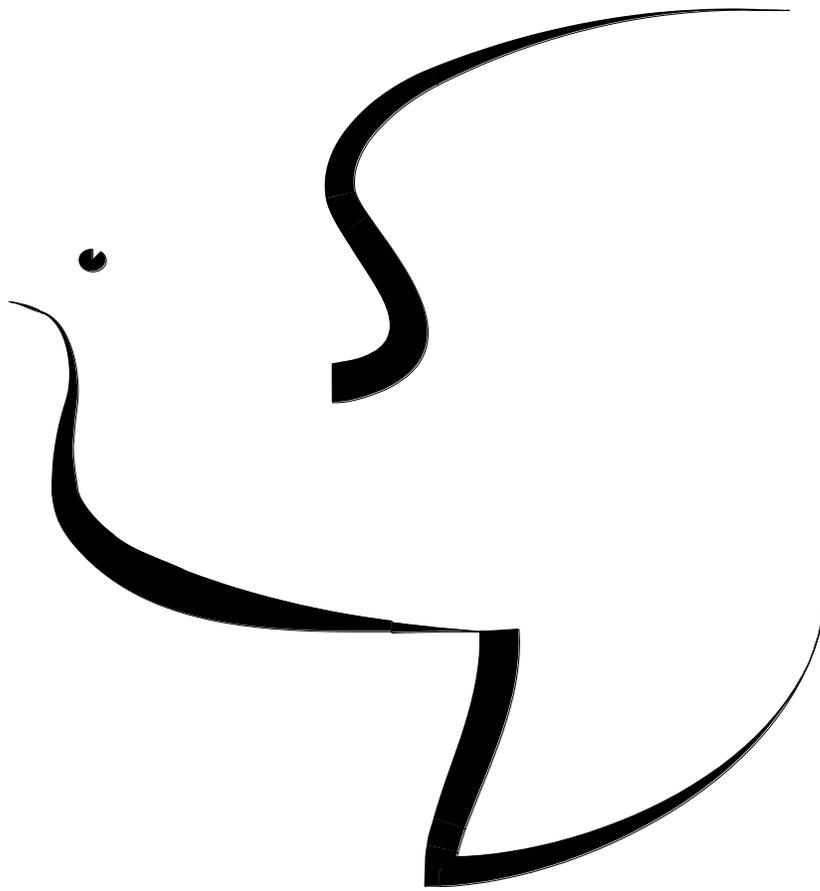


LIFE IN THE SPIRIT



*Guidelines from Paul's letter
to the Galatians*

A series by David Legge

preachtheword.com



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Life In The Spirit - Chapter 1

"Religion Or Relationship?"

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Well, good evening to you all. It's a real delight to be back home in the Iron Hall with you tonight, and to renew fellowship and friendship with you all, and have the privilege of sharing the Scriptures. I really am looking forward to the next four Monday evenings, as we look at the Scriptures together. Now, I was a bit devious in giving you the title 'Life in the Spirit', because you wouldn't have a clue, really, what passage of Scripture I would be turning to. I know what some of you are like - you'd be down into the concordances and everything, and into the commentaries, trying to find out a thing or two before I came! So I gave you the title, but it is an important title because it really does, I believe, sum up the message of the book of Galatians - and so that's where we're turning: Paul's epistle to the Galatians. We're going to read quite a sizeable chunk tonight, chapters 1 and 2, and next week, God willing, we'll look at chapters 3 and 4, and then probably - I say probably - the third and fourth week we'll split up into chapters 5 and 6. We'll take a bit more time on those, because those chapters in particular deal with, in great detail, life in the Spirit, and the liberty that we ought to experience as Christians.

Galatians chapter 1 verse 1 then, and we'll read through to chapter 2, the end: *"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" - anathema, eternally condemned. "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation", my way of life, "in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me".*

"Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas", that is, Peter, "and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do. But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain".

It was during the early missionary journeys of the apostle Paul that he preached the message of salvation through faith alone in Christ to the people of Galatia. He founded, as we saw, churches - plural - in that area of Asia Minor, which was a Roman province. If you want to read about that historic evangelistic venture, you can read it in Acts chapters 13 and 14. What you may not know is that the Galatians, as an ethnic people group, were Gauls - that might sound familiar to you. It ought to, because they were the Celtic relatives of the Scots, the Irish, the Welsh, and the Britons from Brittany in France. They were Celts, and characteristically they were known for their generosity, but also for their restlessness, their changeable character, their inconsistencies, their impulsiveness, and their quarrelsome nature. A bit like the Irish, and the Scots, and the Welsh perhaps! Those characteristics are reflected in this letter to the Galatians. For one example of that, there are fifteen works of the flesh mentioned in Galatians chapter 5 verses 20 and 21, and eight of those works of the flesh are sins of strife - very interesting.

What confronts us this evening is the fact that these churches of Galatia were invaded by false teachers. They were false teachers like those the apostles refuted in the Jerusalem

Council in Acts chapter 15, and we read in verse 1 of Acts 15 that the message that they preached was this: 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'. If you're not circumcised - effectively, if you don't become a Jew - you cannot be saved. Now you've got to understand a bit about the background of this situation. We have to remember that the first Christians in the church were Jewish. At the beginning it was assumed by them that the special character of the exclusive people, Israel, and their rites, rituals and ceremonies, would continue in this new dispensation, as it were, of Messianic Judaism. But they confronted a problem: Gentile, heathen people were getting born again - they were converting to Christ. So their original presupposition was challenged, and they were faced with a very stark question, that is: those people being converted now from the Gentile nations, must they become Jews and observe Judaism? Or do we as Jewish Christians in the church, do we accept them as they are without them becoming Jews?

Now, then that naturally raised the second question, that being how the Jews would relate to the Gentiles - because you must keep in mind that the Jews had strict social and dietary laws, and they didn't know how it was going to be possible for them to mingle in fellowship with those whom they felt were unclean. Now, if you're familiar with the Acts of the Apostles and the history of the early church, you will know that Peter had such a dilemma. In Acts chapter 10 we meet Peter on a rooftop in a place called Joppa, and he's hungry, and God gives him a vision of a great sheet of cloth, and on that sheet there are all sorts of four-footed beasts - and they were unclean animals, even reptiles and insects of the ground. The commandment comes to the apostle Peter in his vision: 'Kill and eat'. Peter's response is: 'I've never ate anything that is impure or unclean'. God says to Peter: 'Do not call anything impure that I have cleansed, that I have made clean'. Peter, right away, was able to interpret this vision from God, that God had now opened the kingdom to the Gentiles, and he was not to call them unclean. You remember the Lord Jesus gave Peter the keys to open the kingdom to the Gentiles, and then in Acts chapter 10 we find that he does just that, and he is sent to Cornelius, and Cornelius comes to Christ. It is Peter who testifies that he saw the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles, just as He did the Jews at the first, at the beginning, at the Day of Pentecost.

But the Judaisers were convinced that the gospel did not set aside Jewish ceremonies, Jewish rites and rituals, particularly this one of circumcision. Therefore, they were preaching that the Gentile Christians must become Jews if they were to receive God's promise to Abraham. Now let me just pause for a moment and make a remark: it never ceases to amaze me how people knowledgeable in the Scriptures oppose what is an obvious work of the Spirit on doctrinal grounds. May repeat that? It never ceases to amaze me how knowledgeable people oppose what is an obvious work of the Spirit on doctrinal grounds. We'll leave that, because we'll touch upon it later on. But these Galatians, who had received the gospel of grace through faith alone in Christ from the apostle Paul himself, embraced this teaching of the Judaisers.

Now, you can see how serious this was to the apostle, because he doesn't even start in his customary way that he normally opens an epistle. He gets right in there, because things are so serious! We see that, to Paul, this was more than mere church politicking, this was not a proverbial 'storm in a teacup' to the apostle, because Paul understood how the acceptance by the Galatians of this new judaising doctrine, how it actually undermined the very essence of the gospel of grace that is faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Now, of course, the question and issue at hand was: should Gentiles be circumcised - and that may appear to be a distant concern for most Christians after the first century, but you're missing the point if you think that. You've got to see that the central issue is a fundamental

issue, and it is simply this: this was a dispute over the basis of our relationship with God. What is the basis of our relationship with God? The gospel teaches that our standing before God is by grace, a free unmerited gift, through faith, in other words faith is the hand that receives that free gift from God. It is by grace through faith, plus zero - nothing! Now this is what was at stake in Galatia. Paul was at pains for them to know that it is the work of Christ on the cross, plus nothing!

Indeed, he says that at the end of our reading in chapter 2 verse 21: 'I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain'. If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing, Paul is saying. So this issue is not some kind of peripheral issue, a secondary issue in the Christian church. This issue goes to the very heart of the gospel that we preach. Paul says as much in his well-known verse, chapter 1 verse 6, look at it: 'I marvel', I'm astonished, 'that ye are so soon', quickly, 'removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel', he says, 'Which is not another', for there can't be another gospel, 'but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you', at the beginning, 'let him be accursed', let him be anathema, let him be cut off, let him be eternally condemned. That is how serious an issue this was for Paul!

Now, it should be no surprise to you that the book of Galatians played a major role in church history on several occasions. Not least, most notably perhaps, the 16th century Reformation when Martin Luther relied heavily on the book of Galatians to attack the Roman Catholic understanding of salvation. Now, do not ever say that the Roman Catholic Church does not believe that we get salvation through the death of Christ - it does. But what they do is they: add to the death of Christ, Christ and..., the cross and... - and Luther, through this epistle, and the epistle to the Romans (and some people believe Galatians is like a sketch for the finished picture of the epistle of Romans, which is correct, they're both on the theme of justification by faith). Well, Luther used this wonderful six chapters to confound and pull down the great bulwark that was Catholicism. John Wesley was converted listening to the reading of the preface of Martin Luther's commentary on the book of Galatians at the Moravian Chapel in Aldersgate Street, London. It was at that point, listening to the truths of this book, that he says: 'My heart was strangely warmed. I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation'.

Now, I haven't heard an 'Amen' yet, but most born-again believers would say 'Amen' to everything that I've said up to now. We are with Paul in his desire to counteract a works-based salvation, and so we should be. We should reject any message that is Christ plus anything else - but here's the danger: we can miss the essence of Paul's argument. It wasn't just an argument about the initial message that we receive in evangelism and preach as we spread the gospel, but Paul's message in essence was: the basis on which we first come to God, and the basis upon which we keep coming to God. Now, please, this is vital: remember that the Galatians were already born-again. Paul had led them to Christ. So I think the book of Galatians is not primarily to do with an initial reception of the gospel at salvation, but more: it teaches us as believers, as it taught the Galatians, that we can operate on a performance-based acceptance with God - Christ plus... Christ plus my performance... Christ plus my good works... Christ plus the meetings... Christ plus the sacraments... Christ plus keeping away from bad things... Christ plus doing good things...

Now listen carefully to what I'm saying, because I'm standing firmly on the authority of the word of God: both are forms of legalism. That is, believing that you need something more than Christ to be saved, and also believing that you need to do more to keep saved and to

keep in 'good tick' - as we would say here in Ulster - with Almighty God. Both are forms of legalism, and both, I believe, are what Paul is writing against in his epistle. Now, you may not have a legalistic view on salvation - and I would hope you wouldn't - but what we're saying is that you may not have a legalistic view of salvation, but you may well have a legalistic view of sanctification. What I mean by that is that you're living your Christian life by a list of written rules or, for that matter, unwritten rules - and you're performing these things to gain God's blessing and the acceptance of God. Paul writes in this epistle that that is not Biblical Christianity, that is legalism! Legalism was a problem, a serious problem in Paul's day, and it is a serious problem, I believe, today - and it always will be a serious problem. It is serious not only because it distorts the gospel as we preach it to unbelievers, but for Christians it always results in a life lived in the flesh, a life lived in the energy of the flesh rather than the power and the dynamism of the Holy Spirit. For the Christian it means that the burden of responsibility is upon me and my behaviour, rather than God's enabling grace that I draw on by faith. It's the difference between trying hard as a Christian, and trusting Him. Very simple. It's the difference between being led by the Holy Spirit or being driven by the flesh, whether it is our own flesh, or others flesh.

Now, I want to ask you: which version of sanctification have you adopted? I'm pretty sure that most of you here tonight have adopted the Biblical view of salvation - that it's not Christ plus, it's Christ alone - but what about sanctification? Is your sanctification - in other words, is the way you're living your Christian life - performance-based? Now this is important, and here's another reason why it's important: it is not people who are half-hearted about the Christian life who get this wrong, it's not folk who are spiritually lazy who struggle with legalism, rather it's those who are highly motivated to serve the Lord who fall into this trap. They gauge their spirituality based on their outward exterior practices of what they think is Christianity, and a great tragedy is that they are doing this with a motivation to connect with God, and they're trying to connect with God on the level of performance, and that always ends in disappointment! Here's the reason why: that is the one place that God cannot be found.

This is a widespread problem, particularly in the conservative wing of evangelicalism. I wonder is it a problem for you? Do you ever say: 'I don't want to try any more'? Have you ever said that as a Christian? Do you feel that you don't measure up to the standard, whatever the standard might be? Perhaps, do you say to yourself: 'I can't rise to others expectations of me'? Have you lost your peace? Have you lost your security? Have you lost your joy in the Lord? I'll tell you, preachers can tell, looking down at most of the congregations that I preach to anyway - maybe it's just me, maybe it's what I do to people, I don't know - but there's not much joy about! Not much joy about.

In Galatians 4:15 Paul diagnoses this symptomatic problem of performance-based Christianity, one translation puts it in chapter 4 and verse 15 very graphically: 'What has happened to all your joy?'. What has happened to all your joy? Now listen to me tonight: a performance-based Christianity - whether it's salvation or sanctification - will sap you of every drop of joy that you ever had! S. Lewis Johnson put it like this: 'Legalism wrenches the joy of the Lord from the Christian believer and with the joy of the Lord goes his power' - that's right, isn't it? Doesn't the word of God say that the joy of the Lord is our strength? So if we don't have the joy, we'll not have the power. 'That power', he goes on to say, 'is vital for worship and vibrant service. Nothing is left but a cramped, sombre, dull and listless profession. The truth is betrayed and the glorious name of the Lord becomes a synonym for a gloomy kill-joy. The Christian under law is a miserable parody of the real thing'.

Is this a problem? Am I missing the mark tonight? I don't think I am, because the Holy Spirit has inspired this book, which refers to us that this will be a continual problem. In a mission I was taking recently, I had a great conversation with a couple who were, I believe, under conviction, and I believe they may well come through for the Lord. But I was asked a very interesting question by the girl in the marriage, she asked me: 'If I become a Christian do I have to change?'. Now she didn't mean: 'Do I have to repent of my sin?' - that's not what she meant, and after talking to her for a while I realised that that wasn't what she was getting at. I think what she was getting at was, without saying it, 'Do I have to become as miserable as all those Christians?'. That is the perception that some have, rightly or wrongly. But listen: if you are operating on a performance-based level of a Christianity, you will have that problem, whether you admit it or not.

It's widespread. In 2002 the George Barna research group was asked by a Christian organisation in America to poll Christians nationwide in the US to find out how widespread legalism was as a problem in the American church. One of the six survey questions and statements that was made was this, listen carefully: 'The Christian life is well summed up as trying to do what God commands', that was the statement, 'The Christian life is well summed up as trying to do what God commands'. How would you respond to that statement? How would you answer a question like that? Is that what the Christian life is all about, doing your best and trying hard to keep God's commandments? Now if you answer affirmative, yes, you're in the majority, for 57% agreed - strongly they agreed - that Christianity was well summed up as trying to do what God commands. Another 25% said they somewhat agreed, and you put those two together and you get a total of 82% who were in agreement that the Christian life is summed up as trying to do what God commands. The only problem with that statement is that it's wrong! It's a performance-based statement, it's more about doing than about being. It's emphasis is on a striving to avoid sin and do good things to compensate for sin. It's not about what true Christianity is. Now if you want a definition of what salvation and eternal life is, there is none better than the one that the Lord Jesus gave when He said: 'This is eternal life', this is eternal life, 'that you might know the only true God', that you might know the only true God, 'and Jesus Christ whom He has sent'.

