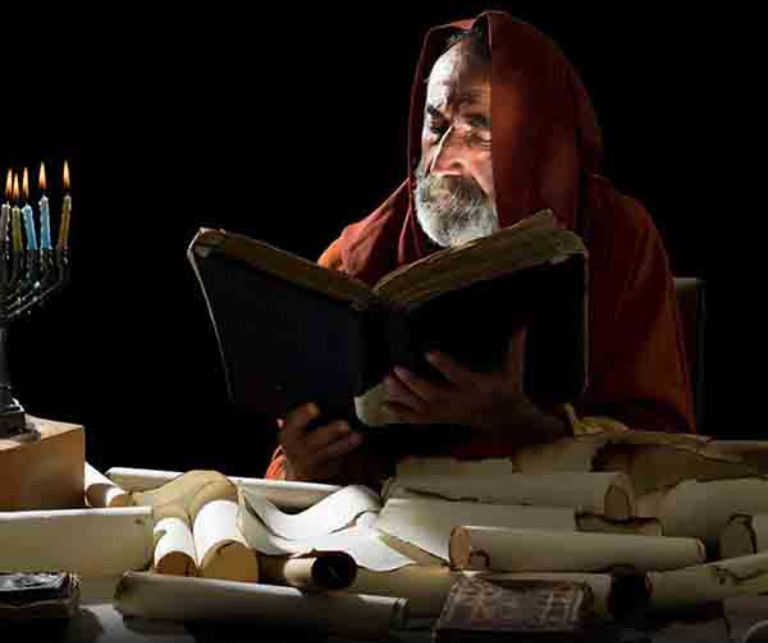


BIBLE STUDY SERIES

GALATIANS

EXPLAINED



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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

Larry Wilson

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Galatians – Explained

The epistles of the apostle Paul are unusually difficult to understand for five reasons. First, Paul often dealt with topics having no substance or meaning among Christians today. When was the last time you heard of a controversy over food offered to idols or the religious importance of circumcision? Second, Christianity in Paul's day was embryonic, constantly challenged with the pervasive culture, theology, and heritage of Judaism. Paul was faced with the task of persuading Jewish believers in Jesus to let go of Judaism with its "salvation by works" orientation so converts could embrace the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and a salvation based on faith, not works. Third, Paul was confronted with the very complicated matter of explaining to Gentile converts the importance of obeying God's laws while also explaining to Jewish converts why Moses' laws were abolished. Fourth, there was a great deal of social friction between Jews and Gentiles. Paul had the impossible task of convincing new believers to let go of their long standing bias and hostility toward each other

so they could genuinely love one another. Last, when Paul wrote the books of Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans among others, the New Testament did not exist. Paul's Bible was the Old Testament and revelations given by Jesus. Because Paul was well educated in Jewish traditions, some of his arguments are difficult to understand unless you understand the traditions.

When these five factors are brought together, you can see why there is confusion regarding Paul's writings. One person quotes a verse from Paul and another quotes an opposing verse and the net effect is nonsense. If anyone puts the Bible in a state of internal conflict, the result is harmful and no writer in the Bible is misquoted more often than Paul. It is highly important that all Christians study the books of Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans as *one unit* to appreciate Paul's approach to the five obstacles mentioned above. Paul does not speak out of both sides of his mouth. One of Paul's epistles cannot give anyone a fair assessment of what Paul thought and taught because each book confronts the five obstacles in different ways. However, when Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans are studied as one unit, Paul's position

and the principles he espoused become quite clear. Personally, I think the capstone to Paul's writings is the book of Hebrews. Of course, all fourteen of his books are wonderful, but this study will be limited to the book of Galatians.

In this commentary, my goal is to let Paul do most of the talking. I hope to only insert and emphasize enough words so you can follow his logic. My words are interlaced in the Bible text and enclosed in brackets []. For best results, you may want to have your favorite Bible translation handy as you read.

Part I

Galatians 1:1-5: “Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Galatians 1:6-9: “[I am writing to you because] I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting [the gospel I taught you. I am] the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and [now you] are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse [because the gospel I presented to you is based on Scripture and our Lord, Jesus Christ, Himself]! As we have already said,

so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted [from me], let them be under God’s curse!”

Galatians 1:10-17: [Because I love you, I must speak boldly and no doubt, some of you will become angry with me.] **Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people [as I did when I lived as a Pharisee], I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached [to you] is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it [in school]; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I [hated Christians and zealously] persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in [the leadership of] Judaism, beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for [protecting] the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my im-**

mediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into [the wilderness of] Arabia [to study and learn from the Holy Spirit]. Later I returned to Damascus.”

Galatians 1:18-24: “Then after three years [in the wilderness, carefully studying the Old Testament and aligning Scripture with the visions given me], I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas [Peter] and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord’s brother [who was the overseer of the church in Jerusalem]. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.’ And [after they heard my gospel] they praised God because of me.”

Galatians 2:1-3: Then [after my conversion to Christ, I lived and worked among the Gentiles for several years. It was] after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas.

I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation [that was given to me] and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them [James and the apostles] the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running [contrary to the teachings of the other apostles] and had not been running my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled [by James and the apostles] to be circumcised, even though he was a [an uncircumcised] Greek.”

