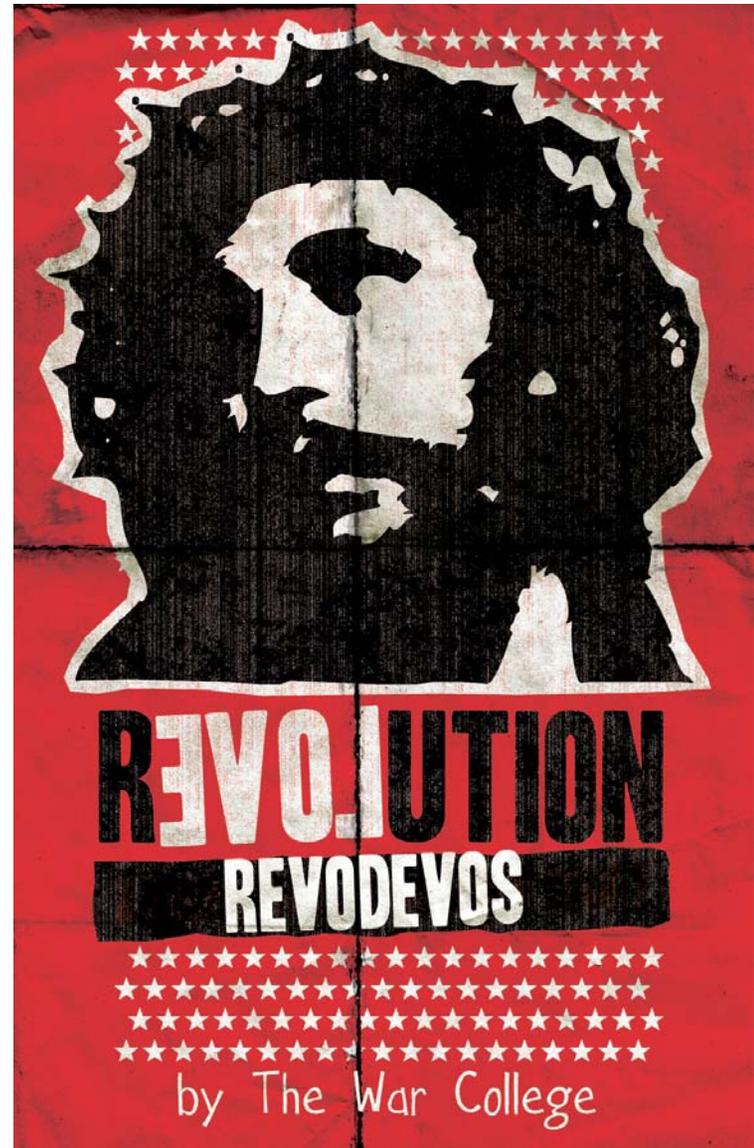


NOIUTJOLVER



Galatians 1:1-5

Who sends you?

It may be more important a question than you think.

Paul had lots of friends in high positions in the church, lots of people who could, and did, influence his decisions. But they did not send him. Paul was a wise man, gifted with the knowledge and wisdom that come straight from God. But he did not send himself. Paul and the apostles in all their giftedness, passion and knowledge—casting out demons, healing the sick and preaching the gospel—still lacked the authority to send. Think about it: these men were given AUTHORITY to go out and preach, heal and deliver! Mountains melted before these powerhouses, prison doors were opened, blind received sight, men died, demons fled! But still, they could not send.

In fact, glancing at the Bible we see that the word “send” is used mostly to reference God sending people, angels, spirits, wonders, His Son, etc. Sending is something that a lord, a king, or a person in high authority does. When Paul recognizes that it is God who sends, he recognizes God as the highest power. When the apostles went out to heal, preach, and proclaim they didn’t go because they knew they could do miracles— they went because they knew God could do miracles, and that He had sent them to do miracles.

That’s why they had authority. That’s why they had boldness—because they knew that God went with them, that God had sent them. Jesus refers to Himself many times as one sent by God the Father. “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” (John 8:29) Even Jesus knew His authority, because He had been sent.

If God sends you, if you hear His voice telling you to go somewhere, then you can go there knowing that He goes with you! “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.” (John 12:26a) If we call ourselves servants of God, we go where God calls us. He does not send us alone. In fact when He sends us somewhere, we can be certain that He goes before us—that He is already there— where He is, His servants are as well. “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” (John 17:18)

Moses held a very good response to God when he and the Israelites were sent to the Promised Land: “Then Moses said to Him, “If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that You are pleased with me and with Your people unless You go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth,” And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.” (Exodus 33:15 – 17) Moses knew what God had power to do when He sends people: He parted the red sea and called water forth from rocks! He knew that without God they, they would look like fools, but if God would be present with the Israelites in their endeavours, the world would know that they children of God.

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The End

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Q: What can you learn about Yahweh, knowing that He is the God who sends? What can you learn about yourself, knowing that you are sent by God? Ask Jesus to tell you something or somewhere that He wants to send you to. What will your response be?

Galatians 1: 6-10

No Other Gospel

Paul seems hurt, and almost angry, that the Galatians forgot so quickly what their purpose in life was. He had been with them when the Spirit was poured out upon these people, and after just a short period of time they started to turn away from the true gospel. The Galatians seemed like they were collapsing under peer pressure because they heard something that sounded better to them than what Paul had to say. Or maybe this wasn't the case at all. Maybe the Galatians were just confused by what other supposed Christians were telling them.

This is where we need to be very careful to discern truth from lies. We need to make sure that when people are giving us messages that they really are from God and not from false prophets. My advice on this is to pray and ask God to give us eyes to see only Him. When we know what He looks like, we will also know what He doesn't look like and that will make it easier to know truth. Paul warns us about others preaching a false gospel—and he even goes as far as saying, in verse eight, that they should be eternally condemned.

Have you ever felt pressured to do something? Maybe you've felt this pressure from your parents, friends, a teacher or coach of some sort. Did you have the feeling that you wanted to do it because they asked you to, but you didn't feel like that was what God was saying to do? Don't forget that we are here on earth to do what God wants no matter what other people say. God is our first focus, and we need to be careful that our vision of what He wants doesn't get clouded by what others want, or what we want.

God knows what is best. He knows what is in store for us. Though sometimes that means that we have to do something other than what is popular, He will take care of us and make our lives prosperous. Paul clearly states, in verse ten, that in order to be servants of Christ, we have to please only Him. This means we are not to try and please friends, but do only what God wants us to do. By doing His will, we will be pleasing Him and that is what Paul has taught us.

Q: Do you feel that Paul's astonishment was rooted in his disappointment in the Christians falling away from Christ so quickly? Why do you think Paul was so passionate that he says that even if an angel from Heaven should preach a gospel, other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned? I leave you with a question that Paul has already asked— in what you are doing, are you trying to please people, or God?

Galatians 1:11-24

Here we have this guy, Paul, who has spent his life working to building himself up—being the best Jew, doing everything right. He devoted his whole life to Judaism. He would do anything for it, even commit murder! This was his life; this was what he put everything he had into. And it paid off! Paul was thought of very highly, because he was zealous for tradition and advanced beyond his years.

However, all this paled in comparison to a revelation of Jesus. When God revealed His Son to Paul, everything else faded away. It didn't matter how advanced he was in Judaism, or how zealous he was for tradition, or even how highly respected he was. When compared to God— all of this stuff didn't stand a chance. It wasn't about what other people thought, or his reputation anymore. We are told that he didn't consult any man. Now it was completely about God. Paul had tasted worldly success and fame. He had spent years earning respect and favour. But in one moment— that was gone! Years of fame, success and power couldn't even compare to one moment with God. Everything that Paul had spent years investing in, everything that he had once thought, didn't matter anymore. It was now irrelevant.