Now some of you, I'm sure, think I'm splitting hairs. Was Paul splitting hairs? Did Paul think this was such a serious issue that he pronounced an anathema, a curse, on anyone who got on the wrong side of this split hair? A better definition of Christianity is this: it is a personal faith-based - faith-based, not performance - faith-based relationship with God the Father, through abiding in His Son, Jesus Christ, and walking in loving obedience to His word through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. I don't think you'll get any better than that - listen carefully: it is a personal faith-based relationship with God the Father, through abiding in His Son, Jesus Christ, and walking in loving obedience to His word through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. It is pursuing an intimate personal relationship with God. So the emphasis is not on rules, the emphasis is on relationship! That is why chapter 3 and verse 11 is a key verse, and we'll look at it in more detail, perhaps, next week in Galatians: 'But that no man is justified by the law', chapter 3:11, 'in the sight of God, it is evident', it is clear, 'The just shall live by faith'.

Now, if you have a marginal reference or study Bible you will see that that is an Old Testament quotation, and it's taken from Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 4 which reads the same: 'The just', or the righteous, 'shall live by his faith'. Now Paul quotes this twice in the New Testament, and if you give him the book of Hebrews he quotes it three times. He first quotes it in the book of Romans, which is a missionary book justifying why we should take the gospel to the whole earth - because it's the power of God unto salvation to everyone, to the

Jew and to the Gentile. His emphasis in the book of Romans is upon the first two words in that statement, 'the just', 'the righteous', and the whole book is about how you are righteous and justified in the eyes of God. 'Therefore being justified', chapter 5 verse 1, 'by faith, we have peace with God'.

So the emphasis in Romans is on the first two words, 'the just', 'the righteous'. Now we go to the book of Hebrews, and the emphasis is on - and this is in the Greek language - the emphasis is on the last two words, the just or the righteous shall live 'by faith'. You know the emphasis in the book of Hebrews is on faith, particularly chapter 11, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God'. But in the book of Galatians the emphasis is on the middle two words, the just or the righteous 'shall live' by faith. In other words, how do we know the victorious, joyous, Christian experience that God intended - well, it'll not come through obeying rules and regulations, it will not come through legalism, it will not come by adding anything to faith, but it will come simply by living in unadulterated faith that comes by grace in Jesus Christ.

Now, this is revolutionary. I read a book not that long ago by a man called Ronald Dunn. He wrote a book called 'Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something', and this book was entitled, 'Don't Just Sit There, Have Faith', a wonderful book. He opens this book on faith with a story entitled, 'The House That Grace Built', and I'm just going to read it to you - it's profound. It's an allegory depicting the Christian life from salvation through sanctification. Now listen carefully, he says: 'Salvation is like a house built beside a broad and busy highway. Like everyone else, I was born on that highway and was spending my life following it to its destination. At first the trip had been exciting and almost effortless, the constant flow of the crowd carrying me along. But the farther down the road I got, the more difficult things became; my original joy had dissipated and I noticed that my fellow travellers rarely laughed anymore and their occasional smiles seemed forced. The backpack I had been issued at the beginning of my journey had grown heavier each day, and I was now permanently stooped from its weight. Worst of all, I had been overtaken lately by an unexplainable fear of reaching the end of the highway'.

'One day my attention was drawn suddenly to the side of the highway to a magnificently constructed house. Over its narrow front doors a sign silently announced in bold red letters: 'Whosoever Will May Enter and Find Rest'. I don't know how I knew it, but I realized that if I could reach the inside of this beautiful house I would be saved from the highway and its destination. Pushing my way through the mass of indifferent travellers, I broke clear of the crowd and ran up the steps to the front door. But it was locked. Perhaps it's only stuck, I thought, and tried again. It refused to open. I was confused. Why would someone put up a sign inviting people in and then lock the door to keep them out? Not knowing what else to do (I refused to return to the highway), I pounded on the door, and shouted for someone inside to open it, and tried to pick the lock - but it was useless'.

'Suddenly a voice spoke my name, and I spun around. It was the Builder of the House. He placed in my hand a key on which was carved one word: FAITH. Turning back to the door, I inserted the key in the lock, twisted it, and heard a reassuring click. The door swung open, and I stepped across the threshold. Immediately the backpack fell from my shoulders, my back began to straighten like a wilting flower reaching for the sunlight, and from deep within me my soul breathed a sigh of relief as an extraordinary sense of peace and well-being wrapped itself around me. The Builder of the House welcomed me to my new home, explaining that everything in the house was now mine to enjoy. This was the house that grace had built, and faith was the key'.

'Surveying my new surroundings, I saw that the House of Salvation was a house with many rooms and I was only in the foyer. Across the way was a door marked Answered Prayer. Next to it was another that said Daily Victory, and next to it, Every Need Supplied. The row of doors, each promising some spiritual blessing, stretched endlessly throughout the house. The discovery of those other rooms puzzled me, for I failed to mention that the foyer in which I stood was jammed with people. It seemed that everyone who entered the house stopped in the foyer, never advancing beyond it, as though the foyer were the entire building'.

'This was little better than the highway. Couldn't they see that there was more to the House of Salvation than the foyer? Surely the Builder intended every room to be occupied. Hadn't he said that everything in the house was ours to enjoy? I, for one, had no desire to spend my life standing in the foyer. This was my Father's house; I was his child, and all he possessed was mine. So I went to the door marked Answered Prayer, and I grabbed the knob, twisted. It was locked. I went to the next door, and the next, and the next. All were locked. But this time I didn't try to pick the lock or knock down the door. I remembered my encounter at the front door and knew I had to have a key. Although I had been in the house only a short time, I had somehow managed to accumulate a large number of keys. Rummaging through my collection, I selected one tagged Doing Your Best, and tried it. It didn't fit. Nor did the key Religious Activity. The key of Sincerity proved useless. Next I tried the key of Tithing (I was getting desperate); but it was as powerless as the others. I was beginning to understand why the foyer was so crowded'.

'And then I heard a familiar voice. It was the Builder of the House. 'Child', he said, 'do you remember the key I gave you to enter my house?'. 'Yes, I remember'. 'What was it?', He said. 'Why, it was the key of Faith', I answered. 'The key of Faith', He said, 'is the master key that unlocks every door in the house'. Ronald Dunn says: 'That was the greatest discovery of my life. Faith is the master key of the Christian life. From start to finish, salvation is by grace through faith operation. Everything we get in the Christian life we get by grace through faith. God's grace makes it available, faith accepts it. Grace is God's hand giving; faith is man's hand receiving. Faith possesses what grace provides. Grace is God's part; faith is man's part. It is our positive response to God's gracious offer'. Ronald Dunn concludes by saying: 'Everything God demands of man can be summed up in one word: faith'.

Look at chapter 3 and verses 2 and 3, we'll not stray into this tonight for we'll be looking at it next week: 'This only would I learn of you', Paul says, 'Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?' - and the answer is 'No!'.

Now, I have a burden on my heart, and I believe it's from God, because I believe that many believers - particularly those who are acutely desirous to obey the word of God by every jot and tittle - many of them have never learned, or if they once learned it have forgotten, what it is to live by grace through faith in the Spirit. Have you? I think the greatest story of grace, perhaps, is the story of the prodigal. Would you turn with me to it for a moment? We're not going to read the story of the prodigal, because I'm sure most of you know it so well, but what I want to read is the story that is part of the punchline that most of us stop reading at, it's the story of the elder brother. Verse 22 of Luke chapter 15, the son that was lost has come home to the father, verse 22: 'But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the

field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found'.

Now listen carefully, we'll touch on this when we come to Paul's teaching on adoption as sons and daughters of God later on in this epistle, but here's a very, very stark lesson that most of us have missed in the parable of the prodigal son: the elder brother never learned to relate to his father as his father. He said: 'I obeyed all your commandments, never disobeyed you once' - that's legalism. He viewed God as a legislator, One whom he had to obey for fear, perhaps, of judgement or displeasure - but he never learned to relate to Him as a Father. That's what a lot of Christians have as their Christianity. I'm telling you now, I had it! Religion - and at times I can lapse into it - religion and not relationship! What do you have?

Listen: it doesn't just affect how we relate to God, it affects how we relate to others. You see, when you understand grace in essence, how God accepts us unconditionally upon the act of our faith, it gives us the ability to receive brothers and sisters in Christ, because they have believed in the same Saviour as we have - but the elder brother couldn't do that! Look at verse 30, he says: 'Your son has come', he doesn't say 'My brother', he says 'Your son has wasted his inheritance on harlots, your son!'. He was a haughty separatist, he was! Look at verse 28, they're all making merry, they're having a celebration, they're throwing a party because of the grace of the father in receiving the prodigal son, and this boy is angry and would not go in!

This is a revolutionary message, and we will find out in subsequent weeks that it is the core message of the New Testament, and it is the core theme of the Gospels. Listen: you will never understand the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ unless you understand what grace is. I rejoice in Him, but He was never stand-offish - never! Was He? He never had a holier-than-thou attitude, never! It was the outcasts, the downcast, the lepers, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, those were the ones He made a beeline for. And it was the Pharisees - who were a good bunch of people, who wanted to revive the Jewish Torah, but had all the letter and none of the Spirit - those were the ones who He vehemently opposed.

Now I will be asking, in the weeks that lie ahead, if you can handle it, what camp do we find ourselves in? When sin came to the Garden in Genesis 3, man's relationship with God was broken. You go to chapter 4, and you see that just after man's relationship with God was broken, man's relationship with his fellow man breaks down. Legalism is sin, and that's exactly what it does: it affects our relationship with God, and it affects our relationship with brothers and sisters. Here's the reason why: when we think that we have to perform to gain acceptance with God, do you know what happens? We require others to perform to gain acceptance with us! When we think we have to perform to gain acceptance with God, we think others must perform to gain acceptance with us!

Now, Peter felt pressure in this regard from the legalist Judaisers in Galatia. Without going into too much detail, I want you to notice what happened here. Some visitors came from

Jerusalem, sent by James, and Peter, who was accustomed to eating - remember that Peter had the vision, you'd think if you had a vision from God it would make a difference! He had a vision from God, 'Don't call unclean what I have cleansed' - and yet Peter, because he was looking over his shoulder at what these folk from Jerusalem would think, he would not eat with the Gentiles in Galatia. Paul had to come, and he faced him, and he rebuked him. Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say: Peter was not a Judaizer, and Peter was not preaching heresy - he wasn't! He wasn't preaching Christ 'and', Christ and performance, Christ and your works, Christ and circumcision, Christ and ritual - no! But I'll tell you what he was guilty of: he was guilty of not living consistently with the message of grace that he did preach. Paul felt that it was serious enough to rebuke him.

Peter had preached grace, but he didn't offer it to his brothers and sisters from the Gentile world. Listen carefully to what I'm going to say, because it's considered: it is dangerous when we create environments where we can claim to believe something, and yet comfortably bypass practising it in our behaviour - that is dangerous. Let me ask you: how are you living? Are you trying to do what God commands? Or are you trying to do what others command? Or are you living in a personal relationship, a faith-based relationship, with God as your Father, through abiding in Jesus Christ His Son, and walking in loving obedience? We're not binning obedience now, we'll see that later on. We have liberty in the Spirit but not license, it's not a licence to sin - but righteous living doesn't come from law, it comes through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. It's life in the Spirit.

Let me close with this story: the famous Boston preacher Dr A.J. Gordon visited the World's Fair in Chicago. In the distance he saw a man robed in bright gaudy Oriental clothing, who appeared to be laboriously turning the crank of a pump and thereby making a mighty flow of water come out. Gordon was so impressed by the man's energy as he pumped the water, and his smooth motions, and his obvious physical conditioning, that he was intrigued and he went nearer - he was pumping a tremendous amount of water! Drawing closer, Gordon was surprised to discover that the man was actually made of wood. Instead of turning the crank and making the water flow, the flow of water was actually turning the crank and thereby making him go. That's life in the Spirit. Not cranking up something, but allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through you.

Let's all bow our heads. Now let me ask you again, and I believe it's the Holy Spirit asking you: what have you got? Have you begun in the Spirit, you're born again already, but what have you got? A performance-based existence without joy, in constant defeat, simply because you're living to please some self-created standard of your own, or the imposed standard of another, or of a system? Or are you walking in a daily, vibrant, Holy Ghost relationship with Jesus Christ and the Father? That's it! Which do you have? It's very easy to slip into the wrong mode, but it's a world of difference to have life walking in the Spirit. I'll tell you, listen carefully to what I say on the authority of the Word and the Spirit: have done with religion and get to know your God!

Father, we thank You that we can know You as 'Abba', Abba, as children. Teach us what that means, and let us live in the joy and the liberty of it, and never again be burdened with a yoke of restriction - but let us know what that is to be free, for where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. Amen.

Life In The Spirit - Chapter 2

"The Magna Carta Of Christian Freedom"

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Well, good evening to you all again, it's good to be back with you in the Iron Hall. I've been enjoying fellowship with you once more, and looking forward to tonight and the next two weeks with you in the Bible Class. I want you to turn with me again to the book of Galatians, we've taken the title 'Life in the Spirit', and we very much want to root it and ground it in this epistle of Paul's. Whilst we've only got four weeks, we're trying to do our best in doing justice to this great epistle - six chapters in total - and we want to look tonight at chapters 3 and 4. God willing, for the next two weeks, we'll look at chapters 5 and 6 - so we're going to take a bit more time on those.

We begin reading at verse 1, please, of Galatians 3: *"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to*

bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise".

"Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all. Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free".

Now if you were not here last week, I would encourage you to get the recording, perhaps, to fill in the gaps - but we spoke about the Judaisers, who had infiltrated the churches, plural most likely, of Galatia. They convinced many in the church that the Gospel did not set aside Jewish ceremonies, and therefore Gentile Christians must be circumcised and practice many of the rites and rituals of Judaism if they were to come into the promise that had been given to Abraham the patriarch. So, in other words, what they were teaching was another gospel, and that gospel was 'Christ and...': Christ and circumcision, Christ and Jewish ceremony and ritual. It was Christ and human legalistic requirements. So really, what they were saying was:

what Christ had begun, Moses must complete. Christ's work was not enough, and the works of Moses - that is, the law - had to be added to the work of Christ.

Just to remind you, chapter 2 and verse 4, Paul says this matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom that we had in Christ, and to make us slaves. So they were heaping upon these Galatian Christians more rules and laws than Paul had stipulated when he preached the Gospel of free grace received by faith in Christ alone. Paul was at great pains, in chapter 1 especially, to implore upon them that this teaching undermined the very essence of the gospel of grace. What he did, we saw last week - although we didn't look at it in great detail - in chapter 1 and chapter 2, Paul speaks personally of how he himself had a Damascus Road experience, and he was an arch-legalist, a Pharisee himself - yet how Christ, in His grace, came to him and delivered him of all that. He points out in chapters 1 and 2 how our standing is by grace through faith plus nothing - by grace through faith in Christ plus nothing. He says very explicitly that our faith is rooted and grounded in the work of the cross plus nothing. Look at verse 21 of chapter 2 again: 'I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain'. What a verse to share with someone who has the problem of self-righteousness or is particularly religious, and thinks they're good enough to earn heaven! If we could earn heaven by whatever rule or a law - even if it's the laws of God - plainly Christ died in vain, and God wasted the precious blood of His own Son, because a penal substitutionary sacrifice was not necessary if we could achieve salvation ourselves.

