

John Wesley wrote: *"The Scriptures, therefore, of the Old and New Testament are a most solid and precious system of divine truth. Every part is worthy of God and altogether are one entire body, wherein is no defect, no excess. It is the fountain of heavenly wisdom, which they are able to taste prefer to all writings of men, however wise or learned or holy."* I hope you believe that. If you do, you will make God's Word your life's study and source of daily direction and inspiration. I can always tell when the Spirit of God has captured a person's heart, for they have an insatiable appetite for the Word of God. The modern preaching of taking a verse out of context and preaching a message from it with a theme of self-improvement is the reason the nation is becoming so spiritually impoverished (1 Peter 2:2ⁱ).

Pastor Todd Wilson writes in his commentary on Galatians, *"From Genesis to Revelation the Word of God is a treasure trove of grace. Golden coins of comfort, costly pearls of assurance, precious jewels of promise are all found in the pages of Scripture. In fact, everything that was written in the Bible was written for us, that "through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4)."*ⁱⁱ

Many men have inspired thoughts. I trust that my devotionals and Preaching through the Bible series is inspired, but only to the extent that it helps you understand God's revelation in the holy Scriptures. **There is a world of difference between inspired thoughts and the Word of God.** My words will pass away, but the Word of God is forever (Matthew 24:35ⁱⁱⁱ). My interpretations may be in error, but the Word of God is flawless. And that is why we go through a book of the Bible verse by verse.

Luther was one of the spiritual giants who was transformed by the Spirit working through the book of Galatians. He taught it in a Catholic seminary, but it continued to work on him all throughout his life. Until his last days he was adding to and editing his commentary on Galatians. In his commentary on Galatians, he tells us, *"The world bears the Gospel a grudge because the Gospel condemns the religious wisdom of the world. Jealous for its own religious views, the world in turn charges the Gospel with being a subversive and licentious doctrine, offensive to God and man, a doctrine to be persecuted as the worst plague on earth."* We can see that in our culture. You can talk about every far-out religious idea and be tolerated, but if you bring up the biblical Jesus who is God's plan of salvation for mankind, you may be immediately judged as unworthy to be heard.

In Jewish culture, the worldly religious wisdom was that keeping the laws of God was the only way of salvation. Paul's letters teach that the Word of God never declared that to be the case. Salvation was always by grace through faith, an unmerited gift, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus. Those before Christ were to look forward in faith to God providing the perfect atoning sacrifice, and those after Christ look back on what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross (Hebrews 11:6^{iv}; Romans 4:3^v). This letter to the Galatians was to respond to the false teaching of the Messianic Jews who insisted Gentile believers needed to be circumcised and keep the laws of Moses to be accepted by God. Though followers of Jesus, they still believed that their obedience to the laws was earning merit with God. Paul realized that if we have broken one law, it is as if we have broken them all (James 2:10^{vi}; Galatians 3:10^{vii}). Adam and Eve only needed to disobey once to be separated from God. Sin is falling short of the righteousness of God, and God cannot

abide the presence of unrighteousness (Romans 3:23^{viii} Psalm 14:3^{ix}). His love for what is good necessitates an abhorrence of evil. There is compromise between the two.

If we are granted any sense of the righteousness of God, we are all like the religious leaders ready to stone the adulteress, but who then drop our rocks when Jesus tells us that if we are without sin, we can cast the first stone (John 8:7^x). We are like the rich young ruler who when asked to sell all he had and give to the poor realized he coveted wealth and went away sad (Matthew 19:21,22^{xi}). It was his idol. He had another god than YHWH. But the legalists believed that at least their good works made them closer to being accepted by God. There is a word for that: pride, which is itself sinful!

In our culture the grudge against the Bible comes from those who insist that God is love and there are a million ways to get to Him. They abhor the narrow nature of Christ alone and final judgment. It is the opposite of Paul's opponents who wanted the way to be narrower. Today's culture wants the way to so broad it accepts anything.

Is faith in Christ's sacrifice enough? Is it too narrow? Paul tells us it is wide enough for all, but faith in Jesus is required (Ephesians 2:8,9^{xii}). It is wide enough for all in that Christ died for all who will receive Him (Romans 3:22^{xiii}). It is narrow in that it requires us to humble ourselves and realize it is only what Jesus did on our behalf that can save us. Only *His* righteousness is acceptable to God, and it is ours only by His gracious gift.