In fact, as a result of Paul’s meeting the group wrote a letter to all Gentiles which stated, **“The apostles and elders, your brothers [at Jerusalem], To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said [which was, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, but we gave them no such commandment’]. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus**

Christ. Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from [drinking animal] blood, from [eating] the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.”¹

Galatians 2:4-8: “This matter [of circumcision] arose [among Gentiles] because some false believers [from Jerusalem] had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves [to the covenant of circumcision²]. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. As for those [believers who also came from Jerusalem to see what I was teaching] who were held in high esteem – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism – they added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized [since the Holy Spirit confirmed my ordination and

¹ Acts 15:23-29

² Genesis 17:12

gospel] that I had been [chosen and] entrusted with the task of preaching the [same] gospel to the uncircumcised [Gentiles], just as Peter had been to the circumcised [Jews]. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised [Jews], was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles.”

Galatians 2:9-11: “James, Cephas [Peter] and John, those esteemed as pillars [in the church], gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the [divine] grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised [Jews]. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I have been eager to do all along. [But a problem started] When Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I [Paul] opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned [he was clearly in the wrong. Even though Peter, one of the closest companions of Jesus while He was on Earth, and a highly respected Christian leader, failed to live up to the demands of the gospel of Jesus. He needed to be rebuked in public for the cause of Christ and I did so.].”

Galatians 2:12: “**For before certain men came from James** [after the conference in Jerusalem], **he [Peter] used to eat [and freely socialize] with the Gentiles. But when they** [this group of spies who pretended to be converts to Christ] **arrived, he [Peter] began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of** [ridicule and criticism by] **those who** [advocated and] **belonged to the circumcision group.”**

The “circumcision group” was a group of Jewish converts who insisted all Gentile converts must enter into the covenant of circumcision that God gave to Abraham as an *everlasting* covenant.¹ The circumcision group believed only Abraham’s heirs could be saved. Therefore, if any man wanted to be an heir of the promises made to Abraham, he had to be circumcised.

Galatians 2:13-16: “**The other Jews** [locals belonging to the church] **joined him [Peter] in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was** [soon confused and] **led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel** [of Christ which treats Jew and Gentile alike], **I said to Cephas [Peter] in front**

¹ Genesis 17:13

of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live [outside Jerusalem] like a Gentile and not like a Jew. [Here in Galatia you have ignored numerous Jewish laws and traditions such as eating with Gentiles and foods which were set before idols before they were placed on the table.] How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?’

‘We [Christians] who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified [deemed perfect in God’s sight] by the works of the law [observing the law], but [we know that justification comes] by faith [alone] in Jesus Christ. So we, too [as former Jews], have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be [or can be] justified. [It is impossible for a sinner to obey God’s law perfectly at all times. Given enough time, each sinner will fail. Therefore, it is impossible for a sinner to stand before God as though he never sinned. Adam’s sin reveals it only takes one sin to ruin a life of perfection.]’

Galatians 2:17-19: “But if, in seeking to be justified [through faith] in Christ, we Jews [evidently]

find ourselves also among the sinners [because faith in Christ does not abolish the royal law (James 2:8) which defines sin], **doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!** [Consider my words to Peter:] **If I rebuild what I [recently] destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.** [In other words, if I return to circumcision and the laws of Moses, I will soon prove that I cannot be justified. I am unable to live very long without violating God's laws. I cannot be justified in God's sight if I violate a single law! God designed it this way.] **For through the [condemnation of the] law I died to the law** [that is, the law revealed I am a sinner and I cannot save myself from the penalty for sin. Therefore, the only way to be perfect before God is this: Believe God's Word and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of living by faith,] **so that I might live for [honor] God."**

Galatians 2:20-21: "I have been crucified with Christ [He died for me and each day I crucify my carnal desires so I can serve Him] **and I no longer live** [according to my will, nor to glorify myself with manmade righteousness], **but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body** [is His, I am

focused on glorifying Christ through obedience to His commands. I cannot justify myself because I know I am sinful, therefore], **I live by faith in the Son of God**, [trusting He will justify me when He sees that my heart's desire is to follow Him and obey His Spirit. There is an important difference between being self-directed and Spirit-led. Those who are self-directed are eager to *achieve* justification. Those who are Spirit-led are eager to *receive* justification. Both groups of people recognize the importance of obedience, but the motives are entirely different. I want to love God and my neighbor as the royal law commands because Jesus] **who loved me and [also] gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God** [any longer by trying to establish my own righteousness through works], **for if righteousness could be gained through [obeying] the law, Christ died for nothing!"**

Part II

Paul was a Pharisee and a son of a Pharisee.¹ He was very zealous and educated as a legalist. After his conversion to Christ and several years of un-learning, Paul became a relentless advocate for the principle that “salvation comes through faith in God alone.” He had the physical wounds and scars of persecution to prove that “faith alone” is far more than intellectual assent. I think Paul would summarize his faith alone position by saying: “First, faith in God means believing God **will do** things for people beyond human ability. Second, faith in God means believing God **will keep** His promises. Third, faith in God means **pleasing** God (fulfilling His laws) without regard for the consequences.” When we combine these three concepts, salvation becomes a matter of love and faith. Obeying God’s laws cannot produce the righteousness needed for salvation and this one revelation destroyed Paul’s zeal for Judaism. Jesus alone produced the righteousness needed for salvation. He overcame every temptation and his righteousness is *transferred* to those who love him and live by faith. The walk of faith requires us to

¹ Acts 23:6

depend on God, enabling us to do things beyond our abilities. This completes the loop.