So the central issue for Paul in chapters 1 and 2, we saw, was the basis of our acceptance with God: by grace, through faith in Christ, plus nothing. But we also learned last week that not only did this affect the gospel that the Galatians preached, but this very clear message also affected the level at which they tried - and the imperative word is 'tried' - to live their Christian lives. Because not only had they started to preach a message of salvation at a performance-based level - what you can do to add to the work of Christ - but they were also imbibing a message of sanctification at a performance-based level. They were living by law. We applied this by saying that many people would agree with Paul, particularly in evangelicalism, that salvation cannot be achieved by performance. But where the mental and spiritual block comes for them is that they have embraced a message that tells us that sanctification can be achieved at the level of performance. Paul comes to them with the same message - we must remember the Galatians were born again, these were Christians that Paul was writing to - and he says that the same is the case regarding your sanctification, equally the message you have believed is not 'Christ and' for your sanctification, it's not Christ plus law, it's not Christ plus your own performance, it's not Christ plus legalistic requirements.

He says this very graphically in verses 1 through to 3 of chapter 3: 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you' - it's as if someone has cast a spell on you! - 'that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?'. So Paul's message is very clear, the message of the Gospel that brings salvation is Christ, and it's a gift, a free gift by grace, and we receive it from God by the hand of faith, and there's nothing else involved! No works or no merits of our own! But sanctification, Paul is at pains to get across, is exactly the same: it is by grace through faith, not of works of the law.

I challenged you last week, and I challenge you again tonight: how are you living your Christian life? Are you trying to do what God has commanded? 'Trying' again being the

operative word - are you trying? Are you, perhaps, trying to do what others expect of you, or the standard that they have ordained for you? Or are you living what is clearly New Testament Christianity, which is a personal faith-based relationship with God the Father, through abiding in His Son by faith, Jesus Christ, and walking in loving obedience to the Word of God through the person and the power of the Holy Spirit? I said that whilst some may think this is splitting hairs, Paul didn't think so. This was such a serious issue that Paul actually accused these Judaisers of preaching a different gospel, whether of salvation or sanctification. It was the difference between doing and being.

Now look with me again at verse 20, we didn't really spend much time on this, but Paul said in verse 20: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me'. That is how you live the Christian life! I thank God, through the recommendation of some Christians in my youth, I read a little book by Roy Hession called 'The Calvary Road'. There is one statement in that little book that really sums up the whole issue of sanctification for me, and all that the New Testament teaches on it, and indeed what verse 20 of chapter 2 is saying. Roy Hession says this: 'The only life that pleases God is the life of His Son'. You think about that. The only life that pleases God is the life of His Son, and that is why our flesh - who we are in self - must die. Now it has died if we are saved, because we are crucified with Christ - past aorist tense - it's a done deal, it has already happened. But yet we can still breathe life into the flesh, and try and live the Christian life through the flesh, try and do good deeds by the flesh, and we are focusing on doing rather than being - allowing Christ to be in and through us. What Paul is saying in Galatians, and what the Holy Spirit says throughout the whole New Testament, is that the Christian life can never be achieved by law, it can only be lived through the Spirit. The crucified life, the crucified life is the starting point of all sanctification - and if it is not, your sanctification might well be of the flesh.

Now, we also saw last week that if we think that we must perform to gain acceptance with God, equally we will require others to perform to gain acceptance with us. Now, I'm not going to spend time on that tonight because we will deal with that next week in chapter 5 and following, where Paul deals with the practical aspects to this teaching of grace. But this week we want to look at chapters 3 and 4, where he speaks of the doctrinal argument behind the exhortations that he brings in the book. We're going to see tonight why Galatians has been called by some 'the Magna Carta of spiritual freedom for the whole world and for all time'. It is a document that proves that we have the right to be free in Jesus Christ.

Now, let us see how Paul argues this. We start at chapter 3 and verses 1 to 9, and in these nine verses Paul shows us that salvation and sanctification are a work of the Holy Spirit to be received by faith, not to be achieved by works. Now, he argues this in three points. First of all he speaks presently, verse 5, of miracles that are among God's people in Galatia: 'He therefore that ministers to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?'. What a wonderful thing it would be to be in a fellowship where God was performing miracles! That was happening in Galatia in the early church - and Paul was saying: 'Presently, the work of God among you now, is the Spirit doing miracles through the works of the law or is He doing it through His own inherent power?'. That was an obvious answer: the Spirit is doing these miracles.

But he moves on from the present to the previous, the past. He says in verse 6: 'Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness' - and previously, he argues to them, Abraham believed, Abraham exercised faith, and it was credited as righteousness to Abraham. Abraham was not justified by acts and works and laws, but by

faith. In other words, Abraham depended upon faith for righteousness, and God credited righteousness to Abraham's account because of his act of faith alone. So, presently, he argues, the works of the Spirit among the Galatians are by the Spirit, not wrought by law. Previously, he argues, Abraham believed and it was accredited to him as righteousness. Then prophetically, he argues in verses 7 to 9, the children of Abraham are all who believe in God through Christ, whether they be Jew or Gentile.

Read the verses again: 'Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham'. Now, of course, you know that the physical descendants of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, are the Jewish people. But the spiritual descendants of Abraham are not necessarily the Jewish people, but people who believe in God through Jesus Christ - people of faith, whether they be Jew or Gentile. But those who are certainly not the descendants of Abraham, spiritually, are those who live by works.

I want you to understand what this did to the Judaisers mindset: this shattered their false confidence in their physical ancestry. They thought that because they were Jews, they were safe. They were children of Abraham, but they were only physical children of Abraham. Unless they believed, they would not be spiritual children of Abraham. You remember the Lord Jesus had this battle in His ministry, but before Him, His forerunner, John the Baptist, cited this great obstacle in the way of the Jews. He called them a generation of vipers, a brood of vipers, and he said: 'Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father', for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham'. Your physical ancestry doesn't mean anything unless you have faith alone in God. The Lord Jesus followed on, of course, and the religious Pharisees and Scribes cast aspersions on the Lord Jesus' parentage, inferring that He was an illegitimate. They said: 'We are not of sexual immorality, we are not of fornication', and the Lord Jesus responded in John 8, and said 'You are of your father the Devil, and your will is to do his lusts, you will fulfil his desires'. They pride themselves on having Abraham as their father, but the Lord was speaking to them as legalistic men who were trying to live right in the flesh, and said: 'No, your father is not Abraham, it's the devil'. In John chapter 6 some came to the Lord Jesus and, with their Jewish legalistic mindset, asked the question: 'What must we do that we might be doing the works of God?'. Jesus said: 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom God has sent' - faith! The Lord Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, challenged this conception.

Greg Morris, in one of his writings, offers four warning signs of traditionalism - and traditionalism is a fruit of legalism, as we'll see, perhaps, next week. But the first sign of traditionalism, which is a fruit of legalism, Greg Morris cites as this: 'One, we begin to worship our history, we lose our effectiveness when our memories are greater than our dreams'. Let me repeat that: we begin to worship our history, we lose our effectiveness when our memories are greater than our dreams. Paul had to come to the Jews and say: 'No, the promise that was given to Abraham was not given to Abraham and his seeds'. Look at it in verse 16, it was given to Abraham and his seed, singular. In verses 15 to 20, we'll not look at it in detail, but Paul uses a human illustration, and he says it's just like a man-made covenant that states the beneficiary of the inheritance in the covenant. Well, Abraham received such a covenant from God, a promise, and it was signed, made to Abraham and his seed - his offspring, singular, not plural. Do you know what that means? Paul tells us in verse 17: the seed that the promise was given to, as well as Abraham, was Christ. His seed was Christ! Therefore, if you want to enter into the full spiritual blessings of the promises that were given

to Abraham in his covenant, you must be in Christ, and you must claim it in Christ by faith, not by the works in Moses.

Do you see it? In verse 17: 'I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise'. So God gave a promise to Abraham before Moses was on the scene, and when Moses got the law it did not disannul the covenant with Abraham which was entered into by faith in Christ, who was the seed it was promised to.

Therefore Paul moves on, and in verses 10 to 14 of chapter 3 he argues on this basis that the righteous, the just, shall live by their faith and not by their works. He says in verse 11, quite plainly: 'The just shall live by faith', 'No man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident'. Now here's the reason why the just can only live by faith and not law, let me give you a number of reasons - well, Paul gives them to us here. Verse 10: the law, the works of the law, living by them brings a curse - the first part of verse 10: 'For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse'. Now I don't know whether you have ever operated on the premise of legalism, or ever been in a legalistic system, but there comes a curse with it. A curse, essentially, that robs us of our joy - and we'll see this later on in chapter 4 and verse 15, I like the translation that goes like this: 'What has happened to all your joy?'. We saw last week how our joy will be sapped from us, and legalism brings shame and guilt. In the arsenal of the legalists, they use shame and guilt to get their way, and to impose laws. Perhaps this is one of the greatest dangers of any legalistic gospel, or any legalistic sanctification: it turns people away from the grace of God as it truly is, and from the joyful freedom that Christ intends in His gospel.

We saw that in the gospels when the Lord Jesus encountered the Pharisees, and we saw last week that His strongest denunciations were against the Pharisees. In Matthew 23 and verse 13 He says: 'But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in'. That is the curse of legalism, it essentially dangles a spiritual carrot in front of people's faces, and they cannot achieve it because the carrot keeps moving, the standard is too high! This is what the Pharisees were doing, and we'll see in more detail how they did it next week - but they were effectively shutting the door in the face of those who needed to enter the kingdom.

Christian legalists do the same. They block God's people from the way of freedom by making the Christian life a cumbersome journey of religious performance. The Lord Jesus cited this against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 and verse 4, He said: 'They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger' - and I think the inference is, 'their little finger'. So they're prescribing rules and regulations that even they themselves know they can't live up to, and they rob everything that is meant to be a spiritual life of joy and satisfaction. Legalism brings a curse. It is like the proverbial hamster's wheel, and the hamster goes round and round, and round and round, and when he has a thought to get off, he gets off and he's puffed - what does he do? He gets back on again, and keeps going round and round and round. Each time he gets off he's as empty as he's ever been.

Paul says the righteous must live by their faith, because living by the works of the law brings a curse. But here is a second reason why we must live by faith and not law: law demands perfection. Verse 10, the second half, shows why this is the case: 'For it is written, Cursed is

every one that continueth not in all things', all things, 'which are written in the book of the law to do them'. Verse 12 as well, 'The law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them' - the implication is that he needs to live by all these laws in perfection if it's going to be a success. Now if traditionalism is a fruit of legalism, equally perfectionism is a fruit of legalism. Someone has said, and I think it's right: Jesus was perfect, but He was never a perfectionist. What does that mean? Well, you might be retorting in your mind: 'Well, did the Lord Jesus not say, 'You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect?' - yes, He did. But if you think of that statement as the Lord inviting broken sinners to pull their socks up, and step up to the mark, and live like God when they can't - you've got it completely wrong. When the Lord Jesus said: 'You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect', and when He said that your righteousness must exceed the righteous acts of the Pharisees, He was showing that such a standard is unattainable without the Gospel of death to ourselves through crucifixion with Christ and life in the Spirit. The life of Christ living through us, the only life that can and will please God!

Now, if you're living under law, it is likely that you will be a perfectionist, or it's likely that those who are enforcing law upon you will be perfectionists. Richard Walters describes perfectionists like this, he said: 'People who must think and act without a flaw, punishing themselves when they don't meet this unattainable goal. They are people who leave behind them a trail of frustration. They remember the past with regret, don't enjoy the present as much as they might, and usually dread the future'. It's very likely that their perfectionism makes those around them miserable as well. Paul says the righteous must live by faith, because living by law brings a curse, it demands perfectionism which is not possible.

Thirdly, and perhaps most pertinently, it doesn't justify. The reason why it doesn't justify is, if I can take you out of Galatians for a moment into Romans chapter 8, the reason why the law does not justify is because it is weak through the flesh. Turn with me to Romans 8 please, Romans 8 verse 1, Paul again says: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus' - note - 'who walk not after the flesh', and his implication is that walking by law, whether it's the laws of Moses or your own little Mount Sinai that you've come down with your list of rules and regulations, there is no condemnation for people who don't live by such laws, but who walk after the Spirit. 'For the law of the Spirit of life', no death or curse there, 'in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death'. Now I don't have time to prove this to you, but you will find that the law of sin and death here, Paul is not speaking about a law that works in our members that he has spoken of in previous chapters. He is actually referring here to the Holy Law of God as the law of sin and death. Now that's strong language, and here's the reason why he calls it the law of sin and death, verse 3: 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh'. The reason why the law cannot justify us to save us, and cannot justify us to sanctify us, is because it's weak in the flesh. In other words, it tells us what to do and what not to do, but it doesn't give us the power to do it! It only shows us that we can't do it! It shows us that we've fallen short of the mark!

You might say: 'Well, why is that?'. Well, here Paul tells us in Galatians, if you go back to chapter 3, the reason why is that the law was never intended to justify. God never gave it for that intention in the beginning. In chapter 3 in verse 21: 'Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law'. God never gave a law that could bring life, He only gives a law that could bring death, and that was why it was given: to show us that we could never achieve the righteous standards of God in the flesh and by our works. If you ever

needed a reason why we should not live by law, it is this: it doesn't justify because it's weak through the flesh, it was never given for that intention in the first place, but ultimately this is the reason why Christ died, to redeem us from the law!

Chapter 3 verses 13 and 14: 'Christ has redeemed us', brought us back, 'from the', bondage and, 'curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' - and you can read verses 26 to 29 which state the same. Now Paul has argued in verses 1 to 9 that salvation and sanctification are a work of the Spirit received by faith, not achieved by the works of the law. Presently miracles were being performed in the Galatians' midst, and it was by the Spirit, not by law. Previously Abraham had believed, and it was accredited to him as righteousness, not by works but by faith. Prophetically those who believe, the promise is to the Seed - that is, Christ - and those who are in Him who believe. The righteous, verses 10 to 14, shall live by their faith, not works, because works brings a curse, works demands perfection, works doesn't justify - weak through the flesh, it was never intended for that reason. Christ has died to redeem us from the law!

Now come to chapter 4, we need to understand a bit more about the purpose that the law was given for. In chapter 3 verse 24, there is that famous verse that tells us that the law was given to us as a schoolmaster, or a tutor, to bring us to Christ. He expands in chapter 4 and verses 1 to 3 by saying that the law is like a guardian that was getting us ready, managing us for our inheritance. It was wanting to show us that we were not up to the mark, the purpose was to show us how in bondage to sin we were. In verse 8 and following, he spells it out even more, chapter 4, he says: 'Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God', in other words, known His grace by faith, and 'are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?'. In other words, the law has done its job, Galatians, its job was to inflame sin in you - that's what the law does, do you realise that? It inflames sin in you! It brings sin to the surface to show you what it is - that's why, if you live by laws, you will be constantly frustrated and you will be miserable, because all you will see is your inherent sinfulness.

That's why Paul says: 'Why on earth do you want to return to that?'. To return to the law is to return to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world. To return to the law, Paul says, is to become slaves again to sin - when what you should be are sons and daughters of God! He cites how they were enslaved in verse 10 of chapter 4, he says: 'Ye observe days', holy days, 'and holy months, and times, and years'. You're enslaved to a whole load of religious rules and regulations, and what is the effect of all this? Verse 15, that wonderful verse better translated: 'What has happened to all your joy?'

