we don't return to Genesis, we might find ourselves somewhat confused. In the last ten verses of Galatians 4, which we'll read tomorrow, Paul introduces a lengthy and complicated argument comparing Ishmael and Isaac, the two sons of Abraham. Today we'll read more about these two sons in Genesis, which will help us with tomorrow's reading.

We know that Ishmael was a son born to Abraham but not to Sarah. Sarah, who had spent many years grieving her inability to have children, had concocted what she thought was a no-fail plan.

Abraham would impregnate her servant, Hagar, and through Hagar, Sarah would bear children (see Genesis 16). It never worked as well as Sarah had hoped. Contempt and jealousy abounded on both sides once Ishmael was born.

In today's reading, Sarah had now also conceived and given birth to a son, Isaac. He was the son of promise, the culmination of everything that God had been telling Abraham and Sarah for decades now. You will bear a son from your own bodies, and you will become a great nation. Now Isaac was the flesh and blood proof that God has kept His word.

Isaac and Ishmael were no different in the sign of circumcision. Both sons were circumcised. Both sons were Abraham's biological

children. But it was through Isaac that God plans to “reckon the offspring” of Abraham. Don’t forget that in Galatians 3 we saw the word “seed,” meaning “offspring,” referred to Jesus Christ. The children of Isaac are the children of Abraham are the children of Christ!

APPLY THE WORD

The story of Ishmael and Isaac portrays what happens when we foolishly take matters into our own hands. God had promised children to Abraham and Sarah, but when Sarah got tired of waiting on God, she made her own plan. And the effects of that plan were disastrous! If you know for certain that God has given you direction about an area of your life, wait on Him and trust that He’ll confirm what He wants you to do next and when.

Galatians 4:19

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible

My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you.—Gal. 4.19

Here suddenly, amid the anger, the satire, the severity of the letter, the deepest thing in the soul of the Apostle breaks through in a flash of revealing glory. It is that of his tenderness, his compassion, his love. He was angry, but why? Because the danger, threatening them, threatened the highest and best things in their lives. He was satirical, but why? Because by such a method he was likely to arouse them from the false lethargy which resulted from resting in rites and ceremonies, instead of exercising faith in Christ. He was severe, but why? Because the courses they were pursuing under false teachers were subversive of their very life in Christ. All the anger, the satire, the severity of the letter, resulted from his profound love for them. It was all the outcome of the care of the churches which he carried daily. How deep and strong that was, is revealed by the daring of this figure. It is the most sacred figure of motherhood. He was "in travail" for them! How searching is this gleam of light! How it rebukes us and instructs us! As we consider it, we are made ashamed of any bitterness which may at any time have entered into our defence of truth. Anger, satire, severity, yes, these are proper things, providing always that no element of personal bitterness enters our heart. The peril is so subtle that we need ever to watch and pray that we may be delivered from falling in this matter. It is only as our love of our fellow-disciples is kept alive, and our solicitude for their spiritual well-being is the one and only motive of our action, that we have the right or the ability to defend the truth.

Galatians 4:19

J R Miller (Miller's Yearbook Devotionals)

"No longer do I call you servants ... I have called you friends." John 15:15.

If we ask, "What is the best that Christ's friendship can be to any soul?" We may answer, "It is shelter, comfort, rest, inmost refreshment, guidance, and far more. Christ is an atmosphere about us—an atmosphere of love, warm with all tender influences, all healthful inspirations, all holy impulses. Christ comes into all our life—as our friend—so really, so fully, that he becomes "an unconscious part of every true beat of our heart." As the summer sunbeams enter into the flowers, and reappear in their lovely hues and sweet fragrance—so does Christ enter into the lives of his people, and permeate and transform them, until they become like him in spirit, in character, in disposition, in every feature. "Christ, who is our life." Colossians 3:4. "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27. **"Until Christ is formed in you."** Galatians 4:19

We know what Christ's friendship was to his disciples. He found them crude—and left them refined. He found Matthew a publican, unjust, grasping, an outcast—and made him an apostle, then a writer of a Gospel. He found Peter profane, rough in manner, impetuous—and made him an eloquent preacher, a man of marvelous power, whose influence lives today wherever the Christian church has gone. He found John a son of thunder, with a strong, fiery temper—and made him the apostle of love, the human embodiment of all the sweet, gentle, tender graces of his own life. The friendship of Christ, can do the same for us!

Galatians 5:22

J R Miller (Miller's Yearbook Devotionals)

"The fruit of the Spirit, is love." Galatians 5:22

The sum of all practical religion is love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." All Christian growth is to be toward the likeness of Christ, and all His character is summed up in LOVE. Whatever is unloving in us—is unlike Jesus; and we should seek to overcome the evil with good. Perhaps the ordinary Christian conscience has not been sufficiently exacting on this line of character and duty. Scripture demands truthfulness, justice, honesty, purity; but it does not tolerate bad temper, resentment, unkindness or other phases of

unamiableness, in those who profess to follow Jesus!

Galatians 6:7

J R Miller (Miller's Yearbook Devotionals)

"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows—he will also reap" Galatians 6:7

People have loose notions about sin. They think they can go on through life in disobedience of God's commands, and defiance of all moral laws—and then, by a single act of penitence, in a moment, have all the consequences of their sinning wiped out, all the effects in their own nature of lifelong evil habits reversed, and their character changed into saintly beauty and fitness for the kingdom of heaven. But the Bible does not teach this. Those who choose sin for their way in life—must eat sin's fruit. The fruit of trees drops off—but sin's fruits stay in the life and become part of it. One may sow common seeds, and others gather and eat the harvest; but the sinner must gather and eat the fruit of his own sowing. We are not through with our life—as we live it. Every act, every word, every thought, every choice, is a seed which we drop. We go on carelessly, never dreaming that we shall ever again see our deeds. Then some day, we come upon an ugly plant growing somewhere, and we ask, "What is this?" Comes the answer, "I am one of your plants. You dropped the seed which grew into me." Our lives are the little garden plots, in which it is our privilege to drop seeds. We shall have to eat the fruits of the seeds of which we are planting these days.

Galatians 4:21-27

TODAY IN THE WORD

When Sarah heard the Lord promise Abraham a son, she laughed to herself and thought, "'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" (Gen. 18:12). The Lord heard her, of course, and repeated His promise.

Sure enough, God kept His word in the birth of Isaac, and Sarah's doubt turned to joy. Remembering her laughter, she exclaimed, "'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me'" (Gen. 21:6). They named their son "'Isaac,'" meaning "'he laughs.'"

This background is key to today's reading. In this passage, Paul turns to a biblical illustration in an effort to separate the Galatians from legalism. He explains that those who boast of their submission to the law and claim to be sons of Abraham forget that Abraham had two sons. The first, Ishmael, was born of a bondwoman (Hagar), the second, Isaac, of a freewoman (Sarah).

Hagar's son was born in the ordinary way. Circumstances surrounding his birth were not ordained of God and were therefore natural. By contrast, Isaac was born of Sarah "'as the result of a promise'" (Gal. 4:23). His birth was miraculous because Abraham and Sarah were both beyond childbearing age. God's extraordinary promise was fulfilled!

Paul explains that the historical event has another meaning. The women represent two covenants--the Abrahamic and the Mosaic. The Abrahamic covenant (represented by Sarah) brought freedom, while the Mosaic (represented by Hagar) brought slavery (vv. 24-25, see v. 31). The apostle is again emphasizing the inferiority of Mosaic legalism.

Verse 26 launches into a statement about the Jerusalem above. For centuries Jerusalem had been glorified in Hebrew history and song as the capital of the Jewish nation and a place where God chose especially to dwell. Now Paul speaks of a "'Jerusalem that is above,'" one that is "'free.'"

APPLY THE WORD

First with Abraham and now with Hagar and Sarah, Paul used the past to teach lessons to the present (the Galatians) and the future (us). That's a pattern we can follow in our own spiritual lives.

Galatians 4:21-31

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. - Galatians 4:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the classic children's book, *Are You My Mother?*, a baby bird falls out of his nest when his mother isn't around, and he sets out to look for her, asking dogs, cows, planes, and steam shovels whether or not he belongs to them.

The question Paul wants the Galatians to answer involves the identity of their spiritual mother. Are the Galatians children of Sarah or children of Hagar? Are they of the lineage of Isaac or of the lineage of Ishmael? This chapter takes argument even further than in previous chapters, when the focus lies on the question of whether or not the Galatians were Abraham's children. In Paul's mind, it has not been sufficient to say that the Galatians are children of Abraham, because as we saw in yesterday's reading, there were two

sons of Abraham.

The sons of Ishmael are the sons of slavery. Hagar, a slave, gave birth to a son who was also a slave. Ishmael is a son of the flesh. There was no supernatural intervention when Hagar conceived Ishmael. Interpreted allegorically, Hagar corresponds with the Mosaic Law given on Mount Sinai. And we've already studied how that law is powerless to save. The law condemns but cannot redeem. It curses all human beings because we are hopelessly depraved and powerless to keep its commands.

The sons of Isaac are sons of freedom. They are born to Sarah, the free woman, and they are born according to the divine promise and provision. Sarah conceived Isaac at the age of ninety, well past menopause. God gave Isaac supernaturally to Sarah and Abraham, and this testifies as evidence that Isaac, not Ishmael, was the chosen and favored son.

Paul's making clear of which mother the false teachers are born. He highlighted that they have come from the literal city of Jerusalem, with which he equates Hagar. The false teachers are the sons of Ishmael!

Whose children do you want to be: those of Hagar, the slave woman, or Sarah, the free woman?

APPLY THE WORD

We have a spiritual heritage of freedom, but like the Galatians, we can be tempted to opt for slavery. We want to define our identity by what we do and how well we perform—even turning service to God into a way to try to earn God's approval and affection. But in relying on our human efforts, we reject the free gift of God's grace. He offers us a place in His family simply because we trust in His Son Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.

Galatians 4:21-31

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. - Galatians 4:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the classic movie, *An Affair to Remember*, Cary Grant plays a character trying to support himself through selling his paintings. He has lost touch with the woman he loves, played by Deborah Kerr. One day, she sees a portrait in a store window and is taken aback—it is a portrait of herself that he has painted. And it is clear through the loving way he has portrayed her image that he still loves her very much.

Paul appeals to one final image to help his readers understand why they ought not, as Gentiles, accept the teaching of those urging them to embrace the practices of the Jewish Law. Drawing on his earlier conclusion that those who have faith are "in Christ" and therefore the seed of Abraham (3:26–29), he goes back to the story of Abraham to illustrate his case (see Gen. 15–16, 18:1–15, 21:1–21).

To get his point we need to remember that Abraham's wife Sarah was barren. God promised Abraham that he would have an heir, but given that Sarah could not have children, the promise seemed futile. Sarah suggested to Abraham that he try to have children by her slave girl Hagar. Abraham took her advice, and as a result Ishmael was born. Hagar was not a barren woman. Thus the birth of Ishmael was completely natural and ordinary (v. 23). God, however, still intended to fulfill His promise to Abraham and, against all odds, Sarah did eventually give birth to Isaac. Since Sarah was barren, Isaac's birth was an act of God, not an ordinary event.

APPLY THE WORD

Some Christians in history have thought that the Old Testament was irrelevant for believers. They couldn't be more wrong! The New Testament itself draws on the Old, as we see in our passage.

Galatians 4:21-27

TODAY IN THE WORD

When Sarah heard the Lord promise Abraham a son, she laughed to herself and thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" (Gen. 18:12). The Lord heard her, of course, and repeated His promise.

Sure enough, God kept His word in the birth of Isaac, and Sarah's doubt turned to joy. Remembering her laughter, she exclaimed, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:6). They named their son "Isaac," meaning "he laughs."

This background is key to today's reading. In this passage, Paul turns to a biblical illustration in an effort to separate the Galatians from legalism. He explains that those who boast of their submission to the law and claim to be sons of Abraham forget that Abraham had two sons. The first, Ishmael, was born of a bondwoman (Hagar), the second, Isaac, of a freewoman (Sarah).

Hagar's son was born in the ordinary way. Circumstances surrounding his birth were not ordained of God and were therefore natural. By contrast, Isaac was born of Sarah "as the result of a promise" (Gal. 4:23). His birth was miraculous because Abraham and Sarah were both beyond childbearing age. God's extraordinary promise was fulfilled!

Paul explains that the historical event has another meaning. The women represent two covenants--the Abrahamic and the Mosaic. The Abrahamic covenant (represented by Sarah) brought freedom, while the Mosaic (represented by Hagar) brought slavery (Gal 4:24-25, see Gal 4:31). The apostle is again emphasizing the inferiority of Mosaic legalism.

Gal 4:26 launches into a statement about the Jerusalem above. For centuries Jerusalem had been glorified in Hebrew history and song as the capital of the Jewish nation and a place where God chose especially to dwell. Now Paul speaks of a "Jerusalem that is above," one that is "free."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

First with Abraham and now with Hagar and Sarah, Paul used the past to teach lessons to the present (the Galatians) and the future (us). That's a pattern we can follow in our own spiritual lives

Galatians 4:22

Oswald Chambers

The offering of the natural

Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. Gal. 4:22.