Faith in God is tested when there is a price for obedience. If a person lives in a setting where obeying God is easy, something is very wrong. We live in a world where the currents of sin are very strong and there is constant temptation to do wrong. This world loves darkness instead of truth. The laws of God are contrary to the ways and purposes of sinners. The “sweet spot” of temporal comfort is the enemy of faith. Jesus made this point painfully clear in his rebuke to the believers in Laodicea. People living on “easy street” are disgusting to the Lord because they do not know they are lukewarm, blind, and naked.¹ Each disciple of Jesus is given a “mission” so far beyond human ability that many of us would quit before starting if we could see what the mission involves. God calls us to do great tasks which can only be done through divine power, but few Christians have such goals today. Unfortunately, they do not have the faith of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Caleb, and Joshua.

Faith is tested when there is a trial or challenge of some kind and the challenge for the Jewish converts

¹ Revelation 3:14-22

to Christ in Galatia was largely centered on whether or not to abandon centuries of Jewish customs. The social and theological consequences were significant.

Galatians 3:1-5: “**You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you** [with religious bamboozle that demands circumcision]? **Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified** [for your sins]. **I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the** [power and the manifestations of the Holy] **Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish** [that you can’t see what you are doing]? **After beginning** [your walk] **by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish** [your goal of justification] **by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much** [ridicule and persecution] **in vain – if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?”**

Galatians 3:6-9: “[Let us go back to the origin of circumcision for a moment.] **So also Abraham ‘believed God** [when God said he would become the father of many nations even though he had no children], **and** [Genesis 15:6 says] **it was credited**

to him as righteousness [because he did not doubt that God would fulfill His promise].’ **Understand, then, that those who have faith** [in God, those who fully rely on God’s promises] **are children of Abraham** [because they believe God’s promises just as Abraham believed God’s promises (John 8:39)]. [Old Testament] **Scripture foresaw** [centuries ago] **that God would** [also] **justify the Gentiles by faith, and** [God] **announced** [this wonderful development in the] **the gospel** [given] **in advance to Abraham** [when He said]: ‘**All nations** [on Earth] **will be blessed through you.**’” [This matter is discussed at length in Ephesians.]

Galatians 3:9-11: “**So those who** [live in all of the nations of the world and] **rely on faith** [in God] **are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on the works of the law** [to be justified] **are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything** written in the **Book of the Law.**’¹ **Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified** [or can be justified] **before God** [by obeying the law], **because** [the Scriptures say in Habakkuk 2:4] **‘the righteous will live by faith.’** [This is a critical point: No one

1 Deuteronomy 27:26

but Jesus has lived a sinless life, not even Abraham. Abraham was not justified through obedience. Abraham was not perfect. Abraham lied about his wife Sarah. He committed adultery with Hagar! At times, Abraham let go of his faith in God's promises. He was a sinner, but he was justified by his faith in God! When God called him to leave home and travel to a foreign land, he obeyed!]”

Galatians 3:12: “**The law is not based on faith** [God's laws are divine obligations which He has imposed on mankind for our benefit]; **on the contrary, it says** [God has said, Ezekiel 20:11,], ‘**The person who does these things will live by them.**’

This declaration means that the man who obeys God's laws will thrive and be blessed because God's laws are not harmful. They are the product of divine wisdom and they bring good results into our lives. Do not be confused, the blessings that come with obeying God's laws and the righteousness needed for salvation are two separate topics. For example, the law says ‘Thou shalt not steal.’ If I do not steal his possessions, my neighbor is blessed and so am I. My neighbor suffers no loss and I am not condemned as a thief. However, if

I do not steal my neighbor's possessions, I have not necessarily fulfilled the intent of God's law. The royal law is fulfilled when I love my neighbor enough that I would rather cut off my hand than to steal his property. Such love is only acquired through faith in Christ. God has promised to remove our selfishness and unrighteousness and give us a new heart.¹ If I am tempted to steal (which is a selfish desire), perhaps I can be victorious over this temptation a few times through willpower, but this is not the way of Christ! Jesus has made two promises: First, He has promised to transform us from within by sending the Holy Spirit to create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us if we ask Him. This process is called rebirth.² Second, he will give us victory over temptation by displacing selfish passions with love and divine power.³ If we ask for transformation and believe it will come, he will send it! He has also promised to put a new heart in every person who asks for it.

So what is the purpose of the law? The law of God functions as a mirror. It shows our weak-

1 1 John 1:9; Ezekiel 36:26

2 Ezekiel 36:26, John 3

3 Romans 6:14-23; 8:14

nesses, our deviation from righteousness, and our desperate need for a Savior. God’s laws are not opposed to the ministry of the Spirit. Instead, our sinful nature is opposed to God’s laws.¹ The Ten Commandments are called a covenant because they are a promise. God promises that when we love Him with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and our neighbor as ourselves, we will fulfill the law by living in perfect harmony with His law. For a sinner, the law is indispensable since it declares right from wrong; it represents a righteousness that a sinner cannot produce. The good news is that Jesus fulfilled the law, he has promised to give His righteousness to all repentant sinners, and He will send transforming power to everyone who seeks it.² Do you believe His promises?