Those who taught against Paul's doctrine of faith alone were very persuasive. After all, Paul was kind of a renegade. He had persecuted the church. He was not one of the original twelve and had probably never seen Jesus preach. **Merit through works is appealing to our old nature.** We would like to think we can be good enough for God. Depending on religious routines is much easier than a moment by moment heart relationship. That is why Islam is flourishing. "Do the five pillars and you can probably get to heaven," they say. This persuasive resistance to the gospel of grace is one reason Paul is so firm in the way he addresses the situation in this letter.

Jerome once said that when he read the letters of the apostle Paul he could hear thunder. Nowhere in the Pauline corpus is such stormy dissonance more evident than in the Epistle to the Galatians.^{xiv} It is the fieriest of his letters.

Most of his letters start with some complimentary words or thanks to the recipients. This letter is unique in that after the greeting it gets right to the issue. Paul and Barnabas had planted the churches of the southern Galatia region now known as Turkey on Paul's first missionary journey. There is a lot of debate about when it was written. I am of the opinion that it was written AD 42 to 46, around the time of the first Jerusalem council meeting with Paul that we read about in Acts 15.

¹ Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— Galatians 1:1 Paul knew what Jesus taught the disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and ordained you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last" John 15:16. Paul was on his way to persecute Christians when God called him to be an apostle around AD 33 to 35, just a few short years after Jesus ascended. His miraculous experience of conversion was the reason he could emphasize that he was called by God and not from man.

Was Paul hinting by these words that the apostles' choice of Matthias was "chosen by men" (Acts 1:26^{xv})? Jesus did tell the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the power from on high (Acts 1:8^{xvi}). Instead of waiting, Peter went ahead and led the disciples to pick

another apostle to take Judas' place. I was of the opinion that was the case, and only recently found a commentator that held the same opinion, but that is just what it is, an opinion.^{xvii} We are however certain of the apostleship of Paul (Acts 9:15^{xviii}). The question remains, who actually took the place of Judas as one of the twelve?

The false teachers had apparently downplayed Paul's role and contradicted his teaching. Paul's declaration that his apostleship is directly from Jesus and God the Father is asserting his place as a legitimate apostle on par with the eleven who were originally chosen by Jesus (Luke 6:13^{xix}). These false teachers, who he refers to as "super-apostles" knew Scripture and were persuasive, but they were self-ordained, not called by Jesus and the Father.

Paul's conversion was an unexpected supernatural rebirth. He writes that it was as if he was born late (1 Corinthians 15:8^{xx}). That turnaround from persecutor to evangelist was a powerful witness to Jews of that time and even hard for the church to believe. Barnabas had to be the go between to testify that Paul's conversion was genuine and not a trick (Acts 9:27^{xxi}). It is a testimony today to the skeptics. Many have tried to explain away Paul's radical conversion, but their arguments are unconvincing.

We first read of Paul and Barnabas establishing the churches in Galatia in Acts 16. Then in Acts 18 he returned to the region to strengthen the disciples there. Sometime after his first or second visit, Paul received word that the Galatians had been influenced by the legalistic false teachers often referred to as Judaizers. These were teachers who insisted that Christians needed to become Jews and follow the Jewish laws to be fully accepted by God. The Galatians swallowed that teaching hook, line, and sinker. They set aside the wonder of grace and turned to the law. This took place about twenty to twenty-five years after Jesus' ascended.

Adding required works to what Jesus did for us is all too common today. You aren't a real Christian unless you ____ . Fill in the blank. You might put in street witnessing, tithing, attend a Bible study, volunteer at a soup kitchen, or any number of good things. It is a very difficult issue because faith results in a change of life and good works will follow (James 2:17^{xxii}). But good works do not earn you merit with God. **The seduction of the law for the Galatians and for us is that obeying legal demands is so much easier than having our own relationship with God.** That is one reason cults can be so successful. The leaders say, "Just follow me and I'll tell you what God is asking of you. All you have to do is obey me." They are false shepherds. Sheep look for shepherds.