Paul is not dealing with sin in this chapter of Galatians, but with the relation of the natural to the spiritual. The natural must be turned into the spiritual by sacrifice, otherwise a tremendous divorce will be produced in the actual life. Why should God ordain the natural to be sacrificed? God did not. It is not God's order, but His permissive will. God's order was that the natural should be transformed into the spiritual by obedience; it is sin that made it necessary for the natural to be sacrificed. Abraham had to offer up Ishmael before he offered up Isaac. Some of us are trying to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God before we have sacrificed the natural. The only way in which we can offer a spiritual sacrifice to God is by presenting our bodies a living sacrifice. Sanctification means more than deliverance from sin, it means the deliberate commitment of myself whom God has saved, to God, and I do not care what it costs. If we do not sacrifice the natural to the spiritual, the natural life will mock at the life of the Son of God in us and produce a continual swither. This is always the result of an undisciplined spiritual nature. We go wrong because we stubbornly refuse to discipline ourselves, physically, morally or mentally. 'I wasn't disciplined when I was a child.' You must discipline yourself now. If you do not, you will ruin the whole of your personal life for God. God is not with our natural life while we pamper it; but when we put it out in the desert and resolutely keep it under, then God will be with it; and He will open up wells and oases, and fulfil all His promises for the natural. (My utmost for his highest: Selections for the year)

Galatians 4:28-31

TODAY IN THE WORD

For nearly a century, a pair of bib overalls was handed down from child to child in the Mehder family, according to an Associated Press wire report.

As a tailor for the Oshkosh Clothing Manufacturing Co., now Oshkosh B'Gosh, Louis Mehder designed the overalls in 1901. Since then, that pair of overalls has been worn by eight children spanning five states and several generations. Amazingly, the garment has survived without a patch, buckle replacement or sewing job!

Family inheritances can range from the amusing to the life-changing. They extend beyond tangible things such as overalls, since families help determine our characters and identities. This truth is also found in the spiritual realm, as seen in today's reading.

All the children of Sarah are members of one family (Gal 4:28). We are children of promise, living in freedom and faith. The implication is that we are children of promise and ought to continue as such, rather than trying to live as children of bondage.

Those in the line of Isaac need not be surprised when persecuted by the children of Hagar (Gal 4:29). The one specific biblical indication of this animosity appears in Genesis 21:9. On the occasion of Isaac's being weaned, Abraham put on a banquet. Ishmael mocked Isaac, probably ridiculing his position as a child of promise and no doubt fearing lest the youngster preempt the inheritance that the older brother felt was rightfully his.

Just as in the past the child of the bondwoman persecuted the child of the freewoman, so now children of bondage (Judaizers) persecute children of promise (true Christian believers). As an encouragement to those who suffer such opposition, and as a

warning, Paul deduces a lesson from Scripture--expulsion from the family, just as Abraham was commanded to send away Hagar and Ishmael.

APPLY THE WORD

For four chapters, Paul has been moving through some heady theology concerning legalism, grace, faith, freedom, salvation and sonship. In chapter 5, he will turn to questions of application or lifestyle. That is, knowing these realities, how should we as Christians live?

GALATIANS 5

Galatians 5:1-6

I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. - Galatians 5:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

The cable network TLC aired a new show within the past year about a polygamist, his three wives, and their thirteen children. Sister Wives tells the story of a fundamental Mormon family seemingly content with their unconventional (and illegal!) household arrangement. The show has sparked an ongoing controversy and debate.

It seems unthinkable to most of us to share your spouse with another person. Choosing to marry is just that: choosing, not sharing! That's what Paul says to the Galatians. They must choose: either they will follow Christ or they will follow the law. They cannot do both, no matter what the false teachers have told them.

We can feel the tone of Paul's letter shift just a bit in the opening verses of chapter 5. So far, Paul has mounted a very thorough theological and reasoned argument for the content of the gospel. He has given every reason for the Galatians to reject the false teachers. He has rooted his argument in the Old Testament Scriptures, in the spiritual experience of the Galatians, and in the defense of his apostleship. He's laid out a compelling case for why the false teachers are wrong and he's right. But in chapters 5 and 6, he doesn't introduce additional new evidence to defend the gospel. Instead, his tone becomes more agitated, insistent, and emphatic. The case has been made, and the Galatians must decide.

The Galatians cannot have Christ and circumcision. They cannot have grace and the law. Circumcision and the law were precursors to Christ, pointing the way to Him. Now that Christ has come and set them free from the obligations of the law, if they choose to return to the law and its demands, they will be rejecting Christ. They will ultimately be saying that the cross of Christ is worthless.

Paul pleads with them. Hear what I've said! Don't turn away from Christ! He reminded them again of their experience of the Holy Spirit, who has given them faith and hope and righteousness. He points them to the ultimate expression of Christian faith, which is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision: it is love.

APPLY THE WORD

Not all situations are as clear-cut as the one confronting the Galatians. They have a definitive choice they must make, and it will determine their spiritual future. But sometimes we do have situations that are obvious. Maybe we've received godly counsel from a friend or heard biblical teaching that confirms we must choose either to turn from sin or to follow a right course of action. If you know what you should do, don't delay in doing it!

Galatians 5:1

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'Christ hath made us free' - Gal 5:1

It is common today for preachers to say that the law is the believer's rule of life. Very few people would tell us that the law is a means of justification. But many insist upon bringing the children of God back under the yoke of bondage for sanctification.

The apostle Paul says that such reasoning is foolish! 'Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?' He states the fact very plainly: 'Ye are not under the law, but under grace.' Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. 'We have been made free, for ever free, by the Son of God, and we are free indeed! 'stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.'

Not only is it unwise, it is a sinful practice, contrary to the faith of the gospel, for a believer to make the law a basis for his life before God. Our acceptance before God is entirely the work of Christ. He is all our righteousness, both in justification and in sanctification. If you do anything, whether it be circumcision, the keeping of the Sabbath, or even purity of conduct, in order to be accepted by

God, you are fallen from grace! And Christ shall profit you nothing!

In Jesus Christ, by virtue of his representative obedience and substitutionary death, we are free from the law. We have no curse from the law, no covenant with the law, no condemnation by the law and no commitment to the law. Does that mean that we are lawless? Can we now sin without fear? Perish the thought! We live by the commandment of God. 'And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.' We trust Christ alone for our entire acceptance before God. And we walk before our brethren in love. These are 'those things that are pleasing in his sight'.

Galatians 5:1

Don Fortner - Grace for Today

'Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage' Galatians 5:1

Legalism is natural to man. And even among those who know better, there is ever a tendency to return to the spirit of legalistic religion. Let us beware of the evils of legalism and resist every tendency of the flesh to return to law religion.

1. The spirit of legalism causes us to seek assurance on the basis of our own works. Assurance that is based on works is false assurance. The believer's assurance is in the person and work of Christ alone. Trusting him, we have assurance.
2. The spirit of legalism causes us to neglect our duties and responsibilities because of our personal feelings of inadequacy and insufficiency. Many refuse to receive the Lord's Supper, as he has commanded us, because they feel unworthy. Many refuse to exercise gifts God has given them to preach, teach, lead the congregation in prayer, or sing, because they do not feel worthy. Who is worthy of such things? No man is in himself. But our worthiness and sufficiency are in Christ.
3. The spirit of legalism causes men to motivate God's people with threats of punishment and promises of reward. We see people beginning to neglect church attendance, fall off in their giving and neglecting other matters of personal responsibility, so we begin to scold them and warn them that they are in danger of being lost. Then they do those things they had previously neglected, not because they love Christ, but out of a sense of duty to prove they are saved. Is this not pure legalism?
4. The spirit of legalism causes us to set up rules of life for God's people which God has not given in his Word. It is the height of self-righteousness and pride for men and churches to add to the Word of God rules of life, 'acceptable Christian behavior', for men and women who belong to God.
5. The spirit of legalism causes us to set ourselves up as judges of God's saints. Legalism produces such monstrous pride in men that they judge God's people by the inch-long yardstick of their own supposed 'holiness'. May God save us from this spirit of legalism.

Galatians 5:1-6

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. - Galatians 5:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the struggle by African Americans for civil rights, many leaders drew an analogy between the experience of Israelite slavery and escape from Egypt and the experience of African-American slavery in the United States. Although the institution of slavery had been abolished after the Civil War, some cities and states had instituted laws that treated blacks as second-class citizens. As they advocated for full rights as American citizens, the cry went out: "We won't return to slavery!"

Paul wanted the Galatians to take up this cry in a spiritual sense. The gospel message, Paul says, does not allow one to return to slavery. Yet as we have seen, anyone who thinks they will be justified by observing the Law are, in effect, enslaved by the Law.

Living out the implications of the message that Jesus died and rose again to rescue sinners from this evil age means that those very people who have been rescued are no longer enslaved by the powers of this age. For Gentiles to turn to the Law, as if that added something to their salvation, was to deny that they really had been rescued and set free by Jesus' death and resurrection. In fact, Paul goes so far as to say quite explicitly what he only hinted at earlier (cf. 4:17-18)--submitting oneself to the Law alienates one from Christ.

Having spent so much time laying out and expanding on his argument for this conclusion, Paul now begins to explain other constructive implications within the gospel message.

Those who possess the Spirit look forward in hope and by faith to the time when they will be fully righteous (5:5). Gentiles, simply by believing the message about Jesus, already begin to participate in the promise of forgiveness of sin and can look toward the day of judgment with the confidence that they will be declared right.

APPLY THE WORD

As you examine your life, could you describe your Christian journey as walking in freedom? Or do you feel oppressed by a list of restrictions?

Galatians 5:1-6

TODAY IN THE WORD

Scholar W. E. Vine points out a special cultural background for the phrase "for freedom" in today's verse.

When a Greek wanted to free a slave, he would take the slave to the temple of a god. In order to be freed, the slave actually had to be "purchased" by the god. The master would pay the money into the temple treasury and draw up a certificate containing the words "for freedom." Technically, the slave became the property of the god, a fact which guaranteed his freedom.

Paul used this culturally familiar image as a metaphor for the believer's status: we belong to God!

Verse 1 is a ringing exhortation to maintain Christian freedom, which would be impossible without the work of Christ. He freed us from bondage to a life of Christian liberty. While we cannot set ourselves free, there is a sense in which we must cooperate with divine power in living the Christian life. Our wills must determine to keep standing firm in the hard-won liberty which Christ has made available.

The apostle now turns to a major example of entanglement in the bondage of the law: circumcision. For Gentiles like the Galatians, to submit to this rite could only signify a legalistic attempt to seek righteousness by works (v. 3). Depending upon works to achieve righteousness alienates us from Christ. It is as though His provision of salvation is not really sufficient (vv. 2, 4).

In grand contrast, Paul describes the experience of the true believer (vv. 5-6). We "eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope." Paul elsewhere described it this way: "Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Galatians teaches some complex truths, many of which cannot be explored completely in these daily devotionals. This book is worthy of additional Bible study, concentrated time that will allow you to dig deeper into God's Word.

Galatians 5:4

Don Fortner - Grace for Today

Some dangers of legalism

Every few days I receive letters, tracts from men trying to persuade me that, though we are free in Christ, we are yet under the bondage of the law. Some of these are good men, men who believe and preach the gospel of God's free grace in Christ. But their error in this point is most serious and grievous.

1. If you seek to be, justified by the law, you will surely perish. It is written: 'By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight'.
2. If you seek sanctification or seek to become more holy by obedience to the law, you will become self-righteous. Self-righteousness is neither more nor less than your own righteousness. It is a supposed righteousness performed by you. It is that proud foolishness of heart which supposes that you are more holy than others.
3. If you make the law your rule of life, you will lose the joy of serving Christ. The joy of Christian service is the fact it is free, unconstrained and spontaneous. It is motivated by love. But when you make the law of God a rule of life the motive becomes fear or desire for reward and all joy is destroyed.
4. If you seek assurance by obeying the law, you will become despondent and fearful. The old Puritans, sound as they were in many points, could never gain any comforting assurance and their congregations were never allowed to enjoy any because they sought it on a legal basis. Some were driven to such despondency by legal fear that they had to be locked away in asylums to keep them from committing suicide. The law breeds fear. You cannot obey it. It can never comfort anyone except a proud, self-righteous man who does not understand it.
5. If you seek acceptance before God in any measure whatsoever upon the basis of the law, you will never be accepted at all. Christ alone is our acceptance before God. He is all our righteousness, all our sanctification, all our holiness, all our redemption and all our

peace. To add anything to his finished work is to make his work vain and useless. Christ will be all, or he will be nothing

Galatians 5:7-12

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. - Hebrews 12:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the semifinals of the 400-meter race during the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, Derek Redmond of Great Britain tore a leg muscle halfway around the track. He fell to the ground in pain, and men soon arrived with a stretcher to carry him off the track. Redmond refused the stretcher, lifting himself up off the ground. It was then that his father left the stands, sped to his son's side, and helped him limp across the finish line.