It's very sad when you read verses 15 and 16, because Paul says that when he was with them - this might infer that he had bad eyesight, I don't know - but he said they were such a loving and a gracious people, that they would have plucked out their own eyes and have given them to Paul. But now, all of a sudden, he has become their enemy because he is telling them the truth. Let me tell you something: that's what legalism will do to you. It will rob you of your joy, and it'll take away your love. Here's a lesson, if ever you need to learn one, it's this: you become like the god you worship - that's a big one. If you believe in Allah, you'll cut people's hands off and heads off if they offend the law of Allah. Make sure you don't have a Christianised Allah.

In verses 4 to 7 of chapter 4, Paul is at pains to bring to their attention that they were slaves - past tense. Look at it, verse 4: 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore you are no more servants, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ'. Now, I want you to get this tonight: you're not a slave to law, you're a son or daughter to God. God's Word says that you have the Spirit of God's Son Himself in you, inside you, crying out: 'Abba, Father'. When was the last time you heard that, or you felt that inside? Let me put it another way: when was the last time you were in touch with the Father-child relationship that you have with God as your Father? Or, conversely, are you living your life, your Christian life, like a slave?

This is important, and it comes to the very heart of what Paul is arguing here. Let me bring you back to Luke chapter 15, where we were last week. We looked a little bit at the prodigal son, and quickly, if you turn to Luke chapter 15, you will see the great difference there is between being a slave and a son. You remember that the prodigal has been in the far country and he has wasted his inheritance in riotous living, and he has come to his senses and now he's beginning to return. He's thinking out beforehand what he's going to say to his father who has been offended by him, and he says in verse 19 - verse 18: 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son'. Now, see that, he felt 'I am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one of thy hired servants'. Do you understand what he's saying here? He felt that because he had sinned, like you have sinned, and because he'd let God down, like you've let God down, that God wouldn't have him as His son anymore and he could only expect to be like a hired servant. Now listen: if that's you tonight, you need to get your eyes off yourself, and your eyes off the prodigal, and get your eyes on the father! I want you to do it: see the father as he is. Now, I want you to see him before the prodigal made the mess up. The prodigal comes to him and says: 'Give me your inheritance' - and I've told you here before that that was tantamount to saying to this old man, 'I wish you were dead so that I could get my hands on your money'. What did that father do? Was he like a legalistic father that some of us may have had, that would have pummelled him into submission? No, he didn't. He gave him it and he let him go!

Some of you could think about that, but I want you to see how the father spotted the son first - have you ever seen this? Verse 20, look at what it says: still a long way off he saw the son returning. Now that infers, I believe, that this old man was waiting on the rooftop, perhaps daily, perhaps for years. He was squinting day on day at the horizon, looking for the son coming back - that's the father! Now it's the Lord Jesus telling this story, and He wants you to see the father! When he sees the little speck, silhouette of that young boy, what does he do? He races out of the house, shouting instructions for a feast to his servants! This parable is a picture, you know, and the Lord, I think, pictures this father hurriedly stumbling toward the boy - maybe tripping over his skirt to get to the boy - who he longed to embrace.

Now I want you to see this, because this is wonderful, verse 21. He starts dictating the spiel that he had rehearsed in private, what he would say: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet'. Now, see this: the father stifles the speech of repentance halfway through. He couldn't even say what he intended to say, 'Make me like one of your hired servants', the father didn't even give him time to get it out until he was ordering the servants to kill the fatted calf, and bring a new robe, and a ring for the boy's finger. Now that is the heart of the

Father, and I want to ask you tonight: is that your understanding of your God? Because if it's not, you're way off the mark. Or let me ask you this: do you call Him 'Abba'? Or do you know Him as 'Abba'? This is the picture, this is an Aramaic word, the picture is of a little Jewish boy running with his arms wide open to greet Daddy after his day's work, and he's crying with excitement, 'Abba, Abba, Abba!'. It is the picture of the childlike awe and affection that a toddler has for his Daddy. We are meant to experience that intimacy, that affection toward our Father in heaven.

Now I know the reaction, I know some of you are saying in your head and your heart: 'Oh, that's too familiar, you're being too familiar with God, that's irreverent'. Now let me tell you, if that's your reaction, can I say: you have never known it, you've never known it. John White calls that kind of thinking, 'A carnal sort of dignity that must go, and a humble heart and trust be added'. When you know Him as 'Abba', your faith will be simpler and clearer, and your prayers will be more reverent. Yet at the same time as being reverent, they will be intimate and they will be informed. Now don't misquote me and say that David Legge is saying we should call God 'Daddy', I'm not saying that, but what I am saying is: the intimacy we ought to have is the same as a child with his Daddy.

There is a picture I saw recently in the press, I don't know whether you saw it as well - it's on the screen just now - a photograph of Barack Obama in the Oval Office, and his youngest daughter, Sasha, has crept in unawares to her father. The press article had that photograph, and right beside it had another photograph - because that most recent photograph was reminiscent of the famous image that some of you here might remember in 1963 of another president, John F. Kennedy, at the desk of the Oval Office during the Cuban missile crisis. Many of the dignitaries assembled in the Oval Office of the White House to discuss this crisis - what was happening, what their response should be to it, what should go out to the public about it - this photograph was taken during the discussions, but it reveals that while these leaders were in serious discussion, little John Jr was playing under the president's feet. Now all the VIPs had to show their credentials and prove them as they entered the White House that day, and as they entered the Oval Office, but the president's son hadn't. If you had asked the question: 'Why did he not need to?', it was simply because of who he was - who he was.

Do you know who you are? You know there's a hymn, and I know I'll get shot down for saying it, but I hate it - it goes like this: 'I'm only a sinner saved by grace' - you are not only a sinner saved by grace! You are a child of the King. You are a son or a daughter of God - but many don't know it! Many don't know who their Father is. Do you know what legalism does? It turns our Father, as God, into a despot, or a harsh legislator. Yes, we are to have fear of God, but do you know what 'fear' actually means? It literally means, in a New Testament sense, 'faith'. It means a reverential awe of God, but it doesn't mean that we are to be trembling in our boots!

Let me say this, and this comes very near the raw flesh for some: not only have legalists given us a warped view of God as our Father, but often our earthly fathers have done quite a good job of this themselves. Do you know that this is what happens? Because of our childhood experience of our parental fathers, we often superimpose upon the personality of God the Father some of those negative characteristics. A father who was absent, a father who was too busy for you, and it's hard for some Christians to understand that that is far from the case with their heavenly Father. A father who is distant, or disinterested, insensitive or uncaring. A father who is stern and demanding, a taskmaster. Maybe a father who's just laissez-faire, passive and cold; or a father who is competitive in nature, and he's never satisfied with what you do, or maybe he's impatient or angry. He's maybe mean, cruel, or even abusive! Or

maybe you've a father - and we've all been this father if we've been fathers - who tries to take all the fun out of life, who is controlling, or who is manipulative, or is condemning, or unforgiving, or nitpicking. Jesus and Paul want us to know that our Abba in heaven is not like that!

Now, I know some of you might have a problem with this. Philip said to the Lord: 'Look, we've heard enough, just show us the Father and that will do'. Jesus said: 'Have I been so long with you, Philip, and you don't realise that whoever has seen me has seen the Father'. Now you listen to this: do you want to know who God the Father is like? Look at Jesus! Now maybe you're here, and you're saying: 'I want to enjoy such an intimate relationship with the Father like that' - is that you? Is that what you're saying? 'I want to enjoy such an intimacy with Abba Father' - listen, now listen: you have it! You have it! It was bought for you at Calvary, but you will never enjoy it if you insist in living by laws like a slave. You must live by grace through faith as a son of God and a daughter of God.

In the United States Civil War, over the issue of slavery, Charles Sumner, on November 5th 1864, drew the battle lines between the two warring sides - and he declared this, I quote: 'Where slavery is, there liberty cannot be; and where liberty is, there slavery cannot be' - that is the message of Galatians. Where slavery is, there liberty cannot be; and where liberty is, there slavery cannot be - that's the message of the Bible. Now what is the remedy to this Galatian controversy? Well, it's found in chapter 4, if you look at it, we're almost finished, chapter 4 verses 21 to 28, and I want to read it in the English Standard Version, because it's clear. What Paul does is, he uses an allegory, an illustration of Hagar and Sarah - verse 21 of Galatians 4: 'Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh', Ishmael, 'while the son of the free woman', Isaac, 'was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written...', verse 28, 'Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise'.

What is the remedy to this problem? The remedy is very simply verses 30 and 31: 'Cast out the bondwoman', that's Hagar, the law, a picture of it, 'and cast out her son', Ishmael, a son of the flesh, of the works of the flesh - cast her out, and live by the promise! That's God's will. Now there's a warning in verse 29, that if you live like this, you'll be persecuted - Ishmael always persecutes Isaac, and the carnal legalists will always persecute the children of promise. But listen carefully: Paul is very clear, 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son' - and let me tell you this: we need to be as ruthless with this issue in our lives as the Lord Jesus Christ was with the Pharisees, because that was exactly the same issue He was dealing with.

Charles Swindoll has a great book I could recommend to any of you called, 'The Great Awakening', and I adopted one of his stories in it for our benefit in our country here. Listen to it as I close tonight, he says this: 'Suppose you began a family holiday in a new car, and you filled it with petrol. You put the family in it and took off, and the car operated beautifully, and the engine purred. You zipped along at 65, maybe 70 miles an hour down the motorway - however, the further you got down the way, it wasn't long before you needed to fill up with petrol again. You noticed that some people along the way, very strangely, were pushing their cars. They would wave at you as you go by, and you would wave back at them and keep on driving. Finally you came by a lay-by to rest, and while you stopped to relax a little, somebody who had been pushing his car comes into the same lay-by and asks, 'How are you

doing?'. You reply, 'Fine', and the car-pusher asks, 'Where are you going?'. You reply, 'Well, we're taking a trip up north, we're going to get up to the coast and enjoy the seaside and the fresh air'. Then he asks you, 'Well, why are you driving? We are all pushing!'. 'Yes, we noticed that, but we don't understand why', you remark back to him. 'Oh, if you push your car the air stays clean, it makes a lot of sense you know, to push your car. We used to rely on petrol a lot, but no longer. Now that we really understand what it's all about, we are pushers, we are not drivers!', was his explanation. So you let your car run out of petrol, and all the family gets out and you begin to push this beautiful, lovely, comfortable new car to your holiday destination and back'.

Now, this is what Swindoll says: 'That's what Paul is writing about in Galatians 3:2-3. In essence he is saying, 'You are telling me that you who began on a full tank of the Holy Spirit are now pushing your way through life? You're telling me that that's an advantageous message?'. Paul says, 'I'm, telling you that it's a denigrating message, it's a degenerating message. That means that Christ, the miracle working One, now He lays back and watches you as you, so-called, pull off a spiritual life that you never had before. Who are you kidding?', Paul says, 'Cars were made to drive, not to push'. That's it - cars were made to drive, not to push.

Some of us say: 'Oh, is there not something for me to do?' - of course there is something for you to do, but it's not what you do that will sanctify you. Galatians 6 and verse 14: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world' - that is the message. You must come as a Christian, here is how to be sanctified: you must come as a Christian to the cross as you did as an unsaved person, and you must admit that in the flesh this Christian life is impossible to live, it must be lived in the Spirit. You must allow yourself to be broken before Calvary, and come with your empty cup and allow God to cleanse it, and allow God to fill it, and allow God to live His life through you - that's it! Nothing more and nothing less!

It all starts, and it all ends, at the cross.

Hallelujah, praise the Lord, the Almighty, the Living God, the only Eternal, Everlasting, Unchangeable Ancient of Days - but my Abba. My Abba!

Lord, may we all be able to say that from the depths of our spirit, for it ought to be Christ's Spirit crying to You: 'Abba'. May we live in such an intimacy, a faith, grace-based intimacy through the Holy Spirit. Free us and let us stand in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and not be enslaved by any yoke of bondage - but may we be free, for it cost the blood of Christ, Your Son, and we thank you for it, Father, to set us free! For who the Son sets free...Lord, may there even be a prodigal - and I know there are prodigals here tonight - who sees the Father, and finds Him. Amen.

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Life In The Spirit - Chapter 3

"Legal Fear vs Loving Freedom"

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by David Legge

Well, good evening to you all again, it's good to be back in the Iron Hall this evening for our third instalment in this study in the book of Galatians that we have entitled 'Life in the Spirit'. So I want you to turn with me, please, again to that little Epistle, and we are looking at chapter 5 tonight, and we're only going to read the first 18 verses. The first week we looked at two chapters, the second week two chapters, but this evening we have a more palatable amount of verses to consider and - God willing - next week we will finish off chapter 5 and into chapter 6 as well, as we conclude our studies.

So Galatians chapter 5 please, and if you want a title for this message it could be 'Legal Fear vs Loving Freedom'. Verse 1 of Galatians 5: *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty",* or the freedom, *"wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage",* or yoke of slavery. *"Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty",* freedom, *"only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law".*

Now if you have been with us from our first study a fortnight ago, you will know that the context of this little book was the invasion of false teachers, who we have come to call 'Judaisers', who were insisting that the Gentiles who had come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ must be circumcised as Jews are in order to receive the promise made to Abraham. Of course, we saw that the essence of such teaching was 'Christ and...', Christ plus something else - the completed work of Christ was undermined, and there was added to the work of Christ legalistic requirements of Judaism. In chapters 1 and 2, you remember, we looked at quite a personal portion of Scripture, where Paul recounts how he himself was an arch-legalist and how, through his Damascus Road conversion, he was delivered by grace. It wasn't the works of the law that saved him, as it was not the works of the law that saved these Galatians when he first preached the gospel of grace through faith alone in Christ to them at the beginning.

Then last week, in chapters 3 and 4, we looked doctrinally at the great truths that are behind

Paul's theme in this Epistle. Tonight we're looking at chapter 5, and we will look into chapter 6 as well next week. If chapters 1 and 2 are personal, and chapters 3 and 4 are doctrinal, chapters 5 and 6 are practical. You will recall, I hope, from our first week that we emphasised the point that to approach God on the basis of our works is to approach God on a performance-based level - that we find acceptance with God, or at least we attempt to, by our own efforts. We saw that what came out of that type of approach to Christianity was that, if that affects our relationship with God, it also affects our relationship with one another. If we must perform to gain acceptance with God, equally we fall into the trap of thinking that we will require others to perform in order to be acceptable to us - and that is certainly what the legalists did in Galatia. They required the Galatians to perform in order to gain acceptance with them - and their performance was specifically circumcision and the rights of Judaism. But the same will be the case for us: if we have accepted some idea of salvation, or for that matter sanctification, that is a performance-based achievement, we will require others to perform in order to be acceptable with us - and legalists certainly will require us to perform to gain acceptance with them.

We see this in chapter 2, remember Paul very descriptively says in verse 4 - and one translation put it like this, that: 'These false teachers infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ, and to make us slaves'. They wanted to enslave these Christians by their legalism. In other words, they had to perform to gain acceptance with them. Now in chapter 5, and particularly verse 1 which I think is the key verse of the whole of the Epistle, we see Paul's response to this teaching of the Judaisers. Verse 1: 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty', in the freedom, 'wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage', or slavery. Paul was having none of it. Basically what he's saying here is: 'Christ set us free to be free! We've been set free in order to experience our liberty and therefore, Galatians, do not submit again to any yoke of bondage, to any form of slavery'.

