

In the previous passage in Galatians, the Apostle Paul expressed his bewilderment at how eagerly they received Paul and his message of grace, but now were accepting a totally different teaching from these Jewish Christians who flattered them. Would obedience to the Jewish laws cause God to love them any more than He already did? Did the sacrifice of Jesus need anything added to it to make them more acceptable to God? Do we, today, realize that Jesus' sacrifice has made us righteous in the sight of God while at the same time we are being sanctified? Listen to how the author of Hebrews expressed this wonderful truth. <sup>14</sup> *For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.* Hebrews 10:14 In Christ we are perfected for all time! Realizing this truth doesn't cause us to be lax toward sin. On the contrary, it causes us to desire to live holy lives, or as Paul wrote in another letter, "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12<sup>i</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.* Galatians 5:1 In the previous chapter Paul taught that all who are in Jesus are sons of promise, like Isaac was. Jesus' truth has given us freedom from the demands of the law, but not from moral boundaries to do as we please. It is freedom from bondage to sin and the accompanying guilt. We are to present our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1<sup>ii</sup>), as slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:13<sup>iii</sup>)! We are free to serve Jesus by the Spirit rather than ritual and rules. To try to keep the Jewish ceremonial and civil rules is to go back into the yoke of slavery. *Paul's emphasis here, is not so much to set our will free from the bondage of sin as to set our conscience free from the guilt of sin. It is the freedom of acceptance with God and of access to God through Christ.*<sup>iv</sup>

We should therefore be standing firm in that freedom. We should be continually rejoicing in the fact that our sin debt is paid in full (John 19:30<sup>v</sup>). We should be careful not to fall back into the idea that we must win God's favor by our own efforts to follow rules or methods. At the same time, our heart does desire to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and watch the Lord work through us. It is the easy yoke, not the hard yoke of the law and condemnation for failure (Matthew 11:30<sup>vi</sup>). It is a place of resting in the Lord, not striving to keep commands (Psalm 37:4-7a<sup>vii</sup>).

Imagine a soldier who was trying to gain rank in the military. Suddenly, one day he is elected as President, Commander and Chief. The responsibility is greater and the opportunities to serve are exponentially increased. Would he then go back and try to obey an officer to strive for promotion? Brothers and sisters in Christ you can have no higher rank. The Lord of the Universe is working in and through you. Stand firm in Christ and His Word and don't let someone intimidate you by telling you that you aren't obeying some command or method that you were once under as a foot soldier. It is as simple as this: *Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh!* Galatians 5:16

I met a Japanese man while in college with whom I became a close friend. After he returned to Japan, he gave his life to Christ. He was amazed that the Lord opened the door to work for the Sony Corporation as there were hundreds of applicants and only a few were chosen. At first, he was sent to various countries and was more like a slave to the company. Then he was moved up and up until he worked with the President of the company handling the public relations for Sony Corporation in North America. He has

retired now and is a consultant and serves in his local church. Do you think he will now listen to some little executive in Indonesia telling him he needs to get back to work if he wants to get anywhere in the company? That is like the law telling us we are not free, that Jesus hasn't really done everything to make us right with God. You are working with the President of Creation! Stand firm in the freedom He has given you (Ephesians 6:13<sup>viii</sup>). Let Him be in you all He has called you to be (Philippians 3:14<sup>ix</sup>).

*<sup>2</sup> Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.* Galatians 5:2 If you choose works as a means to please God, then Jesus' sacrificial death means nothing to you. Your works cannot add to His death. Works don't remove sin. Choosing Jesus means you realize you can't please God on your own or by obeying rules and that you desperately need a Savior, not another rule. Like Paul in Romans 7, we can try on our own to please God, but we will fail (Romans 7:8-10<sup>x</sup>). Nor can we add to what Christ has done regarding salvation. His work on the cross was sufficient for the salvation of all who come to Him in faith, but it is meaningless to those who insist their own efforts should be good enough for God. It is being shortsighted of the holiness of God (Isaiah 6:3<sup>xi</sup>). It is conforming God to their idea of goodness, which is infinitely less than His nature.

Why did Paul make such a big issue of this minor surgery called circumcision? Because it was saying Jesus didn't do enough, and that we need to add to His accomplishment on the cross. "I can help God out." Ha! What self-deception!