As I thought about Paul, and the revelation he had, this song came to my mind:

"All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this
Knowing You, Jesus, knowing You,
there is no greater thing..."

From the moment that Paul encountered God, he turned away from his old life and never went back. We are told that God, who set Paul apart from birth, and called Him by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to him so that he might preach amongst the Gentiles. So, our God—who is so mighty, powerful, awesome, good, and beautiful, that nothing else compares with Him— loves each one of us individually and has a specific purpose for us. Even if the only thing that anyone else saw was a zealous Jew, a religious man, a power hungry guy, or even a murderer, God saw something more. Even when Paul was persecuting Christians, God already had a divine purpose for him—God had already set Paul apart. He was called by God's grace. He certainly hadn't done anything to deserve it. It was all by God's grace. No matter what you work at or build up, no matter what you gain or achieve, it cannot compare to our Lord God. And no matter the sins you have committed, no matter the mistakes you make, they can never be too great for God's grace to cover.

Q: Is there anything in your life that you are holding above God? When Paul chose to follow Jesus Christ, he completely turned away from his old life. Is there anything in your life that you still need to turn away from? Take a few minutes to reflect on God's character, thinking about what we gain when we choose God instead of fame and success.

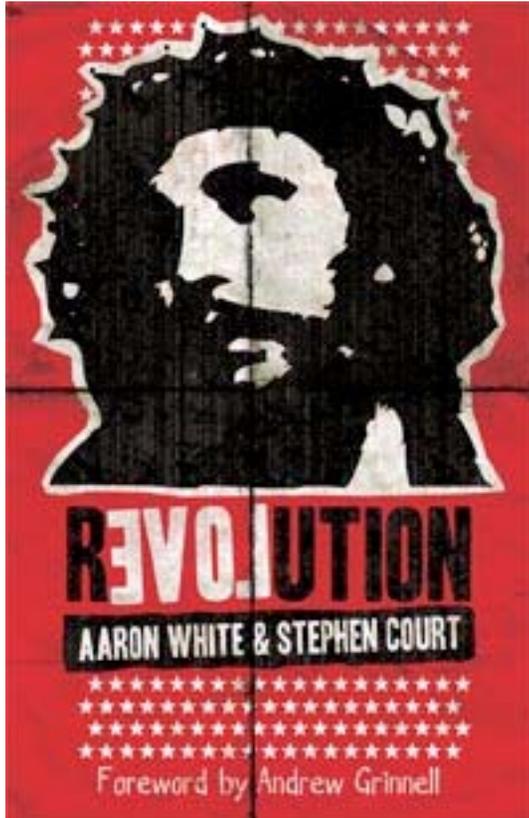
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Galatians 2:1-5

Have you ever wondered if you were on the right track, or if you were running in vain? Paul did.

17 years after Paul's encounter with God on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:7, Galatians 1:18, 2:1) he went to Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish church leaders located there. As Paul said in Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." The leaders he wanted to meet with were the leaders of the Jewish people—but Paul had been preaching to the Gentiles.

Recently there had been some opposition by some of the Jewish believers. They thought the new Gentile believers should follow the Jewish cultural practices. Because of this pressure on the new Gentile believers, Paul wanted to meet with the church leaders in Jerusalem to discuss these suggested requirements.

Paul's preaching focused on the freedom we have in Christ—he had not been placing importance on the cultural practices of other believers. Paul wanted to protect believers from unnecessary rules and restrictions. Instead, he wanted to have them focus on the sacrifice that Jesus had made for them on the cross and the freedom from sin that Jesus made possible for us.

Although the meeting was necessary, Paul was somewhat hesitant to meet with these Jewish leaders, not knowing how they would respond. As he said, 'for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain' (Galatians 2:2b). Because of the potential for this to become a controversial public issue that could stir up racial/ethnic tensions and damage his current ministry, Paul chose to meet with the leaders in private. He was not interested in causing further problems he just wanted to get a clearer understanding of where they were coming from and present his point of view.

When you have disagreements with leadership, or any other believers, it may seem easier for you to simply gossip about how you think they are doing things wrong. It seems easier than building up the courage to meet with them and find out what they really mean. You may find, as I did recently, that words are simply misunderstood and that there was actually nothing to be mad about at all.

Q: When you hear someone has said something about you, do you go directly to that person to find out the truth? I encourage you to do so and not to simply believe what you have heard from others. Have you prayed today for the leaders in your church? Take some time now to bless them and ask the Lord to increase their ministry.

Galatians 2:6-10

Alright, so in this passage we find the ticked off apostle defending his message for the gents. Some hotshots in Galatia were talkin' smack about him and his scoop. They had the idea in there silly noggins that Paul was merely trying to please men and that his message was not from God but from men. But Paul takes a direct attack at them in this passage. "As for the big shots, It doesn't matter who they are, where they come from or who their daddy is, God doesn't care about all that, this stuff's the truth, and here I'll prove it. I've got Jesus' right hand men granting me the liberty of preaching this to the non-Jews, just as they had the liberty from God to preach it to the Jews. As long as I remember the poor, of course, and that's no prob, I got them in the back of my mind all the time."

Now, it's important to realize that Paul isn't defending himself in this passage, he's defending the Gospel. He didn't take what anyone was saying about him personally. He was more offended by the fact that the Galatians doubted the gospel and less about what they had to say about him. So ask yourself—

Q: When you preach, who are you speaking for? Is it you or God? Do you express your own thoughts and feelings or do you express the Heart of God? Are you just trying to please people with an emotional story and enticing words?

It's important to know why it is you're preaching what you're preaching. To know if your message is from God or from man. Paul was more than able to back his authority up, and he did it with the truth. His message was not only true but it was justified by Peter, James and John, disciples of Jesus. People who knew him face to face and would know whether or not Paul's message was from Him. It's good to get the okay from your spiritual leaders before you go off prophesying or preaching.

Q: Also, when someone doesn't agree with what you're preaching who do you defend? Do you fight for yourself or your message? Do you take what the person is saying to heart or do you listen to what they are saying and gently, with respect, show them how they might be wrong, by showing them the truth? And if they are right, do you admit that? I'm sure if Paul were wrong on this, which he clearly wasn't, he would be humble enough to admit that to the Galatians.

Not only does this passage show the Galatians the authenticity of Paul's message, but it can also be a lesson to us. I think that we can sometimes discard some of Paul's writings a little too frivolously. I mean, almost everyone's got something to say about his views on marriage. This passage shows us that Paul's apostleship was ordained by God, and that he was given great authority to proclaim God's salvation to the Gentiles. So before disagreeing with Paul, consider what he's saying, pray into it, wrestle with it, lean not on your own understanding, and find out what God says about his writings.

Galatians 6:11-18

Have you ever had the feeling that 'numbers' were more important than individuals? That building up the numbers in your church was more important than building relationships with them and letting them know they are loved and valued just as they are?

That is what was happening in Paul's day. It had become more important to some that people simply follow the rules so they could be counted as believers. However, Paul stated that it was really the inside change that mattered most. "...what counts is a new creation." (Galatians 6:15b) You see, God doesn't care about the outside as much as He cares about the inside. He knows that once the inside is changed, the outside will naturally change as well.

What is your heart like? Do you know how incredibly much God loves YOU just as you are? Do you know that there is absolutely nothing that can change God's love for you? Romans 8:38-39 says "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." He loves you so much, that Jesus came to die for you! He knows everything about you, and yet still He loves you! His plans for you are so wonderful! Jeremiah 29:11 talks about those plans when it says (place your name where it says 'you') "for I know the plans I have for you (your name)," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." God wants only good things for you. Why don't you ask Him about it?