Now tonight and next week we're going to consider: what does this mean practically? This is what Paul basically does in chapter 5, but let me say, and you must note, that again Paul starts by establishing truth - that's so important. Verse 2: 'I say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing'. He is reminding them, as he has already done so, that to accept circumcision means that Christ will become no use to you, Christ will be no value to you at all! Why? Because Christ's ministry comes to us by grace through faith, and not by the works of the law. Then in verse 3 he reminds them again: 'For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law'. To accept circumcision obligates you to keep the whole law. You cannot cherry-pick with God's Old Testament law, it's all or nothing! Of course, we touched last week, I think it was, on perfectionism and how the law demands that. It demands us to fulfil it perfectly and absolutely, and because that is impossible for us - and that was never God's intention in the first place, giving us the law was to show us that we cannot be perfect - if we try to gain acceptance with God on a legal level, it will bring a curse, it always does and it always will!

Then in verse 4, Paul again brings truth before them: 'Christ is become of no effect unto you', that's some statement, 'whosoever of you are justified by the law', or seek to be justified by the law, 'ye are fallen from grace'. Verse 4 in another translation puts it: 'You are severed from Christ, you are alienated from Christ'. Living by law is effectively a kind of Christ-rejection - that's how serious it is! Paul uses this term: 'it is falling away from grace'. Now, don't fall into the misunderstanding of that statement to think that it's teaching some kind of 'saved and lost' doctrine - that one minute we can be saved by grace through faith, and the next minute we can not be saved, and if we were to die end in eternal torment. That is not what this really means, 'falling away from grace', what it means is, in the context: 'If you're

going to follow law, you're effectively rejecting Christ' - and that is a departure from God's ordained means of salvation, and God's ordained means of sanctification for that matter. He shows clearly what God's ordained means is in verse 5: 'We through the Spirit', not through the law but through the Spirit, 'wait for the hope of righteousness by faith'. The conclusion of the matter is verse 6, 'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love'.

He is laying the foundation of truth, and the reason why he starts this practical section with doctrine is because - and I want you to grasp this lesson, for it's fundamental to your Christian experience - what we believe affects the way we behave. What we believe affect the way we behave! We have seen already that because these Galatians had started to accept a legalistic understanding of the gospel, and a legalistic understanding of their sanctification, they were being robbed of their joy. Chapter 4 and verse 15, one translation puts it: 'What has happened to all your joy?'. In chapter 5 he proves it again to them in verses 7 through to 9: 'Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump'. Paul says: 'What you're starting to believe is affecting the way you're behaving. You're no longer running well as you once did. People are hindering you, and people are persuading you of ideas that are not of God, but are of men'. Verse 8: 'This persuasion cometh not of him that called you', not from God, the inference is it's from men.

The legalists were robbing them of their joy. The legalists were robbing them of their victory, and effectively the legalists were robbing them of life. These legalists who had come to spy on their freedom in Christ and make them slaves, these legalists were spiritual thieves. Charles Swindoll calls them 'Grace Killers', and he's right. Paul says they were upsetting these Christians, they were heaping more and more guilt upon them, and shame on them, simply for not following their legalistic man-made rules. We see that in verse 10, if you look at it, 'I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be', and verse 12, 'I would they were even cut off which trouble you'. Now I don't want to touch a very delicate matter here, but that could be translated: 'As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves' - that's literally what it is in the Greek. These who were advocating circumcision, Paul said, if they want to be so fulfilled with their legalistic requirements, he's so angry at their legalism, he says: 'Why don't they go the whole way and emasculate themselves if there is some kind of virtue in this kind of fleshly and carnal adherence to rules!'. Strong language, isn't it? We wouldn't even want to repeat it if it was not the apostle that first said it, but it gives us an idea of the serious nature of this whole issue of legalism. What Paul is really saying is: 'If man-made laws are keeping you Galatians from God's liberty, if man-made rules are keeping God's children from their freedom and holding them in bondage, I count that so serious, so serious as to pronounce a curse on those who are teaching such lies'.

Now, we're going to get practical tonight in three ways. First of all I'm going to teach you from Scripture how to recognise legalists and their legalism. Then secondly we want to exhort you to exercise your liberty in Christ and enjoy it - you're allowed to enjoy it! Then finally a word of warning, don't flaunt your liberty and beware of license. Let's deal with one at a time, first of all: how do you recognise legalists and their legalism? Well, taking generally the whole teaching of Scripture, there are a number of ways we can identify a legalist and legalistic teaching. I've only four, and one of them I'll deal with next week because it fits the context of our portion next week, but I'll give you three at least tonight, and I'll mention the other.

First of all: legalists elevate human tradition to a place of biblical authority. Let me repeat that: legalists elevate human tradition to a place of biblical authority. Warren Wiersbe put it like this: 'The problem really isn't tradition, because tradition is simply the content of what one generation hands to another. The problem is traditionalism, which is the worship of traditions to such an extent that few people dare to examine them or try to change them'. There are good traditions that we have passed down for us from one generation to another, there are even Biblical traditions that we have mentioned in the Bible - but the problem comes when there is traditionalism, and we worship the traditions to such an extent that we don't allow anyone to examine them, and we certainly will never try to change them. Now the problem comes when the legalist forces others to accept traditional viewpoints that have clearly outlived their usefulness - that's when tradition becomes a burden, when it doesn't do the job it was intended to do in the beginning. But the problem is accentuated, because often that tradition - whatever it might be - might be elevated to a scriptural or to a near-scriptural authority.

We need go no further to none other than our Lord Jesus in this regard, in Mark 7 He said to the Pharisees: 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me', here it is, 'teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' - teaching as doctrines the commandments of men! They elevate human tradition to a place of Biblical authority - but the greatest problem is not necessarily that. The greatest problem is when legalistic, man-made tradition actually prevents us being and doing what God commands. Jesus went on with those Pharisees to say, '...teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God, and hold to the tradition of men'. Are you with me? Where man-made tradition is elevated to scriptural or near-scriptural authority, it actually negates and cancels out what we ought to be, and what we ought to do as God has explicitly commanded.

That leads us to another way you can recognise legalists and their legalism. Not only do they elevate human tradition to a place of Biblical authority, they obsess over the minutiae of these particular man-made doctrines while missing what really matters with God. They obsess over the minutia of certain teachings, while missing what really matters with God. I go to the Lord Jesus again, Matthew 23: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected', here it is, 'the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faithfulness: these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat, and swallowing a camel'. Obsessing over minutiae that they perceive to be in the law, while leaving undone the weightier matters of God's commands - and then there's this quite strange statement about straining out a gnat, and swallowing a camel. I wonder have you ever considered what that means? Well, in the Jewish kosher dietary laws Leviticus tells us that eating both camels and gnats was forbidden - not that you would want to eat a camel or a gnat! But the Pharisees obsessed about keeping these laws, and about anything unclean entering their mouths - so much so that, when they drank their wine with their meals, they would strain their wine through their teeth and then pick out the insects afterwards. I don't know if they had dentists in those days, but I imagine that the Pharisees were popular patients! Straining sweet wine through the teeth, in order to trap little insects to keep God's law - but Jesus comes to them, and He says: 'You work so hard, lest you make the tiniest blunder in breaking this Mosaic law, as if that was the most important thing, that you didn't swallow an insect! But when it comes to the weightier matters of the heart', Jesus says, 'You're effectively gulping down a camel!'. Have you got His point?

The Lord was meaning that you're filling your lives with the uncleanness of lovelessness, cruelty and pride; while you're obsessing about little laws that, in comparison with what God

thinks really matters, pale into insignificance. David Johnson, in one of his writings, expresses the experience he had in a legalistic group - and he really puts modern clothes, I suppose, on what the Lord Jesus was talking about. He said: 'I grew up in a church, and we very carefully monitored external behaviours'. But here was the dilemma that David Johnson had, he said: 'I used to wonder why bowling was so evil, while being a dried up old sourpuss was OK'. Think about it - that's what the Lord Jesus was talking about, that's what legalists are like. They obsess over the minutiae of laws, while missing what really matters with God. Now next week, God willing, we'll tackle the third, where laws become more important than lives - that's a big one.

But fourthly I want you to see that also you can recognise legalists because they use fear, guilt and shame to control their victims - and I use that word 'victim' wisely. They use fear, guilt and shame to control. Now, I've only to give you the example from chapter 2 where bold, big Peter - remember the way he was in the Gospels? - but now he fears rejection from these Judaisers. Legalism uses peer pressure to force conformity, and because the focus is always on exterior conformity of behaviour rather than the interior transforming of the character, you've got to conform! To question is to rebel, and to rebel is to be rejected by the greater group - and no one wants to be rejected, so what do you do? You just give in and you comply. Manipulation of people through fear, guilt and shame is unacceptable - that's what the Bible teaches. I've got to give you the Bible tonight, let's go back to the Lord, Matthew 23 - He says of the Pharisees, the legalists of His day: 'They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders; but they themselves are not willing to move them with one finger'.

Do you know what a legalist does? Do you know what a legalistic system does? It creates false guilt and false shame, because of man-made rules and regulations - and Christians, even, are weighed down so much by them that all their joy, all their peace, all their victory goes. Now here's a question for you to consider - and, I tell you, I've considered it very painfully, because as a preacher I believe that I have weighed Christians down with unnecessary burdens at times - but here's a question to consider: why do we make Christians feel more and more guilty, when the New Testament message is that they are not guilty? In fact, more than that, it is the awareness of their guiltlessness in Christ that will be the very thing that will enable them to live victoriously over sin! It is the awareness that we are justified, and we are sanctified, not by ourselves but by a gracious act of God in Christ, and that by faith He puts us in Christ and immediately we're justified and set apart for Him - and that's the secret of drawing from that, living a victorious Christian life - and yet I have to confess to you, I have often made a better job of pointing out people's failures and faults rather than pointing them to the solution of how they can get over their hangups.

But that is not the greatest tragedy, the greatest tragedy is that legalists and legalism bring death and not life. Paul said it in 2 Corinthians, that we as New Testament ministers of the new covenant are not ministers of the letter, that is the law, but the Spirit - for the letter, the law, kills; but the Spirit makes alive. This is why the Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'You hypocrites!' - and you know that 'hypocrite' comes from a Greek word that was used for actors who would walk around in part with a mask on them, playacting. That's what legalism produces: spiritual performers without reality. Legalism prevents us being real with ourselves, legalism prevents us being real with God. Legalism cannot bring life in the Spirit, and effectively legalism is so serious because it robs us of the blood-bought possessions that we have in the redemption of Jesus Christ.

But the most personally serious part of legalism is the emptiness of life that you experience

when you're in that system. The emptiness of life was expressed several years ago by a pop song - some of you might remember this one, but it could equally well be applied to legalism. The chorus goes like this: 'Nothing ever happens, nothing happens at all. The needle returns to the start of the song, and we all sing along like before. We'll all be lonely tonight and lonely tomorrow' - that's legalism. Nothing ever happens, nothing happens at all. The needle returns to the start of the song, and we all sing along like before - and we'll all be lonely, that is an emptiness in our souls, tonight and tomorrow. The 19th-century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once told a story about a village inhabited by ducks. On Sundays the ducks would waddle out their doors to church, down the street, and they would waddle into the sanctuary and squat in their favourite pews. Then the duck choir would waddle in, and the duck pastor would waddle up to the pulpit and open the Bible. He would read: 'Ducks, God has given you wings. With wings you can fly, with wings you can mount up and soar like eagles. There are no walls to confine you, no fence can hold you. You have wings, God has given you wings, and you can fly like birds!'. Excitedly all the ducks shouted: 'Amen!', and then they all waddled home.

Are you free? Are you living up to your confession in Christ? Are you living up, perhaps, to the claims that you make in song, in prayer, in testimony? I'm asking you: are you free? Well, if you're free then live like it! It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. So here is my second practical point: exercise your liberty and enjoy it! Now you might say: 'Well, if we don't live by laws, then how ought we to live?'. Well, the answer is very simple: we ought to live by the liberty of love through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, I don't have time to fully expound this, and I'll go into as much detail as time permits - but if you want to read more about that, read, when you go home, Romans chapter 13 and verse 8 to the end of the chapter. You will read there the Ten Commandments mentioned, and then Paul says: 'But all these laws are summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself'. You see, this is what Paul effectively says in this chapter, if you look at verse 6: 'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love'. Verse 13, the beginning of the verse: 'For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty', you've been called to freedom, and then verse 14 'For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

Now here, in a nutshell, is the message of the book of Romans, and certainly chapters 6, 7 and 8 of the book of Romans, and much of the message of the book of Galatians: before we were saved we were in the slave market of sin, we were never ever free before - but Christ has bled and died to redeem us, and now we are free, we are no longer under the master called 'sin'. Law has inflamed that sin in us, law has made us aware - it's like a magnifying glass that makes it bigger to our eyes so that we can face it and get it dealt with by Christ - but when we are justified freely by faith, we become free in Jesus! Free from the law of sin, the slave master of sin! Now some of you are struggling in a cycle of sin and defeat, that is a deception of Satan if you're a believer - because the power line of sin has been severed at Calvary, and sin shall no longer have dominion over you. You're not a slave, you're free!

You see, Romans 6, 7 and 8 teaches us that the sin nature has been crucified with Christ, and it has no power. But the wonder of the liberty that is in the Spirit is: God has now written His laws upon our hearts, and so we're not living in an external requirement system, but internally we are now walking by the Spirit. It is in walking by the Spirit, Galatians says, that we will not fulfil the lust of the flesh. So the key is: we live not by law, but by love in the Spirit, and that is the new commandment. Jesus said to His own: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another'. You see, basically, the liberty that we enjoy in Christ can be summed up in this statement: it is to love God and to love your neighbour, and that's

it. Love to God and love to others. Saint Augustine summarised it like this, and it's a startling statement that some of you may have problems with - and I can understand why - but he simply concluded the matter by saying: 'Love God and do what you like'. Oh? Yes, love God and do what you like. His point was: what you like will be what God likes if you love Him. That's why Jesus said: 'If you love me, keep my commands' - but what I want you to understand is that the basis for that is not law, it is love!

Let me illustrate it to you like this: you're 17 years of age, or you could be 77 years of age, and you've just passed your driving test. This only applies to the 17-year-olds: you come in and you declare, 'Daddy, I've passed my test'. Daddy pats you on the back, and he reaches into his pocket, and he hands you the keys of his Mercedes-Benz - or maybe his Clio! He says: 'Away you go, the car is yours, you have it for two hours on your own'. Maybe you can remember that? Now what do you do? Well, I think I'm speaking for most of us, after an hour you come back shaking like a leaf, sweat pouring off you. You didn't take the two hours, you could have driven over the limits, you could have went in reverse down the M1 for all your father knew, but you probably wouldn't have done it - why? Because, hopefully, you have a relationship with your father, and you love him. That's it! That's the liberty that we are meant to enjoy in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Now, let me deal with some concerns that you might have - 'David, are you saying that there are no boundaries?'. No, I'm not saying that. I have boundaries, and you should have boundaries too - but what I am saying, and what Paul is saying, and what the whole New Testament teaches is: that you shouldn't make laws out of your boundaries, and you certainly shouldn't make your boundaries laws for others! Now, if your reaction to that is: 'Well that's not enough, people will then go and do what they want, and everybody will run out of control' - well, that may show several things. It might show that you're not trusting the Holy Spirit to do His job, for its His job, it's not your job - it's the Holy Spirit's job, and if He can do his job, you don't need to worry about it, that's for sure. It might also show you that you are insecure concerning the divine power of the Gospel - because I praise God that the New Testament teaches not only a gospel that wipes the slate clean of our past misdemeanours and sins, but the gospel that delivers us from the power of sin presently. It's a full gospel, it's a gospel of victory! But perhaps a more sobering thing that might show you, if you say 'Well, that's not enough, people will do what they want', it might actually show you that you are a legalist.