Galatians 3:13-15: “Christ redeemed us [believers] from the curse of the law [which is eternal death] by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’³ [The Father] He redeemed us [through Jesus’ death] in order that the [promised] blessing given to Abra-

1 Romans 8:5-8

2 Romans 1:16-17; Acts 1:8

3 Deuteronomy 21:23

ham might [also] come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we [Jews and Gentiles alike] might receive the promise of the [Holy] Spirit [who transforms our rebellious minds and sanctifies our sinful hearts. The Spirit enables us to love God and our neighbors wholeheartedly because this is humanly impossible]. Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.”

Galatians 3:16-18: “[God gave three promises to Abraham. First, God promised that his descendants would be given possession of the land. Second, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. Third, God promised Abraham that through him, the nations of Earth would be blessed – meaning the Savior of *the whole world* would come through his bloodline.] **The [these three] promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed [notice the singular]. [If you examine the promises in Genesis 13:15-16; 15:5, 13, 18,] Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ [plural] meaning many people, but [the promise says] ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law [given at Mt. Sinai],**

[was] **introduced 430 years later** [after the three promises were given to Abraham. The law given at Mt. Sinai], **does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise [s]. For if the inheritance depends on [observing] the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.**”

Galatians 3:19-20: “[I know this letter will be challenged by those false brothers who have come in among you. They will scoff and ask] **Why, then, was the law given at all** [if salvation depends on faith]? [The answer is obvious.] **It** [the law] **was added because of** [man’s darkness and ignorance. God chose to enlighten mankind by giving us His wise and enduring laws to bless us so we can understand the curse, nature, and behavior of sin and the penalty for our] **transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.** [We know that any violation of God’s laws, whether willful or through ignorance, always brings sorrow, pain, and death, therefore] **The law was given through** [the ministry of] **angels**¹ [who were directed by a Mediator] **and** [it was] **entrusted to a mediator** [who

¹ Exodus 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2

represents us before the Father]. **A mediator, however, implies more than one party;** [our mediator understands the needs of fallen man as well as the objectives of the Father] **but [the] God [head] is one** [in purpose plan and action].”

Galatians 3:21-22: “Is the law [given at Mt. Sinai], **therefore, opposed to the** [three] **promises of God** [given to Abraham]? **Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart** [eternal] **life, then righteousness would certainly have come by** [obeying] **the law. But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin,** [we have all sinned, we are condemned by our sins and given our sinful nature, no one can live very long without sinning] **so** [God has provided a better way for us to receive] **that what was promised** [to Abraham], [the promise] **being given** [has been extended to all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike] **through faith in Jesus Christ,** [who are Abraham’s seed, so that everything] **might be given to those who believe** [in God as Abraham believed in God].”

Galatians 3:23-24 “Before the coming [arrival] **of this faith** [before Jesus came to Earth], **we** [Jews]

were held in custody under the law, [we were] **locked up** [and confused in matters of grace, faith and obedience] **until the faith** [in God] **that was to come would be revealed** [that is, properly demonstrated and clarified by the life and teachings of Jesus]. **So the law was our guardian** [at Mt. Sinai to show us our sinful nature and propensity for sin] **until** [it should have led us to understand our need for a Savior who could save us sinners from our sins. For fourteen centuries Israel conducted sacrifices on the Altar of Burnt Offering and very few understood our great need for the Lamb of God. We foolishly thought we were righteous because we did what God commanded. Little did we know that the blood animals could not take away our sins!¹ Our foolishness changed when] **Christ came** [to Earth and now we see there is a difference between obeying the law and obeying the Spirit so] **that we might be justified by faith** [alone].”

Galatians 3:25: “**Now that this faith** [has been demonstrated and clarified through Christ who] **has come** [into the world], **we are no longer under a guardian** [the supervision of the law to understand the curse of sin, the sinful nature, and our desperate

¹ Hebrews 10:4

need of a Savior]. [Jesus has explained the relationship between grace, faith and law. According to the Father’s grace, the promises given to Abraham include all repentant sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike. The fulfillment of the promises has been made possible through the perfect life of Jesus.]”

Galatians 3:26-29: “[In summary, if you will follow Jesus and live by faith, then] **So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ[’s righteousness]. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** [Therefore, the covenant of physical circumcision ended at the cross. No longer does God consider a man an heir of Abraham because of physical circumcision. Moses said the circumcision that matters to God is the circumcision of the heart.¹ The flesh of the sinful heart has to be removed so a new heart, transformed by the Spirit, may function. Because] **If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed [sperm], and heirs according to the [three] promise [s that await fulfillment].”**

¹ Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6

Part III

Galatians 4:1-7: “[I have a few words for my brothers in Christ who are former Jews. Compare the promises given to Abraham with a civil process that you well know.] **What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we [Jews] were [delivered from Egypt, we were spiritually ignorant and rebellious like] underage [children], we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world [that is, we lived as the world does]. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the [obligation of His] law[s], to redeem those under the [obligation of His] law[s], that we might receive adoption to sonship. [‘And who,’ you may ask, ‘is a son of God?’ ‘Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.’¹] Because you [have received Jesus as your Savior, you] are his sons, God sent the [Holy] Spirit [to you, the Holy Spirit serves under the authority] of**