No matter what you have done, or what has been done to you, Jesus loves YOU! He wants you to be happy and free. Romans 3:23 tells us that all of us have done wrong things...and yet He loved us SO much that, even in our sin and filth, Jesus died for us (Romans 5:8). We simply need to confess those wrongs (sins) to Jesus, and not only will He forgive those sins— but He will totally and completely cleanse us from them (1 John 1:9)! What great news! If we believe in Jesus, as John 5:24 says, we WILL have eternal life "and will not be condemned"! Friend, if there is something between you and God, and if you are not experiencing His love and forgiveness, then why not do as Acts 3:19 says— "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord". I pray you will do that today.

Galatians 6:9-10

Have you ever felt like giving up? Maybe playing a game that there was no chance of you winning. Or in school when you just didn't understand the work that was put in front of you. Or maybe when you knew that you were doing the right thing, but some people teased you for it, or tried to make you feel bad. Maybe it's standing up for that outcast person at school who everyone else is teasing, or helping the old lady across the street, despite what your friends say.

Sometimes the world does everything in its power to stop us from doing what is right and to make us feel as though we are doing the wrong thing. Sometimes just wait for us to give up. But God has totally different plans for us.

"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)

Why is it, that the world is so against us doing good? And why is that we give up on doing good? A lot of the time we just want to go with the flow and we don't want to be the cause of any problems amongst friends. And a lot of the time, it simply takes more effort to do the right thing. It takes more effort and more guts to stand up to the bully at school that is teasing the outcast. Also, sometime we can't see the harvest that is on the other side. It's God's timing as to when the harvest comes, and not our own. And normally, we can't see the harvest because we don't know what we're looking for. So, we need to hold onto this promise—the blessings are going to come in God's timing.

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Gal 6:10).

So, in light of this verse, we should be doing good in ALL circumstances. Not just when we 'feel' like it, but in every opportunity that comes our way. Next time we see that poor person walking down the street, or the kid being bullied at school, or someone who is in need, we should help them and do good in the eyes of God, not man.

Q: Has there been any times recently where you knew you were supposed to do something but you chose not to? Is there anyone that you need to apologize to, for not doing the right thing in a particular circumstance? If so, ask God for forgiveness and then ask that person for forgiveness. Is there any area in your life, in regards to doing good, where you need to change? Ask Jesus and if so, write them down and have someone keep you accountable to changing.

Galatians 2:11-16

In this passage, Paul confronts Peter about his hypocritical actions concerning the Gentiles while he was in Antioch. When Peter had first come to Antioch, he was eating with the Gentiles, but when other Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem, he stopped eating with the Gentiles because he feared these men. (They were legalists, who still believed in the requirement of circumcision and the necessity of following the Law.)

While staying in Antioch, Peter gave in to peer-pressure from these legalistic Christians, who believed that Jews should not eat with Gentiles, and began to eat only with other Jews. Peter was not led astray or deceived by these Jews, however. By this point, God had already given him the vision of the "unclean animals" on the sheet, and Peter understood this meant that Gentiles were now considered clean (see Acts 10).

Peter knew that what he was doing was wrong. So, by giving in to this peer pressure, Peter was actually being hypocritical. But his choice didn't affect him alone—his actions were leading other Christians astray. The issue was so important to Paul, that he called Peter on it immediately. It wasn't good enough for Peter to simply understand and accept the Gospel— he needed to practice what he preached! His hypocrisy not only confused others as to how a Christian should live, but it also compromised the Gospel he preached. His behaviour demonstrated that he still thought that there was some hierarchy amongst Christians— that somehow Jewish Christians were superior to Gentile Christians, when the good news is that all are equal in Christ.

In verses fifteen and sixteen, Paul discusses justification by works versus justification by faith. He argues that neither Jews nor Gentiles are made right with God by what we do, but that we are all justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith alone is the indispensable channel of salvation, not anything we can do. Because of Christ's own righteousness and death on the cross, God then assigns Christ's righteousness to us who believe—Jew and Gentile. All are justified not based on human deeds, but on faith. Everyone has sinned (see Romans 3:23), but through Christ's death, we are pardoned, set free, and then reinstated as God's children and as fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. Amen! So what Paul is saying is that it doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Gentile—everyone has to be saved by faith.

Although verses eleven through fourteen, and then verses fifteen through sixteen seem like two separate thoughts, they are actually linked together because both address the issue of legalism. Peter's hypocrisy resulted from giving into others' legalistic views, and justification by works sprang from a legalistic following of the Law.

Q: Have you seen someone in your own life that has been hypocritical? How did that make you feel and how did you react? How are we justified (made right with God)? What problems do you see with legalism? Have you ever found yourself or seen someone else caught up in legalism?

Galatians 2:17-21

"If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution,"—Emma Goldman

This is a revolution of rocks and trees; of people and places; of freedom and spirit. The text states that we are crucified. Why do we always want Jesus to come into our hearts if our whole life is crucified? The movement of Jesus followers is much larger—it is no longer about what we get out of it. We are swept up into a freedom song, and marching to a freedom beat that creation has been groaning. This isn't just about trying to correct ourselves from sin—because sin has distorted everything on this planet. Even our societies and systems have become sick with sin. Where can we beat our breasts and ask God for mercy on the world's behalf? We are swept up into the song that is reality at its most basic, and we are asked to dance. We are part of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of people and systems.

It's not about us and our interactions with Jesus, but us as part of the movement of the Kingdom. This Kingdom has ways of doing justice, economics, poetry, languages, and whole systems of working, like our societies.

That is what being crucified with Christ is about. It's no longer about ourselves or even how Jesus affects us— but it's about Jesus living through us, it's about getting swept up into something larger. Also it's about seeing that the movement and way of Jesus is good in and of itself. Jesus' way isn't good just because we gain from it— but it's good because of the way of Jesus is. It's good because of how we as humans are meant to live. Getting crucified into His Kingdom means that we, like Paul, live this life by faith in the Son of God.

But in this freedom we must be careful not build up what has already been destroyed. Let us use the example of a revolutionary movement that topples the government in their country. If, from the ashes of that revolution, in the new-found freedom one has, a revolutionary starts building a similar oppression, what good is the revolution? In the same way, we who are being swept up into this movement must be careful not to rebuild what has been taken down as a detriment to freedom in Christ. The verse says it truly what is this movement? It is grace that is the beginning and end of the movement, grace is what makes us hear the song, and dance to it. As disciples we must be careful to do the little things but not forget the largeness of the Kingdom and how the little things that we humbly do are inexorably connected to something larger.

Q: Where have we been too narrow in our thinking of the Kingdom of God? What broader things can we see it doing here? Have we as community been rebuilding anything that has been destroyed? What societal sins can we ask God for mercy for as community?

Galatians 6:7-8

Our future is a collage of our choices. Of course, we live by the grace of God, and He empowers us and guides us—but He also gives us freedom to choose. With the choices that we make comes consequences, both good and bad. My friend calls this "the future principle." Pretty much, what we put in, we will get out.

But let's unpack this whole reaping-and-sowing-thing a little more. Ok so, Matt 7:16-18 tells us that we will be recognized by our fruit, which is what we reap. And that what we reap is evidence of what kind of tree we are. I mean, a thorn bush isn't going to start growing big juicy apples, is it? What we sow is incredibly important, because we reap whatever we sow. If we sow to please our sinful nature, then that is the kind of fruit our lives will produce. I think that when we sow to please our sinful nature, it is very easy to compartmentalize our lives. Separating our sin from the rest of our life, fooling ourselves and being deceived that this part of our life is separate and won't affect us too much. The truth is that what we sow into our life completely affects who we are, and the fruit that we will produce.