So often in Scripture, the Christian life is compared to an athletic contest or race of some kind. Paul reminds the Galatians how well they had been running their race initially. But recently, they have been tripped up by the false teachers. These men had cut in on them and diverted them from the truth. These men could not have come from God, Paul asserts. God has called them to Himself by the grace of Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 1:6), but the false teachers have rejected the teaching of grace, and instead they have insisted that more is required for membership in God's family, namely circumcision.

Paul had absolutely no tolerance for their teaching. It is an affront to the truth of the gospel, and such lies originate with the Devil himself. He has no doubt that the false teachers have to expect only divine judgment for their teaching. They had thrown the Galatians into confusion, and they will be held to account for this. Ultimately, Paul says that if they're so insistent upon the necessity of circumcision, they should go all the way and castrate themselves (v. 12). Why not finish the job?

This hyperbole indicates the seriousness of their offense. In suggesting castration, Paul might have had in mind the pagan priests in the Northern Galatia region, who were made eunuchs at an annual festival. Paul could have also have in mind the Old Testament law, which forbade anyone from entering the temple who had been castrated (Deut. 23:1). Either way, he insists their teaching no longer be permitted and that they be excluded from the church.

APPLY THE WORD

The false teachers didn't want disapproval, and they feared suffering, so they trimmed from the Christian message what was most offensive: the cross! That's a temptation for any of us. Will we fully affirm the significance of the cross of Jesus Christ? Will we proclaim that there is only one means for the forgiveness of sin, and it is only through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead?

Galatians 5:7-12

You were running a good race. - Galatians 5:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Anne was out working in her garden when she heard her neighbor Marie screaming at her daughter Madison. Thinking that perhaps she should help calm Marie, she went to see what the fuss was about. Instead of finding Marie angry and distraught, however, she saw her hugging Madison tightly. When Anne asked what was going on, Marie explained that Madison had run into the street, ignoring her command to stay in the yard. Marie had screamed when she heard a car approaching and ran to get Madison. She explained, "My voice and actions have to make it clear to her that it's dangerous to go in the street, and because I love her I won't let her do it."

Paul would understand. He was in the middle of spelling out the relationship between living in freedom and living in love. In our passage for today he deviates from this main issue to exhort his readers again not to fall prey to the dangerous teaching they have heard about submitting to the Law. The issue for Paul is clear: following this teaching equals failing to obey the truth of the gospel message (v. 7). He adds that the notion that Gentiles need both the gospel and the Law in order to be fully rescued from this evil age is to abolish the offense of the cross (v. 11).

Paul uses some very harsh language in reference to those telling the Galatians that they must be circumcised to garner God's favor. He calls them "agitators" and wishes that they would go so far as to "emasculate themselves" (5:12). This strong, even violent, tone is interesting given that Paul is in the middle of a discussion about love (see vv. 6, 13). Ought not Paul to be more loving toward these unnamed teachers?

APPLY THE WORD

While we should act in love, especially toward other believers, this does not mean that we should tolerate or excuse sin—particularly

not our own.

Galatians 5:7-12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, claimed to have received a divine revelation from golden tablets inscribed with "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics." In 1830, Smith discovered these tablets in Palmyra, New York, and took upon himself the job of "translating" them.

No one has ever heard of "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics." Smith claimed that his "translation" was accomplished supernaturally, one character at a time. He also said the Book of Mormon was "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion." Clearly Joseph Smith was a false teacher, with many of his ideas in direct contradiction to the Bible.

Today's Scripture passage is directed against false teachers and erroneous doctrine. Attention seems to focus on a leader of the false teachers rather than on Judaizers in general. This individual had led the Galatians away from the truth of the gospel, which involved justification by faith and a life of Christian liberty.

"That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you," Paul warns (v. 8). In other words, whatever voice the Galatians had been hearing, it was not the voice of God!

Verse 9 introduces a proverb (also quoted in 1 Corinthians 5:6). Leaven is a symbol of spiritual and moral corruption. The proverb indicates that the legalistic infection, once admitted, will spread. Apparently the heresy had not yet spread widely and Paul was trying to eliminate the already existing leaven.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In today's verse, Paul asks the Galatians a heart-stopping question. They needed to return to gospel basics in order to continue in their walk with God. Christ accused the church at Ephesus of a similar fault: "Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love... Repent and do the things you did at first" (Rev. 2:4-5).

Galatians 5:11

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'The offense of the cross' - Gal 5:11

By 'the cross', Paul did not mean the material cross. That is offensive to no one. It is a piece of jewelry. It is a universal symbol of religious sentimentalism at best, and outright idolatry at worst. Nor does he mean the mere historic fact of the cross. The fact of the crucifixion is a part of history which everyone accepts. When Paul talks about the cross, he is talking about the doctrine of the cross: substitutionary redemption, blood atonement, free justification, complete pardon in Christ. He is talking about the preaching of the cross. By the preaching of the cross I mean the proclamation of its necessity, its nature and its efficacy.

The preaching of the cross was an offense to the religious, self-righteous Jew and to the proud intellectual Greek. If Paul had been willing to allow that man had any part in the work of salvation, both the Jew and the Gentile would have accepted his doctrine. But he would not allow any space for man. He declared that salvation was altogether the work of the triune God. It is a work of the grace of God, through the mediation of Christ and by the Power of the Holy Spirit. It is not a co-operative effort of God and man. It is a cooperative act of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The preaching of the cross offends the pride and dignity of man. It is a vivid reminder of man's sin and hatred of God. In its profound simplicity, it offends the wisdom of man. The inventions of man's religion are declared to be vanity. It is offensive because it puts all men upon one level! Princes and paupers, moralist and harlots, scholars and drunkards are all the same in the eyes of God. All are sinners. And if any enter into glory, they must all stoop down and enter in at the door of the cross, elbow to elbow. Indeed, God is no respecter of persons.

But there are some to whom the cross is no offense. To them who are called, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God! Has God removed from your heart the offense of the cross? Do you now see its wisdom and beauty? Have you entered in by faith through the door of the cross? If so, give thanks to God alone!

Galatians 5:13-15

I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law. - 1 Corinthians 9:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Prostitution in Holland has long been legal, and it has a notable presence in the Red Light District of Amsterdam. Walking these cobblestone streets, one sees freedom in its basest form—licentiousness. Women are exploited, and lust is indulged. And it's all legal. The women are free to work, and the men are free to patronize.

In this passage, Paul wants the Galatians to understand what their freedom in Christ is and is not. It is nothing like what happens in the Red Light District of Amsterdam. Christian freedom doesn't simply mean that one is permitted to do everything he chooses when he chooses to do it. Just because we are free in Christ and under no obligation to the law doesn't give us a moral carte blanche. Remember what Paul said about the law? It doesn't save us, but it can teach us moral guidelines and principles.

Freedom doesn't mean the absence of authority. We are still responsible for our choices and accountable to God for those choices. God has a definite will for us. He has plans to shape us into the very kind of people He intended for the Israelites to be. The Mosaic Covenant fell short of empowering the people to live into God's standards. It imprisoned them in their helpless state. But now that Christ has come and His followers have received His Spirit, there is a new empowerment to obey the law. Obeying the law doesn't mean we earn our salvation; rather, it testifies to our new identity in Christ.

For the Christian, God's law isn't about rites and rituals, circumcision, and festival days. The divine requirements could be summed up in one phrase: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 14). The implication is that this is precisely where the Galatians are struggling. They were feverishly zealous when the false teachers preached the necessity of circumcision. They wanted to follow—it seemed so much more clear and straightforward; surely it would be easier to follow! But Paul calls them to something higher and altogether more difficult. It is the way of love, self-sacrifice, servitude, and humility. These four words must govern our interactions with one another in the body of Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

The quality of our relationships matter a great deal to God. Sometimes we think that reading our Bible, attending church, and volunteering are the things that God is most concerned we do. And those are all good practices! But God really wants us to enjoy peaceful and loving relationships with one another. He wants us to let go of pride, selfish ambition, and quarreling. He wants us to be willing to serve our brothers and sisters.

Galatians 5:13-15

Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. - Galatians 5:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many people, even Christians, are confused about what it means to be free. For instance, some believers think they can be more lax on the job if they have a Christian boss, because their employer should not judge them. This notion of freedom is really an excuse to justify sloppy habits. Is this what Galatians means by our freedom in Christ?

By freedom, Paul means release from this evil age (see 1:4), from the power of obsolete authorities, and from the specific practices and principles associated with them, especially as represented in the Jewish Law (see 4:4–5, 8–10). Freedom does not validate a lawless life bent on satisfying sinful desires (5:13). Rather, it entails a new form of service—love for one another. Far from being opposed to the Law, this new service, which is the expression of faith (see 5:6), sums up and fulfills the essential thrust of the Law (5:14). Wise living in light of the gospel brings the freedom to demonstrate faith by serving others in love.

We might be better able to grasp Paul's point if we imaginatively expand on his illustration of the child growing into an adult (see 4:1–6). Prior to the age of maturity the child must submit to the authorities the father has placed over him. These guardians have a job: to train the child to live well. The rules and regulations of the guardians are intended to instill the right values in the child.

Their goal is to prepare the child for the day when he will become an adult. At that point, the child is free, no longer subject to their commands and rules. Yet, if they have done their job, he will know how to make wise decisions based on their training. The rules of the guardians will have been superseded by the values the young man possesses.

APPLY THE WORD

Our focus during this study has been on the wisdom of our freedom in Christ. Do you equate that freedom with the ability to "misbehave" and get away with it?

Galatians 5:13-15

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1992, mission director David Shenk told a Hong Kong church about the plight of Christians in Somalia, suffering from war and

famine. The Chinese believers immediately prayed and collected a love offering for their brothers and sisters in distress.

A few months later, Shenk delivered that gift to a Somali church. As the letter of greeting was read to the congregation, the pastor remembered a time when his church had similarly helped a Vietnamese church. He continued: ""Now when we are experiencing extremity, God has heard our cry through the generosity of our brothers and sisters in Hong Kong whom we have never met. Sometime we will meet them in heaven. Then we can give a proper 'thank you.'""

Such loving service is one of the keys to Christian fellowship. As Paul now turns to a discussion of Christian liberty, he points out that liberty must not be allowed to degenerate into license but should be governed by love and consideration for others.

Freedom is an essential element in the Christian life. But, Paul warns, do not make your liberty an opportunity for giving way to carnal passions (v. 13). Do not make your liberty a ""base of operations"" for the flesh in its war against the spirit. In such a case, a man may be brought into bondage to corruption.

If one wants to be in bondage, let him serve others in the bondage of love. The Galatians had been looking for a bondage. So Paul recommends a real and worthwhile bondage for them to subject themselves to: one of mutual love. What follows in verse 14 justifies this. To ""love your neighbor as yourself"" presupposes love for God, because we cannot begin to love our neighbor unless we first love God and the love of God is flowing through us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

""Serve one another in love"" is an exciting command (v. 13). In obeying it, we follow the example of Christ Himself (John 13).

Galatians 5:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Jim grew up listening to country & western music. His life's dream was to perform center stage at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee. After he trusted in Christ, however, he became convicted that his dream had become an idol. Because of this, Jim made a vow never to play country & western music again. His Sunday school teacher, however, felt that Jim's commitment was legalistic and often tried to persuade him to break his "vow." Who was right?

The difference between a "stumbling block" and a matter of personal taste is sometimes hard to tell. One believer likes to listen to "oldies" on the local rock station while another only listens to Christian radio. Some feel free to visit a restaurant after the morning church service while others do not. The key question is not just whether we enjoy such things but ultimately whether they edify us or not. Not everything that is "permissible" is beneficial (v. 23).

As a general rule, the principle of liberty should govern our actions. We do not need to allow the personal tastes of others to determine our actions. Even in those cases where the conscience of another does not permit them to engage in something we have liberty to practice, we are not automatically obligated to limit our own behavior. If, however, our actions cause another person to violate their conscience or our own conscience troubles us, we are obligated to refrain.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Although the circumstances may differ, we must also learn to discern when something should be a matter of personal conviction or a universal standard. Imagine that another believer has asked you to do something that you feel is wrong. How would you respond? How would you handle the situation differently if the person who asked was an unbeliever? When would you feel that it was your responsibility to try to convince them of the sinful nature of the activity? Under what circumstances would you conclude that it was a matter of personal choice?

Galatians 5:13-26

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. - Galatians 5:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's memorable children's poem wryly illustrates the extremes of human nature. It reads, "There was a little girl who had a little curl right in the middle of her forehead. And when she was good, she was very, very good. But when she was bad, she was horrid."

That little girl is not alone. As Paul expresses to the Galatians, when we live by the Spirit our lives are categorized by a variety of very good qualities. But when we yield to our fleshly desires, the results are awful.

Paul leaves no room for a middle ground. Either we're loving and serving one another, or we're attacking and destroying each other.