Now, you'll come back at me and you'll say: 'Well, are there no boundaries in Scripture? Is that what you're going to say?'. No, it's not! There are many boundaries in Scripture, and let me say categorically that there are what we call the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, and those are nonnegotiables regarding the person of the Godhead, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Gospel by grace through faith, etc. There are the moral laws enshrined in the Ten Commandments, generally speaking, and those are nonnegotiable. We're not talking about those things - and if you look at verses 19 through to verse 21, you will see many sins that Paul mentions, and at the end of his list of them he says: 'I want you to know that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God'. So we're not talking about morality here, and we're certainly not talking about fundamental doctrine. Even over and above that, there are New Testament principles and New Testament guidelines that we must discern and weigh up scripturally as to what they teach - but here's where the problem of legalism comes: when we decide - we decide - to protect people, lest they cross one of these boundaries, one of these principles of the New Testament. So, lest they go too far, we build our own fences around those principles in order to protect those dear people from sinning. That's where the problem starts, that's what the Pharisees did with the Torah - they accepted all the laws of God, and that was OK, but what they did was, lest anyone came near transgressing the law,

they made up a whole lot of rules of their own just to keep people safe. Now it was sincere, and it was well-meaning and motivated - but here's what happens, and it always happens with legalism: it doesn't take time to pass very long before the fences become the laws, the man-made fences become the laws and, tragically, the original Biblical guideline is lost.

Now, I know what some of you are saying, 'Be specific! Be specific!'. Well, the problem about being specific is that you start legislating, and that's exactly what Paul says we shouldn't be doing. But to help you, let me be specific in something that I don't think will be controversial. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 we read: 'Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what partnership', what fellowship, 'has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?'. Now, the original context of that verse was teaching that we as Christian believers in the New Testament should have nothing to do with pagan ritualism. We should not be eating at the table of Baal, or some false god, during the week at pagan festivals, and then on the Lord's Day eating at the Lord's Table - it's not on. Now, we have applied that to Christian marriage, and I think it can be, but what we've often done is we've gone further and we've applied it to say that: 'Well, if you get saved, you need to be very careful of your non-Christian friends. You need to be careful you're not unequally yoked together with unbelievers'. Then the next step that happens is, the Fellowship you belong to, after you've ditched all your unsaved friends, has an evangelistic weekend - and you're scratching your head and looking around the place for some unsaved friend that you dumped many years ago at your conversion, and you don't have them anymore!

Are you with me? Do you understand how man-made fences - and I know you have to choose your friends wisely - but listen, if we have no unsaved friends who are we going to bring to Jesus? Do you think knocking at a door, and a cold-shoulder response is going to do it? It's not going to do it, it might do it once in a while - but the Lord was criticised and castigated, and He was told that He was demonised, why? Because He was a friend of publicans and sinners - a friend now!

That's just one, but let me make another point out of it: we need to learn, as mature believers, to differentiate between principles, clearly laid down, Biblical, New Testament principles, and preferences and prejudices. Let me explain that: a preference is something that is to your taste, a prejudice is a negative feeling or an opinion that you've come to based on ignorance - you don't know all the facts, but you've come to your conclusion. Now let me give - and this is a controversial one, but I don't know why it is - let me give you an example: lifting up your hands in praise and prayer to God. Now, don't fall off your seat! You may not be extrovert in your worship, you may not, and that's OK - that's your preference - but it is a prejudice if you prohibit it for another person. Here's the reason why: there are few more biblical practices, if you read your Bible, than lifting up your hands in praise or in prayer. Now, if you don't feel comfortable, don't do it - but you're not allowed to look down on someone who does do it, you're not allowed! You're certainly not allowed to prevent people doing it - but do you know where the problem comes? When we not only do that, but we start changing hymns and choruses - and I've seen this done - where the author wrote: 'I lift up my hands to the King of Kings', and we are uncomfortable with that, and we change it to 'I lift up my heart to the King of Kings'. Because of our legalistic taste, or distaste, we change it! Then - and this is what is even more worse - you maybe see somebody doing it, and you go to them and you say: 'We don't do that about here'. I'm telling you, that's wrong, that's wrong.

Well, there cannot be true liberty where legalists impose their preferences and their prejudices. Now, we all have to have our principles, and we all have to arrive at our Biblical principles according to what the word of God says - but we are legalistic if we impose our

preferences and our prejudices on others. Max Lucado says: 'Legalism makes my opinion your burden, it makes my opinion your boundary, it makes my opinion your obligation'. Now, I'm with Luther, my conscience is captive to the word of God - but make sure you never make another man or woman's conscience captive to your conscience, for that's wrong! Now, I know I'll not get the 'Preacher of the Year Award' for what I'm saying, but there are many non-essential and indifferent matters that are preferences and prejudices that are dividing the body of Christ tonight, and they ought not. You can have your tastes, and you can have your views, and you can have them in an Assembly context, and you're allowed that - but be careful that we are not betraying a distrust of the Holy Spirit to guide people. When we distrust Him, do you know what we have to do? We have to start making all these rules for every eventuality. I perhaps know what some of you are thinking, 'David, you're being really petty!' - am I being petty? Paul says: 'No! The legalists are being petty, and dangerously so!'.

Charles Swindoll in his book, 'The Great Awakening', that I recommended to you, tells this story: 'I was conversing with a man I greatly admire. He is a Christian leader in a position that carries with it heavy and extensive responsibility. He said he was grieved on behalf of a missionary family he and his wife had known for years. The legalism they had encountered again and again on the mission field from fellow missionaries was so petty, so unbelievably small-minded, that they had returned to the States and no longer planned to remain missionaries. He said it was over a jar of peanut butter' - that's right, a jar of peanut butter. Swindoll said: 'I thought he was joking, to which he responded, 'No, it's no joke at all' - legalism never is.

Swindoll says: 'I could hardly believe the story'. It went like this: 'The particular place they were sent to serve the Lord did not have access to peanut butter. This particular family happened to enjoy peanut butter a great deal. Rather creatively, they made arrangements with some of their friends in the States to send them peanut butter every now and then so they could enjoy it with their meals. The problem is they didn't know until they started receiving their supply of peanut butter that the other missionaries considered it a mark of spirituality that you not have peanut butter with your meals'. Swindoll says: 'I suppose the line went something like this: 'We believe since we can't get peanut butter here, we should give it up for the cause of Christ', or some such nonsense. A basis of spirituality was 'bearing the cross' of living without peanut butter. The young family didn't buy that line. Their family kept getting regular shipments of peanut butter. They didn't flaunt it, they just enjoyed it in the privacy of their own home. Pressure began to intensify. You would expect adult missionaries to be big enough', Swindoll says, 'to let others eat what they pleased, right? Wrong. The legalism was so petty, the pressure got so intense and the exclusive treatment so unfair, it finished them off spiritually' - not as missionaries, spiritually. 'They had finally had enough. Unable to continue against the mounting pressure, they packed it in and were soon homeward bound, disillusioned and probably a bit cynical'. Swindoll concludes: 'What we have here is a classic modern-day example of a group of squint-eyed legalists spying out and attacking another's liberty. Not even missionaries are exempted'.

Is it petty? Well, your preferences and your prejudices, if they're not principled according to the New Testament, they may well be petty - but make sure they're not dangerous. I'll tell you, there are people who have been driven into the world and away from Christ for worse and for less than peanut butter.

We've seen how we ought to recognise legalists and their legalism, and exercise our liberty and enjoy it - but finally and very quickly, there is a warning: don't flaunt your liberty, and beware of license. Now, are there principles that regulate our liberty? Yes, there are. You're

not allowed to flaunt your liberty if it will be the downfall of a weak brother or sister around you. Romans 14 says: 'Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother'. There is the whole law of the weaker brother in the New Testament which prohibits us flaunting our liberty that might cause another to fall. Romans 14:19 also teaches that we're not to flaunt our liberty if it disturbs the unity of the Church, that's another important one. A third boundary is that we are not to flaunt our liberty if it violates our own conscience - what I mean by that is: if you don't feel it's right to do a thing, don't do it; for that which is not of faith is sin. So you heed your own conscience! The problem comes when we want others to live by our conscience, if we don't have Scripture for it.

But certainly what Paul says very strongly in chapter 5 here of Galatians verse 13 on, is that we are not to use our liberty as a pretext to sin. Verse 13: 'Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would'. We've talked about 'Grace Killers', but there are also, the New Testament teaches, 'Grace Abusers' about. In one place it speaks of them as 'turning the grace of God into lasciviousness', lawlessness. Now, we're not advocating that, we're not allowed to flaunt our liberty, and we're certainly to beware of license - but listen: if you know anybody who is a grace abuser, or listening to these messages you're tempted to be a grace abuser, you do not understand the grace of God! You don't understand it!

Paul talks about it in Romans 6: 'What shall we say then?', certain people infer to him, 'Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?'. Are we to sin and just live on in sin, so that the grace might be heaped on it? Paul's answer to that is: 'How can we, who have died to sin, still live in it?'. What Paul is simply saying is - and this is the message of the Gospel - through the cross we have been made free by the redemption of Christ from the master of the sin nature in our life, and from the taskmaster of the law which inflames sin; and Christ, through His precious blood, has made us free not to sin by the power of the Spirit, but He certainly has not made us free to indulge in sin!

Let me say something to you that I have learned. Even when we give the warning that we shouldn't flaunt our liberty, and we should beware of license, there are those - like myself this evening in the series - who preach grace, and they will always be accused of encouraging lawlessness, always. Paul was: 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?'. I have to say to you that that is a risk, that is a risk that we have to take when preaching the grace of God. The risk is: people will misunderstand us, and people will use it as a pretext to continue in sin. But what we must never do is, because of a fear of that, change the wonderful free grace of God into legalism - because Paul says that is a greater sin than any sin you might fall into! Do you believe that? Do you believe that?

I ask you: are you living by legal fear or loving freedom? Are you living by legal fear or loving freedom? In the movie 'The Wizard Of Oz', Dorothy wanted to get home - maybe that's you! - the Lion needed courage, and the Tin Man needed a heart, and the Scarecrow needed a brain. I can't help thinking it's like some groups of Christians, but they all go off to see the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz. When they finally meet the Wizard, they find him to be a huge head - if you've seen the film - with a loud intimidating voice, and a hostile demeanour. All

the fire and smoke surrounding him helps to create the exact image that he wants. In order to gain his blessing, the four must perform a service for him. Now that is a typical religious transaction when dealing with a Pharisee: you have to perform to gain a blessing. They actually succeed in accomplishing what was effectively a suicidal requirement of killing the Wicked Witch of the West, and bringing back her broom. The four adventurers actually then come to the Wizard, and have the audacity to hold the Wizard to account, and ask him to do what he said he would do - he would bless them if they fulfilled his requirements.

Now, where am I going with this? Well, in their book 'The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse', David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen pick up the story here and make a very important point regarding legalism. Listen carefully, they say: 'With thunderous roar, the Wizard demands to know how these four dare to challenge him. It's at this moment that Dorothy's dog runs over to a small room and pulls back a curtain, and what is revealed to us is a simple, flesh-and-blood man who has long been hiding behind the mask of power'. There he is, the film depicts him, 'He is operating behind a curtain pulling levers, making smoke, fire, and noise. The result is to impress, but it's only a facade'. Even when he's exposed he roars out: 'Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!'. They said that: 'The Wizard is in fact a power abuser' - a legalist. Like legalists and legalistic systems, he controls and punishes people for noticing that he's only a man.

That is like a law, and it is like those who live by law - but listen, believer, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who live according to' - what? The law of the Spirit, 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which has set us free from the law death'. Are you free? Are you free? Live like it, and enjoy it!

Abba, Father, we thank You that the Lord Jesus, Your only begotten Son, pronounced that whom the Son sets free, they shall be free indeed. Now Lord, I pray that by the power of grace, through faith, in the Spirit, that people who are shackled and enslaved by their own rules, or by the rules and restrictions of others, Lord, that they will get into the mighty emancipation of the liberty of the Spirit. We know that that doesn't mean that we walk and trod roughshod over the principles of holiness and the command of Scripture, but it does mean that we actually realise them - no longer falling short but, Father, allowing Christ to live in us! Lord, that's what we need: Christ in us, the hope of glory. We will still remain children if we live according to any law. Oh Lord, impart and make the reality evident in people's lives tonight of the life in the Spirit, to the glory of the One who alone is worthy, the Lord Jesus Christ who bought it with His precious blood - not silver or gold, not the vain tradition of our fathers, but with His precious blood. Glory to His name, Amen.

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Life In The Spirit - Chapter 4

"Finding Your Bearings With Grace"

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This evening we are looking again from chapter 5 at a couple of verses we looked at last week, and then into the verses we didn't look at. So we're reading from chapter 5 verse 16 through to chapter 6 verse 18, the very last verse. Of course, as we have been going through this study, we'll not be dealing with every verse - that would be impossible - and certainly all the issues that Paul deals with, we cannot deal with them. We've been looking at the Epistle thematically, and tonight I want to take as the title: 'Finding Your Bearings With Grace'.

So we take up our reading in chapter 5 and verse 16 please: *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another"*.

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of

the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit".

Now if you have been with us these number of Monday evenings, you will recall that on our first Monday night we looked at chapter 1 and chapter 2, which were very personal chapters to the apostle himself. Now there's a whole issue of the challenge of the Judaisers to Paul's apostleship that happened also in 2 Corinthians - we didn't enter into that at all. But Paul outlined there for us how he himself had been a legalist, how he was a Jew, and you can read about it in detail as well in Philippians 3 - how he was a Jew of Jews, a Pharisee from the Pharisees; and he was, according to external keeping of laws and Jewish rites, blameless. You couldn't have pointed the finger at the apostle! Yet he was converted out of legalism by the matchless grace of God. He details there how he didn't confer with any man about this message, but God taught him this message of grace. But when he did share what God had taught him with the apostles in Jerusalem, they confirmed it. Then he also alludes to a very personal experience he had as he had to confront none other than the apostle Peter himself, because he had adopted this message of grace and was no longer living like a Jew, with all the Jewish rites and dietary laws, and yet all of a sudden - when the Judaisers came on the scene, and when certain brethren from Jerusalem visited the churches of Galatia - he started looking over his shoulder again, and he wouldn't eat with the Gentiles. Paul had to face him, and rebuke him, and he told him: 'You're living like a Gentile, but you won't allow the Gentiles to live like Gentiles. You want to enslave them, capture them again in bondage to laws that they are not required to keep'.

So that was a very personal couple of chapters. Then we looked at the underlying truth behind Paul's exhortation, and that was chapters 3 and 4, our second week. But of course last week, we embarked on chapters 5 and 6, which are very practical chapters - and so we're taking two weeks to look at them. You remember, if you were here last week, that we looked at chapter 5 and verse 1, where Paul exhorts them to: 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage'. As another translation puts it: 'It is for freedom that Christ has set you free', therefore they are exhorted to stand fast and not be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Paul has been teaching them: 'You are free from the law!'. So we have the Magna Carta, if you like, of Christian freedom in this little book. Yet Paul is at pains to teach the Galatians that, though they are free in Christ, they are certainly not free to sin. So we saw that our liberty of grace in Christ is far from a license to sin. In fact, on the contrary, our freedom in Christ is a freedom not to sin, a freedom that we could never have known because we were under the slave master of the sinful nature that we have, and the law only served to multiply that in our sight. But because of the death of our Lord Jesus, freeing us from the law and freeing us from sin, we are now free not to sin - and if you want to know more about that, I exhorted you to study Romans 6, 7 and 8. Often we encourage young Christians to study 1 John, or maybe the Gospel of John, when they're newly saved - I think we'd do a better job if we encouraged them to study Romans 6, 7 and 8 to show them that they are now free not to sin.