¹ Romans 8:14

his Son [and He has been sent] **into our hearts,** **the Spirit who** [reveals the goodness and love of the Father, also] **calls out, ‘Abba,** [a term of endearment meaning, God is also my dear] **Father.’** **So you** [dear brothers in Christ] **are no longer a slave** [subject to guardians and trustees], **but** [you are] **God’s child; and since you are his child,** **God has made you also an heir.”**

Galatians 4:8-12: “[I have a few words for my brothers in Christ who are former Gentiles.] **Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those** [idols] **who by nature are not gods** [at all]. [There was a time when you believed it was necessary to appease those gods for fear you would suffer great harm if you did not.] **But now that you know** [the truth about the living] **God – or rather are** [now] **known by God** [as His sons] – **how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces** [of living as a slave to some god]? **Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?** [Look at your foolishness!] **You** [have embraced the teachings of the false brothers from Jerusalem and you] **are observing special days** [feast days] **and** [you are observing the arrival of new] **months** [with new moon feasts. These

religious traditions have nothing to do with serving Christ.] **and** [you are observing the growing] **seasons** [with the presentation of first fruits and the wave sheaf offering] **and** [even attempting to observe Sabbath] **years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become [free of these matters] like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.”**

Galatians 4:13-16: “[I have been told that some in the church have had a change of heart towards me. I am no longer welcome in Galatia.] **As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, and even though my illness was a trial to you [you were very supportive of my physical needs during my recovery], you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?”**

Galatians 4:17-20: “Those people [from Jerusalem

belonging to the circumcision group] **are zealous to win you over** [to a fake gospel of salvation through obedience], **but** [it is] **for no good. What they** [really] **want is to alienate you from us** [who know the wonderful freedom in Christ], **so that you may have zeal for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until** [the ways and joy of] **Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!”**

Galatians 4:21-26: “Tell me, you who want to be under the law [you who want to be justified through obedience], **are you not aware of what the law** [the books of Moses] **says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman** [Hagar] **and the other by the free woman** [Sarah]. **His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh** [in the ordinary way]; **but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise** [from God because Sarah was too old to conceive]. **These things are being taken figuratively: The** [two] **women represent two covenants. One covenant is from**

Mount Sinai and bears [produces] children who are to be slaves [to the law]: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia [where the law was given] and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she [Jerusalem] is in slavery with her children [the Jews]. [The children of Hagar think they can be saved through obedience and they are slaves to the idea that salvation comes through works of the flesh – I know all about this, for this was my zeal and religion at one time!] But the [New] Jerusalem that is above is [comprised of those who believe God’s promises even though we cannot enter the city just yet. We are truly] free, and she [whom Sarah represents] is our mother.”

Galatians 4:27-30: “For it is written [in an oracle – Isaiah 54:1]: ‘Be glad, barren woman [Sarah], you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman [Sarah] than of her who has a husband.’ [This oracle caricatures Sarah, who was a barren woman for most of her life. But God kept His promise and she miraculously conceived. The idea is that Sarah – the barren woman, would have many times more

children through faith than any woman could have through the works of the flesh.] **Now you**, [Gentile and Jewish] **brothers and sisters** [in the Lord are], **like Isaac**, [you] **are children of promise**. **At that time the son born according to the flesh** [Ishmael] **persecuted the son** [Isaac] **born by the power of the Spirit**. **It is the same now**. **But what does Scripture say?** ‘[God commanded Abraham] **Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.**’ ”¹

Galatians 4:31: “**Therefore, brothers and sisters**, we [who are believers in Jesus] **are not children of the slave woman** [our righteousness does not come from our obedience], **but** [we are] **of the free woman** [our righteousness comes through Jesus by faith].

Although obedience is required, a sinner cannot justify himself through obedience because his disobedience always ruins the process. We are truly free from slavery even though the law imposes its obligations upon us. Our joy is in knowing that Christ is our Savior; He is our righteousness. Born-again people want their

¹ Genesis 21:8-13

naturally selfish hearts of flesh transformed (circumcised) each day so we can please Jesus by fulfilling the law, for He justifies everyone who lives by faith. **“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ ”**¹]

Galatians 5:1-2: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will [soon] be of no value to you at all. [If you listen to the men from Jerusalem and submit to circumcision, you will slip deeper and deeper into the slavery that legalism demands. Your religious experience will be reduced to do’s and don’ts (the life of a slave) and the joy of knowing the riches of Christ will fade away. Your religious experience will become a ritual. Your growth in Christ will become stale because there is no faith. Is this what you want? Do you want to deceive yourselves and think you can save yourselves from eternal death by obedience or

1 Romans 1:17

do you want to trust God’s promises and walk with Him in Spirit and in Truth? Salvation comes to everyone who believes the promises of God. **“For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”**^{1]}

Galatians 5:3-6: “Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. [You will be obligated to obey more laws than you can count!] **You who are trying to be justified by [obeying] the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace [God’s favor]. [Your efforts and Christ’s sacrifice have no value.] For through the Spirit we [believers] eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”**

Galatians 5:7-10: “[My dear children,] **You were running a good race. Who cut in on you [pun intended] to keep you from obeying the truth?** [I know who. I am well acquainted with the circumcision group. They love their religious slavery and self-righteousness. I once lived as they live. They

¹ Romans 3:28

foolishly think that rigorous obedience makes a man righteous in God’s sight.] **That kind of persuasion does not come from the one** [Holy Spirit] **who calls you** [to follow Christ]. [Jesus said,] **‘A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.’** [This means a little heresy contaminates the whole religion.] **I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view** [than believing in God’s promises]. **The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty.”**