We live by the Spirit or by the flesh. Our natural desires directly oppose God's desires (v. 17). And it isn't at all difficult to see which way we are living.

Paul gives us two lists of behaviors. The first list (vv. 19-21) is unsettling just to read: fighting, jealousy, immorality, rage ... who would want any part of that? The second list (vv. 22, 23), on the other hand, is refreshing and comforting. Who would object to love, joy, or peace? When we compare those two lists, there is no question about which one is preferable. But when we follow our sin nature and we fail to love, we choose to ignore that which is good and indulge in that which is horrid.

Notice the connection that Paul makes to the law. He says that loving your neighbor fulfills the law and those who live by the Spirit are not under the law (vv. 14, 18). That doesn't mean that rules don't apply, it just means that pleasing God is very simple if you submit to His Spirit and obey His primary governing principle to love. If your heart aligns with God's, your actions should remain in His will. But living by the Spirit doesn't come naturally. In fact, it would be impossible without the intervening work of Jesus Christ (2:20). We are to crucify the flesh, completely forsaking our sinful desires.

APPLY THE WORD

When you read the two lists in today's passage, which resembles your life right now? Is your heart at peace, or are your relationships filled with discord? It shouldn't be difficult to answer the question, but facing the truth may be hard. If you aren't seeing the fruit of the Spirit show up regularly in your actions, ask God to replace arrogance and envy with humility and love. Don't worry about past defeats. Instead, depend on the power of the Spirit and put your faith in the Son.

Galatians 5:14

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word — Gal. 5:14

The Law is the revelation of God's way of life for men. In it are many words. Its statutes and judgments and commandments are multiplied. They deal with every phase of human life—personal, social, religious. They condition all its attitudes and activities—of food, of raiment, of dwelling-places, of health, of sanitation. They cover all its relationships —political, economic, family. They arrange its worship, make its calendar, define its responsibilities. In short, there is nothing in the whole course of life, from cradle to coffin, that is not dealt with in some of its many words. Behind all these words there are ten; the words of the Decalogue, gathering up within themselves the whole of the others, in broad and general statements, so perfectly that if men will live according to their revelation, personally and socially, they will live in the ideal kingdom. All this Paul knew, none better than he. And yet he declared that "the whole law is fulfilled in one word." There is one word, which includes the ten, as the ten include the many. And that word is love! In saying this, Paul was only saying what his Lord had said before him. The only difference is that here he took for granted the first activity of love, which is Godward, and named only the resultant one, which is manward. Who will challenge the truth of this saying? It is impossible that any man who obeys only the law of love in his thought and speech and deed should break either of the ten words, or come short in obedience to the many.

Galatians 5:16

F B Meyer - Our Daily Walk

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."-- Gal 5:16.

WHEN WE walk in the spirit we shall be led by Him. In the early stages of life we are apt to be headstrong and impulsive, as Moses when he felled the Egyptian. But as we grow in Christian experience, we wait for the leadings of the Spirit, moving us by His suggestion, impressing on us His will, working within us what afterwards we work out in character and deed. We do not go in front, but follow behind. We are led by the Spirit.

The man or woman who walks in the Spirit has no desire to fulfil the lust of the flesh. The desire for the gratification of natural appetite may be latent in the soul, and may flash through the thoughts, but he does not fulfil it. The desire cannot be prevented, but its fulfilment can certainly be withheld.

When we walk in the Spirit He produces in us the fruit of a holy character. The contrast between the works of the fleshly--i.e., the selfish life.--and the fruit of the Spirit, which is the natural product of His influence, is very marked. In works there is effort, the clatter of machinery, the deafening noise of the factory. But fruit is found in the calm, still, regular process of Nature, which is ever producing in her secret laboratory the kindly fruits of the earth. How quiet it all is! There is no voice nor language. It is almost

impossible to realise what is being effected by a long summer day of sunshine. The growing of autumn arrives with noiseless footsteps. So it is with the soul that daily walks in the Spirit. There are probably no startling experiences, no marked transitions, nothing special to record in the diary, but every year those who live in close proximity witness a ripening wealth of fruit in the manifestation of love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.

PRAYER - Gracious Lord! May Thy Holy Spirit keep me ever walking in the light of Thy countenance. May He fill my heart with the sense of Thy nearness and loving fellowship. Order my steps in Thy way, and walk with me, that I may do the thing that pleases Thee. AMEN.

Galatians 5:16

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'Walk in the Spirit' Galatians 5:16

Paul tells us that if we walk in the Spirit we shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. And he makes it plain that he is not telling us that we should be seeking some sort of a 'deeper life experience'. Walking in the Spirit, according to the apostle Paul, is the most practical thing in the world. To walk in the Spirit is to be motivated in life by the Spirit of adoption, faith and love, rather than by legal fear. 'If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law' (Gal. 5:18). Just as an intoxicated man is under the control of wine, the child of God is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). If you and I are led by the Spirit of Christ and under his influence, there are three things which will mark our lives. These are not the works of the flesh. They are not things produced by us. Rather, they are the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

1. Joy in our own hearts. 'speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord' (Eph. 5:19). Being united to Christ by faith, through the operation of the Spirit of God, the children of God have joy. We rejoice in the Lord. We rejoice in what he has done for us. And we rejoice in what he is doing in the world around us. Our songs of praise are but outward expressions of inward joy.

2. Thanksgiving towards God. 'Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eph. 5:20). Those who are born of God live by faith and not by sight. This faith, which is the fruit of the Spirit, gives us confidence in God's power, providence and promises. We therefore give thanks for all things, knowing that God has promised and will accomplish nothing but good for them who are in Christ.

3. Humiliation before our fellow man. 'submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God' (Eph. 5:21). The true believer is one who has learned submission. He submits to Christ as King. And that submission makes him submissive towards others. He does not demand his 'human rights'. Rather, he submits his rights to the rights of others. 'This I say, brethren, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

Galatians 5:16-18

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. - Galatians 5:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Students of medicine must take courses in anatomy, but they don't just study the different body systems by looking in reference textbooks. They actually dissect and explore human cadavers. They get an up close and inside look at how the muscles and bones work together; how the heart connects to the circulatory system, and how the organs depend on one another.

Paul has a spiritual anatomy lesson for us today, and it helps to explain what the Christian life can feel like on a day-to-day basis. He not only explains the mechanics of our inner spirit, but he teaches what is necessary to grow in the Christian life.

First, we must understand that once we've become a Christian, there are two very real components to our humanity. One dimension of our soul has been gloriously regenerated by the Spirit of Christ who comes to inhabit our bodies. This part of us wants to do and become all that pleases God. It isn't dutiful or reluctant but joyful and enthusiastic.

But there is a darker side, the flesh that remains with us. The "flesh" is shorthand for referring to our worldly desires and inclinations toward sin, which don't automatically disappear post-conversion. This part of our soul stands opposed to the Spirit of Christ. It has different desires, goals, and ambitions. It wars with the regenerated part of our soul. The struggle to do what is right, to live holy lives, and to be obedient to Jesus Christ can often plunge us into despair. Will we ever be free from the inner feuding? But Paul assures us that this battle is evidence that Christ lives in us. Were there no regeneration by God's Spirit, there would be no war!

So what does it look like to walk with the Spirit and allow God to capture more of our soul and take it under His control? It does not happen by simply working to change our behaviors. Notice that the flesh and the Spirit operate on the level of desire. Until what we

want begins to change, our behaviors will not change.

APPLY THE WORD

Allowing God to change what we desire is a mysterious process. It is a process of surrender. It begins with praying honestly. It means telling God what you really want. It might mean confessing that you've clung to some desire so fiercely that ingratitude or bitterness has grown in your heart when God hasn't provided. Surrender not only means acknowledging our desires to God, but it also entails discovering, through His Word, His good intentions towards each of us.

Galatians 5:16-25

THE SAFETY OF THE OCCUPIED HEART

John Henry Jowett

TWO friends were cycling through Worcestershire and Warwickshire to Birmingham. When they arrived in Birmingham I asked them, among other things, if they had seen Warwick Gaol along the road. "No," they said, "we hadn't a glimpse of it." "But it is only a field's length from the road!" "Well, we never saw it." Ah, but these two friends were lovers. They were so absorbed in each other that they had no spare attention for Warwick Gaol (jail). Their glorious fellowship made them unresponsive to its calls. They were otherwise engaged.

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." That great Companionship will make us negligent of carnal allurements. "The world, and the flesh, and the devil" may stand by the wayside, and hold their glittering wares before us, but we shall scarcely be aware of their presence. We are otherwise engaged. We are absorbed in the "Lover of our souls."

This is the only real and effective way to meet temptation. We must meet it with an occupied heart. We must have no loose and trailing affections. We must have no vagrant, wayward thoughts. Temptation must find us engaged with our Lover. We must "offer no occasion to the flesh." Walking with the Holy One, our elevation is our safety.

Galatians 5:16-18

If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. - Galatians 5:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Five-year-old Jason announced that he wanted to grow carrots in a corner of the garden. He dutifully watered his carrot patch, and his mom bought fertilizer. But no carrots emerged. As they puzzled over the absent carrots, his mom asked, "Jason, when did you put the seeds in?" "I forgot about seeds!" he exclaimed. "But—I thought if I watered and fed it right, the carrots could still grow!"

Just as the ground doesn't spontaneously produce carrots, our hearts cannot spontaneously produce obedience without fundamental change.

Yesterday we saw that faith in Christ as expressed by love does not stand in opposition to the Law. We explored Paul's image of the child placed under a guardian. Yet Paul would find a fault in our illustration. The fundamental problem we overlooked concerns the child. While the guardian's job was to train the child for maturity, it could not actually create the inner change necessary to achieve this goal. This failure was not due to a flaw in the guardian, but to one in the child—the sinful nature.

To see this, we need to understand Paul's claim that the sinful nature opposes the Spirit (v. 17). "Sinful nature" refers to that inward tendency to rebel against God. This universal problem plagued Jews and Gentiles alike (see 4:22). The Law was given as the standard for the Jews to obey. With obedience came blessing; with disobedience came a curse (see Deut. 30:15–20).

Paul notes that because of sin, the Law could not be obeyed and always brought a curse (see Gal. 5:10). The Law was good. The child was bad. No amount of correcting by the Law could change the fundamental problem. The situation seemed hopeless. How would the child ever become the adult heir?

APPLY THE WORD

Though we are well into the season of the church calendar called Pentecost, today is a good day to think back to Easter and our celebration of what Christ did for us through His death and resurrection. He redeemed us! He made it possible for us to be free from sin! He brought hope to hearts that could never become children of God on their own.

Galatians 5:16-21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Life in the Spirit, Scripture tells us, is a rich and satisfying experience. The brilliant Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards, who found this to be true, once wrote:

""I have many times had a sense of the glory of the third Person in the Trinity, in His office of sanctifier... God in the communications of His Holy Spirit, has appeared as an infinite fountain of divine glory and sweetness; being full and sufficient to satisfy the soul: pouring forth itself in sweet communications, like the sun in its glory, sweetly and pleasantly diffusing light and Life.""

Elsewhere, Edwards called the Holy Spirit ""a divine supernatural spring of life and action."" To ""live by the Spirit,"" as Paul put it (v. 16), is to allow the Spirit to be the governing principle of our lives. If we permit the Spirit to control, we will not ""gratify,"" or allow to be accomplished, ""the desires of the sinful nature.""

Verse 17 describes essentially the same struggle as appears in Romans 6-7. Within the believer are two natures: an old, fleshly nature and a new, spiritual nature. The first we receive at birth and the second by regeneration. The new nature is enabled by the Holy Spirit to overcome the downward pull of the old nature. The Spirit is the seal of our being in Christ (Eph. 1:13), and therefore we are no longer under the condemnation of the law (Gal. 5:18).

The next few verses (vv. 19-21) go on to detail the acts of the sinful nature and to show the heinousness of that nature and its potential for evil if left unchecked. Paul does not view the sins here as a complete listing, but only as examples. These sins fall basically into four categories: (1) sexual sins; (2) idolatry and magic; (3) sins of strife (conflict); and (4) sins of indulgence or intemperance, such as drunkenness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Galatians 5:19-21 is one of the Bible's lists of what God hates. These verses make a counterweight to the famous ""fruit of the Spirit"" we'll study tomorrow.

Do you need to confess sin in any of these areas? Don't delay--when we do what God hates, we grieve our heavenly Father. As His children, we should instead be doing things that bring Him joy and glorify Him. As mentioned on Thursday, God ""is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"" (1 John 1:9).

Galatians 5:16-26

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. - Galatians 5:22-23

TODAY IN THE WORD

Urban farmer Will Allen works to provide healthy foods to underserved populations in Chicago and Milwaukee. Co-founder and CEO of Growing Power, Allen and his staff run innovative farms and gardens, make bulk food purchases through a national cooperative, and teach inner-city young people about organic food and the business of agriculture. One of his farms combines fish and vegetable farming, called ""aquaponics." Allen was honored for his work in 2008 with a MacArthur Foundation ""genius grant.""