We reap in proportion to what we sow. Luke 6.38 says "for with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." I do also believe that God adds a supernatural blessing to good seed, if we sow with the right motive. But the reason I have pointed out that we reap in proportion to what we sow is this—the sowing business isn't always easy. In fact, it can be very hard. Maybe you have experienced this. You might have a burning passion for a particular ministry, or maybe God has placed a certain person on your heart and asked you to intentionally sow into that person's life. And sometimes that isn't easy. We face rejection and obstacles. But, even in trouble, we should never downsize our vision. We shouldn't downsize our sowing. Because if we pull back, and only sow a little, then only a little will be reaped.

So if, for example, you are trying to get through to your friends at school and you are experiencing a lot of rejection whenever you try to bring God up—please don't back away. Don't start thinking, "maybe I'll just only sow a little," or, "maybe I will just put less effort into this." If you sow only a little, you will only reap a little.

When you feel like you are sowing and sowing, but cannot see the fruit, remember— a farmer doesn't wake up, sow seeds, have a coffee break, and then go back to pull up all his vegetables that he sowed that morning. We reap in a different season to when we sow. So when we are investing in the lives of others, sowing into a vision God gave us, and putting goodness into our own lives— let's remember that the faith is in the waiting. Let's continue to carry on and find encouragement in the Word and His promises.

Q: Is there anything in your life that you have compartmentalized, because you don't want to have to deal with your sin? How can you start to change this, and stop sowing this sin into your life? How can you sow more good things into your life? What does God want you to be more intentional about putting into your life?

Galatians 6:3-6

Self-evaluations are not usually very pleasant. Generally, it seems that people are naturally selfish. However, when it comes down to the actual thoughts that we have about ourselves, it is easy to become overly critical and self depreciating. We compare ourselves to our favourite singers, actors, or people in magazines. We criticize who we are even though God made each of us, "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27.) While we are all human, we are all very unique. Everyone has fingers and they all take a similar shape, yet no one has the same fingerprints, not even identical twins. When we were created, God made us as an individual, unlike anything He has ever created before, or ever will again. God purposely made us unique, and yet we habitually compare ourselves to everything we see, both positively and negatively. In verse four Paul writes, "Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else." The verse makes it clear that we should not compare ourselves to others, but rather test our own actions. For example— if two children hit each other, does it matter which child hit the other first? In both cases a hurt was committed; both of them hurt the other. We could compare the two and say that "Child A" started it, making it sound worse. But "Child B" also hit someone, is there a difference? We can only find a difference by comparing the two.

It is so easy to deceive ourselves into believing things about ourselves that are not true. We can believe that we are doing well by comparing ourselves to someone who is doing much worse, and rationally believe that we must be okay in comparison. In verse three it says, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." However, while we can engage in self deception, we can never deceive God. He knows our hearts, and He can see through the lies and walls that we build up around ourselves. We need to learn to look at ourselves through God's eyes, and not through the web of lies we build around us. This sentiment is mirrored in Romans 12:3— "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement." We need to know who we are in Christ, how God sees us, and slough off the way the world sees us, along with our judgemental and comparative nature.

Q: What are the most common ways you deceive yourself? Make a list of all of the nagging thoughts and lies you have about yourself. Ask God to help you get rid of these lies. In what way does the way you see yourself hold you back from fulfilling what God asks of you? Ask God to show you how He sees you. Make a list of what He reveals, or draw a picture. Look at it daily. Ask God to help you align your view of yourself to His.

Galatians 3:1-6

Many people believe that it is not what you believe that will get you into Heaven, its how you act. The Church in Galatia is a lot like the Church today: we go, 'oh, I don't need to take the time to pray today; or spend time reading the Bible' or 'it won't hurt me to go and see this movie or listen to this CD because overall I'm a good person.' Paul rebukes the Church of Galatia and the Church today by saying: "*YOU FOOLS!*" (That is my paraphrase of Galatians 3:1.)

Paul makes it perfectly clear that it is not what we do that will get us into Heaven. It is what we believe in. I will not get into Heaven by helping old ladies cross the street, or by pulling my neighbours cat out of their tree, unless I am doing it for Christ, with the belief that He died for my sins upon the Cross.

Paul also says that God does not give us His blessings and His gifts because we are good people – that also lies in what we believe in. Ultimately, Paul is not-so-subliminally hinting at the fact that the only way to Heaven is through Jesus Christ. Jesus did say: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Could it be any clearer?

Now I am not saying to stop doing your good deeds. As Christians we are also called to do good and to show Christ through our love. James 2:17 says this: "So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless."

Moral of the story? Believing the message that we have heard about Christ needs to be number one. Número uno. Numéro un. Nr. Eine. Número um. 一。Aantal. 一。Numrera en. واحدة رقم. 第1. 번호 것. 第一. Get the point?

Then, AFTER we have the whole belief thing down pat, we can worry about being a good person – however Paul once again rebukes us here, because a lot of the time we try by ourselves. Here is where I quote my paraphrase of Paul again: "FOOLS!" Why would we try to be better people by ourselves when we already believe the message of Christ? Here is what Paul says: "*How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to be perfect by your own effort? Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?*" I think that Paul speaks pretty clearly there.

Q: How many times have you neglected the message of Christ by thinking that you can get into Heaven by your own works? Have you ever tried to become a better person on your own strength? Are you willing to give up full control of your life to Christ, who will ultimately make you the new and better person?

Galatians 3:7-9

As Paul continues his discourse to the Galatians regarding justification by faith, he uses the example of Abraham. In verse seven, Paul says that those who have faith are spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham, even if they are not Jews. Paul's argument is, no doubt, disputing the claim of the Judaizers. The Judaizer's claim was that one became a genuine child of Abraham by circumcision and subsequent obedience to the law. The idea of Gentiles being saved by faith, without circumcision, would have been a new idea to the Galatian Christians. Peter's vision and the conversion of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10) was most likely not yet well-known, and Paul's letter to the Galatians was likely written approximately two years prior to the Jerusalem Council, when the Christian church decided that Gentiles could be saved by faith alone and could receive the same Holy Spirit as the Jews. So, Paul's example of Abraham is linking the Old and New Testament covenants, while stressing that Abraham's faith was the same as that of the Christian faith.

In verse eight, Paul continues to use Scripture as evidence for the conclusion that he made in verse seven. He quotes Genesis 12:3, which makes two points: 1. The blessing promised to Abraham was, from the beginning, intended to include the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and 2. The Gospel promise preceded everything else in God's dealings with His people—even including the giving of the law (i.e. circumcision). It is interesting to note here that Paul personifies the Scriptures, in that they 'foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham,' this shows that Paul views the Scriptures as if they were God speaking. This is noteworthy because it shows that the New Testament writers viewed Scripture as the words of God. This is important Biblical support for the historical Christian belief in the total inspiration of the Bible (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).

Verse nine wraps up Paul's discussion and answers the question from verse five: 'Who are the ones who enter spiritual blessing?' The answer is: those who are characterized by faith are blessed along with Abraham, who had faith. Since the blessing of Abraham is declared to have been intended for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, how then could the Gentiles be blessed except by faith? Therefore, Paul concludes that those who have faith, as Abraham did, join his blessed status.

Q: What are Christians justified by? What is Paul's argument regarding Abraham? What does this argument mean for Gentiles?

Galatians 6:1-2

Have you ever given in to temptation? Guys, have you ever been so angry you swore and cursed, maybe even punched someone out? Girls, when was the last time you said something cutting or mean, even nasty, or gossiped about a friend?

How did you feel? Guilty, ashamed, sad? Sometimes I've felt so stupid! I knew that I should have done better.