Look at the relationship of marriage. Wouldn't marriage be easy if all you had to do was obey a few rules? Men, what if your wife said, "Husband, earn a good living, vacuum once a week, help with the dishes three times a week, and play with the children for half an hour on weekdays and an hour on Saturday and Sunday and I will be totally satisfied with you. Or what if the husband made a similar list for his wife? That's not a relationship. That is an arrangement of convenience. It is the cold, impersonal letter of the law. Sometimes that is what we ask of God. Just tell me what to do Lord! But He has. He asks for our love (Deuteronomy 6:5^{xxiii}). He wants us to receive His love. Out of that love relationship we act in love.

Your good works or rules may be acted on with good intentions, but how wrong our good intentions can be! Having been called in such a radical manner, Paul knew he could not trust himself, but needed to always look to the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:7^{xxiv}). He needed resurrection life to do the impossible task of officially representing the One whom

he had been persecuting (2 Corinthians 12:9^{xxv}). God raised Jesus from death, and He can apply that same power to raise us from our spiritually dead condition and give us life in Him (Ephesians 1:19,20^{xxvi}). It is essential that we realize that *His grace* reached out to us and chose us (John 15:16^{xxvii}). Just as our salvation was dependent completely on God, so our service to Him must be completely dependent on His resurrection life in us.

The churches of Galatia had been visited by false apostles who challenged Paul's authority and his teaching that salvation is by grace alone. These false teachers were trying to get Gentile converts to rely on keeping the Laws of Moses to be saved. In doing so they thought they could fit in with both the Jewish and Christian communities and thereby avoid persecution from their fellow Jews (Galatians 6:12^{xxviii}). I imagine many of them were Pharisees who had joined the Christian community.

Paul answered their challenge by reminding the Galatians that Jesus called him on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:16^{xxix}). An apostle is the appointed representative of someone with authority. More than a messenger, it is one who has the authority to represent the one who sent them. Paul was appointed by Jesus just as the other apostles were. The only difference is that it was after the ascension that Jesus appeared to him and appointed him. That is just as official and authoritative as when Jesus appointed the others on the shores of Galilee. They were to be witnesses of the resurrected Lord Jesus (Acts 1:22^{xxx}). Paul's encounter with Jesus enabled him to do the same (1 Corinthians 9:1^{xxxi}). And notice that Paul said his calling was not from man, but from Jesus. That implies that Jesus is more than man. He is divine. That does not mean Jesus was not human, but rather Paul is stating that Jesus is fully God as is the Father.

There is a false doctrine permeating the church today. It comes from liberal theologians who think their insights are so intelligent and fair minded that they can disagree with the apostles Jesus chose. They say things like, "Paul said this or that because of his cultural biases," or "This was his own personal axe to grind, but we are more enlightened today." What they are in fact saying is that God made a mistake in appointing Paul. It implies God was not able to watch over the development of the Scriptures. That makes us the apostles who pick and choose according to our likes and personal preferences or subjective opinions. This is why we have so many cafeteria Christians. They want a helping of this passage and that passage and they pass on the rest. They want the desert but no meat or vegetables, thank you! If some teaching of Scripture offends people, they just reject it, so that they won't be rejected by the world. Jesus declared that nothing from God's Word would pass away (Mark 13:31^{xxxii}). If we have trouble with a passage, the problem is not the Word. It is our hearts. Pray and see what God is showing you, and if needed, ask someone to explain the passage to you.

An apostle speaks in the place of the One who sent him. He spoke and wrote with the authority of Jesus! Paul is careful to point out when he is giving his own opinion (1 Corinthians 7:12^{xxxiii}). Peter even declares Paul's letters to be Scripture (2 Peter 3:15,16^{xxxiv}). That is why we decided to put "Bible" in the name of our church. It says we believe it is all the inspired Word of God. If you don't believe it is, then in effect you make the entire book questionable and of no value to transform your life.

Paul preaches the gospel in the very first verse only in this letter, by saying he was called by the One who raised Jesus from the dead. In a later letter Paul declares that Jesus was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25^{xxxv}), in other words, the resurrection proves His sacrifice was accepted by God as payment for our sins. If that is the case, why were

the false teachers insisting that a person must be circumcised and keep the laws of Moses? What right does anyone have to tell you a certain act can add to what Jesus did on the cross? **Salvation is by faith in Jesus plus nothing! He paid it all.**

The person named Jesus of Nazareth who ministered with the disciples for three and a half years was more than a rabbi, a guru, a great teacher or philosopher. God was manifest in human form (Hebrews 1:3^{xxxvi}). That puts His words and calling on a whole different level from that of man. **What Jesus said is infinitely more authoritative than what any human has ever said.** Jesus told the Jews that they should listen to Him because He is from above (John 3:13^{xxxvii}; 8:23^{xxxviii}). He is the only man worthy of worship.