Like fresh fruits and vegetables, the gardens of our spiritual lives require care and cultivation. In today's reading, we find the roots of godly joy—God Himself. Part of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to cultivate joy. This passage is built around a contrast between, as it were, two gardens. One garden (vv. 19-21) is filled with ""acts of the sinful nature," or things God hates. It is clear that these sins oppose joy. For some items, such as ""fits of rage," this is plain, while for others it is not as obvious. For example, the world tends to encourage ""selfish ambition"" as a key to success, and sexual immorality provides a kind of happiness and immediate gratification that not everyone recognizes as counterfeit or false. But the truth is that all of these are sworn enemies to godly joy.

The second garden (vv. 22-26) is filled with the ""fruit of the Spirit," or things God loves. Together these qualities go a long way toward describing a godly character. How do we get there? ""Keep in step with the Spirit"; live as people who have crucified the sinful nature; and take joy in obedience. Joy is second only to love on this classic list. The Greek term, chara, includes the feeling of gladness, the act of rejoicing, and the cause or occasion of joy. The cause or occasion can be a person, bringing us full circle back to God Himself.

APPLY THE WORD

Genuine joy has deeper roots than appearances or external behaviors. We see a sobering example of inauthentic joy in the parable of the seeds (Luke 8:13). The seeds that landed on rock at first received the word with joy, but without roots they withered when tested. In theological terms, there are people who hear the gospel with great enthusiasm, but when tested they fall away and it turns out they were not true believers after all. Godly joy is much more lasting than a momentary feeling.

Galatians 5:16-25 Ephesians 5:3-7

No immoral, impure or greedy person ... has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ. - Ephesians 5:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

The old saying goes, "Talk is cheap." In our passage today, Paul wants us to understand very clearly that both words and actions matter—and empty words have no place in the kingdom of God.

For several days now Paul has been presenting examples of negative behavior for us to avoid. The Gentiles, that is, those to whom the Ephesians used to belong before they were included in Christ, live by following their own desires. God's children, by contrast, are to live for the good of the church. All the negative examples Paul has listed starting in 4:25 are intended to show us how not to live. Those who live in these ways reflect the fallen order, not the image God wants His children to bear.

But is Paul really serious here? Does it really matter how we live? According to Paul, it's a matter of life and death. This is not the only place we find Paul drawing lines between those who inherit the kingdom and those who do not. In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul says much the same thing. The key is that those who are truly God's children demonstrate that they are God's children. Paul has already told us that God's holy people have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in them enabling them to live holy and blameless lives (see also Gal. 5:24-25). If we claim to be in Christ, but our lives are characterized by sins like sexual immorality, coarse joking, and greed, our claim amounts to empty words and we stand to face the wrath of God (Eph. 5:6).

Grace is free, but it is not cheap. Jesus did not die so that the old order of the fallen world would remain intact. He died so that the redemption of creation could begin. We are the vanguard of that redemption, the body of Christ on earth. Our call is actually to live as Christ lived. To live any other way is to call into question whether or not we truly are children of God.

APPLY THE WORD

In the United States, where we can easily find churches that will develop programs and messages around making us feel better about ourselves, we can lose sight of the cost of God's grace. To help give you a proper perspective, read *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who resisted the Nazi regime. Unlike the message of our society, "easy" does not always mean "good." As Christians, we want to run the good race, even when that path is difficult.

Galatians 5:17

Don Fortner

Grace for Today: Daily Devotional Readings

'Ye cannot do the things that ye would' - Galatians 5:17

There is a terrible, unceasing struggle in my soul. Being born again by almighty grace, I believe a new heart and a new will, a new, heaven-bent nature created in me by the Spirit of God. I long for and seek after righteousness. Above anything in the world, I want to be perfectly free of sin and conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the desire of every saved sinner. But I cannot do the things I would. I find a law in my members that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. I find in my soul iniquity, transgression and sin far more hideous and ignominious than the profane acts of ungodly men. Lying, theft, drunkenness, adultery and murder are only isolated acts of evil. But my sin is ever before me! I want to pray, but there is too much selfish lust in my prayers to call them prayers. I want to worship God in the Spirit, but there is too much pride in my worship to call it worship. I want to be completely free of all earthly care, trusting God in all things, but there is too much unbelief and selfish resentment towards God's providence to call my faith faith or my submission submission. I want to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and my neighbor as myself, but there is too much concern for self to call my love love. Like all believers in this world, I am a man with two natures, two principles, warring against one another continually; and those two natures are the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is evil, only evil, and ever seeks evil. The Spirit is righteous, only righteous, and ever seeks righteousness. This constant warfare between the flesh and the Spirit makes me do three things: (1) I denounce all personal righteousness, for I have none, and confess my sin. (2) I trust Christ alone for all my righteousness before God. And (3) I live in hope of that day when I shall drop this robe of flesh and be like my Savior, holy, blameless and unproveable before God.

Galatians 5:19-21

Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. - Galatians 5:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

A young couple bought their first home last winter. As spring came, they discovered that they had half a dozen beautiful flowering trees on their property. Guessing that they were fruit trees, they began to plan what they might do with all the fruit they could gather that summer. There was one problem: they couldn't tell what kind of fruit trees they had. Were they cherry, crabapple, or pear? Until

the fruit actually arrived, they weren't sure.

Scripture uses this principle from nature to describe the difference between believers and unbelievers. Those who are led by the Spirit are not under the Law (5:18). Paul makes the same point in v. 23—Law can pronounce no judgment against nor levy any curse upon those whose lives are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. However, those living under the power of the sinful nature show by their deeds that they have not believed the gospel message. They remain enslaved to the authorities of this evil age and will not receive a share in the inheritance of God's kingdom.

Is it possible to distinguish between the heirs of the kingdom and the slaves of this evil age? Paul answers, "Yes." He says, in effect, exactly what Jesus said—"By their fruit you will recognize them" (see Matt. 7:15–23). He lays out a pattern by which we might discern the reign of the sinful nature. Paul's litany of sins shows us what this rule looks like. It can be seen

in sexual immorality, idolatry, witchcraft, jealousy, rage, and selfishness. We see it wherever people delight in stirring up trouble and causing factions. Envy, drunkenness, and orgies signify the presence of this power of this sinful rule.

APPLY THE WORD

As you examine your own life today, how would you describe your fruit? If anger, selfishness, and envy are high on the list, this indicates that you need the work of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:19-26

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. - Galatians 5:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

John Newton, author of the hymn, "Amazing Grace," was heavily invested in the British slave trade when he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. Several decades later, he published a pamphlet denouncing the horrors of the slave trade and issuing a confession for his own involvement. Newton had these words fixed to the wall of his study: "Thou shalt remember that thou was a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."

Like John Newton, we are sobered by our sins, especially when reading today's passage. It catalogs sins of which we are all guilty and virtues of which we all fall short. Galatians 5 has been explaining what it means to live by the flesh and to live by the Spirit. Today's verses get quite specific. They read like a catalog of symptoms, and the symptoms are all sorts of sin, internal and external, horizontal and vertical. Sin can be defined by the evil we commit against our own bodies (sexual sin, gluttony, drunkenness), sins we commit against God (idolatry and witchcraft), and sins we commit against one another (hatred and the like).

The list of virtues is unlike the list of vices, which Paul says are "acts of the flesh" (v. 19). The virtues are more than acts of goodness that we do. They are inner qualities of character that reveal how the Spirit of Christ has directly inhabited a person. They are supernatural! Above all else, love tops the list. It is the supreme virtue, which Paul has already mentioned several times (cf. 5:6, 13, 14). When one loves, it is impossible to neglect the other virtues. Love is joyful. Love makes peace. Love forgives, keeps promises, and acts tenderly and unselfishly.

We are no longer imprisoned to our flesh and its acts and desires. All that has been nailed to the Cross! Our struggle for transformation requires not only fighting what is already dead but also watering what's already been planted. Then our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit, fruit that reveals how carefully and lovingly our God is tending to our lives.

APPLY THE WORD

How can a gardener get his trees to produce more fruit? One way is through cultivating the soil. He waters and fertilizes it. So if we are meant to bear fruit for God, we should be paying attention to our soil! We can't grow without the water and fertilization of the Scriptures. We need to read the Bible personally, but we also need to be in a community where we hear the Word preached

Galatians 5:19-26

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book *Killing Giants, Pulling Thorns*, Chuck Swindoll writes: "Those late take-offs, those grocery lines, those busy restaurants, those trains! What fertilizer for the thorns of impatience! ... Your waitress will not likely be impressed that you can prove the authorship of the Pentateuch. Nor will the gal at the check-out stand stare in awe as you inform her of the distinct characteristics of biblical infallibility which you embrace (although she may stare).

"One quality, however—a single, rare virtue scarce as diamonds and twice as precious—will immediately attract them to you and

soften their spirits. That quality? The ability to accept delay graciously. Calmly. Quietly. Understandingly. With a smile. If the robe of purity is far above rubies, the garment of patience is even beyond that... But, alas, the garment seldom clothes us!"

Writing to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul cites the characteristics of a person who is being controlled and empowered by the Spirit of God. Such a person is not given to "fits of rage" (v. 20). Rather, he is marked by "patience" (v. 22).

The word Paul employs conveys the idea of being patient with other people. And nowhere is that more difficult than within our own families. A parent slights you. A sister takes advantage of you. A brother ignores your feelings. A neighbor treats you unkindly. In each instance the natural (and sinful) reaction is to want to get even. But the Spirit leads us in a different way (v. 25), the way of patience. When we are filled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), we do not become easily annoyed or irritated. On the contrary, we are marked by serenity.

APPLY THE WORD

How do you treat the other members of your family? Today, take a moment to consider.

Someone once noted that patience is something you admire greatly in the driver behind you, but not in the one ahead of you! Nevertheless, it is possible to become a person of patience. When we are yielded to the Holy Spirit, we will possess an unearthly calm even in instances of great provocation. And others will be drawn to us, or rather, to Christ in us.

Galatians 5:22-23; John 15:1-17

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. -

TODAY IN THE WORD

To see just how much popular culture talks about love, take this quick test: see how many popular songs you can name in the next ten seconds that have "love" in the title. Even if popular music has never been your favorite genre, you can still probably name at least half a dozen songs with this theme.

Over the next few days we are going to focus on the qualities known as the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22–23 is frequently memorized and quoted, and we want to go through each of these attributes to discover what this fruit really looks like. We want to be able to know what this fruit is so that we can recognize it in our own lives and in the lives of others.

We begin today with love. This quality so celebrated in popular culture is also frequently misunderstood. Love is not just warm feelings, or sexual attraction, or even selfless motives. In our passage today, Jesus is speaking to His disciples about love, and we are able to see how He describes this fruit of the Spirit.

First, we see that this love has a divine origin (v. 9). This isn't something we manufacture ourselves. Second, love has an inseparable connection to obedience (v. 10). Jesus demonstrated divine love by His obedience to the Father; we demonstrate love the same way. Third, love sacrifices for the good of others (v. 13). Again, Jesus is the ultimate example of this, as He gave His own life so that we might be saved. We are to love each other in the same way—without thought to our own gain, pleasure, or advancement.

APPLY THE WORD

In John 15:7 Jesus says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you."

Galatians 5:22 (Titus 2:11-12)

Self Control

Rob Morgan - My All in All

The fruit of the Spirit is... self-control. Galatians 5:22

Titus was Paul's troubleshooter. Every time we see him in the New Testament, he's tackling a difficult problem for the apostle Paul. In the letter bearing his name, Titus was on the island of Crete, which was known for its laziness, lying, and gluttony (Titus 1:12). Paul had sent him to straighten out things in the church (Titus 1:5). One of the hallmarks of the letter is its emphasis on self-control and self-discipline. For an interesting Bible study, read through these three short chapters, looking for every reference to personal discipline and self-control. In Titus 2:11-12, Paul says that the same grace of God that has appeared to all people with salvation also has the power to enable us to say no to temptation and to live with self-control. What kind of self-control do you need? With your credit cards? With anger or anxiety? With tobacco or alcohol use? With gambling temptations? With your thought life? With your diet or eating habits? With exercise? Profanity? Pornography? Sexual immorality in its various forms? Laziness? Entertainment and

diversions? Louisa May Alcott wrote: "A little kingdom I possess, / Where thoughts and feelings dwell; / And very hard the task I find / Of governing it well." We cannot govern our own hearts, but the grace of God can do it.