Did anyone restore you? Or were you left to stuff your feelings deep inside of you, and go on with your mask in place?

If you were blessed enough to experience someone who cared enough to stand with you, not against you, who prayed for you without rubbing it in, who showed you kindness and friendship when you knew you didn't deserve it, then you know someone who fulfilled the law of Christ for you—and now you get to pass it on.

Don't judge someone else when you see that they are in trouble. Love them instead. Why? Because God sent Jesus to be a friend of sinners, not a judge. He came to judge for us against evil demonic enemies and to rescue us! God knows that people mess up, because we are human and incapable of good without His help. Trying to be good for God doesn't work, because we always fail, when we do it on our own strength. Either you let Him take it out and replace it with His love and righteousness, or you'll miss the mark again and again. He doesn't want you to suffocate under a burden of guilt and shame, but to come back to His heart, release the sin and be healed. That's what restoration is—restored to relationship with the Father. And that's why we bear one another's burdens.

Galatians 5:25-26

Near the end of his letter to the Galatians, Paul discusses what it means to walk in the Spirit. Included in this, is our recent discussion on the fruits of the Spirit. Can you remember what they are? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Just after noting these nine fruits of the Spirit, Paul writes, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." So, because the Galatian believers had been made alive by the Holy Spirit (living in the Spirit), Paul admonishes them to also walk in the Spirit, which would include demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit in their lives. Walking in the Spirit would also mean crucifying 'the flesh with its passions and desires' (Gal. 5:24). So, not only does walking in the Spirit mean exhibiting positive attitudes like love and patience, but it also includes not exhibiting negative attitudes or practicing sinful behaviour. As the Spirit leads, they must follow. In other words, Paul is saying that walking by the Spirit means obeying the prompting of the Holy Spirit in how we live.

Immediately following his admonition to walk by the Spirit, Paul writes, "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." It is hard to tell whether this verse belongs with the preceding section on the fruits of the spirit and walking by the Spirit, or whether it belongs with the section that follows on bearing and sharing one another's burdens. It is, however, the first of a number of verses that discuss specific actions that should characterize those who are being led by the Spirit. It makes sense that it would be included in a discussion on how to walk in the Spirit. So, just as those who walk in the Spirit should demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit, they should also not be conceited, or provoke or envy one another. It is also possible, however, that Paul could have written this verse as a return to the theme found in verse fifteen, and therefore this would be a summation of his discourse on living in the Spirit. Regardless of what the precise meaning of this verse is and what section it belongs with, it is safe to conclude from these verses that a believer following the Spirit's lead will not become conceited, and will not provoke nor envy others. Walking by the Spirit is the ultimate solution to evils such as these.

Q: What are the fruits of the Spirit? What might be a passion, or desire of the flesh, that should be 'crucified'? What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

Galatians 3:10-14

Due to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we no longer live by the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. This statement is easy to say, but it can be hard to understand. The Law, given to Moses by God, was given as guidelines for the Jewish people. These guidelines said how the Jewish people were to live, and spelled out clearly what the different sins were. Because the Jews did not have a Saviour (Jesus) yet, it was important for them to understand sin, and how it would keep them from relationship with God.

When Jesus died on the cross for the sin of the world, the law was broken. The prophet Habakkuk prophesied, before the birth of Jesus, that once the Saviour had come and died, the righteous would begin to live by faith. This is contrary to the law because the law is not based on faith. Although faith was involved in following the law, it was not solely based on it. The Jewish people had faith that God would be with them if they followed the law, but most of the experience was based on following the rules.

Deuteronomy 27:26 states that anyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law will be cursed. This verse seems to cause confusion because it says that if we do not continue to follow the Law, we are cursed. So, how does Jesus' death deliver us from the curse? When Jesus had died, all the sin of mankind died with him. This sacrifice destroyed the wall between man and God, and took away sin's power. Because of this, man no longer needs to rely on the law to live according to God's will. It is through faith and relationship with Jesus Christ that we are saved. The law can still be used to outline sin, but we are no longer subject to its rules, because of Jesus' sacrifice.

Before the law was instituted, Abraham believed in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. God already knew that eventually it would be by faith that all would be saved. This is why the scriptures say that all nations will be blessed by Abraham. Jesus died so that the blessing given to Abraham would be open to all. And through faith in Jesus, we are open to receive His promised Spirit that writes His law in our heads, and on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

Q: Does the law still have any significance today? What caused the breaking of the law? Because of Deuteronomy 27:26, are all who do not follow the law cursed?

Galatians 3:15-18

God never revokes his promises. In this passage, Paul is trying to explain that the establishment of the Mosaic Law does not negate the covenant God made with Abraham, four hundred and thirty years later. He explains it by giving the example in verse fifteen, "Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside, or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case." What Paul is saying is that just as you can't set aside promises you make with others, or change the terms after the promise has been made, so God did not change His mind and do away with the promises that He made to Abraham when the laws were given to Moses. For example, if you were to borrow a thousand dollars from the bank, and sign a contract, you would likely not be able to go in three years later and say, "Hey, about that loan, can I just pay back, let's say, fifty dollars and call it even?" I think it highly unlikely that the bank would let you change your terms after the contract has been signed, especially years later. So it is with God. When God makes a covenant it is forever and it will never be revoked.

His promises are not given lightly. So, although the promises given to Abraham were given prior to the laws given to Moses, they were not revoked when the law is given. It is as good as it would be if no law was given. He says in verse seventeen, "What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise." God's promises are everlasting, and unchanging.

It is easy to be caught up in legalism, and trying to follow the law in order to gain God's approval. Yet we know that we are saved by the grace of God, through Christ Jesus, the same grace that was promised to Abraham. It is irrational to believe that simply following the law can save us. Paul explains that living by the law in order to gain salvation is similar to trying to pay someone for a gift that has already been paid for. God fulfilled His promise through Christ. Our inheritance of being a part of God's family does not depend on the law, "For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham as a promise," (Gal 3:18). Let us not get so caught up in following the law, that we forget the promise God fulfilled through Christ, and the subsequent grace that was given to us as a result.

Q: Think of any promises you made to others that you have broken. How is changing or breaking promises in opposition to God's character? Read Matthew 5:37. What does Jesus say about making promises?

How have you been caught up in trying to earn your salvation through works? List ways that you try to earn the free gift of God, and ask Jesus how this affects both yourself and Him. Ask Him how you can change your motives.

Has God ever asked you to promise Him something? In accepting Jesus, we are covenanting ourselves to God, giving our lives to Him. What kind of promises has God asked of you as a result of your covenant with Him through Jesus?

Galatians 5:24

The gentle rain falls on a post-soviet city around Chernobyl. When this rain falls, particles of radiation are contained within it. This rain stills holds the beauty of rain that falls elsewhere in the world. Yet this rain is changed in a horribly subversive way. Sin is much of the same— it is the perversion of that which is good, true, and beautiful in our world. Sin is even so large that it affects systems. Yet in the heart of it, it is a perversion of something that is beautiful. Like lust— a misuse of a gift from God and a misunderstanding of love, twisted into some kind of half-love.

This shows us something about the cross. What did the cross mean? In the time of Jesus, the cross meant to the world that He was a traitor. The cross meant that He was a criminal, the lowest and worst element of society. For His followers, who would have seen and heard of crucifixion, Jesus dying this kind of death wasn't what was supposed to happen. It was humiliating. Yet in this day and age, when we as disciples of Jesus talk about the cross we speak of it as if it was the logical conclusion to Jesus' earthly life. Paul says in this passage that we, as followers of Jesus, have done this to our sinful natures. The same shame and horror was suffered to our sinful natures. In the same way today that we look at the cross and speak of the instrument of death as a tool of life, sin is shown in its proper light. Jesus took that which was shameful and made it into something beautiful. In the same way, we crucify the sinful nature and look at what it was distorting. Instead of anger, we forgive. Instead of lusting (not just sexually, but for material things etc), we choose love. Out of the horror of that sin, we choose the beauty that is born from it.