Now, that being the case, the question begs: how then, if we are free not to sin, practically, do we not fulfil the lusts of the flesh? If you're honest, you will have to admit that those are very real in your everyday experience. How, practically, do you not fulfil the lusts of the old sinful nature which we still have residing in us? Well, the answer is given in our portion that we've read together this evening - verse 16 and following - Paul teaches that we are to walk in the Spirit in order not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. In other words, we are to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into true victory over the works of the flesh. So the answer to this problem - now that we are free not to sin, how do we not fulfil the desires of the flesh? - the answer is: you must walk in the Spirit, and don't think for one moment that you can prohibit

executing the desires and lusts of the flesh by living by law. No, Paul says, you must learn to walk in the Spirit.

Someone has said, and it's very pertinent to our study in the book of Galatians, that 'Nothing will keep the Christian more immature than trying to keep a list' - that's good. If you're a Christian who has gone through your Christian pilgrimage and experience just living on the strength of a list of rules, regulations, expectations of yourself and that of others of you, you will not fully mature in God's intended purpose. You see, God's intention for you is to walk by the Spirit - and that is the Christ-life, that is what Christianity is! I quoted to you Roy Hession from his marvellous book 'The Calvary Road', which I have encouraged you all to read if you can get your hands on it, and he teaches basically in the book that the only life that pleases God is the life of His Son. You remember He rent the heavens on several occasions to say: 'This is my beloved Son, look at Him. It is Him I am well pleased with!'. So, if God is to be pleased with us, it will not be through our fleshly achievements, it will not be through our list of rules and regulations, it will be through the Christ-life manifest in us to the glory of God. Of course, Paul in chapter 2 and verse 20 said as much, and we are so familiar with this verse: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me'. Our portion this evening, chapter 6 and verse 14, says the same: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world'.

Now, the fruit of such a life, such a crucified, Spirit-filled life, is love. We touched on that last week, that we are not to live by law, but to live by the liberty of love. We haven't time to look at 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul gives us that wonderful discourse on what love is, but let me remind you that he says there - at least in verses 1 to 3 - that if we don't have love, we have nothing: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing'. In other words, I can be the most righteous, in an external sense, person on the face of the earth; I can live rightly in every sense - and yet, if I am devoid of love, I am devoid of the very thing that matters to God, and I'm nothing!

Of course, the word that Paul uses for 'love' in 1 Corinthians 13 is 'agape', which is the love of God - and that can only be given to us as a gift from God. It is love for God and love for others - God's love expressed from our lives. This is where this little epistle becomes very practical. Now, right from the very first week we saw how this epistle teaches that we ought not to have a performance-based relationship with God. Our acceptance with God is not based on our performance, but we also saw right there at the beginning that if we think that we must perform to gain acceptance with God, equally we will require others to perform to gain acceptance with us. That's what the legalists did in Galatia. We need to cover this ground again tonight, because if we don't understand grace, and we don't know how to truly receive grace from God - by grace alone through faith - we will not be able and free to offer that same grace and love to others. We will probably give them laws, rather than love.

Now, I have a hunch that most churches aren't preaching and teaching grace in essence. I've also a hunch that neither are they practising it among themselves, or offering it to a lost and dying world. What Paul is saying here in our portion tonight is that the true burden a Christian should bear is not law, but love. He says as much in verse 2 of chapter 6: 'Bear ye one

another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'. So we're going to look tonight at 'Finding Your Bearings With Grace', and the first bearing we want to concentrate on is 'fruit bearing', and the second is 'burden bearing'.

'Finding Your Bearings With Grace' - fruit bearing, then. Verse 16 and following talks to us about how the walk in the Spirit manifests as the fruit of the Spirit. Now, to understand this, you've got to understand the difference, biblically, between flesh and spirit - because when you understand the difference, it goes to the heart of the issue. What I mean by that is: religion can be lived in the flesh, legalism can be lived in the flesh, but Christianity can't! Now understand this please: one of the first discoveries that you need to come to very early in the Christian life, if not at conversion, is that the Christian life, as it is enshrined in the New Testament, is an utter and complete impossibility as far as the human flesh alone is concerned. Now to understand the difference between flesh and spirit, you've got to understand the anatomy of man, and I think a lot of Christians don't understand it. I believe in man as a trichotomy, a tripartite being, that he's made up of body, soul and spirit. I think there are several portions of Scripture that can prove that - not least 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 - but, basically, the body is the world-conscious part of the human being, that is the part that we relate to the world through: through eye-gate, ear-gate, nose-gate, mouth-gate and your feelings and the five senses, sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.

The body makes us world-conscious, but the soul makes us self-conscious. The soul is basically made up of the mind, the intellect; the emotion, the feelings; and the will, the volition - that is the soul. But the spirit, if the body is world-conscious and the soul is self-conscious, the spirit is God-conscious. That simply means that our spirit is the part of us that worships God, it is the part of man that can know God - and, in fact, when born again, can contain God. If you like, the spirit is the Holy of Holies of the human tabernacle, it is the place where God's Spirit dwells.

Now, I want you to understand this tonight, and I know it's a bit complicated but it's important - if you think of man as body, soul and spirit, the soul of man is like the linchpin that connects the body with the spirit. Do you understand? The soul is the linchpin that connects the body with the spirit - and as God created us in the beginning, that is how we knew how to behave in our body, because God was communicating to man's spirit; it came through his intellect, his emotion and his will to his body, and controlled him. The problem is that, because of man's fall into sin, his spirit has died. Now death in the Bible does not mean 'extermination', death of the spirit does not mean the spirit ceases to exist. Death in the Bible means 'separation', so when the spirit of man died it was separated from God.

Let me illustrate this as simply as I can. Some of you might be able to remember the day and age when you had to ring an operator on the telephone to get put through to another destination. The soul, if you like, is like the telephone operator. What I mean is: if you're the caller, you dial the operator and it is the operator that connects you through to the recipient of the call. So you've got the caller, the operator, and the recipient. If you like, God is the caller who speaks to man's spirit, and that is communicated through the intellect, emotion and will to affect how we live our lives out in our body. But since the fall, the spirit has been separated and, if you like, it's as if God's connection has been broken, it's been hung up. So what effectively is now happening is: the soul now relates completely to the body, the flesh; and the Bible calls the soul combined to the body 'flesh' in totality. If you like, to continue the illustration, it's as if the operator and the recipient are carrying on with the conversation on their own.

So the Bible understands 'flesh' as being the soul and body alone, without any spiritual input at all. Paul says that this flesh, the body and soul united without God's influence, it is contrary to everything spiritual. Look at chapter 5 and verse 17: the flesh lusts against the Spirit, the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other so that you cannot do the things that you would. Now, I hope you understand what I'm saying, but basically: the flesh makes self the centre of man. The flesh elevates self-will above God's will. That self-life is manifested in the works of the flesh that we find in chapter 5 and verses 19 through to 21, let me read them to you in the Amplified Version. Interestingly, it translates the first three words: 'Now the doings', doings, '(practices) of the flesh are clear (obvious): they are immorality, impurity, indecency, Idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger (ill temper), selfishness, divisions (dissensions), party spirit (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies), Envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like'.

Now, here's a problem for us as believers when it comes to the works of the flesh as we read them like we just have: we often understand the works of the flesh only as being immorality that is carried out in the body - but the flesh is more than sin carried out in the body. The flesh includes the works of the soul. You remember I told you that the flesh is the soul and body united. If you think about it, even all these immoral acts that are committed in the body, they always start in the soul - because they normally start with a thought in the mind, and then a feeling, and then it is exercised by the volition through the instrument of the body. But the major lesson I want you to learn tonight is that the works of the flesh also include the works of the soul. That means there are not just unrighteous acts that the flesh can commit, there are also self-righteous acts that the flesh commits. What I'm saying is: flesh not only produces defiling sins, but the flesh also attempts commendable morals and religious acts.

Now please remember the context of the apostle to the Galatians, these believers were trying - because of the influence of the Judaisers - to live their Christian life by law. What they were doing was, they were reviving the works of the flesh by trying to keep the Christian life and fire going by law. They were trying to do good, but it was actually their 'trying' to do good by law that made them do evil. Look at verse 17 of chapter 5 again, at the very end: 'You cannot do the things that you would' - isn't that interesting? Let me also point your attention to the fact that, if you count these fifteen works of the flesh in verses 19 to 21, you will find that out of the fifteen, eight are sins of strife - quarrelsome sins, divisive sins. If you look at the 15th verse of chapter 5 you see this borne out again in Paul's exhortation: 'If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another', then go, please, to verse 26 of chapter 5, he says, 'Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another'.

Do you see what is happening here? Here is a group of Christians who are trying to perfect their Christian sanctification by works of the flesh in adherence to law, and what is it doing? It's fanning the flames of their sinful nature, and it's causing division and all sorts of strife among them! So that teaching is very plain, that good acts done in the flesh, good acts done in the flesh are not glorifying to God but are glorifying to self, and actually will not produce ultimate righteousness but will reproduce sin in your flesh.

Maybe you're not getting this? Let me give you the greatest example of this in the Bible, and it is the group, the sect of the Jews called the Pharisees. Now please don't be too hard on the Pharisees - and I have done in the past - the reason being, theologically speaking, they were orthodox. Their orthodoxy was affirmed by none other than our Lord Jesus Himself, in Matthew 23 verse 2 He said: 'The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat'. He actually

exhorted the people in verse 3 of that same chapter to listen to what they taught, but not follow their works. The Lord Jesus, on several occasions, agreed with the Pharisees' estimation of what our duty toward God was: love God and love your neighbour.

Paul the apostle was no exception. You remember in Acts chapter 23 that he had an appearance before a Council, and the Pharisees were there, and the Sadducees were there. Paul with, I'm sure, a bit of a smirk on his face, tongue in cheek, raises the subject of the resurrection - knowing that the Pharisees believed in resurrection, believed in spirit, believed in angels, but the Sadducees did not. All of a sudden the Sadducees and the Pharisees started at one another's throats - but Paul was effectively siding with the Pharisees, because of their orthodox doctrine. Let me commend the Pharisees again, because the Pharisees - in a roundabout sense - were a revival movement, they were a back to the Bible movement. I mean that in the sense that they wanted to bring every facet of Jewish life into subjection to God's truth, specifically the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. The problem is, with the Pharisees, as Tom Hovestol put it in his book: 'The Pharisees received such harsh treatment from Jesus not because they were so far from the truth, but because they were so close'. The problem with the Pharisees was that they had the letter of the law, they had God's word, but they lived it and exercised it and executed it devoid of God's Spirit.

Now, in my first week, I mentioned that it never ceases to amaze me how knowledgeable people, as far as God's word is concerned, can oppose what is an obvious work of the Spirit on doctrinal grounds. Some of you, rightly, last week reminded me that I said I would come back to that - well, this is exactly what I'm talking about when I speak of the Pharisees. They knew the Bible inside out, and yet an obvious work of the Spirit of God was going on before them, the Messiah of God was working signs and wonders to show who He was - and yet they could not recognise Him! In fact, the Lord Jesus said to them in John 5: 'You search the Scriptures, you're experts, lawyers in the Scriptures, and from them you think you have eternal life - but those are the scriptures that testify of me! And you don't recognise me!'

Now that's frightening, it's frightening because those who are well-versed in Scripture can oppose obvious works of the Spirit on doctrinal grounds, and even correct doctrinal grounds at that. I could give you many examples, and I haven't time this evening - the point is: the Pharisees were fluent in Scripture, yet they missed the big point! It's like they're obsessing, as I said last week, about the minutia of the law, and they missed the big weightier matters that God is really concerned about. The Pharisees' sect, what they produced is just like legalism, they produced an external right behaviour but not an internal righteousness of heart. That's why the Lord Jesus was so rough on them.

I'll let you into a little secret: I have been doing an experiment from time to time as I've moved about around some churches. I've asked several Christians with varied backgrounds, denominationally and theologically: from the Gospels, which group do you think the conservative evangelical wing of the church most resembles? Would you be surprised if I told you that, to a man, the answer came back: the Pharisees? Not the disciples! The reason being: our churches, particularly churches that are so well-versed in Scripture it has to be said, contain well-meaning Christians - as one has put it - with mountains of Bible knowledge, coupled with molehills of knowing God. Mountains of Bible knowledge, coupled with molehills of knowing God! Now, do you agree with me - you need to come to this point if we're going to move any further - do you agree with me that flesh, the flesh, the body and the soul, can produce 'good things', can produce 'morals', can do 'religious acts' - do you actually believe that? That you can pray in the flesh, you can read and study your Bible in the flesh, you can witness in the flesh, you can preach in the flesh - do you believe that?

Well, I'll tell you, Nicodemus is an example. He was a Pharisee of course, but we know he was moral, we know he was a good man. Let me ask you another question: do you believe there are people who are naturally nice people? Now you're bound to. I know you might believe in the depravity of the human nature and all that, that's theological and I agree with you - but we could never say that everybody is as bad as they could be. There are ordinary, unconverted, unregenerate people, and they are good, decent people. There are people out there not in the church, and they are patient, they are compassionate, they would often put us to shame as Christians. I believe the Lord Jesus testified to that fact - did He not say: 'You being evil know how to give good gifts to your children', isn't that what He said? You know as parents how to be good to your children, and He even went further - He said to His disciples that 'The publicans, the tax collectors, even they love one another'. There is nothing to be commended in loving people that are like yourself!

You see, this was the stumbling point to dear old Nicodemus. Jesus had to spell it out to him, and I wonder does He have to spell it out to you tonight? 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not', Nicodemus, 'that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again'.

Now, this is very simply the explanation of all religion: it's of the flesh. Let it be said, that is why religion often has a good and positive influence on societies wherever it may be found. It doesn't have to be a Christian flavour of religion, all sorts of religions have had good influences on the face of this world - even though they may well be, and are, of demonic origin. But this is the whole point: this is Satan's strategy behind religion, this is Satan's strategy behind legalism, this is the reason why good churches with good, sound doctrine can remain devoid of the power of the Spirit of God! It is a satanic principle, and here's how the devil's mind goes - now, follow his train of thought. Satan says: 'I'm quite happy to allow these religious people to let go of overtly immoral behaviour and activity, those aspects of the flesh that are external and obvious, I'm happy that they die. If I may deceive them into retaining the good part, the good flesh, well, then I can extend my kingdom on that grounds' - because that which is of the flesh is flesh, and will never bring life spiritually.

But the devil's punchline is even worse than his reasoning, because the devil's punchline is that those who live in the good part of the flesh, morally and ethically, find out that the serpent's bite is that living like that inflames sin, it doesn't solve it. Living by law inflames sin. Here's Paul again, Romans 7: 'But sin, taking opportunity by commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desires'. This is the man who said in Philippians 3:3 that, externally speaking, according to the keeping of the law, he was blameless. To look on him on the outside he was squeaky clean, he was a Pharisee, a whitewashed tomb - pristine on the outside, but on the inside, he admits in Romans 7, he was full of all sorts of lust - why? Because the commandment produced in me, it stirred up in me, all manner of lust.

That is the devil's punchline, it's like trying to blow out a fire with a pair of bellows - it burns hotter. That's why Paul said again in Romans 7: 'For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) nothing good dwells: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I will to do, I do not do: but the evil I will not to do, that I practice'. Now listen, this is the message that every Christian needs to hear, and I wish they would hear it sooner rather than later: God's plan was never to improve on your old sinful nature, your flesh; God's plan has always been to replace it! God's plan is that it is crucified with Christ on Calvary's cross, and it is dead - and you're to reckon it dead by faith, and allow God by His Spirit to replace that old flesh. God's goal is to replace all that the old nature loves

with all that Jesus is - that's Christianity! The goal of the gospel is that God should make us like His Son.