Galatians 5:22-23

Henry Blackaby - Experiencing God Day by Day

The Fruit of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.—Galatians 5:22–23

An examination of the fruits of the Spirit can be intimidating. Working all nine of these traits into your life seems impossible, and indeed it is. But the moment you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit began a divine work to produce Christ's character in you. Regardless of who you are, the Spirit works from the same model, Jesus Christ. The Spirit looks to Christ in order to find the blueprint for your character. The Spirit will immediately begin helping you experience and practice the same love that Jesus had when He laid down His life for His friends. The same joy He experienced will now fill you. The identical peace that guarded the heart of Jesus, even as He was being beaten and mocked, will be the peace that the Spirit works to instill in you. The patience Jesus had for His most unteachable disciple will be the patience that the Spirit now develops in you. The kindness Jesus showed toward children and sinners will soften your heart toward others. There will be a goodness about you that is only explainable by the presence of the Spirit of God. The Spirit will build the same faithfulness into you that led Jesus to be entirely obedient to His Father. The Spirit will teach you self-control so that you will have strength to do what is right and to resist temptation. All of this is as natural as the growth of fruit on a tree. You do not have to orchestrate it on your own. It automatically begins the moment you become a believer. How quickly it happens depends upon how completely you yield yourself to the Holy Spirit's activity.

Galatians 5:22-23 Colossians 3:12-14

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. - Ephesians 4:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to one historian, author Washington Irving changed the popular image of St. Nicholas in 1809 by describing him as a stout, jolly man who smoked a long pipe. A few years later, Clement Moore's world-famous poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," helped cement in people's minds the image of St. Nicholas as "a jolly, fat man flying through the air." By 1886, cartoonist Thomas Nast's drawings depicting this new St. Nicholas for the New Yorker magazine had completed the character's transformation of identity.

Christians have undergone a transformation in identity too except that in our case, the change didn't take most of a century to complete. The change was instantaneous in terms of the transaction. We became "new creation[s]" the moment we trusted Christ. "The old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

However, as we learned yesterday, living out our new identity is a process involving both time and growth. Paul had used the metaphor of changing clothes to describe how salvation causes the shedding of the old nature and its power over us (Col. 3:9). Now he continues that imagery by telling us to put on the new clothes that identify us with Christ (vv. 10, 12).

Talk about a different image! Compare the list in verses 5-8 with the Christian character qualities we will read about today and tomorrow, and one thing is clear. There is no comparison! The difference is more than just night and day. These two ways of living are as different as heaven and hell.

One difference between the sins of our old life and the virtues of the new is that they're focused on different things. Sin is hopelessly and incurably self-centered. Things like immorality, greed, and anger are sins that put the sinner first, even if other people are abused and hurt along the way.

But the Christian life is always "other-centered." Notice the tenderness of Paul's appeal for us to be kind, patient, and forgiving with one another. And just in case he missed anything, Paul urged us to live in love, the "greatest" of the virtues (1 Cor. 13:13) because it reminds us most of Jesus Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

These virtues would make a great Christmas gift!

As we get further into the season, chances are that everyone from your family members to store salespeople could use a little compassion, kindness, patience, and love. Why not be the bearer of these gifts to others this Christmas? It won't cost you anything.

A good reminder might be to write these qualities on a card and put it where you will see it every day. When you go Christmas

shopping, slip the card inside your checkbook and pray that God will give you opportunities to reflect His love.

Galatians 5:22-26

TODAY IN THE WORD

"My garden brings me great joy," says Maria Plichta of Chicago. For this World War II concentration camp survivor, her garden is more than petunias and sunflowers.

At the war's outset, Maria worked in a factory in Poland. During a Gestapo raid, she was accused of being a political criminal and jailed, then sent to a German concentration camp where she remained until the end of the war. In 1951 she emigrated to America.

Cultivating her garden helps her escape from painful memories. As she describes it: "I remember things--dark, very bad things and my heart feels heavy. I cannot sleep, so I go to my garden and look at my flowers. I take care of them. I give them water and pull weeds. I keep busy and try to forget that time in my life." Peace of mind grows in Maria's garden.

Images of gardening underlie today's classic verses on the fruit of the Spirit. If believers walk by the Spirit, the tendencies of the sinful nature (see yesterday's study) will not be permitted to grow. Instead, our lives will be characterized by key spiritual qualities (vv. 22-23). It is interesting to note here that "fruit" is singular, signifying the unity and peaceableness brought by the ministry of the Spirit. The acts of the sinful nature, on the other hand, are plural, indicating their disorganizing and disorderly effects on our lives.

The fruit of the Spirit may be outlined as follows. First, love, joy and peace constitute general Christian habits of mind. Second are special qualities affecting individuals' relationships with others: patience, kindness and goodness. Finally, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are basic principles which guide a Christian's conduct.

Love is the foundation, the mother of all other Christian graces. This kind of love involves self-sacrifice and self-denial without asking for something in return (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many of you have already committed Galatians 5:22-23 to memory; but if you haven't done so, that's your "assignment" for today!

To "learn by heart" isn't just an expression. By memorizing these verses, you have them stored in your heart for future meditation or spiritual warfare. Just as meat marinated in a sauce will be permeated throughout with that flavor, filling your heart with Scripture will "flavor" all you do with God's Word.

GALATIANS 6

Galatians 6:1

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Dealing With Difficult People

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Galatians 6:1

All of us have run across difficult people. Relatives, friends, colleagues-whenver there is a chance for a relationship, there is also a chance for it to sour.

The acronym HEAL could help you remember some helpful guidelines. The first is: Humble-Approach the situation with an attitude of meekness. Don't assume that you are guilt-free. Perhaps something you said or did has contributed to the difficult relationship. Galatians 6:1 states that we ought to first consider ourselves before we confront another person.

Effort-Know that it will take time for the relationship to repair. Just as the situation probably didn't develop overnight, so it will take time for the other person to understand your perspective. When there is an opportunity to speak to that person, don't avoid it. Rather, take the time to inquire about their day. They just might surprise you by opening up and sharing. Appreciate-Take a few minutes and think about the contribution the person has made to either your life or the lives of those around you. Let that appreciation override your own irritation with that person when you talk to him or her today. Listen-Next time you have an opportunity to talk to that difficult person, listen to him. Try not to let your own negative opinion influence you. Ask the Lord to help you listen so that you have an appropriate response. Let HEAL be your response to the difficult people in your life. Following these steps is sure to put you on the road to a renewed relationship!

The more I get to know people, the more I love my dog. Frederick the Great

Galatians 6:1-6

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. - Galatians 6:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

In our pluralist culture today, Christians are confused about confronting sin. Some prominent denominations embrace the gay lifestyle and cohabitation, despite the fact that Scripture forbids it. Others praise the pursuit of wealth, even encouraging ostentation. Today's passage from Galatians gives us a better picture of what it means to confront sin in a biblical way.

First of all, sin cannot be ignored. There are absolutes in the Bible; some choices are right and good, and others are worldly and evil. Although salvation is free through the grace of Jesus Christ, we are called to live holy lives in the likeness of Christ. When a Christian sins and persists in a lifestyle of sin, it must be addressed.

If a brother in Christ confronts another brother about his sin, he needs to have the right goal in mind and the right attitude in handling the situation. His goal is not to castigate the sinner and remind him of what a louse he is for having sinned. Instead, he should aim to bring that person back into fellowship with God and with his church community. Sin always estranges us, so restoring a sinner means helping him to see this estrangement and gently encouraging him to leave his sin and come back to God. When done well, this confrontation is sympathetic and gentle. Perhaps there have been hardships that have contributed to this brother's sin? His community will share to relieve those burdens, through prayer and practical contributions.

What must be guarded against is pride. What will ruin an interaction such as the one described above is a prideful spirit. If someone speaks in a condescending tone and believes himself to be superior to the "sinner" in any way, it could cause great discouragement, anger and resentment. That's why, in the context of Christian community, a person must be carefully considered before he is chosen to confront another's sin. Is this a godly person, one who is bearing the fruit of love, patience, and gentleness?

The law of Christ is to love: love doesn't ignore sin. But love always wears the qualities of gentleness and humility.

APPLY THE WORD

This passage assumes that Christians are living in close relationship with one another. They are familiar with the burdens carried by one another. They're even aware of some of the sins their brothers and sisters commit. This is not a description of an anonymous, go-it-alone faith. Are you living in Christian community? Do you have people with whom you can share your needs and confess your sin? Seek out these relationships, because they are a vital part of your Christian life.

Galatians 6:1-5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Mary Wolf gave up a fast-paced life as an NBC News producer to teach young children about computers. From covering world politics and jetting around the globe, she moved to a job with far less money and social prestige. Why?

Says she: ""There is nothing to compare to when one of these kids hugs you and you know they mean it. It's from another world."" Her work as a journalist, she claims, ""pales in comparison"" to the rewards of working with children and helping them learn.

Helping others is a special responsibility and joy for Christians, a truth seen in several ways in today's Scripture reading.

Spiritually motivated people in the fellowship of believers have a responsibility to help the erring brother or sister (v. 1). ""Restore"" is a beautiful word, used in Greek for the setting of a dislocated or broken bone and making it useful to the whole body once more. This is to be done in a spirit of gentleness, not with a ""better than thou"" attitude on the part of those who have not fallen into sin.

If we are to restore others to full usefulness in the body of Christ, we will help bear their burdens (v. 2). This extends beyond helping those who are erring. ""Burdens"" are weights too heavy for individuals to shoulder and capable of being shared with others in the fellowship of believers.

Self-conceit is one of the chief roadblocks to our showing such forbearing sympathy for others (v. 3). If we think ourselves to ""be something"" because we have not given in to sin, we are deceiving ourselves! As believers, we are entirely dependent on God's grace, both for our salvation and for daily help (John 15:5).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Carrying one another's burdens is a vital part of Christian fellowship--much more than church softball leagues or potluck suppers, as good as those may be.

If you studied the ""one another"" commands with us in February, you may remember that ""bearing burdens"" means to help other believers with circumstances that are too heavy or difficult for them to deal with alone.

Galatians 6:2

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Community Burdens

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. - Galatians 6:2

Contrary to the isolated burdens we saw in yesterday's study, often we encounter community burdens. These are burdens that should be shared with other members of the body of Christ. A great fault of the church today is we often don't share the burdens of others. Someone may have a burden of temptation and need counsel. Others may be suffering financial setbacks and could use a gift. Perhaps there are older folks that need assistance with everyday tasks. Whatever the burden is, it should be shared by the church. We need to share one another's problems without delay. Church attendance shouldn't just be for our own benefit. We should be observant and see who needs a word of encouragement or a listening ear. Sometimes, we may even need to give a little of ourselves. Perhaps we could take someone out to lunch and listen to his or her burden. When we are faced with a burden ourselves, we should be willing to let others share the load. I don't mean we should empty all our complaints on the first listening ear, but we shouldn't be too proud to let others help us out. This is what God ordained the local church to do. Perhaps there is someone in your church that needs you to share his or her burden. God may be leading you to be that listening ear or helpful hand. Don't brush it aside. Make their burden your own.

Galatians 6:2

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Big Shoes

There is no better exercise for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up. Romans 12:9-16

At the United Center, where the Chicago Bulls and Blackhawks play, there is an exhibit with handprints of famous athletes. Visitors can put their hand inside to compare their hand with the star athletes. There is also an exhibit with the shoe sizes of several basketball players. Some of them have unbelievable sizes like 15 or 22! To better understand our fellow believers, we should put ourselves in their shoes. Some of them have giant-sized struggles, such as marital problems or a death in the family. Other shoes may be problem children, the loss of a job, or an illness in the family. Until we try to step into those shoes, we can never understand the struggles that our fellow brothers and sisters are contending with. Our perfect model is Jesus Christ. He stepped into our "shoes" when he chose to come to this earth and live among us. Hebrews 4:15 says that Christ was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Jesus endured the full experience of humanity so He could show us how to live. We're of no help to fellow believers when we stand on the sidelines and judge. Instead, we should get deeply involved in the lives of hurting people. We should try to understand the depth of their pain. The Apostle Paul instructed us to "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2) We do that by slipping off our shoes and putting our feet in someone else's shoes. That's the only way to understand.

Galatians 6:2

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Genuine Acts of Kindness

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

In his autobiography, Up From Slavery Booker T. Washington tells a story about the love of his older brother. As a slave on a plantation, the boys were made to wear shirts woven from rough, scratchy flax fiber. To the young Washington, this shirt was so abrasive to his tender skin that it caused him great discomfort. The older brother was so hurt by seeing his younger brother suffer that he would wear Booker's new shirts and break them in for him. When they were less scratchy and more comfortable, then he would give them back to Booker. You cannot help but be touched by this story. It is a great illustration of the kindness God wants us to show toward each other. This type of self-sacrifice goes beyond ordinary courtesy. It goes the extra mile. That is how we show our love for each other. Sacrifice is the greatest demonstration of love. John 15:13 says "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Kindness is a trait that anyone can share. You don't have to have a special talent or gift. You don't have to have much money. You don't even have to be well-known. All you need is a willing heart. Maybe someone in your world needs an act of kindness. You may be the one who can help lighten their load. Will you be willing to give a little bit of yourself for the comfort of another person?

Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life.