In this first verse of Galatians, Paul has emphasized his authority from God to represent Jesus. In the way he has worded this verse, we can see that Jesus is more than man. He is not a highly evolved man, or a person who after lifetimes attained a more enlightened state of being. He was miraculously conceived, born without a sin nature, lived the only sinless life, and died in our place to satisfy the justice of God. He did that because He came to seek a bride, and to be His bride she needed to be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:26,27^{xxxix}). That is what the miraculous work on the cross would bring about (1 John 3:8,9^{xl}).

If you are in Christ, you are on your way to becoming that beautiful bride. Paul wrote this letter to see that those who made up the bride in Galatia did not become sullied by thinking that keeping the law added anything to what Christ has done for us. He did not want to see the work of the Spirit done through him reversed because of false teaching. **Jesus and just Jesus was his message.** He did not want them sidetracked depending on religious routines. Fix your eyes on the groom and His great love for you. Only then will we participate with Him in the good works led by the Spirit that He planned in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10^{xli}).

Satan is referred to as the Accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10^{xlii}). We have enough struggle recognizing that when we stumble the grace given to us through the cross has covered all our sins. Imagine adding to that a belief that God would not accept us if we didn't keep the 613 laws of Moses perfectly! What a burden! Grace is Paul's gospel. It is not a gospel to do as you please, but rather it is the good news that Jesus paid it all. The grace of God motivates and empowers us to passionately want to walk in the Spirit and live a life that glorifies the One who is so abundantly gracious to us.

Questions:

- 1 What is so special about the Bible?
- 2 How is the gospel narrow? Broad?
- 3 Who called Paul to be an apostle?
- 4 What were the false teachers teaching?
- 5 How does that false teaching sneak in today?
- 6 Why is rule oriented belief seductive?
- 7 What is a cafeteria style Christian?
- 8 How does the first verse declare Jesus as divine?
- 9 Why is that important?
- 10 What did Jesus come to do?

ⁱ **1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

ⁱⁱ Wilson, T. (2013). *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*. (R. K. Hughes, Ed.) (p. 22). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Matthew 24:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

^{iv} **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

^v **Romans 4:3 (ESV)**

³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

^{vi} **James 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

^{vii} **Galatians 3:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

^{viii} **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

^{ix} **Psalms 14:3 (ESV)**

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^x **John 8:7 (ESV)**

⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”

^{xi} **Matthew 19:21-22 (ESV)**

²¹ Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

^{xii} **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

^{xiii} **Romans 3:22 (ESV)**

²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

^{xiv} NAC

^{xv} **Acts 1:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

^{xvi} **Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

^{xvii} A. J. J. Cachemaille

^{xviii} **Acts 9:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

^{xix} **Luke 6:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:

^{xx} **1 Corinthians 15:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

^{xxi} **Acts 9:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

^{xxii} **James 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

^{xxiii} **Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)**

⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

^{xxiv} **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

^{xxv} **2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

^{xxvi} **Ephesians 1:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

^{xxvii} **John 15:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

^{xxviii} **Galatians 6:12 (ESV)**

¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

^{xxix} **Acts 26:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,

^{xxx} **Acts 1:22 (ESV)**

²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

^{xxxi} **1 Corinthians 9:1 (ESV)**

¹ Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?

^{xxxii} **Mark 13:31 (ESV)**

³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

^{xxxiii} **1 Corinthians 7:12 (ESV)**

¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

^{xxxiv} **2 Peter 3:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

^{xxxv} **Romans 4:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

^{xxxvi} **Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)**

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

^{xxxvii} **John 3:13 (ESV)**

¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

^{xxxviii} **John 8:23 (ESV)**

²³ He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

^{xxxix} **Ephesians 5:26-27 (ESV)**

²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

^{xl} **1 John 3:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

^{xli} **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

^{xlii} **Revelation 12:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.