Galatians 5:11: “Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision [as some from Jerusalem falsely claim], **why am I still being persecuted** [by the Jews]? [If I am advocating Judaism, why do they hate me? If I am advocating Judaism,] **In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.** [For the Jews do not accept this truth: Jesus terminated the “everlasting covenant” of circumcision given to Abraham – which was a covenant in the flesh. The Lord has shown me that *“A person is not a Jew if who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit,*

not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God."¹"]"

Galatians 5:12-15: “As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! [If they did this, they would have no more offspring! But] **You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free** [in Christ]. **But** [be careful,] **do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh** [the sinful nature which is naturally hostile toward the laws of God]; **rather**, [humbly accept God's justification through the atonement and righteousness provided by Christ and] **serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law** [pertaining to man's duty to man] **is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

Galatians 5:16-17: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [*“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed*

¹ Romans 2:28-29

by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God."¹] For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. [Be on your guard,] They [the flesh and the Spirit] are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want."

Galatians 5:18-24: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law [as a means for justification]. [Notice how rebellion against God's law works:] **The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.** [This is an essential truth. Do not be deceived. You cannot claim to be led by the Spirit and rebel against the laws of God! The Holy Spirit's objective is to draw us into God's presence by put-

¹ Romans 8:5-8

ting God’s laws in our hearts and minds. How else can we enjoy eternity with God?] **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and [rebellious and immoral] desires.”**

Galatians 5:25-6:5: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit [who knows our thoughts and mind]. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens [concern yourselves with the suffering and temptations of those around you], and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something [righteous] when [actually,] they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions [by looking into the fulfillment of the law and after identifying his or her own failures and successes through faith]. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without

comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load [of responsibilities as far as possible].”

Galatians 6:6-10: “Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor. [Be charitable to those who teach the word and carry its burden.] Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a [good] harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Galatians 6:11-12: “See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! [Because I am nearly blind and no one around me can take dictation, I have written this letter with my own hand.] Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to

avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. [They foolishly think the Jews will approve of us if we consent to circumcision. This is totally false. Any compromise or dilution on the importance of the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross will derail the gospel of Christ and in time, Christianity will become absorbed with confusion and darkness just like Judaism.]”

Galatians 6:13-18 “**Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh.** [They want to return to Jerusalem and say to the high priest, “Look, here are the ‘backsliders’ who returned to Judaism!”] **May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything [now]; what counts [in God’s sight] is the new creation.** [Believe God’s promises, love Him and your neighbor, walk by faith, allow the law to serve its purpose and the Holy Spirit will make you a new creation! When God’s laws are written in our hearts and minds His image is restored in us!] **Peace and mercy to all who follow**

this rule [“Stop thinking that obedience will bring salvation.” I say this] – **to the Israel of God** [who has been separated from ancient Israel.¹]. **From now on, let no one cause me trouble** [dispute the things which the Lord has revealed to me], **for I** [am a servant of the Lord Jesus and I] **bear on my body the marks** [and stripes] **of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.”**

1 James 1:1; 2:1

Appendix

The Gospel and the Ten Commandments

Some Christians use the books Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans to prove people are not required to obey the Ten Commandments after Jesus died. Others, use the same books to prove the opposite. Most Christians do not have a problem with nine of the Ten Commandments, but the fourth commandment is problematic because it demands setting aside the seventh day of the week as a holy day. It demands we do something which the rest of the world does not do: worship our Creator by resting from our work.¹

The arguments used to ignore the fourth commandment are complicated because there is no simple reason for ignoring **one** of the Ten Commandments. If the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross, then adultery, murder, and lying cannot be sinful. Where there is no law, there can be no offense.² Most Christians will agree certain laws are obligatory. For example, they understand taking the Lord's name in vain and worshipping idols is

¹ Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Hebrews 4:4, 9-10

² Romans 4:15

sinful, but desecrating the seventh day is not. The books of Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans were written by one man and it is fascinating how on one hand his words are used to abolish the Ten Commandments and how on the other hand they are used to uphold the obligatory nature of the Ten Commandments. How can this be?

The Church Bipolar

It did not take long for the disciples to observe that Paul's letters and logic were easy to abuse.¹ What makes Paul's epistles difficult to understand is that Paul attempted to resolve several problems at the same time so that his gospel of faith in Jesus could flourish. This was no small task.

Jewish converts came into the early Christian church with a mindset heavily influenced by centuries of legalism that affected every aspect of life² and with a strong dislike for Gentiles who were considered unclean. Gentile converts came into the church with (a) feelings of anti-Semitism, (b) a culture of pagan practices, and (c) resistance to obeying any rules that militated against the desires

1 2 Peter 3:16

2 Acts 15:5

of the flesh.¹ The conflict occurred because Jewish converts wanted to continue with the laws of Moses and Gentiles wanted a salvation that had nothing to do with sanctification. *The presence of these two extremes within the body of Christ makes the writings of Paul difficult to understand.* Additionally, these two extremes still exist within the body of Christ today and each group uses Paul's writings to defend its theological position.