Galatians 6:2

Henry Blackaby - Experiencing God Day by Day

Bearing One Another's Burdens

Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.—Galatians 6:2

When God places people in your life who are in need, He is aware of what they lack, and He knows He has given you the resources to meet those needs. You know God does nothing by accident. When a need surfaces around you, immediately go to the Father and say, "You put me here for a reason. You knew this was going to happen. What did You intend to do through me that would help this person become closer to You?" Recognizing a need in someone's life can be one of the greatest invitations from God you will ever experience. It's easy to become frustrated by the problems of others. They can overwhelm you as you become aware of need after need. Rather than looking at each new problem as one more drain on your time, energy, or finances, ask God why He placed you in this situation. Allow God to help you see beyond the obvious needs of others to the things He wants to accomplish in their lives. Don't miss God's activity because you're reluctant to carry the load of others. Is God blessing you materially? It may be He is developing a "supply depot" in your life through which He can provide for others. Has God granted you a strong, healthy family life? It may be that He requires such a home to minister to the hurting families all around you. Has God released you from sinful habits? Has God's peace comforted you in a time of great sorrow? Has God miraculously provided for your needs? It may be that He has been purposefully building things into your life so that you can now be the kind of person who will carry the burdens of others.

Galatians 6:2

Don Fortner - Grace for Today

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ' Galatians 6:2

These Galatians had foolishly been trying to bear the heavy burden of the Mosaic Law. They had entangled themselves again with the yoke of bondage. They endeavored to establish righteousness for themselves by the works of the law. None of them said, 'We are saved by our own works.' Satan does not work in such an open manner. These lawmongers at Galatia were saying, 'We are saved by grace, but only if we keep the law.' Others of them said, 'We are saved by grace alone, in so far as our justification is concerned; but in order to be sanctified we must keep the law as a rule of life.' In reality their doctrine was the same. They were attempting to mix law and grace. They had forsaken the gospel way of salvation by grace alone. Now Paul says to them, 'Do you want a law to live by? Then live by the rule of the law of Christ—love.' Here is a law which is a living principle. It touches the heart, influences the life, honors God and is sympathetic towards and helpful to men. The whole law is fulfilled in this one thing—love. Without it, all the pretentious, self-righteous piety which men claim to possess is hypocrisy. It seems quite remarkable to me that those self-righteous people who apparently want all men to know that they make the law of Moses their rule of life usually forget that which is the essence and spirit of the law—love. They are so righteous that they become stern, hard, severe, critical and judgmental, which is being unrighteous. Even the righteousness of the Mosaic Law is a righteousness of love. But I have never found one of those self-righteous legalists who was tender-hearted, kind and gentle. He looks at the killing letter of the law and becomes as hard and stern as death. My friends, let this be the law by which we live: 'Love one another.' Reject that which is hard, stern and severe. 'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.'

Galatians 6:2

F B Meyer - Our Daily Walk

BURDEN-BEARING

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."-- Gal 6:2.

IN THESE words the Apostle is evidently thinking more especially of the trespasses and sins into which men and women fall. We are not to rejoice over their failure, nor talk about it to others, but to consider ourselves, remembering our own liability to fall in the event of temptation. We are to be tender, gentle, and compassionate, helping to bear the burden of temptation, remorse, and shame. There is great comfort for us all in these words, for surely, if our Lord expects us to forgive and restore our brother, we may count on Him to do as much for us!

But sin is not the only burden we are to bear with our brethren. The young man or girl who fails to make good; the business man who meets with sudden reverse; those who suffer bitter disappointment; when faces are averted, and tongues are busily engaged in criticism--let us seek out the one who has consciously disappointed everybody, and help by our strong and tender sympathy. It is like

the coming of the good Ananias into Saul's darkness, with the greeting: "Brother Saul!"

We may help to bear the burden of bereavement--when the husband is suddenly stricken down, or the mother is taken away and there is no one to care for the children, then we may show our practical sympathy and helpfulness. All through His life on earth our Lord sought to carry the burdens of the people, and we are to follow in His steps. Sympathy means suffering with; and as we endeavour to enter into the griefs and sorrows of those around us, in proportion to the burden of grief that we carry do we succeed in lightening another's load. You cannot bear a burden without feeling its pressure; and in bearing the burdens of others, we must be prepared to suffer with them.

This was the law of Christ, the principle of His life, and the precept which He enjoined on His followers to fulfil. Let us remember, also, that in carrying the burdens of others, we often lose our own.

PRAYER

For friends above; for friends still left below;
For the rare links invisible between.
For sweet hearts tuned to noblest charity;
For great hearts toiling in the outer dark;
For friendly hands stretched out in time of need,
For every gracious thought and word and deed;
We thank Thee Lord! AMEN.

Galatians 6:5

Isolated Burdens

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

For every man shall bear his own burden. Galatians 6:5

If you had the opportunity to examine a handful of snow under a microscope, you would find that it is made up of many tiny snowflakes. Each one, though similar to the next, possesses its own very distinguishing characteristics. The structure of each one is altered ever so slightly from the next. It is a fascinating marvel of God's creation.

Like the snowflake, God created each person in a unique fashion. Each of us differs from the other in some way. God has set us aside for a special purpose, dramatically different from any other human being in history.

Because we are so different, God has given us unique burdens that only we can bear. Not even the greatest encouragers can understand what we are enduring. The Apostle Paul, speaking from experience, points this fact out in Galatians 6:5. There are periods in our life when we will suffer absolutely alone. During these moments, nothing another person says will be of much help. It is a time set aside for exclusive communion with God.

I can look back at my life and recall certain times of loneliness. These are the times I had to walk through the "valley of the shadow of death" alone. But, I know that Jesus, who suffered alone for me, helped me endure.

Perhaps you are bearing a burden all alone. Take comfort in knowing God is with you in your loneliness, and He will bring you through.

You never get lost in a crowd when you are with God.

Galatians 6:6-10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Harvesting was a far more difficult task before Cyrus McCormick invented the mechanical reaper. Even laboring long hours, farmhands using sickles could harvest no more than one acre per person per day.

When McCormick redesigned his father's defective prototype and presented the world with the first mechanical reaper, he revolutionized farming worldwide. The new machines could harvest more in one hour than one worker could in a whole day.

One fact remained the same, however. Whether with sickles or McCormick's invention, farmers could reap only what they had sowed. This truth, also found in the spiritual realm, is Paul's focus in today's reading.

The life of Christian liberty is a life of thinking of others, as we continue to see in verse 6. "All good things" refers generally to blessings of the Christian faith, and possibly to the material support of those who teach the Word full-time.

"A man reaps what he sows" (v. 7) is a law of life, whether in the realm of nature or the realm of the Spirit. Whatever you sow you will reap; only you will reap much more, for just a few seeds will yield much fruit.

Verse 8 presents a contrast between a worldly and a spiritual sower. The worldly or carnal person sows to further his sinful nature. Such actions produce an effect on his character; the hold of sin over him increases. But the spiritual person sows to cultivate the new nature. Every time he performs an action in the power of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit over him increases. His abundant harvest is a life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What seeds have you been sowing? Do you walk through life looking for opportunities to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (v. 10)?

For many of us, the answer is probably "no." We have lapses, grow selfish, forget, think of excuses, or fail to see others' needs. Ask the Lord to give you eyes to see the needs around you and the grace to do something about them. He will show you opportunities and enable you to respond as He would.

Galatians 6:7-10

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. - Galatians 6:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Frank Abagnale's first act of fraud was against his own father when he was only a teenager. Later, he worked for a bank, stealing \$40,000 from clients before the bank finally figured it out. While on the run, he pretended to be a pilot, a doctor, and a lawyer. When he was finally caught, he served only five years of his sentence when the federal government offered him a deal: help them catch other con artists, and he could earn back his freedom.

Paul warns in today's verses: don't get conned! We don't know whether or not Paul was referring to the false teachers; it may also be that he is warning against Satan's lies, which can subtly invade our own thoughts. But clearly the Galatians had failed to understand the biblical idea of personal accountability. If yesterday's reading teaches that members of the church are responsible to help and serve one another, especially when struggling with sin or hardship, today's reading reminds us that each individual must make choices and then expect the consequences of those choices.

Paul uses the metaphor of farming to help describe what he means. If you plant cabbage, you're going to get cabbage. If you plant seeds of fleshly desire, committing the sinful acts he's already catalogued (cf. Gal. 5:19-21), then expect the judgment of God and destruction. Sin may give pleasure momentarily but in the end, it will always destroy, whether destroy our bodies, our consciences, our fellowship with God, or our relationship with others.

Sowing to the Spirit, on the other hand, promises life and harvest. No doubt sometimes it's much harder work to sow to the Spirit than to sow to the flesh. That's why Paul warns not to give up. There's spiritual sweat involved in planting the seeds that will bear spiritual fruit in our lives. It's not easy to maintain habits of spiritual discipline. It's never convenient to make the sacrifices necessary for serving others. But if we keep the long view in mind, we'll remember that it's worth it!

APPLY THE WORD

William Perkins wrote in his commentary on Galatians, "If men could be persuaded of this, that the time of this life is the seed time; that the last judgment is the harvest and that as certainly as the husbandman which sows his seed looks for increase, so we for our good works, a recompense to the full; O how fruitful should we be, how plentiful, how full of good works!" Take this word of encouragement with you through the day: God is faithful to His promise, and He will bring the harvest!

Galatians 6:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

John Wanamaker, a very successful department store founder and merchant in Philadelphia, was a friend of D. L. Moody's and often supported Moody's work. Sixty years after starting his own business, the 83-year-old Wanamaker was still on the job and making plans for the future. When asked how he was doing, Wanamaker replied that he was "happily busy." Then he explained, "Many people are busy because they have to be; I'm busy because I want to be."

That is a great way to approach your work. God designed work not only as a way of meeting our needs, but as a means of personal satisfaction and benefit to others. Paul knew the value and the necessity of work, and he was passionate about God's people setting a good example for each other and the outside world.

The apostle was committed to a God-honoring work ethic not only because work is productive. Paul understood that if people were not busy doing something useful, the devil would make sure they had something destructive to do.

This was happening in the church at Thessalonica, where those who didn't want to be busy working were becoming busybodies or gossips, a lethal sin in any group of believers. Paul said that he had heard about the problem, and the form of the verb implies that he had heard about it more than once. Laziness was an ongoing problem in this church.

As he did in verse 6, Paul linked his command with the Person and authority of Christ, which tells us how serious the issue is. He and his fellow missionaries had always paid for the food they ate (v. . It was time for the "voluntarily unemployed" Christians at Thessalonica to follow his example.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Notice that Paul tucked a word of encouragement into these verses of discipline and reprimand.

To those who were doing the job well, the apostle said, in effect, "Don't get tired of doing it right" (v. 13). Today's verse promises a good return for us if we refuse to let other people or circumstances get us down. Do you need a fresh dose of encouragement for today? Ask the Lord to help you see your work through His eyes.

Galatians 6:9

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Faint Not

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. Galatians 6:9

In 1968, the country of Tanzania selected John Stephen Akhwari to represent it in the Olympics held in Mexico City. Along the racecourse for the marathon, Akhwari stumbled and fell, severely injuring both his knee and ankle. By 7 p.m., a runner from Ethiopia had won the race, and all the other competitors had finished and been cared for. Just a few thousand spectators were left in the huge stadium when a police siren at the gate caught their attention. Limping through the gate came number 36, Akhwari with his leg wrapped in a bloody bandage. Those present began to cheer as the courageous man completed the final lap of the race. Later, a reporter asked Akhwari the question on everyone's mind: "Why did you continue the race after you were so badly injured?" He replied: "My country did not send me 7,000 miles to begin a race; they sent me to finish the race." Every believer is participating in a race. It could accurately be titled, the Marathon of Life. Along the way, we're sure to trip and fall over the course's many obstacles. At times, we'll be hurt severely, often bleeding profusely. Those moments of despair will tempt us to throw our hands in the air and give up altogether. Yet, our Savior didn't send us here to begin the race. He sent us here to complete it. May we, like Paul, be able to cross the finish line with joy, knowing we've "finished the course."

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The greatest way to succeed is always to try one more time. Thomas Edison

Galatians 6:9-10

Robert Morgan

My All in All

Fatigue is one of our greatest enemies. I know all about it, and I don't want to live in the Land of Nod any longer. For many years I worked too many nights, burned too much midnight oil, rose too early, and skipped too many days off. It finally caught up with me when I realized I had become short-tempered and irritable—qualities that just won't do in a pastorate! But it's not just Christian workers. Our 24/7 society gives us electricity at all hours. We no longer go to bed when the sun goes down. We work into the night, or we entertain ourselves by watching late-night comics elicit halfhearted laughs with crude humor and off-color jokes. We do our grocery shopping at midnight, check our e-mail at 3:00 a.m., and drag ourselves out of bed when our cell phone alarm clocks render a tech-sounding version of our favorite pop song. In Galatians 6, Paul was concerned about another kind of fatigue. The devil's greatest weapon is discouragement; and if he can steal away our enthusiasm, he has countermanded our effectiveness for Christ. The combination of physical fatigue with internal discouragement has trounced some of the mightiest saints, but the remedy is simple—Galatians 6:9-10. Take time to rest in body and soul, and remember that God has assuredly promised that our work for Him is never in vain.