Earlier in the book of Galatians, Paul states that we have been crucified with Christ. Therefore, we, and our sinful natures, are identified with Him in His death. As we keep looking at the cross, we understand the depth that it brings. In the horror of the cross and the beauty it brings, we see that even though His way would lead to the execution stake (the cross), Christ still says that the way of compassion, love, and forgiving our enemies, is to be taken.

A man once asked, "If there were no heaven or hell, and we simply died at the end of life, would you still follow Jesus?" On the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter, when Jesus was simply dead, was His way still good? We say yes, because Jesus teaches us what life really means, He shows us reality at its rawest, and He shows us how to live in a way that we are truly living.

So, as followers of Jesus, we embrace the cross, both as a means of following Jesus, but also as a means of killing the sinful nature.

Q: What beauty is being perverted in sin? Where are some places that you need to follow the cross in exchanging half-loves for full ones? Would you follow Jesus even if there were no heaven or hell? Why?

Galatians 5:19-23

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. Against such things, there is no law.

(Galatians 5:1-2)

Where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom— freedom from the world and its destructive ways. We are bombarded by the world through media, consumerism, globalization, government, and war. Obviously, the list goes on, but as we know, we are not fighting a war against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph. 6:12)

Therefore, put on the full armour of God. (Eph. 13-20) Be on guard against the schemes of the enemy, walk in the spirit of Jesus Christ, influencing and encouraging others along the way. So, put to death the sin of the flesh, and walk in the Spirit. Jesus says, "Wait for the gift my Father has promised, which you have heard me speak about. And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the end of the Earth." (Acts 1:4b & 8) So therefore, as we can see Jesus has left for us His Holy Spirit and with this all the fruits of the Spirit.

"It is for freedom the Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Eph 5:1)

Q: Are you living your life through the spirit that Jesus promised us, and the fruits of the spirit? Are there areas in your life that are not of the Spirit, and need to be addressed? If so, do you believe you can be free of these things?

Galatians 3:19-25

What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the seed to whom the promise referred had come.

The law was put into affect through angels by a mediator. A mediator however does not represent just one party; but God is One. Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of god? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly come by the law. But the scriptures declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locks up until the faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

(Galatians 5:19-25)

The law never made us righteous, or gave us life. When we were still walking in darkness, our forefathers became mediators between God and man. They did this in order to point the way to the true Mediator who was to come— and who is now sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Our Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, our Humble King, Jesus Christ.

The law was put in place because of God's love for us. After coming out of Exodus our Father knew that we needed direction. God always disciplines those He loves. In order to keep us from falling into our transgressions, the law had been given to us. God knew that He would send His Son into the world as Light that shines in a dark place, and now that light is here. A new covenant has been given us, which has made the old one obsolete. The old law was not perfect—otherwise we would still be under it. However, Jesus Christ is perfect, and we too can now be perfect in Christ, and have a place reserved for us with Him in Heaven.

Q: Are there still those who believe they are under the old law? How can we deliver the message of belief—that Jesus has come, and brought with Him a new covenant for those who still walk in darkness? Do you believe that you can become perfected in Christ through His covenant and promises?

Galatians 3:26-29

Now here's one of my favorite passages, a classic. Some top notch truth from Paul the Apostle, a true slave of Christ.

The truth is this: YOU'VE GOT IT, you've got the award freely given to all men. It don't matter who you are, where you come from, what school you went to, or who your daddy is—it's all for you. As long as you believe with faith, you've got those nice white robes they talk about in Revelation, you're on the Highway of Holiness that Isaiah talks about, and you have received all those spiritual blessings you hear about in Ephesians. Yep, it's all yours through faith in Christ, baby. In other words, you believe in the Son of God, and you become a son of God. It's that simple. Ain't no thing but a chicken wing, know what I'm sayin'? It's no longer like it was.

A long time ago, God caught up with this guy Abraham and told him about all the promises He's making for the Jews. And now, through Christ, a Jew, all can become heirs according to those same promises. Isn't that something? Talk about grace, jeeppers. But don't get cocky. Only by Christ is this possible, and God can take us out of the tree as quick as he grafted us in— keep Christ and keep salvation... but that's another passage...

Now, let's talk about this oneness that the apostle tells us about. It's quite a beautiful thing. Did you know that you're one in spirit with the Living God? Again, you obtain this by faith in the Son, Jesus. It's part of the package deal. It's as though we were once split apart from God, and Christ is the stitches that reconnect us with God. It's a bit hard to explain, but I'll make it easy for you: through Christ you are RIGHTEOUS children of God, and brothers and sisters with one another.

you've got a whole new family— it don't matter what color your skin is, or where you come from— you've got brothers in Tokyo right now. You're brother is Martin Luther King Jr. or Billy Graham, it doesn't matter who they are, as long as they've got Jesus. God has put you in a brand new family.

He has made everything new. God was sad when Adam and Eve broke His command, because it meant separation. We don't have a God of separation, but a God of reconciliation—so He sent His Son to make us one with Him. That's how much He loves us. And through that blood that was shed we have oneness, get it? Good—because that's the truth, Ruth.

Q: Do you have faith in the Son of God? No, really. Look into yourself, don't just say it because you're suppose to, be honest with yourself and with God, don't be afraid to look deep within yourself. Ask yourself "Do I really believe?" Meditate on that for a while and come up with the right answer, for your own sake. What have YOU learned from this passage? It's one thing to read a bunch of mumbling from some guy you don't know, another thing to hear your own take on something, meditate and express. What does Holy Spirit bring to YOUR beautiful God-created mind? And finally, how are you going to apply this Scripture?

Galatians 5:16-18

Sin and the Spirit are in direct opposition. Sin is to be apart from God. The Spirit is God. And if there's one thing that God is, He is HOLY. He is completely and fully Himself, unable to be a part of anything but Himself.

Love is good. He can be with love because He is love. He can be with joy because He is joy. He can be with us when we are in Him and He is in us. But He cannot be in the areas that are given over to sin, because sin is separate from God. He can have nothing to do with it, because it brings separation from who He truly is. The spiritual law says that the punishment for sin is death. "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 3:23a.) Areas of our life that are being controlled by sin lead to death— they hurt us, they hurt others and most of all, they hurt God. Our flesh and mind are constantly vying for control, trying to cause us to do what we don't want to do: feel fear, anger and hurt, act in selfish ways. We feel a need to protect ourselves, to appease the things like fear, anger and hurt, which are eating away at us. But the truth is—painful feelings are the precursor of an attack from the enemy. If we feel hurt by something, we automatically feel the need for justification. So we get angry, bitter, jealous, envious, prideful, rude, self-seeking etc.

But, if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 3:23.) When we asked Jesus to save us from our sins, the law of death that was at work in us was abolished. We are no longer slaves to the law that says we will die. However, though our souls are safe with Christ, there is still temptation for areas of our souls, minds and bodies to live contrary to the Spirit. It is God's desire that we continue to grow towards life-giving ways rather than ways of destruction. God's desire is that we are open to letting Him fix us. We cannot fix ourselves. Only God can make us holy. The enemy works against us by using our hurts to tempt us into sin. Because of this, we can look for where he tries to abuse our hurts, and instead of allowing the bad reactions to take over, we can ask the Spirit to guide our reactions. We can claim the promise of God in those areas— the promise of eternal life in Christ. Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full, (John 10:10) so He desires that we would take up ways of life, of the Spirit. He gives it to us as a gift, not as something we can earn. When we turn to the Spirit, and ask for guidance, He will surely lead us away from the law of death.