Many Protestants argue the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross and the fourth commandment was abolished because nine of the Ten Commandments are *repeated* in the New Testament (inferring the fourth commandment is not found in the New Testament), but this claim is false. The New Testament references all of the Ten Commandments. God's seventh day Sabbath is mentioned in Hebrews. Paul wrote: **“For somewhere [in Scripture] he [Moses] has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘On the seventh day God rested from all his works.’ . . . There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who [plans to] enters God's rest [the new Earth] also rests from their works [on**

1 Galatians 5:15-21

God’s holy day], **just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest [the new Earth], so that no one will perish [in the wilderness of this life] by following their example of disobedience.**”¹ A careful study of Paul’s comments will show he associates disobedience (the violation of God’s laws) with Israel’s failure to enter Canaan and the same failure can keep a person from the new Earth.

If the New Covenant of grace releases Christians from obeying the Ten Commandments, why would James, the brother of Jesus, write thirty years after the cross, “If we break one commandment we break them all?”²

The Ten Commandments are ten simple laws, but they have profound importance. Most Christians believe the Ten Commandments are important and obligatory until a discussion on the fourth commandment. Then, the topic implodes. It becomes a controversy that can go in many directions because it threatens the eternal and religious security of those who reject the fourth commandment.

I believe some Christians have made God’s grace

¹ Hebrews 4:4, 9-11, insertions and italics mine

² James 2:10-11

an object of idolatry just as the Jews made God's law an object of idolatry. Those "saved by grace" do not want any laws imposed on them and legalists do not want any laws cancelled. Both positions are nonsense. We live in freedom in the United States, but we have thousands of laws. We live in freedom in Christ, but He has ten laws. The Ten Commandments are a difficult topic today because early Christians in Rome abandoned the fourth commandment to avoid being confused or associated with the Jews. History says that Rome's influence over Christianity grew during the first six centuries after Christ ascended and this is how Sunday observance became traditional; a practice which most Protestants do not openly question.

Obeying the Law is Not Necessarily Fulfilling the Law

There is a sharp difference between *obeying* and *fulfilling* the Ten Commandments and any discussion about the fourth commandment should address this difference. For example, obeying the Ten Commandments cannot produce salvation and this remains true until the end of the world. Sinners cannot obey the Ten Commandments and expect

to receive salvation because salvation is not based on “hit and miss” obedience. I write hit and miss to acknowledge that no sinner can live a sinless life. No one but Jesus has done this. Therefore, no sinner can consistently obey the Ten Commandments for a lifetime. Each sinner falls short; therefore, observing the fourth commandment and breaking any other commandment means death because the wages of sin is death.

Some Christians who presently observe the seventh day Sabbath think that God is going to test the whole world to see who will keep His Sabbath holy. In their minds, the test will be the observance of the seventh day Sabbath. The coming test will include the fourth commandment, but more importantly, it will be far more difficult than merely resting from work on the seventh day. The coming test will center on the two laws of love. The two laws of love are these: “**Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?**” **Jesus replied:** “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**” **This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law** [the books of Moses]

and the Prophets [the rest of the Old Testament] hang on these two commandments.’ ”¹

The two laws of love are expressed in the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments show what love for God will do, and the remaining six commandments show what love for our neighbor will do. Paul wrote, **“The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”²**

Salvation requires obedience motivated by love for God and neighbor and carried out in faith. It is very important we understand there is a huge difference between meeting the demands of the law because it is the law, and fulfilling the law because we love God and our neighbor. Jesus distilled this difference saying, **“If you love me, keep my commands.”³ “You are my friends if you do**

1 Matthew 22:36-40, insertions mine

2 Romans 13:9-10

3 John 14:15

what I command.”¹

Everyone in the universe is subject to God’s laws. Jesus immediately put Adam and Eve under the obligation of law when he created them. **“And the Lord God [Jesus] commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’ ”**² Adam and Eve could not have sinned if there was no law because there is no sin where there is no law.³ Sin, by definition, is lawlessness; a disregard for God’s laws and order.⁴ The Ten Commandments are not ten suggestions. They are divine laws and Jesus commands everyone to obey them, but not for the purpose of achieving salvation.

The Ten Commandments were designed to provide two elements for human beings: First, on a secular level, Jesus designed the Ten Commandments to produce social order. He gave us the Ten Commandments so mankind could live together in a healthy and prosperous way. If everyone obeyed

1 John 15:14

2 Genesis 2:16-17, insertion mine

3 Romans 4:15

4 1 John 3:4

the Ten Commandments, there would be good will within and among the families in every nation. There would be no valid reason for hatred or animus if everyone obeyed the Ten Commandments. Nations prosper when a majority obeys and exalts the divine principles expressed in the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments also serve a second purpose. Once a person is born again, he relates to the Ten Commandments in a very different way than before. A born-again person discovers the Ten Commandments are a divine revelation. The Ten Commandments predict the actions of a pure heart; what an honest-hearted person will do when he loves God and man properly. In other words, the royal law (the law of God's kingdom) reveals what pure-hearted beings will naturally do!

For example: If a secular man obeys the seventh commandment which forbids adultery because the law demands it, his family, his children, and even his coworkers will be blessed. There is no scandal or bitterness caused by unfaithfulness. Instead, there is social peace and harmony. However, after a while, let us suppose this man's lust overcomes

him and he violates the seventh commandment. The social benefit of the seventh commandment is lost. His children are betrayed and made bitter. His coworkers are upset because he cannot do his job. His wife is broken with grief and sues for divorce. We see there is a secular benefit for obeying the seventh commandment as well as the other nine.