It is a constant transformation. Paul said in 2 Corinthians: 'Changed into the same image of the Lord, that is from glory to glory, even as by', not the law, but 'by the Spirit of the Lord' - that's how it's done! If you're walking in the Spirit like that, not by law, not by the flesh, not by your soul and your body put together, you will produce the fruit of the Spirit. Let's look at the fruit of the Spirit for a moment. If you count them, you will find that there are nine - but please note that they are called, in verse 22, 'the fruit', singular, 'the fruit of the Spirit'. There is only one fruit, and it says 'the fruit of the Spirit is', not 'the fruit of the Spirit are'. The idea is not - and often Christians, I think, have this idea that Tom down the road, well, he has love; and Sammy in the seat beside you, he has peace; and Joy, well you know what she has, joy! That's not Paul's thinking here, it's 'fruit', it's singular. What Paul is saying is that the Spirit of Christ in us can produce all these qualities, all this fruit - and all of these mentioned characteristics could be summed up in one word: character. The fruit of the Spirit is character. The question begs: whose character? The answer is: Jesus' character.

Now, Christ's character, would you agree, is beyond us to produce. This is why this is a spiritual work. The evidence of the fullness of the Spirit in a Christian's life - listen to what I'm saying - is not knowledge. Listen to what Paul says to the Corinthians: 'Knowledge puffs up'. There is no virtue in knowledge at all without the Spirit. There is no virtue in gifts, even gifts of the Spirit, tongues, healing, prophecy, words of wisdom, words of knowledge - we could go on and on, even raising the dead - there is no virtue in those charismatic gifts without love. That's what 1 Corinthians 13 is about, that's why it's stuck in between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14 about tongues and prophecy! The fullness of the Spirit, neither, can be identified because of the ability of any person serving the Lord, but is manifest alone in character, fruit.

Now, let me outline for you a little bit more the difference between works and fruit. When someone says 'work' to you, well, I'll not ask you how you feel - but immediately the thoughts of effort and toil and labour will come to mind, and it's a sort of mechanical word, isn't it? Then you think of the outcome of work: it's weariness, faintness, frustration - and that is any work. Work, spiritually speaking, if it's done in the flesh, is accompanied by fleshly effort and display, and often a lot of noise, saying 'Look at me!' - but fruit is very different, because fruit does not involve any work, but it's result is wonderful. You might say, 'Well, hold on a minute, fruit does involve work. There is the farmer who plants the seed, and he tends the vine, and there is a husbandman' - but who is the husbandman? God is the husbandman, not you. The work comes from God, the ability comes from God, and all that is required of us is the receiving, like a fruit - receiving, and yielding, and accepting by faith what God is giving. It is that that gives you the power to work for the Lord and serve the Lord. A machine can do work, but only life can produce fruit - and there is a world of difference!

Producing fruit means having no confidence in the flesh. It means having an honest confession of your own weakness, and surrendering to the power of God. Now I don't have time to look at individual characteristics here in the fruit of the Spirit, save to say that the first three - love, joy, peace - could be described as fruit of internal experience. Can I ask you, Christian, this evening: are you experiencing love to God from your heart? Are you experiencing love to God to your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you experiencing love to God from your inward being to a lost and dying world? Are you experiencing joy in the depths of your soul? Joy that the Bible says ought to be unspeakable and full of glory? Are you experiencing peace in your mind and your heart? The peace of God, Paul says, which passes

all understanding? That is your blood-right in Christ, and if you walk in the Spirit you will experience it!

The internal experience, and then the next three - four, five, and six: long-suffering or patience, gentleness and goodness are external behaviour. It's how the character that you imbibe from the Spirit of God working in your life affects others - it will touch others, it will change others! The last three: faith or faithfulness, meekness, and temperance or self-control, are fruit of spiritual character - and those are self explanatory. I would urge you to go home and study these individually, but please see that these nine descriptions of the fruit of the Spirit cover completely our responsibility to God and to our fellow man. It's just like the Ten Commandments, only it's not a commandment, it's an enablement: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our strength; and to love our neighbour as ourself. The law is being fulfilled in the liberty of our love.

But please note as well that Paul calls these 'fruit of the Spirit', and they don't have any flowers on them. 'What are you getting at now?', well, John Stott put it like this: 'The Christian is a fruit tree, not a Christmas tree'. We're not meant to be covered in decorations, saying 'Look at me, look at what I'm doing, look at who I am, look at what I have achieved!'. Fruit - what is it for? Fruit is for feeding hungry people, not so that we can say 'Look at how great I am', but that people who are hungry and spiritually thirsty might find God's love in us! But legalism does not produce that! Here's what legalism produces: Jesus told a story of two men who went into the temple one day, one a tax collector, the other a Pharisee. The Pharisee looked up to heaven and he said: 'I thank You, God, that I am not like other men', and he began to delineate all he did during his week, giving to charity, fasting twice in the week; and he even added on as an appendix, 'I thank You that I'm not like this tax collector'. That's what legalism does - but Jesus said it was the boy that beat his chest, and wouldn't even come near, who went to his home justified.

Listen, there are three aspects of legalistic pride - we've already dealt with two of them in previous weeks: one, traditionalism; two, this week we have dealt with it, self-righteousness - but there is a third. Traditionalism, self-righteousness and judgementalism. We cannot leave the last. We've encountered this already in the greatest story ever told in Luke 15, the prodigal son. You remember the reaction of the elder brother, you remember he said to his father - he didn't call him 'father', he didn't even call his brother 'brother', he called him 'your son'. He said: 'You kill the fatted calf him and throw a party, but I've always kept all your commandments' - that's basically what he said - 'I've always obeyed you, I've always done my duty, and you never threw a party for me!'

The elder brother was filled with criticism and a haughty separatist spirit. By the way, do you know what 'Pharisee' means? 'Separate ones' - they prided themselves on how they felt they were above others. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying, you must remember: if we don't know how to truly receive grace from God, we won't be able to freely offer it to others. Here's a lesson if there ever was one, if you're wanting to reach out to a dying and perishing world: make sure you get the prodigals to the Father, before the elder brother gets to them! Make sure you get the prodigals to the Father, before the elder brother gets to them.

Fruit-bearing, and that leads us to burden-bearing, how we are to show grace, we are to live grace. Paul says in chapter 6, specifically to the fallen brother, verses 1 and 2: 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'. Brothers and sisters who have fallen into sin, and also - verse 6 -

serving brothers and sisters: 'Let him that is taught in the word communicate'. In other words, if you've been taught by one in the word of God, make sure that you communicate to them in good things - in other words, provide their needs.

But we'll not deal with that one, we want to concentrate on the fallen brother and sister. You see, what Paul is saying is: 'It's great if you can accept what you've rejected', Galatians, 'the idea, the theory of the grace of God for your salvation, but you can't accept the theory and reject the practice!'. You can sing, 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me', and be wretched in how you treat other believers and those without Christ. Now the great test, and Paul is giving it to us here, whether we operate legalistically in the realm of spiritual matters or not, the great test is how we treat those who don't measure up. How do we treat them? Do we treat them judgementally?

Last week I gave four ways to recognise legalists and legalism, and I'll not repeat three of them - but I mentioned one that I said I would revisit this week. It is simply this: laws for legalists are more important than lives. You could put it another way: reputation of their good name means more than rescuing perishing lives. The legalist almost always demonstrates a far greater concern for laws than he does lives. Greg Morris put it like this: 'They become gatekeepers rather than trailblazers, adopting a defensive posture and therefore failing to impact the lives of those around us'. Legalists are more about saving face than saving grace.

Now, listen carefully to what I'm saying: if our convictions become restrictions to helping the struggling Christian, or reaching a lost soul, we need to look again at our convictions. The reason why legalism is such, is because law is easier to deal with than lives - it is! To put it very bluntly: the lives of people out there - and there might be some in here for all I know - if you get involved in them, you'll have to roll up your sleeves, and it will be messy! So the easiest thing in the world is to have laws that keep them well away from you, and that makes things a lot easier. I remember a Brethren man saying to me: 'You know, people may become fit for heaven, but not the assembly' - garbage! Someone should have told the Lord that, and maybe He wouldn't have bothered having a need to go through Samaria and speak to a woman who had been married five times, and the guy she was living with wasn't her husband. He didn't leave her on the scrapheap of immorality without any hope. I tell you, we need to have a good look at our Saviour again, because I think we may have lost sight of Him. For the Lord Jesus Christ lives were more important than laws! Lives were more important than laws! But with the legalists, conformity to law is quantifiable, and it's more quantifiable and regulated than caring for people. In other words, you can measure laws, you can control laws, and it's more gratifying to our pride.

If you look at verses 3 and 4 of chapter 6, you will see that these legalists took pride in the fact that others were conforming to their standards - and when others couldn't, and they fell into sin because of legalism, they got a great thrill out of the fact that they were doing better than them. First Corinthians 13 says love is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrong. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. The trouble with legalism is that people are dying for grace, not laws.

John 8 is my favourite portion in the whole of the New Testament. It's about a woman with the smell of adultery still on her, and she is dragged by religious legalists into the presence of Christ. A theological debate ensues, whereby they try to trap Him in some kind of doctrine loophole. They debate theology with Christ over the head of a broken life that was crying out for love, grace and healing. You see, for the Lord Jesus, lives were more important than laws. If I go home tonight and, God forbid, one of our children is severely ill and taking convulsions,

and I throw them, automatically, in the car and take them down to Accident and Emergency at our local hospital - what would you think of me if, on the way down, I decided to keep to the 30 mph speed limit along the way? You would say it was madness, wouldn't you?

I tell you, the Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees on one occasion when they lambasted Him for His disciples taking the corn and crushing it and eating it when they were hungry, He said to them: 'Have you' - that was on the Sabbath by the way - 'Have you not read what David did when he went into the temple and he took the shewbread and he ate? Have you not read that he ate to save his life and the life of his men?'. Lives are more important than laws! What the Lord was saying to them was, 'Pharisees, you know your Bible more than you know God!'. Galatians is all about getting to know your God! Have your principles and, I said last week, have the boundaries - and we ought to have them - but let's keep things in perspective. It's the same not only with the lost, it's the same with God's people: they're dying for grace. Someone put it well: 'Why is the church the only army that shoots her wounded?'

I had a Mission not that long ago, and I preached a lot on the theme of grace. A man came to me after one of the meetings, indeed after the series of meetings, and he thanked me because it had helped him. He had, not that long ago, come back to the Lord. He had been a backslider for many years, and previously he had been an elder in the local Presbyterian Church. Why did he backslide? Well, he told me the story. His daughter had gone away from home to study, and she fell in with a chap, and she became pregnant and had to come home. One day after she was home, the minister met her up the main street, and he publicly reprimanded her and gave her a dressing down in front of the people in the town. That finished that elder, that finished that girl spiritually until he got a grasp again of the grace of God. Now everybody is running around with these bracelets, 'WWJD' - What Would Jesus Do? - what would Jesus have done? What did He do with the sinner? What did He do with the harlot? What did He do with the publican?

Legalism punishes those who don't measure up, grace restores them. I have seen - and I'm not castigating you - I have seen how much of a Pharisee I am, I have...when God's call upon my life is to be like Jesus. Here's a question worth pondering: does the winsome Person we find on the pages of the Gospels, does He live on in our churches today? The irony is, some of the people we look down on might show more grace and love than we do. The Lord Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to a lawyer, an expert on the law, who thought he measured up and wished to justify himself. He said: 'Who is my neighbour?', and Jesus said, 'The Samaritan is your neighbour' - and yet the Samaritan, when the priest and the Levite walked by the beat up man, it was the Samaritan who loved him, it was the Samaritan who tended him. Do you know what the lesson was? There are people who you despise that might do a better job of loving and showing grace, and they have less knowledge of God than you have!

Anderson, Miller and Travis said: 'It's a tragedy that some people find more grace and acceptance in a local bar or a local AA meeting, than they often do in the local church'. In chapter 6 and verse 10 Paul says: 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith'. If you don't understand grace, you will not be able to offer it to others. Let me conclude this message and conclude the series by saying simply this: it all comes down to a very elementary matter of whether self is on the throne of your life, or whether Christ is, through the power of the Spirit. Verse 3 of chapter 6: 'If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself', chapter 6 verse 14, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither

circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature' - a new creation, that's it! Life in the Spirit! Whether we are trying to live the Christian life in the flesh, or by grace through faith in the Spirit, is the issue. Not only will it affect our relationship with God, it will affect our relationship with others.

As I close, let me answer a question that I hope you're asking as I continually ask myself: how do you know if you're trying to live your Christian life in the flesh? One: have you a sense of the utter impossibility of you ever pleasing God in the flesh? Have you got a sense of the utter impossibility of you ever pleasing God in the flesh? You see, the flesh never declares: 'I'm weak', and put its hands up and says 'I'm useless'. The flesh derives kudos and fulfilment from achieving, and that's the reason why so many people in legalistic systems, they get cast down. That's what religion does to people, they go mad because they can never achieve the standard because it's impossible in the flesh! Maybe you're a rollercoaster Christian: you go up and down, and up and down, but you never have a steady state - why? Because you could be making the exact same mistake: you're trying to live the Christian life in the flesh, and you don't realise that God doesn't want you to try, He wants you to die! You have died with Christ, reckon it so!

The opposite of those who are cast down are those who try to live their Christian life in the flesh, and they're puffed up. I think this is the great conservative evangelical sin: because of their knowledge in principle and practice, they look down their noses at others. Listen carefully to what I'm saying: contempt for others is a tell-tale sign of hidden self-righteousness. Have you a sense of the utter impossibility of you pleasing God in the flesh, if you're cast down tonight, if you're puffed up? But the second and last question: have you a sense of your utter and complete dependence on God alone? If you have, you've understood grace - and that will be manifested in a constant reckoning of yourself dead to the flesh and to this world, and a constant waiting upon God, and a constant asking for the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and a constant abiding in Christ. As Jesus said, 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine; neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, bears much fruit' - and here it is - 'for without me ye can do nothing'!

You might be doing good things, but whatever does not issue from abiding in Christ and waiting on God in utter dependence is invariably of the flesh. That's the reason why so many dedicated, sincere people never experience victory and true maturity in their Christian life - because they're not walking in the Spirit, they're in the flesh. What is the answer to the flesh? You can't redeem the flesh, you can't regenerate the flesh, you can't revive, you can't restore, you can't reform the flesh. The only thing you can do with the flesh is put it to death, and God has done it. You must believe it, and allow Christ to live His life from you, bearing fruit and doing works that will not be burnt up as wood, hay and stubble on the day of judgement.

A.T. Pierson asked George Mueller: 'What is the secret of your great work, and the wonderful things that God has done through you?'. Mueller looked up for a moment, and then bowed his head lower and lower until it almost was between his knees. He was silent for a moment or two, and then he said: 'Many years ago there came a day in my life when George Mueller died. As a young man I had a great many ambitions, but there came a day when I died to all those things, and I said, 'Henceforth Lord Jesus, not my will but Thine', and from that day God began to work in and through me'. Every day, every day should be like that day, and will be like that day for those who walk in the Spirit.

I hope you've got your bearings with grace tonight: bearing fruit and bearing burdens.

Let's all pray - I apologise for going over the time, preaching by grace and not by law you see! But it would be wrong to rush just now, I think, it would be wrong. You see, if you get to the cross - and Jesus said we need to get there every day - your pride will never recover, never. I need to get there just now, do you? 'All the vain things that charm me most' - some of us make idols out of our doctrine - we can have nothing before the living God, nothing. 'The dearest idol I have known', cannot stand beside the crucified Christ. If you can get before the cross of Calvary just now in brokenness and repentance, and ask the Saviour for the filling of the Holy Spirit, He has promised to give that you might walk in the Spirit. May you do it now.

Father, hear the cry of Your children. May Your Spirit witness with their spirit of their adoption, and may they be able to know the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit - they and I - in our lives. Amen.

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