*<sup>3</sup> I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.* Galatians 5:3,4 If you go back to trying to keep the laws God gave through Moses as a means of being right with God, then you have rejected the grace offered to you through Jesus' death on the cross. Then you must keep every law, and that was only ever done by Jesus. In other words, you would be trying to live a life as righteous as Jesus. If you fall short in any way, you fail and are under a curse (3:10<sup>xii</sup>). Why would anyone reject what Jesus has done for us? It is in Him we live by the Spirit of the law rather than the letter (5:14<sup>xiii</sup>, 16<sup>xiv</sup>; 6:2<sup>xv</sup>).

Paul's three warnings in verses two to four couldn't be more severe. If you rely on the law to be right with God, Christ will be of no advantage to you. You are severed from Christ, and you have fallen from grace. In other words, if you want to be circumcised to be justified by the law, you will find yourself separated from the salvation that is in Christ alone. Everyone must choose. You can ignore God. You can try on your own to please God (which is the way of most if not all religions), or you can trust in Christ and what He did for us and receive it by grace alone through faith alone.

*<sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.* Galatians 5:5 By faith we (notice the change from "you" to "we") look to the deposit of the Spirit and eagerly wait for God to finish the work He began in us (Philippians 1:6<sup>xvi</sup>). That is our hope. We are positionally righteous now, which means God counts us as righteous (Galatians 2:16<sup>xvii</sup>; 3:22<sup>xviii</sup>). But in our daily experience, we are waiting and expecting God to do what we cannot do by conforming us completely to the likeness of Jesus (1 John 3:1,2<sup>xix</sup>).

That is why heaven will be so wonderful. Everyone will have their unique personality, but they will also have the very nature of Jesus expressed in all they do. It is one thing to hope for our own lives to be perfected, but to know everyone else we are

with will also be like Jesus makes it even more wonderful. But even more than that, the very presence of Jesus will be among us (Revelation 7:17<sup>xx</sup>).

*<sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.* Galatians 6:6 Here is Paul's conclusion to the matter. Circumcision, or any law or ritual for that matter, does not amount to anything at all. What counts for eternity is faith working through love! That is it! Pretty simple, but deeply profound. **Faith expresses itself through the love we have for God and one another.** Is that what ultimately counts to you?

God is pleased with faith (Hebrews 11:6<sup>xxi</sup>), and the first fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22<sup>xxii</sup>). Expressing faith is to express love to God and our fellow man. That is why Jesus said it was the Great Commandment that takes the place of all the others (Matthew 22:37-40<sup>xxiii</sup>). We don't work to be perfect or acceptable to God, we wait for Him to finish what He started and what He alone can do. **Final glorification in heaven is as free a gift as our initial justification.**<sup>xxiv</sup> But faith can express itself in love through you now. That is how we lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21<sup>xxv</sup>). That is part of our eager expectation: to be utterly righteous that we might kneel before the glorified Christ and lay our rewards at His feet. Are you living with that expectation as you go through your daily life? How different from the long-faced legalists striving to please God by their obedience to the law! **Our joy is abundant, our posture is at rest in Christ, and our hope is certain.**

When we stand before God He won't care if we are Jew or Greek or circumcised or not or what church we attended. He won't ask you how many souls you witnessed to, or how many times you read the Bible. Of course, you will want to do some of those things. But in the end, all that will matter is that our faith is expressed in love for Him and others. That is the evidence that our faith is genuine. Many of the stories of life after death experiences recount a review of one's life with an emphasis on when they were loving and self-sacrificial as opposed to when they were selfish. Since we have the accounts, they were not ready to die and were revived. Most of these people had a dramatic turnaround, for they realized the truth of this verse. All that counts for anything is faith working through love. Let us take hold of that truth.

This does not mean that we live as we did before we were born again. Verses 22 and 23 of this chapter describe the product of the Spirit in us, the working of faith through love. Because God is love, the life of the Spirit in us will be expressed in love. Love expresses itself in generosity, in preferring others needs to our own, in correcting others for their good, and in pointing others to Jesus, the source of the love in us.