Q: Think of things that have hurt you recently. Are there ways that you reacted which were contrary to the Spirit? Are there ways that you reacted which were in submission to the Spirit? Go back to a time when you reacted in a way that contrary to the Spirit. Ask Jesus to take your hurt, and show you what to do with it. Ask Jesus to get rid of any sin that may have come from the hurt, and ask Him to give you love instead.

Galatians 5:13-15

It was just a little fib, so it can't hurt, right? That cookie was delicious, my parents won't find out I ate it before supper, right? It was an innocent kiss, nothing happened. No one saw me looking, I'm okay.

God wants us to be free. All these things mentioned above (and so many more that you know about and I don't need to mention) keep us in bondage. Let me say this again— GOD WANTS US TO BE FREE! Hallelujah! That privilege we have shouldn't be taken for granted by continuing to live in sin. The enemy wants us to stay in sin, because then it keeps us from being active. It keeps us from advancing on the enemy's ground.

Admitting that you need God, and allowing Him to change you is the first step. I don't think I need to go into all the details, I believe you know them. What does Paul say? "...do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13). How do we serve one another in love? Well Paul goes right onto that in verse 14, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

It's pretty straight forward. Whatever you want done to you, do it to other people. But wait, I thought there were more commands, does that mean that this is all I have to do? Well, what Paul is saying is that by loving your neighbor as yourself, you will automatically follow His commands and love Him. If you love someone, do you murder them, or covet their stuff, or gossip about them, or steal from them? Of course not!

Paul warns us that if we continue "biting and devouring each other" (Galatians 5:15a), we will "be destroyed by each other" (Galatians 5:15b). There are so many rifts in the church—people holding on to stuff, not loving each other. If people just loved each other and treated each other the way they would want to be treated, the Church would be the ultimate fighting force. Satan would be trembling, even more terrified than he is already.

So—be free. Ask God to help you through temptation, and to give you the strength. I'll give you another verse to help you with this. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) Tell the enemy to stick it! Mend broken relationships and love your neighbor.

Q: *There is stuff in everyone's life that they are holding onto and "rolling in the mud" with. Give it to God, get an accountability person and get free. God wants you to be free, and once you are, He will be able to do tremendous things through you. What friendships/relationships in your life have been destroyed, or are on the rocks? How about you phone them up and mend it. Keep a soft, forgiving heart toward them, remembering your own weakness as well as theirs. How can you love someone today, this week, next week, this month, this year? Make a list and go do it! There is nothing more fulfilling than loving and blessing other people.*

Galatians 4:1-7

Congratulations, you have inherited \$10,000. You can do anything with it. Oh, I can see it now: movies, new clothes, those shoes that you have always wanted, maybe a new computer and a few games. WAIT ONE MINUTE! There is a catch. You can't get that money until you're 18 years old. Darn! Still a few more years left.

You see, the Galatians were like that—they were spiritual children, not adults. They had stopped following the original message that Paul had preached. They had gone astray and were following a different message. Some had slipped back into their old sinful lives and others believed the Jewish believers when they said that they had to follow the Jewish law, in addition to believing in Jesus, their Savior. When they did this, they weren't maturing as Christians. They were staying as children—they were enslaving themselves. The Galatians were not allowing themselves to be free in Christ.

Just like Paul wanted for the Galatians, God wants us to be free. He wants us to fully reach and take hold of what He has to give to us. We might have slipped into old sin or maybe we think that there is more we need to do to be saved or maybe we are just going through the motions of church. Guess what—there is hope! See Christ came that you may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10b). He came to redeem all of us who are under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:5). All we need to do is repent and turn to God and follow Christ. John 1:12 says it all—"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

Repent of that sin. Believe that there is nothing more that you can do and allow God to change you so that you don't find yourself caught in the trap of just going through the motions. Cry out to Him, "FATHER, I love You. I want to serve You. I want to be Your child. I want to do whatever You want me to do."

When we are mature enough God gives us huge blessings and gifts. We have reached the age when we can have our inheritance. God then gives us the \$10,000 (so to speak). Believe that God wants to do this. Believe that He can transform your life. Believe that he can make it whole, and full, and amazing.

"So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." (Galatians 4:7)

Q: *Do you believe that you are a child of God, a co-heir with Christ? Find someone who can disciple you and help you grow into your identity in Christ. What might be causing you to still be immature, and not be ready to take hold of what God wants for your life? You know what it is. Are you just going through the motions? Ask God to change your heart and give you joy and a new passion for the things He desires.*

Galatians 4:8-11

Have you ever gone to one of those wacky youth weekends? I've gone to a bunch. They always start with all the girls who haven't seen each other since the last shindig screaming, then running, then embracing, then screaming more, then jumping up and down. It is a good time getting together for a weekend of spiritual pump. I remember being at one of these winter retreats where something happened when the speaker was talking. Next thing I know we're singing, "I have decided to follow Jesus [x3]... No turning back, no turning back." I'm up there kneeling at a bench weeping with two close friends [one of them turned out to be my wife]. After wiping my tears and eating lunch I was on my way home— a new person!

The only problem was that I didn't really change after that event. The next week I would be stuck in the same old habits and experiences—lying to my parents, not getting along with my siblings, manipulating my friends and trying to fit in by doing the wrong things. It turned out that my songs were a lie. How could I do this? The speaker's talks, the worship team's songs and my friends' prayers didn't mean much for me.

The Galatians weren't much different than me. Before Paul, they were stuck in habitual sin—slaves of their culture and cults. They had truly experienced God and His truth, however, Paul saw them entering slavery again. BUT—the new slavery wasn't exactly old habitual sin. The slavery was following a list of religious rules: what to eat, what not to eat, what to wear, when to wash. If they kept the right rules they could be accepted. What a miserable way to live— always looking over your shoulder to fit the 'new status quo.' They lost their identity with God, caring more about what people thought than living in response to God.

Could it be that when people come to us, the body of Christ, we make them enter a form of slavery too? A kind that is just as bad as doing all the wrong things to 'fit in?' In your youth group do you have any social rules that you get people to follow rather than let them figure out what God is saying to them and respond to it?

Maybe this was my problem. I don't think I was really taught how to respond to God. I know I had an encounter with Him, but, I wasn't taught to know Him and live a new life directed by Him. I tried on my own to do what was right but didn't receive the Holy Spirit to guide me in a new spiritual life. No wonder I failed. Real obedience comes from knowing God and doing what He says - not trying to be like everyone else or following a list of do's and don'ts.

Q: Do you know God? Do you ask Him what He wants you to do? How can you know what God wants? Do you do it?

Galatians 5:7-12

Does it ever feel like there is an opposition against you, as you seek Christ more and more? Well, there most likely is! His name is Satan, and he comes to kill, destroy, and pervert everything good that comes from God. Satan is an enemy of God, and has devoted his existence to luring people into what separates them from God— sin. Satan tempts us to sin because he is fearful of the power that lives within us. As believers in Christ, we are the stronger opposition to Satan, and are therefore a threat to his plans. There are all sorts of methods that Satan uses to try to mess up our relationship with God. He may use other humans, circumstances in our lives, or spiritual walls to block us from God. Satan can even cause people to misunderstand, or miss the truths, in Scripture.

Galatians 5:7-12 agrees that there is an opposition trying to persuade people to disobey the truth. The beginning of this passage celebrates the fact that the church in Galatia was running a good race. The "good race" symbolizes how well the church was following God. When Satan noticed that the church was doing so well, he began to lead people in the opposite way of truth. This is very typical of Satan. Paul (the writer of Galatians) recognized the enemy's schemes—he points out that this kind of persuasion does not come from the One who calls you (God). God is truth, and therefore He only pulls people towards truth.