Work hard, but don't wear yourself out.
Do not grow weary of doing good.

Galatians 6:9

James Scudder - Living Water - Devotional

Faint Not

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. Galatians 6:9

When I think of persistence, no one comes to my mind faster than Peter. He was what you would call a survivor. He'd been through it all. For three years, he'd been walking with the Lord every step. Yet, before his bold sermon at Pentecost, the story of his life had been failure at every junction. His knee-jerk style had gotten him into so much trouble. He broke vows to the Lord. He denied Him, not once, but three times. He irrationally cut off a soldier's ear. He'd sunk beneath the waves for lack of trust in the Lord. Yet, amidst a life of very few ups and too many downs, Peter persevered. That persistent quality made him a success. God showed him that achievement wasn't dependent on the apostle's frail efforts, but on the object of his weak faith, Jesus Christ. Life is full of failure, even for the winningest coaches, the greatest preachers, and the wealthiest businessmen. In fact, failure is often the very teacher that produces success in its pupils. Calvin Coolidge once said this: "Press on. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful individuals with talent. Genius will not: unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts." Don't let failures keep you from serving God. God isn't done with your life. In fact, He may be just beginning.

Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently. Henry Ford

Galatians 6:10

F B Meyer - Our Daily Walk

TRUE BENEFICENCE

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men."-- Gal 6:10.

WE ALL have a mission in the world, though we may never be called to cross the sea, or to visit distant lands to preach the gospel. Christ's command to each of us, is begun with the person next to you. Do not wait to be neighbored, but neighbor somebody who is in need. The best way to bring in the Kingdom of God is to bring the person whom you can most easily influence to the Saviour. All great work in the world has commenced, not by committees, but by the consecration, self-sacrifice, and devotion of single individuals.

The Apostle indicates three methods of helping people. The restoration of the fallen (Gal 6:1). How often in daily life a Christian man or woman is suddenly overtaken by some temptation, to which they yield, and which leaves a deep stain on character. Thus was David overtaken and also Peter! What an agony of remorse ensues! The Psalms are full of bitter repentance for such transgression. The sinful soul has to bear a heavy burden indeed; and too often his fellow-Christians pass him by with averted faces and frowns. No one visits him, or cares to be seen in his company, or tries to help him regain his former footing.

"Christ's law," which we are called to fulfil, is to seek out the erring one, to go after that which is lost, to restore the wanderer, to help carry his burden, considering lest we be tempted, and lapse into the same sin.

The care of Pastors and Ministers (Gal 6:6). If all who are being taught in Church and Sunday School would set themselves to minister to those that teach them, how many a weary servant of Christ would pluck up new courage and hope. Communicate helpfulness, sympathy, prayer, the grip of the hand, the expression of thankfulness for blessing received.

The ministry of all men (Gal 6:9-10). These opportunities of doing good are always recurring, and at every turn there are those who need a helping hand. "The poor," said our Lord, "ye have always with you." Let us bear a little of the burden of each, and specially do it for those who belong to the household of faith.

PRAYER - Give us grace to be encouragers of others, never discouragers; always making life easier, never harder, for those who come within our influence. AMEN.

Galatians 6:11-18

TODAY IN THE WORD

What does the cross of Christ mean to the believer? The famous preacher John Henry Jowett saw in the cross not only the reality of

sin and grace, but also the reality of God's holiness. In one sermon he declared:

""If I want to gaze upon the holiness of God, I know no place like the cross... We are never going to have grand trees of righteousness until they are rooted in a rich soil of reverence, and we are never, I think, going to get the requisite reverence until we find time to contemplate God's holiness; and I do not know any place that will lead us to such a fruitful contemplation of God's holiness as when we take our place near the cross.""

The cross of Christ permeates Paul's comments as he concludes his epistle to the Galatians. After he took the pen from his secretary (v. 11), he reiterated several of his major themes.

In verses 12 and 13 Paul underscores the insincerity of the Judaizing agitators. Despite their apparent religious zeal, they were not concerned about the welfare of believers or the glory of God, only about their own safety (teaching against circumcision almost cost Paul his life on more than one occasion!) and reputation.

In direct contrast, Paul says, ""May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"" (v. 14). By means of Christ's redemption, other things have lost their power: the world system with its attractions, the flesh with its sinful desires, and other religious systems with their teaching of salvation by human effort. Truly we are a ""new creation"" (v. 15)!

Paul concludes the epistle as he began, asserting his authority as an apostle (v. 17). The ""marks of Jesus"" on his body are marks of physical suffering, there because of the apostle's faithful service to God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Congratulations! We've completed our study of Galatians!

As we prepare for a new topic tomorrow, here are a few suggested applications to end the month well: (1) Read through the entire epistle again in one sitting; this will be a good review. (2) Return to an earlier application that you meant to do but never got around to. Don't let the opportunity slip by! (3) Following today's verse, ""boast"" to someone about God's work in your life or generally about His greatness and goodness.

Galatians 6:11-14

May I never boast except in the cross of ... Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. - Galatians 6:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the award-winning film, *The King's Speech*, King George VI of England suffers from a speech impediment. He's helped by the unorthodox methods of speech therapist Lionel Logue, who, it is later discovered, has no official credentials. In the scene where King George confronts Lionel about having lied to him, Lionel defends his actions. I never boasted about having certificates or letters after my name. I only boasted that I could help you.

Paul had his reasons for boasting, and the false teachers have theirs. The false teachers wanted to boast only in the number of foreskins they collect. Their goal in visiting various Gentile congregations was to convince the Gentile believers of the necessity of circumcision. And when they succeeded, no doubt they proudly reported back to Jerusalem the number of their "converts." These false teachers do not come to Galatia for altruistic reasons. They were motivated by selfish ambition. They wanted to grow in prominence and success, giving themselves fame and recognition.

Not only were their motives centered on selfish ambition, but they also wanted to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Jesus Christ. Remember what the fundamental problem in Galatia: Jews were eating with uncircumcised Gentiles! The book of Acts records that persecution of Jesus' followers came most often at the hand of devout Jews. They were infuriated that the strict separation between Jew and Gentile was not being upheld. The false teachers did not want to be persecuted, and their solution for resolving the problem was to have the Gentiles circumcised. No need to renounce the cross, they insisted. Simply add this other requirement, and submit yourself to the knife, and all will be well.

Paul draws a clear contrast between himself and these false teachers. The false teachers have preached a message contrary to the cross. They were sowing to the flesh, and they will reap destruction. Paul, however, will not renounce the cross. His only boast is in the cross of Jesus Christ. All his hopes in the divine promise and for future salvation rest in the cross.

APPLY THE WORD

The world's system is aptly described by the apostle John, where he talks about "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions," (1 John 2:16, ESV). Imagine that by the cross of Jesus Christ, we could put to death our fleshy desires,

our greed for more, and our determination to define ourselves by what we own. Imagine that freedom! We don't have to imagine, for God offers it to us today, through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Galatians 6:14

Oswald Chambers

How can I personally partake in the atonement?

But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Gal. 6:14.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ always forces an issue of will. Do I accept God's verdict on sin in the Cross of Christ? Have I the slightest interest in the death of Jesus? Do I want to be identified with His death, to be killed right out to all interest in sin, in worldliness, in self—to be so identified with Jesus that I am spoiled for everything else but Him? The great privilege of discipleship is that I can sign on under His Cross, and that means death to sin. Get alone with Jesus and either tell Him that you do not want sin to die out in you; or else tell Him that at all costs you want to be identified with His death. Immediately you transact in confident faith in what Our Lord did on the Cross, a supernatural identification with His death takes place, and you will know with a knowledge that passeth knowledge that your 'old man' is crucified with Christ. The proof that your 'old man' has been crucified with Christ is in the amazing ease with which the life of God in you enables you to obey the voice of Jesus Christ.

Every now and again, Our Lord lets us see what we would be like if it were not for Himself; it is a justification of what He said—"Without Me ye can do nothing." That is why the bedrock of Christianity is personal, passionate devotion to the Lord Jesus. We mistake the ecstasy of our first introduction into the Kingdom for the purpose of God in getting us there; His purpose in getting us there is that we may realize all that identification with Jesus Christ means. (My Utmost for His Highest)

Galatians 6:14

Don Fortner-Grace for Today

'I ... glory ... in the cross' Galatians 6:14

With the apostle Paul, I have made it my solemn determination 'not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified'. I say, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' To glory in the cross is to trust the crucified Christ alone as my Savior. To glory in the cross is to live by the cross and for the cross. And to glory in the cross is to proclaim it boldly and constantly. That which is in the eyes of men most offensive and most repugnant, I take to be my glory. The cross of Christ is my one message. I glory in that message with good reason.

1. The cross of Christ is a covenant respected. Before the world began God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit chose a people and agreed to save them upon the condition that a suitable ransom would be found, a ransom that could fully satisfy divine justice. That ransom was found in the voluntary agreement of the Lord Jesus Christ to assume our nature and die in our stead at Calvary.
2. The cross of Christ is a conquest realized. Our Lord did not die at Calvary as the helpless victim of circumstances. He laid down his life as a mighty, conquering King. As he was bringing the deathblow to his enemies and ours he cried, 'It is finished!' And by his mighty act of redemption he obtained a mighty conquest. He crushed the serpent's head, breaking the power of the old dragon's usurped dominion. He took the sword of justice and swallowed it up in his own heart. He took the enormous load of our sin and made an end of it, establishing everlasting righteousness for us. All of this Christ did for us in our stead. He obtained the victory as our Substitute.
3. The cross of Christ is a compassion revealed. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took our sins upon himself and died in our place upon the cursed tree, because of his great love for us: 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us!' My heart is constrained by the love of Christ to glory in the cross. I cannot do otherwise.

Galatians 6:15-18

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. - Galatians 6:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Imagine you're in a basketball arena on the edge of your seat during the final seconds of the game. Your team is losing by one point, but a player launches a shot from midcourt and whoosh! It goes in! Everyone looks to the referee to figure out if the shot got off before the timer buzzed. Did it count?

And that's the final summary statement with which Paul ends his letter to the Galatians. After all this theological argumentation, after confessing his great affection and concern for the Galatians, after exposing the motives of the false teachers, Paul says in effect:

here's what really counts. It doesn't matter to God whether you're circumcised or uncircumcised. You won't have any more or less favor with God either way. What counts, what really matters in God's kingdom, is that you are a new creation.

By a new creation, he is describing what happens spiritually to a person when he declares faith in Jesus. He dies with Christ but is regenerated by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Yes, there are still struggles with sin and temptation, but this new Christian is like a new baby with new parents. He drinks spiritual milk, is nurtured by the love of His new Heavenly Father, and lives for different purposes and pleasures. And this has obvious relational implications. Jew and Gentile can get along when brought into God's family through Jesus. Gone are the dividing lines! Table fellowship is really possible.

The hopeful tone of the closing of the letter makes us think that Paul believed the Galatians would return to Christ. He wishes them grace and calls them his brothers and sisters. He won't give up hope. He'll trust that God's Spirit in them will convince them of their error and reclaim their devotion and obedience.

Paul has proven he is a loving and committed spiritual father to these Galatians. He's suffered persecution and yet, he's never renounced his faithfulness to Jesus or to the message of the gospel. He's labored long and hard for them.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul is an example of what it looks like to walk alongside another Christian through struggles and doubts. Paul never compromised the message of the cross, and he never minimized the danger that he thought the Galatians were in. He kept taking them back to the truths of the gospel and reminding them of the freedom and hope they have through Christ. He was courageous, tender, honest, and hopeful. May we go forward focused on what is truly important in our spiritual lives!

Galatians 6:17

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible

Henceforth let no man trouble me ... —Gal 6.17

There is a fine touch of independence in these words, a claim that the writer is exempt from interference, that if any shall break in upon his quietness, the intruder is guilty of misdemeanor. After reading the letter, with its clear logic and its splendid passion, we feel that he has won the right to write thus. And yet it is not upon that ground that he bases his claim. His ground is that he bears branded on his body the stigmata of Jesus! There has been much mystical interpretation of these words of Paul, which may be warranted. I believe that the reference was a very simple and very actual one. In his proclamation of the Gospel committed to him, he had given his physical powers without reserve, and in the process had been actually bruised and broken by the brutality of those who had opposed him. He carried the actual scars of this brutality, and knew actual physical weakness as the result of his devotion. These all were to him the true stigmata of Jesus, sweet and terrible companions of the very wounds of his Lord. Let them appeal to men to recognize his right not to be troubled. And so his appeal finally was to the Gospel which was thus evidenced, as to its compelling and sustaining power, by the very sufferings through which he had passed, of which these scars were the sure signs. It is really a very keen word this. Have we any right to claim exemption from the troubling of men, such as Paul had? What stigmata do we carry about with us that speak of suffering or deprivation, or limitation, resulting from our persistent and passionate devotion to the Gospel of the eternal grace?