When we realize the truth of this verse, we lay down our denominational elitism, our insistence on minor doctrines, our demands that ceremony be done one way or the other. And what you will see is a greater sense of unity, of brotherhood, for we are focused on the main thing. We can allow the differences to not disturb us or cause us to reject others who express faith working through love.

Instead of the word circumcision in this verse you could put in any legalistic demand. The day we worship, the type of music, the time of the rapture, when and how the Holy Spirit fills a life, whether or not one can lose their salvation, or anything we too often argue about. When you stand before God, I can guarantee you He will not ask you if you prefer hymns or contemporary music, or if you are a Calvinist or Armenian, Catholic or Baptist, Pre or post-triber, etc. Either He has a relationship with you, or He

doesn't (Matthew 7:23<sup>xxvi</sup>; John 17:3<sup>xxvii</sup>). That means either you are in relationship with Him, or you aren't. Your faith has been demonstrated by your actions or it has not (James 2:17<sup>xxviii</sup>). That alone will decide whether you are on the right or the left, because it is evidence of a relationship with Jesus.

*<sup>7</sup>You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup>This persuasion is not from him who calls you.* Galatians 5:7,8 They were on track, growing in grace and demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit, running the race as if they meant to win. But then an outside influence came in and sowed a seed of doubt implying that works also were required to please God.

*"run well' in the Christian race is not just to believe the truth (as if Christianity were nothing but orthodoxy), nor just to behave well (as if it were just moral uprightness), but to 'obey the truth', applying belief to behavior."*<sup>xxix</sup> And I would add that we must run well - to the end. We all have seen the enthusiastic new believer's zeal. Perhaps we remember it in our own experience. Where is it now? Did we settle for a slow trot or even a casual walk? What hindered us (Matthew 13:20,21<sup>xxx</sup>)?

I believe those who hindered the Galatians were "Christian" Jews who thought they were helping these Gentile believers. But in fact, they had sown doubt in the all-sufficient work of Jesus on the cross. The Holy Spirit called the Galatians to faith in Jesus. This doubt that was sown was not from Him! It was not conviction of the Holy Spirit, but rather the condemnation of man. The Judaizers told them, "What! You are not obeying what God told Moses! Then you are not obeying God!"

What God asked of the nation of Israel was a standard of living that set them apart from the world with a unique culture blessed of God so that the world could see that their God was the true God. But it was only meant for a time until the Messiah came whose sacrifice would open the way for the Holy Spirit to put the law in the hearts of all who receive Him, just as the prophets predicted (Jeremiah 31:31-33<sup>xxxi</sup>). Since He came, it is seen in the way in which we respond to everything that sets us apart and draws others to our God. That is what the Judaizers couldn't understand. They relied on works, never realizing they couldn't keep all the laws. They were like the Rich Young Ruler who said with some doubt, "All these have I kept from my youth up." At least he realized he was missing something, or he wouldn't have asked Jesus what it was (Luke 18:18<sup>xxxii</sup>).

*<sup>9</sup>A little leaven leavens the whole lump.* Galatians 5:9 Leaven is an analogy for sin. Here it is referring to the cross, *plus* relying on obedience to the law to please God. Paul's life shows that it is fine for Jews to obey the law as long as they don't count on it for salvation. The false teaching of the need for Gentile converts to be circumcised was spreading throughout the Gentile church. There are attempts today from Jewish believers in Yeshua to have Gentiles obey laws like the Sabbath. Paul addresses that in Romans 14 (Romans 14:5,6<sup>xxxiii</sup>). If you want to observe the Sabbath while realizing that it adds nothing to the work of the cross, that is fine. But it can send a mixed message to any Gentile who observes or hears of you religiously doing so. Is salvation by works or grace? Did Jesus save us because we tried hard to keep the law? Or did He save you because He fulfilled the law for you and took all your sins upon Himself? That means you are free to worship in Spirit and truth in whatever manner the Holy Spirit leads you, whenever, wherever, or all the time (John 4:23<sup>xxxiv</sup>). That is obeying the truth.

*<sup>10</sup>I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.* Galatians 6:10 This false teacher

who sowed the doubt must answer to God. That is a warning for all who teach in the church. We are accountable to God to teach only the truth of God's full counsel (James 3:1<sup>xxxv</sup>). Paul had confidence in the Lord that they would see the truth of what he was saying and abandon the false teaching that was hindering them from running the race.