“But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived [sinful desires can pop up at any time, so be on your guard], my dear brothers and sisters.”¹

Now, consider a second scenario that contrasts the temporal and spiritual purpose for the seventh commandment. One day, a married, but born-again man is tempted to have a sexual relationship with an attractive woman, and given human nature and the rush of hormones, he faces a very powerful temptation. Immediately, the Holy Spirit pounds on his heart with this impression: ‘Flee! You must not do this, for if you sin, you will prove that you do not love God or your

¹ James 1:14-16, insertion mine

wife as you should!’ At this point, the man should ask himself if he has been fulfilling the seventh commandment or merely observing the seventh commandment! Suppose he has lived within the boundaries of the seventh commandment for many years. Should he be alarmed that he finds another woman tempting?

Jesus said, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”**¹ Contrary to what is often said about this passage, Jesus spoke these words to the Pharisees to highlight the fact that a great gulf exists between observing the seventh commandment and fulfilling the *intent* of the seventh commandment. If the man in this scenario has observed the seventh commandment because it is God’s law, there is some temporal benefit. There is no scandal and his family remains intact. However, it is altogether possible that the observant man has missed the higher and more important reason for the seventh commandment!

1 Matthew 5:27-28

God knows all about the curse of sin. He knows we are attracted to evil and, worse, we have a propensity for evil. To counteract the curse and our propensity, He has promised that if we will love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul, and our neighbors as ourselves, He will miraculously transform our hearts and minds. He will write His laws in our hearts and minds and as children of God, we will reflect His character of love. This is why the Ten Commandments are called a covenant. They are promises from God!¹

The Ten Commandments have temporal and spiritual value. The man who rests on the Sabbath because the law requires it, receives the temporal benefit of rest. The man who rests on the Sabbath so that He can have communion with His Creator is blessed a hundred times more! The higher value for the Sabbath by far is the spiritual value.² The spiritual component of the Ten Commandments explains a mystery. James wrote: **“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”**³ How is this possible? How does adultery make a person

1 Exodus 25:16-22; Ezekiel 36:26; Hebrews 8:10-12

2 Romans 7:14

3 James 2:10

guilty of violating the Sabbath? Here's how: Sin occurs when we fail to love God or our neighbor as we are commanded.¹ Therefore if a man lusts after a woman, he is not loving God and his wife as he should even though he may be observing the law! The man is not fulfilling the intent of the law. He is guilty of selfishness. This is the point that Jesus made.

Jesus' words produce a litmus test. If the man is tempted to look on a woman lustfully, he should understand that he is governed by the flesh. Lust violates the two laws of love and this is why lust is called "adultery within the heart." However, if a man is living "**in accordance with the Spirit** [he has his] **mind set on what the Spirit desires.**"² A man's view of women is very different when he lives in accordance with the Spirit. Remember, the seventh commandment is a promise, a born-again heart will not commit adultery because love for God and neighbor will prevail over temptation. Jesus has proven that love is more powerful than any temptation. **For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.**

¹ Matthew 22:37-40

² Romans 8:5, insertion and modification mine

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”¹

Paul Explains

Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, finally understood the difference between observing and fulfilling the law after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. He wrote, **“Once I was alive** [a self-righteous legalist, but I was actually living] **apart from** [the fulfillment of] **the law; but when** [the proper understanding of fulfilling] **the** [tenth] **commandment came** [to me], **sin sprang to life** [I had to admit to myself that I had a covetous heart] **and I died** [that is, my self-righteousness was destroyed by this knowledge]. **I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life** [by showing me what a heart of pure love will do] **actually brought death** [that is, it destroyed my self-righteousness – my arrogance and self-righteousness had to die].”²

Meaningless Defense

If a person really wants to justify his or her rebellion against fulfilling the Ten Commandments, it is easy to lift various “sound bites” out of their scrip-

¹ Romans 8:13-14; Genesis 39:10-13; Romans 7:14-20

² Romans 7:9-10, insertions mine

tural context to support this notion. Peter noticed Paul's writings were easy to distort when he wrote, **“Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”**¹

If this were true of Paul's epistles during the first century A.D., it is even more true today since we are far removed from the culture and problems associated with early Christianity. If we casually lift segments of Paul's arguments in Galatians from the context of his argument, we can make Paul appear to say the opposite of what he is actually saying. I realize how easy this is because people often do this to me. Therefore, it is imperative when reading Paul's arguments to read his entire argument carefully. This requires studying more than one of his books in the New Testament. Remember also that, prior to his conversion, Paul was a highly educated Jew and, when he confronts various heresies enter-

1 2 Peter 3:15-16

ing Christianity through Jewish converts, he uses Jewish arguments to show Jewish converts fatal flaws within Judaism.

Bottom line: We cannot love as God loves unless the Holy Spirit generates the love of God within us. Obeying the Ten Commandments cannot merit salvation. They will improve secular life, but that is as far as they can go. On the other side of the coin, the Ten Commandments are a promise showing born-again people what love for God and man does.¹ Everyone will be tested during the Great Tribulation to see if they love God with all their heart, mind, and soul, and their neighbor as themselves. Persecution will separate “commandment keepers” from “commandment fulfillers” because those fulfilling the commandments will love God more than they love their lives! **“They triumphed over him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”²**

¹ James 1:12, 23-24

² Revelation 12:11

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