This constant battle can seem heavy and overbearing, but there is hope. Galatians 3:10 says that Paul is confident that God's people will not fall to the temptations of the evil one. This is good to know! Paul also goes on to say that those who are causing confusion within God's people will pay a penalty. This penalty refers to the judgment of God. This is not a penalty we are to issue, but to leave up to God.

In this passage, Paul, recognizes the struggles often faced in being a believer. In this case, the message that circumcision of the heart was needed, not circumcision of the body, was a new idea that many believers found hard to accept. Paul spent multiple days in jail because of this truth. There was a definite opposition against him. Satan caused many to be blind to the truth that God gave to Paul, and made it difficult to continue ministry. Does this mean that our lives as Christians are going to be a never ending battle? Yes and no! Satan will always try and tempt us to sin, but as we grow in relationship with Christ, He will make us strong. God will teach us to resist the evil one by changing our hearts to hate sin. There will always be opposition, but God promises that He will never allow His people to be tempted beyond what they can bear. This is a good truth to live by and understand. The devil is miniscule compared to God, and although we are mere humans, we have authority over him as well.

Q: Is it normal that there is spiritual opposition to us knowing, and living like Christ? As believers in Jesus— do we authority over Satan? Can Satan pervert the words of the Bible?

Galatians 5:2-6

In the beginning of chapter five, Paul again addresses the issue of circumcision and legalism. He essentially condemns the theology of circumcision. The legalistic Jewish teachers in Galatia were urging believers to be circumcised. They sought to establish conformity to external standards of behaviour, and they were using these standards to judge spirituality. Paul argues against such thought, as the requirement of circumcision changes the entire message of salvation from one of faith to one of works. Paul further argues, in verse three, that one who is circumcised in an attempt to gain God's acceptance and earn his salvation, is therefore obligated to keep the entire law. But the Old Testament is overflowing with stories which prove that no one is capable of keeping the entire law. Thus we can conclude, as Paul states in verse two, that circumcision profits one nothing. Paul wasn't entirely concerned with circumcision itself, but with peoples' motivation behind circumcision. So it's not that circumcision in itself is bad, but that the Galatians viewed it as a means of salvation and a judge of spirituality—particularly in regards to the Gentiles.

After shooting down the Galatians' legalistic views on circumcision, and telling them off for trying to justify themselves through works, he then transitions into a discussion on justification by faith. No one is saved through works, or by keeping the law, but only by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). As Christians, we must choose to live by faith as we wait for the full realization of our salvation. We don't work for salvation—we wait for it. In verse five, Paul notes that we wait for the 'hope of righteousness' through faith. So, as we follow God in faith, we also grow in righteousness. Although we are justified through Christ's death on the cross, and will be declared righteous on judgment day, God allows us to have a foretaste of righteousness through His Spirit who lives in us (2 Cor. 5:5). Paul furthers his discussion on faith in verse six, in noting that with faith it is possible to fulfill Christ's command to love one another. So, faith in Christ is not just a state of mind or intellectual belief, rather, it should express itself in love. Since we, as Christians, have learned love in such great measure from Christ, our faith must also issue a genuine and self-denying love for others.

Q: Is circumcision necessary for salvation? Why or why not? What is the relationship between faith and righteousness? What should be the natural outflow of our faith?

Galatians 4:12-20

The truth hurts a lot of the time. It especially hurts when it is someone telling you something that they see in you that is not glorifying God. Words of correction are not always the best, and a lot of the time, we don't receive them very well. The people in Galatia knew God, but were turning away from Him and going back to their old ways. Paul was the apostle that had to bring the truth to them. I am sure you can guess how the people of Galatia reacted towards Paul. Galatians 4:14- 16 says:

Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

So as you can see, the people of Galatia did not like the fact that Paul was being truthful. They didn't receive it very well at all. In fact, they were pretty much ignoring what he was saying. But this isn't what God wants. The Lord desires growth in us and the Lord desires us to be good followers of him. If there was no discipline in our life and no correction, where would we be? God disciplines those He loves.

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? (Heb 12:5-7).

So when correction and discipline come your way, embrace it, know that it is from God and God desires us to grow closer to Him and sometimes this requires the hard truth.

Q: Has someone ever told you the truth bluntly? Did you receive it? Do you find it hard giving a word to someone that requires being completely honest and can possibly hurt that person? Is there anyone that you need to be honest with today? If so, pray about it and then go do it.

Galatians 4:21-31

This illustration about Hagar and Sarah prepares us for Paul's discussion in which he says that we are to be free in Christ. Paul says in verse 31 "we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman." Paul is saying that the believer is not enslaved to the law, but rather is a child of promise who lives by faith. The child that Abraham had with Hagar represents the law that was given at Mount Sinai. The child that he had with Sarah represents the promise and the freedom of God. Paul says in verse 24 "these things may be taken figuratively." He is not saying that the Hagar-Sarah account is an allegory in the sense that it was non-historical. He uses the events to illustrate a theological truth. The theological truth he is speaking of is the covenants— the old covenant of law and the new covenant of promise. Paul tells us that we are to be like the child of Sarah—FREE. We are not to live under the old law anymore, but by God's promise and faith.

Verses 28-29 says "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now." This pretty much says it all. We are believers in Christ, and we may be persecuted. Maybe you already have been persecuted at school or work maybe even by your own family. When Paul says in verse 30, "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the save woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son," it does not mean to actually get rid of these people, but to get rid of the law and live freely. However, this does not mean that we can just do whatever we want and think, "Well I refuse to live under the law, so I can do what I want." It's right that we do not live by the law, but we do live by Jesus Christ and we must remember that He tells us to live holy lives.

Q: Why do you think some people choose to still live under the "law"? Could the story with Sarah and Hagar reflect some of the problems facing organized church today, for example— legalism (being under the law)? Do you see any areas in your life where you may still be living under the old law or where you may be a little legalistic?

Galatians 5:1

Sometimes we can feel trapped, as if we have no control over our lives or ourselves. Sometimes it feels like we don't have any choices, like we are being pressured into everything and being beaten down. A slave to a life we don't even want.

Well the good new is that if you're a disciple of Jesus, then Christ has set you free. You don't have to feel like a servant or a slave. Christ has busted you out of your old life and given you a new one. So...why is it that we still sometimes feel like we are trapped in our old lives?

I remember reading once about a group of freed slaves who voluntarily stayed with their old masters. They lived in the same slave houses, worked the same tasks and kept their slave names. Some walked in short, clumsy steps, as if metal shackles still held their feet. They were free, but they didn't live like it.

This can happen to us when we decide to follow Jesus. Sometimes we can act like we are still slaves when we are actually free. Maybe there's bad stuff that's happened to you in the past that catches up with you, and brings you down. Maybe there's a sin that you just can't seem to get rid of. Maybe the enemy is lying to you, or trying to scare you to weaken your faith.

This is the thing—Christ didn't set us free just to live like a slave! We don't have to stay trapped in past hurts and bad habits, struggling under the enemy's attacks.

If you want live out your freedom in Christ then there are some things you can do. First, pray for strength and support. Second, talk to some godly leaders who can keep you away from the sin stuff that enslaves you. Third, keep reading your Bible to remind yourself of what Christ has done. Stand strong against the spirit of slavery. You don't answer to the world, you don't answer to your own body and you definitely don't answer to the devil. You are free and you answer only to Jesus Christ who is the Lord of all.

Q: Are there any areas of your life where you feel trapped? How could you be giving away your freedom? How do you plan to stand strong against the spirit of slavery?