Sometimes we take on our own unnecessary weights: lust of the eyes, pride of life, unforgiveness, covetousness and the like. It slows us and can even pull us off the track of the gospel. We are told to lay these extra weights aside and run with endurance (Hebrews 12:1<sup>xxxvi</sup>). The same is true with false teaching that gets us to slow our pace or even pull us out of bounds. We must escape their influence and live in the freedom of obedience to the Spirit. By referring to leaven, Paul was implying that they had to expel the Judaizers from their midst (1 Corinthians 5:6,7<sup>xxxvii</sup>). Sin in our lives whether from internal or external must be dealt with if we are to finish strong, or even finish at all.

*<sup>11</sup> But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.* Galatians 5:11 If Paul would just add the law to the message of the cross and Jesus as Messiah, the Jews would leave him alone. They would still consider the Way as a branch of Judaism that was converting Gentiles. Rome would leave them alone. Paul would save himself a lot of persecution if he would just compromise the message. So would we. But we must answer to God.

Salvation in the cross alone humbles us by telling us we can't do it and we desperately need a Savior. That message is often rejected by man because we are prideful. It invites persecution because it declares that without Jesus all are hopeless. The more we pursue Christ the more the world will try to hinder us. Persecution is to be expected. It invites God to empower us. Only in His power can we run all out to the end (1 Corinthians 15:58<sup>xxxviii</sup>; 1Thessalonians 5:24<sup>xxxix</sup>). His grace is enough for us. We rest in His grace while giving ourselves completely to this race. It sounds contradictory, but Jesus' life shows the two can and should go hand in hand (Philippians 2:13<sup>xl</sup>).

*<sup>12</sup> I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!* Galatians 5:12 In other words to stop trying to reproduce their doctrine that combines grace and works. Those who don't like Paul point out this verse. It is allegorical and somewhat humorous. If these have such pride in their circumcision, it would be better for them to become eunuchs so that they trust totally in grace. Critics say this is an example of Paul's mean spirit. We should all have such a passion to see the truth preserved that we are just as angry with teaching that leads people away from trusting in the finished work of Jesus!

Questions:

- 1 To what freedom are we called?
- 2 Discuss the analogies and application.
- 3 Why was Paul so opposed to them being circumcised?
- 4 Can the law add to our righteousness? Why or why not?
- 5 Why are we waiting for righteousness?
- 6 What does count? Why?
- 7 What are some things God won't ask us when we get to heaven?
- 8 What does it take to run well?
- 9 What does verse 9 mean? Application?
- 10 What must we rid ourselves of?

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<sup>i</sup> **Philippians 2:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

<sup>ii</sup> **Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>iii</sup> **Romans 6:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

<sup>iv</sup> The Bible Speaks Today - The Message of Galatians: Only One Way.

<sup>v</sup> **John 19:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

<sup>vi</sup> **Matthew 11:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

<sup>vii</sup> **Psalms 37:4-7a (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. <sup>6</sup> He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. <sup>7</sup> Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;

<sup>viii</sup> **Ephesians 6:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

<sup>ix</sup> **Philippians 3:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>x</sup> **Romans 7:8-10 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. <sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. <sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

<sup>xi</sup> **Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

<sup>xii</sup> **Galatians 3:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> 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."

<sup>xiii</sup> **Galatians 5:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

<sup>xiv</sup> **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

<sup>xv</sup> **Galatians 6:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Galatians 2:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Galatians 3:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

<sup>xix</sup> **1 John 3:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

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<sup>xx</sup> **Revelation 7:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

<sup>xxi</sup> **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

<sup>xxiv</sup> The Bible Speaks Today – The Message of Galatians: Only One Way

<sup>xxv</sup> **Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Matthew 7:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

<sup>xxvii</sup> **John 17:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **James 2:17 (ESV)**

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

<sup>xxix</sup> The Bible Speaks Today – The Message of Galatians: Only One Way

<sup>xxx</sup> **Matthew 13:20-21 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

<sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Luke 18:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **Romans 14:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **John 4:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

<sup>xxxv</sup> **James 3:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> **Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

<sup>xxxvii</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

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xxxviii **1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)**

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

xxxix **1 Thessalonians 5:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

xi **Philippians 2:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.